



TCHAIKOVSKY: Serenade; NIELSEN: Suite  
TrondheimSolistene/Oyvind Gimse  
2L-090A-LP TOTAL TIMING 45:09

The Norwegian label 2L is devoted to audiophile values and to experimentation in achieving them, and for this recording the company has gone all out: it's being issued as a high-definition download in several encodings including a multichannel version (downloads available from HDtracks.com, HighResAudio.com, and Klicktrack.com), as a Blu-ray disc, and as an LP (available from amazon.com, the label's Web site at [www.2L.no](http://www.2L.no), and distributed by Naxos of America.

You haven't entirely forgotten that venerable stalwart of all over-40 music lovers, have you? If so, it's understandable. So few releases of new classical-music recordings have come out on vinyl in the past three decades that many if not most of us have given up on the format. But in the past decade LP reissues of vintage pop, jazz, and classical recordings have become quite popular, and now releases of newly-recorded music are coming out in large numbers on vinyl. The so-called "legacy" format is no longer an obsolete relic. Many audiophiles insist LPs just sound better than CDs, while others both young and old are attracted by nostalgia or by vinyl's mid-century, retro-cool cachet.

Still, very few new (as opposed to reissued) classical recordings have, as yet, appeared since the resurgence of vinyl. The few exceptions include a couple of pricey, limited-edition sets: the complete Mahler symphonies with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony in a luxurious box-set of 22 LPs, and the nine Beethoven symphonies with Paavo Jarvi and the Bremen Chamber Orchestra in a similar box-set. Certain new music labels (like Innova) occasionally issue LPs, and a handful of new recordings of standard repertoire have been released on vinyl by the Tacet label, most notably an especially beautiful recording of Dvorak's String Sextet.

So 2L's foray into vinyl, though unusual, isn't unique. But the recording is still extraordinary, for other reasons: never has Tchaikovsky's lovely Serenade been rendered on any recording with such startling clarity. It's as though a scrim between the music and the listener had been removed. Every inner voice, every texture, every articulation, every submerged detail, is rendered with startling immediacy and precision. Yet the music is also, as it should be, richly sonorous, with the full sweetness and resonance of the string consort in all its glory as heard in the concert hall--a hall (actually a small stone church in Norway) that comes through here with clearly individuated ambience and spaciousness. The result--given the gorgeous tonal sheen and shapely expressiveness of the Trondheim Soloists's playing--is a rendition so fresh and joyous and "there" it almost made me feel that I'd never really heard the piece before. A corollary of this sonic realism is that it heightened my appreciation for Tchaikovsky's superb craftsmanship--something that I hadn't fully appreciated given the prominence of his melodic inspiration and emotional fervency.

2L's sonic realism simply trounced my two favorite recordings up until now--Munch and the Boston Symphony on RCA, and Barbirolli and the London Symphony on EMI; they sounded veiled and muddy by comparison, especially the inner and lower voices. Yet the Trondheimers are just as convincing in their interpretative sensitivity and emotional engagement with the music. (Nielsen's Suite Opus 1, though a minor composition nowhere near the stature of his great symphonies, benefits equally from 2L's sonic virtues. It never made much of an impression on me before; now I can say that I enjoy it.)

2L explains that it attained such exceptional clarity and presence by using the highest-possible resolution (352.8kHz/24bit) in its digital sampling rates, and by arranging the ensemble placed in mixed voices, meaning no one is sitting beside anyone playing the same part, creating a totally new soundscape to the music. The LP was made from a direct-metal master and pressed on 180-gram vinyl. Frankly I don't quite grasp exactly what these techniques involve, but I can affirm that they accomplish what 2L claims for them--including absolutely dead-quiet record surfaces. (As for the beauty of the performance itself: surely that's partly due to the circumstances that the group selected the music it wanted to play, and allocated two weeks in the studio for recording it.)

Whether encoded as a high-resolution download, Blu-ray, or on vinyl, this revealing and delightful recording will likely please and gratify all those who love Tchaikovsky's Serenade and indeed anyone curious about state-of-the-art recording technology. As no doubt also will a forthcoming second installment from 2L of the Trondheim Soloists, this time playing Tchaikovsky's "Souvenir de Florence". I'll be looking to add that to my LP shelves too.