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Classical CDs Weekly: Laurence Crane, Martinu, Prokofiev

English minimalism, folk-inspired choral music and a wintry violin sonata

by [Graham Rickson](#) | Saturday, 29 April 2017

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Laurence Crane: 6 Trios, 2 Solos and 1 Quintet *The Ives Ensemble (RTF Classical)*

It's a rare pleasure to discover a contemporary composer whose work speaks with such effortless clarity. You'll know within a few seconds of Laurence Crane's *Trio for Ros and Peter* whether it's your sort of thing – repeated diatonic piano chords supporting slow string lines, the whole thing brilliantly sustained for four minutes. It's definitely my thing, recalling Howard Skempton's delicious piano miniatures as well as, oddly, Brian

Wilson's backing tracks for the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. If you're in search of elaborate thematic transformation and structural complexity, look elsewhere: Crane writes of "presenting a single idea in a state of stasis with no discursive or developmental activity." Fine by me – if the ideas are sufficiently arresting, they withstand **repetition**. The works assembled here, performed by the Rotterdam-based Ives Ensemble, span 30 years, the earliest composed in 1986. Everything sounds recognisably Cranesian, though you notice that the early pieces are incredibly compact, few lasting more than three minutes. There's plenty of wry humour: the splendidly named *Jurgen Hip* and *Hugo Pine* only described as trios in the sense that three musicians are involved, a third hand occasionally intervening on piano.

The most outwardly conventional work is Crane's 2011 *Piano Quintet*, its throwaway opening preceding a pair of weightier inner movements. Repeated cadences pay lip service to the classical tradition before a subdued finale. Most recent is the *Klavierstücke opus 84 or 85 "Keith Miller Project"*, a sequence of seven engaging piano pieces written in 2016. Every note counts. The performances are outstanding, especially from pianist John Snijders. Good production values too – a deeply lovable disc.

