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REINECKE Cello Sonatas: in a, op. 42; **in D**, op. 89; **in G**, op. 238 • Manuel Fischer-Dieskau (vc); Connie Shih (pn) • MDG 6031661 (62:44)

Carl Reinecke seems to be undergoing a mini-revival lately, though, frankly, it's hard to understand why he fell out of favor in the first place. His music is quite as good as it sounds, and here are three masterfully written cello sonatas to prove it. Think Brahms without the layers of emotional and compositional complexity. Of course you might legitimately ask, without those layers what are left but empty gestures? To which I would reply, sometimes music is just music. It doesn't have to storm the heavens or plumb the depths to give pleasure and even succor. Besides, it's not as if cellists have a huge inventory of original works for their instrument to choose from, which makes it all the more surprising that the only other recording I find of all three Reinecke cello sonatas is a mid-1990s cpo disc featuring cellist Claudius Herrmann and pianist Saiko Sasaki. It's not listed at ArkivMusic but it is at Amazon, which misidentifies the cellist as Otto Modersohn. Want to know where they got that from? He's the artist whose cover painting adorns the album. How do I know that? Because much to my surprise—since I hadn't taken it off the shelf and listened to it in many a blue moon—I discovered that I actually have the cpo disc in my collection.

Prolific as Reinecke was, his three cello sonatas were produced over a considerable span of time, 42 years to be exact. The first sonata, in A Minor, was written in 1855; the second, in D Major, in 1867; and the third, in G Major, in 1897. Incidentally, I would point out a missed proofing error in Christiane Wiesenfeldt's booklet note in which the op. 42 Sonata is identified as being in A Major. As correctly printed on the CD's backplate and booklet title page, the key is A Minor and is so listed in the IMSLP/Petrucci Library catalog of Reinecke's complete works. This minor (no pun intended) discrepancy in no way, however, invalidates Wiesenfeldt's remarks about Reinecke's style in general and about these sonatas in particular.

If Saint-Saëns was the French Mendelssohn, then it might be said that Reinecke was the German Saint-Saëns. Those aren't Wiesenfeldt's words, they're mine; but the gist of her notes makes the oft-repeated point that as a highly respected academic—his students included Grieg, Sinding, Svendsen, Bruch, Janáček, Čiurlionis, and Weingartner—Reinecke was a strong traditionalist and, as a composer, he practiced the conservative principles he preached. Early on, Mendelssohn and Schumann were Reinecke's models, though he never achieved the natural fluency and spontaneity of the former or the lyrical inspiration and

freedom of fantasy of the latter. In later years, Reinecke came under the influence of Brahms, his junior by almost a decade, but not to the point where he became a sycophantic Brahms imitator like Heinrich von Herzogenberg.

As you might have guessed, Manuel Fischer-Dieskau is the offspring of famed singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and his wife, cellist Irmgard Poppen. Principal cellist of the German Radio Philharmonic from 1998 to 2007, Manuel today is heavily engaged in chamber music, playing in the Mullova Ensemble and partnering with many leading artists. His able partner on this disc, Canadian pianist Connie Shih, is likewise a much sought-after chamber-music artist.

The aforementioned cpo CD with Herrmann and Sasaki may be a bit more difficult to come by than this new MDG release, but in all honesty I have to say that I marginally prefer it to this new one. Fischer-Dieskau and Shih are superb, playing these works with vibrant tone and consummate technical assurance, and if I had no basis for comparison, I'd no doubt give them a rapturous recommendation. But when I listen to Herrmann and Sasaki play these same sonatas, I hear something in their performances that seems missing, or at least at lesser voltage, in the Fischer-Dieskau and Shih readings, and that is the element of passion. With Fischer-Dieskau/Shih, all the notes are there, and beautifully played to be sure, but with Herrmann/Sasaki, I get the feeling that there's more substance to this music than one might have thought.

In any case, if I didn't have the Herrmann/Sasaki and was unaware it existed I would rate the Fischer-Dieskau/Shih very highly and recommend it enthusiastically. No one with a love of late-Romantic works for cello and piano should be without Reinecke's three sonatas. **Jerry Dubins**

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REINECKE Harp Concerto in e.¹ Flute Concerto in D.² Ballade, op. 288² • Patrick Gallois (fl),² cond;¹ Fabrice Pierre (hp), cond;² Swedish CO • NAXOS CD 8.557404 (55:27)

The Reinecke works for flute hold a peculiar position in the repertoire. They are like a musical platypus, not quite modern, not entirely 19th century. If Reinecke had written his *œuvre* just two decades earlier, he would certainly occupy a better position in the music pantheon. As it is, in a century when audiences were already starting to worship Debussy, Ravel, and Wagner, his style was deemed old-fashioned and expendable. He was better known as a professor who had among his students such celebrities as Edvard Grieg, Leoš Janáček, Isaac Albéniz, Felix Weingartner, and Max Bruch, among many others. Still, his sonata *Undine*,

composed in 1882, and the Flute Concerto, from 1908, are extremely popular among flutists and are now considered standard repertoire in any conservatory in the world. For those who cannot bear to play the Mozart concertos once again, yet consider that Takemitsu is too off-putting, for those who wish Brahms had written a flute concerto (don't we all?), Reinecke offers a very good alternative.

