

Artist Management

Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio

Brahms/Smetana

CD Review

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BRAHMS Piano Trio No. 1 in B.
SMETANA Piano Trio in G
Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio • BRIDGE 9362
(65:45)

Of the three musicians billing themselves as the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio, the only name I recognize is that of Mark Kaplan, a violinist widely known for his solo concertizing as well as for his many outstanding chamber music recordings with the former Golub-Kaplan-Carr Trio. Based on their group photo in the accompanying booklet, Kaplan appears to be the veteran of the group. American pianist Yael Weiss looks much younger, but has already established an impressive international reputation. Upstate New York-born cellist Clancy Newman also appears quite young, but holds a master's of music degree from Juilliard and has distinguished himself as a composer as well as an award-winning cellist.

Brahms's B-Major Piano Trio, in its more familiar, revised form, has enjoyed many exceptionally fine recordings, but I knew from the moment Newman began to spin out the gorgeous open-hearted melody that opens the work that this performance was going to be special. And indeed it is. One can point to many recorded versions of this trio and say that they're superbly well executed and, architecturally, masterfully wrought. But there's something of precious rarity in the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman's performance one doesn't hear that often.

When we speak of an ensemble matching the tone, weight, and inflection of its reciprocal

phrases, we frequently refer to it as "breathing together." But there is something even more here that is hard to describe, and it has to do with dynamics. Say you have a crescendo written to be played at the same time by all three players. Naturally, one expects to hear the volume increase across the board. But is there a multilevel continuum in which all three musicians are increasing their output in lockstep by exactly the same decibel increments?

As I said, it's hard to explain, but let me try to do so using a graphic visualization. Say you have three thermometers lined up side by side. As the temperature increases, you see the mercury levels rise in each of them, but do those levels rise as though all three were bound together as one, or do the levels go up in ever so slightly staggered increments, eventually reaching the same destination point? The Weiss-Kaplan-Newman's dynamics are like the three conjoined thermometers, the tonal volume rising and falling in an analog as opposed to digital model, and it makes for a smoothness and radiance of sound that's exquisitely expressive and compelling. This may just be the best of the best Brahms B-Major Trio performances I've yet to hear on disc, and the ensemble permits us to revel in its, and the music's, glories by observing the lengthy first-movement exposition repeat.

Everything said about the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman's Brahms applies equally to the ensemble's Smetana, though the Czech composer's G-Minor Piano Trio is a very different affair from the Brahms. It's a work steeped in the grief of Smetana's loss of his eldest daughter, Bedriska, and the music, at times, can sound somewhat disjointed and even a bit incoherent. The pairing of these two piano trios on the same disc is an unusual one, and I'm not sure they make particularly comfortable bed partners, but choice of program aside, this is absolutely one fabulous chamber music recording you cannot afford to be without. Urgently recommended.

FANFARE: Jerry Dubins