

Sandrine Piau & Susan Manoff – Chimère (2018)

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Carl LOEWE (1796 – 1869) 1. *Ach neige, du Schmerzenreiche* (Tx. Goethe) (1835) Robert SCHUMANN (1810 – 1856)
2. *Kennst du das Land* (Tx. Goethe) (1849) 3. *Dein Angesicht* (Tx. Heine) (1840) 4. *Die Lotusblume* (Tx. Heine) (1840)
Claude DEBUSSY (1862 – 1918)
Fêtes galantes (Tx. Verlaine) (1892) 5. *En sourdine* 6. *Fantoches* 7. *Clair de lune*
Hugo WOLF (1860 – 1903)
8. *Verschwiegene Liebe* (Tx. Eichendorff) (1888) 9. *Nixe Binsefuss* (Tx. Mörike) (1888) 10. *Das verlassene Mägdlein* (Tx. Mörike) (1888) 11. *Lied vom Winde* (Tx. Mörike) (1888)
Ivor GURNEY (1890 – 1937)
Elizabethan Songs (1917 – 1922): 12. *Sleep* (Tx. Fletcher)
Robert BAKSA (b. 1938)
13. *Heart! We will forget him* (Tx. Dickinson) (1967, rev. 1999)
Francis POULENC (1899 – 1963)
Banalités (Tx. Apollinaire) (1940): 14. *Chanson d'Orkenise* 15. *Hôtel* 16. *Fagnes de Wallonie*
17. *Voyage à Paris* 18. *Sanglots*
Samuel BARBER (1910 – 1981)
19. *Solitary Hotel* (Tx. Joyce) (1968-1969)
Francis POULENC
20. *C'est ainsi que tu es* (de Vilmorin) (1943)
André PREVIN (b. 1929)
Three Dickinson Songs (1999): 21. *As imperceptibly as grief* 22. *Will there really be a morning?* 23. *Good Morning Midnight*
Sandrine Piau - soprano Susan Manoff - piano

After a number of appearances in Alpha productions, Sandrine Piau now joins the label for several recordings. With *Chimère*, she invites us on a voyage into the intimate and infinite territory of dreams. Chimera: an illusory, unsatisfied quest, the graveyard of our illusions... She and her longstanding partner, the pianist Susan Manoff, have thought up a programme combining the German lied (Hugo Wolf, one of Schumann's Mignon songs, a scene from

Goethe's Faust by Carl Loewe), *Mélodies* by Debussy and Poulenc (his *Banalités*), and Art Songs by Barber along with discoveries of more rarely heard composers like Ivor Gurney and the Dickinson Songs of André Previn the celebrated American conductor is less well-known for his compositions, which include this magnificent cycle written for Renée Fleming. Equally at home in French, German and English, Sandrine Piau is at the peak of her artistry. *Fantoches*, *Clair de Lune*, *Solitary Hotel*, *Will there really be a morning?: set out for the world of dreams following this unique poetic itinerary. The land of chimeras is the only one in this world worth living in (Jean-Jacques Rousseau).* ---amazon.com

Having her roots in baroque music Sandrine Piau has gradually widened her scope and tackled composers like Haydn and Mozart and even ventured into the world of Offenbach. But she has also been deeply involved in art songs. As long ago as 2004 my then colleague Anne Ozorio reviewed a Debussy disc very favourably and some six years ago I was lucky to get a disc with a mixed programme, titled "*Après un rêve*" (review), which was much to my taste. The catholic programme encompassed composers as wide apart as Richard Strauss, Gabriel Fauré, Felix Mendelssohn, Ernest Chausson, Francis Poulenc and Benjamin Britten and also included a present-day composer, Vincent Bouchot (b. 1966). It should be mentioned that earlier than that Sandrine Piau issued another mixed recital, "*Evocation*", that doesn't seem to have been reviewed at Musicweb-International and I never came across the disc at the time it was issued, but I am in no doubt that it is a worthy forerunner to "*Après un rêve*".