In the case of the harp, an instrument with an even smaller choice of works than the flute, the concerto recorded here is equally valuable. Joining these two works in one CD is a great idea, made even better by a very endearing detail: flutist Gallois conducts the Harp Concerto, while harpist Pierre conducts the flute pieces. Both do their jobs very well, and this CD is certainly worth its price.

Besides, the Ballade is added to the lot, making it a perfect package.

Reinecke's music is unashamedly romantic, with wonderful sweeping gestures, bravura passages, striking orchestral writing, and singable melodies that stick to one's mind for a long time. Gallois and Pierre are both first-class musicians, with respectable musical careers, and they have worked together often before. This close collaboration is easily perceived, and works in favor of the music all the time. Also, contrary to most recordings of concertos, the solo instruments are quite realistically rendered (not artificially enhanced to overpower the orchestra), and their sound blends with the orchestra in a natural and pleasing way. And because the whole conception does not emphasize the soloist in detriment of the ensemble, the orchestra does not need to wait for the *tuttis* to play to their heart's content, and they seem to enjoy the chance to truly interact with the soloists, and not being a mere backdrop for their prowess.

Gallois often breathes in strange places—but that is a quality, not a defect. He surprises the listener with the unusual punctuation, and uses it to give new meaning to familiar phrases. His sound is mellow and pure. Pierre reaches the same high level in his playing, with impressive technique and bouncy sound. In fact, they are both so outstanding that I was a bit disappointed that they were not entirely able to shed their modern inhibitions.

Both seem afraid of digging into the most sloppy, gushy, oozingly romantic goo. This music is full of accelerandos and ritardandos, sighs and over-the-top sentimentalism. The writing itself has plenty of clues on how it should be interpreted. But if one needs to look farther, one can unearth period recordings that show us the kind of liberties musicians took with the score at the beginning of the 20th century (I was thinking of the 1906 recording of Mozart's "Queen of the Night" aria by Maria Galvany, for example). Don't get me wrong: Gallois and Pierre are musical, and they do play expressively. It is just that this music demands the nth degree of expression, and they only get to the "jth" degree, always shying away from the kitsch element.

A good example of their unwillingness to really go deep into these romantic waters is the failure to exploit the crowd-pleasingly Spanish character of the finale/scherzo in the harp concerto. Everything here screams of Spain, the orchestration with the trumpet solos, the characteristic triplet figures, the melody itself. But

instead of calling the listener's attention to the Iberic trait, Pierre and Gallois choose to soften it, and that is a pity.

Still, this is a very good version of these works, one that deserves to be heard and praised. **Laura Rónai**

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Classical-Music dot com Review

COMPOSER(S): Reinecke WORKS: Piano Quartet in E flat, Op. 34; Piano Quartet in D, Op. 272; Piano Quintet in A, Op. 83 PERFORMER: Linos Ensemble

LABEL:CPO CATALOGUE NUMBER: 999 618-2

PERFORMANCE: 5*/5* SOUND: 4*/5*

Carl Reinecke's music, on the evidence not only of the works on this disc but others that have passed my way, is seriously underrated. It possesses the sweeping Romantic qualities of Schumann, a dazzling technical brilliance (Reinecke was one of the most accomplished pianists of his age) and a compelling self-confidence rather at odds, one understands, with his self-effacing personality. Yet it is also both individual and deep in its content. The two piano quartets recorded here make an excellent contrast, as, given the years between their composition, one might expect. Op. 34 is the more spacious and headstrong of the two, its debts to Schumann plain. Op. 272, published in 1904, aims on the other hand for concision, and was described by Reinecke as being 'in the easier style'. It shows, too, textures and flavours from Brahms, and its ripe slow movement is complemented by a jaunty, lopsided Scherzo. The Piano Quintet – an acknowledged masterpiece among Reinecke aficionados – goes a step further, its mysterious, tonally ambiguous opening showing that the lessons of Wagner and even of early Schoenberg had been fully assimilated. The Linos Ensemble gives this fine music all the care it deserves in its passionate, clean performances.

Stephen Pettitt