

IRR

Chamber

The popularity of nineteenth operatic fantasias for solo instrument is not hard to fathom. Based on tunes most listeners would already know, they offered scope for display limited only by the techniques of their composers or intended soloists. Pianists will recall Liszt's examples, violonists those of Paganini. Thoughtful paraphrases exist – Ronald Steveson's Peter Grimes fantasia is a notable example – but most specimens of the genre seek merely to entertain and amaze. Wind players use them a lot : partly to show off (or offer for judgement, en route to Parnassus) their techniques and *cantabile*, and partly because they have less « serious » music than pianists or string players with which to build recital programmes : these virtuoso displays made highly suitable finales, encores – and, of course, promotional Cds !

Céline Moinet, ex-Malher Youth Orchestra player under Claudio Abado, ex-Mannheim Theatre Orchestra and now principal oboe of the Dresden Staatskapelle, has compiled her visiting card with considerable ingenuity and a minimum of barrel scraping. Familiar operas named amid the titles listed above will need no introduction, though some components need further explanation, particularly as Florence Badol-Bertrand's note is more historico-philosophical than composer biographical. The Donizetti, first on the disc, is in fact non operatic, the sole surviving movement from an Oboe Concerto in F (not the more familiar cor anglais Concertino in G). Antonio Pasculli (1842 – 1924) was dubbed « the Paganini of the oboe », with – on this evidence- good reason. A pioneer of circular breathing (whereby the player inhales through the nose without stopping playing, a trick not everyone can master), his transcriptions virtually demand the technique from others : his pre-Rimsky-Korsakov fantasy « le Api »(the Bees), for example, seems to provide nowhere to breathe at all. The eight-minute Omaggio a Bellini comes second on the disc ; the 14-minute Donizetti feature makes an astonishing finale.

Schubert's calm moment is effectively an out-take from the melodrama The Magic Harp. The Ibert was published for flute (or violin) and guitar or harp : oboe makes a better substitute than violin (a medium I reviewed in April 2013), when playing from the printed guitar part, sounds an octave away from where Ibert may have intended. (Harps sound as written, guitars an octave lower.) The Massenet Works perfectly for oboe, though budding recitalists be warned : you'll need three effortless top F sharps and one top G in order to see it through. The Honegger is an intriguing fragment omitted from the published Antigone score : an enterprising find but in this context unseasonably acidic. Within its two minutes the soloist switches from oboe to cor anglais. Godard provides more calm ; Henry Brod (1799 – 1839) is probably familiar only to oboists through his didactic Méthode de Hautbois. This Fantaisie springs from the Mad Scene : another Lucia fantasy exists for oboe, basson and piano, and there is also a Nocturne on Rossini's Siege de Corinth for oboe and harp. The Tannhäuser transcription is « the Song to the Evening Star », the Tristan the offstage shepherd's-pipe solo from Act 3.

Moinet is flawless throughout : her sound is a delight, her technique impeccable and her stamina – especially in Pasculli – superhuman. Between 5'07 to 6'10 in

Poliuto, a cleverly written simultaneous tune-and-accompaniment solo passage, she plays – with artistry and apparent nonchalance – 510 notes in one breath (I may have miscounted), and a further 468 between 13'06" and 13'43".

Accompanists usually welcome operatic fantasias, listening contentedly to the acrobatics unfurling above their simple oom-pahs. (Introductory tempo are, of course, crucial : too slow, and the soloist will run out of breath ; too fast, and the instrument could well burst into flames.) Switching from piano to harp certainly adds glamour : Sarah Christ – sister of violonist Raphael and (serendipitously in this context) grand daughter of Jiri Tancibudek, dedicatee of Martinu's Oboe Concerto – fills the bill admirably. Her few opportunities for solo display (introductions, sometimes elaborate, and interludes designed for soloists to get their breath back) are shaped with perfect technique and exquisite artistry. I'd have welcomed a couple of extended solos from her : there was certainly room on the disc for them. They'd also have varied the disc's tone colour in straight-through listening, something the tiny gaps between tracks (some only three seconds) seem to encourage.

Astonishingly, she seems to have made no solo albums as yet, something I hope Harmonia Mundi will rectify without delay. The wholly admirable, astonishing and inspired Céline Moinet is better served, with an unaccompanied récital disc already out, ranging from the Bachs to Elliot Carter (it also received an Outstanding from Robert Matthew-Walker in July/August 2012). Oboe, harp and recording are here all perfect : this is a joyous and frankly outstanding disc.

Michael Round

New

Meditations :

Oboe and Harp at the Opera

Brod Fantaisie sur la 'Scène folie' de l'opéra 'Lucia de Lammermoor' op. 57.

Donizetti Andante sostenuto. **Godard** Jocelyn – Berceuse (both arr. by Moinet and Christ). **Honegger** Antigone – Musique de scène (original version). **Ibert** Entr'acte. **Massenet** Thaïs – Méditation. **Pasculli** Omaggio a Bellini. Fantaisie sur l'opéra 'Poliuto' de **Donizetti**. **Schubert** Die Zauberharfe, D644 – Andante.

Wagner Tannhäuser – O mein holder Abendstern(all arr. by Moinet and Christ). Tristan und Isolde – Mélodie du berger.

Céline Moinet (oboe/cor anglais)

Sarah Christ (harp)

Harmonia Mundi HMC902175 (full price, 56 minutes).

Website www.harmoniamundi.com

Producer Tobias Lehmann. Engineer Sebastian Nattkemper. Date May 2013.