

Instrumental

Liaisons Vol. 3

New CD/SACD

C. P. E. Bach Keyboard Sonatas – E flat, Wq65/42 (H189); D minor, Wq69 (H53).
Fantasia in D, Wq117/14 (H160).
La Böhmer, Wq117/26 (H81).

Britten Five Waltzes, Op. 3. Holiday Diary, Op. 5. Night Piece (Notturmo).

Dejan Lazić (piano).

Channel Classics CCSSA28511 (full price, 1 hour 9 minutes). Website www.channelclassics.com.

Producer/Engineer C. Jared Sacks. Producer Dejan Lazić. Date September 2008.



Dejan Lazić

Susie Knoll

The young Croatian pianist Dejan Lazić first came to my attention in March 2008 when I reviewed his 'Liaisons Vol. 1', a disc that broke the mould by bringing together music by two seemingly unlikely bedfellows: Domenico Scarlatti and Bartók. If the thought of melding such overtly contrasting musical styles strikes you as wilfully bizarre, then in a sense you'd be right, although Lazić's route to programming this music was, by his own admission, a chance discovery, and one which has since led him to reappraise both composers in an entirely new light. Not all liaisons are dangerous, of course, as Lazić's second volume testifies: the music of Schumann and Brahms – though even here, peel back the surface and you'll discover as many interesting points of departure as moments of more unified direction. In Volume 3 Lazić is up to his old tricks again, this time casting his spell on C. P. E. Bach and Benjamin Britten.

Whether we may resonate more easily with the heart-on-sleeve outpourings of J. S. Bach's most illustrious son, or prefer the grainier sinews of Britten's piano writing, pared down and often teetering on a knife edge, is for the purpose of this recording hardly relevant: it's all about the alchemy that occurs when different sound-worlds, two centuries apart, collide. C. P. E.'s instrument of preference was the clavichord, yet it seems ironic that such a diminutive keyboard would become a vehicle for the composer's audacious 'affects'.

Indeed, a glimpse at one of C. P. E.'s keyboard scores, extravagant in its expressive markings, reveals an often startling urge to embody human emotion in sound. Britten was equally capable of turning back as looking forward, and yet his highly personalized vocabulary lays bare an unswerving need to innovate and explore. Unlike C. P. E. (Bach), who wrote a great deal for the keyboard instruments of his day, Britten's kinship with the piano, which is amply revealed in his performances, for some reason does not seem to have regularly stirred his compositional impulse, accepting of course his marvellous ongoing affinity for it as an accompaniment to songs such as *The Lincolnshire poacher* or *A Charm of Lullabies*. Britten left us drooling over a relatively small clutch of solo piano pieces, as Clemens Romijn, the writer of the booklet notes with this new recording, makes clear.

The CD, recorded in September 2008, contains two Sonatas by Bach (Wq65/42 and Wq69), the *Fantasia* in D major, Wq117/14 and *La Böhmer*, Wq117/26, a character piece for harpsichord,

interspersed with two early works by Britten, *Five Waltzes*, Op. 3 and *Holiday Diary*, Op. 5, offset by a rather later work, *Night Piece*. The effect, as I recall eulogizing in reference to the first volume, is 'electric', with a direct, beautifully gauged sound on the recording and expertly incisive performances from Lazić.

The multiple personalities of the Bach pieces flit about mischievously, especially in *La Böhmer*, which bristles with wit. I might have been tempted to kick off with this sub-three-minute teaser actually, if only to heighten the nervy behaviour of the Britten *Waltzes*, composed in the 1920s. Lasting around ten minutes, these amount to rather more than music 'useful for the young or inexperienced to practise', as indeed does the delightful set of descriptive pieces entitled *Holiday Diary* (1934) and the evocative *Night Piece*, which was composed especially for the first Leeds Piano Competition some three decades later.

What comes over so strikingly is the not dissimilar soul and personality of the two composers, as opposed to the obvious differences between their harmonic and structural approaches. This serendipitous liaison is made all the more cogent by the pianistic achievements of Lazić, whose magical touch invigorates the more impassioned moments, such as the *Andante* to Bach's Sonata in D minor, as well as in the mellifluous murmurings of Britten's *Night Piece* with which the CD concludes. What seems to have appealed to the pianist is the consistently high level of interest packed into these short pieces of music, and the fact that both composers demonstrate a true feeling for the unexpected, not to mention an enviable empathy with the highly contrasted possibilities in the instruments for which they were writing. Compare, for example, the atmosphere in 'Sailing' from Britten's *Holiday Diary*, which is given a most poignant treatment by Lazić, with the *Adagio assai* from Bach's Sonata in E flat – works both brimming over in expressive interest. Musical language, it would seem, need not be as critical as emotional weight when presenting a successful programme of piano music, especially when it is so thoughtfully performed.

Lazić has hitherto recorded a dozen discs for Channel Classics and there seems to be no stopping him. His 'strawberries with balsamic vinegar' approach certainly chimes easily with the prevailing tide of fusion cuisine, but how many more unusual dishes will he be cooking up, one might ask? I am sure our twenty-first-century tastes will tolerate quite a few further adventurous couplings: Couperin and Messiaen, perhaps, or even Giles Farnaby and John McLeod. After all, if you caught Lazić's encore at the Proms on September 2nd you'll have heard him follow up Liszt's *Totentanz* with, ahem, Lady Gaga's 'Bad Romance' – a nifty little fugue by Giovanni Dettori that brought the house down. Whatever we're in for next, I hungrily await his next iconoclastic serving.

Mark Tanner

Beethoven

New

Piano Sonatas – No. 3 in C, Op. 2 No. 3; No. 21 in C, Op. 53, 'Waldstein'. Rondo a capriccio in G, Op. 129, 'Rage over a Lost Penny'. Andante favori in F, WoO57.

Alice Sara Ott (piano).

DG 477 9291 (full price, 1 hour 6 minutes). Website www.deutsche Grammophon.com Producer/Engineer Helmut Burk. Date August 2010.

Comparisons:

Piano Sonata No. 21:

Brendel (Philips) 438 472-2 (1993)

Goode (Nonesuch) 7559-79328-2 (1993, ten discs)

Schnabel (Pearl) GEMMCD59139 (1934)

Alice Sara Ott's three previous releases on DG (reviewed in March and October 2010) have each confirmed the extraordinary technical