

REGER String Trios: No. 1, op. 77b; **No. 2**, op. 141b. **Piano Quartet No. 2**, op. 133
 • Tr Lirico; Detlev Eisinger (pn) • AUDITE 97.714 (83:31)

These three works all bring out Reger's Mozartian sensibilities. The textures are clear and the movements are well structured and well proportioned. Yet there is little sense of Neoclassical restraint here: The music is passionate and often intense. The op. 77b String Trio dates from 1904, during Reger's Munich years, his most progressive and experimental phase. But writing for just three instruments brought a clarity and focus to his music that was often lacking in his larger projects of the time. The op. 141b String Trio and the op. 133 Piano Quartet date from 1915 and 1914 respectively, towards the end of Reger's short life, when he had retreated to Jena and resolved to write music to his own taste, rather than compete with the fashions of the day. So there is directness and simplicity here too, along with a good helping of the sophisticated harmony and intricate counterpoint that we find in almost all his music.

The German ensemble Trio Lirico do an outstanding job, giving performances that are light and buoyant, with beautiful clarity of texture and finely gauged balance between the instruments. Focused articulation helps to propel the lines, and the viola and cello in particular often display a woody, tactile attack, while the overall tone is suitably balanced between transparency and richness. Pianist Detlev Eisinger fits perfectly into the ensemble for the Piano Quartet. In all three performances, the string players indulge in some sweeping rubato gestures in the transitions—ideal for this music—and Eisinger seems to goad them even further, into daringly broad and opulent phrasing. The gamble always pays off.

As with most of Reger's chamber music, the competition for these three works is select but strong. And, as usual, the benchmark is the MDG series from the 1990s. The string trios there, from the Mannheimer String Quartet (MDG Gold 336 0711 and 336 0722) are weightier in tone and recorded in a warmer and more ambient setting that is easier on the ear where these are more confrontational.

Interpretively, they are similarly well executed and conveyed, so the two versions deserve joint top billing. But don't miss the excellent version from the Vogl Trio on Gramola (98943). Their approach is lighter and more conversational in the counterpoint, lacking a little in drama but still impressive.

The MDG version of the Piano Quartet, again with the Mannheimer String Quartet, with pianist Claudius Tanski (336 0714) has a compelling sense of urgency in the first movement which Trio Lirico seem to lack, at least by comparison. But the audio quality on the new version is superior. The other versions available are not competitive: The Fanny Mendelssohn String Quartet (Troubadour 1415) is rushed, while the Aperto Piano Quartet (Naxos 8.570786) lacks focus and engagement, and neither version comes close to this or the MDG for audio quality.

Generous running time and an unusually well-translated booklet round out an attractive package. Just one complaint: The Audite label used to champion SACD. Its new approach seems to be to issue standard CDs, but with a high-resolution, surround-sound download equivalent. I'm sorry to have missed out on that, but it could potentially elevate this joint first into a clear winner. **Gavin Dixon**

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Max REGER (1873-1916) - MusicWeb Review String Trios w/ Trio Lirico

String Trio No. 2 in D minor, Op. 141b (1915) [22:28]

String Trio No. 1 in A minor, Op. 77b (1904) [23:48]

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 133 (1914) [37:01]

Trio Lirico (Franziska Pietsch (violin), Sophia Reuter (viola), Johannes Krebs (cello))

Detlev Eisinger (piano)

rec. 2017, Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem

AUDITE 97.714 [83:31]

I can understand why many find Reger's music unforgiving and daunting. It took me a while to crack the hard shell of the nut. Once I did, after much perseverance, I discovered the wealth of treasures that lie within. I am pleased to say that the music featured on this disc is some of the least forbidding in his output. A large part of Reger's compositional oeuvre consists of chamber music, and these two String Trios and Piano Quartet are certainly more approachable than the String Quartets.

"It is absolutely clear to me that what our present age lacks is a Mozart" declared Reger in June 1904. The result was the String Trio No. 1 in A minor, Op. 77b. It was premiered in November of that same year to great critical acclaim. It sounds quite extrovert at times, almost certainly in an attempt to capture some of that Mozartian lightness. After a solemn introduction, the opening movement suddenly springs to life, the energetic thrust alternates with contrasting lyrical warmth. A tender *Larghetto* follows, reflective in disposition. The good-humoured *Scherzo* sounds quite neoclassical in style. Quoting a theme from Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, the finale cannot fail to raise a smile.

I, personally, find the String Trio in D minor, Op. 141b the more attractive of the two; maybe this is the reason why it is positioned first on the CD. A late work, it was completed in 1915, a year before Reger's untimely death. It is a reworking of a Flute Serenade, Op. 141a, and is structured in three movements. Despite the glow of the opening movement, there is a pervading sadness and sense of longing. This is followed by a theme and variations, elegant and skilfully etched. The

Vivace, which ends the work, is sun-soaked, with a playful abandon. The Trio proved popular with public and critics alike after the first performance, and it is hardly surprising.

The Trio Lirico join forces with pianist Detlev Eisinger for an impassioned reading of the Piano Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 133. The work was begun in 1914 and premiered at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in February 1915. It was published a year later. At the time, the critics praised its "glorious sororities" and its "vocal, vivid and catchy" melodies. For me, there are powerful echoes of Brahms in the music. Reger's often dense, syrupy textures and virtuosic piano writing are a notable feature of the intensely passionate opening movement. A frolicsome *Vivace* follows, offering some light relief. A noble, ardently-etched *Largo* precedes a spirited finale.

The Trio Lirico was formed in 2014, and this is their debut CD. Recorded last year, it marks the centenary of the composer's death on 1916. These are stunning performances, with precision ensemble. The Trio are utterly committed to the music and their interpretations are thoroughly convincing. Detlev Eisinger I would equally praise for the passion, energy and refinement he brings to the Piano Quartet. Audite's plush sound is another asset. For the uninitiated, especially, this constitutes a highly recommended Reger chamber music primer.

Stephen Greenbank