

American Record Guide, May/June 2009

SMITH, L.: Chamber Music

Sarah Darling, v, va; Jeffrey Grossman, p

Naxos 559351 -- 59 minutes

Californian Leland Smith (b. 1925) studied, as a young man, with Milhaud (at Mills College) and Sessions (at Berkeley), and later, perhaps most significantly for his career, with computer guru John Chowning at Stanford; but he didn't compose much after 1970, when he began devoting his attention entirely to the development of computer software for music notation. The result was the music typography system SCORE, which set the stand for music publication at the time (it has, of course, since been superseded but retains its influence). Most of Mr. Smith's career was spent teaching at Stanford. This collection is a souvenir of his compositional work--almost all from the early 50s--written for colleagues, students, and friends.

There are eight pieces here for violin, viola, and/or piano. For violin and piano, there is a concise neoclassical *Sonatina* (1952-53), and *Concert Piece* from 1951, sometimes soulful, otherwise disjunct and sketchy.

For viola (also played by Ms. Darling), there is a solo *Suite* (1948), broadly lyrical in the mainstream neoclassical style of the time, and a tightly-wound three-movement *Sonata* with piano from 1953.

For solo piano, we have four serial one-page *Etudes* in the style of Schoenberg (1952), a spiky *Intermezzo and Capriccio* (1952) certainly influenced by Sessions, six conventionally quasi-Weberian *Bagatelles* (1964) (for the record, "the first musical score to be typeset entirely on a computer"), and the most substantial work on the program, a knotty 15-minute *Piano Sonata* from 1954, also out of Sessions's notebook.

Performances are skillful and obviously authoritative. Notes by the composer and Carson Cooman.

ALLEN GIMBEL