



# Review by John Miller - December 12, 2015

Oslo Kammerakademi is a relatively new orchestral wind ensemble composed of leading Scandinavian wind soloists, founded and artistically directed by David Friedemann Strunk, Oslo Philharmonic's solo oboist. They are unique in using wind instruments with classical harmony music instrumentation, and also use historical brass instruments of the Baroque, Classical and Romantic repertoire in order to produce an authentic and transparent sound.

One of the aims of the group was to produce a set of three discs showing the development of so-called 'Harmonie' wind music from the Classical period to the present day. The first of these ([Beethoven for Wind Octet - Symphony No. 7, Parthia & Rondo](#)), featured Beethoven's 'Harmonie' music, dominated by an adaptation of the Seventh Symphony, which was a huge success. Romantic 'Harmonie' pieces by Grieg, Svendsen, Hartmann, and Reinecke ([Grieg, Svendsen, Hartmann, Reinecke: Wind Octets](#)) were a delight on the second disc. Now the triptych is completed with wind octets from our own times.

This new programme certainly requires more effort from the listener, as most of the pieces here are not designed solely to entertain audiences. However, the faultless technicality, tight ensemble and beautiful tone of Kammerakademi is at once beguiling, and if you are familiar with avant garde music, say from the Second Viennese School, listening to this disc will be comfortable. Most of the pieces are partially tonal as well as dissonant, and at least partially melodic. There are some unusual and intriguing rhythmic textures, and the intertwined colours of oboe, clarinet, flute and bassoon with horns and double bass are themselves a delight.

Gideon Klein (1919-1945) was born into a Moravian - Jewish family in Czechoslovakia, the origin of 'Harmonie' music which became highly favoured across Europe. Devoted to music from an early age, he was captured by the Nazis in 1941 and deported to the notorious Terezin Concentration Camp. He was murdered by the Nazis in 1945. The Divertimento for wind octet was composed in 1939-40, and is structured like a 4 movement Mozart Divertimento, with strong influences by Alban Berg and Leoš Janáček. Its first movement is a military march, but at 5/4 beats, not the usual 4/4, and likely its limping rhythms ironically refer to the arrival of the Nazis in his country, as the Divertimento was in progress at that time. The second movement is an Adagio with its pure melody of great depth, until interrupted several times by a rapid flurry of dissonances.

Norwegian Johan Kvandal (1919-1999) is regarded as a musician of musicians, and is one of Norway's most frequently performed composers. His Night Music op. 57 (1981) is a tonal nonet for wind octet and double bass in 4 movements, and has quotes from Mozart's Night Music piece; melodic, rhythmic and harmonic. With its eloquent conversations between instruments and a moving and endearingly beautiful Adagio, this is performed by Oslo Kammerakademi with great panache.

Isang Yun (1917-1995), born in the southern part of a united Korea, was politically involved in trying to reunite the North and South. Unwelcome in Korea, he moved to Berlin to study with the likes of Blacher. In 1967 he was arrested by South Korean agents and returned to South Korea where he was accused of working for North Korea. There was a world wide outburst against this action while Yun was jailed, and 23 celebrated musicians including Stravinsky and Karajan sent a petition to the Korean government. He and his wife were released and returned to Berlin, where Yun was given a Professorship. Yun described his undoubtedly avant garde music as "restless in repose" which is also a description of Korean historical music style ([National Gugak Center's Gajeunhoesang](#)). Yun's Wind octet with double bass ad libitum is highly complex in its orchestration and instrumental technicality, but Kammerakademi's members play it expressively and with considerable relish.

Norway's Magnar Åm (b. 1952) was commissioned by Kammerakademi in 2012 to write a classical instrumentation of 'Harmonie' music. Åm works from a religious universe and writes his titles in lower case, suggesting the spiritual presence of something unspoken. For the title 'the first beauty' (the title of this disc), there are three movements, entitled "which unites my deepest unease" atmospherically using the lower, darker ranges of the wind instruments and bass, followed by "with my happiest dance" which is playful and tuneful, using the brighter ranges of the instruments, then "and lifts me" which seems to be soothing and content in a psychological way. Remarkably, Åm organises the instruments in two groups each with different instruments, distributed across the stage and elsewhere in the venue, with the double bass always central. In multichannel 5.0, this sounds superb, with a solo horn answering from the back of the sound stage, and a wider left-right arrangement of players - a real wrap-around experience.

Recording was done with DXD in Grefsen Church, Oslo which sounds perfect for wind instruments. It has a wonderfully warm and active ambience, which maintains the instrumental detail despite bestowing ample resonance, amplifying the Kammerakademi to orchestral status. This combination of architecture and wind instruments is pure joy for listeners. The stereo track is very well focused and has a respectable quotient of the ambience, but it flattens notably when compared with the 5.0 version.

Despite a little more work for the audience, this third disc in the historical exemplars of 'Harmonie' music is colourful, has excellent music which is not very well known but indefatigably performed, just as with the previous two discs. If you haven't got these earlier discs, then I heartily recommend them. And this final disc in the trilogy caps a very entertaining and informative project, once more presented in superb sonics.