



07/2020



**Johann Wilhelm WILMS (1772-1847)**  
**Sonatas for Piano and Flute Op. 15 (publ. 1810)**

Sonata No. 1 in A major [19:58]  
Sonata No. 2 in F major [23:16]  
Sonata No. 3 in C major [17:00]

Helen Dabringhaus (flute)  
Sebastian Berakdar (piano)

rec. 2019, Konzerthaus der Abtei Marienmünster,  
Germany

**MDG 903 2149-6 SACD [60:19]**

***Superlatively performed classical frothiness.***

Johann Wilhelm Wilms was christened in Witzhelden, but after an apparently somewhat lacklustre beginning to his musical career in Germany he moved to Amsterdam in 1791. Here he gained a reputation as a virtuoso pianist and established contacts with the publishing houses of Leipzig. This helped his profile as a composer, though these sonatas were initially published by Hummel in Amsterdam. Wilms never really advanced into true Romanticism in terms of style however, and while remaining a respected musician was already more or less forgotten as a composer during his lifetime.

Superbly played in this premiere recording, the bright and sunny major-key character of these sonatas is immediately established in the *First Sonata*, the sparkling runs and general significance of the piano following to a certain extent the example of Mozart in his piano and violin sonatas. Wilms was both a pianist and a flute player, and so there is great effectiveness in the general balance between the instruments, the low register of the flute used when accompanying the piano, but mid and upper registers able to rise above piano accompaniment figures and textures in passages with louder dynamics.

Stylistic and structural features in this music can be found shared in works by the likes of contemporaries such as Danzi, Spohr, Hummel and Weber, so in that sense there are no real surprises to be found here. A critic of the time wrote of one of Wilms' flute concertos that it was "not grandiose and full of pathos, but rather brilliant, cheerful and very agreeable to listen to", and this sums up these sonatas very well indeed. The slow movements have a pastoral or stately manner, and this added to the joyous feel of the outer movements adds up to an impression of melodic facility and fluidity of inventiveness that would be the envy of most composers. The only thing absent here is any real memorability to these tunes. If anything they are just 'too easy', and lacking in that sense of inventive struggle or search for expressive depth you hear more often in Schubert or Beethoven. Wilms sits in that period between 18th century classicism and the stylistic passions of the 19th century, and he clearly preferred to look back at the models of the past rather than take part in that avant-garde of poetic expression that was taking off in Vienna and elsewhere.

Performance and recording in MDG's 2+2+2 SACD house style in the deliciously resonant Marienmünster acoustic are both superlative and there is much to enjoy here. These pieces are clearly great fun to play, and in that sense they certainly enrich the repertoire of a period that has little enough to offer in this genre. I am glad to have been able to make their acquaintance, and this looks like the first volume of further Wilms recordings so watch this space if you are looking out for new classical frothiness.

***Dominy Clements***