

'Beginning with the otherworldly cries of the *Gavia Arctica* bird (also known as the black-throated loon), the music of Swedish composer Jonathan Östlund gently makes its way into our consciousness in *Lunaris* for lyric soprano (here Ruxandra Ibric Cioranu) and piano. Rautavaara has played with this idea, too; it is such a successful gesture that it is surprising more composers do not experiment with this. Cioranu also impresses in the fluidity of her voice in the later vocalizes *Rêve et lune*, *La Féérique et Pierrot*, and *Music at Moonrise/Lunaris* (the last of which also featuring the violin of Ariel Jacob Lang). The lighter tone of *Opus Pocus Fantienne* for flute and piano might come as something of a surprise, while the decidedly French Impressionism-fragranced *Phantasion* for flute and piano, performed in the most miraculous manner here, gives us a clue as to what lies at the heart of Östlund's expression. Yoana Kareмова's piano playing is particularly sensitive.

Many of the titles used by Östlund may well imply Impressionism, *Air dans l'air* being one of them. For solo flute, this short five-minute piece flits around playfully; the similarly evocative *Lumière d'étoiles* opts to include the odd reference to lighter musical genres such as jazz, while its second part explores darker regions effectively. Blandine Waldmann is superb in her keyboard color, unafraid to opt for harsher sonorities when appropriate.

The Impressionist moniker is perhaps not entirely apt, as Östlund's range of expression is wider. Some pieces do, however, sit happily with that description, the lonely and lovely *Winter Vigil* (expressively played here by Waldmann) being a case in point. The change to *Fantasia on Scarborough Fair* is abrupt; we enter a nostalgic world closer to the *Scepter'd Isle*. Scored for flute, cello, and piano, this is a superb piece of chamber music, scored with a deft hand. There is fun to be had here, too – the *Habanera* rhythms of *Rencontre* for flute and piano, for example. Of particular interest is the playfulness of *The Wizard*. Delightful.

The four-movement *Rêverie – Jeux de pluie* for string quartet is given a positively radiant performance by the Cellini Quartet. This is a fascinating canvas, full of color, with the second movement veering back to the folksy sentiments of *Fantasia on Scarborough Fair*. The inventively named *Night-struck* for cello and piano (the first of the three movements is for cello alone) is rather rugged, the second movement in particular, which is indicated as "electrifying." Alexander Zagorinsky's cello is highly expressive, not to mention passionate.

Each disc contains one larger-scale work. For the second, it is the 27-minute *Miroir d'un mirage* for solo piano. Each of its six movements is prefaced by a single capital letter, which together spell "ONDINE", a clear pointer towards Ravel, and indeed atmospheric pedal-haze is part of this piece's expressive armory; so, too, is a more dissonant mode of expression (the second movement, for example). The lumbering gait of the fifth movement is well projected by Waldmann. It's nice to see a piece for solo bassoon, too: *The Frog Pond*. Playful in extremis, Ursula Leveaux and Waldmann clearly have fun in both of its movements.

The booklet is mainly filled with biographies of the performers. The composer states that "the inspiration, message and outline of many compositions benefits from remaining undefined," so we are effectively left with our own ears to assess this music. That's no bad thing. Östlund clearly has much to say, and he says it in a consistently interesting manner. Fully worthy of investigation.'

Colin Clarke [Fanfare Magazine]