



Carl Philipp Stamitz: Quartets for Clarinet

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Even among clarinetists Carl Philipp Stamitz's name is probably better known than his music – from which one might fairly conclude that clarinetists are an ungrateful lot, since he gave us at least 11 concertos (some composed jointly with clarinet virtuoso Joseph Beer, a fine composer in his own right). Those seeking music of earth-shattering originality should certainly look elsewhere. In common with his output in general, these are amiably disposed works treading largely familiar harmonic and melodic paths – there is rather a lot of the Classical clarinet's favourite key of E flat major here and the boundaries of the quartets may easily elude the inattentive listener. Any particular innovation lies in the instrumentation itself, and perhaps also in the attribution of such a leading role to what was at the time still a relatively new arrival on the instrumental scene – period instruments might have had a chance of reproducing this effect for modern ears but the use here of the familiar modern instrumental palette irons this out somewhat. No matter.

Exactly what brought four professors from Grand Valley State University, Michigan to the Himmelfahrt-Kirche in Munich-Sendling to record Stamitz is an intriguing mystery. (It doubtless has a perfectly simple explanation which I am content to leave unsought.) Arthur Campbell studied with no less a figure than Robert Marcellus; his relatively light tone (at least, on the evidence this disc provides) is appropriate for these unassuming works and his command of Stamitz's relatively modest technical requirements unimpeachable. Those who are fussy about matters of style might find a quibble or two: Campbell's ornamentation of Stamitz's fermatas is perhaps a little unidiomatic and there are moments where Stamitz's appoggiaturas might have been more appropriately interpreted in the long form rather than the short form Campbell chooses.

His string colleagues likewise rise easily to the demands Stamitz places on them without seeking out more in the music than the composer put there; the 'Allegros' are not over-driven, the 'Andantes' are not over-milked. To be fair, they might have delved a little further into the music's potential. The C minor 'Andante' of the Op. 8 Quartet, for example, fairly teems with expressive sighs in which these performers' legato treatment does somewhat miss the mark, and the minor-key passages in the development of the opening movement of the first quartet on the disc, Op. 19 No.3, might have benefited from a little Sturm und Drang. A relatively unsensational release but agreeable listening nonetheless.