

## Brahms Volume 1.

Piano Quartets – No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25; No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60.

**Milander Quartet** (Lisa Schatzman, violin; Alexander Moshnenko, viola; Beni Santora, cello; Milana Chernyavska, piano).

**Avie AV2203** (full price, 1 hour 16 minutes).

Website [www.avie-records.com](http://www.avie-records.com) **D** Producer/Engineer

Sébastien Chonion. Producer John Barnes. Dates

March 27th-29th, 2007.

### Comparisons:

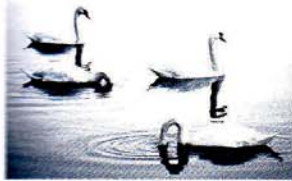
Trampler, Beaux Arts Trio (Philips) 454 017-2

(1973, two discs)

Aller, Hollywood Qt (Testament) SBT3063

(1956, three discs)

**BRAHMS**  
PIANO QUARTETS 1 & 3 MILANDER QUARTET



This is a truly lovely disc. The Milander Quartet was a new name to me and its

members are from diverse backgrounds: a pianist and violist from the Ukraine, a French violinist and a Swiss-Hungarian cellist. However, this is certainly not some international gathering of whiz-kids: the way these four musicians play together is wonderfully cohesive, sensitive and warm-hearted, and the results recall some of the finest chamber music playing of earlier decades. The sense of ensemble is something to marvel at, not just in terms of how well they play together but their collective sound: beautifully balanced and perfect for Brahms, with a burnished, unflashy tone, yet with plenty of attention to detail. Nowhere are big climaxes forced, but they are never short-changed either: there's an amplitude and richness to the sound of this group that is quite remarkable. The veiled, slightly misty mood of the second movement *Intermezzo* of the G minor Quartet is captured to perfection, while the slow movement of the C minor Quartet is heart-rending, the instruments matching each other quite magically. Nothing is overdone, but everything sings and yearns as it should here.

I've listened to this disc quite a few times over the last few weeks and feel more and more that these are among the most engrossing and unobtrusively excellent performances of these works I've ever heard. They certainly merit comparison with the best vintage accounts, among which favourites include the Beaux Arts Trio with Walter Trampler (Philips) or, going further back, the fabled Hollywood Quartet with Victor Aller (Capitol, now Testament). What the Milander Quartet has that makes it so remarkable is something that's very hard to describe but that is also a feature of these great earlier sets: while the individual players are outstanding, what makes the performance

New

so memorable is a quality of collective character and purpose – it's a rare treat, but it's very apparent here. There's a superb feeling for light and shade, inspiring energy in the finale of the G minor, and balance manages to be both warm and rich, lucid and transparent. Again, the first movement of the later C minor Quartet can sound a little over-bearing in less sensitive hands, but here it's ardent and thrilling.

All of this is captured in one of the most beautiful and natural recordings I've ever encountered of a piano quartet: the best way I can describe it is that it's like listening from good seats in a hall with ideal acoustics. I can't praise this disc highly enough – and nor can I wait to hear more from the Milander Quartet. Enhanced by Richard Whitehouse's interesting notes, this is outstanding in every way.

*Nigel Simeone*

## Buxtehude Opera Omnia XII.

New

Chamber Sonatas – C, BuxWV266; D, BuxWV267<sup>a</sup>; D, BuxWV268; F, BuxWV269; G, BuxWV271; A minor, BuxWV272; B flat, BuxWV273; D minor, BuxWVAnh.5.

**Catherine Manson, David Rabinovich** (violins); **Jonathan Manson** (viola da gamba); <sup>a</sup>**Christine Sticher** (violone); **Mike Fentross** (lute); **Ton Koopman** (harpsichord/organ).

**Challenge Classics CC72251** (full price, 59 minutes). Website [www.challenge.nl](http://www.challenge.nl). Producer Tini Mathot. Engineer Adriaan Verstijnen. Date February 2010.

'These ingenious works are worthy of frequent listening', Ton Koopman tells us in his introductory note to this recording of the eight sonatas which were the only Buxtehude chamber works not to be published in his own lifetime. Presumably it was a surfeit of modesty which prevented Koopman from adding that these performances are even worthier of frequent listening. I'm happy to put right that omission and say, unwaveringly, that while the music is certainly absorbing enough, it is the glorious vitality of these six supremely gifted instrumentalists relishing every moment of the music which makes this one of the most eminently listenable discs it's been my pleasure to review.

Buxtehude's posthumous reputation suffers from his having so soon been obscured by the shadow of the later North German Baroque composers and, especially, that of Bach. The fact that the 14 chamber works by Buxtehude which were published in his own lifetime quickly fell out of favour after his death reflects this, but, as Christoph Wolff's excellent booklet notes tell us, these eight sonatas were pretty well doomed from the start because of their variable and unusual scoring, their free structure and their virtuoso demands; they are, we are told, 'among the most