



Robert Schumann: Piano Trios Nos 1 & 2 (Op. 63 & 80)

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RECORD REVIEW
An exceptionally good programme essay for this disc by Wolfgang Rathert points to the problems that lurk in wait for the performers in Schumann's first two piano trios, lying as the music does between 'expectations of virtuosity and brilliance and his own compositional ambitions of reflection and constructive concentration'. High among the qualities of these excellent performances is the ability to make the most of the brilliance of the writing without losing a grip on the lyrical, and indeed the highly personal, inward nature of the music. Melodically, both works are difficult, and the players (helped by a very lucid recording) keep a clear hold on not only the unusual nature of the melodic material but on how it is conveyed between the instruments and how it is so skilfully developed. The great striding theme opening the First Trio seems initially straightforward, owing much to Mendelssohn and in particular the D minor Trio which Schumann so much admired: 'the master Trio of the day', he wrote, as in their day had been the Trios of Beethoven and Schubert. It turns out to have many pitfalls in this long, complicated movement, and it is to the players' greatest credit that they never lose their grasp on the directions it takes. They keep the textures light in the Scherzo; and without overemphasis, even with understatement, the beautiful return to the opening music at the end of the slow movement is the more effective.

The Second Trio is in some ways even more elliptical, and if Mendelssohn is again largely the inspiration in the first movement, here the material is much more personal. Rathert points out the importance of the song allusions which Schumann incorporates: the subtle manner in which out of a previous theme there emerges 'mention' of the song 'Intermezzo' in the Eichendorff Liederkreis praising the portrait of the beloved ('Dein Bildnis') and its answer at the end of the third movement from Frauenliebe und -leben, as the gesture of love is returned from the woman to the man. In this subtly allusive music, one cannot be sure whether or not there is perhaps a further Eichendorff 'Dein Bildnis' reference in the slow movement, at any rate a melodic line drawn from it. It is fascinating music, played here with great perception, and with the suitably outward virtuosity indeed concealing much inward thoughtfulness.