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Dämmerung: Late 19th Century Cello Sonatas

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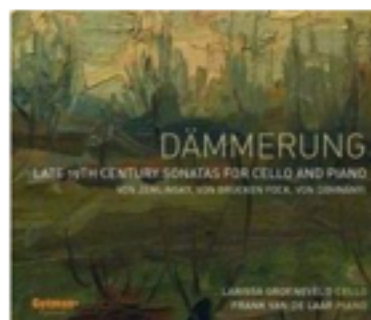
It's a nice parallel that all the lesser-known sonatas on this disc, entitled 'Twilight', were written when their respective composers were still in their twenties, the heading referring to the era during which they were written.

Zemlinsky's characterful *Three Pieces* (1891) open the programme rather than any of the trumpeted sonatas, and this is a good move given that they pack far more of a musical punch than their diminutive size would suggest, particularly in Groeneveld and van der Laar's readings. The opening Humoresque is rather more solid and passionately full-blown than the impishly insouciant

reading its title might suggest, but it works. The real triumph, though, is the Lied. Here Groeneveld tones herself down to a tender softness, although retaining the Humoresque's strength for the crescendos, and it's hard to imagine this tiny gem singing more under another cellist's fingertips. Close miking plays a part too, particularly in the final seconds when the bow leaves the string, the piano pedal is released and silence descends.

It's the kind of weighted moment you expect more in a concert hall than on a studio recording such as this.

In terms of stylistic approach, the rest of the programme continues in kind. Zemlinsky's A minor Sonata brings more warm, predominantly smooth, expansive readings from Groeneveld, always in perfect communion with van der Laar, who for his part is generous with the pedal but never at the expense of definition. The close of Dohnányi's quirky scherzo has a nice element of humour. Then, it's not clear whether musicologist Eric Matser, who discovered the little-known Dutch composer Gerard von Brucken Fock's Sonata, is trying to do a hard sell or not when he describes the piece in the booklet as 'certainly one of the best written for cello and piano in the 19th century in the Netherlands', but the analysis feels about right. With a Brahmsian first movement and whispers of Beethoven across the rest, it's not going to set the world on fire, but this first recording of it is a thoroughly enjoyable listen, not least because it's beautifully played.



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(3) Pieces

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