

HAYDN Piano Trio in E, Hob XV:28. TURINA *Circulo*—Fantasy for Piano Trio, op. 91. SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Trio in e, op. 67 • Icicle Creek Piano Trio • CON BRIO RECORDS 21048 (52:49)

Back in 32:5 I welcomed an album by the Icicle Creek Piano Trio on the specialty audiophile label Con Brio Records, an enterprise founded by Carol Greenley (whom I'd interviewed in 32:4) and her husband Ed Hollcraft. That release, containing piano trios by Schubert and Ravel, earned some of the highest accolades I've ever accorded a new CD in my years with this journal, and, not unexpectedly, it topped my 2009 Want List. That recording was, if I'm not mistaken, taped at the Canyon Wren Concert Hall in Leavenworth, Washington's Icicle Creek Music Center, where the trio is the ensemble in residence and from which institution it obviously takes its name. For those who may not know, Leavenworth is a picturesque, touristy community done up to resemble a Bavarian village and situated near the eastern edge of Washington State's Cascade mountain range about 80 miles due east of Seattle. This new release was recorded at a different venue, the ButterflyProduction.com Studio in Seattle, in February, 2010. The Icicle Creek Trio's members are Jennifer Caine, violin; Sally Singer, cello; and Oksana Ezhokia, piano.

As complement to its previous album, the Icicle Creek ensemble gives us three contrasting piano trios that are not only quite different from each other and from the earlier recorded Schubert and Ravel trios but, in the case of two of them—the Haydn and Turina—I'd venture not that familiar. True, Haydn's piano trios—all 45 of them—have been essayed on disc before, most notably perhaps by the Beaux Arts Trio in its 1970s groundbreaking cycle for Philips.

There are those who will say, though I'm not one of them, that if you've heard one Haydn trio you've heard them all, and that unless you've played them yourself or have a very sharp memory for detail, you're not as likely to experience that “aha” moment of recognition as you are with other works by the composer that exhibit a more immediately distinctive profile. But the E-Major Trio, Hob XV:28, is one of the composer's more frequently recorded trios, and if you acquired either the Florestan Trio's version, reviewed as recently as 33:4 by Christopher Brodersen, or the Ensemble Trazom's period instrument performance reviewed in 27:4 by James H. North, you are more likely than not to find the piece familiar. Moreover, it's one of Haydn's last works in the medium. Written in London in 1794–95 and dedicated to the talented pianist Thérèse Jansen, it contains some of the composer's most advanced harmonic and contrapuntal writing. The E-Minor Allegretto built over a passacaglia-like bass line is especially unusual. It was only in these last trios that Haydn began to break away from the accepted understanding of the piano trio as a piano sonata with violin and cello accompaniment. It wasn't until the string instruments were liberated from their supporting role and the piano began to give up its dominant position in the hierarchy that the piano trio came into its own in the hands of Beethoven.

Joaquin Turina's piano trio titled *Circulo* has also had its fair share of recordings. A few have been reviewed in these pages—see the *Fanfare* archive under both “Turina” and “Turína,” but apparently not my longtime favorite with the Beaux Arts Trio on a Philips CD that includes the composer's two other piano trios plus a trio by Granados. That performance of the *Circulo* Trio, wonderful as it is, must now cede pride of place to this new one by the Icicle Creek Trio which plays the piece as if spellbound by its mood painting. In three short movements—one might wish they were longer—Turina's rapturous writing is intended to capture the changing sky colors and climates of the day—“Dawn,” “Midday,” and “Dusk.”

I don't think it will upset too many readers if I say that Shostakovich's E-Minor Trio is the greatest piano trio of the 20th-century. Some 75 recordings of the piece tend to support that opinion. But such fierce competition also makes it difficult for the Icicle Creek Trio—indeed, for any ensemble relatively new to the scene—to mark its territory amid the pack. But I can honestly say that the ICT's Shostakovich is another award winning performance that, in my opinion, demotes even the best of the rest to second class.

The cello's artificial harmonics at the beginning of the first movement shimmer like hoarfrost, as silvery as I've ever heard them. The entrances exchanged between the instruments in the second movement—one of those backbiting, nose-thumbing Shostakovich scherzos—are so perfectly timed and balanced, they're like the workings of a Swiss watch. And those curling-iron, hairpin swells and diminuendos throughout are discharged like so much flatulence to pollute the air with gaseous gossip. The sullen, bleak tragedy of the Largo is given voice by Shostakovich in the form of that age-old lament composers from earliest times expressed in the falling progression of the chaconne. And here in the ICT's performance, one hears the underlying foundation in stark relief. In the concluding Allegretto, never have I heard any ensemble make more of the dynamic contrasts or differentiate as sharply as the ICT does between various pizzicato techniques, some soft and fleshy, others hard and percussive.

I've counted other versions of the Shostakovich among my favorites—those by the Kempf, Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson, Jupiter Trios, and an Erato recording with Repin, Berezovsky, and Yablonsky—but this is simply one fantastic performance, and it would earn my strongest recommendation even if the Shostakovich were the only work on the disc. But it's not. The Turina is wonderful too, in different ways of course, and the Haydn is given a polished and spirited reading. Con Brio's latest Icicle Creek Piano Trio album is a must for all chamber music lovers. **Jerry Dubins**