Reviews

Bassoon bravado • A musical marriage • Ives by Ives

Beethoven · Mozart

Beethoven Trio, Op 9 No 3
Mozart Divertimento, K563
Da Salo Trio (Ani Kavafian *vn*
Barbara Westphal *va* Gustav Rivinius *vc*)
Kleos Classics Ⓕ KL5138 (69' • DDD)

Fine players who really have no need to look over their shoulders

Do we really need another recording of Beethoven's C minor String Trio or Mozart's Divertimento? When the playing is superb, the answer is emphatically 'yes'. We don't need any more blasé recordings of masterworks tossed out by performers who feel some sort of requirement to show their mettle in the core repertoire. But when talented musicians revel in a canonical piece and want to pass on that joy, there's no such thing as too much.

Named after the early violin- and viola-maker Gasparo da Salo, this trio was formed in 1997 by three 'name' musicians: Ani Kavafian on violin, Barbara Westphal on viola and cellist Gustav Rivinius. The result is just the sort of spot-on

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phrasing, warm timbre and tight ensemble and passionate playing that leaves the listener agog for more.

There are many ingredients in the final concoction but a major one is that the trio approach this music as a quartet would – playing as artistic equals throughout. In the Divertimento, even when the top voicing is salient, it does not dominate. The performance heaves and sighs, offering that aesthetic glorious artistic momentum in which phrases and melodies seem to dovetail inevitably into each other. Dynamic shifts are quick and decisive, especially in the 6/8 Rondo. Forceful passages throughout never stray from a core of bowing grace and beauty of tone.

The Beethoven brings out more passion but is delivered with a remarkable liberty in phrasing. Fast passages, such as the opening of the finale, are precise yet naturalistic. Themes of all types develop organically and depth is borne with an easy-going elegance. These musicians aren't looking over their shoulders at how others have played this music – they are simply enjoying it. That makes four of us.

Andrew Druckenbrod

Boismortier

Sonatas for Two Bassoons and Continuo – Op 14 No 6; Op 26 Nos 2, 3 and 5; Op 40 Nos 1 and 5; Op 50 Nos 1 and 2. Rondeau, Op 40. Chaconne, Op 66
Musica Franca (Mathieu Lussier *solo bn*
Nadina MackieJackson *bn* Fraser Jackson *contrabn*
Sylvain Bergeron *theo* Richard Paré *hpd/org*)
MSR Classics Ⓕ MS1170 (75' • DDD)

Corrette

Les délices de la solitude, Op 20. Le phénix. Organ Concerto No 1, Op 26 (arr F Jackson)
Musica Franca (Nadina Mackie Jackson *solo bn*
Mathieu Lussier, Kathleen McLean *bns*
Fraser Jackson *contrabn* Terry McKenna *bqgtr/theo*
Paul Jenkins *hpd/org*)
MSR Classics Ⓕ MS1171 (69' • DDD)

Bassoonists hit the heights in two delightful and surprising programmes

These dynamic companion discs find the splendid Canadian ensemble Musica Franca exulting in the creativity of French composers who evidently adored the bassoon's wise, jocular and agile personality. A bit of scholarly conjecture surrounds the pieces by Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755), who wrote reams of sonatas for two bass voices, with the bassoon a designated solo contender, along with cello or viol. Michel Corrette (1707-95) is represented by his complete music for bassoon, as well as an arrangement of an organ concerto.

Actually, every piece Musica Franca play here could be deemed an arrangement. The musicians alter the instrumentation from movement to movement to provide striking contrasts in timbre and texture. The results are delightful. At times, Boismortier and Corrette qualify as the 18th century's grandest writers of bassoon duets. Elsewhere, we hear solo bassoon embraced in various continuo capacities by another bassoon or bassoons, contrabassoon (full of sonorous pepper), theorbo, baroque guitar, harpsichord and organ. The hybrid melding of modern and period instruments works beautifully, especially given the musicians' scrupulous and imaginative attention to phrasing, vibrato, articulation and ornamentation.

Boismortier's sonatas are prime junctures in the crossroads of French and Italian styles that Musica Franca champion. His miniatures abound in dance movements that rub shoulders with arias and slow movements of lyrical effusion. The movements tend to be brief, in the manner of Scarlatti keyboard sonatas, and are packed with elegant and virtuoso music.

In his elusively titled *Le phénix* and *Les délices de la solitude* (the latter comprising six sonatas), Corrette savours the bassoon's haunting high register and ability to negotiate long lines and lightning-quick passages. The bassoons sound like lusty hunting horns in the *Bruit de chassse* movement of Sonata IV. The arias are opportunities for the soloist to engage in Italian-opera musing; the finales are episodes of fiery or nimble character. And you can't help but love the cavernous scampering of the contrabassoon, beneath racing bassoon lines, in the *Fuga da cappella* of Sonata III.

Bassoons and harpsichord assume orchestral duties in Fraser Jackson's glistening version of Corrette's Organ Concerto No 1. As performed to the hilt by Paul Jenkins and company, the piece is a chamber-music delicacy.

Then again, the solo bassoon playing of Nadina Mackie Jackson in the Corrette selections and Mathieu Lussier on the Boismortier disc – and their teamwork throughout – couldn't be more refined, quicksilver or swashbuckling. Their Musica Franca colleagues are sophisticated, animated partners. **Donald Rosenberg**

Harrison

Concerto in Slendro[a]. Main Bersama-Sama[b]. Serenade for Betty Freeman and Franco Assetto[d]. Threnody for Carlos Chávez[c]. String Quartet Set[e]. Suite for Percussion[f]
[a]Daniel Kobialka, [c]Susan Bates *vns*[a] **Machiko Kobialka, [a]James Barbagallo** *tack pfs*[a] **Patricia Jennerjohn** *cels* **[a]Don Marconi, [a]Jerome Neff** *perc* **[b]Scott L Hartman** *bn* **[d]Lou Harrison** *suling* **[bcd]Gamelan Sekar Kembar; [c]Kronos Quartet; [f]Manhattan Percussion Ensemble / [f]Paul Price, [a]Robert Hughes**
New World Records Ⓕ 80643-2 (67' • DDD)

Music from a western composer with one ear tipped towards Asia

Is it any wonder that, for most of his life, Lou Harrison was out of favour with the musical establishment? The man cared deeply about musical line – not the prescribed tone-rows of the time, but actual melodies. Nor did he believe