

# gryphontrio

“big, bold, almost orchestral performances”

*Los Angeles Times*



Photo: Daniel Ehrenworth

## press clippings

“This is a piano trio that plays with strength and unanimity... big, bold, almost orchestral performances.”

*Los Angeles Times*

“The evening’s highlight came as the Gryphons... dug into the Mendelssohn trio with full-blooded gusto, carrying us off in wave after wave of Romantic emotion. It was music-making at its most communicative.”

*Toronto Star*

“As playing per se, this is exquisite. I don’t just mean technically, though the ensemble and tonal control can be almost breathtaking. Both performances bring out the kind of delicacy and sensuous beauty that’s often overlooked in Beethoven.” [Beethoven Trio: Analekta]

*BBC Music Magazine*

“None of this would be possible if they weren’t phenomenal musicians in the first place... an example of what fine, engaging chamber music is all about.”

*John Terauds (www.musicaltoronto.org)*

“Not only extraordinary instrumentalists but they have also mastered the art of ensemble playing.”

*WESER KURIER*

“The Gryphon Trio show themselves to be well up for the task, once again affirming their status as one of Canada’s premiere ensembles.” [Mendelssohn/Lalo Trio: Analekta]

*Wholenote Magazine*

“The Gryphon’s musical conversations are animated and charming... it has character and detail to spare, and elegance is no small accomplishment.”

*Globe and Mail*

“...dynamics of unusual depth and variety...”

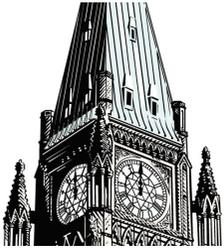
*Washington Post*

“A more popular combination of piano trio repertory than this would be hard to contemplate, but these accomplished accounts by Canada’s Gryphon Trio are worthy competitors in the field... played with musical insight, technical accomplishment and passionate commitment.”

*The Strad*

“From the first measures you could hear the mastery the Gryphons bring to their core repertoire. The coloration was ravishing, especially in places like the last few minutes of the first movement where the violinist and cellist play in unison (or fifteenths more exactly) against dark sounds from the piano. The counterpoint in the slow movement was also striking.”

*Ottawa Citizen*



# OTTAWA CITIZEN

gryphon trio in  
fine form

richard todd  
ottawa citizen 28 july 2012

One of the surprises in this year's Chamberfest, one of the less pleasing ones we might add, is that the Gryphon Trio is only playing one concert and by the time you read this, it will be history. Granted, at least two of its members are participating in other programs, but it's not the same thing, is it?

The program, given before as large an audience as Dominion-Chalmers can comfortably accommodate, consisted of trios by Smetana and Dvorak, as well as a new work by University of Ottawa professor James Wright.

Bredich Smetana (1824-1884) led a hard life, and his Piano Trio in G minor is the product of an especially dark period during which he lost his wife and three of their daughters. It's not surprising that the trio is full of anguished passages. More remarkable are the frequent sunny episodes, often expressed in terms of unmistakable nobility. The Gryphon Trio dug right into the turbulent score, producing as convincing an account of it as you're likely to hear. The contrasts of mood were well handled, being neither overly subtle nor too in-your-face. There is no slow movement in the piece, though there are tender episodes in all of the movements, providing an overall emotional balance. The Gryphons conveyed the balance to perfection and, as usual, their playing was impeccable.

James Wright's *Letters to an Immortal Beloved* for mezzo-soprano and piano trio is based upon three letters discovered after Beethoven's death in 1827. The Immortal Beloved to whom they are addressed has never been positively identified. Current thinking is divided between the Hungarian aristocrat Josephine von Brunswick and Antonie Brentano, the wife of one of Beethoven's friends. It doesn't matter for the purposes of the music, except that reflecting upon the mystery adds a layer of poignancy for the listener, and perhaps for the performers as well.

Wright's score is richly romantic but also contemporary in its sensibilities. Mezzo Julie Nesrallah's singing of the text was gorgeous as usual. Her diction could have been

a little better but translations were provided, so it didn't make a practical difference. The trio played well too, and composer Wright received a well-earned ovation.

The final offering was Dvorak's *Trio in F minor*, op. 65, a sunnier work than the Smetana trio, but with a similar Czech accent. The Gryphons also projected the Brahmsian influence nicely. The slow movement was especially beautiful. All in all, a wonderful ending to a wonderful concert.

