



Suites for Viola by Reger, Busch & Weinreich

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[Fanfare](#) (James A. Altena - 2016.08.01)

By contrast, I can locate only one prior recording of the Adolf Busch Suite, by Sibylle Langmaack on an Antes CD that offers a recital of various 20th-century solo viola works and a transcription of Bach's BWV 903 Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue. These are the premiere recordings of the three Suites for Solo Viola by Justus Weinrich (1858–1927). Reger's suites, among his last compositions, date from 1915; he had planned to write a fourth suite for Karl Doktor, violist of the Busch quartet, and had even played themes from the planned work for him, but died in 1916 before actually composing it. Busch, a friend and composition protégé of Reger, then wrote his suite for Doktor to compensate for the loss. The extremely obscure Weinreich—there is no entry for him even in the New Grove, and this is the first recording of any of his works—was a court musician in Karlsruhe who apparently was a teacher, as he composed various pedagogical works, including these suites in 1894. They are lighter and less sophisticated in content than the Reger and Busch suites, but pleasingly melodious and not lacking in invention.

Violist Roland Glassl performs all these works with secure technique and a fine interpretive sense. His tonal quality is somewhat light, partaking of oak rather than cherry or mahogany. In the Busch Suite, Langmaack plays with richer tone, and I find her interpretation more searching, but she is recorded in a very resonant acoustic and is miked so closely that her breathing is intrusive, which may put some listeners off and lead them to prefer Glassl instead. As for the Reger Suites, I was unable to audition the recordings of Fukai, Franck, or Kobayashi. Of the rest, there isn't a bad performance in the bunch, though Vladimir Bukac had some rhythmically stiff phrasing in some of the fast movements. Though I am a fan of Tabea Zimmermann and expected to favor her recording, everyone seemed to be more or less on a par with Glassl—until I reached the final entry with Katarzyna Budnik-Gałązka and was left slack-jawed at some of the most stunning viola playing I've ever heard, with a gorgeously rich tone, seemingly limitless technical facility, and deeply probing interpretive artistry. Yes, this disc is firmly recommended and very much worth getting for all its contents, being a necessity for the Weinreich Suites and one of only two choices for the Busch Suite; but for the Reger Suites absolutely do lay your hands on Budnik-Gałązka's recording as well.