

# NORTH AMERICAN DISCS

GIL SHARON joins the **FINE ARTS QUARTET** to perform Bruckner's Quintet; the **ELARIS DUO** play Kodály's remarkable Duo for violin and cello; plus the complete quartets of **GEORGE ANTHEIL**

## Americans abroad

ANTHONY BURTON enjoys a rich seam of music history



### AMERICANS IN ROME

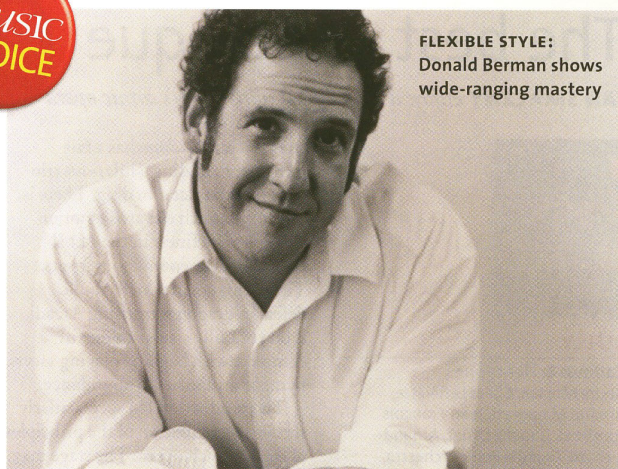
Music by Fellows of the American Academy in Rome

Various artists, Donald Berman (piano and artistic director)  
Bridge 9271A/D 284:15 mins (4 discs)  
ArkivMusic.com \$61.99

Since 1921, the American Academy in Rome has offered annual residencies to American composers at formative stages of their careers. Thirty-seven of them are represented in this four-disc

set, lavishly annotated and with high standards of performance and recording. On a solo piano disc, the artistic director of the project, Donald Berman, shows great stylistic flexibility, both between pieces and within Tamar Diesendruck's multifarious *Sound Reasoning in the Tower of Babel*.

The other discs feature voices, strings and winds. Among the highlights are a tantalising fragment (in a chamber arrangement) from Roger Sessions's operatic masterwork *Montezuma*, Elliott Carter's luminous orchestrations of two early songs, Stephen Hartke's piano quartet *Beyond Words* (a restrained Tallis-based meditation on 9/11) and



**FLEXIBLE STYLE:**  
Donald Berman shows wide-ranging mastery

David Lang's coruscating *Vent* for flute and piano. But if you have even a passing interest in 20th-century music, you'll want to explore this rich

seam of American musical history and choose your own favourites.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★



### BRUCKNER

String Quintet & Quartet etc  
Nos 3 and 4  
Gil Sharon (viola)  
Naxos 8.570788 79:33 mins



### REICHA

Wind Quintets, Op. 100  
Nos 3 and 4  
Westwood Wind Quintet  
Crystal Records CD 271  
72:04 mins



### DUO VIRTUOSO

Works for violin and cello by  
Mozart, Kodály etc  
Elaris Duo  
MSR Classics MS 1236  
66:17 mins



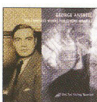
### ROMANTIC TREASURES

Dvořák, Saint-Saëns etc  
Schwartz (vln), Chien (pno)  
Roméo Records 7263  
71:00 mins



### CHAUSSON • FAURÉ

Chausson: Concerto in D;  
Fauré: Violin Sonata No. 1  
Kim (vln), Dank (pno);  
Jupiter Quartet  
Azica ACD-71243 60:52 mins



### ANTHEIL

Works for string quartet  
Del Sol String Quartet  
Other Minds Records  
OM1008-2 63:17 mins

**THE FINE ARTS QUARTET** are joined by violist Gil Sharon in **BRUCKNER's** only mature chamber work, the fine Quintet written between the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies. The performance is accomplished, but doesn't always respect Bruckner's more extreme dynamics, while the recording seems over-bright and lacking in the depth needed for the slow movement. The Quintet's coupled with the Intermezzo intended as a replacement for its *scherzo*, together with an earlier Quartet and Rondo, interesting but somewhat dutiful student exercises dating from his late thirties! (★★★★)

Another long-standing ensemble, the Westwood Wind Quintet, is nearing the end of its traversal of the complete wind quintets of Antonín, or Antoine, **REICHA**, the Czech-born friend and contemporary of Beethoven who ended up teaching an entire generation of composers in Paris. No. 11 of the 12 volumes contains two characteristically well-crafted, formally ingenious and occasionally witty quintets, though playing them with every last repeat is perhaps stretching their charms a little too far. The ensemble playing is smooth, but the players aren't perfectly matched in tone quality and technical neatness (★★★).

The Elaris Duo have planned their **DUO VIRTUOSO** disc as a history of the development of the violin and cello duet. Unfortunately, that means mostly *hors d'oeuvres* – an arrangement of Mozart, a snippet of Boccherini, a probably spurious Haydn movement, a Beethoven piece originally written for wind, and even an arrangement of Halvorsen's free transcription of Handel – before the main course of Kodály's magnificent Duo, very well and idiomatically played. The recording, in an empty concert hall, takes a bit of getting used to (★★★).

The collection of **ROMANTIC TREASURES** by violinist Sergiu Schwartz and pianist Alec Chien also has a recording that initially seems unhelpful, though for the opposite reason: a slightly close, almost domestic acoustic. The two are persuasive in Dvořák's lovely *Four Romantic Pieces*, the eloquent Saint-Saëns First Sonata, and a couple of Debussy transcriptions. But Schwartz's intonation isn't always spot-on in Richard Strauss's early Sonata, and Chien is a bit loose in the 'Scotch snap' rhythms in its finale. And why make a cut in this movement, and reverse the order of the last two Dvořák pieces? (★★★)

Another violin-and-piano team, Soovin Kim and Jeremy Denk, pairs **FAURÉ's** wonderful First Sonata with the lush chamber Concerto by his contemporary **CHAUSSON**, the latter accompanied by the promising Jupiter Quartet. Kim spins a fine thread of beautifully pure and well-tuned tone, but his playing seems all too clean: surely the music of this period cries out for some Romantic glides and swoops? The recording, close on the piano and sometimes relegating Kim to the background, doesn't help (★★★).

**GEORGE ANTHEIL's** first two string quartets were written in Paris in the 1920s, and they're very much of their time and place, with their sometimes strident discords and sudden switches of mood and tone. Quartet No. 3, written in Hollywood in the '40s, is blander: a mixture of Prokofiev and Milhaud with what sounds like an English folk melody thrown in. The excellent young Del Sol Quartet, well recorded, plays these and a couple of shorter pieces with devoted attention to detail and a nice light touch (★★★★). Anthony Burton  
ArkivMusic.com: Azica \$14.99;  
Crystal \$14.99; MSR Classics \$9.99;  
Naxos \$6.99; Other Minds \$17.99;  
Roméo Records \$15.49