

GRAMOPHONE March 2016

Brahms

Piano Trio No 1, Op 8. Piano Quartet No 3, Op 60^a

Trio Wanderer with ^aChristophe Gaugué *va*

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2222 (74' • DDD)



It's a decade ago now that Trio Wanderer recorded the three standard

Brahms piano trios for Harmonia Mundi, in a two-CD set somewhat inaccurately designated 'complete' and filled out with the G minor Piano Quartet. This new disc presents the earlier, unrulier version of the B major Trio, Op 8, plus another quartet, in which they are joined once again by the mellow-toned Christopher Gaugué on viola.

The characteristics of the earlier release are again in evidence here. Violinist Jean-Marc Phillips-Varjabédian offers playing that alternates sweetness of tone with bite, and cellist Raphaël Pidoux is able to sing out his lines with passion or dig deep into his earthy, resonant lower register as required. Pianist Vincent Coq underpins it all with playing that is forthright but never overbearing, and Harmonia Mundi's engineering is luxurious, if perhaps a little reverberant on occasion.

It's a Brahms sound that offers grandeur without stodginess, is light-footed but not lightweight. As such, the Wanderers make a supremely eloquent case for the early Op 8, and one that I think is more compelling than the other recent accounts of the original version from the persuasive but slightly wirier-sounding trios Testore (Audite) and Gould (Quartz). They nevertheless can't really persuade me that the trio's revised version isn't preferable, an impression that arguably is only reinforced by the coupling: the C minor Quartet shows Brahms in modestly proportioned and economical guise. Nevertheless, they manage to impose control over the work's large span – with repeat, observed also by the Testore but not the Gould, the first movement is a whopping 18 minutes – and keep its structure together throughout the occasional contrapuntal forays that would later get the chop. The playing is consistently excellent, and is particularly beguiling in the slow movement.

The exquisite slow movement is a highlight of the performance of the quartet, too, its beauty emphasised by the fact that they chose a true *andante*, creating a moving tension between the sensuous desire to linger and the chaste need to push on. Here also we hear the balancing act Coq achieves between being dominant and supportive – less reticent than Nicholas Angelich with the Capuçons (Warner Classics, 8/04), more poetic than Marc-André Hamelin with the Leopold Trio (Hyperion, 1/07). The outer movements are hardly less fine, the finale urgent and building up an impressive sense of momentum, the scherzo pointed and with a Mendelssohnian playfulness at times. High-quality Brahms playing, highly recommended. **Hugo Shirley**