

Bernhard Henrik Crusell – Clarinet Quartets (1983)

Wpisany przez bluesever
Piątek, 12 Maj 2017 13:41 -

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Clarinet Quartet No. 1 In E Flat Major Op 2 A1 *Poco Adagio - Allegro* 7:02 A2 *Romanze (Cantabile)* 4:49 A3 *Menuetto (Allegro) - Trio* 3:59 A4 *Rondo (Allegro Vivace)* 3:30
Clarinet Quartet No. 2 In C Minor Op 4
A5 *Allegro Molto Agitato* 4:02 A6 *Menuetto - Trio* 4:25 B1 *Pastorale (Un Poco Allegretto)* 5:17 B2 *Rondo (Allegro)* 3:50
Clarinet Quartet No. 3 In D Major Op 7
B3 *Allegro Non Tanto* 7:01 B4 *Un Poco Largo* 5:17 B5 *Menuetto (Allegro) - Trio* 4:44 B6 *Finale (Allegro)* 5:03
Thea King - clarinet Members of the Allegri String Quartet: Peter Carter - violin Prudence Pacey - viola Bruno Schreker – cello

As one goes along in their classical-music journey, you eventually start moving beyond the "safeness" of the major composers and exploring the lesser-known "minor" composers - and often discovering soon enough some of the "hidden treasures" of the classical repertoire. And among some of these treasures are the clarinet concertos and the featured quartets on this CD by the Finnish-born virtuoso/composer, Bernhard Crusell.

Like his predecessors and peers - Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Weber - Crusell is a classicist-at-heart as seen by his four-movement structure and use of sonata form. Like Mozart and Schubert, Crusell was a master melodist as seen in his silky-smooth clarinet quartets here with their rich, flowing lyricism that have an alluring, calming effect not unlike a flowing stream. The intimate sound of the clarinet with string trio was very popular in Crusell's and Beethoven's era for private chamber performances. And for a good reason - these compositions are superbly crafted and stand among the finer in the 19th century clarinet repertoire.

Thea King and the Allegri Quartet nicely match the exuberant, yet classically-restrained flavor

and poise of these works and bring a warmth of tone and tempo that greatly refreshes the spirit. Thea King captures the sunny and carefree moods of the allegros and rondos with great esprit. (but sometimes her instrument can sound "over-nasaly" - especially from the close-up balance favoring the soloist). In these quartets you hear most readily the perfection of structure and effortless melodic flow of Mozart from the past as well as occasional rhapsodic interplays of the sensual clarinet anticipating Brahms. The music is highly "accessible" to the average person for its sheer lushness of tone and exceedingly pleasant melodies. Of course, for the clarinet connoisseur, there is much to be savored musically from these rich compositions. The Helios sound quality is excellent as is the value. So, if you warm to Mozart's clarinet quintets or Brahms' quintet, you will find much here to discover and relish in this most excellent of minor composers of the early 19th century. A real gem of a CD along with Crusell's clarinet concertos on separate releases. --- Alan Lekan, amazon.com

The doyenne of English clarinetists, Dame Thea King was a greatly loved and respected artist who enjoyed a varied career as soloist, chamber musician, orchestral player and teacher. She appeared at all the major festivals in Britain, and also in Europe, Hong Kong, Japan, Brazil and the USA, frequently as soloist with the English Chamber Orchestra for whom she played principal clarinet.

Her solo recordings feature nineteenth-century repertoire and British music of this century (many were première recordings), including a recent issue of Britten's posthumously published Concerto Movement, together with concertos by Malcolm Arnold and Elizabeth Maconchy. Her versions of Mozart and Brahms have often been the preferred choice of critics in both broadcast and magazine reviews.

Thea King also played the solo repertoire for basset clarinet and basset horn, and recorded all three parts in Mendelssohn's Konzertstück, Op 114, for clarinet, basset-horn and piano for the BBC's 'Double Exposure' series.

She was a professor at the Guildhall School of Music, and was created a Dame of the British Empire in 2001, having earlier been awarded the OBE in 1985. Dame Thea King died on 26 June 2007. --- hyperion-records.co.uk

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