

RICERCARE • Sølve Sigerland (vn); Hennige Landas (va); Ellen Margrete Flesjø (vc) • LAWO 1238 (66:34)

KVANDAL String Trio, op. 12. **MORTENSEN** Trio, op. 3. **BRÆIN** Trio, op. 15. **JOHANSEN** Ricercare for String Trio

The Norwegian label Lawo regularly puts out recordings of challenging contemporary music, so it was something of a surprise to encounter this engaging collection of mainly tonal 20th-century Norwegian music for string trio. The opening work, the 1950 String Trio of Johan Kvandal, immediately strikes a mood of lively, propulsive music that is entirely accessible, yet expressed in a compellingly original voice. The polyphonic structure of the music comes across as an homage to Bach, which seems to have influenced the choice of titling the album Ricercare. The long (11-minute) and brooding *Adagio* is followed by a perky *Allegro*, returning to the playful spirit of the first movement. This work marks a more adventurous turn for the generally conservative nature of Scandinavian music, but still far from what many of the young Turks in Germany, Italy, France, America, and elsewhere were producing in the wild, early post World War II era.

Finn Mortensen's trio, which was also premiered in 1950, is said to be representative of the "new musical modernism" of post-war Norway per annotator Arvid O. Vollsnes, but as is the case with Kvandal's work, this Modernism is relative, and in no way resembles the output of such contemporaries as Boulez and his Darmstadt buddies. Of course, that will come as a positive distinction for many *Fanfare* readers. Indeed, there is an elegance in this music that is practically Mozartian, particularly in his use of contrasting tempos within the individual movements. The single-movement 1963 Trio of Edvard Fliflet Bræin is a bit more adventuresome, in a harmonic sense, but exudes a sense of playfulness and irony that puts it at odds with much of the dark, angry music of the time. The work is titled *Allegro*, but it might also be thought of as a scherzo.

With the Ricercare of Bertil Palmar Johansen, the youngest of this quartet of composers (b. 1954), we arrive at a score that is bristling with dissonance and bold energy. The definition of *ricercare* in the Baroque era covers a broad range of possible formal structures, mainly including fugal wiring, but also fantasia-like constructions. It is the latter interpretation that Johansen hews to. The *Andante* is especially moody, even mildly nightmarish, leading to a more actively tumultuous final movement, appropriately titled *Energico*.

This showcase of modern Norwegian music for string trio features music that is consistently well written, varied in emotional signature and very accessible. The Ssens Trio (pronounce it "essence") plays with powerful virtuosity and unmistakable devotion to this program. This is relatively obscure music, but it is of very high quality, and I would highly recommend this disc for those looking for something new and refreshing.

Peter Burwasser

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