



## R STRAUSS

Piano Trios Nos 1–2; Serenade in G; Festival March in D; Two Pieces for Piano Quartet; Concertante

Max Mandel *va*; Amelia Piano Trio  
Naxos 8570896

★★★★☆

Most of this stuff is very, very early Richard Strauss indeed, and only an obsessive-compulsive hoarder of boxed sets is likely to have found the material on other labels. The pieces here were composed with family occasions in mind: a testament not just to Strauss's own good musical genes, but to the central role which domestic performance then played in Germanic middle-class households.

Strauss's First Piano Trio is a pretty staggering achievement for a 13-year-old. Naxos's booklet note cites Mozart and Beethoven as the clearest influences on the writing, but Mendelssohn proves at least as evident (the second movement could be a hitherto undiscovered *Song Without Words*). A year later, in 1878, Strauss produced the Second Piano Trio: almost 27 minutes long, and even more technically assured than the First, with hints of Saint-Saëns. The tiny, four-minute *Serenade* reveals Strauss's love of Brahms, while the ghost of Schubert beams kindly over the somewhat longer March. Both the Two Pieces for Piano Quartet are mature works dating from 1893; the first and incomparably more striking is a proto-minimalist *Arabic Dance*, almost Bartókian in style.

Nothing here suggests the genius behind *Heldenleben*, let alone *Salome*, but the sheer rarity of pointers to the future increases the CD's charm and interest. Performances throughout are robust and uniformly convincing, as is the recorded sound, except for occasional intimations of unduly harsh piano tone.

**RJ Stove**

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