

MOZART Clarinet Quintet. BRAHMS Clarinet Quintet • Leif Arne Pedersen (cl); Oslo P Ch Group •
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These may be standard readings of these two summits of the clarinet's chamber-music repertoire, but they're beautifully played standard readings. Leif Arne Pedersen is principal clarinetist with the Oslo Philharmonic, and he plays with a full, rich sound, a smooth, even tone from pp to ff, a fluid legato, and stunning breath control. His fingerwork in the Gypsy music of the Brahms Quintet's second movement is faultless and even. Like many orchestral clarinetists, he eschews vibrato, with the exception of the coda of the same movement. His colleagues are exemplary, playing with whistle-clean accuracy in the Mozart and warmth and intensity in the Brahms.

Pedersen plays the Mozart on a standard A clarinet as opposed to the increasingly popular extended-range or "basset" clarinet (see my review of Sharon Kam's Mozart in *Fanfare* 35:3). There is little influence here of the HIP movement: Trills are usually taken on the main note and grace notes are played before the beat; there is no Eingang on the fermatas before the coda of the Mozart's last movement. But tempos are well judged, exposition repeats are taken in both first movements, and the ensemble is impeccable.

Minor carps: The sound, while full, is a bit bright, and favors the clarinet a bit too much; this throws off the balances of passages in the Brahms in which the clarinet is an inner voice. But, in any case, this CD is likely to be of greatest attraction to clarinetists and clarinet mavens, to whom this may not be a serious drawback.

I'm not about to retire my recordings of these two works by David Shifrin (on Delos and, later, with the Emerson Quartet on DG), nor the older versions by Karl Leister (also on DG); Shifrin plays with a greater variety of tone color and phrases exquisitely, finding depths unplumbed here, while Leister is another exemplary European orchestral clarinetist whose playing has an exquisite purity to it. But I may keep this one for the lovely playing of Pedersen, abetted by that of his Norwegian colleagues. Recommended to clarinet collectors. Richard A. Kaplan

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