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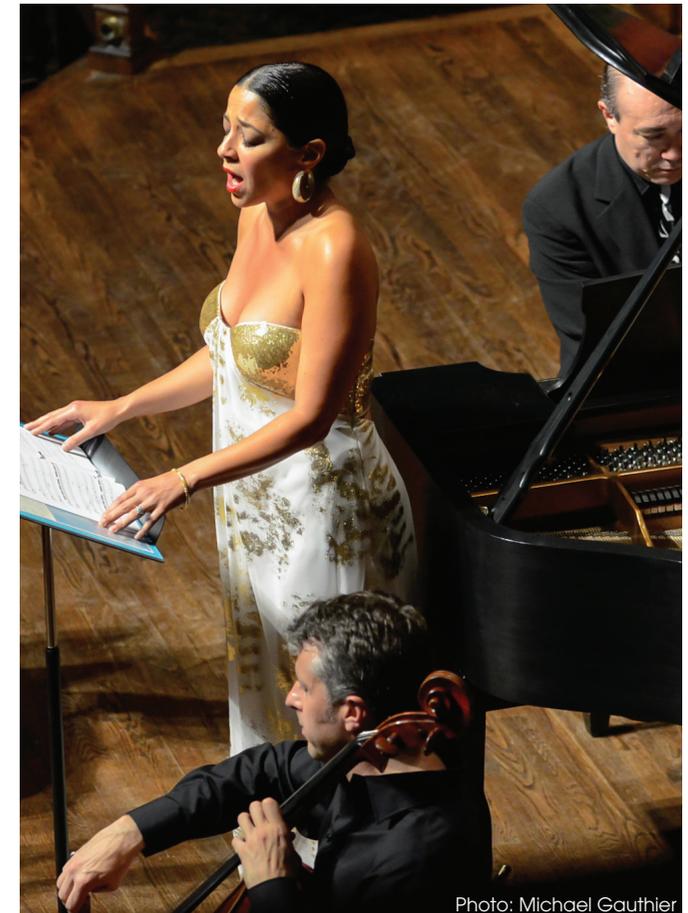


Photo: Michael Gauthier

# BBC music

## beethoven piano trios

Works: Piano Trio in G, Op. 1 No. 2;  
Piano Trio in B flat, Op. 97 (Archduke)

misha donat

The Gryphon Trio of Canada has recorded an eclectic range of music stretching from Mozart to the tangos of Astor Piazzolla. Reviewing their Mozart double album back in 2006, I found it highly accomplished, but a little lacking in elegance and spontaneity. I'm glad to say that isn't the case with their new Beethoven disc: this is one of the most satisfying and enjoyable accounts of the Archduke Trio I've heard in a long while.

The Gryphon players are warm, spacious and lyrical in the opening movement, while the slow movement—one of Beethoven's most profound sets of variations—is serene and deeply-felt without ever dragging, and the helter-skelter coda of the finale taken at a genuine presto that nevertheless leaves room for the required further acceleration in the closing moments.

One day I hope to hear the Scherzo in the expanded form that Beethoven intended, with two full appearances of the mysteriously chromatic quasi-trio sandwiched between a threefold statement of the scherzo section itself; but since virtually no one does the piece that way, one can hardly complain.

The middle work of the Op. 1 triptych receives a fine performance, too, with an affecting account of the radiant slow movement—the expressive highpoint of the series as a whole. In the Scherzo I missed the off-beat accents that give the horn-calls at the end of each half of the piece their piquancy; and it's a pity the pianist couldn't resist the temptation to add a couple of jokes of his own in the finale. His additions are discreet, but they are not necessarily in the best of taste, and Beethoven's piece is in any case witty enough as it stands. However, this is a minor blip in what is a beautifully recorded and strongly recommended disc. Not to be missed!



Running Time: 74:33 mins

Label: Analekta

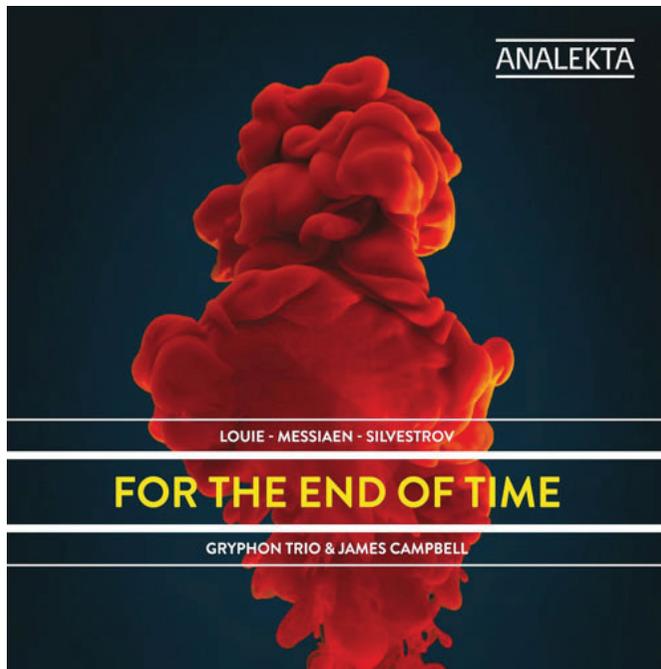
Catalogue Number: AN 2 9858

Performance: ★★★★★

Sound: ★★★★★

# GRAMOPHONE

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## echoes of the quartet for the end of time

