

Jansa Duo

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If the recently-completed Mendelssohn year had added nothing else, this new recording of chamber music would have been more than enough. It's certainly a surprise...

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This is rare chamber music in several senses: the obvious one, that it is seldom played or heard on discs, but also that violin and cello duos are uncommon, and that the music is remarkably fine. Once the province of private performances in homes and studios, the medium has gained acceptance primarily through recordings; yet these works were all written by 1927—their composers did not need to wait for records to promote the repertoire. The interconnections within this well-planned program go beyond its synchrony, however. Most of the composers or their music were suppressed by the Nazis (even though

Emánuel Moór died in 1931), adding to their rarity. And—finally?—the works share attributes which contribute, as the booklet notes so cogently suggest, to a feeling of the string quartet: Each contains sonata-form movements, and each places extreme demands on the performers and on their instruments, extending the range of register, dynamics, and tonal production. To which these expert, elegant performances by violinist Christine Rox and cellist Klaus Dieter Brandt add the final touch, aided by a rich, intimate recording.

Still, there is much variety among the five pieces. Ernst Bachrich (1892-1942) was a private student of Schoenberg; his 1925 Duo takes a polyphonic approach to composition while amiably stretching tonality and hinting at the development of serialism. It is a remarkably successful blend of classical and avant-garde elements. As its title suggests, Toch's brief Divertimento lightens the atmosphere, maintaining his classical poise

while peeking into music's new freedom of the 1920s. Moór (1862-1931) was a Hungarian Jew, whose 1910 Suite was partially inspired by high praise from Pablo Casals. It combines elements of both his heritages with an allegiance to Bach's solo-cello suites. It is but a slight exaggeration report that the viola is playing the modern melodies over the cello's Bach, and the roles are occasionally reversed.

The Swiss Rudolf Moser (1892-1960) studied with Reger; he was the only composer here who eluded the Nazi's proscription. His 1927 Sonata reflects almost every prevailing influence, from Debussy and Schoenberg to Bartók and Hindemith, yet its sincerity helps it achieve a convincing stature of its own, serious yet colorful, highlighted by a surprisingly contrapuntal Scherzo which belies the absence of viola and second violin. In this company, Schulhoff's Duo is a well-known repertory staple, having at least ten recordings. It is a universal piece, working beautifully in every performance I have heard, including this one.

The inclusion of an SACD layer plus surround sound is a welcome if unnecessary bonus to this already gorgeous CD, the musical substance of which far outweighs its sonic thrills. This is as rewarding a disc as chamber-music lovers will find, within or without the standard repertory.

— James H. North