



French Music for Horn and Piano

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Fanfare (Robert Markow - 2012.01.01)

Giulio Pellarin, principal horn in the Santa Cecilia National Academy Orchestra in Rome, turns in a program of six works by five French composers. Some of these are well known to horn players, others less so. Collectively they span the period from the late 19th to the late 20th centuries. Though some were written for the natural horn, Pellarin plays everything on a Paxman model 20M. The most substantial work on his program is Jean-Michel Damase's three-movement sonata, music that continuously engages the ear with lyricism, harmonic piquancy, forward thrust, and idiomatic exploitation of the horn's assets. The eight-minute Alpha by Jean-Michael Defaye was written in 1973 as a final exam piece for students at the Paris Conservatory. It too makes a worthy contribution to the literature, demonstrating the full range of the instrument and running the gamut of styles from moody Impressionism to jazzy virtuosity.

The Romance was a favorite genre of Saint-Saëns, and he wrote nearly a dozen of them for various instrumental and vocal combinations. Op. 36 is the well-known one for horn and piano; op. 67 is an arrangement of the fourth movement of the Suite for Cello and Piano, op. 16 (a fact not mentioned in the otherwise excellent program notes).

I particularly like the spirit of adventure Pellerin brings to his playing. It is always imaginative, full of ideas, and demands the listener's full attention. Coupled with what appears to be an innate capacity for lyricism plus technical facility and a pleasing tone, this CD can be added to my growing pile of heartily recommended horn recitals on CD.