

Chamber

Lang Lang, Mischa Maisky and Vadim Repin • Marc-André Hamelin • Ykeda Duo

Bach

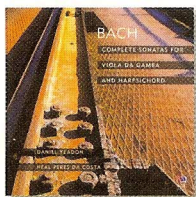
Complete Viola da gamba Sonatas

Daniel Yeadon *va da gamba* Neal Peres da Costa *hpd*
ABC Classics © ABC476 3394 (43' • DDD)

Selected comparison:

Savall, Koopman (6/00) (ALLA) AV9812

A decidedly different take on Bach that lacks a clear interpretative vision



Recording Bach's three sonatas for bass viol and harpsichord – all trio sonata textures in which the harpsichordist plays two parts – is a rite of passage for all serious viol-

players. The catalogue includes recordings by Pandolfo with Alessandrini, Dreyfus with Haugsand, Savall with Koopman, Linden with Egarr and Manson with Pinnock. So it is among distinguished company that Daniel Yeadon and Neal Peres da Costa must compete.

To set their performance apart from the others, they have chosen a more muscular, instrumental, less vocal approach than those who also perform and record the overtly declamatory French repertoire. The downside is that the music is often beat-bound and airless, especially in the slow movements. Bach's hierarchies of rhythm and phrasing are lost: musical gestures pass by unnoticed, phrases end perfunctorily and even the larger architectural structures within movements pass unnoticed. When the musicians do phrase, it feels contrived – such as just before the resolution of an important cadence.

Yeadon and Peres da Costa rely perhaps too much on the expressive power of *rubato* because the result is occasionally rhythmic instability. Yeadon would seem almost dismissive of sustained notes within movements, starving them of tone and shape, yet he often dwells on final notes. Finally, sadly, ornaments are not always gracefully executed. Both players are highly knowledgeable, experienced musicians and close colleagues but the impression these performances give is that they have not always agreed on the best way forward.

Julie Anne Sadie

Brahms

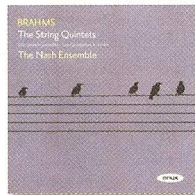
String Quintets – No 1, Op 88; No 2, Op 111

Nash Ensemble (Marianne Thorsen, Malin Broman *vns* Lawrence Power *va* Paul Watkins *vc*) with Philip Dukes *va*
Onyx Classics © ONYX4043 (56' • DDD)

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Hagen Qt, Caussé (5/97) (DG) 453 420-2GH

The Nash Ensemble are on cracking form for this joyous Brahms disc



Brahms followed Mozart's lead in adding a second viola to the string quartet line-up for his two string quintets, rather than opting for the extra cello favoured by Schubert and

Boccherini. For Mozart this offered a range of melody instruments and sub-groups drawn from the expanded chamber ensemble, whereas Brahms revelled in the richness such bulking-out in the mid-range afforded him. The two string quintets (1882 and 1890) are essentially sunny creations, conceived during happy times in Bad Ischl, a summer retreat much favoured by the composer. The First Quintet strikes a characteristic Brahmsian balance between economy and expansiveness, telescoping slow

'The Nash Ensemble are nothing less than the London regiment of chamber music's crack troops'

movement and *scherzo* into the single span of the central variations, and framing this with the autumnal, Schubertian unfolding of the opening *Allegro non troppo* and the Beethovenian contrapuntal discursiveness of the final *Allegro energico*. Brahms conceived the Second Quintet as his final work (its opus number – 111 – is a coincidence he would surely have wryly enjoyed), until the artistry of clarinettist Richard Mühlfeld persuaded him back to the composer's desk. In one of the most striking openings in all chamber music, upper-string sirens blaze off in hot pursuit of a drive-by cello solo. The slow movement and waltzish intermezzo are in Brahms's elegiac mode, while the finale demonstrates his love of Hungarian gypsy music.

The Nash Ensemble are nothing less than the London regiment of chamber music's crack troops and they yield nothing in interpretative power and consistency of concentration to the Hagen Quartet and Gérard Caussé, the comparison favoured in the *Gramophone Classical Music Guide*. Both discs present this joyful, compelling music in its best light; the Nash are recorded with a touch more immediacy.

David Thresher

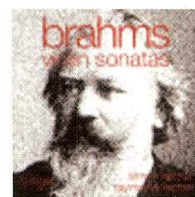
Brahms

Three Violin Sonatas. Sonata 'FAE' – Scherzo
Simon Fischer *vn* Raymond Fischer *pf*
Biddulph © 80229 (80' • DDD)

Selected comparison:

R Capuçon, Angelich (11/05) (VIRG) 545731-2

Detailed and loving performances from father and son Fischer



Simon Fischer is better known for his fine qualities as a pedagogue than a performer, and credit is due to any teacher who steps out and shows he can still lead by

example. He does so with the old-fashioned virtues of line and length, which pay dividends in places where others are more nervy (the first movement of the Third) or more generically impassioned (the "FAE" Scherzo). Healthy vibrato and portamento never fail him in projecting the melancholy of the First and the quick-tempered Third. His father Raymond is an accomplice of intimate understanding, who warms passages such as the spread chromatic chords in the finale of the Second while retaining their strangeness, and I think it's a distant microphone placing that occasionally causes the violin to be occluded, even when both are playing quietly.

These detailed and loving performances are also broad: the gaps between sonatas are severely attenuated, presumably to avoid exceeding the 80-minute mark of a standard CD. You wouldn't know from the expressive markings in the booklet track list – which are wrong apart from the Third Sonata – but the second movement of the Second Sonata begins *Andante tranquillo*. The Fischers play this at 78 beats per minute, which makes an interesting comparison with the 90 that most performers take over the *Adagio non troppo* of the Second Symphony (also an F major movement of a D major work). Raymond Fischer's booklet-note argues for its "raptly beautiful *adagio* character" but Capuçon (with Angelich) and Perlman (with Ashkenazy) both take half a minute less. Capuçon and Angelich are scarcely quicker overall – less than a minute – than the Fischers but their sweeter, better-recorded sound, more lively phrasing and more sharply drawn sense of the ambiguities that lie within these late works all make a surer recommendation for a modern recording.

Peter Quantrill