

BERIO: *Folk Songs*; see GOLIJOV

BERKELEY: *6 Preludes; 5 Pieces; Violin Sonatina; Duo; Concertino*
Schirmer Ensemble
Naxos 557324—62 minutes

Margaret Fingerhut's traversal of Lennox Berkeley's major piano compositions is on

American Record Guide

Chandos 10247 (Mar/Apr 2005), and I refer the reader to my review of that for background. This new Naxos includes two piano sets—the Pieces, from 1936, and the Preludes, from 1945—along with a short piano mazurka and five chamber pieces: the 1942 Sonatina, three pieces for solo clarinet from 1939, the Cello and Piano Duo from 1971, a brief Andantino for cello and piano, and the 1955 Concertino for flute, violin, cello, and piano.

This a well-played and cleanly engineered anthology of Berkeley's chamber output, but if your main interest is the piano music, get the Fingerhut on Chandos—it's played with more polish and sensitivity and recorded in fuller, more immediate sound. For Berkeley's chamber music you'll want to buy the Nash Ensemble's delightful collection on Helios 55135 (Nov/Dec 2003). That includes a pair of two-piano pieces along with a quartet, sextet, and octet, each for mixed group of strings and winds, the octet with piano also.

The high point of this Naxos is the piquant 14-minute Concertino. This work can also be played by recorder instead of flute and harpsichord instead of piano, imparting a quasi-renaissance feel rather different from the bright, neoclassical effect it makes in the version used here. The Duo for Cello and Piano, a single 6-minute span, is a somewhat steelier work, and despite its brevity it feels compact and concentrated rather than lightweight. The earlier Violin Sonatina is slighter in substance, though very appealing.

In sum: though not my first choice for an introduction to Berkeley's chamber music, this new Naxos is a worthwhile release that anyone interested in this composer should pick up after the Chandos and Helios discs. Indeed, at Naxos's bargain price this is worth buying for the enchanting 1912 landscape on the cover.

LEHMAN