

GCD 921803. 2 CDs
 New release information
 April 2006

‘Musique de salon’ by Claude-Bénigne Balbastre



Musique de salon
 Claude-Bénigne Balbastre

Mitzi Meyerson
 fortepiano (Broadwood)
 & harpsichord (after Taskin)

Glossa GCD 921803. 2 CDs
NEW RELEASE
 Digipak with 2 CDs and 2 booklets

Programme

Claude-Bénigne Balbastre (1722-1799)
Musique de salon

CD I

Prélude - La Monmartel ou la Brunoy -
 La Bellaud - La Suzanne - La Morisseau -
 La Laporte - La De Caze - La Lamarck -
 La Berville - La Castelmore

CD II

La D'Hericourt - La Courteille - La Lugeac -
 La Genty - La Malesherbes -
 La Berryer ou la Lamignon - La D'Esclignac -
 La Segur - La Boullogne -
 Marche des Marseillois et l'air Ça-Ira

Production details

Recorded in Berlin in March 2003
 and October 2004
 Engineered and produced by Maria Suschke
 Executive producer: Carlos Céster

Booklet essays by Philippe Beaussant
 and Boris Kehrmann
 Design 00:03:00 oficina tresminutos
 Booklet in English - Français - Deutsch - Español



NOTES (ENG)

Maybe it is the fact that they are women, perhaps it is because of their preference for discretion over visibility, maybe it is in order to give a higher sense of priority to the timeless rather than to immediate success, the case is that both Mara Galassi and Mitzi Meyerson, the only two women in Glossa's artistic line-up, have become skilled in producing minority yet exquisitely-refined and lasting recording projects. Their discs indeed have attained cult status, for they succeed by word of mouth rather than through any more established means of communication.

Such will be the case also, we suspect, with Mitzi Meyerson's latest project, called *Musique de salon*, wherein she introduces us to a charming and delicious recital of pieces by Claude-Bénigne Balbastre. Sounds from a Taskin harpsichord and from a beautifully restored Broadwood fortepiano from 1792 take us back to the fascinating ambience of the pre-revolutionary Parisian salons... although the disc, appropriately, reaches a climax with a series of variations on *La Marseillaise*.

Philippe Beaussant in his essay for the booklet: "The music informally known as 'salon music' is not always as futile as it might at first appear. The very fact that it evolved in keeping with social mores, tastes, trends and even fashions means that it is a privileged witness of the history of music. This is wonderfully illustrated by Claude-Bénigne Balbastre."

The second booklet includes a long interview with Mitzi Meyerson, offering her in-depth views on the music and some amazing "making of" details.

NOTAS (ESP)

Quizá por su condición de mujeres, quizá por preferir la discreción a la visibilidad, o quizá por dar más importancia a lo intemporal que al éxito inmediato, el caso es que tanto Mara Galassi como Mitzi Meyerson, las dos únicas féminas del plantel artístico de Glossa, se han especializado en proyectos minoritarios, exquisitos y duraderos. Los suyos son discos de culto, para los que opera el boca a boca por encima de cualquier otro medio de difusión.

Será el caso también del último proyecto de la Meyerson, titulado *Musique de salon*, en el que nos presenta un delicioso recital de piezas de Claude-Bénigne Balbastre. Los sonidos de un clave Taskin y de un fortepiano Broadwood de 1792 nos trasladan al fascinante ambiente de los salones parisinos prerrevolucionarios... aunque el disco, apropiadamente, culmina en una serie de variaciones sobre *La Marseillesa*.

El musicólogo Philippe Beaussant en el libreto: «La música que llamamos familiarmente 'música de salón' no es, siempre, tan fútil como parece a simple vista. El mismo hecho de que evolucionara en concordancia con la vida social y sus gustos, sus tendencias y hasta sus modas, la convierte en un testigo privilegiado de la historia de la música. Algo que ilustra magníficamente Claude-Bénigne Balbastre.»

El segundo libreto incluye una entrevista en profundidad con Mitzi Meyerson, que nos ofrece sus puntos de vista acerca de esta música, además de algunos interesantísimos detalles del «making of».

