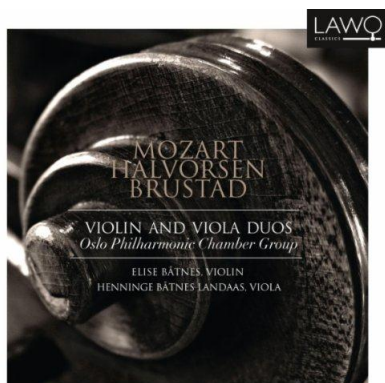


a MOZART Duos for Violin and Viola: No. 1 in G; No. 2 in B \flat . BRUSTAD Capricci for Violin and Viola. HALVORSEN Passacaglia on a Theme by Handel • Elise Båtnes (vn); Henninge Båtnes Landaas (va)
• LAWO 1028 (57:06)



Violinist Elise Båtnes (playing the 1689 Ardi Stradivari) and violist Henninge Båtnes Landaas (playing a 1781 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini) bring together works for violin and viola that each, as Hild Borchgrevink mentions in the booklet notes, points to the past in some way (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in his adaptation of contrapuntal devices, Bjarne Brustad in his reliance on folk materials, and Johan Halvorsen in his use of a theme from George Frideric Handel's Suite No. 7 in G Minor). In Mozart's Duo in G Major, the two string players take the

first movement at a lively tempo, and they reinforce the impression of lightness with bowings that only occasionally result in scooping but otherwise keep the textures transparent for the contrapuntal exchanges between the two instruments. They develop the Adagio's poignancy without allowing its tempo to slacken or its textures to grow heavy. In the Rondo, as in the first, their brisk tempos allow for spirited dialog, even when the mode changes to minor in the movement's episode (the lower registers of Henninge's viola emerge from LAWO's reverberant recorded sound with particularly sharp definition). But their buoyant vivacity hardly results in slickness or superficiality; just the opposite, it provides a sweeping, synoptic view of the works' profundities.

Violinist and violist create a similar impression of spirited yet profound interchange in the Allegro of the Second Duo, emphasizing its wit (through pert pauses and clever exchanges) as well as the ingenuity of its combinations and recombinations of the instruments and their timbres. In the Andante cantabile, they allow rich harmonies and textures to complement one other and, as in the First Duo, draw out the music's pathos as well as its elegance. In the last movement, they endow each variation with an individual personality, yet each seems to dance in their performance. Both duos sound as though they've been pumped full of helium, yet paradoxically, as noted earlier, neither sounds lightweight.

Bjarne Brustad's four brief capricci may draw upon folklike materials, but they also exemplify Brustad's forward-looking harmonic explorations, from the crisp harmonies of the first through the slinkier drones of the second, the plaintive tremolo-accompanied plaints of the third, and through its brusque dissonances to the heady romp of the last. The duo revels in the complexities, both musical and technical, with a *joie de vivre* that's hard to resist.

The program concludes with a reading of Halvorsen's pastiche on Handel—either a bon-bon or a barnburner, depending on the listener's disposition of the moment. Jascha Heifetz (with William Primrose) and Itzhak Perlman (with Pinchas Zukerman) tended to make of it a virtuoso romp, but Elise and Henninge soften its edges somewhat (beginning with those of the theme at the beginning), and the resulting effect is more elfin than macho, uncovering yet another of the work's highly attractive aspects. In addition, the chestnut has perhaps never sounded so Grieg-like.

The booklet presents pictures of the two sisters in their childhood, and perhaps that's no accident, for the performances preserve a sort of freshness and optimism often associated with that period of life, although showcasing an instrumental brilliance that can be acquired only with extended and laborious effort. Urgently recommended across the board. Robert Maxham

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