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**GYROWETZ String Quartets**, op. 44 • Salomon Str Qrt • HYPERION CDA67109 (67:08) Quartets: No. 1, in G; No. 2, in B $\flat$ ; No. 3, in A?

One of the salutary lessons from the flood of music that keeps on emerging on CD, despite the moaning of the industry majors (the independents just keep their heads down and get on with producing the goods), is how much of the stuff that has been swept aside by the mainstream and beached by history is just about as good, sometimes even as good as, the music that is held to have made the grade. Stick these quartets by Czech-born Adalbert Gyrowetz (*recte* Vojtěch Jírovec, 1763-1850) alongside any middle-period Haydn and they come within an inch or two of Papa H himself. Gyrowetz apparently made no secret of his admiration of Haydn, a personal friend to boot: Gyrowetz knew him in Vienna, and facilitated his high-society maneuvering when he first visited London (all this and more is in Graham Melville-Mason's helpful note with this CD). What makes Haydn the outstanding composer and Gyrowetz (in Hans Keller's wonderful neologism) the instanding one is that touch of divine madness that means you never know exactly what he is going to do next; he confounds your expectations rather more radically than the more conventional Gyrowetz. That apart, there are lengthy stretches of music in these three quartets (published in 1804) where there's not much to choose between them; if you wonder what Haydn would sound like without the surprises— and, it must be confessed, with barely half the depth—this disc is for you. The music is elegant, refined, often rather beautiful. And the Salomon String Quartet plays on period instruments, giving the timbre a wonderful woody, grainy quality (and perhaps explaining the odd insecurity of pitch, particularly when the first violin heads up through the ledger lines), and the recorded sound could not be better. This is not an earth-shattering recording, but it will fit the bill perfectly when you come in from a rotten day at the office, having fought your way through traffic and lousy weather, and just want to put your feet up with a scotch or a Chilean Merlot to let some music massage away the hassle. **Martin Anderson**

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**GYROWETZ String Quartets: in E $\flat$** , Op. 29/1; **in D**, Op. 13/1; **in G**, Op. 29/2 • Pleyel Qrt Cologne (period instruments) • CPO 777770 (73:09)

He was born Vojtěch Matyáš Jírovec in 1763 in the Bohemian town of České Budejovice (aka Budweis, original home of Budweiser beer), adopted the German version of his name, Adalbert Gyrowetz, and died in Vienna at the age of 87 in 1850. He outlived not only Beethoven and Schubert, but Mendelssohn, Chopin, Paganini, and Bellini. Yet as a composer, Gyrowetz remained steadfast in style to his idol, Haydn.

If you've encountered Gyrowetz before, it was probably in one of his symphonies; he wrote over 60 of them, three of which were recorded by Matthias Bamert and Chandos (9791) in their "Contemporaries of Mozart" series. But goodness knows, Gyrowetz was blessed with long enough years to compose a great deal more than symphonies, and compose he did—some 30 operas, 28 ballets, 40-plus string quartets, 46 piano trios, 40 violin sonatas, 11 masses, and much else. I note that back in 2001 (issue 24:4) Martin Anderson reviewed a CD of the composer's op. 44 quartets performed by the Salomon String Quartet on Hyperion (67109). There is no duplication between that recording and the present one, nor do I find any other current listings for the opus numbers on this disc.

The D-Major Quartet bears a publication date of 1796, making it exactly contemporaneous with Haydn's six Erdödy Quartets, op. 76. Published three years later in 1799, the E<sup>b</sup>-Major and G-Major quartets are exactly contemporaneous with Haydn's two "Lobkowitz" Quartets, op. 77. Significantly, Gyrowetz's op. 29 quartets are also exactly contemporaneous with Beethoven's op. 18 set of six quartets.

I wish I could work up more enthusiasm for this release, but neither the music nor the playing of it does anything for me. Gyrowetz's writing is solid in craft but weak in inspiration. Where Haydn's alchemy can transform base materials into gold, Gyrowetz's magic, like that of the sorcerer's apprentice, turns a little water into more water. Soon you find yourself swimming in a sea of notes that are the flotsam and jetsam of a shipwreck floating on the surface. Perhaps after encountering Beethoven's "Razumovsky" Quartets, Gyrowetz was humbled, or shamed, into learning some new tricks, but based on Anderson's aforementioned review of Gyrowetz's later op. 44 quartets, it doesn't sound like it.

