

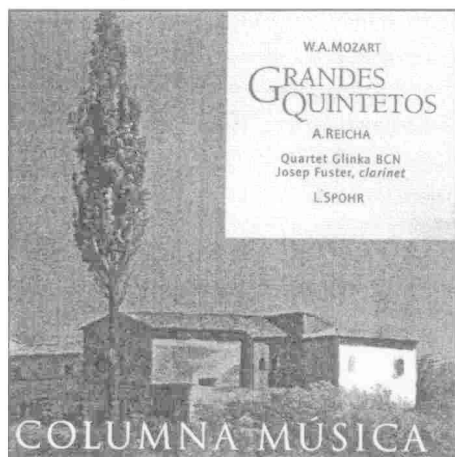
The Clarinet

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CD REVIEWS

by Armand Ferland

Grandes Quintetos. Josep Fuster, clarinet; Quartet Glinka BCN: Anton Reicha: *Clarinet Quintet in B^b Major*; Louis Spohr: *Fantasia and Variations on a Theme by Danzi*, Op. 81; W. A. Mozart: *Clarinet Quintet in A Major*, K. 581. COLUMNA MÚSICA (no catalog number). Total time 70:45. (no U. S. distributor; e-mail: <columnmusica@canal21.com> or at: Circumval lació 8, 08790 Gelida [Barcelona], Spain)



Regardless of Anton Reicha's substantial creative output of operas, symphonies and other full-scale compositions, he is remembered mostly for his theoretical and didactic works. As a composer, his present-day reputation rests mainly on his chamber music for various wind instrument combinations, especially his 24 woodwind quintets. Surprisingly, he wrote only one quintet for clarinet and strings, but it ranks amongst his finest works and deserves to be more widely heard — especially if played by someone as talented as Josep Fuster, the Catalan clarinetist featured on this disc. Fuster plays Reicha in such a natural and tasteful style that one may be led to consider his interpretation as definitive (though the term "definitive" does not really apply to music). He is a nonsense musician who plays the music as written, but with great sensitivity and feeling. His performance is impeccable from a technical standpoint, but beauty of tone

and elegant phrasing happily take precedence over technical display.

Louis Spohr's *Fantasia* was composed a scant six or seven years after Reicha's *Quintet*; yet the two works differ substantially in style and musical content. Indeed the *Fantasia*, very dramatic at the onset, is written in the flamboyant style so typical of the composer's violin (and clarinet) concerti. The work also abounds in rapid scales and roulades, covers the entire compass of the clarinet (like Spohr's other works for this instrument), and contains difficult harp-like arpeggio passages for the solo instrument. Of course, it is in this piece that Josep Fuster's virtuosity can better be appreciated. The music simply flows, effortlessly, beautifully. The Glinka String Quartet's fine playing is on par with that of the soloist, in this as well as in the two other pieces included on the disc. Incidentally, Fuster plays on Klosé-system instruments.

Seemingly it was just yesterday when the only available classical music recordings featuring the clarinet were Mozart's *Concerto* (with Reginald Kell) and the *Quintet*, K. 581 (with Benny Goodman). Fortunately, the enormous quantity of present-day CDs makes it possible for us to hear artists from all over the world performing an ever-increasing repertory of traditional and contemporary compositions. Without global record distribution, many fine musicians such as clarinetist Josep Fuster would remain relatively unknown and, of course, we would be unable to appreciate his version of Mozart's *Clarinet Quintet*. In this case, one should not decry the release of yet another version of Mozart's masterpiece; simply because this umpteenth version happens to be a good one. Indeed, the "uniqueness" of each performance of a given work — provided that aesthetic criteria are also met — gives music lovers the possibility of enjoying various interpretations of their favorite compositions. The Fuster version of Mozart is commendable both for its interpretative and sound recording qualities. Many will appreciate the calm and serene feeling conveyed in the opening movement, but also the superb, awe-inspiring performance of the entire work. Evidently, the players have a kindred feeling for the composer, dispelling all possibility of unsettling the precarious and exquisite proportions of Mozart's music.

There are no surprises in this CD, only beautiful music, admirably performed in

traditional fashion. The recorded sound is excellent throughout except for a slight lack of presence in the strings compared to that of the clarinet. This disc should be enjoyed by any lover of the clarinet and chamber music, if only to hear Spanish clarinetist Josep Fuster's glorious tone and legato phrasing.