

REVIEW IN MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL (novembre 2019)
cd piccolo concertos (Skarbo)

Piccolo (recorder) concertos were by no means a novelty in Vivaldi's day, and the same proves true of this fascinating programme of mostly brand-new works for piccolo and orchestra. Yes, the piccolo is known for its piercing high pitch, but as with all instruments, with a good player it can have all of the expressive qualities of anything else. Jean-Louis Beaumadier is a piccolo specialist and has been an ambassador for the instrument for many years, and with many of the works commissioned by or written for him, he is singlehandedly creating an entirely new and rich repertoire for a neglected solo sound.

The music here is entirely mellifluous and attractive. Florentine Mulsant's *Concerto for Piccolo and Orchestra* opens with a bitter-sweet, quite pastoral *Lento espressivo* which has tinges of Milhaud in its harmonic pacing. This is followed by a *Vif* which is full of wit and orchestral dialogue and virtuoso passage work for the soloist, while never entirely abandoning that gentler atmosphere in echoes from the first movement.

Lowell Lieberman's *Concerto for Piccolo and Orchestra* has a neo-classical frame in which that American neo-romantic idiom, with its spacious and often cinematic effects, expands into what is quite a significant work. There is some technical noodling in the first movement, which goes through variations of its theme. The central *Adagio* is truly gorgeous, the Prague strings restrained and deeply expressive under the piccolo's lyrical lines, and the final *Presto* has a nervy edge, Shostakovich in mostly genial chase mode.

Carl Joachim Andersen is well known for his flute studies, and the *Moto perpetuo* is a classic virtuoso work-out for the soloist. Originally composed with piano, the orchestration has been done by Véronique Poltz. Her 'Kilumac' *Concertino* opens with an exploratory cadenza for the piccolo, representative of her future son-in-law's marriage proposal, the title an interweaving of the letters of their names. This programme is taken further as the piece progresses, with more family members being added, though if listened to with no knowledge of all this you will hear another beautifully written work with impressionist overtones.

Régis Campo's *Touch the Sky* was inspired by the view from an airplane window, its four compact movements creating various colours of open horizons and distance using echo or call and response effects and ostinato textures, some in the John Adams mould. The final *Concerto for Piccolo and Orchestra* by Jean-Michel Damase is if anything the most French-sounding of all of the works in this recording. The music has a melodic grace allied with the kind of melancholy and *joie de vivre* you can find in Poulenc. This is the composer's last completed work and was written for Beaumadier, and it is packed full of wit and lovely moments. We get a sublimely melodic central *Andante*, and the programme is brought to a rousing close in an *Allegro scherzando* full of humour and bonhomie.

This recording has more to do with the quality of the music in its programme than with the instrument held by the soloist. If you've never had the idea of exploring the piccolo in this way then this is an ideal place to start, as you can forget superficial preconceptions and just enjoy what comes up. It's new music, but each work is highly appealing and I would happily recommend this to anyone.

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