

C D S P O T L I G H T

Stunningly Performed

**Trios by Schumann, Smit,
Mozart and Françaix -
recommended by
GEOFF PEARCE**

'Music is in fine hands for the future with young artists of this calibre.'

This delightful disc takes its name from the classical Greek poet Ovid, as the musicians are drawn from different parts of the world, and from the idea that we try to create images and different emotions when playing music, and are therefore telling a colourful story.

The first work, Robert Schumann's *Fairy Tales*, is one of clarinettists' most beloved works, and is in four movements.

The opening movement is expansive and is really a lovely song, graceful and beguiling. Immediately one is struck by how well the members of this trio play together. Jean Johnson's clarinet sound is creamy and sumptuous, and each player knows when to project their voice or recede, depending on how important to the melody their part is.

The second movement is much more marked, with many contrasting moods and articulations, all handled masterfully by the performers. A song-like middle section eases the tension somewhat.

In the song-like third movement, all the instruments have their time playing the beautiful long lines, but particularly the clarinet and Roeland Jagers' viola. Ilona Timchenko's piano plays more of an accompanying role here.

The last movement is lively, and again the marked dotted rhythms, so beloved by Schumann, really are a feature. The piano has a much larger solo role here, but there is plenty for the others to do, often interjecting after piano chords or passages. The middle section is particularly delightful. These musicians really show a great understanding of this music, which requires sensitivity and the ability to change mood quickly.

Dutch Jewish composer Leo Smit (1900-1943), previously unknown to me, was influenced by Stravinsky and Ravel, yet his music is individualistic. Unfortunately he was incarcerated by the Nazis and died in a concentration camp — a talent cut far too short if the music on this disc is anything to go by. His trio, in three movements, a fascinating work full of contrasting ideas and textures, is well worth a listen, and I am certainly interested in finding and hearing more of his music.

All instruments are kept busy, and the middle section of the first movement is quite challenging.

The second movement is slow, and dirge like. The piano and viola set the mood at the opening, then the clarinet comes in and soars above the other instruments in a heartfelt lament, before a rhapsodic section takes over, which is at times quite dramatic. A feeling of sadness prevails, though.

The third movement is fast and dance like and altogether a happier affair than the previous movement. There is plenty of florid and challenging music for the musicians, but they excel in the changes of mood, florid passages and more cantabile lines when they present themselves. If I was in a trio for these forces, I would want to perform this work often.

Mozart's 'Kegelstatt' trio needs no introduction. He was a particular lover of the clarinet, and produced some of the finest works in the repertoire. This trio plays it beautifully, and I would recommend this recording without reservation. This is a stand-out performance.

Jean Françaix's Trio is in five movements. His music has always been a favourite of mine, but I have to confess that I did not know this work. The opening *Largo* feels its way around, and you are not always sure where it is going harmonically. (Unusual modulations are a significant feature of Françaix's music.)

The second movement, a whirling jazzy dance, has plenty of pyrotechnics and fizz. There is a contrasting slower section, in a habanera type rhythm, and this expands into a song-like melody before the original section reasserts itself.

The third movement is a *scherzando*, full of contrasting ideas and textures as well as some interesting modulations, revealing what a fine composer Françaix is, and how European Jazz and dance music is integral to his style.

The fourth movement, slow and restful, is a contrast to the two previous movements and, quite remarkably, since it is a longish movement, it remains in this vein for the duration.

The last movement, a sort of jazzy waltz, typical of a lot of Françaix's music, is refreshing and fun — like drinking a glass of chilled chablis whilst sitting on a balcony in Provence.

I would not hesitate to recommend this ensemble and this disc to anyone. It is highly enjoyable and stunningly performed. Buy this disc — you will be so pleased that you did. Music is in fine hands for the future with young artists of this calibre.

There is a supplementary piece, available for download — music of a composer I have also been very impressed with, judging by the few works that I have heard — Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979). I heartily recommend downloading and saving this, as her music has a real quality and interest, and the three fine musicians here are great champions of her music.

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