

Fanfare: Trios From the City of Big Shoulders

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It is a perfectly fine impulse to express one's civic pride. In this case, we have music from a pair of Chicago-born composers, performed by a Chicago-based ensemble and produced by a Chicago label. All good, but there is nothing, to my ears, in the music that reflects the wonderfully swaggering gusto of the city of big shoulders. If anything, both composers, as represented by these trios, write in an elegant, approachable style that feels rather old-fashioned—even, dare I say it, European.

Ernst Bacon is a new name for me. This trio was written late in very long career, in 1987, when he was 89 (he lived to the age of 91). The seven movements display a nice variety of moods and dynamic levels, beginning with a lyrical *lento* and concluding with a jaunty *vivace*. A very pleasing feature of Bacon's writing is his ability to pass the thematic material fluidly from soloist to soloist, almost in the manner of a modern jazz combo, but much more seamlessly. This is a fine, beautifully structured work, which deserves greater attention. This is a world premiere recording.

Bacon, though born and raised in Chicago, had a peripatetic career, with stints in San Francisco, the American South, and the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. Leo Sowerby, on the other hand, largely stayed in the Windy City, excepting a late in life stint at the National Cathedral in Washington. This trio is an early work, written for the then nascent Berkshire Music Festival in 1919, shortly after Sowerby returned from his service as an American soldier in World War I. Sowerby was a traditional tonalist for all of his career, but it may be possible to discern some of the winds of change that were starting to sweep across the artistic landscape in those heady days, particularly in the dark opening movement, marked *Slow* and *solemn*, which conveys something of an Expressionistic flavor. The middle movement starts out in a lighter mood, as a lovely, soaring, if still melancholy melody line appears on the violin. A rumbling piano pulls the music back to the shadows, then lifts it up again, a pattern that repeats itself throughout this section. This push/pull dynamic appears again in the final movement, but with greater energy and speed.

The Lincoln Trio, consisting of violinist Desirée Ruhstrat, cellist David Cunliffe, and pianist Marta Aznavoorian, plays magnificently, with a remarkable combination of delicate interplay and robust tone. They are fine champions for this unduly neglected music.