

smetana trio

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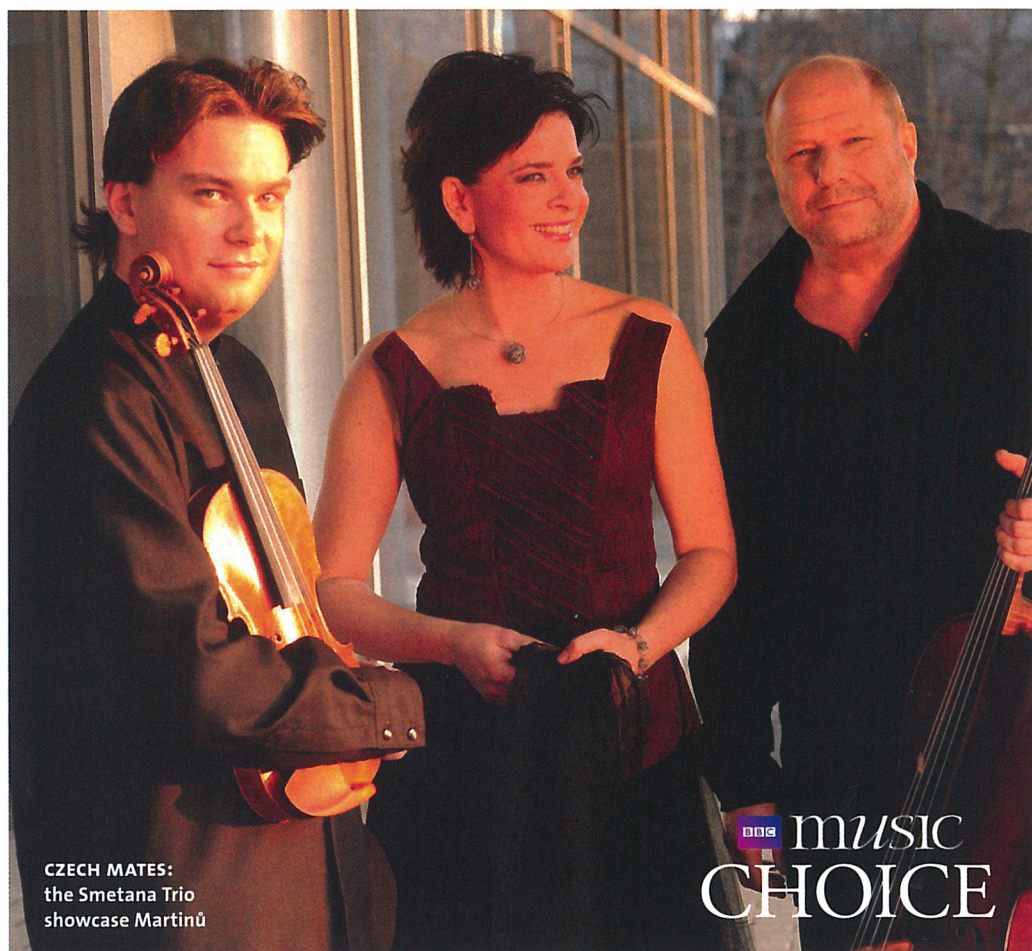
Recording of the Month

It would be hard to find more ardent champions of Martinů's complete piano trios than the Smetana Trio, alive to every mercurial mood and nuance of this still underrated music, p72



TRIUMPHANT TRIO:
the Smetana Trio
revel in Martinů

RECORDING OF THE MONTH



From tragedy to jubilation

The Smetana Trio get to the heart of Martinů's world, says *David Nice*



MARTINŮ

Piano Trios Nos 1-3; Bergerettes
Smetana Trio
Supraphon SU 4197-2 71:30 mins

Viola player Maxim Rysanov's all-Martinů disc was my favourite recording from last year's listening (reviewed August 2015), and it's already obvious that the music for piano trio performed here by the Smetana Trio is going straight on the shortlist for 2016. Martinů's

chamber music reveals originality at every turn; there's so much of it, but each new discovery – sonata, duo, trio, quartet, serenade – seems to unveil a gem. The 20th-century Czech composer's genius is for having so many instantly recognisable musical thumbprints – Moravian syncopated dance-music chief among them – and at the same time being able to take each work in unexpected directions. This is music that never settles, yet somehow feels organic.

