

Wohlhauser

L'amour est un duperie - l'amour
n'est pas une symbiose

Christine Simolka sop

Ensemble Polysono / René Wohlhauser bar/pf

Neos © NEOS11824 (74' • DDD • T/t)



His may be an unfamiliar name but the Swiss composer René Wohlhauser

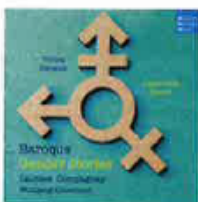
(b1954) has gained a wide reputation for his sizeable catalogue these past four decades, while being equally active as baritone, pianist and director. All of which are put to distinctive use in the present work, a chamber opera derived from texts by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Or it would have been had not the former's estate withheld permission, leading Wohlhauser to replace them with 'sound poetry' whose phonetics replicate the expressive content of Sartre's texts.

Other than Sartre's early treatise *L'être et le néant*, these texts (actual or intended) are letters exchanged over the period January 5 – February 23, 1940, when Sartre and de Beauvoir became engrossed in a sexual relationship as much about those others involved as themselves. This is enacted across a prologue and three parts, soprano and baritone partnered by an ensemble resembling that of *Pierrot lunaire* (but without violin), the manner which they merge into – even become – each other defining the essence of this piece as much as any purely semantic evolution. This is most evident in the second part, much the longest yet having the least text, in which voices and instruments lock into passages of melodic and rhythmic unison charged with an emotional intensity though also a confiding intimacy affecting in its tangible poise.

The performance, recorded in the studio following two European tours, sounds as focused and involving as expected given the lengthy collaboration between the composer and the Basel-based Ensemble Polysono. Christine Simolka makes a suitably alluring contribution, with Wohlhauser as committed vocally as in the sparing yet strategic piano part. It makes for an intriguing and provocative experience. One looks forward, moreover, to the stage premiere in 2051! **Richard Whitehouse**

o stelle; Son stanco, ingiusti numi **Hasse** Achille in Sciro - Risponderti vorrei. Siroe - Sinfonia **Lampugnani** Semiramide riconosciuta - Crudel morir mi vedi; Tu mi disprezzi **Porpora** Semiramide riconosciuta - Il pastor se torna aprile **Traetta** Siroe - Che furia, che mostro **Vivaldi** Orlando furioso - Insolito coraggio; Nel profondo cieco mondo; Orlando, allora il ciel **Wagenseil** Siroe - Esci, crudel, d'affanno; La sorte mia tiranna

Vivica Genaux mez **Lawrence Zazzo** counterten **Lautten Compagny** / **Wolfgang Katschner** Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 19075 94309-2 (87' • DDD • T/t)



Early 18th-century Italian opera companies often cast female voices in male

roles, and sometimes castratos took female roles according to the vicissitudes of local circumstances. For example, during some periods female performers were forbidden on stage in Rome, but throughout the rest of Europe good female singers were the preferred option for leading male characters if no suitable castrato was available. Beyond that, there are plenty of Baroque operas in which characters disguise themselves as someone of the opposite gender. Such fluidity inspires a playful double album by Vivica Genaux and Lawrence Zazzo, who take turns to sing every conceivable kind of character within the compass of their voice-type (male, female, and covertly disguised), regardless of the genders of the characters or their original performers.

Zazzo sings Amastre's wistful 'Cagion son io' (Handel's *Serse*) and Bradamante's furious 'È gelosia' (Handel's *Alcina*) – both female characters disguised as men that the countertenor is unlikely to perform on stage. On the other hand, Genaux's propulsive 'Nel profondo cieco mondo' from Vivaldi's *Orlando furioso* sounds as if her unstable title-hero belongs on stage. These are heard in context alongside much less familiar music. Zazzo's spirited enactment of Tamiri's 'Tu mi disprezzi' from Lampugnani's setting of Metastasio's libretto *Semiramide riconosciuta* (Rome, 1741) is juxtaposed directly with Genaux's gentle dialogue with soft pastoral flutes and horns in Semiramide's 'Il pastor se torna aprile' from Porpora's version revived at Naples in 1739. Metastasio's drama *Siroe*,

laden singing as the imprisoned hero in Handel's version (1728), and his limpid singing in two arias by Wagenseil (1748) – one for the *primo uomo* and another for the *prima donna*.

Wolfgang Katschner and Lautten Compagny provide lean, skilfully balanced and astute theatrical support. Clever artistic programming means that each half starts with a striking overture and culminates in an engaging duet, via a series of vividly contrasting musical styles, orchestral colours, speeds and moods. **David Vickers**

'A Spanish Nativity'

Flecha 'El Viejo' El Jubilate. Riu riu chiu **Guerrero** A un niño llorando. Beata Dei genitrix **Maria Lobo** Missa Beata Dei genitrix **Maria Morales** Cum natus esset **Rimonte** De la piel de sus ovejas **Victoria** O magnum mysterium **Stile Antico**

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2312 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Released in time for Christmas, Stile Antico's latest offering explores the

Spanish Golden Age from Morales to Victoria. The centrepiece is the Mass by Alonso Lobo, based on a motet by his master, Francisco Guerrero, with a few seasonal vilancicos by way of palate-cleansers. While the Mass is not explicitly for Christmas, the parent motet's emphasis on Mary as the begetter of the Christ child makes it a plausible choice. In any case it's a lovely work, opulent yet graceful, and one welcomes a second performance of it on disc (La Grande Chapelle recorded it six years ago – *Lauda Música*, 3/14 – but with soloists and chamber organ rather than several singers to a part, as here).

In the sacred music, Stile Antico deliver performances of admirable contrapuntal clarity, sonic bloom and opulence; devotees of their approach won't be disappointed. They could hardly dispute, however, that the secular pieces come off second best. Sensibly, Stile Antico take most of these with single voices, which is surely correct; but then one would expect a far greater projection of the text's affects. In Flecha's *Jubilate Deo*, the Virgin's colourful language in facing down Satan elicits little discernible response. The same goes for the narrator's occasional asides to the audience