



Mertz: Guitar Duets

(Two different CD recordings)

Johannes Möller and Laura Fraticelli

Naxos

Raphaella Smits and Adrien Brogna

Soundset Recordings

Similar but different interpretations bring Romantic duets to life

Mertz's duets are wonderful creations that have not largely been taken up by players, and this is probably due to the unique instrumentation he employed in all of them—namely one part being written for a *terz*-guitar tuned a minor third higher.

Of course, that is easily rectified by placing a capo on fret 3 and just playing your normal guitar like that, but I suspect it has put off many people from discovering what is one of the few sources of true 19th century Romantic (with a capital R) guitar-duet music.

Comparing the almost identical programs on these two CDs one finds the Smits-Brogna Soundset CD slightly more forward and a little rounder in sound. It also has the added bonus of the occasional use of a fine, gutsy 8-string guitar, an instrument with two lower basses that Mertz may have used. It adds considerably to the texture when used every now and then, as it is here.

Both sets of performances are wonderful, with lots of emotion and poetry, as well as plenty of dash and fire when required. Comparing times is an interesting exercise, for many of the performances are very similar indeed, with only a few seconds difference between them. But with a piece like *Standchen*, the Smits-Brogna version is a full two minutes longer than the Möller-Fraticelli, as they make it a considerably more serious piece with more dynamic contrast and gravitas. Likewise, the *Trauermarsch* and the *Wasserfahrt Am Traunsee* receive slightly different interpretations, but both are valid and extremely enjoyable. As for the two works that occur on only one of the CDs, I can say that they are both great pieces—*Der Ball* is full of engaging dance rhythms, while *La Rage* is brimming with angst and tension.

These are both excellent CDs, and the music itself is second to none: Mertz was a stunning composer, one of the few to carry the Romantic flag fully when writing his works. If somehow you have missed his music, either (or both) of these discs would be a good place to start.

—C.D.