

## Lajos Lencsés



### Romantic Rarities for Oboe and Harp

Gaetano Donizetti | Robert Nicolas Charles Bochsa | Henri Brod | Antonio Pasculli

CD aud 91.402

www.musicweb-international.com January 2004 (Robert Hugill - 01.01.2004)



The romantic composers did not do very well by the oboe, so a disc of 19th century music for oboe and harp must, of necessity, cast its net rather wide. For this disk the principal oboe of the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra performs a rather slight piece by Donizetti alongside more substantial pieces by lesser known composers – Frenchmen Robert Nicolas Charles Bochsa and Henri Brod and Italian Antonio Pasculli. Not surprisingly both Pasculli and Brod were oboe virtuosi and Bochsa was a harp virtuoso and son of an oboe player, so writing for the instrument was almost inevitable in each case.

Donizetti's Andante Sostenuto is a charming miniature, a cantabile cavatina that emulates an operatic aria. But it leaves one feeling a little unsatisfied, wishing the cavatina had had its cabaletta as well.

Bochsa's father was both an oboist and a music publisher. Bochsa himself became Royal harpist in 1813 and managed to maintain his position even after the return of the Bourbons. Dodgy business deals seem to have forced him to flee to England where he was a teacher and soloist. In 1839 he ran away with the wife of the conductor Bishop and the wayward pair led a vagrant life, Bochsa eventually dying in Australia. Amongst the many concert works that he wrote are the Three Nocturnes Opus 50 for harp and oboe. The piece is rather like an operatic pot-pourri, though some of the themes are explored in a sequence of variations.

Henri Brod seems to have been a far more sedate figure. Younger than Bochsa, he died at the early age of 37. He was a teacher at the Paris Conservatory, a famous oboe virtuoso and author of the 'Grande méthode complète pour le hautbois'. He wrote two Nocturnes for piano (or harp) and oboe. The emotional Introduction is followed by an attractive theme and variations including a variation using the theme from the introduction in a minor key. The piece ends with a waltz.

Pasculli was born in Palermo. He taught oboe and cor anglais as well as appearing as a virtuoso all over Italy. He seems to have written many fantasies on the popular Italian and French operas of his day and this Homage to Bellini includes themes from 'Il Pirata' and 'La Sonnambula'. The use of cor anglais gives a welcome change of timbre, though the form of the Homage is essentially another pot-pourri.

The Donizetti piece opens with a long-breathed cantabile theme for the oboe, supported by arpeggios in the harp. This basic texture is repeated throughout all of the pieces on the disc. The music generally lacks development; where a theme is explored it is usually through a sequence of variations. This combined with the rather similar texture of the pieces means that the basic musical material is slight, though charming, and can lack variety. In such cases, the performers' ability to add colouration and depth is important. Lencsés makes a wonderfully rich and mellifluous sound on both the oboe and cor anglais, but both he and Talitman play with a rather unvarying tone. Though talented and possessed of fine techniques, they don't quite present the pieces in the best light possible.

This is a charming record of admittedly slight musical material. Admirers of this genre or this combination of instruments should have not trouble enjoying it.



## Musique de Nuit

Charles Koechlin | Gabriel Fauré | Gabriel Pierné | Eric Satie

CD aud 97.409

**Stereoplay 12/1988 (Holger Arnold - 01.12.1988)**



Eine hübsche Zusammenstellung französischer Miniaturen pastoralen Charakters...

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**American Record Guide 1/2001 (Steven E. Ritter - 01.01.2001)**



The Night Music recording is not bad as "novelty" albums go, and I am betting I will be listening to it whenever a relaxed mood and a glass of wine are called for. Lencses is pretty much a known quantity--though somewhat variable depending on what company he happens to be recording with. His sound is sweet and secure, and Gisele Herbert gives angelic support when not soloing on her own (Faure Impromptu and Satie Gnossiennes). The music is wonderful, of course, and I would rank this as good or better than similar albums--and they are legion. Excellent sound.



## Charles Koechlin: Works for Oboe

Charles Koechlin

CD aud 97.417

Scherzo N° 184, Marzo 2004 (S.M.B. - 01.03.2004)

sch~~er~~zo

Sorprende que obras de la delicadeza, el sosiego y la inspiración clasicista de...

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Fanfare Jan/Feb 1992 (Adrian Corleoni - 01.01.1992)

fanfare

Soon after the review of the above cited Audite disc appeared, a reader wrote privately to ask if the album number were correct—the distributor claimed it was "nonexistent." He was, apparently, entering the jungle for the first time. . . .

