

MOZART: Bassoon Concerto; Clarinet Concerto – Ole Kristian Dahl, bassoon/Thorsten Johanns, clarinet/WDR Sym. Orch./Karl-Heinz Steffens, Eivind Aadland – Lawo Classics

Worthy additions to an already large list of options.

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WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART: Bassoon Concerto; Clarinet Concerto – Ole Kristian Dahl, bassoon/Thorsten Johanns, clarinet/WDR Sym. Orch./Karl-Heinz Steffens, Eivind Aadland – Lawo Classics LWC1060 (11/01/15) 44:41 **:**

Can there be too many recordings of the Mozart wind concertos, especially these; his most iconic two? Since they are considered by many to be the masterworks; the concertos for bassoon and clarinet by which all others are measured; probably not. They have to be good to compete though and, fortunately, these recordings by soloists and an orchestra very few have ever heard of are, indeed, quite good.

The *Bassoon Concerto* was written in 1774 and was the first wind concerto Mozart wrote, probably written for one of the bassoonists in the Salzburg court orchestra, although an exact commission or attribute is long lost. Aside from being very demanding on the soloist, and on an instrument that has always been difficult to play with facility, this concerto is an upbeat and charming work. The attention getting 'fanfare'- like opening gives way to some witty embellishments for the bassoon. The second movement is noteworthy for its melody which Mozart had used previously in the B-flat *Violin Sonata*, K.207, from 1773 and he used again in a well-known aria, "*porgi amor*", from *The Marriage of Figaro*. The work concludes with a minuet rondo as were very popular in Salzburg courts. The soloist in this recording, Ole Kristian Dahl, has a very warm, beautiful tone and a simply amazing staccato. I was quite impressed!

The *Clarinet Concerto*, from 1791, is one of Mozart's last works and remains one of his very best known and most loved compositions. This is a longer, darker and more introspective work than probably any of his other wind concertos. It was written for instrument designer and virtuoso Anton Stadler. Mozart, more than any other composer before and few since, saw the potential of the clarinet for expression, variety of mood and, certainly, its unique natural range of over three octaves. This iconic three movement work is well-known and requisite learning for any serious clarinetist. Of the three movements, most casual listeners are probably most familiar with the poignant beauty of the second movement, the *Adagio* – helped a lot in its mass appeal by its use in the film adaptation of "Out of Africa"; using the still gorgeous Jack Brymer London recording. (I found Aadland's take just a bit fast for my tastes) There are hundreds of renditions of this iconic masterwork still available (more than the *Bassoon Concerto*, in fact) The performance here by Thorsten Johanns is quite good. His pacing is excellent (save the second movement) and his technique meets all the fluid demands of this work. The clarinet player in me finds his tone very pretty if a bit bright for my tastes and Thorsten inserts a couple of little flourishes into the mix that are not in the score but these are, admittedly, 'nit-picky.' It is a fine performance.

There is certainly no way to know if these recordings, from performers and an ensemble that few outside of northern Europe have likely heard of, will make headway in this already bountiful market. I found them worthy additions, however, and no doubt there are some players and some Mozart aficionados who will find this the recording to have. These performances are live from two different WDR concerts and the audience in each case seems justifiably enthusiastic.

—Daniel Coombs