

DANZI Woodwind Quintets: in B \flat , op. 56/1; **in g**, op. 56/2; **in F**, op. 56/3; **in G**, op. 67/1; **in e**, op. 67/2; **in E \flat** , op. 67/3; **in A**, op. 68/1; **in F**, op. 68/2; **in d**, op. 68/3. **Piano and Wind Quintets: in d**, op. 41; **in F**, op. 53; **in D**, op. 54 • Berlin P Wind Qnt; Love Derwinger, (pn) • BIS 1581 (3 CDs: 233:02)[s](#)

Though Anton Reicha's 24 woodwind quintets (actually 25) will continue to set the standard for the foreseeable future in this difficult genre, it would certainly be a mistake to disregard the works of his near cotemporary, Franz Danzi (1763–1826), whose life also nearly paralleled that of Beethoven. The Classical period in general was responsible for a number of important innovations in the musical world, most notably through the influence of Haydn, who steered the *sinfonia* into the symphony, and almost single-handedly developed the string quartet idiom into the chamber music standard-setter that we know today.

If you were a wind-player in those days, more time was spent at dinners and soirees than on the concert stage. The *Harmonie*, a form of wind-band-playing that was so important in the era, was given due consideration by nearly every composer of merit during this age, mostly for monetary considerations. Mozart, as he frequently did, was the first to develop the form so that it began to transcend the necessities of function and move into the realm of high art, and his great wind serenades remain today as some of the supreme examples of music, period, let alone the sublime pinnacle of *Harmonie*-writing.

Though Danzi was a younger man than Reicha of about 10 years, he most likely came across the idea of the latter's innovative work for wind quintet from the publication *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, the bible of new musical work in its day. Reicha, who had accepted a professorship at the Paris Conservatory and was to become fully immersed in the early Romantic French school, no doubt received inspiration from the great Parisian wind-players of the time (indeed, his quintets were written for five of the very best), and though we cannot be sure as to why this "quintet" ensemble formed as it did, one cannot discount the thoroughly French obsession with pungent and diaphanous reed sounds as found in the great organs all through France.

Danzi traveled in different circles, and his view of this genre was based partly in light of his extensive orchestral experience, with some remarkable individual solo-writing for the instruments. He penned nine quintets appearing in groups of three, the first dedicated to Reicha. The works are all in four movements, following the trend of the time, with the first in the typical sonata-form structure. While I don't believe that, ultimately, they top Reicha's work, they are certainly worthy of more attention than they currently receive in the concert halls of the world (and

recordings), and contain some marvelous music that will engender repeated hearings.

Danzi also went a step further to embrace the even more unusual piano and wind quintet form, leaving us three superb examples, one for a wind combination of oboe-clarinet-horn-bassoon, and two more for flute-oboe-clarinet-bassoon. These are each astounding works, especially in the way he uses the piano, with the op. 54 piece a virtual virtuoso showpiece for the piano, the quintet playing the role of orchestral accompaniment. I don't understand why more wind-players don't insist on performing this music more often.

These recordings blossomed on the scene in 1991 and 1992, one of the finest things the estimable Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet has done, and while there is some competition (notably Michael Thompson on Naxos), most recordings of this music get put in a mix-and-match situation with other composers of the era in compilation albums. There is only one other "complete" set available, that of the Das Reicha'sche Quintet (NCA label) on period instruments, and it only gives the nine purely wind quintets, also on three discs. BIS offers the canonical nine plus the three piano quintets in wonderful sound, and in performances that without question have set a very high bar for future endeavors. It is nice to have them in this set, and the jewel box tells us that they are a three-for-two bargain.