The new disc can be seen as a third sequel to the other two and the programme is just as far-reaching and unpredictable. As on the previous disc all the positive features of Ms Piau's artistry are fully in evidence: "cleanness of tone, perfect intonation, agility and a wealth of soft nuance. To this can be added a wonderful sense of style and an intelligent use of the text", as I wrote in my previous review, to which may be added, somewhat reluctantly I admit, that there are occasional moments where the voice is not completely rock-steady. But that is only marginally and a discreet sign that the passing of time doesn't go on wholly imperceptibly. So much is however just as fine as it always was and her interpretative insight is as keen as ever.

The programme idea is highly personal and far from conventional and Stéphane Goldet's liner notes, headed "*Simplicity and Mystery*" is a perfect guide. The opening song, by Carl Loewe, himself an excellent singer and composer of more than 400 songs, is a setting of a text from Goethe's *Faust*, which Schubert had set – although left unfinished – before Loewe and Schumann, Wolf and Liszt after him. It is not one of Loewe's best known songs but a noble beginning of this journey through this fascinating programme. Schumann is next in turn with

another Goethe text, “probably the German text most frequently set to music in the entire history of the lied” as Stéphane Goldet writes, referring to *Le Guide de la mélodie et du lied* (Paris: Fayard, 1994) which lists more than a hundred settings. It is of course *Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen*. Mignon’s song from *Wilhelm Meister*. It is followed by two Heine settings, of which *Die Lotusblume* from *Myrthen* is the best-known.

The Debussy songs are settings of “the prince of French poets”, Paul Verlaine and there is certainly a very special chemistry between the poet and the composer, *Clair de lune* possibly the greatest masterpiece. The step from Debussy to Hugo Wolf is a long one, even though they were contemporaries. Generally speaking it is native German speakers who have been the foremost interpreters of Wolf, sensitive word-painters like Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. But French baritone Gerard Souzay, who was an eminent linguist, made really memorable readings of Wolf – I have a wonderful recording of *Italienisches Liederbuch* – and Sandrine Piau seems to have the same deep understanding, and the four songs here, one to a text by Eichendorff, the other three by Mörike, are real gems: the sensitive *Verschwiegene Liebe*, the exquisite *Das verlassene Mägdlein* and the dramatic *Lied vom Winde* has to rank with the best readings of these oft-recorded songs.

Ivor Gurney suffered from mental illness during most of his life but produced hundreds of poems and more than 300 songs, the majority of them never published. The 5 Elizabethan Songs from during and just after WW1 are among his best known works, and *Sleep* is a fine nocturnal song.

Robert Baksa, born in New York to Hungarian parents, is one of the most prolific American composers with more than 500 works to his credit. He has set a large number of Emily Dickinson’s poems, many of them recorded. *Heart! We will forget him* was composed in 1967 but revised more than 30 years later. There is a very clear blues feeling here.

Sandrine Piau showed in her previous album that she has an affinity for Poulenc’s music, and the five short pieces by surrealist Apollinaire, collected under the title *Banalités* are highly entertaining – as is the subtle *C’est ainsi que tu es*, a setting of Louise de Vilmorin.

Samuel Barber wrote around forty songs and was, like Loewe, an excellent singer. The Joyce setting *Solitary Hotel* is from a group of songs Op. 41, written in 1968-69, immediately after the opera *Anthony and Cleopatra*, which was commissioned for the inauguration of the new Metropolitan Opera.

Finally we return to Emily Dickinson and the three songs André Previn wrote for Renée Fleming, who premiered them on 18 December 1999. The extremely versatile Previn, composer, arranger, conductor and pianist, was at home in most styles and long before he established himself as one of the great conductors of the late 20th century he was deeply involved in Broadway musicals and performed as jazz pianist. There are traces of this in these songs, which round off this highly agreeable recital. As in the two previous recitals she is accompanied by the eminent Susan Manoff, whose playing is a wonder of clarity and accuracy. ---Göran Forsling, musicweb-international.com

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