

GRAMOPHONE

TCHAIKOVSKY; SMETANA *Piano Trios*

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Among these piano trios' defining features, optimism does not loom high. Smetana's mourns his eldest daughter Bedřiška, who had just died, aged four, from scarlet fever, while Tchaikovsky's was written 'in memory of a great artist', his friend and teacher Nikolay Rubinstein. But Trio Con Brio Copenhagen never overplay the 'tragedy' card. Their hallmarks are vitality and an ability to let in every chink of light, both of which serve them well in Tchaikovsky's A minor Trio, Op 15. They come to the fore in the first few tracks of the Tema con variazioni and the beginning of tr 7, where pianist Jens Elvekjaer comes into his own; not even Trio Wanderer or the Gould Trio boast such pixie-fingered soloists. It's all the more striking, then, when the players do give way to grief and anguish. They do it unreservedly, with a thrust that highlights the work's monumental design. They do it as though for the first time, befitting the spontaneity of Tchaikovsky's language. What they don't always do is pay enough attention to textural clarity and balance. Ensembles such as the Gould have a better grasp of that. In Smetana's G minor Trio, Op 15, however, no such issues persist. This is an excellent performance all round, showcasing an airtight ensemble, but also these Danish-based musicians' flair for colouristic detail. They are consistently compelling, whether in the howling opening statement, the tender dips into lyricism or the tightly coiled whirring that constitutes the Scherzo. And even if the Dvořák Trio outmatches them in terms of emotional amplitude, any group would be hard-pressed to imitate this blend of verve and poise.