

**Arnold BAX (1883–1953)**

Rhapsodic Ballad (1939) [14:27]

**György LIGETI (1923–2006)**

Sonata for Solo Cello (1948; 1953) [8:41]

**Luigi DALLAPICCOLA (1904–1975)**

Ciaccona, Intermezzo e Adagio (1945) [18:35]

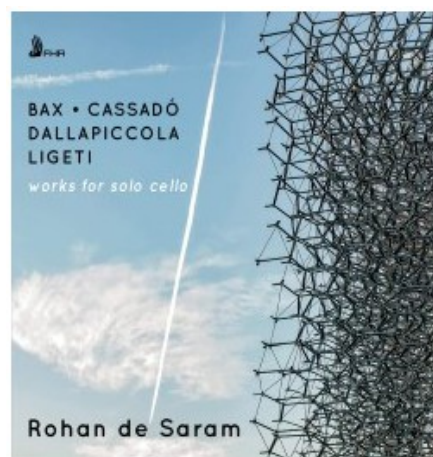
**Gaspar CASSADÓ (1897–1966)**

Suite for Solo Cello (pub 1926) [16:21]

Rohan de Saram (cello)

rec. 2015, Monkswood Studios, Waltham Abbey, UK

**FIRST HAND RECORDS FHR49** [58:11]



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Rohan de Saram was 75 in 2015 when he recorded this taxing recital of works for solo cello. It is compellingly structured, anchored by the Bax *Rhapsodic Ballad*, taking in Ligeti's early and light-hearted bipartite Sonata, moving on to Dallapiccola's powerfully dissonant and Bergian *Ciaccona*, *Intermezzo e Adagio* before ending with the best-known work of his teacher, the Suite for Solo Cello by Gaspar Cassadó. Moreover, the disc represents a kind of musical autobiography, given that de Saram premiered the Ligeti in 1979, and had met Dallapiccola when the composer journeyed to meet Cassadó to discuss the solo cello work; in addition he gave the British premiere of the Bax.

He also recorded the Bax many years ago for Pearl LP. It's something of a Baxian ugly duckling, more often neglected than taken up, perhaps because of the difficulty of programming it as much as for its technical and expressive complexities – though these are both considerable. Certainly Beatrice Harrison, for whom it was intended, didn't perform it. De Saram plays it with acute architectural sense. He avoids Raphael Wallfisch's solution to any perception of prolixity, which is to drive ahead in an agitated way – Wallfisch is exceptionally fast - in favour of a more measured mediation between episodes. It's a solution that convinces throughout, whether in the disquieting opening or its balladic and emblematic writing.

Ligeti's two-movement work dates from 1948 and 1953. Its *Dialogo* is saturated in folkloric influence and the later *Capriccio* takes a more dynamic, contemporary look, full of tight drive, which de Saram manoeuvres with room to spare. The years seem not to have taken much of a toll. The Dallapiccola is an impressive triptych, full of incident, full of dense dissonance. The nearest it ventures toward the ludic is in the Intermezzo though here the predominant mood is a slightly thin-lipped sarcasm. The gravitational weight of the work falls on the Adagio finale, the Bergian introspection of which is not unnoticed by de Saram who plays with considerable variety of colour and inflection – earlier in the work he had positively cackled with abrasive nasality. Younger players, such as Natalie Clein on Hyperion, who also includes the Ligeti as well as Bloch on her solo cello album, have been faster and generate more of a sense of tumultuous danger, but de Saram views the work in the round and the result is different but equally satisfying.

Cassadó's Suite brings out more folkloric influence, Catalan circular dances and frolic-like momentum. Whether it's the Sarabande or the Sardana, de Saram responds to the music's lustrous sway and allure. This may well be a work more closely associated with the tensile rapier strains of Janos Starker, but de Saram's tempi are excellently judged and his tonal resources enhance the wistfulness and the drama of the writing.

In short, this disc is a credo of devotion, raptly played and recorded, and offering just one of the many musical autobiographies that could be gifted to a musician as adaptable, questing and resourceful as Rohan de Saram.

*Jonathan Woolf* ([http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2019/Jul/Bax\\_Saram\\_FHR49.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2019/Jul/Bax_Saram_FHR49.htm))