

## Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio

*Brahms/Smetana - CD Review*

*"This is almost certainly how Brahms wanted and expected his music to be played...an immensely accomplished ensemble...recommended with confidence and enthusiasm."*

INTERNATIONAL RECORD REVIEW  
BRIDGE9362



I found a great deal to enjoy here, though these performances may not be to everyone's liking. The Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio is an immensely accomplished ensemble – one of the features of its Brahms playing is considerable flexibility with the tempo – apparent right at the start in the phrasing of the great opening theme, and on a larger scale in its rubato generally. This is almost certainly how Brahms wanted and expected his music to be played, but some listeners may like a less fluid approach to tempo. So natural is the way in which this ensemble moulds phrases that I was firmly convinced as well as entirely absorbed by the approach here. In the notes, there's a discussion between the members of the trio about the longer and substantially different original version of the Op. 8 Trio where they express reservations about Brahms's first thoughts. That's fair enough – especially as they play the revision on this disc – but this is just the sort of group which could make a really fine recording of the more expansive first version.

After a cogent, flexible first movement and a Scherzo that has plenty of point and wit, the quiet intensity and intimate expressiveness of the playing in the slow movement is particularly impressive, as it's the constant

care over balance. The finale has a dark, urgent thrust at the start, helped by the scrupulous articulation of the rhythm and a fine sense of phrase and line, and the joyous point of arrival at the major-key second theme provides a wonderful sense of release. The close has all the requisite seriousness and drama.

This enjoyable Brahms performance is coupled with the Piano Trio by Smetana, a work conceived in grief. As Smetana himself put it, his only piano trio was 'written in memory of my first child Bedřiška, who enchanted us with her extraordinary musical talent, and yet was snatched away from us by death, aged four-and-a-half years'. Given that the work was written as a memorial, the surprise is that this trio contains no slow movement, but two other features of this trio are noteworthy: one is the powerful motto theme first heard at the start – and idea that unifies much of what follows – and the other is Smetana's use of popular Czech dance forms. The second movement is a ghostly Polka and the finale is based on the Skočná, a rapid jig-like dance, while there are also elements of folk-dance rhythms in the first movement. This is something that is captured very well by the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio: there's no self-conscious fussing with the dance elements and they are always played with a natural feeling for their propulsive energy.

In short, if the supple, stylish rubato of the playing appeals, along with this coupling (an unusual but very effective one), then this disc can be recommended with confidence and enthusiasm. Most of the booklet consists of discussion by the players of the music, often quite illuminating, and the sound is impressively clear and full.

--Nigel Simeone

MARCH 2012