

demanding and getting a long contract with the option to renew. Alas, he died in 1964, but much of the credit for improving the orchestra went to him.

London made some excellent recordings in the 1950s and early 1960s, and this is one of them. The Decca CD is good, but it lacks the sumptuous blend and atmosphere of the LP. Praga's remastering has more "black background"—less noise. It is also a little bolder and cleaner, but I wouldn't call it sumptuous. Both digital issues expose (or exacerbate) the thinnish string tone more than the LP does. Neither captivates like the LP when played on a good analog system.

If you have the Decca CD, should you spring for the Praga? You can to some advantage, but on my system it is not a must. If you have no recording of the Monteux *Daphnis*, do you want the performance on CD? Yes, if you are a fan of Monteux. Otherwise, think Munch (twice, especially the first one), Boulez (New York), Haitink (Chicago), Cluytens, Gielen, Martinon, Markl, Petitgirard, and Tortelier, to name a few. The Debussy and Ravel Overview also likes Ansermet and Previn. I've never cared for the former and don't know the latter. Finally, is the LP worth pursuing? Yes if you have the proper equipment for it.

HECHT

RAVEL: *Trio*

with **BEETHOVEN: *Trio 4***

Blakemore Trio—Blue Griffin 275—52 minutes

with **SHOSTAKOVICH: *Trio 2***

Ibuki Trio—Claudio 5890—55 minutes

with *Rapsodie Espagnole*; **TURINA: *Trio Circulo***;

CHABRIER: *Espana*

Hoboken Trio—Anima 121—61 minutes

Ravel completed his Piano Trio in the summer of 1914. He'd been sketching it for over a year, but the imminent outbreak of WW I suddenly drove him to work (in his own words) "with the sureness and lucidity of a madman". His aim was to finish quickly so he could enlist in the war effort. He wrote to Stravinsky that he had done "five months' work in five weeks". Nonetheless, it is a work of thorough craftsmanship and striking originality.

The recordings reviewed here remind me why I love Ravel and why I love chamber music. Texturally, this is among the most sophisticated piano trios, famous for its orchestral approach and often sounding like more than three instruments. Utmost sensitivity is essential, as every interpretive choice—the use of pedal, vibrato, phrasing, even subtle variations in dynamics and tempo—carries a

here. On these recordings, the performers show outstanding musicianship and deliver three fine but very personal interpretations.

I would rank the Blakemore Trio's reading the highest of the three. The strings bring out the lyricism of the themes. Their phrasing is complex, but they are matched perfectly by not only each other but the piano as well. The *Passacaille* is particularly sensitive. Moreover, the orchestral techniques Ravel employs in the strings—tremolos, trills, arpeggios, harmonics—are quite well executed here, particularly in IV. Impressionism at its best.

Also on the program is Beethoven's *Ghost* Trio—an interesting pairing, as ethereal textures of a different type are on display. The Blakemore Trio demonstrates exemplary dynamic control here. The sound is not always clear—likely a fault of the engineer, not the performers—but it is warm and dark.

The Ibuki Trio's rendition of the Ravel is also outstanding. They are a young group who show youthful energy as well as an elegant maturity. Where Blakemore's *Passacaille* is a love song, Ibuki's is a meditative chant. My only gripe is about balance in a few places where I struggled to hear details in the piano. A fine performance of Shostakovich's Trio No. 2 is also on the program. I'm not moved by it, but Shostakovich rarely moves me.

The Trio Hoboken's album is called "Rapsodie Espagnole". Their Ravel is bright and colorful, though in the most "orchestral" moments they fall just short of Ibuki and Blakemore. Their reading of the 'Pantoum' is excellent and lively, reminding me of *La Valse*. Hoboken effortztes right through the polymetric sections effortlessly.

Turina's *Circulo* Trio, also included, is new to me. It's an interesting work that may take a few more hearings to sink in. Ravel's trio is a tough act to follow, and Turina's comes off as a bit drab in comparison.

The remainder of the program consists of two arrangements. Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole* is adapted fairly well for trio here, but does not measure up to either of Ravel's versions (for orchestra or two pianos). I think only a true master of orchestration like Ravel himself could have pulled it off. On the other hand, the character of Chabrier's *Espana* (a piece I loved as a child) is wonderfully reproduced in this arrangement. Even when sounds are missing (like the timpani) I can't seem to sit still while listening, which is the real test in a piece like this!

PAGEL

RAVEL: *Bolero*; see STRAVINSKY

September/October 2013