

'Perspectives'

Högberg Double Bass Concerto, 'Hitting the First Base'^a **Kurtág** Aus der Ferne III **Lutosławski** Funeral Music **Pärt** Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten **Webern** Fünf Sätze, Op 5

^a**Dan Styffe** *db*

Tromsø Chamber Orchestra / Kolbjørn Holthe *vn*

Simax © PSC1302 (54' • DDD)



Seminal works from the orchestra of Arctic Tromsø

Norway's only full-time professional chamber orchestra is heard to advantage on this disc largely devoted to 20th-century classics for strings. Framing the recital are breakthrough works from Webern and Lutosławski: the former's *Five Movements* (1909) leavens its atonal abrasiveness with a raptly inward expression to which this account does full justice, while the latter's *Funeral Music* (1958) combines serial elements with a homage to Bartók whose explosive climax is given context by the implacable accumulation then dispersal of activity on either side. At the centre is Kurtág's *Aus der Ferne III* (1991), a compact yet potent distillation of motifs that typifies the 'less is more' ethos of his maturity, while before this comes Pärt's *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten* (1977), whose decelerating cascades of string harmonies and hieratic bells recall a time when minimalism ('holy' or otherwise) was as uncompromising as any modernist aesthetic.

All of which might seem a tough act for Fredrik Högberg's *Hitting the First Base* (2008) to measure up against but this concerto for double bass – with its fanciful section headings and breezily anarchic interplay between soloist, the redoubtable Dan Styffe, and strings – only marginally outstays its welcome through to the speculative sequence of cadenza-like gestures and nonchalant final pay-off. One of several fine Nordic string works might have widened the scope of the programme accordingly although, with its cleanly astringent sound and extensive annotations, this is a release whose perspective on the Tromsø Chamber Orchestra is both enlightening and impressive.

Richard Whitehouse