



Louise FARRENC (1804-1875)

Variations brillantes on the Cavatina "Nel veder la tua costanza" from "Anna Bolena" by Gaetano Donizetti op. 15 (1835) [12:36]

Air Russe Varié op. 17 (1835) [13:00]

Grandes Variations on a Theme by Count Gallenberg op. 25 [17:33]

Variations on the duet "C'est la fête de village" from "Le Colporteur" by George Onslow op. 10 (1828) [9:20]

Biliana Tzinlikova (piano)

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PALADINO MUSIC PMR0088 [52:29]



It just so happened that when this disc arrived I was listening to Louise Farrenc's Piano Trios and Sextet (on CPO 777 256-2). I thought that, whilst I was in the mindset, I would review this disc of her variations for piano.

Louise Dumont was born into the heart of Parisian cultural and artistic elite. Both her father and brother, Auguste Dumont, were successful sculptors. She showed such ability as a young piano student that she was sent to Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Nepomuk Hummel for further lessons. After a while, her parents allowed her to study composition privately with Anton Reicha. The Paris Conservatoire only admitted men at the time, but this did not stop her from mixing with the young men of the Conservatoire. In 1821, she married Aristide Farrenc, a flute student who was ten years older than Louise. The couple performed regularly together and became quite celebrated for their concerts. Aristide eventually gave up performing and set up his own music publishing house.

During the nineteenth century it was quite common for composers to arrange pieces by other composers, usually from the successful operas of the day. It seems that Farrenc was no different. The Variations brillantes are virtuosic piano variations of an aria by Donizetti, and as the name suggests, they are brilliant. Here we have all the pathos of the opera wrapped up in little over twelve minutes. It is a wonderful example of this artform, and one that is more than worthy of remembering.

Composed in the same year as the Variations brillantes, the Air Russe Varié was in fact Farrenc's first major success as a composer, a piece praised by Robert Schumann for "all manner of nice canonical playfulness". Despite the title, the Air seems to have been an original composition. Farrenc composed a tune that she saw as being of a typical Slavic folk idiom. She fashioned eight wonderful variations out of the theme.

The third piece, the Grandes Variations on a Theme by Count Gallenberg, present variations on a piece by a largely forgotten composer and impresario. He is mainly remembered for marrying the women that Beethoven was once infatuated with, and he was the dedicatee of the Moonlight Sonata. It is not known which work this theme comes from, but Farrenc originally composed it for Piano and Orchestra or Piano and String Quartet. Here the orchestral part has been transcribed, the booklet notes do not state by whom, in order to fill in the missing music. Based upon a waltz theme, Farrenc expertly spins the music to produce her energetic set of variations in the longest work on the disc.

The final work is a set of variations on an aria by George Onslow. I know his music, but not his operas. This is a bravura piece, full of twists and turns. Farrenc uses the variations to highlight the various musical and dramatic aspects of the duet from Onslow's opera. The main theme is presented in a wonderful and fitting dancelike manner.

This is a wonderful disc. Any devotees of Louise Farrenc's music should certainly grab it whilst they can. It shows a whole different aspect in her music. Biliana Tzinlikova exploits it to the full. Her excellent playing brings both light and colour to these characterful forgotten works. Indeed the final two pieces presented on this disc receive their premiere recording. The informative booklet notes give good background to the music. The recorded sound presents the piano in a natural way.

Stuart Sillitoe