bill rankin

On May 9, at the Banff Centre in the heart of the Canadian Rockies, the renowned Gryphon Trio and clarinetist James Campbell performed Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*—with a twist. Preceding the work, which Messiaen wrote while he was a Prisoner of War and which he premiered with a group of fellow prisoners on January 15, 1941, was *Echoes of Time*—a Gryphon-commissioned work from Toronto-based composer Alexina Louie. The work will act as a prelude to a new 40-minute play that tells the story of how Messiaen composed his seminal work. The play has been written by London-based writer Mieczysława Wazacz, will be directed by her sister Helena Kaut-Howson and will eventually become part of the Gryphon Trio's touring repertoire.

Messiaen's wartime composition, inspired by the tribulations of his internment and his fascination with the Book of Revelation's prophesy of the end of time, is one of the great works in the chamber music repertoire. When Louie agreed to the Gryphon commission, she was excited. The Gryphon Trio has commissioned at least 60 new works, but this would be Louie's first for them.

As she began to write, though, it dawned on her that her piece would be up for comparison with the Messiaen masterpiece. 'At first I thought, what a great opportunity. This is going to be fun. And then when I started it, I said, "Oh my God, what have I done?" It's the greatest piece for chamber ensemble that's possibly ever been written. What am I going to do? And it's going to be on the same programme.'

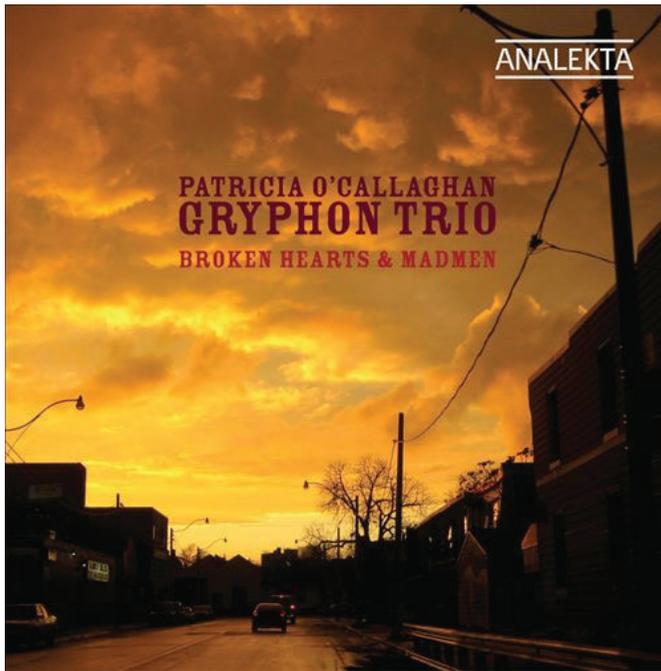
She says the trepidation caused her many false starts.

'This piece might have had more pages thrown out as I was writing than any other piece that I have worked on.' Her first efforts sounded derivative: 'It's hard not to be slavishly devoted to the piece.'

Eventually, she found her way towards a balance between originality and humility, and the result that I heard on Wednesday evening was brimming with the Messiaen spirit, but did make its own mark, echoing Messiaen's distinctive musical bursts of violence and his exploration of shards of unexpected scales and agitated, angst-ridden rhythms.

The concert opened with Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov's *Fugitive Visions of Mozart*, a series of six achingly beautiful miniatures that gave us our ration of hummable sweetness and light for the evening. Silvestrov's music, except for a few short, surprising bursts of forte attack and occasional poignant punctuating dissonance, would be the perfect music to soothe a child to sleep. The performance of the Messiaen clearly captivated the 150 or so people who sat positively silent in the Rolston Recital Hall. It was my first live performance of the *Quartet for the End of Time*, an unforgettable experience. Among the highlights was watching Campbell fend his way through the treacherous musical meditation 'Abîme des oiseaux'.

