

Ketil HVOSLEF (b. 1939)

Chamber Works III

rec. 2014, Gunnar Sævig Sal, The Grieg Academy, Bergen; St John's Church Bergen (*Kirkeduo*)

LAWO CLASSICS LWC1117 [64:45]

I first came across the music of the Norwegian composer, Ketil Hvoslef, when I [reviewed](#) a recording of his *Oboe Concerto* performed by David Friedemann Strunck and the Oslo Philharmonic (LWC1100). I stated that I would be "looking to invest in more of Ketil Hvoslef's music." As a result I bought both previous volumes in this proposed survey of his complete chamber music (LWC 1066, LWC 1081), and I was not disappointed.

The disc opens with his *Inventiones*, a series of three pieces for violin and piano dating from 2007. Rather than a single sonata, these pieces are linked together as a whole, but can also be seen as separate works with the "imitation of church bells" at their heart. *Inventiones III*, as the *Oboe Concerto*, takes Mozart as a starting point, but again this influence is more subliminal. The music ranges from strident neo-classicism to that which is reminiscent of Arvo Pärt's more minimalist style.

Kvartoni, composed in 1990, is one of Hvoslef's better known chamber works. It is scored for the unusual combination of wordless soprano, recorder, guitar and piano. Here Hvoslef pits the soprano and recorder against the guitar and piano, and the results are quite mesmerising.

This is followed by another piece for violin and piano, his *Bel Canto* of 2005, in which he tries to "present a completely tonal unfolding". The work is dominated by a theme Hvoslef first employed in his *Frammenti di Roma* (1988, rev. 2014) for oboe, clarinet and bassoon (LWC 1066). The result is a work of great power and melodic beauty, and probably my favourite piece on the disc.

The next piece is yet another for an odd combination of instruments, this time guitar and organ. *Kirkeduo* was composed in 1988 and received its premiere at the Bergen International Festival of 1990, with the same performers reprising their performance in this recording. Ricardo Odriozola in his excellent booklet notes describes the piece as "odd", mainly due to the instrumentation. I am reminded of Mozart once again, and especially his *Church Sonatas*—who else would pit a string quartet against a church organ?—but that is where the similarities end. This music bears no relation to Mozart. It is a rhythmical piece, the guitar opening with strong strumming action over a muted organ. This is followed by contrasting sections in which the guitar, plucked and strummed, alternates with the organ. I must say that here the balance is excellent; the guitar is never overpowered by the organ.

The final work on this disc is the earliest and probably the most conventional-sounding and approachable. This is despite its unusual makeup of flute, clarinet, horn, guitar, violin and piano. The *Sextet (Post)* dates from 1980. Like many of Hvoslef's works, it has a strong sense of rhythm, a rhythm that builds intensity as it progresses. The unusual scoring leads to problems in balance, but as Hvoslef states "it is precisely such challenges that often give me good ideas about how the music is to unfold." The result is a strong sense of musicality and structure that leads to an enjoyable work.

The performances on this disc are all excellent. They are all committed to the course of Ketil Hvoslef's music, especially Ricardo Odriozola and Einar Røttingen who instigated this series of recordings. As already stated, Ricardo's notes are excellent. I especially like the inclusion of the composer's own words to describe pieces, something common throughout the series. The recorded sound is also excellent. As with the *Kirkeduo*, the balance engineers have worked wonders throughout.

Yes, Ketil Hvoslef's music can be challenging, but with a little perseverance it offers the listener great enjoyment. I look forward to future releases in this project, especially to the recordings of Hvoslef's three string quartets.

Stuart Sillitoe

Disc contents

Inventiones I, for violin and piano [8:38]

Inventiones II, for violin and piano [3:40]

Inventiones III, for violin and piano [5:29]

Kvartoni, for soprano and recorder [10:46]

Bel Canto, for violin and piano [12:40]

Kirkeduo, for guitar and organ [12:02]

Sextet (Post) for violin, guitar, flute, clarinet, horn and piano [11:30]

Ricardo Odriozola (violin)

Einar Røttingen (piano)

Hilde Haraldsen Sveen (soprano)

Frode Thorsen (recorder)

Stein-Erik Olsen (guitar)

Egil Haugland (guitar)

Karstein Askeland (organ)

Gro Sandvik (flute)

Diego Lucchesi (clarinet)

Ilene Channon (horn)

http://musicweb-international.com/classrev/2017/May/Hvoslef_chamber_v3_LWC1117.htm