



POPULAR TRUMPET CONCERTOS:

HAYDN Concerto in E flat,
HUMMEL Concerto in E Flat,
ARUTIUNIAN Concerto in A flat,
CLARKE Trumpet Voluntary,
PURCELL Trumpet Tune and Air.
Maurice Murphy (trumpet), Consort of London,
Robert Haydon Clark.
Regis RRC 1325 (55.16)

There is no doubt that Maurice Murphy is a splendid trumpeter. There is nothing excessive in his playing. There is a brightness and a mellowness in his tone. There is a mercurial flow in his performances and a rare beauty in the slow movements and his performances blend exquisitely with the orchestra.

While I do not wish to belittle brass bands, Murphy grew up playing in such ensembles, his performances are never brash or vulgar which sometimes pervade brass band music. He treats the trumpet as a valid concerto/soloist. He was born in 1935 and was principal trumpet in the LSO after a similar post in the BBC Northern Orchestra. He was awarded the MBE in the 2010 New Years Honours List.

I had forgotten how brilliant and satisfying the Haydn Trumpet Concerto of 1796 is, and in this performance there is as rare sensitivity and the octave leaps in the finale are spot on. The slow movement is played with a beauty that is almost unbearable for its loveliness. The first movement is perfect in its content as well as its performance. I don't think I want to hear any other performance than this.

The Hummel Concerto may be more dramatic and has a long orchestral opening with a perky tune. The opening theme is more angular than anything in the Haydn. It is a substantial movement lasting about ten minutes with perky theme but, at times, it sounds a little banal. It may lack the coherence and form of the Haydn and its angularity may not suit everyone but there is much to admire here particularly the superlative playing. The orchestra are also very good and the sound cannot be faulted. The first movement may suffer from a few too many arpeggios and broken chords.

The Andante is deeply felt and has a sadness that is very appealing. How well it is played. It is sumptuous and the flute trills are like rays of sunshine. The pizzicato bass, almost an ostinato, is very telling. A beautiful movement impeccably performed.

The brief Rondo finale ends the work with some bravura passages which are no problem for this fine artist.

Alexander Arutiunian was born in 1920 in Armenia and has been successful in his own country particularly with his uses of Armenian folk style music. He was encouraged by Khachaturian and has written much music from cantatas to concertos.

His Trumpet Concerto has often appeared in music competitions and has received adverse criticism. It is often an introspective work as well as being a challenging work requiring a soloist of the highest order which we have heard. Having heard this piece in competitions I turned away from it, but in Murphy's hands it is a different work. I do think it is episodic which can often be the case in a one movement work with several sections and, as a result, it does not flow. And, occasionally, it sounds a little Hollywoodish or like George Gershwin and some cheap music some ten minutes in? However, some of the orchestration is very good (do I detect Shostakovich?) but the work stops and starts. The final four minutes are fun.

Jeremiah Clarke's stately Prince of Denmark's March is better known as the Trumpet Voluntary and, with Purcell's Trumpet Tune and Air, this CD comes to an end. The ornamentation is superb.

I do recommend it for the Haydn and the slow movement of the Hummel. Here is a soloist than will not disappoint.

Since writing this review we sadly have to advise that Maurice Murphy died on 28 October 2010

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