All the repertoire performed has been recorded for the Gryphon Trio's 20<sup>th</sup>-anniversary disc (their 16<sup>th</sup> recording), to be released on Analekta in the autumn. I have no doubt the disc will reinforce the Trio's already distinguished reputation.



The Canadian chamber music group Gryphon Trio is about to release *Broken Hearts & Madmen*, and the record is surely a contender for the crossover album of this young decade, as well as getting our vote for one of the great album titles of all time. With material from such a diverse crowd as Nick Drake, Leonard Cohen, Laurie Anderson and Lhasa de Sela, the record was made in a live-like atmosphere of complete takes and closely-miked quarters. The result is absolutely breathtaking in its attention to detail, with every note carved from their love of the songs and their obvious ease with each other.

Such is hardly the case in most attempts of classical musicians taking on disparate genres, but 2011 has been a year of musical surprises. The Ebene Quartet delighted us some months back with their audacious release *Fiction*, but Gryphon Trio surpasses that notable quartet handily. Several factors facilitate their success, among them the guest vocalisations of Patricia O'Callaghan and presence of jazz bass player and producer Roberto Occhipinti, a classically trained musician renowned for his work in Latin music, and who has toured with experimental hip-hop band Gorillaz.

Patricia O'Callaghan is no stranger to cabaret, Cohen, or classical. In fact, she's one of the best singers ever to come out of Canada. Born and raised in Northern Ontario, Canada at seventeen she lived in Mexico for a year as an exchange student. It was there that she had an epiphany one day and decided she should become an opera singer. Up until that time she could not decide whether to become a rock star or a nun and she thought opera was the perfect melding of the two: all the discipline and undebauched life of a nun, but she would still get to sing. She has performed and recorded previously with Gryphon Trio.

Approaching their 20th season together with a dozen recordings and a coveted Juno Award to their credit, the group is composed of musicians each having a stellar career in his (her) own right: Annalee Patipatanakoon

on violin; Roman Borys on cello and Jamie Parker on piano. The trio excels at the traditional chamber music repertoire. However, with their exciting performances of the Argentinian modern tango compositions of Astor Piazzolla they have re-invented chamber music. Anyone who has heard their take on Piazzolla (who famously stood the tango on its head) will understand that Gryphon Trio was more than ready to tackle this project. In addition, their adventurous multimedia production of composer Christos Hatzis's epic work *Constantinople*, scored for mezzo-soprano, Middle Eastern singer, violin, cello, piano, and electronic audiovisual media, has thrilled audiences across North America and at the Royal Opera House in London.

*Broken Hearts & Madmen* is an exquisite piece of work, bringing together the works of writers and musicians known for extreme states of mind: it's no secret that passion, heartbreak, and artistry go hand in hand. Mental imbalances often inspire creative spirits, while at the same time driving those talents to extreme actions: Cohen in self-exile on a Greek island, the suicide of Nick Drake; the list goes on. This record is a tribute to those states of mind. Far from being a dark or depressive work, this album also contains several romantic melodies from Mexico, Argentina and Chile. Particularly touching is "Cucurrucucu Paloma" composed by Tomás Méndez. Another standout track is the trio's version of Elvis Costello's "I Want You."

Gryphon Trio has recorded a work of catharsis and self-renewal, one of almost overwhelming tenderness. Long regarded as one of the finest chamber music groups in the world, with *Broken Hearts & Madmen* they widen their audience considerably and burnish their enviable reputation.

# Vivoscene

broken hearts  
& madmen

brian miller  
vivoscene rating 9.5

usa - quebec - europe

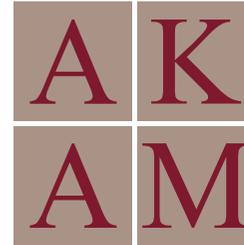


Melvin Kaplan, Inc.  
115 College Street  
Burlington, VT 05401  
United States of America  
T: (802) 658-2592  
E: [music@melkap.com](mailto:music@melkap.com)  
W: [melkap.com](http://melkap.com)

media relations

Karen Lorenowicz  
KL Strategic Communications  
T: (416) 245 2475  
E: [karen.lorenowicz@gmail.com](mailto:karen.lorenowicz@gmail.com)

canada



Andrew Kwan Artists Management Inc.  
1105 Leslie Street, Suite 1604  
Toronto, ON M3C 4G9  
Canada  
T: (416) 445 4441  
E: [info@andrewkwanartists.com](mailto:info@andrewkwanartists.com)  
W: [andrewkwanartists.com](http://andrewkwanartists.com)

enquiries

Please direct all other enquiries, by email, to Sophie Vayro at [svayro@gryphontrio.com](mailto:svayro@gryphontrio.com).

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