Louis Spohr - Complete Piano Trios (1995)

Disc: 1
1. Pno Trio No.1 in e Op.119: Moderato
2. Pno Trio No.1 in e Op.119: Larghetto
3. Pno Trio No.1 in e Op.119: Scherzo
4. Pno Trio No.1 in e Op.119: Finale. Vivace
5. Pno Trio No.2 in F Op.123: Allegro
6. Pno Trio No.2 in F Op.123: Larghetto
7. Pno Trio No.2 in F Op.123: Scherzo
8. Pno Trio No.2 in F Op.123: Finale. Vivace

Disc: 2
1. Pno Trio No.3 in a Op.124: Allegro Moderato
2. Pno Trio No.3 in a Op.124: Andante Con Var
3. Pno Trio No.3 in a Op.124: Scherzo
4. Pno Trio No.3 in a Op.124: Finale. Presto
5. Pno Trio No.4 in B Op.133: Allegro
6. Pno Trio No.4 in B Op.133: Menuetto
7. Pno Trio No.4 in B Op.133: Poco Adagio
8. Pno Trio No.4 in B Op.133: Finale. Presto

Disc: 3
1. Pno Trio No.5 in g Op.142: Allegro Vivace
2. Pno Trio No.5 in g Op.142: Adagio
3. Pno Trio No.5 in g Op.142: Scherzo
4. Pno Trio No.5 in g Op.142: Finale. Allegro Molto

Ravensburg Beethoven Trio

His first Trio in E minor, Op.119 was completed in May, 1841,and appeared to rapturous

acclaim by the critics so that his publisher was soon asking for more. It was not for nothing that the trio was published as Trio Concertant, for, as one reviewer pointed out: "Through all the details of its construction, even to the manner of using the instruments in combination, it has no parallel in the trios of Beethoven, Hummel, Mendelssohn, or any other writer." It was Spohr's specialist knowledge of string techniques which enabled him to give the violin and cello equality with the piano and also to introduce novel sonorities which earlier trio composers scarcely envisaged, such as at times giving the cello the real bass of the ensemble with the pianist's left hand playing well above it.

The very opening of the Piano Trio No.1 in E minor, Op. 119 exemplifies the quintessential Spohr emotion of wistful pathos and the work as a whole is a fine expression of its composer's artistic personality. A firmer tone is injected by the march-like second subject which then accompanies scintillating bravura passages - part of the trio's "concertant" ambience. The contrasting moods of the two main themes are closely intertwined until the restrained conclusion. The broad lyrical theme (there is only one) of the slow movement develops a declamatory intensity as it is presented in a variety of settings; again, peace reigns at the end. The Scherzo was an immediate hit; one reviewer wrote: "One wants to hear it again and again" and it has been described both as almost a forerunner of a Slavonic Dance and as jazzily syncopated. In contrast, its Trio has a waltz-like tune on the strings along with a brilliant display by the piano. The finale draws together many strands with a fiery main theme, a more relaxed second subject, possible hints of both the first movement and Scherzo and - a magical moment - the return of the slow movement melody. The closing bars arrive at a peaceful and beautiful resolution.

The Piano Trio No. 2 in F major, Op.123, which dates from April, 1842, is Spohr's grandest work in the form, being laid out on the largest scale. His intentions are signalled by the powerful opening while the second subject offers another example of imaginative scoring. The slow movement is one of the most remarkable creations in all Spohr, demonstrating to the full the unique sonorities the composer is able to draw from his ensemble. The tension is screwed tight until the thirteenth bar when the violin, silent till then, steals in as a consolatory middle voice. Later comes a dramatic outburst which the strings attempt to pacify with a version of the main theme. The Scherzo is both catchy and slightly grotesque, being followed by a perky Trio which Spohr cleverly integrates into the Scherzo repeat. The finale opens in the minor with a "travelling" theme while the second subject is one of those inspirations which" fall from heaven" .The final homecoming is decisive - "Spohr has not appeared so young and hearty for a long time" as one reviewer put it.

Spohr wrote in virtually every genre, not the least being chamber music. He composed some 36 string quartets, 7 string quintets, five piano trios, four double quartets and several other chamber pieces. His teaching assistant related that as the 1830's he bemoaned his lack of ability on the piano and said that he would gladly trade a year's salary to be able to play the piano well. Spohr was truly a great man of many skills (mountaineer, hiker, painter et. al.), and nothing if not determined. Sometime during the late 1830's he undertook a rigorous course of study of the instrument and by the 1840's had become a good, if not great, pianist. The main result of this was that he was able to compose chamber works with piano, such as his Piano Trio No.3, which were to have lasting value

Piano Trio No.3 was completed 1842 and published not long after. The dramatic opening of the Allegro moderato, begins with a theme of pathos. This is immediately followed by a highly romantic theme. In the second movement,Andante con variazione, Spohr chooses a fine folk ballad for his theme, which proves capable of withstanding the wide-ranging treatment it is given. The Scherzo which comes next is of the sort in which Spohr was a master. It might be called the flip-side of the Mendelssohnian scherzo with its elves and fairies. Spohr's scherzos are haunted and tend to feature ghosts and ogres. The constrasting trio is more ethereal. The finale, Presto, seems to take up where the Scherzo leaves and begins with a haunted "march of the goblins." Full of exciting and bizarre twists and turns, it provides an excellent conclusion to what is one of Spohr's very best chamber works.

"The first movemment over, a murmur of praise and favourable criticism ran trough the audience. According to all, Spohr had newly imbided the waters of rejuvenescence. The minuetto evidences the pecularities of Spohr's genius, but is hardly so much as the allegro, a spontaneous inspiration. It presents some highly effective passages for the pianoforte, which were interpreted by Mr. Sloper in a masterly manner. The adagio is an exquisite movement, the subject clear and elegant, and varied in the most charming manner possible; the dialoguing of the violin and the violincello is managed with the happiest effect. The entitre movement is in every way worthy of Spohr's genius in its loftiest moments. The last movement, Presto, is as bright and fleeting as a flash of lightning. We shall have occasion by-and-by to speak more largely of this work ; at present we can hardly allude to it impartially, so deeply were we impressed with it on a first hearing. The Trio gave most intense delight to all present, and there was but one opinion expressed as to its merits. "

Piano Trio No.5 in G minor, Op. 142, dates from October, 1849, at a time when Spohr's enthusiasm for the March, 1848, German revolution was turning to disappointment as the forces of repression began to regain control. In contrast to the joyful atmosphere radiating from his C major String Sextet composed in March-April 1848, "at the time of the glorious people's revolution", as Spohr himself entered in his catalogue of works, the trio is more disturbed. March-like rhythms predominate in the urgent opening movement, where both of the main themes are built from the same material. In contrast, nobility sings out in the Adagio while the Scherzo mixes a somewhat sinister quirkiness with the playfulness of its Trio section. The finale is even more unsettled than the first movement, especially in the central development and, despite a more optimistic second subject which follows a bridge passage built on an ominous ostinato in the strings, the G minor tonality returns at the end when the music subsides on a note of resigned acceptance. --- virtuosochannel.com

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