



BERG

Three Pieces, Op. 6 (rev. 1929); Violin Concerto; Three Fragments from Wozzeck; Symphonic Pieces from Lulu; Passacaglia etc

Geraldine McGreevy (soprano), Robert Murray (tenor), Isabelle van Keulen (violin); Gothenburg SO/Mario Venzago
Chandos CHSA 5074 (hybrid CD/SACD)
157:20 mins (2 discs)

BBC Music Direct

£12.72

Alban Berg was not a prolific composer, though his works are so dense that they somehow give the impression that they are part of a much larger oeuvre than they are. These two well-filled discs include one work which Berg wrote for piano solo, and one which he abandoned after 113 bars.

The orchestration of the Piano Sonata by Theo Verbey gives us a virtually new piece. The impact of the brilliantly idiomatic scoring makes it a quite different affair from the work played on the piano, and is a real addition to the repertoire. The Passacaglia fragment from 1913 is characteristic in its intensity, and in its mode of 'developing variation' – each variation building on the former one rather than on the original theme. The further novelty in this set is that the 13-minute-long orchestral concert aria *Der Wein* (The Wine) is given two performances, one in German, as usual, by Geraldine McGreevy, the other in the Baudelaire's original French, by the tenor Robert Murray, which makes a strikingly different

impression, less overwrought and more mellifluous than one expects Berg's music ever to be.

The other works on the set are standard fare. Though this account of the Op. 6 Three Pieces is less utterly terrifying than some, it's nonetheless impressive. The third Piece is Berg's most eloquent tribute to Mahler – and achieves in ten minutes what Mahler often takes three times as long to convey: a sense of impending cosmic doom. Berg seems to have lived with that, since it pervades everything here. Thanks to the lucid conducting of Mario Venzago, the magnificent and fearless playing of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, and a Chandos recording which combines clarity and enormous weight, this set represents an outstanding addition to the catalogue, and a to some extent fresh approach to this intense, oppressive music. *Michael Tanner*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★★