

POST *Concertino á Cinque* for Clarinet and String Quartet¹. Piano Quintet for Piano and String Quartet² • ¹Ludmila Peterková (cl); ²Jan Dušek (pn); Martinů Q • BRIDGE 9576 (55:13)

A new release from Bridge Records spotlights two superb chamber works by American composer David Post. First is the *Concertino á Cinque* for Clarinet and String Quartet (2010). In his concise, eloquent, and informative liner notes, Post pays tribute to the Clarinet Quintets of Mozart and Brahms, “the towering giants, the touchstones in the group. They are each profound, cut-to-the-bone utterances, not coincidentally written very late in each composer’s life. In them, I hear a summing up of a life’s work and a letting go, a farewell.” There is no question that Brahms had faced the specter of his mortality, and even vowed to give up composing, prior to meeting Richard Mühlfeld, the inspiration for his Clarinet Quintet (1891). It’s more debatable whether Mozart was ready and willing to say farewell when he composed the Clarinet Quintet in 1791, the final year of his tragically brief life. But both the Brahms and Mozart Clarinet Quintets are beautiful, expressive works that radiate an autumnal glow. In his *Concertino á Cinque*, Post wrote “a completely different type of piece.” It is a three-movement “rather light mini-concerto, but one in which all five instruments, at various points, have a soloist role.” Nonetheless, the clarinet is the primary focus of the *Concertino*. Set in the traditional three-movement structure, the *Concertino á Cinque* offers music brimming with melody, energy, and optimism, all couched in lovely, transparent instrumentation. The work has a decidedly neoclassic bent, with a healthy and invigorating dose of jazz throughout. The instrumental writing abounds with virtuoso opportunities, especially for the clarinet. I think Bohuslav Martinů, who provides the name for the participating Martinů Quartet, would have approved.

Post composed his Piano Quintet (2007) for pianist Simone Dinnerstein and the Hawthorne Quartet, who premiered the work at Bard College/Simon’s Rock in 2008. Here, Post turns to the music of three Jewish composers who were imprisoned in the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp, and murdered by the Nazis; Gideon Klein, Pavel Haas, and Viktor Ullmann. Each of the movements is respectively dedicated to these composers, and incorporates works by them, “to show how their powerful musical ideas have living seeds that can grow in new, transforming directions.” *For Gideon Klein (Moderato assai)* opens with a quotation from Klein’s Piano Sonata, the basis for the entire movement. *For Pavel Haas (Adagio Quasi Andante)* references the final movement of that composer’s Woodwind Quintet, op. 10. The finale, *For Viktor Ullmann (Allegro)*, incorporates the Death and the Harlequin duet from that composer’s opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*. In contrast to the *Concertino á Cinque*, the Piano Quintet, by its very nature and source material, explores a far more intense and severe emotional landscape. And with the substitution of piano for clarinet, the instrumental sonorities are denser, bordering on orchestral. Nonetheless, Post once again writes with the utmost clarity and transparency. The work explores a Mahlerian juxtaposition of moods and instrumental colors, often incorporating what the composer describes as “a wistful nostalgia of an era rapidly receding into its past.” I found it a profoundly moving experience.

Post describes the performances on this Bridge release as coming “as close to ideal as any composer could wish for.” I certainly understand his reaction. Clarinetist Ludmila Peterková gives a virtuoso performance in every respect; technical mastery is

wedded to a rich, singing tone, and a hearty embrace of the *Concertino*'s diverse qualities. Pianist Jan Dušek is both fervent and incisive in the Quintet. The Martinů Quartet is a model of tonal beauty, textural clarity and balance, and arresting fervor. The recorded sound is superb. A marvelous disc.

Ken Meltzer

Five stars: Marvelous chamber works by David Post