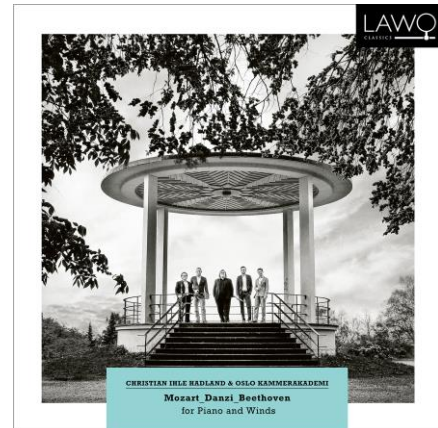


**MOZART Quintet in Eb, K 452. DANZI Quintet in d, op. 41. BEETHOVEN Quintet in Eb, op. 16 • Christian Ihle Hadland (pn); Oslo Kammerakademi (period instruments) • LAWO 1187 (75:49)**



Quintets for piano and winds have been interesting works that expand the usual chamber music for the keyboard and strings into a fast-emerging realm of the 18th century. That is not to say that combinations of winds and keyboard were entirely new, for the sonata was a favorite means early on of combining the instruments, and by the 1770s at least one could find quartets and quintets with a woodwind paired with strings as chamber music began to become modernized. Much of the development hinged upon the technical advances in woodwind construction and technique. For example, the addition of keys and, in the case of the horn, a playing technique whereby notes not found in the harmonic series could be produced all created the possibilities for composers to explore new genres beyond the conventional. Two composers in particular, Franz Danzi and Anton Reicha, produced a myriad of chamber pieces for woodwind quartet and quintet, but the addition of the fortepiano was a step that moved the genre into the chamber music mainstream.

Today, most wind groups are familiar with the music of both Danzi and Reicha. Indeed, so much so that their own reputations as versatile composers have been focused on these works, and so there is a bit of a reputation for writing generic pieces. Other composers also indulged, and in modern times, the quintets for piano and winds by both Wolfgang Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven are performed as a contrast to either of these other composers. I do this rather lengthy introduction only to underscore Reicha's own admission about 1817 that he wrote so many just because "there were so few" available to players. In any case, both the Mozart and Beethoven have become iconic works. The first (K 452) was composed in March of 1784, most likely for members of the Imperial Kapelle, possibly with himself as piano soloist. For him, the work was quite a challenge, and he wrote to his father that it was "the best thing I have written in my life." The work was a success, and because it had few antecedents, Mozart was able to craft a ground-breaking three-movement work that demonstrates his interest in harmony, timbre, and formal structure. There is even a nicely French-style Rondo that is light, airy, and quite idiomatic. The work was performed widely to the extent that Beethoven was inspired to imitate it in form and structure as his op. 16. He must not have felt entirely comfortable, for he later rearranged it as a piano quartet with strings; even the local publisher Artaria had an arrangement as a quintet with strings, though this is probably not traceable back to Beethoven himself. Danzi, who was acquainted with both of the other men, was far more comfortable in his quintet since by the time he wrote it, around 1815 or so, he had already composed numerous pieces. His work, much more Romantic in style and in D minor, is both quite progressive and at the same time harkens back to the formal clarity of the late 18th century.

All of these works have been recorded previously, so one does not need to spend much time on the description. What we have here are members of the Oslo Philharmonic, operating under the auspices of the Oslo Kammerakademi, a group dedicated to the revival of wind chamber music. While some of their focus is on new music for various combinations, they also have an interest in period instruments, as in this recording. Both the Mozart and Beethoven offer opportunities for each of the instruments to play off of each other in long sections. The fortepiano, though the odd person out, has much of the virtuoso material, the integration of all of the instruments shows that Mozart, at least, was operating in a milieu that he found easy. His inventiveness is inexhaustible, from the expanded first movement to the light and tuneful final rondo. Danzi focuses more on the piano, which has all of the virtuoso material, so that it becomes a sort of piano concerto with woodwind accompaniment at the outset. The work here is sprawling and spread out over a large expanse. It is sort of the antithesis of Danzi's normal work, in which the winds are dominant. Yet, the piano part is probably the most challenging of the three pieces. Beethoven's is better integrated texturally, but relies on a considerable amount of repetition and sequence for themes, into which the occasional solo wind insertion is placed.

The Akademi winds perform these well-known works with ease and nice interpretations. Pianist Christian Hadland is at the top of his game, while one notices that the period instruments are all clear and right on pitch. The tempos are excellent and the sound quality fine. This is an excellent disc and if one wishes to have some of these keyboard and woodwind works that are in the repertory, they probably cannot find a better performance than this. **Bertil van Boer**

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