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The Australian Album (Asmira Woodward-Page)

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The Australian Album

Works for violin and piano by Dulcie Holland, Miriam Hyde, Frank Hutchens, Alfred Hill, and Arthur Benjamin

Asmira Woodward-Page (violin) and Scott Davie (piano)

Artworks AW034

Reviewed by Michael Hannan

It has been fashionable in the modern era of Australian music composition to question the achievements of the generation of Australian composers represented on this CD. But as the moon of musical modernism has waned, a revival and re-evaluation of this earlier approach to composing has been taking place. This is taking the form of academic research, the preparation of editions for publication, and the making of commercial recordings.

An appreciation of this newly restored musical heritage is best achieved through highly polished performances in the concert hall and on record such as those provided here by Asmia Woodward-Page and Scott Davie.

The power of the chosen pieces to engage the listener varies. Dulcie Holland's *Cradle Song* (1947) is melodically inventive, harmonically luxuriant, and well structured. By contrast her three-movement Sonata, written a decade earlier is less economical in its approach. The first two movements have loose rhapsodic tendencies. The final movement demonstrates more of the motivic logic expected of a sonata, but is also prone to romantic excesses.

Holland's contemporary Miriam Hyde is represented by the very short *Dryad's Dance* (1936), a piece with great forward drive and vibrant interplay between the two instruments. Frank Hutchens' *Always Afternoon* (1934) is a charming, wistful work displaying a satisfying development of the initial musical idea. The outside movements of Arthur Benjamin's *Sonatina* (1925) ramble aimlessly but its short central scherzo is cleverly skittish.

Although romantic in style the five pieces by Alfred Hill (including three waltzes and a mazurka) demonstrate a restraint and grace that sets them apart from the other works on the CD. The relatively formal approach, which may be a result of Hill's study in Leipzig (the other composers on the CD all trained in London), perhaps endows Hill's pieces with more lasting interest than the others on the CD. But certainly this is a matter of taste.

The performances on the CD are of a high standard. Woodward-Page plays with great expressiveness in the slower pieces and negotiates the rapid passages (for example in *Dryad's Dance*) effortlessly. The recording of the piano sometimes has a muffled quality

which effects the overall value of the product. Another disturbing aspect is the pronounced sniffing sounds of the performer(s) captured on the recording. Although the musicians(s) need to breathe, for a recording for commercial release it is surely possible to better control this aspect of the performance.