In no small part, my less than enthusiastic reaction to these string quartets—I had a much more positive response to the composer's symphonies on the above-cited Chandos CD—must be laid at the feet of the Pleyel Quartet. The ensemble's intonation is accurate, but that's about the only positive thing I can say about the vibratoless sound the players draw from their period instruments fitted with gut strings. A Picasso-like portrait of four anorexics laboring over ironing boards comes to mind. The tone is sallow, shallow, scrawny, and sour, evincing the very sound that once gave the period-instrument movement a bad name. More needn't be said. **Jerry Dubins**

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**GYROWETZ String Quartets: in E<sup>b</sup>, Op. 29/1; in D, Op. 13/1; in G, Op. 29/2 •**  
Pleyel Qrt Cologne (period instruments) • CPO 777770 (73:09)

Gyrowetz's charm as a composer, his ability to utilize the models of his much admired Haydn and reproduce his varied and genial tone, is never here in doubt. These three string quartets from the 1790s demonstrate not merely a willingness to deploy the same complex tension-release language that the older composer developed, but a similar interest in achieving diversity through a select application of counterpoint, folk materials, abrupt shifts of textural density and movement, and playfully misleading tonal direction. Gyrowetz occasionally had his manuscripts ascribed to Haydn by unscrupulous publishers, and it's easy to understand why; though the much older composer demonstrates a stronger grasp of structure. These witty, inventive quartets deserve more investigation. Though I'm disinclined to think the Pleyel Quartet of Cologne should be involved in such a project.

Jerry Dubins wrote in a review of their previous recording of three works by the Quartet's namesake, "The sound they make often turns astringent, desiccated, and raspy. That they play in tune is a saving grace, but to paraphrase something I believe Itzhak Perlman once said, it's sad to think that an entire generation has now grown up having been led to believe that this is how string instruments are supposed to sound. For personal reasons then, a less than enthusiastic endorsement." I'll add to the mix both poorly nuanced phrasing, and a lack of accenting that, combined with a predisposition for constant balance between the parts, makes for bland, textural sameness throughout. I'm also not sure why the Pleyels insist on playing completely without any vibrato. The quartets on this release all date from roughly 50 years after that extremely well regarded teacher, Leopold Mozart, wrote in his famous violin method of the vibrato as "an adornment which arises from Nature herself," to be imitated on the instrument "by a small movement" utilizing "the whole hand." If it was standard enough to be recommended as an occasional but important expressive coloration device by him, in a celebrated manual that went through several editions in Mozart's lifetime (along with various translations), why isn't this authentic practice good enough for a string ensemble specializing in music of the late 18th century?

Finally, a word about the essay accompanying this release. It is lengthy, as is CPO's laudable custom, but much of it is a simple recounting of history. Only one paragraph touches upon the musical content of Gyrowetz's quartets in general, much less in specific detail. And every statement in that paragraph is demonstrably incorrect.

Take a pass. Gyrowetz deserves to be served better. **Barry Brenesal**

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**GYROWETZ Symphonies: in Eb, op. 6/2; in F, op. 6/3; in D, op. 12/1 • Matthias Bamert, cond; London Mozart Players • CHANDOS CHAN 9791 (64:13)**

Chandos's series of "Contemporaries of Mozart" goes from strength to strength, now with a disc that can hold its head up proudly among the earlier revelations of Pichl, Koželuh, Vanhal, and (to date) eight others. Astonishingly, all that seems to be currently available of Gyrowetz's music in the catalogs is a Fermate CD of flute quartets (FER20013), and yet he was one of the main men of his age. He was born, as Vojtech Jírovec, in Ceske Budějovice, south of Prague (and the original home of Budweiser beer), in 1763; he adhered to the German version of his moniker— Adalbert Gyrowetz—all his professional life, which he spent, respectively, in Italy, Paris, London, and Vienna, where he settled permanently. The crowning appointment came in 1804, when he was made Vize-kapellmeister of the Court Theater, and he died as late as 1850.

For all that Gyrowetz was a contemporary and friend of Beethoven (and a pallbearer at his funeral, as Robin Golding's well-researched notes point out), his music betrays nothing of that acquaintance. Instead, Papa Haydn is the dominant figure behind his well-crafted orchestral style— though, at least in these three symphonies (all believed to date from around 1790), what he takes from Haydn is not the ability to suggest power and fleet movement but his bright confidence; in a nutshell, Gyrowetz's first movements sound like Haydn's finales. The faster music is thus shot through with good humor, often incorporating some recurrent witty turn. Even where his slow movements begin with some grandiose gesture, as in the F-Major Symphony, op. 6, no. 3, Gyrowetz cannot keep a straight face for long, and the stiff mien of the music is broken by a winsomely lovely melody. He is wide awake to the use of instrumental color for dramatic effect, pulling in solos from the orchestra and alternating tutti outbursts with sectional passages. It sounds very much as if he was enjoying himself enormously.

The performances, recorded in excellent sound, are every bit as good as the previous issues in this series: Bamert set himself a high standard early on and has stuck to it. The playing is tight, focused, surefooted, even when Gyrowetz expects his musicians to belt along like whippets. I see from the booklet that Andrew Parrott is taking over as conductor of the London Mozart Players from September this year; I sincerely hope that (a) Chandos has more of this repertoire from Bamert in the can, and (b) Parrott keeps this potentially endless series going after he takes the helm—after all, we haven't had our Vranický symphonies yet! **Martin Anderson**

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## Magazine.

