

## **La Flute Norvegienne**

Tom Ottar Andreassen, fl; Ingar Berby; Norwegian Radio

LAWO 1127—71 minutes

The curmudgeon wonders why the title of the release is in French, but the booklet is in Norwegian and English. Is it because two of the four Norwegian composers spent some time in Paris? The musical idiom is certainly far from Gallic. All four of the works date to a very brief moment around 1960. The Braein concertino remains closest to traditional tonality, with neo-classic gestures that recall Prokofieff (particularly) and Shostakovich (in his circus polka moods). This is the work that you will be most likely to hear on classical radio.

The Kvandal concerto and the Hovland suite both draw to a limited extent on serialism, but Kvandal's muse is far closer to Hindemith than to Vienna or Schoenberg; and Hovland, though a student of Dallapiccola, has Bartok in his ears. Closing the program is a lengthy solo sonata by Finn Mortensen, which has had several previous recordings (it was considered "unplayable" when it was published).

Soloist Tom Ottar Andreassen (b. 1963) has a relatively slim discography (though he has another concertino leading off a disc of compositions by Marcus Paus also released in 2017). Everything about his playing here—plus the contribution of the orchestra, the recorded sound, the presentation—is world class. A very welcome release for lovers of the flute and contemporary music.

T MOORE

## **Tour de France**

Bonis, Debussy, Durufle, Gaubert, Hahn, Poulenc  
Trio Arkaede  
Leaf 202—64 minutes

This release combines the familiar—sonatas by Poulenc and Debussy—with uncommon selections for flute, violin, viola, and piano well worth hearing if you like French music from the early 20th Century. The cover art ties in with this theme by showing *Violin and Checkerboard* (1913) by Juan Gris. Lest you assume too much, the styles are not uniform: we encounter writing that is romantic, impressionist, and neo-Renaissance. In other words, each contributor speaks distinctly from his or her artistic perspective.

Flutist Karin Aurell plays with fine contours of phrasing and a rich, pure sound. Isabelle Fournier, a former member of the

English Chamber Orchestra, plays violin and viola often with the softness and delicacy, even reticence, of a chamber musician rather than the heft of a soloist. We get the more aggressive side of her personality in the Debussy Sonata and Durufle Trio, and the softer side absolutely enchants us in the Pastorale from the Bonis. Whether it is small, atmospheric detail or firm foundation he offers, Julien LeBlanc revels in his role from the keyboard, contributing to the success of our French tour and leaving the impression that there is yet more we would like to "see".

The rather brief program notes imply that Cesar Franck made some sort of exception to admit Melanie Bonis (1858-1937) to the Paris Conservatory. This statement is very misleading. Neither uncommon composers, historical truths, nor women's rights are served well by such carelessness. Bonis was an exceptional student, but we should remember that Cesar Franck was not director of the conservatory; in the 1870s, that was Ambroise Thomas. A cornet professor, Henri Maury, actually recommended her and convinced her parents that she should go. The conservatory had been founded as open to both sexes in the aftermath of the French Revolution, which was all about equality, so girls had attended since it opened in 1795—and conservatories all across Europe admitted women in the early decades of the 19th Century. Even before she was born in 1858 many women had been faculty and earned prizes.

So what was the barrier she broke? It is true that when Bonis attended no women had won the highest recognition for a composer, the Rome Prize, and a strong reason was that women were not admitted to the advanced composition course necessary to prepare for it. Here is where she was the first—in 1879—and this was the exception Franck had made on her behalf. The way it turned out was unfortunate: her parents forced her to leave when they found out she was in love with another student, and made haste to find her a husband they considered more suitable. They found a man more than 20 years older who said he had a tin ear. Go ahead and guess how the rest unfolded and you won't be far from the truth. Don't forget the secret love child she had no choice but to give away and never speak of again. Melanie Bonis lived a life with far more drama than her music.

But this is a very fine production that deserves a wide audience.

GORMAN