

## Schoenberg

Chamber Symphony No 1 (arr Webern).  
*Pierrot lunaire*<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Jacqueline Janssen *mez*  
Het Collectief / Robin Engelen  
Fuga Libera © FUG504 (55' • DDD • T/t)

**A frustrating mix of choral works but  
a razor-sharp Chamber Symphony**

The Accentus Chamber Choir usually come up with something unpredictable, but on this occasion it seems a pity to have rejected the obvious – a complete programme of Schoenberg's choral music, along similar lines to the Stuttgart Radio Choir's 1995 Arte Nova release. Instead, there's nothing from the Opp 27 or 28 pieces, and we hear only the last movement (*Verbundenheit*) from Op 35. The performances themselves are never less than adequate and the late *De profundis* setting is outstanding in its fiery eloquence.

Maximum variety must have been the aim. Otherwise there is little point in breaking up a choral programme with a performance of the First Chamber Symphony – well played

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but no more successful than many other recordings at achieving a convincing overall balance. It also seems wasteful to include two performances of *Friede auf Erden*, one with instrumental accompaniment, one without, and to fit in four minutes of a pointless vocal arrangement of the Op 16 No 3 orchestral piece *Farben*: music that depends entirely on instrumental resonances, and contrasts, for its effect.

The programme on the Belgian Fuga Libera CD makes better sense, coupling *Pierrot lunaire* with Webern's arrangement of the Op 9 Chamber Symphony for the *Pierrot* instrumental quintet – flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano. Op 9 is given a properly fast and furious performance, and with playing – and co-ordination – of such razor-sharp precision, the loss of the original's endlessly fascinating textural density is less frustrating than it might otherwise be. *Pierrot* has comparable precision, the vocal part very much acted rather than sung, and although the instruments tend to swamp Jacqueline Janssen now and again, the overall effect is a strikingly authentic blend of the light and the sinister. Not as refined or diverse in character as the outstanding account by Christine Schäfer with Boulez and the EIC (DG, 10/98) but among the best of the available alternatives. **Arnold Whittall**