

MOZART Bassoon Concerto.¹ Clarinet Concerto² • Ole Kristian Dahl (bn); Thorsten Johanns (cl); ¹Karl-Heinz Steffens, ²Eivind Aadland, cond; WDR SO • LAWQ 1060 (39:11)

At something less than 40 minutes, this is obviously not going to show up on many lists of the Top 10 Bargains of the Year. The principal reason why some spendthrift collectors might give it a second thought is that the live performance of the Clarinet Concerto is led by the young Norwegian conductor Eivind Aadland, with whom this superb Cologne orchestra recently concluded a stunningly fine series of discs of the orchestral music of Edvard Grieg.

From the sensitively phrased opening bars—not only are the textures wonderfully transparent, but also the internal voice-leading is a model of what such things should be—it's clear that this is going to be an outstanding modern version of the composer's last great love note to his favorite wind instrument, with all concerned sounding both completely relaxed and on point. Thorsten Johanns makes the most of the elegantly natural backdrop that his colleagues provide: He has a big, rich tone, a seamless technique, and glides over the concerto's difficulties in a way that makes them disappear.

The version of the Bassoon Concerto is far less distinguished. Although Ole Kristian Dahl is a superb musician, his playing lacks the wit and personality of Gwydion Brooke in the classic Beecham recording—which seems to be temporarily out of circulation—while Karl-Heinz Steffens's efficiently purposeful conducting isn't a patch on Aadland's.

Then, too, as you're listening along, you begin to wonder why they couldn't have included a version of the one for oboe and even a couple of the horn concertos, as there was certainly plenty of room. For decades, Philips had the guts to charge full price for what was, in terms of actual playing time, a similarly skimpy offering: Haitink's Concertgebouw versions of Debussy's *Nocturnes* and *Jeux*. Of course, that was something very special.

Except for fleeting moments, this one is not. **Jim Svejda**

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