J. MARTÍN Cello Sonata, “4 Noble Truths.” Recuerda. 3 Nocturnes. Rope Vieja. Hollywood Variations • Yehuda Hanani (vc); Walter Ponce (pn); William Schimmel (acc); Arti Dixon (perc) • ALBANY TROY 1279 (75:22)

This is the first commercially available recording of Jorge Martín’s output of cello music. Martín is a Cuban-born American composer who has had a prolific career in a variety of media. He writes in an appealing tonal idiom that is often engrossing and quite original. A serious-minded composer, Martín has a penchant for grappling with difficult philosophical concepts and important existential questions, and the five works on this recording, which were composed between 1997 and 2010, are cases in point.

The disc opens with Four Noble Truths, a 30-minute, four-movement sonata for cello and piano that purports to be loosely based on Buddha’s teachings about suffering, impermanence, and the path to enlightenment. Whatever the source of Martín’s inspiration, this is interesting music that stands very much on its own and is worth hearing. I am particularly taken with the somber second movement and the extended finale, which provides an appropriate conclusion to this passionate and mysterious work.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the 10-minute piece for unaccompanied cello, Recuerda, which Martín wrote in 2005 for a close friend who was terminally ill. Although composed with the expectation that it would be played at a memorial service, the piece was premiered by celloist Yehuda Hanani while its dedicatee was still alive, ostensibly to celebrate his “77th birthday.” Recuerda begins and ends austerity, with the cello imitating the drone of bagpipes. Martín claims that the extended middle section is an homage to the dedicatee’s favorite composer, Robert Schumann. To my ears, it is in fact a lot closer—particularly in character—to Sontzakovich’s late works, such as the Violin Sonata. Regardless, Martín’s affection for his dying friend is apparent throughout, and the piece as a whole is deeply affecting. I believe that Martín has made a very important addition to the cello repertoire. Cellists looking to add contemporary music to their recitals would be well advised to include Recuerda a close listen.

Although comparatively lighter fare, the remaining works—the nocturnes for cello and piano, the crossover, Latin-inspired Rope Vieja for cello, accordion and percussion; and the mildly sarcastic Hollywood Variations for cello and piano—are very enjoyable and add to the listener’s understanding of Martín’s musical interests and range.

The quality of the performances fully matches that of the music. Yehuda Hanani, a champion of Martín and, I suspect, the catalyst behind this recording, plays with heart, mind and a big, romantic tone that is suited to this music. Hanani is joined in the sonata, nocturne, and variations by the outstanding Walter Ponce, who plays with intelligence and passion. In Rope Vieja, Hanani is joined by accordionist William Schimmel and percussionist Arti Dixon, who deliver sensitive and idiomatic performances.

The recording was made at the American Academy of Arts and Letters and is of uniformly excellent quality. I enjoyed this disc a great deal, and I will be returning to it often. Radu A. Lelutiu