

# Thierry ESCAICH



### ... Music for the ear

The music of Thierry Escaich falls into that fairly rare category of works that “speak” immediately. That being the case, what point is there in talking about it ? Precisely because this direct eloquence disturbs the off-shared conviction according to which the appreciation of truly new work would require the apprenticeship of an original approach and a calling into question. That is by no means the case with the *Fantaisie Concertante for piano and orchestra*, for example, which comes straight to the point, neither more nor less than in Debussy’s *Fantaisie*, Weber’s *Konzerstück*, Rachmaninov’s *Rhapsodie* or Fauré’s *Ballade*. On the other hand, the beauties of the *Fantaisie for piano and orchestra* by this same Fauré are not so easily grasped ; does that therefore signify that they are of a higher order ?

The question is not so easy to resolve. Is it not also said that the finest pleasures in life are the simplest ? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Bach can be quite simple when he wants to strike, as can Beethoven. If we compare the *Finale* of the *Ninth Symphony* and the *Missa solemnis* or the *Musical Offering* and the *Magnificat*, we are forced to acknowledge that, even coming from the same pen, grandeur does have two faces. Thus, the precept “what is well conceived is stated clearly” must be understood in the broad sense : one can be as clearly (seemingly) simple ; a fugue does not disguise itself as a romance, nor should a song be mumbo jumbo.

The three works brought together on this disc are not particularly difficult to understand, yet their worth does not lie solely in their clarity. For here, simplicity, is not an aesthetic but simply a means of making the conception’s teeming richness audible.

One of the major laws of composition concerns balance between the material and the treatment applied to it : the more complex one is, so must the other be even simpler, and vice versa. Thierry Escaich has the sense of this balance in an extreme. His fairly frequent use of motifs imitating Gregorian chant, whose seeming ingenuity nonetheless conceals pockets of complexity (rhythmic fluidity, harmonic ambiguity, melodic polymorphism), enables him to build veritable cathedrals in sound. The intermingling of arches may make the listener’s head spin, yet it is impossible to resist the soaring force of the whole. After the shock of listening, a quite natural curiosity pushes one to look at how it is done. Yet reading the scores - unless one goes for beyond ordinary study - reveals above all a combinatorial analysis of quite typical elements, characters that are sometimes almost banal in themselves : nothing worth mentioning.

Let us add that one might say the same about Bruckner’s symphonies. He, too, was an organist and therefore also attentive to the music “projection”. The grandeur of his symphonies is the fruit rigorous economy in behalf of sumptuous combinatorial analysis.

Invention, in the sphere of combinatorial, is what is most difficult to grasp, define and evaluate from the outside. For the composer, it is a dizzying perspective, of an unlimited, but terribly dangerous abundance. Indeed, most juggling produces cold, vain music. Doubtless because improvisation is one the fundamental elements of his vocation and an important part of his creative activity, Thierry Escaich is not driven by the combinatorial passion but by a need for immediate expression : he seeks only to give, by means of combinations, a tangible form to the alchemy of his inner universe.

The expression of life is at the heart of his music, it would seem, and just as our existence is made up of the superposition of a multitude of rhythms - the seasons, days, celebrations, heartbeats, the subjecting passing of the hours - , so do his compositions depend on the interaction of parallel strata of different levels and a counterpoint of events. Moreover, listening in an overall fashion proves more fruitful than analytical (and therefore dissociating) reading, since it is interactions that count and, in this domain, the ear is more subtle than the eye. Thus, this is music for the ear and, from this point of view, not remote from the electroacoustic (“musique concrète”, starting from sound objects). That is said in order to emphasize it profound belonging to the second half on the 20th Century and to challenge any ill-founded accusation of attachment to the past : well rooted in the triple modal-

tonal-atonal tradition, as in the contemporary sensibility, the art of Thierry Escaich looks straight ahead. It is not free of anxieties, but those metaphysical or existential anxieties do not alienate the language. A clear language, regardless of however dark the intention might be ? As a result of too often hearing the opposite, we had forgot that it was possible.

Gérard Condé