By chance, one hears something haunting. The composer may have been encountered in footnotes but had remained innocent of auditory associations. Small and not very representative pieces may be available as filler and one collects them, becoming more intrigued—as shelf space disappears beneath umpteen mediocre performances of the basic repertoire items one endures for the privilege. Reference books serve mainly to tantalize, the best of them with complete catalogs and tidings of large, rarely performed works marking grand syntheses. Descended from these, album copy tends to be a circus of undigested (mis-)information, dutifully parroted by reviewers to create an odd consensus about a body of music which only a very few people could know at first hand; though, occasionally (notably, on early LP jackets), gracefully revealing notes by uncelebrated, even anonymous, writers will prompt the ear and prime the spirit with a loving erudition surpassing anything in scholarly sources. Slowly, the picture fills in as stalking the elusive forgotten master becomes a passion. One searches old and foreign catalogs, canvasses out-of-print dealers, turns up antique vinyl and ancient monographs in languages in which one is not fluent, and scarce, expensive sheet music which remains impervious to the assaults of one's musicianship. The large, epochal works receive once-in-a-decade (or two, or three) performances and circulate on tape, pirate recordings, or short-lived commercial issues. Reputations shift a bit as dissertation topics thin, and the picture takes on overwhelming, highly specific detail. One is graying now and you take the elevator for anything over a couple of flights when, with disconcerting suddenness, the forgotten master arrives—as Koechlin seems to have done. But such arrivals are more likely deceptive than decisive and, in the press of business (e.g., those "nonexistent" stock numbers), the collapse of empires, ozone depletion, oil crises, and the simultaneous crowding in of an incredible and bewildering number of other forgotten masters—to say nothing of the quick and neglected—the newly revealed master may suffer eclipse, occultation even, and depart as suddenly as he came. Which is to say that, if Koechlin's varieties of luminosity have settled on your ear, you are best advised to grab these fast.

It is, perhaps, because Koechlin is so much the musician's musician that he attracts first-rate, adventurous, virtuosic musicians and draws from them such exquisite care. The song and flute albums, for instance, are as composed as the music, offering works representative of the vastness and extremities of his oeuvre, of

its charms and challenges, its miniatures and monstrosities, that is—within the compass of single programs—its staggering variety, through which one is led with rare and radiant assurance. A not intentionally invidious comparison—in his generous offering of horn pieces, Barry Tuckwell Plays Koechlin (ASV CD DCA 716), Tuckwell is no less accomplished than the artists cited above, and no one who cares for Koechlin will willingly be without it, but the inevitable monotony of seventy-eight minutes of music for one instrument, a good bit of it unaccompanied (though, by overdubbing, we have pieces for two, three, and four horns), makes it an album to be sampled piecemeal, where the fantastically shifting soundscapes of the song program, and the deft alternation of brightly brief and pithily extended flute works with pieces offering the relief of vocal obbligato, carry one deliciously and irresistibly to the end. On a smaller scale, the same is true of Lajos Lencsés's collection—though the works are fewer, and cover less ground chronologically and stylistically, their timbral variety is greater. Finally, Herbert Henck's masterly reading of the suite *Les Heures persanes* follows the subtly shifting refractions of Koechlin's light-obsessed imagination through one of his most ambitious works.

Sound for these albums is generally optimum, and the accompanying materials range from well done (from Audite) to superb. The song album and sung portions of the flute program are matched with texts and translations. Nor should one underestimate the virtue of informed, lucid annotation in prompting the ear to assimilate novelty to pleasure, in point of which these albums excel.

The liner notes for the song album, by the way, are by none other than Dr. Robert Orledge, author of *Charles Koechlin (1867-1950): His Life and Works*. Following its subject, this is a large and labyrinthine book. As his dates remind us, Koechlin enjoyed a long and amazingly productive life, his works running to 226 opus numbers, many of which (as in Reger's catalog) cover a surprising number of independent works. Self-borrowing, the assembly of multi-movement works from older pieces, several scorings of individual works (e.g., the *Symphony No. 1* and the *String Quartet No. 2* are the "same" works, *Les Heures persanes* was orchestrated, while the orchestral tone poem *Au loin* exists in an arrangement for harp and English horn), and the like, afford rich complications which the body of the book is occupied in tracing.

Along the way, Orledge describes Koechlin's working methods, and renders a painstaking account of his technical resourcefulness through all its unfoldings, pointed by over a hundred music quotations (many quite extensive), and laced with revealing references to the aesthetic crosscurrents—literary, pictorial, cinematic, and, of course, musical—in the heady swirl of which his own oeuvre rose imperturbably and majestically. This awareness of complex interrelationships is evident on every page—Inseparable from their poly tonal support are Koechlin's long sinuous melodic lines, which at times recall art nouveau arabesques and at others suggest the suppleness of plainsong, especially when they are accompanied by parallel chords in organum. In *Le Chant du chevrier* [from the piano suite *Paysages et marines*] Koechlin deliberately keeps the line of the French goatherd's pipe separate from the glowing, wide-spaced chords which support but never overbalance it, creating a perspective of distance and open spaces. . . . The free, fluid melody of the final *Poème virgilien* again makes little use of exact repetition, and in the suite as a whole diverse elements combine to create an overall equilibrium—just like that of Nature herself.

