

Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio

Brahms/Smetana

CD Review

“...one of the best chamber music CDs you are likely to hear, this or any year.”



Brahms: Piano Trio, Op. 8
Smetana: Piano Trio, Op. 15
Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio
Bridge [9362]
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This was my first acquaintance with this performing trio consisting of Yael Weiss, piano; Mark Kaplan, violin; and Clancy Newman, cello. If, as they say, first impressions are the most important, mine was definitely favorable. These artists work very hard at the underlying pulses and basic tempi of a work of music, bringing out its expressive beauty in the process. That, and the fact that they aren't afraid, collectively or individually, to step up to the plate when a given moment calls for really virtuosic brilliance, pays off handsomely in one of the finest accounts I've ever heard of Bedřich Smetana's Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 15, and the most convincingly account ever of Johannes Brahms' Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major, Op. 8. It all makes for one of the best chamber music CDs you are likely to hear, this or any year.

We have here the revised (1891) version of Brahms' B Major Trio, the one that is almost always performed. The key words to observe here are three R's – Rhythm, Restraint, and Rubato – and in that respect the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio certainly

have the number of this great masterwork all the way. That starts off with the broadly stated theme in the cello and piano which increases in intensity with the surreptitious entry of a more delicate theme that counterbalances it. After the Scherzo with its fleeting filigree passages interrupted by fortissimo outbursts, the heart of the matter lies in the slow, poignant, and reflective Adagio movement, with the piano setting the tone for spaciousness and stillness. The finale is simple marked *Allegro*, but that tells us nothing of the turbulence and agitation of the ride on which Brahms takes our trio of artists before they arrive at a very satisfying conclusion.

Smetana wrote his G minor Trio in memory of his first child, a daughter named Bedřiška, who died at the age of four and a half. Curiously, there is no slow movement as such in this work, although there are slow passages scattered throughout its three movements. Even more than most such elegiac works, there is an enormous range of emotions and dramatic contrasts in this work, as the composer seems to be struggling to work through to some understanding of, or consolation for, this tragic loss. That consolation occurs late in the third movement with an ascending scale that seems to come mystically out of nowhere only about a minute or so before the ending in the major key. Until then, changes in mood and tempo typically occur after dramatic pauses, creating a sectional structure based on stops and starts that our artists are able to take in stride and incorporate into more logical coherence than we might at first have imagined.

While we're at it, let's credit the superb recorded sound – produced, engineered, and mastered by Silas Brown – that has come to be a Bridge Records tradition.