

CD REVIEW 128

DAVID MATTHEWS Piano Quintet
SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Quintet Op 57.
Villiers String Quartet, Martin Cousin (piano)
(DDD) Somm CD0157 (52.16)

This CD has not the best coupling. The Shostakovich is a marvellous work but the David Matthews does not come close to it, so I would have to pay full price for 32 minutes of music.

It is not easy being a reviewer. Being honest is a virtue not appreciated in today's society.

David Matthews was born in London in 1943 and his brother, Colin, was born 1946 and is also a composer.

According to many music experts, the Matthews brothers both had the 'misfortune' of studying with Britten and his influence has resulted in a sort of hero worship and the brothers music shows his influence and, to some extent, originality goes by the board. It is never wise to be so influenced as to have little or no originality of one's own. The megalomania of Britten is not a helpful trait in any way.

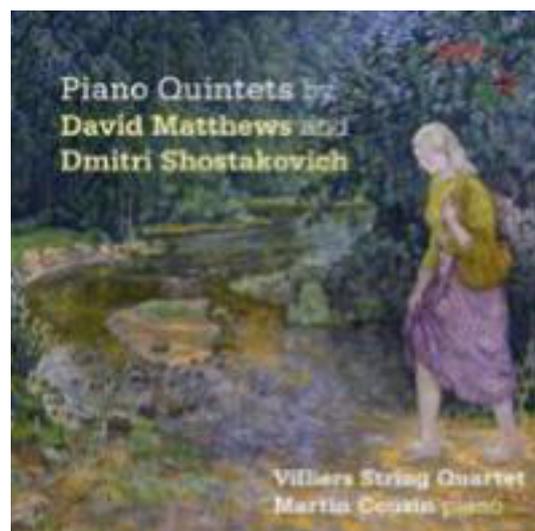
The greater of the Matthews brothers is probably David who did have the good influence of Anthony Milner, Nicholas Maw and Peter Sculthorpe. David has written eight symphonies, thirteen string quartets and many other works. The only work I know of his is the Symphony no 2 written in a familiar style of being a cold slab of concrete...heavy and over intense and often inactive. Matthews has had time on his hands arranging Elgar and Arnold, but why?

His Piano Quintet is his Op 92 and is in four movements namely Prelude (Moderato) Tango, Ciacona (Largo) and Canto (Allegretto Giocoso) and the work was originally conceived as a song and dance work rather than a conventional quintet. The composer asserts that the tango is suited to the tango but few would agree with him. The work may owe something to Elgar since there is no fast music in the quintet which limits it.

The opening Prelude is not a curtain raiser and is very ordinary. In fact, it is tepid and somewhat slow. The tango does not work and has some ugly moments. The slow movement is just that. The opening accompaniment to the melodic line of this movement spoils the melodic nullity. This movement left me cold.

The finale is still basically slow and inactive. The whole work lacks contrast and tension, essentials in any major work. Music which does not have these ingredients may not attract many adherents. The music does pick up somewhat but it takes a long time to do so.

The Shostakovich, Op 57 of 1940, must be one of the finest chamber works of all time. There is more interest in the opening prelude than the whole of the Matthews work. There is much colour and variety and the piano writing is vastly superior. The following fugue which is marked adagio is the most substantial movement at 9 minutes 25. I must confess it meanders a little but it has moments of real beauty. The Scherzo is a super movement but I have heard it played better. There is some sparkle missing here. A slow Intermezzo follows often with a single line. Some of the high violin writing is unbearably beautiful. The finale has much to commend it recalling some previous themes.



These performances are honest and sincere but there are better performances of the Shostakovich. The sound is acceptable although my copy was occasionally rough.

Marta Agerich on Medic Arts, Ashkenzky on Decca and Marc-Andre Hamelin on Hyperion can be recommended.

I am truly sorry I cannot be more positive but I have to express the facts.

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