

Kurpinski, Lessel – Chamber music (1999)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 29 June 2013 15:57 -

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Karol (Kazimierz) Kurpiński 1. *Fantaisie pour quatuor à cordes in C major* 2. *"Dumanie nad mogiła Wandy" in B minor for violin and piano* Franciszek Lessel
3. *Fantaisie en quatuor in C major* 4 – 5. *Adagio et Polonaise in D major for violin and piano, Op. 9* 4. *Adagio* 5. *Polonaise* 6. *String Quartet No.1 in A major: Allegro moderato* 7 – 9. *Piano Trio in E major, Op. 5* 7. *Allegro brillante* 8. *Rêve. Adagio* 9. *Rondo: Allegro di molto*
Pawel Perliński – piano Wilanów String Quartet: Tadeusz Gadzina – 1st violin [tracks 2, 7–9]
Pawel Łosakiewicz – 2nd violin [track 3] Ryszard Duż – viola Marian Wasiółka – cello

Acte Préalable continues its exploration of little-known and, up to now, unheard Polish repertoire. Their rapidly-growing catalogue contains some of the better-known Poles - Chopin being an obvious example - as well as a smattering of releases of Bartók and Beethoven. However, with the apparent embarrassment of musical riches to be found in Poland, they have chosen to stick with a continuing string of world-premiere recordings of Polish composers both new and old. Here we have what might be the final instalment of Lessel's chamber music. Much was considered lost, and his first string quartet — only one complete movement has survived — was a rather recent discovery.

As mentioned in my previous review, Lessel studied with Haydn over the years of 1799-1809 and was considered one of his more talented pupils. Haydn fans will find much to like in this music. Born in Warsaw to a musical family - his father was also a composer - Lessel served as Kapellmeister in Pulawy, but went to Vienna at the age of 19 to study medicine. Little is known about this period of his life, but it is evident that music won out over medicine, in that his studies with Haydn took place very shortly thereafter. According to the liner-notes, the first string quartet was composed soon after beginning his studies with Haydn at the age of twenty. The piece certainly bears the mark of Haydn's influence; a cheerful allegro moderato with a lovely sense of balance.

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The Op. 5 Trio in E also does not stray far in structure and sound from Haydn, beginning with a rollicking upward major scale. The development section moves us into a brief stormy passage before setting us back into the sunny security of the first theme. The slow movement, titled "Rêve," begins with the piano as the violin and cello play quiet pizzicati. The violin soon joins in, but Marian Wasiolka's cello holds the spotlight best in this movement. The final movement, a rondo, sports some pleasant surprises with its rapid shifts, tinged with Polish folk music elements and occasional strumming.

Opening the disc are two pieces by the little-known Karol Kurpinski. Five years Lessel's junior, he seems to have more of an eye looking forward to the tension of Beethoven over the balance and poise of Haydn; not to say that these pieces don't have a sense of balance. It is their somewhat greater focus on rhythmic drive that seems to point to Beethoven. Opening the disc is the C major Fantaisie, which opens rather sternly, in minor mode, and often returning to it. From the outset, the Wilanow quartet give us some beautiful playing — the whole disc is wonderfully performed — and the recording aesthetic is clean and clear. The writing here in this piece, less so in the short piece that follows (translated as Musing Over the Tomb of Wanda), reminds me of the work of Dobrzynski, on an earlier Acte Préalable release I reviewed, which seems yet a further step toward early and middle-period Beethoven.

Overall, for fans of early Beethoven, Haydn, and Hummel, this is certainly a recording worth a listen. Of recent review discs I've received, this has spent the most time in my car during commutes, and at home — an eminently enjoyable release. ---David Blumenberg, musicweb-international.com

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