

PERSONAE Leslee Smucker (vn) GEGA 32 (55:00)

ANTHEIL *Printemps*. BOUGOGNE (arr. Pound) *Madame trop vos me spremes*. POUND *Fiddle Music: First Suite*. *Sestina: Altaforte*. *Al Poco Giorno*. ANDRIESSEN *Raadsels*. *Xenia*. MERZ *Sestina (after Pound)*. FAIDIT (arr. Pound) *Plainte pour la Mort du roi Richard Coeur de Lion*. KESIKLI *The Logical Conclusion*. SAARIAHO *Nocturne*. CONVITORTIO (arr. Pound) *Tu soi nel fiore della sua bellezza*

This is a wonderful album. Violinist Leslee Smucker has produced a program around poet Ezra Pound's works for solo violin. They were written for his partner, Olga Rudge. The contents of the recital all are arranged in tercets, each containing a work by Pound and a stanza from a lovely poem by Jesse Nathan, recited by the violinist's sister Lana Smucker. The poem is entitled "Persona," and ends with the telling line, "Words are children, words our mother." The same sentiment can be applied to the music on this album. Its title, *Personae*, is taken from the title of Pound's first successful book of poetry. I have very little use for Pound as a poet. Even his translations, such as "The Seafarer," which generally are held in high regard, seem overwrought to me. I think Pound's greatest literary accomplishment was editing T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. I must admit to a certain bias in this regard. I think the most important 20th Century American poets are Ira Gershwin and Cole Porter. My Harvard English professors would be horrified, but that's my opinion. In addition to being a savvy program maker, Leslee Smucker is a wonderful violinist. I strongly recommend her videos of several of the works on *Personae*. On YouTube you can find her performances of J.P. Merz's *Sestina (after Pound)* and Egemen Kesikli's *The Logical Conclusion*. Smucker's web site contains a video of Kaija Saariaho's *Nocturne*. You also may find there, as a testament to Smucker's virtuosity, a splendid rendition on viola of Henri Vieuxtemps's *Capriccio "Homage to Paganini"*. Smucker's *Personae* represents its own world, seducing the listener into its sources of contemplation and reverie.

George Antheil's *Printemps*, also written for Olga Rudge, has a long, sinuous line that illustrates the season's fertility. Pound's First Suite of *Fiddle Music* has a middle section redolent of medieval dance music. The work is an impressive testimony to Pound's range as a composer. Louis Andriessen's *Raadsels*, or "Riddles," encompasses several moods with point and elegance. Its enticements perhaps owe something to his period of study with Luciano Berio. Pound's *Sestina: Altaforte* possesses an angularity and cryptic quality that perhaps is a reflection of modernist poetry. Merz's piece, apparently with recorded accompaniment, is eerie and haunting. Pound's transcription of the Lament for the Death of King Richard the Lionhearted is a work of genuine empathy and pathos. Kesikli's piece has an Ivesian feeling of experimentation. *Al Poco Giorno*, with a title taken from Dante, is a late work of Pound's with considerable sublimity. It includes an Italian Baroque element in the violin's figurations. Kaija Saariaho's *Nocturne* was written in response to the death of the Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski. It is an expression of genuine pain. Andriessen's *Xenia* opens with an avant-garde take on the sarabande. Its last

movement, "Song," is an intriguing interweaving of evocative melody with words by Rimbaud sung by the violinist.

The CD's sound engineering is excellent. *Personae* is a bewitching collection carefully chosen to elicit the poetic qualities in music and words. I found it captivating from the first time I heard it, and now at my fifth listening it strikes me as even more meaningful. I believe it stimulates the hearer to think of the genesis of music and poetic speech, and for this quality must be highly recommended. **Dave Saemann**