



Green Places, Sazas 105210

Matej Zupan –/flute
Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra of Slovenia
Marko Munih - conductor

Matej Zupan's new CD takes its title from the first of its pieces – Green Places by Gary Schocker – which was inspired by James Galway and to whom the work is dedicated. Schocker explains that Galway “suggested I write two outer movements and to orchestrate something I had played him one evening”. The result is a concerto in three movements separately entitled Topiary, Nightblooming and Troll Garden.

Gary Shocker has a great talent for writing melody and Green Places is rich in good tunes – from the opening subject of the first movement, through the slinky jazz of the slow movement to the syncopated medieval gigue which frames the final rondo, Schocker is never short of an idea. And there is one very beautiful melody which appears once in the middle of the first movement and reappears in the middle of the last.

But the music is also full of fast runs and articulations, all of which Matej Zupan performs with an ease that belies the considerable technical difficulties. Zupan's flute darts from low to high and back again, trilling as it goes, in an almost uninterrupted flow of thematic invention.

Topiary is the most substantial of the three movements and is written in neoclassical style. The music has a nobility and elegance that fits well with the image, conjured up by the title, of greenery sculpted for the gardens of the aristocracy. In the opening bars of Nightblooming, upward semi-tone appoggiaturas and downward chromatic slides in the flute part indicate that the style for this movement is ‘cool’, and Schocker floats one of his lazier tunes above the orchestra in meditative ‘laid-back’ mood. Finally, Troll Garden is a lively rondo interspersed with musical forays into different tempi and moods until the whole piece ends on a high note – a top, top F.

In contrast to Shocker's exuberant and joyful music, Jani Golob's two-movement Concertino is a much more introverted and serious work. A sense of thematic structure is immediately apparent from the beginning of the opening andante comodo when in slow fugal fashion the cellos and basses, closely followed by the violas and violins, pick up the simple four-note motif stated by the solo flute. Golob makes much of this material and, indeed, most of the movement is constructed from it. The music clings constantly and yearningly to the minor key – much like Shostakovich at his bleakest. But on its first entry in the second movement, the solo flute eventually rises to the third of a major chord. However, this proves to be a false dawn and, despite the livelier 3/4 tempo, the music remains in wistful and melancholy mode to the end of the piece. Despite its dark mood and its overall gloominess, Golob's Concertino possesses a powerful and haunting charm. It is a work that well deserves a place in the repertoire of shorter concertos.

The composer of the following concerto – Malcolm Arnold – was once an orchestral trumpeter with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and his works display an intimate understanding of the nuts and bolts of music as well as an accomplished artistry as a composer. In his flute concerto, the first of two he has written for the instrument, these qualities combine in music of ingenuity and great vitality. Arnold's music is never dull and the outer movements of this concerto – con energico and con fuoco – are filled with energetic runs and arpeggio figures which drive the music along at breakneck speed. The slow movement is a haven of serenity amid this frantic activity.

The final concerto on this disc is one of six written by Saverio Mercadante between 1816 and 1820 while the composer was studying in Naples. Mercadante wrote some 60 operas and largely paved the way for the success of his compatriot Verdi, whose operas have upstaged and largely obliterated Mercadante's own from the repertoire. This E minor concerto contains music that preserves much of the lyrical and dramatic qualities of the Italian stage. Mercadante was himself a flautist and possibly the soloist in the first performance of this piece. If so, his abilities as a player must have been considerable because the flute writing is virtuosic and demands a fine technique of the soloist for its execution. Certainly, on the pre-Boehm flute this would have been very difficult music to perform. The technical difficulties of this work and its Neapolitan musical charm have made this delightful concerto a long-time favourite with the players and teachers of the French school.

In all four works the excellent Slovenian Radiotelevision Symphony Orchestra (in which Matej Zupan holds the position of principal flute) is conducted by its principal conductor Marko Munih and the orchestral accompaniment is at all times sensitive and finely shaded. This recording provides an excellent opportunity to hear a partnership that perhaps is only familiar in this country to nightowl listeners to BBC Radio 3's Through the Night broadcasts.

Matej Zupan brings a spontaneity to his performances throughout this recording, yet at all times his technical control is evident and he plays with a spirit and musical understanding that allows the music to speak for itself. His assured technique, fine sound and command of tone colour are splendidly showcased in this recording.

Laurence Joyce
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