ArkivMusic.com has it listed correctly at about 31 bucks, but someone should notify Borders-Amazon.com, for they are still selling it at \$10.00 more. **Steven E. Ritter**

This article originally appeared in Issue 31:3 (Jan/Feb 2008) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

Franz DANZI (1763-1826) Complete Wind Quintets - MusicWeb Review - Berlin

CD 1

Wind Quintet in B flat major, Op.56 No.1 [15:52]

Wind Quintet in G minor, Op.56 No.2 [15:53]

Wind Quintet in F major, Op.56 No.3 [22:30]

Quintet in D minor, Op.41 for piano, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon [22:58]

CD 2

Wind Quintet in G major, Op.67 No.1 [17:12]

Wind Quintet in E minor, Op.67 No.2 [18:07]

Wind Quintet in E flat major, Op.67 No.3 [17:01]

Quintet in F major, Op.53 for piano, flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon 23:30]

CD 3

Wind Quintet in A major, Op.68 No.1 [15:49]

Wind Quintet in F major, Op.68 No.2 [20:48]

Wind Quintet in D minor, Op.68 No.3 [17:58]

Quintet in D major, Op.54 for piano, flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon [21:06]

Love Derwinger (piano)

Philharmonisches Bläserquintett, Berlin

rec. February 1991, Siemens Villa, Berlin, Germany (Op.67); February 1992 (Op.56 nos. 1+3), October 1992 (Op.56 no.2, Op.68), Andreaskirche, Wannsee, Berlin, Germany; October 1991, Danderyd Grammar School, Sweden (Quintets)

BIS-CD-1581/82 [78:20 + 77:33 + 77:09]

Franz Danzi is one of those 'in between' composers, whose lifetime straddled the era of Mozart (who Danzi knew and admired as a youth), and Beethoven (of whom Danzi also knew, but probably only partially understood). Franz was the son of Innocenzo Danzi, a cellist in the Johann Stamitz's famous Mannheim orchestra, and whose chair he would eventually take over. As such the younger Franz was an eminently practical musician, knowing his orchestral instruments inside-out. His work is as a result thoroughly crafted and idiomatic, equally fun to play as to listen to in concert.

Antonín Rejcha (1770-1836) had already paved the way for this form with his 24 wind quintets, which are characterised with a refinement more associated with the already highly advanced string quartet. Danzi's nine quintets were probably written between 1820 and 1824, appearing in the groups of three which allow for such symmetry in these three discs. Opus 56 is dedicated to Antonín Rejcha, and all follow the then popular four movement pattern of sonata form first movement, lyrical song form second, minuet third – sometimes with something of a scherzo character, and rondo finale. The piano quintets for piano and winds also represent Danzi's entire output for these combinations, Opp. 53 and 54 for purely woodwind quartet and piano, with the piano taking a more prominent, almost concerto role. Opus 41 is more evenly matched, with subtle dialogues between piano and winds having more in common with the playful way in which Danzi employs such exchanges during the wind quintets.

This music is what we impresarios describe to clients as 'light classical', but with many such cases, the more you listen, the more there is to enjoy. Like a Fragonard painting, you can enjoy it as entertaining fluff, and then you can look closer at the detail, the individual characters and the way they interact, and discover that there is more to the work than meets the eye at first glance. There are some surprising modulations and little harmonic twists here and there, but to be fair there is little here which will make serious intellectual demands on the listener. With these CDs you can relax, pick up a book, and with a glass of wine or cup of tea at your elbow, have your moments repose enhanced by what even my 4½ year old daughter called 'beautiful music' after hearing only a brief fragment over my Grado headphones between running around and destroying things. What is beautiful is not only the composition, but the playing and recording as well. Perfectly balanced and intonated, the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet were all members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and formed their ensemble in 1988 when Herbert von

Karajan was still in charge. The quintet recordings are all set in an appropriately resonant acoustic, the piano quintets slightly less so, but still with an appealing warmth and gentle flow to the sound which suits the form completely. There are plenty of opportunities for virtuosic display alongside the well-turned phrases and superbly crafted melodies and instrumental interaction, and Love Derwinger is a proven sensitive chamber musician as well as being a powerful soloist.

These three CDs were previously issued separately during the 1990s, and the track listings are identical to the original volumes. They now appear as a '3 for the price of 2' set, and at over 230 minutes of top quality playing there can be no complaints about value. This set will enrich any chamber-music orientated shelf, and even just knowing you have it to hand will probably improve your life expectancy – it's the musical equivalent of stroking a gorgeously soft and friendly cat.

