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Bernhard MOLIQUE (1802-1869)

Chamber Music - Volume 2

Quintet in D major for flute, violin, violas and cello [28:32]

Introduction, Andante and Polonaise in D major for flute and piano, Op. 43 [13:25]

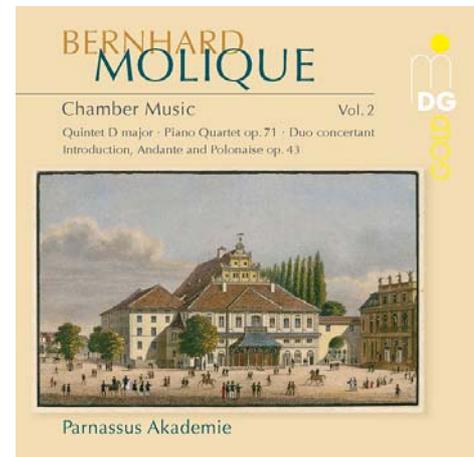
Duo concertant in G major for flute and violin [12:13]

Quartet in E flat major for violin, viola, cello and piano, Op. 71 [18:01]

Parnassus Akademie

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MDG 303 2132-2 [72:12]



The first volume of Molique's chamber music featured his two piano trios, and was the subject of a MWI review back in April. Volume Two has now appeared where the emphasis has shifted to a combination of two works for larger ensembles, and two for duos.

Most CD booklets follow the familiar and well-tried approach, which begins with biographical details of the composer(s), followed by a description/analysis of each work recorded. However, German label MDG continues with the format it followed in Volume One, which in the case of Volume Two begins with a discussion between Parnassus Akademie cellist Michael Groß, and musicologist and music journalist Rafael Rennieke, who was responsible for producing the current booklet, and Volume One's. This is then followed by a shorter biography of the composer.

It was comforting to read in Jonathan Woolf's review of Volume One, that he found the booklet's initial 'conversation' approach very 'twee' even if it did disseminate a fair amount of information about the composer and his music. I am very much of the same opinion here, and much prefer to see individual works, the titles of which are normally shown in bold, where it's so much easier to find specific information, without having to wade through a few pages of chit-chat.

Wilhelm Bernhard Molique was born in Nuremberg, Bavaria, where his father was a musician. As a boy, Molique studied various instruments, but finally devoted himself to the violin, receiving some lessons from Louis Spohr in 1815. As a composer, though, Molique was unapologetically self-taught, while his music essentially combines the influences of Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and, unsurprisingly, Spohr himself.

Volume Two opens with quite a rarity in chamber-music terms. Molique has effectively written a string quintet, but replaced the first violin with a flute. The hushed opening at the start of the Allegro, where the cello introduces the opening theme is quite a magical moment, even if, momentarily, it tends to make you want to check you have set a sufficient volume level. When the flute first enters, the music turns into the tonic minor, which again produces a special effect before the major key resumes. The ensuing Scherzo, in the tonic minor, has a real Mendelssohnian feel to it, followed by a more relaxed trio in the major, which features some particularly agile playing from the flute. The Andante is full of simple, unaffected lyricism in the outer sections, which really makes a direct appeal to the listener, while the middle section does become more agitated and somewhat more impassioned – 'it captures the air of a serenade', as Rafael Rennieke says. The finale is a jolly Rondo, which opens with a catchy tune on the flute, setting the scene for the remainder of this charming little movement, and provides the perfect conclusion to all that has gone before it so far.

The Introduction, Andante and Polonaise for flute and piano also has a hushed opening, leading initially into an expressive melody in the minor key from the flute with some delicate interplay from the piano. This is followed by the piano's announcement of the Andante theme, which is very suggestive of Mendelssohn, both in terms of melody and harmony, and in the delightful filigree decorations subsequently added by the flute. The music becomes somewhat more impassioned as it moves towards the transition to the Polonaise, by means of an extended dominant pedal. The Polonaise has all the hallmarks of any that might have come from the pen of Weber or Hummel at the time. The flute's part is highly virtuosic, while the piano's role is somewhat more by way of support, even if some of the flute part's virtuosity tends to boil over into the piano part at times. Just towards the end of the Polonaise, Molique uses the familiar trick of a short chromatic side-step – Beethoven did similarly in his *Emperor* Piano Concerto, as did Chopin in his First Concerto – just rescuing the home key almost at the last minute. In the hands of two such talented players as here, this pure piece of salon music would make a delightfully light and frothy addition to any concert programme – thoroughly enjoyable.

