

Emoción

It is always interesting when artists show us correspondences between works of different styles and cultures. Chilean-German soprano Carolina Ullrich and Brazilian pianist Marcelo Amaral here explore the song repertoires of four composers—Fernando Obradors, Reynaldo Hahn, Richard Strauss, and Francisco Ernani Braga—from the same time period but from different countries, in fact different continents, who wrote in different musical languages but shared a common interest in the expression of passion in song.

Strauss is, of course, the most familiar of the four. He is represented here by some of his most joyous and tender songs, including an enchanting ‘Rosenband’ and the luscious ‘Rote Rosen’, and a refreshingly un-strident ‘Muttertändelei’—not, perhaps, the selection one might expect on a program about passion, but perfectly suited to Ullrich’s youthful voice and a nice balance to the other works on the program. The Braga songs, simple but sophisticated settings of traditional Brazilian folk songs, are probably the least familiar. They require fluency in regional dialects and a light, sure touch from both singer and pianist, and Ullrich and Amaral make them sensitive and affecting. The songs of Obradors have been popularized by Montserrat Caballé, Jose Carreras, Shirley Verrett, and many others as the epitome of “Latin” passion; and although the performances here are not without fire, they do not generate as much heat as the other singers do.

The songs by Hahn, born in Caracas to a Venezuelan mother and German Jewish father but raised and educated in Paris, are the real revelation of this recording. Hahn’s style, described as French “through and through” in the program notes, seems to shimmer with sensuality just below its polished surface and connects effectively with the other composers here, different as they are. Ullrich and Amaral convey just the right sensation of deep but carefully controlled emotion, especially in the elegant, deliberately archaic ‘A Chloris’ and the delicately bittersweet ‘Derniere Valse’.

Ullrich is surely one of the most promising young singers active today, with glistening top notes balanced by warmth in the lower register, flawless diction, and effortless musicality. Also impressive is the way Ullrich and Amaral work together like a single musical unit. Their performance of this thoughtful program is a pleasure to hear.

Sudie Marcuse

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