

The Sun

Julian Bliss (clarinet)

Sabine Meyer (clarinet)

Concerto for Two Clarinets, Franz Krommer

Concerto No.2, No.4, Louis Spohr

St.Martin-in-the-Fields, Kenneth Sillito

As you may in these pages, this is a good age for clarinetists, and one of the leaders of the pack is Sabine Meyer. She is the German musician who made worldwide news 25 years ago when she became the first female member of the Berlin Philharmonic. (Some of the boys didn't take it so well.) But she has long since been a soloist, setting a standard wherever she goes.

On her latest disc, she has a partner: another clarinetist, Julian Bliss. Who's he? He is an English teenager — b. 1989 — and a student of Ms. Meyer's. He is one of the great phenomenons on the musical scene today. And there is something touching about a disc shared between a teacher and a student now matured.

The disc (from EMI Classics) offers three concertos by two composers: Franz Krommer and Louis Spohr. Krommer was a Moravian-born composer (1759–1831) whose Op. 91 is a concerto in E flat for two clarinets. It's a cool piece, too: sprightly, stylish, and even somewhat jazzy. If you can keep from smiling during the final movement — Alla polacca — you're having a bad day indeed. And Ms. Meyer and her charge play the concerto splendidly. They are spiffy, smooth, and complementary. They exhibit notable musicality, doing nothing even hinting of the vulgar, dim, or clumsy. And similar praise goes to the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, directed by Kenneth Sillito. The orchestra is crisp and engaged, without ever lapsing into "period practice" (thank goodness).

Then we have two concertos — for solo clarinet — by Spohr (1784–1859). Spohr is a mainstay

of the clarinet, along with Weber, Bernhard Henrik Crusell (1775–1838), and a few others. Ms. Meyer plays Spohr's Concerto No. 4 in E minor, and Mr. Bliss plays his Concerto No. 2 in E flat. Thus is equal time observed.

About Ms. Meyer, there is little more to be said, after all these years: She is simply a musical and technical paragon. Her student is no slouch either, different from her — in tone, for example — but admirable on his own terms.

Yes, this is a fine age for clarinetists, given David Shifrin, Ricardo Morales, Martin Fröst, Jose Franch-Ballester, and several others. By the way, EMI's CD booklet includes no information whatsoever about Ms. Meyer and Mr. Bliss (although there's plenty of information about Krommer and Spohr). I find this baffling. It can't be in the interest of the company, and it's certainly not in the interest of the buyer/listener.

By Jay Nordlinger

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