

CD Review by Phillip Scott

VILLA-LOBOS Piano Trios: No. 1; No. 2; No. 3.

FERNÂNDEZ *Trio Brasileiro* • Damocles Trio • CLAVES 50-2916/17 (2 CDs: 114:19)

3 Trios With Piano

Audio CD

Here is a set for the Villa-Lobos completist. All three of the composer's piano trios are early works, written in Rio de Janeiro prior to the composer's relocation to Paris in 1923. As Etienne Barilier's astute note points out, Villa-Lobos tended to write in European forms for the local elite, but his music became more Brazilian, and therefore "exotic," when he needed to impress French musical circles. There is also no doubt that geographical distance made him more aware of his native roots.

The earliest of the trios dates from 1911, and the relatively undigested influences include Brahms and Tchaikovsky. The second (1915) is more French, at times recalling Fauré, while the third and longest (at almost 40 minutes) shows the dense, melody-filled Villa-Lobos sound reaching maturity.

In spite of the vast amount of solo piano music he wrote, Villa-Lobos was not as comfortable with that particular instrument as with others (such as the cello and guitar, both of which he played). In genres where he wished to make a significant contribution, his piano parts can sometimes seem overwritten and inflated. This certainly applies to the five piano concertos, and also to some extent to these piano trios. (In comparison, his series of string quartets is a far superior addition to the chamber-music repertoire.) Having said that, the Juilliard-trained Damocles Trio makes a compelling case for this music. Violinist Airi Yoshioka and cellist Sibylle Johner understand that the composer's melodic lines need to sing, while pianist Adam Kent lightens the texture wherever possible and points rhythms to emphasize the music's unflagging energy.

The imaginative coupling is a piano trio by Villa-Lobos's younger contemporary Lorenzo Fernández (1897–1948). His *Trio Brasileiro* is a more straightforward rendering of Brazilian rhythms and folk tunes into the piano trio format, lacking Villa-Lobos's contrapuntal development but more open in texture. A welcome contrast, it is a delightful work that ought to be better known. Once again, these first-rate musicians give us a highly accomplished and sympathetic performance. Sound is excellent. Highly recommended. **Phillip Scott**

This article originally appeared in Issue 34:3 (Jan/Feb 2011) of *Fanfare Magazine*.