

Delta Piano Trio - Music of Martin, Dvořák and Mansurian

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A piano trio is perhaps my favorite performing ensemble. And when the performances are as finely crafted as these from the Delta Piano Trio, bliss is near at hand. Add music by Swiss composer Frank Martin, and a recording engineered by Bert van der Wolf, and my expectations are very high. And those expectations are met in this superb release.

Origin, Delta Piano Trio. Challenge Classics | Northstar Recording 2022 (DXD) [HERE](#)

Frank Martin – *Trio sur des mélodies populaires irlandaises* (1925)

Tigran Mansurian – *Five Bagatelles, for violin, cello and piano* (1985)

Antonin Dvořák – *Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor "Dumky"* (1891)

I have long had a fondness for the music of Frank Martin (1890-1974). I simply don't see his music recorded frequently enough.

As I rebuild my music library in digital editions, I was delighted to see this

composition among the works being performed here. Best known for his orchestral works, Martin's chamber music compositions have a particular draw for me. They are typically compact, with a density of expression that I find most attractive. Martin composed his *Trio sur des mélodies populaires irlandaises* upon the request of an Irish-American benefactor to write a work based on Irish folk songs. Martin chose to use the folk melodies intact, in their complete form, but add his own gloss by applying multiple rhythms. As the Delta



Piano Trio explain, "It's a complex, mature and multi-layered score. Every time we worked on the piece, we heard something new in it." They perform it with panache, in full fun and enjoyment—it is simply a delight to hear in their hands.

The Armenian composer Tigran Mansurian (b. 1939) is not well known to me. It is a pleasure to hear more of his music with this recording of his *Five Bagatelles* (1985). Each bagatelle is unique, each a jewel-like window onto a world full of further possibilities. "Mansurian is always looking for a particular truth in his music," according to the Delta Piano Trio, who have worked with him extensively. "There is not a single spare note in his music, which gives every note even more meaning." His music is modern, but largely tonal. While these are called "bagatelles" there is nothing light and fluffy about them. They hold depths that unfold intriguingly for the thoughtful listener.

When I was much younger, Dvořák's Dumky Trio was one of my favorite works. I am older now, and...

And, yes, I still love it. This is perhaps the most famous piano trio in the literature. Deservedly so, in my opinion. Dvořák bases this work in the Dumka, a genre of Slavic epic folk ballads generally thoughtful or melancholic in nature. In Dvořák's hands, the music makes sudden changes from melancholy to exuberance. There are six movements, each of which is a Dumka. Each tells a story.

Wikipedia quotes music critic Daniel Felsenfeld writing: "Being completely free of the rigors of sonata form gave Dvořák license to take the movements to some dizzying, heavy, places, able to be both brooding and yet somehow, through it all, a little lighthearted." [HERE](#)

The Delta capture all of this very nicely in their performance. The music broods, it dances, it leaps exuberantly—all in the space of moments. Just like the best performances of this work that I've heard, this performance has emotional depth, perfect ensemble, brilliant transitions. I give the Delta Piano Trio high praise for this performance. They've earned it.

So, what ties these three works by Martin, Mansurian and Dvořák together? Why the title Origin? The liner notes by Simone Leuven capture this quite well:

"Quite often, a work becomes a journey of discovery towards a certain origin, translated into sound; a quotation from a folk song can embody the spirit of a country; a meditative harmony can unveil the key questions of existence and the rhythms of a folk dance can unearth the roots of a culture. Martin, Mansurian and Dvořák composed three such colourful works for piano trio—voyages of discovery taken here by the Delta Piano Trio through scintillating sound worlds."



Recording session, 23-25 August 2021, in MCO-1, Muziekcentrum van de Omroep, Hilversum, the Netherlands

The MCO-1 is an excellent recording hall and we've had many outstanding recordings from this hall on various labels. Recording engineer Bert van der Wolf is working here at his usual exceptionally high level of quality, obtaining a result that sounds utterly natural, highly detailed, and completely transparent. As always, he allows the instruments to reverberate with the natural acoustic of the hall by standing his microphones off a bit for a nice balance of direct and reverberant sound. The clarity that he obtains, and the wonderful balance of direct and reflected sound, is simply a delight to hear. I could say the same of virtually every recording I've heard from him.

Highly Recommended.

Photos courtesy of Bert van der Wolf and Northstar Recording.