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## REVIEWS FOR FOUR STRINGS AROUND THE WORLD

### From Philip Glass to folk-inspired violin, sounds for the summer

It was Irina Muresanu's difficulty in playing "The Cricket Dance" — an Americana-flavored violin piece by Mark O'Connor of no more than intermediate difficulty — that led to this illuminating release. The problem wasn't technical, for a player of Muresanu's abilities; it was instead, she decided, an unfamiliarity with the work's idiom. Curiosity about styles from different parts of the world led to this collection of solo violin music, from a variety of countries. Familiar works, such as Paganini's Caprice No. 24 or Bach's Chaconne, here seem like lesser attractions; the real revelations come in works that reframe and transform national traditions, such as the pulsing Irish dance rhythms and droning double stops of "Tar Éis an Caoineadh" by Dave Flynn, or the bent notes and grinding dissonances of "Calligraphy No. 5" by Iranian composer Reza Vali. Muresanu plays each work with fidelity to its distinctive character. When "The Cricket Dance" arrives at the end, it bounces along effortlessly, just as O'Connor must have intended.

- David Weininger, [Boston Globe](#), July 2018

### Irina Muresanu an Extraordinary Violinist

This post to bring to the attention of our readers an extraordinary violinist, **Irina Muresanu**.

Romanian by birth, she now lives in Maryland and teaches at the University of Maryland. *Sono Luminus* recently released the album *Four Strings Around the World* (DSL 92221) and forwarded to us a copy for review on our blog.

When you have a chance, ...find a hard copy of this beautifully engineered CD. I promise you will be stunned by not only the virtuosic playing of **Irina Muresanu**'s playing but also by her deep commitment to exploring music for her instrument from musical cultures as diverse as Indian, Persian, Native American, Irish, Chinese and Argentine ones. Oh, and read her liner notes. This is a musical scholar who gives voice to her ideas both in words and in her playing.

In her album she mixes samples of an off-beat repertory with sundry pieces by Kreisler, Paganini, and JS Bach. The *Caprice No. 24* of Niccolò Paganini, Fritz Kreisler's *Recitative and Scherzo*, Op. 6 and JS Bach's Chaconne from the *D minor Partita* are de rigueur test pieces for the best of violinists and Irina Muresanu quickly puts any doubts to rest: this is a superb artist in full command of her instrument. She plays the Italian master's *Caprice* with Romantic *bel canto* singing tone. The Kreisler is all pure Viennese *Schlagmusik* here given a lively reading. The Bach *Chaconne* – a notoriously tricky musical mine-field is played by Muresanu with classical sobriety.

None of the rest of the music in this album is strictly and traditionally classic, but grown from strong folk roots. Such is the case with Georges Enescu's decidedly gypsy-flavored *Airs in Romanian Style*, which Muresanu plays with the dash and abandon of a village fiddler and with daunting technique.

In the Gaelic *Tar éis an Caoineadh* the composer and Ms. Muresanu employ all sorts of technically dazzling effects typical of Irish fiddle music. In Reza Vali's *Calligraphy No. 5* the inspiration for the composer is born out of ancient music for the Arab *rebab* and the Persian *kemancheh*, both ancestors to the western violin. In both these compositions Muresanu is nothing short of dazzling, as her violin imitates the bending of the pitch typical of much Iranian music with its modal, non-western sound.

In Shirih Korde's three-part *Vak* for violin and electronic drone Muresanu's playing is hauntingly redolent of the sound of Indian string instruments. In Bright Sheng's lovely *The Stream Flows: II*, Muresanu adopts a percussive mode of playing that alternates with a plangent sound reminiscent of a Chinese *erhu*.

The music of Astor Piazzolla's *Tango Etude No. 3* is cool at times, red hot at others, recalling the sound of fiddles played in dimly-lit, smoke-filled dives near the docks of the River Plate. Muresanu cuts loose on this track fearlessly throwing all caution to the winds.

Entering the musically unknown territory of Native American composer Jerod Impichchaachaha'Tate, of the Chickasaw Nation, Irina Muresanu plays *Oshta* with intensity and respect for the spirituality inherent in this strangely haunting composition.

Mark O'Connor's *The Cricket Dance* is Appalachian to the core and foot-tappin' and fiddlin' her way into a grand finale, Irina Muresanu convinces us there's simply nothing in this world she cannot play.

- Rafael de Acha, <http://www.rafaelmusicnotes.com> April 2018

## Strings Attached

**Four Strings Around the World** is a quite stunning solo CD from the Romanian-born violinist **Irina Muresanu** that features diverse musical styles from across Europe, the Middle East, Asia and both North and South America (**Sono Luminus DSL-92221 sonoluminus.com**). Muresanu

introduced her *Four Strings Around the World* project in 2013 after her difficulty in learning Mark O'Connor's *Cricket Dance* led her to explore worldwide non-traditional violin styles.

Enescu's *Airs in Romanian Folk Style* opens the disc, with works by Ireland's Dave Flynn, Iran's Reza Vali, India's Shirish Korde and China's Bright Sheng surrounding Paganini's *24th Caprice*, Kreisler's *Recitativo and Scherzo Op.6* and a strongly melodic reading of the Bach *D Minor Chaconne*. Then it's Piazzolla's *Tango Étude No.3* and a work by Chickasaw Nation composer Jerod Impichchaahaaha' Tate before the short *Cricket Dance* that apparently gave Muresanu so much trouble.

