

**HVOSLEF:** Sextet; Beethoventrio; Nordisk Kontrapunkt; Piano Quintet

LAWO 1130—60 minutes

This is the fourth entry in a project to record the 38 pieces that constitute the chamber music of Norwegian composer Ketil Hvoslef (b 1939). The son of composer Harald Saeverud, Hvoslef adopted his mother's maiden name when he decided that Norway didn't need two famous composers named Saeverud. His career began with 15 years of teaching music theory at Bergen Conservatory. When the composition bug bit in 1979 he became a fulltime composer.

Two of the works are early efforts. The 12-minute Sextet (1972) is for pairs of woodwinds (oboe, bassoon), brass (trumpet, trombone), and strings (violin, cello). It is very lively, in a number of sections, and shows the strong influence of Stravinsky. The final, madcap section is quite entertaining. Also from that early period is a quirky and amusing little 'Nordic Counterpoint for Fiddles and Bottles' (1973), where two violins wander and meander over a tooting bass line blown on bottles.

Two mature works round out the program. The 16-minute Beethoventrio (1997) for clarinet, cello, and piano is based on the lighthearted theme from the finale of Beethoven's Opus 11. The notes say the work is anything but lighthearted (it "ranks among Hvoslef's most sinister and unsettling"). I wouldn't say it is sinister, but it is indeed quite a transformation of Beethoven's original.

The big piece is the 27-minute Piano Quintet (2003), of which the composer says, "I have, in this quintet, dared to approach the very limit for how minimalist it is possible to be. The piano part contains almost nothing!" I don't agree—many works are more minimalist than this one. Yes, there is economy, repetition of motives, some spare textures, simplicity, and repeated-note material. But it is a fascinating and thought-provoking work that held my attention from start to finish. Especially absorbing is a long, slow, dreamy piano passage that descends continuously, but is repeatedly jarred by fast and strident string interjections. Excellent readings by some of Bergen's best musicians. Violinist Ricardo Odriozola plays in three of the works and wrote the lucid notes, so he seems to be one of the forces driving the project.

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