

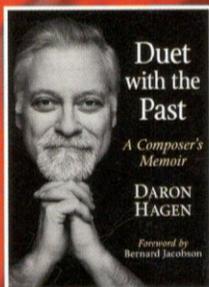
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The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors

Featured In This Issue



**Stankov Ensemble
and Linus Lerner**



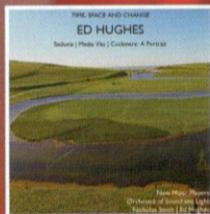
Daron Hagen



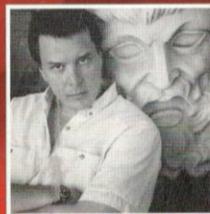
Alexander Brincken



Călin Humă



Ed Hughes



Geoffrey Gordon



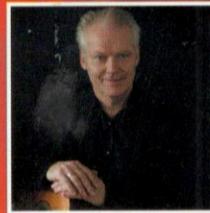
Glen Adsit



James Lentini



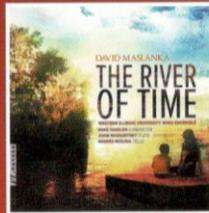
Jory Vinikour



Lars Hannibal



Marija Ilić



Mike Fansler



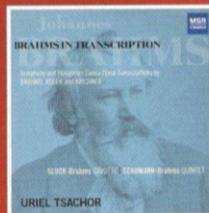
Paul Reale



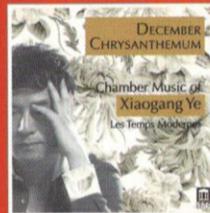
Robert Levin



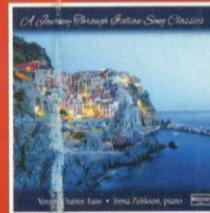
Susan Collins



Uriel Tsachor



Xiaogang Ye



Yoram Chaiter

SCHUMANN Märchenerzählungen, op.132. KURTÁG Hommage à R. Sch. MOZART Clarinet Trio in E ♭ , K 498, “Kegelstatt.” C. WEIß Piano Trio No. 3, “Gespräch unter Freunden”

There is an historical trajectory here of Mozart’s “Kegelstatt” Trio inspiring Schumann, which in turn inspired Kurtág; then, in 2013, the Mozartfest Würzburg commissioned Christof Johannes Weiß to write a piece inspired by the Mozart “Kegelstatt.” This web of connections forms the rationale for the present program, although the connections are rightly not presented in chronological order: The Schumann is paired with the Kurtág, and then the Mozart then leads to the Weiß.

The spirit of chamber music is writ large in the Iris Trio’s performance of Schumann’s beautiful and brilliant *Märchenerzählungen*, perhaps most so in the stunning crepuscular stillness of the third movement. This wonderful performance is contained within a stunning recording, having just the right amount of warmth and yet allowing for utter clarity. The players seem completely at one with Schumann’s expressive world. Molly Carr’s viola is every inch the equal to her colleagues in strength, enabling true conversations across the scoring.

The Kurtág pieces are characteristically brief and enigmatic, with the nightmarish “In der Nacht” (the fifth movement) particularly visceral in its effect. The confidence of the players throughout is a key aspect of this performance’s success, not least in their being able to prolong the atmosphere for the passacaglia finale. Here the reference is actually to Machaut and his isorhythmic motets; the slow tread is remarkable, requiring the rock-solid rhythmic discipline we encounter here.

It might feel like a long way back from Kurtág to Mozart, but actually both composers share a distaste of excess. Just like one would not wish to add notes to Mozart (except perhaps in period decorations of a line), Kurtág similarly says everything he needs to and no more. Hearing the warmth of the E ♭ Major of the “Kegelstatt” Trio offers the perfect contrast. The Iris Trio considers this Mozart the “nucleus” of their program: They perform it with all the bonhomie of good friends (and the photos included in the booklet certainly imply they are that), with real joy and wit in the central Minuet. Christine Carter’s clarinet offers golden legato and a superb sense of Mozart’s flowing genius at the opening of the finale; and just listen to Anna Petrova’s articulation on the piano shortly afterwards—delicious.

Conversation itself is the generating factor to Weiß’s *Drittes Klaviertrio*, a 17-minute exploration of the dynamics that can exist between three protagonists, including a three-subject, three-part fugue with material based on Mozart’s “Kegelstatt.” Although composed from a Modernist perspective, Weiß’s piece includes moments of real repose and warmth, and indeed the interactions between performers are those of exchanges rather than adversarial confrontations.

