

Alberto GINASTERA (1916-1983)

Harp Concerto, Op. 25 (1956/1965, rev. 1968) [23:59]

Variaciones concertantes, Op. 23 (1953) [24:51]

Sidsel Walstad (harp)

Norwegian Radio Orchestra/Miguel Harth-Bedoya

rec. 2017/18, Radio Concert Hall, Oslo

LAWO CLASSICS LWC1182 [48:50]



I haven't paid much attention to Ginastera until now, but catching a sample of the *Harp Concerto* when running through the CD listings impressed me enough to want to hear the whole work. This is one of those striking pieces that has just about everything you want from a concerto.

The solo part is technically demanding, the booklet notes reminding us that it "calls for a level of pedal technique not attempted until then", and with nail and plenty of other effects it is hardly surprising that harpist Sidsel Walstad describes playing it as like "climbing a mountain."

The first movement in particular has a special energy with plenty of rhythmic drive, the orchestration vital but transparent, allowing the soloist to shine but also creating a highly dramatic, almost cinematic atmosphere. The central *Molto moderato* builds from darker moods, the atmosphere taking on magical qualities with extended passages for the soloist. Ginastera doesn't go in for lyrical charm here, and that cinematic quality is extended here into a chamber of grim, sometimes emotionally charged secrets. After a remarkably wide-ranging *Liberamente capriccioso* harp cadenza the finale returns us to the driving energy of the first movement, a chase full of peril and excitement with an ending designed to get you out of your chair in a standing ovation.

Variaciones concertantes is an earlier work, Ginastera's own description including the words, "These variations have a subjective Argentinian quality. Instead of using traditional folk material, I try to achieve an Argentinian mood by using my own thematic and rhythmic elements." The result is a kind of concerto for orchestra, with each section of the orchestra under the spotlight with solos or duos for each variation. This is another impressive and attractive work, arguably a bit more approachable than the *Harp Concerto* but with an equally wide-ranging amount of variety and contrast and having a more easily assimilated lyricism. The Norwegian Radio Orchestra proves itself entirely capable of creating Ginastera's desired Argentinian moods, skilfully led by Peruvian conductor Miguel Harth-Bedoya, whose "heart pounds for South American music and culture".

There are a few recordings of these works around. I didn't manage to hear Marie-Pierre Langlamet on the Assai label ([review](#)), that also has the *Concerto for Strings* to make for added value. The Chandos label recorded the *Harp Concerto* alongside that of Reinhold Gliere in another impressive performance by Rachel Masters and the City of London Sinfonia conducted by Richard Hickox ([review](#)). The recording here is in a more resonant acoustic which creates additional atmosphere, but the Norwegian Radio Orchestra is sharper rhythmically in the outer movements. It may in the end be the couplings that tips the balance, and short playing time is less in this Lawo release's favour than some. The recording and performances are, however, pretty impeccable.

Dominy Clements

http://musicweb-international.com/classrev/2020/Jan/Ginastera_harp_LWC1182.htm