



Germaine TAILLEFERRE (1892-1983)

Pastorale in A Flat Major [2:45]

Partita (1957) [9:39]

Impromptu (1909) [2:50]

Romance (1913) [3:41]

Georges AURIC (1899-1983)

Sonatine (1957) [6:20]

Nocturne (1926) [3:09]

Three Pastorales (1920) [7:20]

Louis DUREY (1888-1979)

Romance sans Paroles [2:37]

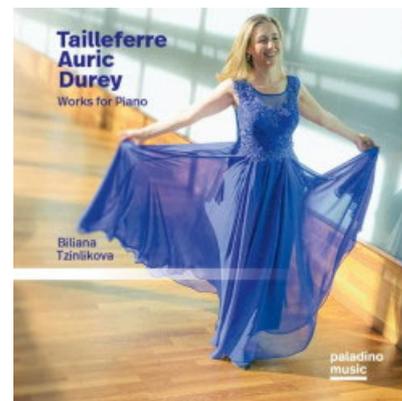
Nocturne in D Flat Major [5:30]

Three Preludes (1920) [10:45]

Biliana Tzinlikova (piano)

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PALADINO MUSIC PMR0103 [54:36]



Here is a welcome survey of the less known half of that group of 1920s French troublemakers, *Les Six*. Francis Poulenc and, to a lesser extent, Darius Milhaud have had their piano music extensively recorded. Arthur Honegger may have somewhat fallen into neglect, known mainly for his opera *Jean d'Arc au bûcher* and a few orchestral works, but it is not comparable to the relative obscurity of Georges Auric, Louis Durey and Germaine Tailleferre.

Tailleferre was in many ways the most interesting talent. I tend to subscribe to the theory that her best work was in the first few decades, and it was comparable to that of her close friend Poulenc. What followed was a sad decline, arguably stemming from two miserable marriages and a move into music education, where her writing lost its sparkle and playfulness.

The selection here only partially confirms my preconceptions. The opening *Pastorale* is indeed very jolly, elegant yet subversive, like much of the best of Poulenc's writing, but there is a lot to admire also in Tailleferre's late-period *Partita* from 1957. Like Poulenc, she was keen to reassess early music (well before any period movement was in full swing) but simultaneously infused it with the contemporary scene, be it café music or Stravinsky-esque overtones. It must have been deemed a conservative work by 1957 but those splashes of harmonic dissonance in the *Notturmo* and playfulness elsewhere reveal more than just a turgid exercise in Neo-Baroque. A flit back in time to her earlier *Impromptu* of 1909 and *Romance* of 1913 reveals a more carefree melodic style in keeping with the rest of the style of *Les Six*.

Georges Auric demonstrates a more restless spirit with his busy, quirky *Sonatine* of 1957. There are exquisite moments in the raindrop-like writing of its Andante but the style is very *Les Six* in its flippancy and sudden bursts of café melody. In many ways, he had the busiest career of the group and, like Milhaud, was a lot more experimental, and keen to explore various music trends. Concurrently he wrote for both film and concert; his renown seems mainly for the former. With a huge film legacy, including that extraordinary heist thriller, *Rififi* and even several Ealing comedies, his quick wit and diversity are apparent in his piano writing. A sombre *Nocturne* shows his reflective side but the three Pastorales are more typical of his explosive, chaotic ideas. The tempo instructions are 'lively and rough' for the opening Pastorale. There are all sorts of things in the mix, pentatonic harmonies and breathless changes of direction. The second is more conventionally beautiful and serene but then it is back to skittishness of the 1920s in the 'lively and sharp' final Pastorale.

Louis Durey's output more or less stopped after the war when he moved into criticism and communist politics: he was definitely the more reluctant member of the 1920s music scene. You can hear him wrestling with form and modernism in his melancholic *Nocturne* written in the late 1920s. The three preludes similarly do not conform to his colleagues' froth and sardonic love of popular music. Indeed with the final prelude instructed to be played with 'hardness and violence', we are flirting with atonality and fractured, aggressive melodic forms. If nothing else, this album summarizes quite a potted history of 20th century French piano writing.

I did not follow the scores but Biliana Tzinlikova seems to have the measure of the style with subtle use of rubato and pedal. She understands that these composers love both baroque and café music, and one needs to use careful judgement and not become too tasteful! There are excellent notes on these rather neglected figures and their work. Sound quality is excellent if a little reverberant. It is an obvious recommendation for anyone interested in this period of light hearted musical rebellion. Frothy, slight and proud of it, this is where you graduate to if you want to explore further than Poulenc.

Barnaby Rayfield