
Brahms Piano Trio in B major op.8

Smetana Piano Trio in G minor op.15

Trio Bamberg THOROFON CLASSICS CTH 2447

We are blessed with an embarrassment of riches when it comes to piano trio ensembles and Trio Bamberg is clearly right up there with the best. The group appears to be recording its repertoire steadily for Thorofon, which is good news – this disc is volume six.

Robert Benz is a heavyweight – but not heavy-handed – pianist who has the Brahms style in his bones, so the revised version of the early B major Trio rolls out before us with conviction. My ear is especially caught in this work by the superb Russian violinist Yevgeny Schuk, whose tone is always centred on the note.

Doing my best to find something to criticise, I feel that perhaps cellist Stephan Gerlinghaus could have played his

lovely solo in the Adagio with greater flow and spontaneity. As it happens, he is particularly convincing in the other work, the trio that Smetana wrote after the death of a daughter.

It is always good to hear the Smetana Trio, as few groups outside the Czech Republic seem to specialise in the composer’s work – I remember fine performances from the Yuval Trio of Israel, now disbanded. It needs the same breadth of treatment as the Brahms in its first two movements, coupled with precise observation of note values and rhythms.

Trio Bamberg certainly gives one of the best non-Czech interpretations I have heard. Benz is able to take off in the sparkling fast passages of the finale without trivialising them, while the string players put their heart and soul into the many emotive phrases provided by the composer. The Bavarian Radio recordings are splendid.

TULLY POTTER
