

REVIEW –MUSIC WEB INTERNATIONAL

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Trio in G major for flute, bassoon and piano WoO 37 [24:54]

Serenade in D major for flute, violin and viola Op. 25 [24:11]

Trio in B flat major Op. 11 for clarinet, cello and piano Gassenhaur [20:14]

Oslo Philharmonic Chamber Group (Per Flemstrøm (flute), Leif Arne Pedersen (clarinet), Per Hannisdal (bassoon), Elise Båtnes (violin), Henninge Båtnes (viola), Bjørn Solum (cello), Gonzalo Moreno (piano))

rec. Bragernes Church, Drammen, 21 May 2011; Sofienberg Church, Oslo, 29-30 August and 28-29 October 2011

LAWO LWC 1034 [69:29]

Beethoven's very early works, especially those without Opus numbers, tend to be neglected in favour of later and more obviously important works. That applies to the three works on this disc, all of which have the additional handicap of being scored for unusual combinations of instrument and therefore of being awkward to fit into concerts. On the basis of the performances here that is a real loss to listeners. Every work, indeed every movement, has much to offer, and if the kind of profundity we expect from the composer's mature masterpieces is lacking, well-crafted and imaginative moments abound.

The earliest work here is a trio for flute, bassoon and piano written for the family of one of the composer's piano pupils. The lengthy first movement has an energy that draws attention away from its relative formal conventionality, especially when played with the sparkle and bounce found here. The slow movement and final set of variations are more inherently interesting and again the players make the most of them. The Serenade, written in the 1790s and published in 1802, is the one clear masterpiece on the disc. With the viola as the lowest instrument and the flute on top there is a lightness to the scoring of which Beethoven takes every advantage. Its six short and varied movements, again including a set of variations, are full of invention, especially in terms of the textures created. It is more often heard in the composer's own arrangement for flute and piano which greatly reduces its effectiveness. The Trio for clarinet, cello and piano was written in 1798 and again makes imaginative use of the unusual choice of instruments. The final movement is a set of variations on a melody from an opera by Johann Weigl which was so popular that it was said to be "Gassenhaur", that is, often heard on the city streets.

There are no weak links among the performers here and the recording is ideal in its clarity and realism. The notes, in Norwegian and English, are admirable and my only minor criticism is over the printing of some pages in a light red on a white background making them impossible to discern properly. This is however of little importance. These are works which are well known to players of the wind instruments concerned but probably to few others. Here is an excellent chance to enjoy three examples of rarely heard early Beethoven of real quality played and recorded with energy and sensitivity.

John Sheppard