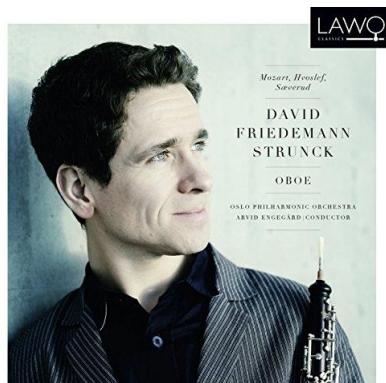


MOZART Oboe Quartet in F, K 370. **HVOSLEF** Oboe

Concerto. SÆVERUD Oboe Concerto, op. 12. *Rondo amoroso*, op. 14/7 • David Friedemann Strunck (ob); †Elise Båtnes (vn); †Henninge Båtnes Landaas (vl); †Bjørn Solum (vc); Arvid Engegård, cond; Oslo PO • LAWQ 1100 (SACD: 63:55)



Oboe
AUDIO CD; HYBRID SACD - DSD
Lawo Classics

If, as I do, you love the pure, tightly focused sound of German oboe playing, this release will be an absolute joy. The Mozart is the one familiar piece on the program, and it is brilliantly played by David Friedemann Strunck, who studied in Detmold and Stuttgart, and three other Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra principals. There are so many good performances of this gem, it would be foolish to declare a best, but this would certainly rank among the finest: light-footed, elegant, and subtly shaped in the outer movements. Strunck and friends observe all repeats in the first movement, and make one glad that they do, not least for the splendid *pianos* Strunck plays to shift the emphasis back to the strings, as it should in a chamber work. The *Adagio* may have been more meltingly done somewhere, but I can't think of where now, while poise is perfectly maintained. And the engineering is as lovely as the performance.

The rest of the program consists of oboe concertos by Norwegian composers of two generations, one new and written for the soloist and the other far too little known for such a delightful piece of music. The unjustly neglected concerto is by eccentric 20th-century composer Harald Sæverud (1897–1992). The excellent program notes launch a spirited defense of Sæverud as a composer as great as contemporaries Britten and Shostakovich. I have heard nowhere near enough yet to fully judge that statement, but it doesn't seem outrageous. Quirky and playful—in spite of the storms on the horizon in 1938 when it was written—the Oboe Concerto is a high-spirited and slightly off-center paean to tonality after the composer's years of experimentation with atonality. I occasionally found myself thinking of Bartók and Hindemith—both, though, uncharacteristically smiling and joking—as I listened to this and an earlier recording by Ole Kristian Ruud and oboist Gordon Hunt on BIS. (There is another on the Aurora label which I have not heard.) Both are fine performances, but I prefer the slightly more moderate tempos and droller humor of this new recording; with Strunck and conductor Arvid Engegård, the music dances with a grin and refuses to be rushed off the stage.

The new oboe concerto is by Sæverud's son, Ketil Hvoslef (b. 1939). (He took his mother's maiden name to avoid confusion.) It is a remarkable piece, really unlike anything I have heard before. At times it reminds me of his father's work, not least for its eccentricity. It is colorful, rhythmically unpredictable, either driving ahead with irregular ostinatos or suddenly freezing in place for a moment of breathless reflection. It doesn't seem to have a clear structure, and yet it develops organically and satisfyingly to a powerful conclusion. The use of tonality is individual and captivating. In its 20-minute span, there is one delightful surprise after another. He even provides a link back to Mozart's Oboe Quartet.

The program ends with Sæverud's own arrangement of the piano work *Rondo amoroso* for oboe, bassoon, and chamber orchestra. In piano form, it is the most popular of the composer's works. It could be treated as a gently Romantic sketch, as in Per Drier's recording (Norwegian Composer), but in Engegård's reading, *amoroso* is a bit more complex, even pained and melancholy—the composer's nickname for it—and more than a little regretful. I like it.

One complaint: Let's stop with this tiny type, with skinny descenders and fancy serifs. I'm sure they looked great on the screen, and they look nice enough through the magnifying glass, but give us older listeners a break, please. Otherwise, my recommendation couldn't be warmer. I also suggest checking out the LAWO releases of Strunck's Oslo Kammeracademi. The first was reviewed here (*Fanfare* 37:3) but there are two subsequent releases. There is some great stuff coming out of Oslo on this label. **Ronald E. Grames**

This article originally appeared in Issue 40:3 (Jan/Feb 2017) of *Fanfare Magazine*.