



Chopin Competition laureate Kate Liu plays sonatas by Beethoven and Brahms, thoughtful and considered performances with an innate sense of shape

Corrette

'Le Clavecin Français'

Premier livre de pièces de clavecin, Op 12.

Carillon in F. Largo in D minor. Romance

'Ah vous dirai-je maman' and Variations

Olivier Baumont *hpd*

Plectra (PL22401 • 63')



Michel Corrette's name will be familiar to French Baroque buffs, his copious

output perhaps less so; his better-known works include some sonatas useful to wind players and about two dozen *Concertos comiques*, into which he incorporated some of the music he had written for the Opéra-Comique and Parisian fair theatres. He is also known for publishing a staggering number of teaching methods for everything from violin to voice and flute to mandolin, a valuable source for students of performance practice. That he also wrote 18 books of keyboard music seems a well-kept secret – somewhat perversely, as he was a professional organist – but for Olivier Baumont Corrette is 'a genuine love story that has lasted since childhood'. Baumont's debut recording (on LP in 1982) was of the

1734 *Premier livre de pièces de clavecin*, and it is to these that he returns now in a re-encounter he likens to his 'own personal madeleine'.

Published the year after Couperin's death, the *Premier livre* is unmistakably French, consisting of preludes, dances and character pieces, though Italian influence is also evident: 'La prise de Jéricho', which ends the fourth suite, is clearly in Vivaldian ritornello form. It would be a mistake, however, to expect the poetry of a Couperin: Corrette's gift is one of theatre-infused wit and unpretentiousness, and perhaps only 'Les idées heureuses', 'L'héroïne' and the remarkable study in space and distance that is 'L'étoiles' attempt something more profound. Rather, Corrette's titles and the naivety of his responses – heard, for instance, in the downward tinkling of 'Les giboulées de Mars' ('March showers'), the gabbling 'La babillarde' ('The voluble one') or the postillion of 'Le courrier' – put me in mind of the images you might find in a child's piano tutor. Harder though. Lively finger skills are required at times, not least the handful of pieces Baumont inserts from Corrette's other publications, including two variation sets and the remarkable *Carillon* (which in places seems more Rick Wakeman than French Baroque).

Baumont performs with a style, affection and nimble skill that conveys the music's cheerful charm. I only wish he could have dug a little deeper in those more thoughtful pieces. His 1768 harpsichord by Joannes Goermans has a crisp and characterful tone which, perhaps, over time, is just the wrong side of comfortable; maybe a slightly less close recording would have made it more grateful. **Lindsay Kemp**

Dufourt

'L'origine du monde'

An Schwager Kronos. La fontaine de cuivre

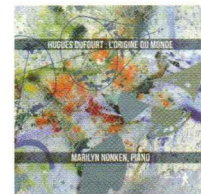
après Chardin. Meeresstille. L'origine du

monde^a. Rastlose Liebe. Tombeau de Debussy

Marilyn Nonken *pf*^a NYU Contemporary

Music Ensemble / Jonathan Haas

Métier (MEX77120 • 65')



As one of the six separate compositions by Hughes Dufourt on this album, written

between 1994 and 2018, *L'origine du monde* is rightly singled out for the disc's title as an exceptionally assured and spellbinding demonstration of Dufourt's uncompromising creative ambitions.

While there is no sign in this music of an ironic or even dismissive nod towards Darius Milhaud's beguiling *La création du monde*, Dufourt is much more concerned than Milhaud with the resonances of High Art that radiate from such radically diverse sources as paintings by Courbet and Chardin, and poetry by Goethe, as well as music by Schubert and Debussy.

That Debussy is the most pervasive resonance is made clear in the very first track, *Meeresstille* ('Calm Sea'), which has less to do with explicit echoes of Schubert's Goethe setting or Mendelssohn's concert overture than with the uneasiness of attempting to progress purposefully though a passive but alien environment – the kind of atmosphere found in some of Debussy's piano *Préludes*, most obviously 'Des pas sur la neige' ('Footsteps in the snow'), and the piece called *Tombeau de Debussy* that rounds off this programme reinforces an inheritance which Dufourt may well value more than any other. But he is not providing acts of pious homage to the particular materials signalled in the composition titles; and the concern to avoid straightforward quotes or good-humoured pastiches in his own materials creates an aura of sometimes anxious, sometimes aggressive expressiveness. This is a modernist style in which affirmation and suppression confront one another and draw the listener into a seductive web of diverse sonorities that never degenerate into the kind of soulless aridities that spectralism seeks to supplant.

