

Triste Plaisir (2002)

Wpisany przez bluesever

Poniedziałek, 23 Sierpień 2010 17:05 - Zmieniony Środa, 19 Luty 2014 16:33

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GUILLAUME DU FAY (1398 – 1474)

*Belle, veullies moy retenir
Pour l'amour de ma douce amye
Qui latuit in virgine
Je me complains piteusement
Quel fronte signorile
Resvelons nous
He, compaignons
Je languis en piteux martire
J'ai grant douleur
Vergene bella
Signor Leon*

JACOBUS VIDE (ca. 1386 – ca. 1433)

Et c'est assez

GILLES DE BINS DIT BINCHOIS (1400 – 1460)

*Triste plaisir
Mort en merchy
Lune tres belle
Adieu, adieu, mon joieulx souvenir*

NICOLAS GRENON (1380 – 1456)

La plus belle et douce figure

La plus grant chiere (anon. 15th cent.)

Paumgartner (Buxheimer Orgelbuch, 15th century)

Lena Susanne Norin, alto
Randall Cook, viola d'arco, fidel
Susanne Ansorg, fidel, rebec

This is a disc of courtly songs of the first half of the 15th Century, not all by Dufay as the heading might suggest - the CD writes it as 'Du Fay'. Without doubt it the Dufay songs that are the best known pieces in his output and the most often recorded. This very generously filled disc also has songs by his contemporaries added into this fascinating mix. But first what was medieval Courtly Culture and how is this reflected in these songs? The ancient poets tell us that the true meaning of courtly social life with its material splendour and ceremonial etiquette lay in its relationship to the idea of chivalry. The fact that love was the highest social value reveals just how far removed from reality these poetic visions were. The love of a distant unobtainable lady was crucial like those heroes in Arthurian romances. The pain created becomes a 'Triste Plaisir' and a 'douleureuse joie' as in the words of the Binchois song which gives the CD its title. And this idealization had a profound impact and influenced the real social behaviour of the upper classes of medieval society, the courtly knight and the courtly lady becoming the model social figures. This exalted vision of noble life gives some sort of backcloth and when listening to these songs and texts this vision provides a way to penetrate their deeper meaning. Despite the CD's heading some of the music is by Binchois, Dufay's greatest contemporary and quite possibly a close friend. There is an anonymous manuscript illustration of the two together, often reproduced, with Dufay standing by a portative organ and Binchois with a harp. I have often wondered if these instruments are significant, but no matter. Lena Susanne Norin has recorded Binchois before, a disc entirely devoted to him in 1998 on Virgin Veritas 5452852. On this new CD she makes this especially melancholy composer sound even more so than on the earlier one. Her voice does indeed sound lighter and younger. Especially of note is 'Adieu, adieu mon joieulx souvenir' which lasts here well over six minutes, ending the CD. In 1998 she gave it an airier touch with a length of just over four minutes. As if to emphasise the point the two string players also play the piece, at a faster tempo - in fact, in less than four minutes. It is true that the musicians have chosen mostly the slower and more thoughtful songs of the period but where they have selected a more robust example like 'He, compaignons' it still sounds rather reflective. I much prefer here the version recorded by 'The Medieval Ensemble of London' and the Davies brothers for Decca (L'Oiseau Lyre) in 1981 (4525572) in their complete Dufay box. Performed by men it sounds lively and fun, just I assume as Dufay expected. Oddly enough where a reflective religious light could be cast by Norin, Cook and Ansong in the famous and beautiful 'Vergine Bella' - words by Petrarch, no less, a rare contemporary setting - they seem to rush through with less than the usual expressive zeal. This is I suppose an attempt not to over-sentimentalize the music. To understand more clearly what I mean you could do no worse than hear Catherine Bott on a disc I reviewed in 2006 called 'Delectatio angel' (Hyperion CDA67549 - see review). It is the way she expresses the text that is especially wonderful, not just a slightly more relaxed tempo. There is a Naxos disc devoted entirely to Dufay (8.553458) by the Ensemble Unicorn. This includes some rather eccentric performances. However that of 'Vergine Bella' with the counter-tenor Michael Posch is quite ravishing and my especial favourite. Actually Norin and the group become more animated in a lovely performance of Grenon's 'La plus belle et doulce figure' - a picture of the idealized beloved in formal and yet passionate courtly language. The only other composer represented is Jacobus Vide whose 'Et c'est assez' is one of the pieces played purely instrumentally. It is short and also quite lively. Funnily enough, this deliberately chosen programme includes songs by Dufay not so often recorded. This, in itself is commendable but some pieces may not actually be by him. Using

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David Fallows' book in 'The Master Musicians' series (Dent, London 1982) as my bible, I looked through his complete listings of Dufay's songs. In the 25 years since this publication Fallows may well have altered his opinion but 'Qui latuit' and 'Je longuis en piteux martire' are given as of uncertain authorship. It's interesting also that the Davies mentioned above, under Fallows' general direction did not record them. 'J'ai grant douleur' is not supplied with a text in any manuscript. It becomes one of the eight pieces played by only vielle and rebec or fiddle and viol d'arco. When Susanne Norin recorded the above-mentioned Binchois disc there was a wider variety of instruments used under Dominique Vellard. That does encourage one to listen through the disc. The colour of this new CD is, as it were, generally the same throughout. I found myself listening to a few tracks at a time and then picking it up again later in several sittings. Still, that's no matter I suppose and it may be what the performers are expecting. If you can find some notes in a book or on the net about Dufay whilst listening, it might be a good idea as, although the texts are clearly given and nicely translated, the two accompanying essays are next to useless. Each is about 200 words long: one by Randall Cook entitled "What's Goin' On?" and the other, an anonymous essay on 'Dufay and the Burgundian court'. At the end of all this I have still found listening to this disc a highly pleasurable, sophisticated and delightful experience and, despite the various caveats would recommend it to anyone with an interest in the period. If you are new to early music however, then perhaps this may not be the best place to start. ---Gary Higginson, musicweb-international.com

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