

CD REVIEW 19

JANACEK String Quartet no. 1 Kreutzer Sonata; String Quartet no 2 Intimate Letters

DVORAK Cypresses.

The Lindsays

Regis RRC1361 (74.54)

One of the sad things that happens when you listen to so much music is that you can go for years without hearing some pieces and then after a decade or two you hear such pieces again and ask yourself, "Why have I not listened to this for so long?!"

The String Quartet no 1 goes through many mood changes and some may find the lack of continuity a problem but this is a human document. All feelings are here. As is the drama. The work owes its title to a response by Janacek on hearing Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata Op 47, an amazing piece which many regard as the greatest sonata ever written for violin and piano. Janacek quotes the second subject of the Beethoven. Janacek wrote to his beloved Kamila to explain that this quartet was a narrative, a story about a persecuted woman. It is a drama and a tragedy. One passage is marked 'as if in tears.'

I cannot help feeling that this tragedy is more personal. Janacek is now elderly and in love with a young married woman, his beloved Kamila. This quartet is a longing and a yearning for something that will never happen. The Beethoven is a union between two but there can be no union between Janacek and his beloved.

The music is full of outbursts, rhythmic excitement and a passion usually associated with the rich tones of the lower strings. There are tessituras of almost uncontrolled passion.

The music is very personal and very special. Given the attention it deserves you can experience the composer's profound feelings.

The String Quartet no 2 of 1928 is entitled Intimate letters or Love letters. It starts tragically but hope ensues in a well-worked allegro with references to the opening tender and quasi tragic style with some moments of unbearable beauty, the beauty of Kamila is here. The double stopping of the violin may suggest their union. Swirling high strings may convey the nervous excitement of meeting. Everything is here! The passion in the third movement is unequalled anywhere else in music. And what about the infectious jauntiness of the finale!

I don't know why we bother with second and third rate music when we have such music as this!

The composer has an amazing ability to create tension which many famous composers could not do and never did.

This quartet is a poignant love story with its complications such complexities being shown in the writing for the quartet is very difficult but in the hands of the Lindsays that is not apparent. These love letters are not just a musical work but an experience the composer shares with us.

Marvellous music but not always comfortable.

Respite follows this high voltage music with Dvorak's Cypresses originally written as 18 songs for voice and piano and associated with a romance that Dvorak had with Josefina Cermakova which came to nothing and Dvorak married her sister, Anna. Twelve of these songs were arranged for string quartet and they are attractive little pieces and presented here.

The Lindsays do not need any recommendation from me or anyone else. They are first rate.

David C F Wright

