

as a 'milestone' since their formation in 1998, and in some ways it can be seen as the culmination of a long association both with Britten's music and with Suffolk itself. They were formed at Pro Corda, the school for chamber musicians at Leiston, not far from Aldeburgh, and the Suffolk landscape, they tell us, has long been in their minds and imaginations when studying Britten's scores. Hélène Clément, meanwhile, the Doric's viola player, plays the composer's own instrument, previously owned by Frank Bridge, who made a present of it to Britten when he left for the US in 1939.

The set also, however, reflects upon the indelible imprint left by Purcell's music on Britten's work, which is sometimes taken as read, though the juxtaposition here is effective and telling. The Second Quartet was famously written to mark the 250th anniversary of Purcell's birth, while the great closing Passacaglia of the Third was Britten's last deployment of a form he took from his predecessor and made his own. Moreover, hearing the Purcell Fantasias, particularly Nos 8 and 9 (Z739 and 740) in D minor and A minor respectively, in proximity to the First Quartet is to be reminded of their closeness in mood to the patterns of introspection and energy that give the First both its structural integrity and its nostalgic tone, particularly in its long, finely wrought slow movement.

The performances are all superbly judged and controlled, balancing fragility with strength, restraint with great depth of feeling. The opening of the First, with its high, ethereal phrases offset by worldly, guitar-like cello twangs, is rich with ambiguities, while the *Andante calmo*, its long violin solo played with exquisite poise by Alex Redington, grieves quietly for the war-torn England Britten left behind during his American sojourn. In the Second, the Doric offset formal logic with deep emotional resonance, sweeping us through the ceremonies and wonders of the final Chacony with great refinement and dignity before we reach the final moments of assertion and grandeur. The Third, haunted by thoughts of imminent mortality, bids farewell to life and love with quiet dignity and gazes towards infinity as time ticks away towards the close: it's wonderfully done, and you can't help but be moved by it.

The early Divertimenti, played with considerable wit and elegance, provide some much-needed contrast to the intensity of it all, while the counterpoint of Purcell's Fantasias is finely realised in performances of considerable weight and finesse. Comparisons here are perhaps invidious. I have great fondness for the Amadeus Quartet's slightly more spacious way with the Second in their 1977 performance (Testament DVD, 2/06), and if you like a more overtly dramatic approach

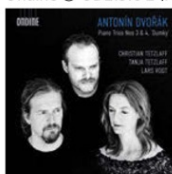
to this repertory, then you may prefer the Belcea Quartet's fractionally more extrovert interpretations (EMI, 7/05). But this is a major cycle, engaging and profound in equal measure, and you need to hear it. **Tim Ashley**

**Andrew Everard writes** There's a lovely warmth and intimacy to this set, combining as it does string quartet styles separated by more than two and a half centuries. The 96kHz/24bit Qobuz download reveals extra depths of detail, bringing the listener closer to the music while placing the quartet persuasively in the context of the generous Snape Maltings Concert Hall acoustic.

## Dvořák

Piano Trios – No 3, Op 65 B130;  
No 4, 'Dumky', Op 90 B166

Christian Tetzlaff *vn* Tanja Tetzlaff *vc* Lars Vogt *pf*  
Ondine © ODE1316-2 (73' • DDD)



and Tanja Tetzlaff sing softly together in the quietness at the start of Dvořák's noble F minor Piano Trio (No 3) – cello and violin in equipoise, and proving with the very first dotted rhythm that they think and feel together too. Enter Lars Vogt on piano, and in that first surge he supports and carries his colleagues upwards: establishing, in barely eight bars of music, both the intimacy and assurance of these players' partnership, and the magnificent sweep and expressive scope of what is to come.

I'm no fan of 'all star' chamber music projects but the virtuosity here is entirely at the service of the music, capturing the full symphonic grandeur of Dvořák's vision without ever sounding like anyone is playing for effect. It's always chamber music, and it's helped by Ondine's lifelike acoustic, against which the focus and refinement of the Tetzlaffs' palette is never at any risk from Vogt's expressive generosity (in the booklet note, he compares the Trio of the second movement to Rachmaninov – and he certainly delivers).

Grandiose when they need to be, the trio find moment after treasureable moment of subtly shaded tone colour (even Christian's pizzicatos sound tender) – and you can imagine how that translates into the kaleidoscopic folk-fantasy of the *Dumky*. Staccato piano chimes its way over fading cello drones; melting violin lines float over translucent keyboard textures; the transitions are delicious; and of course, when the dances really start to fly, these players commit absolutely, without any loss of finesse. This disc sounds, and feels, like a recording born of love, and I urge you to listen. **Richard Bratby**

**Andrew Everard writes** A chamber music recording lives or dies – at least in technical terms – on the resolution, precision and dynamics on offer; here, the remarkable musicianship and instinctive interplay of the three performers really shines through in the Qobuz 96kHz/24bit download.

## Mendelssohn

Piano Concertos<sup>9</sup> – No 1, Op 25; No 2, Op 40. Rondo capriccioso, Op 14. Song Without Words, Op 19b  
No 6, 'Venetianisches Gondellied'. Variations sérieuses, Op 54

Jan Lisiecki *pf*<sup>3</sup> Orpheus Chamber Orchestra  
DG © 483 6471GH (64' • DDD)



This is the third account I've had of Mendelssohn's concertos in as

many months and, from the off, the young Canadian Jan Lisiecki sparkles and shines, bringing to the opening movement of the G minor First Concerto an effortless rapport with the Orpheus CO players, with none of the over-accentuation that distracted me in Roberto Prosseda's account. The chamber-like sonorities and intricate interplay – surely the result of this being a conductor-less ensemble – are an endless delight: sample from 4'09" of track 1 for a taster. The small forces also ensure that there's an airborne quality in the fast movements, while the concerto's *Andante* is very intimate in effect. I had reservations here about both Brautigam (somewhat unpoetic) and Prosseda (too slow) but Lisiecki gets it just right, colouring and shading the line with great tenderness. And the finale, announced by fanfares from the Orpheus's splendidly coloured horns and trumpets, finds Lisiecki conveying a real sense of the dance that is infectious indeed.

In the D minor Second Concerto's *Allegro appassionato* Lisiecki and the Orpheus offer a lean-toned, high-energy account that is again very telling. But it is the *Adagio* that is particularly fine here, filled with a sense of confiding that again comes from relatively small forces. Every detail has been considered, from Lisiecki's poetic opening phrase to the answering strings, who cushion the music in a warm chorale-like sonority. I find their tempo more convincing than the otherwise compelling Hough, who seems too fast for an *Adagio*. And the finale in this new account, if not quite having the array of colours that the Cologne Academy offer Brautigam, has a real one-in-a-bar energy to it that is irresistible.

The solo pieces generally work very well too – though I did find Lisiecki slightly