

Chamber Reviews

Debussy • Kernis

Debussy: String Quartet;
Kernis: String Quartet No. 3 (River)
Jasper Quartet

Sono Luminis DSL-92233 62:35 mins



This has been some time coming. Released in 2011 and 2012, the first two volumes of

the Jasper String Quartet's 'Kernis Project' paired Aaron Jay Kernis's existing string quartets respectively with Schubert and Beethoven. The Jaspers subsequently commissioned Kernis's third String Quartet, giving the first performance in 2015. They wisely resisted the temptation to dash into the studio, taking time to live with a piece that is more complex than its predecessors. Whereas those previous works owed much to earlier music, such as Renaissance and Baroque dance forms or Beethovenian fugal writing, the five movements of the third Quartet create more of a stream-of-consciousness, expressionist experience.

The character aptly reflects the Quartet's subtitle, 'River', which relates obliquely to Romain Rolland's novel *Jean Christophe*, a French story of a composer's life. From the winding and yearning opening cello solo, this searches deeper within the teeming invention of his material than is sometimes the case in Kernis's music. There is still plenty of lyricism, but also a sense of grit in the oyster resulting in some striking moments and one of his most compelling pieces to date.

The partner on this occasion is Debussy's String Quartet, an apt choice for there is a certain kinship of wistful utterance, especially between Kernis's 'Cavatina' and the Frenchman's slow movement. This is a strong performance, the Jaspers being vibrantly sonorous in the second movement's pizzicatos and wonderfully controlled in the slow movement. An intriguing series that will hopefully encompass Kernis's recent Fourth Quartet in due course.

Christopher Dingle

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★