In the *Duo concertant* for flute and violin, Molique quotes a theme from the finale of Act Three of Weber's opera *Der Freischütz*, and follows this with an entertaining set of variations. As with the previous work, virtuosity is very much the order of the day here, and the work was no doubt written with a view to the composer performing it together with an equally accomplished flautist. Contemporary sources refer to Molique as 'the greatest Violin Virtuoso in all of Germany'. Again there is a rather plaintive short introduction in the minor key that leads in to the theme itself – a Tyrolean *Ländler* that follows a very simple harmonic pattern of alternating tonic and dominant chords, which largely remains intact for the first part of the variations. A second section follows, where some melodic changes are made, as well as adding a more complex rhythmic interplay between the two instruments. This leads to a third section which reflects the original spirit at the start of the variations, with a little added folk-dance influence at times, before a fairly abrupt ascending scale from the flute ends the work – another interesting candidate for any aspiring flute and violin duo, though the work didn't really grab my attention the whole time, whereas the previous work certainly did.

The Piano Quartet, Op. 71, is the last piece on the CD, and was actually published in 1870, a year after the composer's death. It is cast in just three movements and opens quite serenely, again with distinct shades of Mendelssohn. It becomes more agitated as it progresses, until the recapitulation is reached, and calm of the opening briefly returns. The piano is given some lovely embellishing filigree patterns along the way, before the movement reaches its lively, though in no way overstated conclusion. The slow movement, marked Andante, could easily pass as a Mendelssohn 'Song without Words', though where Mendelssohn's writing can sometimes come over as saccharine, Molique's adds little elements of pure German Romanticism to the mix – with shades of composers like Lachner, Kirchner, or Burgmüller, and all suffused with the spirit of Schumann. The finale is a jaunty rondo in 6/8 time, begun by the piano, and while Mendelssohn is never that far away, the writing also looks back quite significantly in the direction of Hummel (1778-1837), particularly in terms of the piano-writing. The closing bars are decidedly business-like, but still bring this attractive rondo, and the quartet itself to an effective close.

Whenever possible, I always choose to review unfamiliar repertoire, especially from the late-Classical Period through to the end of the Romantic Era. In doing so, I have heard a good number of works that 'deserve to be better known', 'don't deserve their current neglect', or that their respective composers 'need to be afforded the same musical prominence in the twenty-first century, as perhaps they enjoyed a few hundred years back'. In a number of cases, this kind of claim – very often promulgated by a seemingly over-enthusiastic record company, or the writer of the CD booklet – has nevertheless unearthed some forgotten works and composers which were genuinely felt deserving of resurrecting and promoting.

The release of Molique's first chamber-music CD, and the plaudits and acclaim it has received, hasn't, of course, escaped the notice of online retailers and advertisers, hoping to encourage listeners to consider the present Volume Two on the back of Volume One's success.



I have yet to have the pleasure of hearing Volume One, but how I would seek to sum up Volume Two, is very much in the same spirit of what was written about the first CD. It's not going to set the world alight, but it is still exceedingly good music that ticks all the boxes. It's abundantly melodious, still has an immediate appeal today, but without being obliged to pander to the lowest denominator. It is extremely well put together, and has more than sufficient virtuosity to provide an interesting, yet totally worthwhile challenge.

The recording is absolutely first class, and each member of Parnassus Akademie has combined perfectly, to achieve such a flawless ensemble. By virtue of the works recorded, a special mention must go to flautist Helen Dabringhaus, violinist Julia Galić, pianist Kerstin Mörk, and cellist Michael Groß for their superb playing, as well as to Paul Pesthy and Bertram Jung (violas) for their equally sterling support. They clearly all enjoyed every note they played, which is really what it's all about, and so vividly communicated to the listener via this recording.

This was my first encounter with Wilhelm Bernhard Molique, and I was so very glad to have made his musical acquaintance. His Chamber Music Volume Two is a highly engaging disc, with an appeal that is not only immediate, but wide-ranging. Do keep up the good work, Herr Groß.

Philip R Buttall