

DAQUIN: *Noels* (12)

Adriano Falcioni, organ
Brilliant 94895—71 minutes

Louis-Claude Daquin (1694-1772) was one of the most celebrated organists and harpsichordists of his day. As a child prodigy, he performed at the age of 6 before Louis XIV. He held several important organist posts, including an appointment in 1755 as one of four titular organists of Notre Dame in Paris. Of his few surviving compositions, undoubtedly the best known are these 12 Noels, published in 1757 as *Nouveau Livre de Noels*. They are organ pieces based on traditional French Christmas songs and undoubtedly represent the improvisations that attracted crowds of listeners to the churches where he played.

The pieces are charming rather than profound. Most are lively, but there are also slower and more reflective examples marked *tendrement*. The lively variations tend to be formulaic, with much the same sort of material recurring from one piece to the next. It is worth remembering that all 12 were never intended to be heard at one sitting. They require considerable manual dexterity.

This recording is a showcase for the organ by Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, grandfather of Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, at Gellone Abbey. Cavaillé worked on the instrument from 1782 to 1789, when work ceased with the outbreak of the French Revolution. The instrument had several narrow escapes—many French organs were destroyed and their pipes melted down for tin. The organ's positif division was not built until 1971, carrying out Cavaillé's original plan. The most recent restoration took place in 2000, and since 2010 maintenance has been in the hands of Michel Formentelli. The instrument has 3 manuals. The largest divisions are the positif and grand-orgue. The recit consists only of a 5-rank cornet. The 18-note pedal consists of an 8-foot flute and eight-foot trumpet.

It is difficult to judge an organ from a recording, but as heard here it has a bold and pungent tone, especially the reeds. That tone is effective in the lively pieces, but does not capture the flavor of the more tender Noels. Perhaps more space in recording would have been advisable. Dynamic contrast between the divisions is not as pronounced as in some recordings I have heard of other French baroque organs. Many of Daquin's Noels exploit this contrast, so the performances here are not as effective in that respect as they could be.

In general Adriano Falcioni is heard to best effect in the lively Noels. His manual technique is more than equal to Daquin's demands, and he performs the passages of rapid movement from one manual to another with breathtaking precision. The slower pieces, in contrast, suffer from a lack of coherent flow. One of my favorites is *Noel sur les Flutes* (9), but here the opening section and its reprise tend to plod. The quicker variations between them fare better.

I was surprised to find only two other recordings of the Daquin Noels listed in the ARG index. Gregory Hamilton had good things to say about a recording by Vincent Boucher on a large Beckerath organ at St Joseph's Oratory in Montreal (ATMA 2703; N/D 2015). Donald Metz was less enthusiastic about a recording by Francois Zeitouni on a French classic replica in a Montreal seminary chapel (XXI 1609; N/D 2009), preferring recordings by Gaston Litaize (EMI) and Christopher Herrick (Hyperion).

GATENS

DEBUSSY: Piano Pieces

Images I; Images Oubliées; Estampes; La Plus que Lent; 2 Arabesques; L'Isle Joyeuse

Dennis Lee

Omnia 7—60 minutes

Suite Bergamasque; Images II; 2 Arabesques; L'Isle Joyeuse; Jardins sous la Pluie; La Plus que Lent; Haydn Homage

Nikolai Lugansky

Harmonia Mundi 902309—54 minutes

L'Isle Joyeuse; Golliwog's Cakewalk; La Cathédrale Engloutie; Prelude a l'après-midi d'un Faune; La Puerta del Vino; Clair de Lune; La Soirée dans Grenade; ALBENIZ: El Albaicin; Granada; MOMPOU: Cancion & Danza; GRANADOS: Danza Andaluza; La Maya & el Ruiseñor; FALLA: Danza de La Vida Breve; Debussy Homage

Azumi Nishizawa

IBS 132018—77 minutes

Images I+II; Prelude a l'après-midi d'un Faune; Fêtes; Lindaraja; 3 Songs; SCHMITT: Debussy Memoire; DUKAS: La Plainte, au Loin, du Faune; FALLA: Debussy Homage

Sandro Russo

Steinway 30105—71 minutes

My last reviews of 2018 include four discs with almost all the piano works of Debussy. There are two additional discs with a few great Debussy works in the Collections section (Helene Grimaud's "Memories" and Alice Sara Ott's "Nightfall"). Over the course of 2018, the 100th anniversary of Debussy's death, there

have been 3 or 4 Debussy piano music discs in my batch for each issue. The *Preludes* are found on all my 2018 discs, but only two of them here. There are 3 recordings each of *L'Isle Joyeuse*, *La Plus que Lent*, *Clair de Lune*, and the first *Arabesque*, plus several *Images* and *Estampes*. Most unusual are arrangements of *Prelude a l'apres-midi d'un Faune* for solo piano. We should not forget that this work has been noted by many as a turning point in music and one that "marked the beginning of modern music" (Pierre Boulez). Debussy made his own 2-piano version and Ravel did a piano 4-hands version.

