



Tour de France. Quintessenz. Claude Debussy: *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, Petite Suite, Suite Bergamasque*; George Bizet: *Jeux d'enfants*; Camille Saint-Saëns: *Le carnaval des animaux*; Maurice Ravel: *Pièce en forme de Habanera, Alborada del gracioso*; François Couperin; *Le tic-toc-choc*; Louis Ganne: *Andante et Scherzo*. Genuin Musikproduktion GEN87108

Having read excellent reviews of this flute quintet's live performance at the BFS Convention, I was looking forward to hearing them for the first time on this, their latest CD, which continues the 'world tour' theme of previous discs. The contents list reads like a flautist's dream calling card so the bar is set high even before a note is heard. Also, to lead with *L'après-midi d'un faune* seems a bold, if not—as the sleeve notes suggest—audacious, choice. But I need not have worried: Anna Garzuly's beautiful opening solo lulls you into an easy acceptance of the new sound-world. Your imagination takes over, re-interpreting the expected into the new but glowing tone-canvas now unfolding. Lines of colour thread among the voices in a continuous palette; arpeggios bubble and ripple gently through the shimmering view. (There is also an astonishing imitation of a muted French horn towards the end. To describe it further would spoil its impact: a masterstroke!)

The orchestral scoring demands sensitive dovetailing of lines and dynamics, but to achieve the same between only five players, under close-miked conditions, is quite something. In fact, the acoustic for the whole disc is very natural, with a resonance well suited to this repertoire. Throughout, the quintet's ease of interpretation and finely-judged pacing of the music is a delight; tone colour is so uniformly matched and restrained that individual lines easily

come through the texture when required, or can blend and fool the ear (as in the opening solo line of the Bizet *La poupée*: a beautifully controlled piccolo solo, in fact). Yes, these are professional players (all from Leipzig orchestras), but that does not necessarily guarantee the high level of ensemble, unity and polish displayed here; much hard work as an ensemble has been invested over several years.

The sound engineering and post-production of the disc is first-class, as are the arrangements—mostly the fine work of the group's piccolo player, Gudrun Hinze, with contributions from their bass flute player, Christian Springer (in the Saint-Saëns), and Trevor Wye (in the Bizet and Couperin). Several of the tracks are skilfully and subtly enhanced by the castanet playing of Friederike von Krosigk. The Spanish-flavoured Ravel pieces are a gift for this, of course, and the rhythms and nuances spilling from her hands bind seamlessly to the texture. You would think the 'mallets' of Couperin's *Rondeau* would do so, too, yet this was the only track where, for me, the imagery failed. (Less French mallets, more East End spoons!) There is too much on this disc (a generous seventy-one minutes) to cite individual items and the playing is too consistently excellent to pick favourites, but if you have any interest in what a flute quintet can achieve, buy it. It could hardly be bettered.

Philip Rowson

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