



French Saxophone - 20th Century Music for Saxophone & Orchestra

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Here is a provocatively attractive and varied collection that should appeal to saxophone buffs as well as enthusiasts of these composers and this style-genre. With the exception of the Debussy these are all uncommon works and will attract interest ... and more.

The Tomasi shows Tassot as a soloist able to coax honey and amber from the sax. The legato phrasing is notable slightly coloured with a jazzy voice. The music has the motion of sea-wrack and deep green tones. The second episode is more animated with a 'Bolero' stomp. The brass can be scaldingly Baxian and the boiling climaxes at 7.01 and 11.15 are redolent of La Valse (again a Ravel cross-reference). Soon we return to the warbling and rough-rolling brass - a little like Messiaen meets Bax. There are only two movements the second of which starts with a sinister Baxian chase. This is extremely effective music also reminding me of the music of Louis Aubert (the superb Tombeau de Chateaubriand - hear it on Marco Polo) and the melodramatic Bernard Herrmann. Tomasi is well worth dedicated exploration and persistence as the Lyrix CD (LYR 227) also reviewed here further bears out. I have been working on a review of his gorgeous opera Don Juan for several months now.

I was much looking forward to the Caplet having heard his scorchingly imaginative and tragic Epiphanie for cello and orchestra last year. This Légende dates from much earlier in the composer's short life at a time when the saxophone enjoyed its first solo celebrity. It is a rhapsodically extended piece with a pleasing serenading character but without the scorch and acid of Epiphanie. The work was uncovered as recently as 1988 by Londeix. This is the first recording of its version with orchestra. The version for saxophone and alto saxophone, string quintet, oboe, clarinet and bassoon (1903) was recorded by Arno Bornkamp (saxophone) on Brilliant 6476. It has the liquidly mellifluous yearn and yield of the Glazunov concerto crossed with the idyllic Delius. The Absil is the most recent piece here, light on the palate but a little dry.

Marius Constant had a French father and a Rumanian mother. He studied in Paris with Tony Aubin and Olivier Messiaen. He also studied with Jean Fournet (whose outstanding Debussy on Supraphon Archive, I have just reviewed) and Arthur Honegger. While we Brits brag about BBC Radio 3 and its illustrious predecessor, The Third Programme, France had 'France Musique', a station which grew under Constant's direction. The Musique de Concert is for sax plus three each woodwind and brass plus strings, piano and percussion. The whole thing is done in just over ten minutes across five varied and jewelled movements in which the musical influences are compendious from Swingle-style Bach, to jazz, to avant-garde alienation, to rhythmic and dissonant 'pepper'. Finally comes the Debussy. This is all plush and dripping honey, gurgling dances and warm dawns. The orchestra score a wondrous warmth at 2.19.

That's four of the five pieces appearing here in world premiere recordings. The Debussy provides the 'sheet anchor' of comparative familiarity.

I really liked this collection. It is well played in every department. The selection reflects an audacity and valour rare in today's industry.