Dennis Lee is a Malaysian pianist. His Debussy is clear, with less pedal than most, but not too dry either. There is always musical direction, not just beautiful moments. I also appreciate that all of the published sets of pieces presented here are complete (*Images Book 1*, *Images Oubliées*, *Estampes*, *Arabesques*). This gives Lee the opportunity to display all of his pianistic and musical talents. His fast and brilliant work contrasts perfectly with the soft colors he paints in the quiet music. This group of pieces defines what we think of as the French impressionist style at the turn of the century. This release is labeled Volume 1, so watch for Volume 2.

Nikolai Lugansky is best known to me for his Russian romantic repertoire. I have praised his Rachmaninoff many times. His Debussy is wonderful, as I imagine was Rachmaninoff's, who programmed *Pour le Piano* and *Suite Bergamesque* on his Carnegie Hall recitals back in 1933 and 1937. Lugansky ranks among the top pianists today, and this is his first foray into the music of Debussy. These selections are much more restrained than the usual big Russian repertoire and give us the opportunity to hear Lugansky's most reflective and intimate side. His effortless technique doesn't even blink at the nasty sections of 'L'Isle Joyeuse', 'Poissons d'or' or 'Jardins sous la Pluie', the three most extroverted selections here. His dynamic gradations and chord voicing are most notable. The *Images* especially are complex music that require a substantial musical intellect behind the digital expertise to bring off effectively. At 54 minutes there is room for more music.

Azumi Nishizawa's release is titled "Homage" and is an interesting combination of some of Debussy's greatest hits ('Clair de Lune', 'Golliwog's Cakewalk', 'La Cathedrale Engloutie', 'L'Isle Joyeuse'), Leonard Borwick's transcription for solo piano of *Afternoon of a*

Faun, and two of the composer's Spanish influenced works ('La Puerta del Vino' and 'La Soirée dans Grenade'). Following the Debussy are seven works by Spanish composers: Albéniz, Mompou, Granados, and Falla, whose 'Homage pour le Tombeau de Debussy' inspired the release's title. I found the juxtaposition of Debussy with his Spanish contemporaries most enlightening. It is also of note that all five composers lived in Paris at one time or another and Falla's postcard to Debussy with a picture of 'La Puerto del Vino' directly inspired the Debussy Prelude included in this program. It was Falla who said of 'La Soirée dans Grenade', "There is not even one measure of this music borrowed from the Spanish folklore, and yet the entire composition in its most minute details, conveys Spain admirably." Hats off to Nishizawa for putting together a captivating program, played with her wonderful sense of rhythm, with all the style and panache one could want.

Sandro Russo, under the title "Images et Mirages, Hommage a Debussy", includes a significant number of Debussy works transcribed for solo piano by a number of arrangers. There are orchestral works; *Afternoon of a Faun* (arr. Leonard Borwick) and *Fêtes* (arr. Vladimir Leyetchkiss); a two-piano work; *Lindaraja* (arr. Roger-Ducasse), and three songs; 'Il Pleure dans mon Coeur' (arr. Daniel Ericourt), 'Nuit d'étoiles' and 'Beau Soir' (arr. Koji Attwood). Added to these are a fascinating group of works inspired by or honoring Debussy by other composers; Schmitt, Falla, and Dukas. Finally, to bring the repertoire back to masterpieces by Debussy, Russo plays both books of *Images* with all of the skill and sensitivity expected of a master pianist. Steinway's always superb piano sound and Russo's brief but perceptive notes complete the package.

It is very hard to summarize this set of releases. All have some unique and desirable qualities. Lugansky has the best 'Isle Joyeuse'. Both Nishizawa and Russo give us fascinating programs of familiar and rare pieces. That will make me return to both on occasion. Lee was new to me and presented a well-rounded Debussy recital covering about 22 years of his compositional life. His and Lugansky's disc both have 13 tracks and 5 are duplicates; since the 8 others are wonderfully complementary I am tempted to combine the best of both into one listening session.

HARRINGTON