While I would challenge any simplistic critical claim that the music of Webern, Boulez, Birtwistle or Lachenmann is nothing more than soullessly arid, I accept that the spectralists sound very different, and offer valid but still challenging alternatives, such as the sheer earthiness of the music inspired by Courbet's notorious painting *L'origine du monde*. Yet Dufourt, like his French spectralist confrères Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail, does much more than merely negate what has previously been affirmed, and his ability to provide fresh insights into archetypal musical polarities – consonance and dissonance, symmetrical and asymmetrical forms, motivic and more abstractly textural materials – is vividly expounded in the music's often startling sonic environments, as acoustic and quasi-electronic sound worlds merge and diverge. While Marilyn Nonken is the tirelessly resourceful pianist throughout, there are also vital contributions from the New York University Contemporary Music Ensemble, conducted by Jonathan Haas, and a recording team who make the most

of 'the cavernous and regal Troy Savings Bank Music Hall in upstate New York', as the booklet evocatively describes it.

Arnold Whittall

Field

Complete Nocturnes

Alice Sara Ott *pf*

DG (486 6238 • 75')



Gone are the days when one heard the name of John Field mentioned only as a precursor of Chopin. Now he is regarded, in the words of Robin Langley, as 'one of the most original figures in the development of Romantic piano music'. If his influence on Chopin has always been obvious, elements of his style can also be traced to Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms and Glinka. Himself a pupil of Clementi, Field taught extensively after his arrival in Russia in 1802, eventually becoming one of the pillars of the 'Russian School'. His pupil Aleksandr Dubuque taught Nikolay Zverev, who would become the teacher of Scriabin and Rachmaninov. All of Field's rather substantial catalogue of piano works has been recorded, along with his seven piano concertos and a number of his songs and other works. Still, it is his Nocturnes, the form he pioneered, that are best known. One catalogue lists nine complete recordings of Field's Nocturnes, one by Tyler Hay (Piano Classics) among the most recent. The latest of all is by Alice Sara Ott on a beautifully produced DG album.

Few would argue, I suspect, that Field's 18 Nocturnes are the equal of Chopin's 19 in terms of variety, drama or overall musical depth. Yet they have a great deal to recommend them, beyond mere historical interest. Ott deftly captures their delicate poise without ever resorting to overplaying. Pellucid textures are beautifully rendered and the individual lyricism of each piece finely wrought. The essentially Italianate lines are held aloft effortlessly and with the utmost tenderness. Interestingly, if only two of the 18 pieces are in a minor key, several have intriguing subtitles, such as *Nocturne caractéristique noontide* and *Réverie-Nocturne*. Not everything is an invitation to repose: some of the nocturnes are interrupted by perky folk dances. Transitions in and out of these are but one delicious aspect of Ott's beguiling performances. **Patrick Rucker**

Liszt

'Phantasmagoria'

Cantique d'amour, S173 No 10. Piano Sonata in B minor, S178. Réminiscences de Don Juan, S418

Lise de la Salle *pf*

Naïve (V8602 • 57')



Lise de la Salle is a seasoned Lisztian. Her B minor Sonata is beautifully

recorded (lovely-sounding piano), considered, technically assured and individual. Were this your introduction to the work, you would have done well. One of its merits is that it does not seek to dazzle but emphasises the work's organic growth.

De la Salle does not get it all right. The episode after the first *grandioso* statement is robbed of tension and energy; sometimes, notably in the 'first movement', she cannot decide which of two voices must be given precedence and so makes both equally important; the brakes go on for the famous *prestissimo* octave salvo in the finale. In return, you get to hear, with more clarity than usual, felicitous details, her firm grasp of structure providing a convincing and individual account of this great work.

Maintaining the tone of hushed reverence, and modulating pleasantly from the Sonata's final B major to E major, takes us into the rarely heard 10th and final number of Liszt's *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (the collection with 'Funérailles' and the masterpiece that is 'Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude'). This 'Cantique d'amour' is certainly ardent and intense, a splendid vehicle for de la Salle's firm, rich chord-voicing (heard to advantage, too, in the Sonata).

Liszt's mighty *Réminiscences de Don Juan* is given a muscular, full-bodied reading, de la Salle making the most of its overblown theatrics, even if the difference between *presto* and *prestissimo* eludes her in the bravura pages of the Champagne Aria. She plays the score uncut except for about 30 bars before the coda and the curious excision of four bars six before the end. I cannot agree with the booklet writer's assertion that '[this recording] restores this somewhat neglected score to its former glory' (its glory has never needed restoring nor has the score ever been neglected) but de la Salle's magisterial account put me in mind of Jorge Bolet's. I can offer no higher praise.

Jeremy Nicholas