

GRAMOPHONE

US & CANADA SOUNDS OF AMERICA

RECORDINGS & EVENTS *A special eight-page section for readers in the US and Canada*

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Hannah Addario-Berry...

...on recording Stephen Brown's folk- and rock-infused solo cello suites

The first suite, *Takakkaw Falls*, was originally written for flute...

I've known Stephen since he was my pre-college theory teacher, and I'd always thought it would be wonderful if he wrote something for solo cello. Back in 2003, I was home in Victoria, British Columbia, for Christmas and I heard this piece for solo flute, which Stephen had been commissioned to write for a memorial service at Takakkaw Falls in the Canadian Rockies. It's such lyrical, vocal writing and I felt that it could work on any single-voice instrument that had a singing quality.

How much did it need to be changed?

That Christmas, Stephen and I played around with different keys to find those that best used the open strings and resonance of the cello, and there might have been some switching of octaves, but mostly it worked really well as it was. What I love about working with Stephen is how open he is to the performer's input - there were no dynamics and very few articulations so we worked those things out together. He really gave me freedom to find my own voice.

Both this suite and the third, *There Was a Lady in the East*, are inspired by folk music...

Most of it is from the East Coast - Nova Scotia, Newfoundland - and when Stephen explained to me about the genesis of this music, I found out all I could about it and listened to many recordings. When you're playing vocal music, it's really helpful to know what the words are and where the emphases fall.

What's the appeal of folk music on the cello?

Folk music goes beyond any instrument in a way, but of course the fiddle is used so much in this music and, although certain techniques are easier on the violin because of how it's held, some of those do translate to the cello - the open fifth, for example, that produces that droning sound so typical in folk music.

You're a Canadian living in California...

Whenever I play Canadian music in the States, I definitely feel like a Canadian ambassador - it feels really important and meaningful to me. But when I play music infused by Canadian folksong, it does feel like I'm truly representing Canada. You can imagine the cold winds on the rocky cliffs...I do miss it if I'm away too long.



The second suite, *Fire*, is very different...

I don't have a rock background so Stephen was a good coach in that way - we had a lot of fun throughout the whole process. The second movement that uses bits from Jimi Hendrix is really the 'Fire' of the piece and definitely brings out my wild side!
addarioberry.com

S Brown

Solo Cello Suites - No 1, 'Takakkaw Falls'; No 2, 'Fire'; No 3, 'There Was a Lady in the East'
Hannah Addario-Berry *vc*
Stephen Brown © SJB1362CD (60' • DDD)



Affectionately self-described as 'beasts' and written in a tonally elegant, homespun style

analogous to furniture makers who never repeat a design, with deeply satisfying beauty at every turn, Stephen Brown's Solo Cello Suites Nos 1-3 (Nos 4-6 have been composed

but are yet to be recorded) could make a powerful evening's concert for enterprising cellists. The three works began in 2003 as a five-minute piece for solo flute to be played at a memorial service in sight of a spectacular falls in the Canadian Rockies. With the close collaboration of cellist Hannah Addario-Berry, Brown arranged *Takakkaw Falls* for solo cello, tapping into both the elemental forces of nature and Canadian musical sources; the piece was premiered in Victoria, British Columbia, the following year.

Fire followed in 2005, influenced by Jimi Hendrix, Procol Harum, Cream, the Stones and the Eagles; as in the two accompanying suites, Bachian references and devices played

an important but clearly secondary, non-derivative role. In the third suite, *There Was a Lady in the East*, Brown returned to weaving folksongs and fiddle tunes, both direct and implied, into his wandering musical fabric. Whether folk or rock, it is the integrity and strength of the materials Brown draws on, such as the Newfoundland outport song 'Who is at my window weeping', which sets the musical tone and its simple focus on humanity.

The recording in St Stephen's Anglican Church, the oldest in British Columbia, has an honest, intimate sound that makes you feel as if Addario-Berry were in the room, speaking to you with her cello. **Laurence Vitte**