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## Pekka Kuusisto

*On the roots of his  
deeply personal  
new album*



PLUS



**John Dowland:**  
why his songs  
are still relevant  
400 years on



**Kerensa Briggs:**  
exploring  
her spiritual  
choral music



**Mendelssohn's  
'Reformation'  
Symphony: the  
best versions**

published in 1931, Kletzki continues this exploration even further. Kletzki worked on his most progressive, expressionist quartet, the Fourth, in 1942 but left it unfinished (it was completed by Adam Manijak). Sometimes I wish the sound of the strings was more velvety to bring out the orchestral breadth of these works but in general the all-female Bacewicz Quartet are passionate and convincing advocates of Kletzki's music. **Aleksander Laskowski**

## Martin

String Trio<sup>a</sup>. String Quartet<sup>b</sup>. Piano Quintet<sup>c</sup>  
 'Ilona Timchenko *pf*<sup>bc</sup> Utrecht String Quartet  
 (Eeva Koskinen, Katherine Routley *vn*<sup>a</sup> Mikhail  
 Zemtsov *va*<sup>a</sup> Sebastian Koloski *vc*)  
 Dabringhaus und Grimm (MDG603 2388-2 • 61')



This release features three outstanding chamber works from different periods of Frank Martin's career. Although all three have been recorded before, their representation in the catalogue remains sparse, and their presentation on a single album is most welcome.

The Piano Quintet was composed in 1919 shortly before Martin turned 30. Although his mature style was yet to fully develop and there are touches of Ravel in the writing, the work is characterful and deeply felt, with an almost cinematic immediacy. It is also the most recorded of the works here, with five versions now available. All of these have something to offer, particularly the account by Martin Klett and the Armida Quartet (AVI-Music, 7/23), but the performance by Ilona Timchenko and the Utrecht Quartet has an even greater communicative intensity.

The String Trio dates from 1936 and was a particular favourite of the composer, who affectionately referred to it as an *enfant terrible*, largely on account of its formal rigour and technical difficulty. The sombre outer movements have a sense of gravity beyond even that of the elegiac *Adagio* of the Piano Quintet, and little relief is provided by the mysterious, scurrying central movement. It is, nevertheless, accessible and powerful music that haunts the mind long after listening. This is the first recording of the Trio since the version by the Zurich Chamber Ensemble (Jecklin, 10/91) and enjoys considerably finer sound.

Completed in 1967 when Martin was in his mid-70s, the String Quartet also leaves a strong impression, although it is a more subtle work than the Trio, hinting at tragedy rather than explicitly stating it.

The Quartet recently received a fine recording by Quatuor Terpsycordes on the Claves label, but once again the performance by the Utrecht Quartet is wonderfully accomplished, and especially moving in the third-movement *Larghetto*. MDG's engineering presents the performances in impressively vivid sound, although a few moments of distortion can be heard in the left channel on headphones during the loudest moments of the Piano Quintet. This small caveat aside, this is a valuable and distinguished addition to the Martin discography.

**Christian Hoskins**

## 'American Tapestry'

Barber String Quartet in B minor, Op 11  
 Korngold String Quartet No 3 in D, Op 34  
 Marsalis At the Octoroon Balls J Williams  
 Lincoln - With Malice Toward None  
 Calidore String Quartet  
 Signum (SIGCD970 • 71')



'American Tapestry', the Calidore String Quartet write in the CD booklet, 'reflects

our belief that American classical music is not a single style but a dialogue among many voices', with each of the four works here revealing 'a facet of our shared identity'. One could argue that Korngold's Third Quartet (1945) sounds more European than American, but then the strong connection to Europe is, in fact, quite an important facet of American music.

The Calidore begin with a taut account of Barber's early B minor Quartet (1936) that focuses on motivic concision in the outer movements, and in the famous *Adagio* they make little effort to suggest the richness associated with the string orchestra arrangement. I do have a soft spot for the Cleveland Quartet's lush version (recently reissued in a box-set containing all that ensemble's RCA recordings – 4/24), but the Calidore's interpretation is touching in its own, spare way.

The three central movements of Wynton Marsalis's seven-movement *At the Octoroon Balls* (1995) work well as a (sub)set. Perhaps the Orion Quartet played 'Creole Contradanzas' with a little more sexiness on the premiere recording (Sony, 7/99), but the Calidore make more of the music's rhythmic high jinks. Marsalis's music always has a sharp dramatic sense, and the Calidore seize on that in all three movements. John Williams arranged music from his film *Lincoln* at the Calidore's

request, and the five-minute-long cut from the score titled 'With Malice Toward None' makes it point in an appropriately plain-spoken way.

We've had several fine recordings of the Korngold quartets, including a recent one by the Pacifica Quartet (Cedille, 1/26), and I'd have a difficult time choosing between the two performances. The Calidore are more closely miked, giving a sharper edge to the fast movements, and particularly in the finale they bring a sense of urgency that's especially compelling. Yes, I can think of at least half a dozen American quartets more desperately in need of a new recording (William Schuman's Third, say, or George Rochberg's Fifth), but 'American Tapestry' is highly recommended nonetheless.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

## 'Art Nouveau'

Bonis Barcarolle in E flat, Op 71<sup>a</sup>. Soir - Matin, Op 76 Debussy Piano Trio in G. Violin Sonata in G minor<sup>b</sup>. Cello Sonata in D minor<sup>c</sup> Lalo Piano Trio No 3 in A minor, Op 26 Ravel Piano Trio in A minor. Sonata in A minor for Violin and Cello<sup>d</sup>  
 Trio Wanderer (Ed Jean-Marc Phillips-Varjabédian *vn*  
 Raphaël Pidoux *vc* - abc Vincent Coq *pf*)  
 Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 2394/5 • 130')



These are exceptionally exciting interpretations for the most part. Listen to Trio Wanderer's scorched-earth approach to the climax of the opening movement of Ravel's Trio (starting around 5'07"), say, or to the intense rhythmic energy they bring to the scherzo-like *Presto* of Lalo's A minor Trio. The trouble is that quite often they can also seem short on softness and delicacy.

Take Jean-Marc Phillips-Varjabédian's reading of Debussy's Violin Sonata. His tone is handsome, and he and Vincent Coq manage its twists and turns with grace. Yet, at the same time, it's very brightly lit and unabashedly virtuosic. The result is electrifying, certainly, but heard alongside the chiaroscuro Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov bring to their *Gramophone* Award-winning survey of Debussy's late chamber music (also on HM, 11/18), this newcomer is almost off-puttingly flashy. Similarly, while it was clever of the ensemble to include works by the little-known Mel Bonis, I prefer the Neave Trio's dreamy way with 'Soir' from the diptych *Soir - Matin* (Chandos, 8/25); the Wanderer's version is too easily overheated.