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BEACH Complete Works For Piano Duo (Genova & Dimitrov)

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Record and Artist Details

Genre: Instrumental

Label: CPO

Magazine Review Date: 03/2022

Media Format: CD or Download

Media Runtime: 64

Mastering: DDD

Catalogue Number: CPO555 453-2



BEACH Complete Works For Piano Duo (Genova & Dimitrov)

Variations on Balkan Themes

3 Pieces for Piano Four Hands

Suite for Two Pianos founded upon Old Irish Melodi

Summer Dreams

'War is God's way of teaching Americans geography' – a quote attributed to the satirist Ambrose Bierce. Which is why it is as surprising as it is admirable that in the first decade of the 20th century an American composer should be concerned with the plight of the Balkans, and work up a set of variations using four Balkan folk tunes. If, however, you are expecting a work in the manner of Rachmaninov, say, or Lyapunov, you will be disappointed. This 1942 version for two pianos is different in numerous respects from Amy Beach's original 1906 version for piano solo, and I can't say I prefer it. Even with the score and after several hearings, it is not a work with a structure one can easily follow and in which the theme is increasingly subsumed (I wish CPO had given us separate tracks for each variation, short though each may be). This version ends with the funeral march which, though highly effective, does not provide a satisfactory conclusion for a concert work, petering out, rather than with the force and drama of the original.

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This and the Three Pieces for piano four-hands are newly published by an outfit called Women's Philharmonic Advocacy (wophil.org), part of whose mission is to encourage 'performances and recordings of neglected music by women'. The latter collection, composed in 1883 when Beach was still Amy Marcy Cheney, is, I am sure, going to attract many more fans, having the melodic charm and instant appeal of Schubert's *Moments musicaux*.

The *Suite Founded upon Old Irish Melodies* from later in her career (1924) is written, to offer a shorthand comparison, in a style reminiscent of Edward MacDowell. Its four movements (Prelude, 'Old-time Peasant Dance', 'The Ancient Cabin' and finale) make for a substantial work with a playing time of 22'22". MacDowell again comes to mind with the six short character pieces of *Summer Dreams* (1901), Beach's only piano duet to appear in print in her lifetime and clearly intended for home entertainment. Each piece is preceded by a brief poem (reproduced in the booklet).

Aglika Genova and Liuben Dimitrov are a polished duo, unfailingly musical, with an ensemble precision that sits well with their two superbly matched (though uncredited) instruments. The disc, very well recorded, comes with an exhaustively detailed booklet and is a valuable addition to the Beach discography, so superbly enriched by last year's *Gramophone* Award-winning recording of her Piano Quintet (Hyperion, 7/20).



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