



Compelling programme-building: Francine Kay impresses with her passionate advocacy of Czech music ranging from Smetana to Suk

equally affecting and inventive, showing the twenty-something Walker already to be a composer of exceptional skill.

Still's *Lyric Quartet*, written during 1939-45 and published in 1960 with the subtitle 'Musical Portraits of Three Friends', abounds in poetic and jaunty activity. Its engaging conversations include an Incan melody that provides impetus for the slow movement. Similar warmth and vitality pervade Perkinson's String Quartet No 1 (1956), whose subtitle, *Calvary*, denotes the Spiritual that underlies the absorbing narrative.

As on their two previous recordings in the series, the Catalyst musicians perform with intense vitality and finesse, making bold cases for works that deserve to be regular concert fare. **Donald Rosenberg**

## Schnabel

'Complete Vocal Works'

Five Songs, Ten Songs, Op 11. Seven Songs, Op 14. Notturmo, Op 16

Sara Couden *contr* Jenny Lin *pf*

Steinway & Sons (STNS30208 • 78' • T/t)



Though Schnabel's career and reputation as a pianist and pedagogue overshadow his compositions, creating music remained a lifelong pursuit. 'Officially I have remained a pianist', he

wrote in his autobiography, 'although secretly I always did and still do compose.' At 19 he made his debut as soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic in his own large-scale Piano Concerto in D minor, and his catalogue includes three symphonies, five string quartets and other chamber music, plus more than 30 pieces for solo piano.

When he married the celebrated German contralto Therese Behr (six years his senior) in 1905, he was 23 and they had been recital partners for years. The young Schnabel wrote his early songs for her, and they are sophisticated achievements. Setting texts by his contemporaries Richard Dehmel and Stefan George, as well as such earlier poets as Eichendorff and Rückert, the songs are lucid and affecting, their late-Romantic tonal language keenly tailored to the words. The piano parts are imaginative and resourceful (eg the shadowy octaves in 'Frühlingsdämmerung', the stillness established in 'Abendlandschaft' or the evocative figurations in 'Die Sperlinge') and never over-written. Schnabel was obviously a composer of substance and impressive craftsmanship, though some of the early songs don't quite escape a whiff of conventionality.

A stylistic breakthrough occurs in the far more expansive and expressionistic 'Notturmo' (1914), a 22-minute setting of a Dehmel poem. This provides an interesting reminder that while Schnabel composed atonal music, he rarely performed works by his contemporaries (though he did

participate in one of the early performances of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*). In 'Notturmo', Schnabel all but abandons a Romantic tonal vocabulary, and the rhythm flows freely without bar lines. The style is reminiscent of Schoenberg's early atonalism before *Pierrot lunaire*, and the work assigns equal roles to the pianist and singer, as in all of Schnabel's songs.

American contralto Sara Couden and pianist Jenny Lin together offer beauty of line and sound, and deliver each song with impressive unity, commitment and understanding, and careful attention to detail. **Stephen Cera**

## 'Things Lived and Dreamt'

Dvořák Three Humoresques, Op 101 B187 Janáček Piano Sonata 1.X.1905, 'From the Street' Kaprálová April Preludes, Op 13 Smetana Czech Dances, Book 1 - Polka No 2 in A minor Suk Things Lived and Dreamt, Op 30. Yearning, Op 22a No 5

Francine Kay *pf*

Analekta (AN2 9004 • 75')



Francine Kay commences this smartly programmed recital of Czech music with a reading of Janáček's two-movement Sonata that is both detailed and impassioned. In the opening 'Předtucha' ('Foreboding'), unison melodies marked *ppp* convey a ghostly, other-worldly effect