

Berg · Schoenberg

'Transfigurations'

Berg Chamber Concerto - Adagio. Piano Sonata, Op 1 (arr Mulleman) **Schoenberg** Chamber Symphony, Op 9 (arr Webern). Verklärte Nacht, Op 4 (arr Steuermann)

Het Collectief

Alpha (ALPHA867 • 73')



Collections of Second Viennese School arrangements have proliferated during

recent years, and here Het Collectief combine the tried with the unfamiliar to a thoughtful and provocative degree.

Almost as often performed now as the original for string sextet and not so far behind in terms of recordings, Eduard Steuermann's arrangement of *Verklärte Nacht* unerringly captures its *fin de siècle* aura. Initially a little tardy in emotional response, this account feels at its best in the work's second half – the equanimity of the man's acceptance securing an eloquent response through to a fervent culmination,

then a postlude whose lingering ecstasy is unerringly caught.

That phase in Schoenberg's output initiated by the above piece ostensibly concludes with his First Chamber Symphony, and it was an astute move to include Webern's arrangement as this tells us as much about the latter composer in terms of its fine-tuning the music's contrapuntal intricacy and making audible every motivic connection. Other accounts have exuded greater tonal finesse but Het Collectief's expressively volatile momentum makes an absorbing listen.

Indebted to this work in many aspects, Berg's Piano Sonata all too easily skirts overkill in its chosen medium such that Tim Mulleman's arrangement gets closer to the heart of the matter than Theo Verbey's orchestration (as recorded by Riccardo Chailly – Decca, 1/97). A pity that Berg's reduction of the *Adagio* from his Chamber Concerto is rarely heard, this most approachable movement from its composer's most intractable piece succeeding well as a stand-alone item.

Other recordings retain claims on the listener's attention but to have these pieces so coupled and in such sympathetic readings is its own justification. Immediate yet well-balanced sound and succinct but informative notes are further enhancements of this recommendable release. **Richard Whitehouse**