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REVIEW

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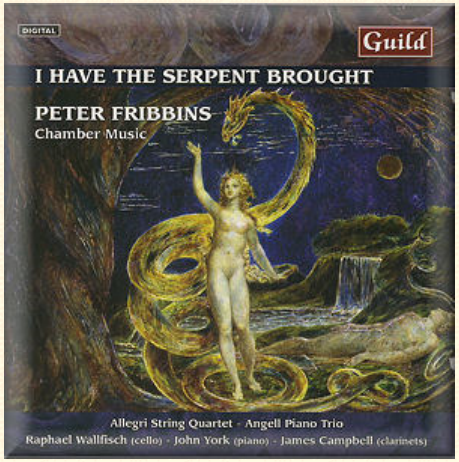

Peter FRIBBINS (b. 1969)
Piano Trio (2003-4) [21:54]
String Quartet No. 1 *I Have the Serpent Brought* (1990-2004) [14:50]
Sonata for Cello and Piano (2004-5) [18:12]
Quintet for Clarinet and Strings (1999-2002) [14:14]
• The Angell Trio (Frances Angell (piano); Jan Peter Schmolck (violin); Richard May (cello))
The Allegri String Quartet (Daniel Rowland/Peter Carter and Rafael Todes (violins); Dorotea Vogel (viola); Pal Banda (cello))
Raphael Wallfisch (cello); John York (piano)
James Campbell (clarinets)
rec. November 2008, The Orangery, Trent Park, Middlesex University; October 2004, April 2006, The Church of St Peter, DeBeauvoir Town, London; October 2006, Champs Hill, Sussex UK. DDD

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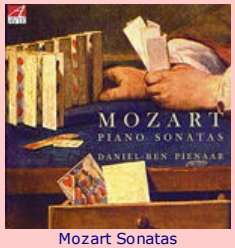

Mozart Sonatas
Daniel-Ben Pienaar

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Peter Fribbins writes what many would consider unusual music for someone in their forties. A student of Hans Werner Henze and now Principal Lecturer at Middlesex University, his chief interest is chamber music. Fribbins is also Artistic Director of the London Chamber Music Society concerts. 'I Have The Serpent Brought' is a collection of four works completed within the last decade; it takes its name from the title given to his First String Quartet. Sinewy, decisive and full of forward motion and revelling in at times quite spare instrumentation, Fribbins' style is closer to that of Britten or even a mellow Shostakovich than the experimental writers of the second half of the twentieth century.

Fribbins' style is not, though, spiky or clipped, rough or dissonant. There is very little of Bartók. Just as the string sound he calls for is neither lush nor indulgent of any extra-musical, pastoral traditions. Significantly, the composer's determination to shift tonalities as the thematic developments throughout each movement dictate is far stronger than any trend to create them merely for effect. Pleasingly and unusually, his sense of the Romantic is greater than even a conscious call to Romantic tonality (and tempi) would be - not unlike Britten's allusions, in fact. In short, his string (and clarinet) style and idiom are likely to have wide appeal. Particularly when one is aware of his refreshing commitment to variety … these movements come and go without ever lingering.

The playing of the Allegris - with Daniel Rowland and Peter Carter as first violins in the First Quartet and the Clarinet Quintet respectively - is impressive. They have managed to combine a resonance and depth of string sonorities with tempi and attack that do the music full justice.

The Piano Trio, the first and longest work on the CD, doesn't shrink from bleakness. Writing in octaves and tenths competes with cantabile passages to establish a tension that never quite resolves itself. Here the Angell Trio brings an insight and enthusiasm individually and as three which truly reveal the essence of Fribbins' musical ideas.

Nicely paced because nicely placed between the String Quartet and Clarinet Quintet, the Sonata for Cello and Piano [tr.s 8-10] seems to explore fresh though not wholly unfamiliar territory. One is struck again by the chordal writing which always supports the melodic ideas. These at times present something of a moving target. Raphael Wallfisch and John York are equally enthusiastic about the music. They have obviously thought hard about the best way to make the frequent *accelerandi* and *ritardandi* work as well as they do. Which - yet again, in Fribbins' case - is not for effect; but for the thematic integrity of the work.

The String Quartet is an early work, though completed (relatively recently) over eight years. Not for

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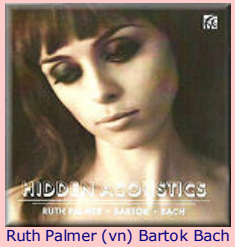

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nothing is it inspired by the first stanza of John Donne's remarkable *Twicknam Garden*. Fribbins is at home with the metaphysical and speculative as with the abstract. One's only slight doubt might be that the range of techniques employed - *col legno*, *staccato*, *pizzicato* - might risk inflating (or, worse, burst out of) the time and proportions in which he has otherwise chosen to scale the Quartet. The Allegris, though, respect the spirit of the music and bring it to us whole.

The writing in the Clarinet Quintet is clearly aware of the two greatest forerunners - those of Mozart and Brahms. It's more virtuosic and more concerned with the emphases that can be given to the wind instrument than it is interested in exploring combined string-woodwind textures. Although not his most recent work, it seems to hint at a less 'established' and perhaps even vaguely serial style than do the other works on this CD. The playing of James Campbell (with the Allegri) is vivacious and highly communicative.

This is a collection that's somewhat unusual, then. And all the more enjoyable for that. There's nothing else to speak of by this composer in the catalogue. If he's new to you or if you want to explore a relatively singular vein in contemporary British music, you can buy it with confidence. The recording is close and helpful to the intimate sounds. The booklet provides well-packed information on the musical concerns of Peter Fribbins, and details of the performers. Well worth a look.

Mark Sealey

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