

Leoš JANÁČEK (1854-1928)

String Quartet No.1 JW VII/8 'The Kreutzer Sonata' (1923) (arr. string orchestra Terje Tønnesen) [18:52]

String Quartet No 2 JW VII/13 'Intimate letters' (1928) (arr. string orchestra Terje Tønnesen) [24:06]

Leo TOLSTOY (1828-1910)

The Kreutzer Sonata – Dramatisation in English [54:12]

The Kreutzer Sonata – Dramatisation in Norwegian [55:18]

Teodor Janson (speaker)

Norwegian Chamber Orchestra/Terje Tønnesen

rec. 2014, Kulturkirken Jakob, Oslo

LAWO CLASSICS LWC1124 [3 CDs: 152:34]

Leoš Janáček's string quartets have been orchestrated less frequently as, for instance, those of Shostakovich, their detailed and quirky contrasts and narrative extremes making them less amenable to straight transcription. Terje Tønnesen has solved some of these complexities by using solo parts to contrast with *tutti* sections and to retain that intensity of expression that makes these quartets so special.

There is always a swings-and-roundabouts set of arguments about these kinds of orchestration, with a loss of that directness and intimacy one has from a well-played quartet version and potential gains elsewhere. This is true of course, but Tønnesen's intention of adding new dimensions to this remarkable music is highly successful here. The emotional connections to Janáček's music and these quartets in particular, whether stated or latent, are powerful indeed, and with the sweep and collective resonance of larger string sections we are given wordless operas – dramatic in the extreme but still respectful of the originals, and indeed adding substantially to our understanding of these works.

The Norwegian Chamber Orchestra does remarkably well in this recording, dealing with technical problems like true specialists, but always conveying the remarkable impact of Janáček's quartets in their essence. Tønnesen allows plenty of space but doesn't wallow: urgency is conveyed and the pacing is as good as any quartet version. Richard Tognetti's orchestrated recording of the *First String Quartet* with the Janáček Chamber Orchestra on the Chandos label ([review](#)) is also very fine, beating his first outing with the Australian Chamber Orchestra on CHAN10016. The Norwegian recording has more grit and energy than both however, and the recording is also a touch more transparent.

This is a project in two parts, and the remaining CDs have dramatisations of Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* in English and Norwegian. Tolstoy's story is a psychological drama about jealous rage that results in murder, the narrator and main character Pozdnyshov becoming convinced that his wife is passionately involved with a violinist with whom she plays Beethoven's eponymous sonata. The dramatisation doesn't give the entire text, but has enough content to give the rising tensions and crucial points of the story. It is expertly read by Teodor Jansen and larded with musical extracts, opening with some of the Beethoven sonata and including each movement from the Janáček quartet, though with no access points we're left with a single track which is hard to navigate if searching for particular moments. Having complete Janáček movements slows the pace of the narrative and gives plenty of space for reflection, though there are well-chosen dramatic fragments used as well. With subtle use of sound effects and distant shreds of music the whole thing takes on the character of a nightmare, the denouement understated but deeply memorable.

This is a winning combination of dramatic narrative and closely allied music, and with such potently performed orchestrations of Janáček's two quartets we very much have a complete package - both musical and literary - that is well worth having.

Dominy Clements

http://musicweb-international.com/classrev/2017/Oct/Janacek_Kreutzer_LWC1124.htm