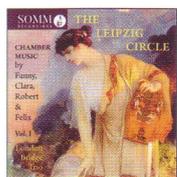


*Lobet Gott in sennen Reichen* ('Praise our God', also termed the Ascension Oratorio) is a fine example of immediate post-war baroque performance. Contrary to a review in *The Gramophone*, this was not the first complete issue of a Bach cantata, as Lionel Salter claimed: in Spain in 1930, Cantata 4, *Christ lag in Totesbanden*, was recorded complete (in Catalanian!). The transfers on this new SOMM release are good and this most valuable issue is strongly recommended.

**Robert Matthew-Walker**



**The Leipzig Circle – Vol I: Fanny Mendelssohn: Piano Trio in D minor Op 11/ Clara Schumann: Three Romances Op 22/ Felix Mendelssohn: Song Without Words for cello and piano Op 109/ Robert Schumann: Piano Trio No 1 in D minor Op 62**

**The London Bridge Trio**  
★★★★★ SOMM CD0199 [78']

A fascinating disc, full of much musical interest, and very well played by these gifted young artists. All the music is worth getting to know and much will doubtless be unfamiliar even to lovers of music from the mid-1850s. Fanny Mendelssohn's Trio (her last major work) is a masterpiece: one may comment similarly on each item, but such is the worth of the repertoire that the enquiring music-lover is advised to acquire this CD and explore the music it contains urgently.

**James Palmer**



**Schumann: Arabesque in C major, Op 18. Fantasie in C major, Op 17. Papillons, Op 2.**

**Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op 26**  
**Joseph Tong (pf)**  
★★★★★ Quartz QTZ 2134  
[75 minutes]

There have been a number of rather fine Schumann recordings of late (of Robert, rather than double centenarian Clara), of which the best has been to my mind

Sarah Beth Briggs marvellous coupling of *Papillons* and *Kinderszenen* with Brahms' Opp 117-8. Until now.

Briggs' disc surprisingly divided critical opinion, so I hope this newcomer, devoted wholly to the Schumann of the 1830s, receives the unanimous accolades it deserves because, as with Briggs, this is Schumann playing of the highest order. Right from the outset of the relatively brief *Arabesque*, Tong reveals himself to be as sympathetic an interpreter of Schumann as he was of Sibelius in his previous two releases.

The larger works are where the main joys of this disc reside. The *Fantasie in C* is one of the peaks of Schumann's piano works and Tong gets to the heart of the sense of separation in the opening span, originally penned in 1836 as an expression of dismay at being separated from Clara. It is built from the five-notes 'Clara motto' and allusions to (sublimations of) Beethoven's *An die ferne geliebte* (with its similar sense of passionate loss), and this synthesis of the Beethovenian and the Clara-focussed are carried through the subsequent movements, written with the intention of raising funds for the Beethoven monument on Bonn. Tong navigates his way through the virtuosic demands of the more volatile passages of the central span with consummate skill, but it is playing of the softer, calmer conclusion that is really special.

That feeling for the quieter, more inward-looking aspects of the music – not just playing to the gallery – also marks out his beautifully nuanced account of *Papillons*, treating each one of the twelve miniatures as an independent masterpiece and yet melding them together as a coherent whole. The vigour and conviviality of his playing unite in that subtle and awkward suite, *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, to perfectly judged effect. Simply marvellous.

**Guy Rickards**



**Gudmundsen-Holmgreen: String Quartets Nos 1-6**  
**Nordic String Quartet**  
★★★★★ Dacapo  
8.226217  
[63 minutes]

The late, great Pelle Gudmundsen-Holm-

green (1932-2016) composed fourteen string quartets between 1959, when he was in his mid-to-late twenties, and 2013 – three years before his death. The Nordic Quartet has undertaken to record them all for Dacapo and on this first volume the first six are presented. The first three date from 1959; these are cunningly interwoven with the next three to form a very satisfying musical, but not chronological, sequence: opening with the onrush of energy with which No 5, *Step by Step* (1982-6, rev 2003) begins and progressing via Nos 1, 6, 3 and 4 to the more traditional yet concentrated layout of No 2, *Quartetto Facile* (1959), with its hints of Bartók.

This presentation of the six works highlights the variety of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's response to the quartet medium above all, showing that even on the evidence of these first six he was a quartet writer of considerable gifts and innate understanding. This is evident in the compressed single movement of No 1, which as Steen Pade states in his informative booklet note, is concerned "with the harmonic implications of a twelve-note row", stated in the opening viola solo. The spikier textures of the *Quartetto Facile* are about as different as one might imagine, such that these two might be considered two sides of the same coin. The Third Quartet – also from 1959 – is a set of Five Small Studies the scale of which (together lasting under four-and-a-half minutes, the smallest of all the six here) might make one think of Webern but the internal thinking moves on different lines. The Fourth Quartet is another concentrated single-movement design, written in 1967 and a study in calm inspired by the chirping of cicadas heard while "dozing off" in Greece! The end result is as mesmeric, though not soporific.

The Fifth and Sixth Quartets were, like Nos 1-3, composed in close proximity, even overlap, the Sixth – written in 1983 while No 5 was still unfinished – bearing the subtitle *Parting*. The title and the music do remind me a touch of the composer's great contemporary and compatriot Per Nørgård, no mean composer of quartets in his own right. These are the two longest quartets on the disc (here running to 18' 52" and 12' 46" respectively) and by far the most complex. *Step by Step* (No 5) is a true masterpiece that should be much more widely known,