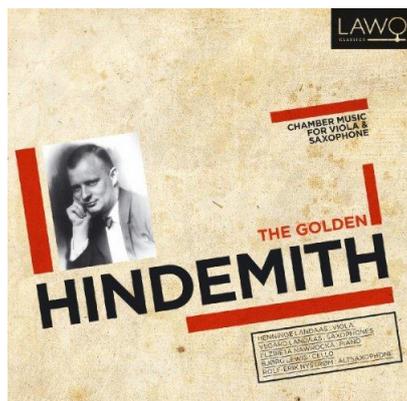


a HINDEMITH Duet for Viola and Cello. Concert Piece for 2 Alto Saxophones. Sonata for Solo Viola, op. 25/1. Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano. Trio for Tenor Saxophone, Viola, and Piano • Henninge Landaas (vla); Bjorg Lewis (vc); Rolf-Erik Nystrom (alto saxophone); Vegard Landaas (alto saxophone, tenor saxophone); Elizabeta Nawrocka (pn) • LAWO LWC 1005 (55:25)



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This is a delightful CD of Hindemith chamber music. The program is exceptionally well planned, with viola and saxophone alternating and finally combining. The composer played every instrument he wrote for, but the viola was especially his, as he played it professionally throughout his mature life (and left us many recordings thereof). He wrote as fluently for the saxophone as he did for the viola.

The first piece on the disc is labeled Duet, but it is the 1934 Scherzo for Viola and Cello, composed (literally) overnight to fill the odd side of a 78-rpm set. Thanks to modern sound as well as fine musicians, this recording compares favorably with that by Hindemith and Emanuel Feuermann, made when the piece was but hours old.

The Concert Piece for Two Alto Saxophones was written for the great saxophonist Sigurd Raschèr in 1933, but he didn't get to play the premiere until 1950. Although he left us no recording, there is one on BIS by his daughter, Carina Raschèr, playing second to Harry Kinross White. They play with smooth yet luxuriant tone unmatched on recordings, including this one. Nevertheless, Rolf-Erik Nystrom and Vegard Landaas give a precise, elegant reading worth hearing for its own merits.

The 1943 Sonata for Alto Saxophone is a popular work (13 recordings are currently listed by ArkivMusic), but it is almost always called Sonata for Alto Horn—even when it is played on a saxophone! According to Geoffrey Skelton's Paul Hindemith: The Man Behind the Music, the original was for alto saxophone. The op. 47 Trio is usually referred to as being for piano, viola, and heckelphone, but Skelton adds “or tenor saxophone.” It has been recorded both ways, and with a bass oboe (which is almost identical to a heckelphone), but it is more colorful with the sax.

As with most Hindemith chamber music, the piano parts here are extremely demanding; they lead the way, establishing the character of each piece. Elizabeta Nawrocka's playing is brilliantly dynamic, just what the music needs. Although each performance is successful in its own right, this marvelous disc is even more than the sum of its parts.

This Norwegian production is called The Golden Hindemith, which seems to be the title of a stage play “written for the music of this CD.” The notes consist of passages from that play, apparently a Hindemith monolog; there are also performer bios, but nothing about the music. That's OK; it's more fun to listen to it than to read about it. James H. North

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