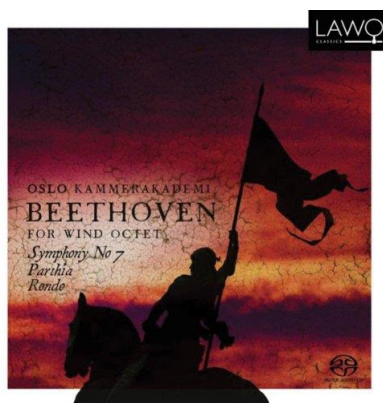


BEETHOVEN Octet in E ♭ , op. 103. Rondo in E ♭ , WoO 25. **Symphony No. 7** • Oslo Kammerakademi • LAWO 1036 (SACD: 61:52)



For Wind Octet: *Symphony No 7*
Audio CD
LAWO Classics



The Oslo Kammerakademi, a wind octet, was formed in 2009. This is their first CD. They are members of a variety of Oslo-based ensembles, including the Oslo Philharmonic and the Staff Band of the Norwegian Armed Forces. Each player performs with the caliber of a soloist, and together they make a beautiful sound. The Artistic Director is oboist David Friedemann Strunck. Their CD is very distinguished. In Beethoven's early Octet (for unexplained reasons titled the "Parthia" on this CD), the opening *Allegro* is sprightly and full of charm. The natural horns, employed throughout the CD, contribute spice—even barking at times. The ensemble's balances here are especially good. In the next movement, an *Andante*, the playing is mellifluous and lyrical, with distinguished solos. Occasionally a shadow falls over the music, which the players render sensitively. The third movement's Menuetto features especially fine ensemble, while the Trio has a ghostly tinge. The Octet finds a chattering, comic element in the Finale. It is hard to imagine the Octet being played better. For the Rondo, the group performs Beethoven's original version with expanded horn parts. The horn playing is particularly nimble, while the group's other members contribute subtle and gracious solos.

The apparently anonymous arrangement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony for wind octet and double bass was published in 1816, the same year as the original work. On the assumption that a piece with trumpet parts, in this arrangement taken by natural horns, always would include timpani, the Oslo Kammerakademi has added the original timpani part to their version. The result may not be particularly authentic, but it does make the pulse race. In the

arrangement, the final movement is substantially cut. The Oslo Kammerakademi's speeds for the whole Symphony are basically leisurely, more Bruno Walter than Roger Norrington. The tempos permit much expressive playing. The introduction to the first movement has an especially warm sound. The flute solo at the start of the *Vivace* is given here, perkily, to the oboe. The *Vivace* sounds alternately exciting and convivial. The players take the exposition repeat. What Carl Maria von Weber considered the Symphony's madness still comes across, and the movement's coda sends a shiver up your spine. In the *Allegretto*, the opening tune is played beautifully by the two bassoons and the double bass. The tempo almost is dirge-like. In the second subject, the ensemble performs with uncommon warmth. The movement's fughetto passage features ghostly clarinets. The *Presto* sounds like Rossini, with chattering pairs of winds. In the Trio, the arrangement evokes the sound of the original very well. In the last movement, the clarinets take on the original violin parts with licks that are almost klezmer-like. The arrangement very cleverly maintains the original's excitement. The Oslo Kammerakademi gives us a wonderfully new and insightful way to listen to this great work. This is highly distinguished playing.

The sound engineering of the CD layer is superb: full, warm and excellently balanced. I was unable to hear the SACD layer. Let us hope for more CDs by the Oslo Kammerakademi. Their Beethoven offers playing that is as accomplished as that of any chamber music ensemble in the world, regardless of genre. **Dave Saemann**

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