

KROMMER *Clarinet Quintet in B \flat* , op. 95. *Clarinet Quartet in E \flat* , op. 69. *Pieces for 2 Clarinets and Viola*, op. 47 • Eduard Brunner (cl); Amati Qrt; Marcel Lallemand (cl); Diemut Poppen (va) • TUDOR 7089 (63:31)

There's a wonderful German word for composers like Franz Krommer: *Kleinmeister*. (You have to love a language in which the word for glove is *Handschuh*.) The term does carry with it a whiff of the pejorative, and in fact Krommer may not have left us a "Jupiter" or a "London" Symphony. But like many of his contemporaries (Rosetti, Hoffmeister, Carl Stamitz, Dittersdorf—the list could go on), Krommer, who was three years younger than Mozart but outlived him by 40, composed skillfully and prolifically over his long career, producing a large body of work, practically none of which, unfortunately, is widely known today. The reasons for this are probably best left for another discussion, but suffice it to say that the music on this disc is both attractive and interesting. I refer the reader to Michael Carter's and Barry Brenesal's reviews of two other Krommer discs on Tudor, in *Fanfare* 29:6, for details on his life and career.

The Quintet, op. 95, is a full-scale four-movement work whose language mostly exists comfortably within Classical constraints, but it does have some chromatic surprises—hints of Spohr, in fact—and is rather adventurous both tonally (an Adagio in B \flat Minor) and rhythmically. The fugal opening is striking. A competing version of the Quintet has just been issued on the Columna Musica label, but I haven't heard it; I doubt it could be much better than the performance here. The Quartet, op. 69, is one of six; Brunner has also recorded ops. 21/1, 21/2, 82, and 83 on Tudor 7080, which apparently is not distributed directly in the US. The remaining quartet, without opus number, was unearthed by Dieter Klöcker, who plays all six on a two-disc cpo set. Klöcker takes the first-movement exposition repeat; unfortunately, Brunner does not. In all other respects, I find the present version preferable; Brunner, who was the principal clarinetist of the Bavarian Radio Orchestra throughout the Kubelík era, has a lovely, dark sound with perfect intonation, superb control, and ample body even in the *altissimo* register. Klöcker, on the other hand, tends to sound thin and overly bright, especially when he is playing loud or in the upper register. Tudor's sound is clear but full, allowing plenty of space around the instruments.

The 13 Pieces, op. 47, are charming miniatures (they total 27 minutes) generally in ternary form, some with a brief coda. Even the four Rondos have only one episode each, so that these are really just three-part pieces themselves. The first clarinet is the lead instrument throughout; the second clarinet and viola provide

accompaniments that sound ingeniously full. While the music (written in 1804) is mostly not very complex, there are some surprises, including the five-bar phrases of the last piece; the third alludes unmistakably to Mozart's Clarinet Quintet. I recommend not listening to all 13 in one sitting. A natural bisection occurs about the midway point (in the present ordering); the first seven pieces are in either E \flat or B \flat , and would almost certainly be played on the standard B \flat clarinet; the last six are in D or A, and would be played on the slightly darker-sounding clarinet in A. This is their only recording, as far as I know.

I can't imagine anyone who is interested in the clarinet not finding this disc a delight. I plan to order Brunner's recording of the other four Quartets from overseas immediately. Since Tudor's US distribution seems spotty (the present disc was issued in 2001 but apparently has turned up on this side of the pond only recently), I'd advise getting hold of a copy of this one as soon as you can find it.

Richard A. Kaplan

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KROMMER Clarinet Quartets: in E \flat , op. 21/1; in B \flat , op. 21/2; in D, op. 82; in B \flat , op. 83 • Eduard Brunner (cl); Amati Str Qrt • TUDOR 7080 (65:05)

Franz Vinzenz Krommer (1759–1831) was born František Vincenc Kramář in Kamenice u Třebíče in that musical kingdom known as Bohemia. His uncle was a composer and choirmaster who taught his nephew violin and organ but young František was self-schooled with regard to theory and composition. His first position appears to have been that of an organist in his uncle's hometown, Turan, but like many, Krommer would relocate frequently, and for him the longest way around was the shortest way home.

In 1785 we find the 26-year-old Krommer in Vienna with his name altered to its German form, a practice adopted by many of his countrymen. After a brief period, Krommer moved on to what is now Hungary, where he became a violinist in the employment of the Duke of Styrum and was promoted to the position of musical director two years later. In late 1790 Krommer was appointed *Kapellmeister* at the cathedral in Pécs; and at some point after 1793, he was *Kapellmeister* for one Duke Karolyi and later for Prince Grassalkovich de Gyarak. A decade after he left Vienna, Krommer was back where his employment changed less frequently. His last position was that of director of chamber music and court composer to the Hapsburg emperors.

One of the more influential and successful of the Bohemians resident in Vienna at the end of the 18th century, Krommer left behind a substantial catalog of some 300 works, but they remained in manuscript until later years. His contemporary

reputation is supported by the rapid dissemination of his music in reprints and arrangements—legal and otherwise—by German, Danish, French, English, Italian, and even American publishers. Krommer was also a respected member of several professional musical societies, including the Instituto Filarmonico (Venice), the Philharmonic Society (Ljubljana), the *Musikverein* (Innsbruck), and the conservatories of Paris (1815), Milan (1818), and Vienna (1826).

Save music for solo keyboard, songs, and opera, Krommer delved into and was largely successful with all of the prevalent musical genres. In his symphonies, concertos, and chamber music he trod the path of Haydn and Mozart, but his modes of expression were more varied, ranging from the *gallant* of the early 18th century to budding Romanticism. His string quartets were much in demand and frequently mentioned in the same breath as those of Haydn, but the current prevailing opinion sets his wind concertos as his most significant accomplishments.

The New Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians lists five quartets for clarinet, violin, viola, and cello by Krommer: the pair published as op. 21 in 1802 by Offenbach, and ops. 82 and 83, also engraved by Offenbach, but in 1816. Possibly because of timing considerations, the op. 69 quartet—published in Bonn—is not included here. The exceptional ability with which Krommer has been correctly credited is in evidence here. The clarinet is the star, its sparkling, refined, and *cantabile* melodies expertly countered by virtuoso writing that exploits and explores the instrument's broad range of color and sonority. But the strings are allotted important material as well and do far more than simply support the clarinet. Those of you who know the quartets of Franz Hoffmeister and Antonio Cartellieri will find these just as interesting.

Like his better-known German colleague, Dieter Klöcker, Swiss clarinetist Eduard Brunner has taken to the undergrowth and resurrected a few gems, including a CD (Tudor 7098) of concertos by his countryman, Jean Xavier Lefèvre (1763–1829). Brunner's tone is rich and round, dark and woody; and his agility is *primus inter pares*. Here he is partnered with three members of the Amati String Quartet. Together they effortlessly capture the essence of the music, and also master the technical demands with unerring musicianship, suppleness, and control. The colloquy left me wanting for nothing save more from these extraordinary executants. Without question, the performances on this CD rank as models of their kind. The sound is somewhat close and a tad on the dry side, but it will find favor with some, and is decidedly far more than acceptable.

Even though Krommer's quartets are not on the same level of inspiration and craft as Mozart's clarinet quintet, they clearly and indisputably exhibit why this Bohemian innkeeper's son was able to hold his own against the best in Imperial Vienna. Krommer's music in general and these quartets in particular impress immediately and should find a comfortable resting place in the collections of those to whom Classicism has an unending appeal. **Michael Carter**

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