



Mozart

Serenade in B flat major, K.361 'Gran Partita'

Stuttgart Winds

Recorded in October 2012

Producer and Recording Engineer: Andreas Spreer

Tacet 180gm vinyl: TACET L209

Performance: 4/5

Mozart's Gran Partita lasts almost fifty minutes when - as here - all the repeats are observed; rather fortunately the length of its movements means it also fits perfectly onto an LP. There is some initial confusion about the number of French horns used in this performance; an album photo shows three, but the sleeve lists four players, while one's ears and the score say there are two; along with pairs of bassoons, oboes, clarinets, basset horns and a double bass. The performance is solidly central European, in that the players produce a rounded, weighty, elegant sound, avoid extreme tempi and often create a seamless legato. In essence this is highly sophisticated, urbane, relaxed music-making, of a type and style that is - alas - almost defunct. Which means the Largo opening of the first movement is suitably relaxed, the Molto Allegro has bounce and wit, the ensuing large-scale Menuetto's two contrasting Trios are seamlessly integrated into the whole and there is a quiet sense of refined elegance (much the same can be said of the later Menuetto). Today you will rarely hear the opening of the Adagio played with such Romantic breadth of phrasing, or made to sound so much like the beginning of The Blue Danube; indeed all of the seven movements are full of such felicities, along with some beautifully characterised solo playing (although the double-bassist is too self-effacing).

Just occasionally the performance can sound a little slick - the substantial Romanze is rather bland and the final Molto Allegro needs more attack and vitality - but there is no perfect performance of this work and the Stuttgart Winds are as good as any.

Sound

Balance: 5

Inner balance: 5

Detail and clarity: 4/5

Dynamic range: 4

Before discussing the sound it is worth mentioning that the lacquers were cut using half-speed mastering (which is said by some to improve the accuracy and quality of the groove profile, although two very distinguished mastering engineers I spoke to weren't entirely convinced by this) the master-tape was produced using tube/valve technology (including microphones), each of the musicians was individually miked (given the seating arrangement - see below - presumably out of necessity) and I presume that the cutting-head amplifiers are also tube.

In terms of the overall balance the players are placed just behind the speakers, there is an excellent sense of depth that appears to mirror the album photo mentioned above (with the

double-bass slightly to the left) which shows them seated in two rows, however the notes say they were – for some reason - sat in a closed circle, and being analogue, you can hear the acoustic space around the performers. Definition and clarity are exemplary (although the double-bass sounds slightly tubby) every instrument can be clearly heard, and the internal balance is perfect. Analogue sound does have a weakness, in that the dynamic range has to be reduced to stop the cutting head mistracking, or being damaged, but rightly or wrongly the range does seem a little *too* constricted.

However in every other respect this disc made – as you would expect - three digital 16bit recordings sound what they are, unnatural, dead, fakes that are completely incapable of capturing instrumental timbre or presence, and for any audiophile who wants this work with all the repeats, this is self-recommending.