### **Adalbert GYROWETZ (1763-1850) - MusicWeb Review**

String Quartet in G, Op. 29 No. 2 [27:19]

String Quartet in D, Op. 13 No. 1 [20:45]

String Quartet in E flat, Op. 29 No. 1 [24:52]

Pleyel Quartet, Cologne

rec. 4-7 June 2012, Siemensvilla, Berlin

**CPO 777 770-2** [72:56]

Born Vojtěch Matyáš Jírovec in the Czech country town which one day would be home to the original Budweiser brewery, Adalbert Gyrowetz spent his youth in Bohemia, then moved on to Vienna, Paris, and London. Mozart conducted one of his symphonies; in London Salomon commissioned more symphonies, and Gyrowetz got to meet another of Salomon's favorite composers, Haydn. In Paris, Gyrowetz apparently discovered that a publisher had been printing his symphonies with Haydn's name on the front. There are at least fifty string quartets and symphonies, and a few dozen violin sonatas, too. A recording of three string quartets once appeared on Hyperion.

The publisher who accidentally confused Gyrowetz with Haydn had a point. These string quartets have all Haydn's best qualities: they may not break the mold, but they're cheery, they have genuinely memorable tunes, each is crafted with great skill, and the works are full of unique touches. Each of the quartets opens with a broad, flowing tune which could do Haydn proud, and each contains its share of wit and more than a usual amount of harmonic spice.

In the D major Quartet, the finale deceptively begins in a minor key; in the E flat Quartet's *menuetto*, watch out for some startling dissonances. The first time I heard them I thought something had gone wrong. Nope: some cheeky, daring fun. The G major quartet's scherzo has a "trio al roverscio" or "trio in reverse" which does indeed present part of the scherzo theme backwards. As I said: these quartets are constantly entertaining.

The Pleyel Quartet of Cologne plays very well on period instruments. If CPO wants to commit to more Gyrowetz with these forces, I'll try my best to hear all of it. In addition to the dozens of string quartets, Wikipedia reports a quintet with added viola and a quintet in E minor, Op. 39, for, intriguingly, "flute, violin, violas and cello." Given how inventive and pleasing this first album is, I'll be excited for any more that are on the way.

**Brian Reinhart**

## **Gyrowetz Quartets Hyperion C - ClassicsToday Review - Vernier**

Review by: David Vernier *Artistic Quality: 8 Sound Quality: 9*

I've enjoyed recordings of Haydn's quartets by Simon Standage and his Salomon Quartet, so I was pretty sure that this disc of string quartets by Haydn's friend Adalbert Gyrowetz would be enjoyable as well. Gyrowetz writes very much in the middle-Classical style, with the first violin doing most of the work, a configuration that particularly suits this group. Uniformity of ensemble is the rule of the day here, and by that I mean much more than just playing the notes together. Lengths of bow strokes and vibratos always match, which is especially important with period strings.

Most of the time, Standage and his group give the music full expressive attention and energy; however, there are moments when the energy falls away, almost as if the group loses interest for a few bars. For example, the musicians correctly emphasize the Bohemian folk qualities Gyrowetz interpolates into the Menuet, but they only stress the big moments and gloss over smaller details. They're recorded just a bit on the quiet side, with the overall sound not as full as it might be. But the voices of the strings still seem natural, without any tinniness. The players obviously rehearsed the larger gestures, and the overall scope of each work clearly emerges; I just wish more time had been spent with the finer details.

## **Gyrowetz Symphonies - ClassicsToday Review - Carr Jr**

Review by: Victor Carr Jr *Artistic Quality: 8 Sound Quality: 10*

I was only a talented man who can be happy if he conquers the present; only a genius lives beyond the grave, wrote Adalbert Gyrowetz in 1850, and history has borne him out. Gyrowetz (1763-1850) was yet another of the 18th century's prolific (more than 30 operas, 40 symphonies, and a large body of chamber music, songs, and sacred works) and talented composers who earned their daily bread by turning out what were very interesting, pleasing, but ultimately time-bound works. The symphonies on the present disc are all believed to have been written around or before 1790. The first two, Op. 6 Nos. 2 & 3, are typical classical symphonies that follow the standard fast-slow-fast-fast pattern. Their bright, sunny Allegros, gentle Andantes, graceful Minuets (No. 2 has a beautiful horn solo in the trio), and fleet, lively Finales nevertheless pale in comparison to Mozart and Haydn, whom Gyrowetz knew and befriended. In fact, on a visit to Paris he found that one of his symphonies in performance was mistakenly attributed to Haydn!

We must wonder if it wasn't the very Haydnesque Symphony in D, Op. 12 No. 1,

which, with its protracted introduction and bold allegro (with trumpets and drums), clearly conjures up the master. The andante features much greater melodic and harmonic complexity than the first two symphonies, and the Minuetto and Presto are more rhythmically varied and exciting. This work is the real interest of this disc; it also seems to be the one that inspires Matthias Bamert, conducting here with much more energy than he gave to the first two symphonies, which are too relaxed in the allegro movements. The London Mozart Players demonstrate once again that they are old pros in this idiom, and the Chandos recording is the usual wide-ranging, clear, reverberant production. Recommended for those who can't get enough of the classical era.