Dominy Clements

DANZI Wind Quintets (complete) • Reicha'sche Qnt (period instruments) • NCA 60126 (3 CDs: 165:55)

One or more of these 1995 thru 1997 recordings have been, and/or still are, available separately. NCA has conveniently and, it must be said, quite elegantly repackaged them in a handsomely appointed foldout set. The first disc in this set, the op. 56 quintets, was reviewed as far back as 10 years ago by John Bauman in 23:6 in all of three brief paragraphs. Franz Danzi, (1763–1826) an almost exact contemporary of Beethoven, perhaps deserves a bit more than that, but frankly, not a lot more. He got it in 31:3 from Steven E. Ritter who reviewed a three-CD BIS set of Danzi's *complete* wind quintets performed on modern instruments by the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet that were recorded half-a-dozen years earlier than these NCA releases. *Complete* is italicized to call attention to the discrepancy in the number of works included in both of these sets and the significantly more generous timing of the BIS entry, which includes the three wind quintets with piano. The current NCA set is limited to just the nine winds-only quintets that Danzi had published in groups of three under three opus numbers.

No examination of Danzi's wind quintets can avoid mention of Anton Reicha (1770–1836), for even though Reicha was the slightly younger of the two composers, it was he who did for the wind quintet—a medium mainly associated at the time with the *Harmonie*, or wind bands—what Haydn did for the string quartet and the symphony. Danzi, by all reckonings a much lesser talent than Reicha, played followed the leader when it came to the writing of wind quintets.

The Reicha'sche Quintet, founded in 1992, is comprised of a group of musicians who alternate freely between playing in both modern and period instruments ensembles. In the latter, they have performed with Berlin's Akademie für Alte Musik, Anima Eterna, Cappella Coloniensis, and Vienna's Concentus Musicus. An odd sentence in the booklet note maintains that playing these works is "an almost impossible undertaking, with this extremely heterogeneous line-up, on modern instruments." I think Ritter would beg to differ. He called the performances on BIS "one of the finest things the estimable Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet has done," and concluded "that without question [they] have set a very high bar for future endeavors." There seems to be a self-serving mindset among many period-instrument practitioners that theirs is the only legitimate approach. It isn't. That said, I have no criticism of the Reicha'sche Quintet's playing on these discs. Hans-Peter Westermann's oboe, a 1996 replica of a Vincenzo Panormo oboe from the end of the 18th century, is a particularly lovely sounding instrument, sweet-toned and smoothly regulated over its full range. It's really unfair, though, to single out the oboe; for, in fact, all of these instruments but one are well mannered and possess very pleasing tonal characteristics. The sole exception is the replica of a Heinrich Grenser bassoon, circa 1800. The sound it produces is not unpleasant; it just sounds a bit thin and lacking in body compared to the other instruments, the result being a slightly undernourished bass.

The criticism I've held in reserve is not for any of the fine musicians of the Reicha'sche Quintet, for their instruments, or for the recordings, which have an aliveness and presence to them that's quite appealing. My disappointment is with Danzi. Of course, it's not incumbent on anyone to sit down and listen to these three discs straight through, but even an abbreviated sampling should be enough to convince you that Danzi's musical endowments were limited. To my ear, these quintets come across as exercises in the exploration of wind band sonorities with little in the way of melodic or harmonic interest. Danzi may have been gifted with a technical facility for combining wind instruments, but based on the evidence of these quintets it would seem that a talent for writing music of any real consequence was not his; which I guess is a bit like saying the presentation of the meal is praiseworthy, but the food itself is subpar. Ah well, at least there's consolation in knowing the set is expensive, \$49.98 at amazon.com. Recommended then for fine performances and recording, but probably to an audience with deep pockets and a special interest in this genre. **Jerry Dubins**

This article originally appeared in Issue 33:3 (Jan/Feb 2010) of *Fanfare Magazine*.