The Third Piano Trio of 1951 is the obvious masterpiece here,

and the Smetana Trio were wise to place it first in the programme. Its opening *Allegro moderato* movement is characteristically volatile, with some extraordinary writing for solo piano, and the *Allegro* finale lifts us to heights of manic jubilation; Martinů always was the most bipolar of composers, at least in the extreme

moods which mark his years of exile from his Czech homeland. I would put this whirling C major kaleidoscope up there with the finale of the Second Symphony (1943) for sheer clinching ecstasy, two

It's hard to imagine more ardent champions of Martinů

FURTHER LISTENING

Smetana Trio

SHOSTAKOVICH • RAVEL

Piano Trios Nos 1 & 2 • Piano Trio
Smetana Trio
Supraphon SU 4135-2 68:11 mins



'In No. 1, a youthful work inspired by love, the Smetanas bring out its playful self-awareness yet give the central episode's guileless, almost Arensky-style sweetness its due. The wry and brittle character of No. 2 is compellingly realised.'
July 2014

BRAHMS

The complete trios

Premysl Vojta (french horn), Ludmila Peterková (clarinet); Smetana Trio
Supraphon SU 4072-2 136:55 mins



'Here's an effective antidote to the notion of Brahms as 'all beer and beard'. It isn't often you hear this music played with such delicacy and atmospheric refinement. The Clarinet Trio is a revelation ... deeply poetic and full of late autumnal colours.'
April 2013

DVOŘÁK

Piano Trios Nos 3 & 4

Smetana Trio
Supraphon SU 3872-2 66:54 mins



'The Smetana Trio, excellently recorded, deliver landmark performances of both trios. The developmental intensity of the F minor Trio's first movement has rarely seemed more incandescent or the slow movement more winningly lyrical.' September 2006

of the most convincingly vibrant conclusions to any work.

Tragedy is potentially registered in the central *Andante* of the Third Trio, taking even further many of the depths in the more constantly sombre D minor Trio No. 2 (1950) and the *Adagio* of Trio No. 1 (1930), a relatively long movement among epigrammatic miniatures (the alternative title is *Cinq pièces brèves*). Here in the Third Trio, as elsewhere, the ecstatic cadence which first appeared in the opera *Julietta* and

which derives from Janáček's *Taras Bulba* makes crucial appearances, lifting the heart above all that sadness. It's not fanciful to hear in it Martinů's attempt to bring back the love of his life, composer and conductor Vítězlava Kaprálová, who died tragically young in 1940.

There's plenty of joy in the more straightforward forms of the five *Bergerettes*, written in 1939. Like most of the *scherzos* in Martinů's symphonies, these miniatures have identical outer sections and a more restful trio in the middle. The Smetana Trio, pictured on the CD cover looking chilled and like they might be good fun, really go rustic-wild in the final number, with plenty

of gut and grit – so track five is an excellent one to sample to see if this is to your taste – while pathos and nostalgia tend to be the tone of the middle sequences.

It's hard to imagine more ardent champions for this visceral, unpredictable music. And clear, warm sound is exactly what we've come to expect from the Supraphon label over the years.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★★



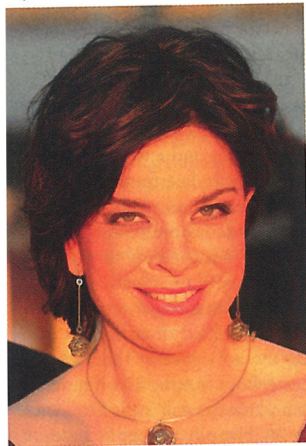
ON THE PODCAST

Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on the **BBC Music Magazine** podcast, available free on iTunes or at www.classical-music.com

Q&A

JITKA CECHOVÁ

The Smetana Trio's pianist tells **REBECCA FRANKS**
why Martinů's music deserves to be heard more widely



Smetana is your trio's namesake; here you are playing Martinů. So it's fair to say you have a strong affinity for Czech music?

I hope so! It's a natural thing. And of course the public wants to hear Czech music from us. The father of our cellist, Jan Páleníček, was the great Czech pianist Josef Páleníček, who founded the Smetana Trio. He studied in Paris under Roussel, who also taught Martinů, and they met there many times. Josef promoted Martinů's music around the world. He also handed over to his son all his ideas and experiences about the interpretation of Martinů's music. This is an important connection.

Martinů is still not as well known as, say, Dvořák: where does his music stand in the repertoire for you?

I think Martinů is starting to receive more focus today, and I hope he will be known even better in the future. His music is so fantastic, colourful and interesting and his repertoire is huge; he wrote 90 chamber compositions for a variety of instruments. Between the first and last trios you can hear a big difference. The First Trio, the *Cinq pièces brèves*, is like an experiment: very complicated, rhythmical and polyphonic. The *Bergerettes* which follow are already a big contrast: they are incredible, mild, simple songs, influenced by pastoral French songs and dances. By the last trio, 20 years later, he's found a more simple way to compose: the melodies and harmonies are very simple. I think it's interesting to see this development.

And what are the benefits of being immersed in his music?

It's always so interesting to explore the complete work of a composer as you can really see the developments and learn about their life. We did the same with Smetana, Brahms and Dvořák. Martinů's music is necessary to play for a little bit longer because it is quite complicated. You have to get to the stage of being able to forget the difficult rhythms and just feel the fantastic music. That's a big pleasure, then. We enjoy his music so much and we hope the public will enjoy it with us.