

hear the growth of the orchestra in recent years under the leadership of music director Carlos Kalmar. Central to this album is Portland-based composer Kenji Bunch's *Aspects of an Elephant*, inspired by the parable of six men who try to determine the traits of an elephant in a dark room. Dedicated to the members of the Oregon Symphony, it's a mercurial showpiece that takes the orchestra through its paces. Composer, conductor, and orchestra meticulously explore diverse colours, moods, and effects to deliver a first-rate performance. Sebastian Currier's elegant *Microsymph* is also notable for its turn-on-a-dime exuberance and compressed, deftly-crafted structures.

AMERICAN SOUVENIRS

For Violin and Piano

Blue Violet Duo

RRP: \$13.82USD download

[www.amazon.com/American-Souvenirs-](http://www.amazon.com/American-Souvenirs-Blue-Violet-Duo)

[Blue-Violet-Duo](http://www.amazon.com/American-Souvenirs-Blue-Violet-Duo)

www.bluevioletduo.com



The Chicago-based Blue Violet Duo was formed in 2013 by violinist Kate Carter and pianist Louise Chan. Their recording debut features works from the mid-to-late 20th century by four American composers—Norman Dello Joio, William Bolcom, John Adams, and Paul Schoenfield. The duo is completely 'in sync', rhythmically, stylistically, and dynamically. In these pieces, the composers all claim to align themselves with elements of American jazz, swing, or dance music. While I do hear a modest flirtation with those genres, this is not jazz, which is perfectly able (and better able) to articulate its music without the assistance of Western classical musicians. Hints of jazz, at least for me, often weaken my listening experience more than enhance it. The most rewarding work on this CD is William Bolcom's in turns moody, flamboyant, and rhythmically incisive *Second Sonata for Violin and Piano*, written for my friend, the violinist Sergiu Luca. I still recall the dynamism they brought to performing this sonata. Carter and Chan approach this piece, as they do all of these works, with an unsentimental but nonetheless passionate reading. They excel at both extremes, from the nuanced and restrained to the incandescent and extravagant.

Hollis Taylor

by Robert Harris

ASCENT: Viola and Piano

Matthew Lipman, *vla*, Henry Kramer, *pno*
CEDILLE Records CDR 90000 184



Ascent offers violists and music-lovers generally an hour-plus recital by a prize-winning USA-resident young artist whose world travels may not soon include Australia – so CD purchase is highly recommended!

Their performer names are not yet well known but deserve to be; Lipman and Kramer display individual technical and tonal prowess, and a collective musicality and ensemble skills honed since sharing Juilliard and Ravinia studies. Familiar Schumann - the delightfully imaginative *Fairy Pictures* Op.113 (1851), is studied by most serious violists. Fewer violists study the more demanding, passionately expressive York Bowen *Phantasy* Op.54 (1918). Fewer still are brave enough to attempt the virtuoso techniques of Garth Knox's *Fuga Libre* (2008), the CD's only work for unaccompanied viola –

unplayable for most but not for Knox, nor for Lipman. Violists may have heard Franz Waxman's *Carmen Fantasie* for violin (if not in concert then in the 1947 film *Humoreske*, in the young Isaac Stern's hands) – but few have heard, let alone played a viola transcription. Lipman's first-ever recording by a violist affords scintillating listening.

In two other premiere recordings Lipman and Kramer include Shostakovich's *Impromptu* Op.33 (1931), originally for viola, lost until 2017. (Here is a potential recital encore sequel to his iconic 1975 *Sonata*, Op.147). Clarice Assad's *Metamorphose*, commissioned by Lipman to honour his mother's memory, is a two-movement fantasy portrayal of personalities.

Despite a slight reservation about spatial placement and balance occasionally favouring the piano, this recital offers satisfying artistic variety, impressive virtuosic musicality, high production standards and very informative booklet notes.

WEBER/BRUCH: Clarinet, Viola & Orchestra

Anton Kholodenko, *vla*,
Dimitri Ashkenazy, *clarinet*
Royal Baltic Festival
Orchestra cond. Mats Liljefors
PALADINO pmr 0089



Concerti with viola? Yes, under the guise of other names, in an early and late Romantic century span of music by Carl Maria von Weber and by Max Bruch. Two of the five works on this CD feature the violist as



soloist: Weber's *Andante & Rondo Ongarese* Op.35 (1809) and Bruch's *Romance* Op.85 (1911). In two others the viola shares the billing with clarinet: Bruch's *Double Concerto* Op.88 (1911) and in first recordings with orchestrations of the piano part, two of Bruch's *Eight Pieces* Op.83 (1910), here captioned *Romanian Melody* and *Scherzo*. Such sharing status is not unknown to violists whose most frequently performed concerti seem to be Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* K.364, Richard Strauss' *Don Quixote* and J S Bach's chamber-textured *Brandenburg* No.6. This CD also offers a clarinet-only bonus: Weber's *Concertino* Op.26 (1811).



None of the five pieces are major works; with the Bruch *Double* the longest at 19 minutes. While not amongst the great concerti for clarinet or viola, every work on this recording deserves to be heard, and programmed by orchestras, professional or community, perhaps featuring players from those orchestras, or young artists as soloists. The fine performances of these lyrical and at times virtuosic works on this well-produced Paladino CD offer explorative listeners enjoyable (re-)discoveries.

Robert Harris