



# ATLANTA AUDIO CLUB

APRIL 2022

## BLOCH, CASSADO, HINDEMITH, BRITTEN: MUSIC FOR SOLO CELLO

BENJAMIN WHITCOMB, cellist

MS1798

This is a must for students of the cello. Additionally, it has much more popular appeal for music listeners who are not cello students than you might have imagined, thanks to American cellist Benjamin Whitcomb who combines teaching (he is currently Professor of Cello and Music Theory at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with active careers as a clinician and adjudicator, recitalist and chamber musician. All of which makes him eminently qualified to present four solo masterworks by 20th Century composers that capture the very soul of the cello and the thoughts it is capable of expressing all by itself. Seldom do we find musical education and sheer aural pleasure in such an optimal balance.

We begin with Suite No.1 for Unaccompanied Cello by Ernest Bloch (1880-1959). Though the listener may detect some lingering after-glow from the way Bloch employed the cello in his masterwork *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra, the thrust here is definitely that of solo chamber music. It involves the listener in emotions that may be lonely and sad, richly textured and defiant, expressed as modal melody, aria or folk song. The richness of the bass line that Bloch calls in for accompaniment is quite welcome, as is the Allegro finale, which makes quite a contrast to the general seriousness of the earlier movements. Throughout the suite, the rich vocal-like quality of the cello's voice is much in evidence.

Spanish composer Gaspar Cassado (1897-1966) is heard from in his Suite for Solo Cello, a beautifully laid-out work in which the spirit of his native province of Catalonia comes to life before our very ears, especially in the *Sardana*, a communal dance that has been bound-up with Catalan social consciousness down to the present day. A solemn and dignified dance in which men and women join hands alternately in a circle, we seem to sense the footfalls of the dancers, the long and short steps, in Cassado's imaginative setting. And we are given another dance for our listening pleasure in the final movement, *Intermezzo e Danza finale*.

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), a German composer who was intimately conversant performing on most instruments including the cello, displays his range as a composer in his Cello Sonata, Op.25, No.3. In five movements, marked *Lebhaft, sehr markiert* (animated, strongly accented), *Mäßig schnell*, *Gemächlich* (moderately fast. Slow, gentle, and unhurried), *Langsam* (slow), *Lebhaftes Viertel* (animated, in quarter-notes), and *Mäßig schnell* again, it is a beautifully laid-out work with a variety of moods from sadness to jollity.

Lastly, we have Suite No. 2 for Unaccompanied Cello, Op.80, by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976). It is a five-movement, well-balanced suite of contrasted musical forms, richly conceived and executed. Britten, whose own favorite instruments were voice and piano, also absorbed a considerable body of string theory and technique from his own mentor, Frank Bridge, and it served him well in devising a suite of richly textured, sonorous music that often reminds us in its expressiveness of the common range the cello shares with the human voice.

In parting, I should like to mention the rich, sonorous, and translucent quality of the sound recordings made in January, 2021 at Tanner-Monagle Studios, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It serves this particular music very well.

[www.atlantaaudioclub.org](http://www.atlantaaudioclub.org)

Phil Muse