



Icicle Creek Piano Trio

Reviews



Ravel: Trio in A minor • Schubert Trio in E flat, D929

CD Reviews:

Gramophone Magazine April 2009

“Two contrasting discs illustrate how music is open to a universe of interpretive possibility”

by Donald Rosenberg

(Reviewed with Schubert Piano Trio Nos. 1 and 2 with Philip Setzer, violin, David Finckel, cello, and Wu Han, piano)

The concept that the Icicle Creek Piano Trio take in [Schubert’s] D929 is more compact, marked by fine intimacy of attack and interplay. Never mind the cool implication of the ensemble’s name, which stems from the Icicle Creek Music Center in Leavenworth, WA, where these musicians are in residence. The playing is warmly considered, meticulous in articulation and blend, and silken in sonority. Violinist Jennifer Caine, cellist Sally Singer, and pianist Oksana Ezhokina gauge Schubert’s brooding lines with affecting subtlety. They emphasise the music’s contrasts of light and dark within a true chamber-music context, as if they’re seated in the room feet away from your ears.

The Icicle Creek musicians pair Schubert with Ravel’s Piano Trio, which they limn in shadings of exquisite sheen and vibrancy. The score’s mysterious radiance receives as much attention as the sweeping activity. Icy it most definitely is not.

Strad Magazine April 2009

by David Denton

They catch all the subtle, shimmering shades of the Ravel Trio, but this is essentially a young, virile and robust view of the score. I particularly enjoyed the piano’s spiky introduction to a second movement that is illuminated by brilliant flashes of light.

By contrast the Passacaille has that nice, languid feeling of a midday reverie, eased forward on gentle movement.

Their approach to the Schubert is literal and free of those mannerisms that have become encrusted on the work over the years. Tempos are true to the essence of the music, with a real walking gait to the second movement forming the backdrop to a beautifully played cello solo.

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American Record Guide March/April 2009

by Gil French

After not even five seconds, I was aware of this group's exquisitely bright tuning and the gentle atmosphere they create for Ravel's impressionist masterpiece. After repeating the opening phrase at a leisurely pace, they give a delicate surge of energy to the first theme before slightly retreating into the ineffably lovely second theme, as the cello in tenor range plays counterpoint to the violin, and the pianist gently generates waves of arpeggios.

The strings (they have gorgeous-sounding instruments) play absolutely seamless lines except when they deliberately create a new phrase; their use of vibrato is so selective that it took about 15 minutes before I became aware of how cleverly they employ it. Sometimes the cellist becomes "tone color with a pulse" rather than a soloist. And the piano: its tone is so rich, yet its textures are so clear and its melodies so bell-like—all made possible by the excellent balance and integration of the three players by Al Swanson, the engineer who made so many of those Seattle Symphony recordings for Delos.

The opening Allegro here is bright, light, fleet; the piano is rippling; and the results are gorgeously shaded. The development has almost the sway of a waltz and is extraordinarily sweet—so preferable to a forced pounding approach that can make it seem interminable. The nuances that open II add poignant touches to its walking tune; each crescendo and decrescendo is treated poetically, each dotted note is given a buoyant lift, and the Piu Lento coda is a touch of heaven. The main section of the canonic Scherzo is light and tripping, while its trio is given the neatest touch of swagger. In the final Allegro the players are also careful to observe the Moderato direction, giving the style enough of a "kid's touch" for it to have playfulness (otherwise it can be deadly).

This is one album that is absolutely worth having.

Fanfare Magazine, May 2009

by Jerry Dubins

...any past recommendations I may have made for recordings of Schubert's E-Major Piano Trio are hereby rendered null and void by this new release. The performance by the Icicle Creek Trio comes as close to being "definitive" as any I expect to hear in my lifetime."

...a performance that transcends all the usual plaudits of pitch-perfect intonation, ideal pacing, polished ensemble playing, and even interpretive insight and musical intelligence. There is something both magical and exalted happening here, a communing of spirits so sensitive and responsive to every nuance of expression that three souls merge into one, and only one voice is heard: Schubert's. It may be an odd way to describe a musical performance, but I felt as though a reading this beautiful should only exist in an otherworldly state of moral perfection and pure grace.

Everything I've said above about the Icicle Trio's playing and recording in the Schubert applies in the Ravel. This is a chamber ensemble I look forward to hearing soon in much more of the mainstream piano trio repertoire. A five-star recommendation.

CD Baby
by Chris Robley

The name "Icicle Creek" doesn't really do this piano trio justice. They perform with such fiery passion that there couldn't possibly be anything frozen within 100 yards of them. But at the same time, this superbly talented group seems to be at its finest when they're interpreting Ravel or Schubert's more melancholy passages, each melody tinged with mourning. So maybe there is something to be said for the chilliness of their chosen name. But hot-and-cold clichés aside, this stellar recording captures some truly stunning musicianship.

Trio Reviews/Quotes:

"...astonishing level of ensemble playing...polish and professionalism"... "ready to really make a dent on the chamber music world"

— Xak Bjerken (member, Los Angeles Piano Quartet)

"...a crystalline performance of the work, with equal attention to Ravel's passion and precision."

— classicalseattle.blogspot.com

Individual Reviews:

For Ms. Singer:

"a performance of the highest caliber, which will leave life-long memories for every person in the audience."

— Polemics of Art Journal (Bulgaria)

For Ms. Caine:

"...Complete mastery over her instrument and a highly developed musical sense..."

— Judy Gruber, The Washington Post

For Ms. Ezhokina:

"The musicians played superbly throughout. I've never before heard it done as well."

— Heuwell Tircuit, San Francisco Classical Voice