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Review of GMCD 7341 - Music by Fribbins



print

International Record Review June 2010

Well established as a lecturer and administrator, notably at Middlesex University (where he organized an important seminar on the music of Zemlinsky, the proceedings from which were reviewed in May 2008), Peter Fribbins (b.1969) also has a growing output to his name. This first disc devoted to his music confirms his awareness of the potential of instrumental combinations that acknowledges their historical context without inhibiting their present and, by extension, their future viability.

The First String Quartet was begun when Fribbins was just into his twenties but did not reach its definitive form until 2004. The subtitle, drawn from John Donne, has ominous implications which break free from a fraught slow introduction into an *Allegro* of real impetus.' Here and in a rhetorical *Recitativo* that precedes the dynamic finale, the influence of Berg and Zemlinsky can be detected, whereas the rapt *Adagio* looks back - by no means passively - to an earlier Viennese era which more fully informs the three other pieces, all completed during 2002-05.

Most ambitious is the Piano Trio, whose sizeable first movement might almost be a work in itself except that the probing slow movement and incisive finale open out its range of motifs and expression accordingly. In that its initial two movements fall short of such purposeful contrast, the Cello Sonata feels less satisfying overall - but this is not to deny its confident handling of a difficult medium or the heady momentum of its final 'Toccata'. Even so, the Clarinet Quintet seems the more fully realized - not least because its motivic flexibility is deployed so deftly in an incisive 'Scherzo on seven notes' or so eloquently in the subdued 'Interlude'; these being framed by a pensive Andante which is transformed into a finale of unforced serenity. Mozart, Brahms and Reger may continue to dominate the medium, but Fribbins's piece is a notable contribution.

The performances are responsive not merely to each work's technical demands but also to the spirit of renewed classicism informing them. The sound makes the most of the different venues involved (save for a touch of harshness in the Piano Trio), and there are informative if overly earnest booklet notes by Christopher Dromey. Too conservative for the neo-modernists and too ambivalent for the photo-fit tonalists among us, Fribbins is a composer with something to say and it is to be hoped that this release will not have to wait too long for its successor.

Richard Whitehouse



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