

# Chamber



Andrew Achenbach on a new disc of Ellington's reimagined *Nutcracker*:

*'It has one marvellous anew at Tchaikovsky's vernally captivating invention and consummate mastery of orchestral poise'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 71



Rob Cowan listens to a batch of Decca Eloquence chamber discs:

*'This is the sort of mellifluous reading that keeps Schubert's masterpiece securely within the world of song'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 73

## J Adams

Fellow Traveler: The Complete  
String Quartet Works of John Adams  
John's Book of Alleged Dances.  
String Quartet. Fellow Traveler  
Attacca Quartet  
Azica © AZICA71280 (67' • DDD)



First time on one release for all Adams's quartets to date

With titles such as 'Crotchet Stubble' and 'Toot Nipple', one could be forgiven for believing that Adams's output for string quartet – recorded in its entirety for the first time here by the excellent Attacca Quartet – represents the more jokey, frivolous side of the composer's personality. On the contrary, the three works contained on this disc are serious, weighty and challenging: as if the composer had taken a crash course in the late quartets of Beethoven.

This is most evident in the recent String Quartet (2008), which, after a deceptively light and breezy introduction, soon develops into a dense tangle of complex contrapuntal activity. The first movement is conceived as a single uninterrupted 20-minute arch and is followed by a much briefer second movement that struggles to match the first's power and poise. Adams draws on material from *Nixon in China* and *Doctor Atomic* for the short, punchy *Fellow Traveler* (2007) but it sounds rather like a dress rehearsal for some of the ideas developed on a much larger scale in the String Quartet.

A lighter side is communicated in the opening work on the recording, *John's Book of Alleged Dances*. The suite of 10 dances allows Adams to explore a wide range of vernacular dance forms, including bluegrass, ragtime and habanera. Such dance patterns only provide a basis from which Adams constructs a number of highly virtuoso and impressive rhythmic studies, matched on this recording by the Attacca Quartet's superlative technical and artistic execution. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

## Arensky • Taneyev

Arensky Piano Quintet, Op 51  
Taneyev Piano Quintet, Op 30  
Piers Lane pf Goldner Quartet  
Hyperion © CDA67965 (69' • DDD)



Lane and the Goldner explore Tchaikovsky's varied influence

The shadow of Tchaikovsky is sometimes said to fall over both of these fine works; it would be fairer to suggest that some of the rays of his genius suffuse them. Taneyev was one of the few composers who studied with Tchaikovsky and also one of the rare people from whom he tolerated criticism (though even the faithful pupil could get a rap on the knuckles if he went too far). His Piano Quintet is an expansive work, warmly played here and with the subtle intelligence Taneyev demanded of himself when planning a work. Among much else, he shows how much invention can be wrought out of something as simple as a scale, hauntingly in the *Largo*, which David Fanning's booklet essay perceptively describes as 'a dialogue...between intellectual severity and expressive warmth'. There is particular brilliance in the *Scherzo*: like others of their colleagues, when exercising their very Russian preference for French influence over German, Taneyev and Arensky made an exception in favour of Mendelssohn.

If Taneyev's Quintet is the more impressive, Arensky's is perhaps the more attractive. It has the lightness of touch that he admired in Tchaikovsky, to whose influence he migrated from that of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov (thus earning himself a snuffy dismissal in the latter's memoirs that he would soon be forgotten). The introduction of a waltz into the variation movement (on a French song) is certainly Tchaikovskian, and none the worse for that. The piano-writing is deft and delicate, excellently handled by Piers Lane and well balanced with the strings in the recording.

John Warrack

## JS Bach

Six Sonatas for Violin and Keyboard, BWV1014-19  
Michelle Makarski vn Keith Jarrett pf  
ECM New Series © 2 476 5682 (95' • DDD)



Jazzier Jarrett back to Bach for sonatas with Makarski

With his recordings of the '48' (10/88 and 9/91), *Goldberg Variations* (3/90) and *French Suites* (4/94), Keith Jarrett long ago established that he does not come to Bach with any kind of agenda other than to represent the music as unpretentiously and respectfully as he can. His is not jazzman's Bach; indeed, he has said that Bach (which he learnt to play before he took up jazz) is for him a release, an opportunity to worry less about projecting his own personality than that of the composer.

The evidence of this recording of Bach's six wondrous sonatas for keyboard and violin, in which he is joined by Michelle Makarski, the American violinist with whom he has worked before on pieces of his own, is that nothing has changed in his attitude. There is nothing gimmicky here: from Jarrett come soft hands producing clear textures, well-judged tempi and precise but never fussy articulation; from Makarski, stylish and musical playing, Baroque in its low vibrato and relaxed tone but with still a touch of 'modern' sweetness to the sound. The air of two fine and technically well-equipped musicians happy to give themselves up to music which is more than capable of speaking for itself is near-total: slow movements are quietly dignified (the only indulgence, perhaps, being a dreamily drawn-out *legato* opening *Largo* of No 5), while fast ones are allowed to build impressive heads of steam out of their own resources with perfect naturalness. Even the booklet keeps its own counsel, with no programme-notes, no artists' mission statements – just track listings and photos of the sessions.

Of course, this will not be what every listener wants. If you like the bend and whip of a Baroque violin you won't find it here. Some might feel that at the very least the opening of No 1 is a touch laboured and that there could be more of a lilt to the first movement of No 2. For more individualism and interpretative input you should probably look elsewhere, perhaps among other violin-and-piano versions to the little-known treasure that is Ruth Waterman and Morey Ritt's deeply felt (though less well recorded) recording for Meridian. But for its cool beauty and unaffected honesty, this recording is one that will be very easy to live with. **Lindsay Kemp**