Suggestive as this may be—and valuable in its fluent demonstration that Koechlin's language assumes the entire musical past to be contemporary and expressive—it stops short of genuine helpfulness before the sensuously appealing yet bewildering strangeness of hearing Koechlin's longer works. One wants to know how the music works—or is intended to work—since this is not always evident even to close, repeated attention. Certainly, as Koechlin tells us, his music "demands a certain degree of concentration," but the balance from effort to pleasure—and this music affords pleasures like no other—might be achieved more readily through a detailed examination of the ways by which "diverse elements combine to create an overall equilibrium." Indeed, the more ambitious the work, the more necessary this becomes. In this instance, as throughout the book, *Paysages et marines* and *Les Heures persanes* are dispatched in passing with tidy generalizations establishing some "truth" about Koechlin sub specie aeternitatis. The listener ungifted with an eternity for this sort of contemplation and who wishes to make aural sense, say, of the seemingly chaotic events of *La Course de printemps*, which, as the title suggests, sweeps and twists like a force of nature for over half an hour, and who turns to Dr. Orledge for help, will not find it. Some of Koechlin's works, in fact—e.g., the *Sept Chansons pour Gladys* and parts, at least, of *Les Heures persanes*—seem to demand new modes of auditory relation touching the penumbra of consciousness, and of this there is no word.

The reader will, however, find here a concise biography; an account of the vicissitudes of Koechlin's reputation; a close and admiring look at his theoretical works and compendious *Traité de l'orchestration*; teasing descriptions of and quotations from unpublished and unrecorded works in the course of a remarkably wide-ranging survey; a fascinating narrative of Koechlin's infatuation with Lillian Harvey and other stars of the silent screen—and of the music they inspired; a translation of Koechlin's own self-aware—if occasionally also self-justifying—self-assessment; a number of revealing side-glances at composers as diverse as Franck and Chabrier (who were still at work while Koechlin was a young man), his master, Faùré, Debussy (whose *Khamma* he orchestrated), friends such as Ravel, Sauguet, and Milhaud, and reactions to Schoenberg, Berg, and Cole Porter—for starters; a complete catalog of the works running to some ninety pages; an extensive bibliography; a thorough, useful—indeed necessary—index to discussions of the works; and thirty-seven photographs. No doubt, this volume will prompt specialized studies bringing greater scrutiny to bear upon smaller segments of Koechlin's oeuvre, and from these, eventually, an informed literature for the non-specialist, non-academic listener will develop. Meanwhile, it is unlikely that such largesse—so comprehensive yet keenly detailed an account—will appear again in the foreseeable future.

Here, then, is a richly colored topographical map to the dark continent of Koechlin's music, lighted by four exemplary collections of representative works. Taken with recent issues of the great orchestral poems, *The Jungle Book* (Cybelia CY 679/680, two black discs—long overdue for CD issue—*Fanfare* 10:1) and *Le Buisson ardent* (Cybelia CY 812, *Fanfare* 11:3) it is possible now to get to the radiant heart of "le cas Koechlin." Seldom has a forgotten master arrived so splendidly—though, as noted, the station is crowded and there are frequent departures.

**ABC – Blanco y negro Cultural (A. G. L. - 06.03.2004)**



**KOECHLIN. Obras para oboe, oboe d'amore y corno inglés.**

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## Fantaisies Pastorales

Henri Tomasi | César Franck | Joseph Guy Marie Ropartz | Paul Ladmirault | Albert Roussel | Pierre de Bréville | Eugène Bozza | Georges Hugon | Jacques Murgier | Louis Durey | Georges Auric

CD aud 97.502

**Pizzicato 10/2003, (Rémy Franck - 01.10.2003)**



Mit der Oboe in eine Traumwelt - Lajos Lencsés ist ein Meister auf seinem Instrument. Das beweist der Oboist einmal mehr mit diesen hinreißend gespielten Aufnahmen. Ihm zuzuhören, sein sorgfältiges Phrasieren zu bewundern, seinen wohlgeformten und wirklich schönen und warmen Ton goutieren, das ist ein Genuss fürs Ohr. Die CD hat ein Programm und sie hält darin, was der Titel verspricht. Sie ist zwar dadurch recht wenig abwechslungsreich, aber wer die Ruhe hat sich der Musik hinzugeben, wird in der wunderbaren Stimmung in eine Art Traumwelt entführt.

**Répertoire No 169 (Philippe Simon - 01.06.2003)**

Après deux très beaux disques Koechlin (Audite et CPO), le hautboïste...

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**Ensemble - Magazin für Kammermusik 1/2004 (Robert Nemecek - 01.01.2004)**



**Naturgeist**

Naturgeist

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[Das Orchester](#) Januar 200 (Thomas Lang - 01.01.2004)



Lajos Lencsés ist auf dem besten Weg, für die Oboisten das zu werden, was...

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