Not that you would know it – complete with foot stomps, it's a simply dazzling end to one of the best solo CDs I've heard.

- Terry Robbins, [The Whole Note](#), June/July/August 2018 edition

## MusicWeb International

“The programme divides in two: Western and Eastern Europe, which ranges from Bach to the contemporary David Flynn via Enescu, Paganini and Kreisler, and Music from the Middle East, Asia, and North and South America; quite a lot to include here all round...

“Muresanu has selected wisely when it comes to her fellow countryman, Enescu, whose *Airs in Romanian Folk Style*, though written in 1926, was not to be published until 2006. There aren't many recordings around. The four movements offer plenty of opportunities for characteristic rubato-style performance and for vital dance patterns. The taut melancholia of the third piece is followed by the giocoso vibrancy of the concluding Allegro. This galvanizing reading shows its charms in fine fashion...

“For the second part of her journey she visits Iran via Reza Vali's *Calligraphy No.5*. This draws on traditional Persian modes, employing the Dastgāh. This is something of which Behzad Abdi is an outstanding exponent and, like Abdi, Vali aims at a concordance between Persian and Western techniques: Bartók is a probable starting point. Representing India, Shirish Korde's *Vák*, for violin and electronic drone invariably owes its inspiration to Ragas. The drone effect allows Muresanu to negotiate the work's three unbroken sections with considerable virtuosity. Bright Sheng's international reputation is now of long standing and *The Stream Flows*, of which we hear only the second part (shame) evokes the sound of the *erhu* in this dance-patterned and pizzicato-flecked piece. Piazzolla's *Tango Etude No.3* possesses all its resonant and driving capital in this solo reading...”

- Jonathan Woolf, MusicWeb International, May 2018

## Sono Luminus Label Does It Again...

### CD featuring violinist Irina Muresanu as eclectic as it gets

In the space of less than two years, the recording company Sono Luminus (distributed by Naxos) has proven to be the go-to label if you're looking to break out of a listening rut. One of their latest releases features [Irina Muresanu] in repertoire ranging from pillars such as the Chaconne of Bach's *Partita in D Minor* to world premieres from India and the Chickasaw Nation.

The purveyor of this stimulating potpourri is Romanian violinist Irina Muresanu (pictured above on the CD cover). She relates that when working on Mark O'Connor's "Cricket Dance," the time it was taking to learn the short work made her realize that the technique required generally lay outside the demands of the classical repertoire. What else, she wondered, is out there that might fall into this category? The result of her search culminated in the CD "Four Strings Around the World."

The disc is divided into two parts, "Music from Western and Eastern Europe" and "Music from the Middle East and Asia, South and North America." Muresanu begins the journey in her native Romania, with "Airs in Romanian Folk Style," an engaging and brief four movements from George Enescu. We then head to Ireland with the celebratory "Tar Eisan Caoineadh" of David Flynn. The title translates "After the Keening," the mournful portion of an Irish wake. The life-affirming section follows, and Flynn paid homage to a quartet of great Irish fiddlers by using a technique each was known for as the basis for a new section in the eight minute work. This is a good place to mention that one's enjoyment of the more obscure works is greatly enhanced by the detailed and generous program booklet.

Muresanu closes the European portion of the selections with some obvious selections: the "Caprice No. 24" of Paganini and the aforementioned "Chaconne" by Bach sandwich Fritz Kreisler's "Recitativo and Scherzo." While one would have to split hairs to criticize Muresanu's traversals of these iconic works, I did feel after hearing the disc twice that I was drawn back much more strongly by the off the beaten path pieces.

Thus the second half of the disc grabs one's attention at once with "Calligraphy No. 5" of Reza Vali. The derivation of the material is rooted in traditional Persian music, in this case based on a scale that includes a quarter-tone. Next we are treated to a world premiere recording of "Vak" for violin and electronic drone by Shirish Korde. Its three brief movements are based on a Raga that uncharacteristically omits the fifth degree of the scale. Designated as Raga Lilit, it is usually associated with daybreak (and by the way, the drone is the only accompaniment of Muresanu on the CD). The dreamy improvisatory sound of the opening section leads to a middle movement of meterless, but pulsed, music, and the finale grows in unabated speed and excitement.

Bright Sheng's "The Stream Flows" (Part II only) brings us to China, before we take a giant leap to South America, courtesy of "Tango Etude No. 3" of Piazzolla. Lest one fears that the territory may become too familiar, Muresanu presents a work commissioned for this project, "Oshta" ("Four") by Jerod Impichchaachaaha Tate. The composer has written, "*Oshta* is the Chickasaw word for the number 'four'...The work is closely based upon a Choctaw church hymn that was

composed in the 1800s.” In addition to more fascinating detail from the composer in the notes, Muresanu adds “At the premiere of the piece, I performed *Oshita* in the dark, in order to allow the listeners to focus only on its haunting sounds.”

The disc closes with O’Connor’s “The Cricket Dance” the very short—and very daunting—work that triggered the whole project. Muresanu’s bio reveals that she is anything but unknown; indeed she enjoys a major reputation in many cities in the U.S. and abroad. But her new CD should enhance her reputation and win many new fans...and some of us will keep a close eye on what the Sono Luminus label releases next.

- Greg Gettmansberger, [WhatGregSays blog](#), May 2018