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Review by Julian HAYLOCK

ALFANO Violin Sonata in D major, Piano Quintet in A flat major, Nenia, Scherzino

Elmira Darvarova, Mary Ann Mumm (violins), Craig Mumm (viola), Samuel Magill (cello), Scott Dunn (piano)

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Chamber works from an Italian operatic composer

Although his name is remembered today almost exclusively for completing Puccini's last great opera *Turandot*, Franco Alfano (1875-1954) was a gifted though not especially prolific composer in his own right. He produced a series of orchestral, piano and chamber music in addition to the operas *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *La leggenda di Sakuntala*, which led to him getting the *Turandot* job in the first place.

The Violin Sonata (1923) dates from Alfano's middle period, when he was intoxicated with the sounds of Ravel and Debussy - the rarefied neo-Classical world of Debussy's Violin Sonata is fused here with post-Lisztian flourishes reminiscent of Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*. Enrico Pierangeli's transcription of two pieces dating from 1933 and the 1945 Piano Quintet return to the more overtly melodic style of his youth, but with a new sophistication of almost Fauréan sensibility.

Considering these are world-premiere recordings, it is remarkable how totally inside Alfano's distinctive idiom these outstanding musicians sound. Elmira Darvarova, a former concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera, plays with intoxicating tonal beauty and beguilingly sensuous phrasing, and is well matched by her colleagues in the Quintet (Darvarova, Samuel Magill and Scott Dunn have already recorded Alfano's Cello Sonata and Concerto for Naxos). There's atmospheric and well-balanced engineering from John Baker.

JULIAN HAYLOCK