

### *The First Beauty*

Klein, Kvandal, Yun, Am  
Oslo Chamber Academy/ David Strunck  
LAWO 1093 [SACD] 75 minutes

Wind octets here, each with the standard instrumentation of pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns, plus double bass in three of the pieces.

To read the life story of Gideon Klein (1919-45) is to wonder what the talented Jewish composer might have accomplished had he survived the Holocaust. His 4-movement, 16-minute Divertimento (1939) was rediscovered in a suitcase in 1990. It speaks a dense harmonic language. A march is the very noisy opener, the Allegretto is rowdy, the Adagio is beautiful but has some impish moments, and the final Allegro is rambunctious.

I find Johann Kvandal's 4-movement, 18-minute Night Music (1981) more easily enjoyable because of the genial harmonies, and I also love the references to Mozart's Gran Partita, especially the pulsating chords in III.

Politics played a big part in the life of Isang Yun (1917-93), who promoted Korean reunification but, because he was considered by South Korea to be a North Korean sympathizer, was kidnapped in Germany by South Korean agents. Convicted of espionage, he was imprisoned, then released after strong international protest. He returned to Germany, became a professor, and continued to compose. None of this can be detected in his 19-minute Wind Octet (1993). It is a lively, freeflowing work with tonal but often dissonant harmonies, some odd moments of pitch bending, and an inconclusive ending.

This ensemble commissioned Magnar Am's 3-movement, 20-minute First Beauty (2012), which treats the instruments not as pairs but as individuals, and which has the ensemble split into two spatially separated quartets with string bass in the middle. The work begins coherently but becomes increasingly chaotic.

Oslo Chamber Academy is an excellent ensemble; they play with conviction at all times. Strong readings of challenging works.

KILPATRICK

*American Record Guide*