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CD Review by Colin Clarke

HOMAGE AND INSPIRATION • Iris Tr • COVIELLO 92002 (62:46)

SCHUMANN *Märchenerzählungen*, op.132. **KURTÁG** *Hommage à R. Sch.* **MOZART** Clarinet Trio in E ♭, K 498, “Kegelstatt.” **C. WEISS** Piano Trio No. 3, “Gespräch unter Freunden”

There is an historical trajectory here of Mozart’s “Kegelstatt” Trio inspiring Schumann, which in turn inspired Kurtág; then, in 2013, the Mozartfest Würzburg commissioned Christof Johannes Weiß to write a piece inspired by the Mozart “Kegelstatt.” This web of connections forms the rationale for the present program, although the connections are rightly not presented in chronological order: The Schumann is paired with the Kurtág, and then the Mozart then leads to the Weiß.

The spirit of chamber music is writ large in the Iris Trio’s performance of Schumann’s beautiful and brilliant *Märchenerzählungen*, perhaps most so in the stunning crepuscular stillness of the third movement. This wonderful performance is contained within a stunning recording, having just the right amount of warmth and yet allowing for utter clarity. The players seem completely at one with Schumann’s expressive world. Molly Carr’s viola is every inch the equal to her colleagues in strength, enabling true conversations across the scoring.

The Kurtág pieces are characteristically brief and enigmatic, with the nightmarish “In der Nacht” (the fifth movement) particularly visceral in its effect. The confidence of the players throughout is a key aspect of this performance’s success, not least in their being able to prolong the atmosphere for the passacaglia finale. Here the reference is actually to Machaut and his isorhythmic motets; the slow tread is remarkable, requiring the rock-solid rhythmic discipline we encounter here.

It might feel like a long way back from Kurtág to Mozart, but actually both composers share a distaste of excess. Just like one would not wish to add notes to Mozart (except perhaps in period decorations of a line), Kurtág similarly says everything he needs to and no more. Hearing the warmth of the E ♭ Major of the “Kegelstatt” Trio offers the perfect contrast. The Iris Trio considers this Mozart the “nucleus” of their program: They perform it with all the bonhomie of good friends (and the photos included in the booklet certainly imply they are that), with real joy and wit in the central Minuet. Christine Carter’s clarinet offers golden legato and a superb sense of Mozart’s flowing genius at the opening of the finale; and just listen to Anna Petrova’s articulation on the piano shortly afterwards—delicious.

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Conversation itself is the generating factor to Weiß's *Drittes Klaviertrio*, a 17-minute exploration of the dynamics that can exist between three protagonists, including a three-subject, three-part fugue with material based on Mozart's "Kegelstatt." Although composed from a Modernist perspective, Weiß's piece includes moments of real repose and warmth, and indeed the interactions between performers are those of exchanges rather than adversarial confrontations.

Of course, each piece except for the Weiß, which as far as I can tell receives its first recording here, will have its preferred performances in the discographies. Schumann's *Märchenerzählungen* appears in a similarly imaginative coupling (with two other sets by Schumann, *Phantasiestücke*, op. 73 and *Märchenbilder*, op. 113, plus Widmann's *Es war einmal*) performed by Tabea Zimmermann on viola and Dénes Várjon on piano, and Widmann himself on clarinet. The choice for the Mozart is pretty impressive, including a Supraphon disc with Josef Suk on viola (this one in fairness might be difficult to locate), Igor Oistrakh and his trio on MCA Classics, or Kremer/Kashkashian/Afanassiev on DG, to name but three that stand out. Obviously for the Kurtág there is less, although there is a Genuin release that features Schumann's *Märchenerzählungen* also. But the present disc's unique programming, coupled with its superb performances and equally excellent recording makes it a real stand-out release with real potential for my Want List when the time comes. The sense of the Iris Trio's preternatural familiarity both with the music and between themselves makes sense when one considers that the recording took place on April 14–16, 2018 as between April 6 and 14 of that year they had toured the program around Germany, including performances in Neuberg an der Donau, Zwickau, Bamberg, Würzburg, Amberg, and finally the place of recording, Bremen. **Colin Clarke**

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