Of course, each piece except for the Weiß, which as far as I can tell receives its first recording here, will have its preferred performances in the discographies. Schumann’s *Märchenerzählungen* appears in a similarly imaginative coupling (with two other sets by Schumann, *Phantasiestücke*, op. 73 and *Märchenbilder*, op. 113, plus Widmann’s *Es war einmal*) performed by Tabea Zimmermann on viola and Dénes Várjon on piano, and Widmann himself on clarinet. The choice for the Mozart is pretty impressive, including a Supraphon disc with Josef Suk on viola (this one in fairness might be difficult to locate), Igor Oistrakh and his trio on MCA Classics, or Kremer/Kashkashian/Afanassiev on DG, to name but three that stand out. Obviously for the Kurtág there is less, although there is a Genuin release that features Schumann’s *Märchenerzählungen* also. But the present disc’s unique programming, coupled with its superb performances and equally excellent recording makes it a real stand-out release with real potential for my Want List when the time comes. The sense of the Iris Trio’s preternatural familiarity both with the music and between themselves makes sense

when one considers that the recording took place on April 14–16, 2018 as between April 6 and 14 of that year they had toured the program around Germany, including performances in Neuberg an der Donau, Zwickau, Bamberg, Würzburg, Amberg, and finally the place of recording, Bremen.

FANFARE: Colin Clarke

SCHUMANN Märchenerzählungen, op.132. KURTÁG Hommage à R. Sch. MOZART Clarinet Trio in E ♭ , K 498, “Kegelstatt.” C. WEIß Piano Trio No. 3, “Gespräch unter Freunden”

As a blend of classic and contemporary, this release is at once unusual, intriguing, and satisfying. The talented members of the Iris Trio—clarinetist Christine Carter, violist Molly Carr, and pianist Anna Petrova—met as music students in New York City and gave their first public performance together in 2013. The most well-known composition for this instrumentation is Mozart’s “Kegelstatt” Trio, for which Mozart intended to play the viola part. Clarinetists are quite familiar with Schumann’s dreamy fairy-tale fantasy, *Märchenerzählungen*. The Iris Trio gives compelling, lovely readings of both works. To make a complete program, the two contemporary pieces by György Kurtág and Christof Johannes Weiß were composed in homage to the Mozart and Schumann trios. Besides sounding like a neat package tied with a ribbon, this merging of styles works quite well musically, and the ensemble has toured with it to very positive response.

Schumann was inspired by hearing a performance of the “Kegelstatt” Trio in 1853, and he told Clara that his composition would be Romantic, probably referring to the air of mystery the four episodes of *Märchenerzählungen* evoke. Composer Weiß, who writes the informative program notes, points out that Schumann had no specific fairy tales in mind (he often provided literary titles that were more suggestive than explicit), and although the four movements roughly form a quasi-sonata, it’s better to approach them as individual character pieces. Op. 132 is late in Schumann’s lucid working life, and there is no strict pattern to the pieces despite a linking motif. Inspiration floats in an out elusively, I’d say. The Iris Trio gives an atmospheric reading marked by intimately caressing ensemble.

Kurtág wrote his *Hommage à R. Sch.* for three musicians who were practicing the Schumann, forming the next link in the chain of influences. The six movements in his characteristic terse style consist of five short movements that last less than a minute, followed by a seven-minute final movement titled “Abschied.” Since Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* also consists of five short movements followed by a very long one titled “Abschied,” Weiss surmises an indirect reference. Most listeners, I think, will find this the most compelling part of *Hommage*, because it is slow, dark, low-lying music that hints at Schumann’s tragic farewell (“Abschied”) to sanity and life. It feels like a spoiler to give away the piece’s final note, an ominous stroke of the bass drum played by the clarinetist.

Weiss calls the “Kegelstatt” Trio the nucleus of the program, since everything else points directly or indirectly back to it. He underscores the relaxed mood of the piece, calling it a conversation among friends (which is the English translation of the subtitle Weiß gave his own composition). The three movements include no slow movements, and Mozart limits his themes in an unusually casual way. I can’t say I’ve ever warmed to the trio as a masterpiece, but the qualities of friendliness and affection that Weiß mentions are nicely conveyed in the present performance—one could hardly wish for better.

When it comes to his own trio, Weiß describes the single 17-minute movement in terms of friends politely taking turns in a conversation. They sometimes have their own solos but mostly drift in and out of a unified group. The chatter, if I can call it that, consists in the main of short motifs and gestures that do not amount to full-fledged melodies. For me, the piece feels fairly dry, and if affection was the intent, it didn’t come through. The Iris Trio premiered the work and play it with enough suavety and refinement that Weiss’s creation is given the best opportunity to make an impression.

Each of these performers has an active recital and teaching career; as you’d expect, there’s not exactly a banquet spread out of works for clarinet, viola, and piano. As I began with, by combining classic and contemporary, this release is unique and satisfying. The playing is thoroughly enjoyable, skillful, and

expressive. In short, this album is worth a warm recommendation.

FANFARE: Huntley Dent