

[SMITH, L.: Chamber Music - Piano Sonata / Viola Sonata / Suite for Solo Viola / 6 Bagatelles \(S. Darling, Grossman\)](#)

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Though Leland Smith will enter the history books as an originator of computerised music typography, his younger years enjoyed a compositional education that included Milhaud, Sessions and Messiaen.

Born in California in 1925, he was to become an extremely versatile musician well able to play six instruments at professional level, eventually settling into a career as a bassoonist with some of the leading American orchestras. He shared his time with teaching in major Universities, and was a busy composer for thirty years, though, for some unexplained reason, he has composed nothing since he was forty-six. Much of his output has been in solo and chamber music, the present disc covering works mainly from the 1950s and involving piano, violin and viola in various permutations. He describes himself as a 'miniaturist', and all of the works are built from very short movements, many lasting less than a minute. Those movements are generally described by a metronome mark and that does impart a certain mechanical rigidity. His time spent with Messiaen often surfaces, slow passages contrasting with brief sections flooded with notes. I greatly admire Smith's immense skill in his *Sonatina* for violin and piano; the *Sonata* for viola and piano; his *Six Bagatelles* and *Four Etudes* for piano, but this is one of those occasions where the critic has had difficulty connecting with the composer. All are receiving their first recorded performance, the two soloists, Jeffrey Grossman and Sarah Darling (both violin and viola) being persuasive advocates of contemporary music. The sound quality is excellent, and those outside the US will find the disc readily available on Internet.

-- David's Review Corner