NOTES (FRA)

Sans doute pour leur condition de femme, sans doute pour avoir préféré la discrétion au spectaculaire, ou encore peut-être pour avoir donné plus d'importance à l'intemporalité qu'au succès immédiat, Mara Galassi et Mitzi Meyerson, les seules musiciennes parmi tous les artistes de Glossa, se sont spécialisées dans des répertoires minoritaires, exquis, permanents. Leurs disques sont des disques-cultes, et la distribution de bouche à oreille est, dans ce cas, un mode de diffusion insurpassable.

Ce cas sera aussi celui du tout dernier projet de Meyerson, intitulé *Musique de salon*, qui nous présente un délicieux récital de pièces de Claude-Bénigne Balbastre. Les sons d'un clavecin Taskin et d'un fortepiano Broadwood nous transportent dans l'ambiance fascinante des salons parisiens pré-révolutionnaires... bien que le disque, convenablement, soit couronné par une série de variations sur *La Marseillaise*.

Philippe Beaussant: « La musique que l'on appelle familièrement 'musique de salon' n'est pas toujours aussi futile qu'on pourrait le penser. Le fait même que son évolution se produise en concordance avec celle de la vie sociale, de ses goûts, de ses tendances et même de ses modes fait d'elle un témoin privilégié de l'histoire de la musique. Claude-Bénigne Balbastre en est un remarquable exemple. »

Le second livret inclut une entrevue, profonde, de Mitzi Meyerson qui nous fait part de ses points de vue sur cette musique en plus de certains détails très intéressants concernant le « making of ».

NOTIZEN (DEU)

Vielleicht aufgrund ihres Frauseins, vielleicht, weil sie diskrete Zurückhaltung Augenscheinlichem vorziehen, oder vielleicht, weil sie dem Zeitlosen mehr Bedeutung beimessen als dem unmittelbaren Erfolg. Tatsache ist jedenfalls, dass sowohl Mara Galassi wie auch Mitzi Meyerson, die einzigen Frauen unter den bei Glossa wirkenden Musikern, sich auf minoritäre, erlesene und dauerhafte Projekte spezialisiert haben. Das Ihrige sind die Kult-CDs, bei denen die von Mund zu Mund gehenden Empfehlungen von Liebhabern und Kennern wichtiger als jedes andere Verbreitungsmedium sind.

Dies wird wohl auch beim jüngsten Projekt der Meyerson unter dem Titel *Musique de salon* der Fall sein, wo sie uns eine vorzügliche Auswahl von Stücken Claude-Bénigne Balbastres präsentiert. Die Klänge eines Taskin Cembalos und eines Broadwood Hammerflügels versetzen uns in die faszinierende Welt der vorrevolutionären Pariser Salons... obwohl die CD, in angemessener Weise, in einer Reihe von Variationen über die *Marseillaise* ihren Höhepunkt findet.

Der Musikologe Philippe Beaussant im Booklet: »Jene Musik, die uns als »Salonmusik« vertraut ist, ist nicht immer so vorzüglich sagend, wie dies auf den ersten Blick erscheinen mag. Der Umstand selbst, dass sie sich entwickelte in Übereinstimmung mit dem sozialen Leben und den jeweiligen Vorlieben, Tendenzen und gar Moden ihrer Zeit, lässt sie zu einem ganz besonderen Zeugen der Geschichte der Musik werden. Das Beispiel Claude-Bénigne Balbastres vermag dies vorzüglichst zu illustrieren.«

Das zweite Begleitheft enthält ein ausführliches Interview mit Mitzi Meyerson, in dem sie uns ihre Anschauungen bezüglich dieser Musik darlegt und uns darüber hinaus auch noch einige äußerst interessante Einzelheiten des »making of« verrät.

Mitzi Meyerson

A portrait



Mitzi Meyerson signals her return on Glossa with a further example of her ability to seek out entertaining music that for too long has been ignored and perform it with all the subtlety, charm and musical skill that such music demands. For her new Glossa release she presents a demonstration of the compositional joys provided by one of the lesser-known French keyboard masters – Claude-Bénigne Balbastre. In her substantial discography there are already recordings given over to other bypassed talents such as Jacques Duphy, Georg Böhm, Antoine Forqueray and even the Fourth Book of François Couperin.

The lifetime of Balbastre spanned the passage of his native France from the decline of the *Ancien Régime* in the times of Louis XV to the dramatic events that led from the reign of Louis XVI to the Revolution – all at a time when France was a byword for cultural pre-eminence. A pupil of Jean-Philippe Rameau and a harpsichord teacher of Queen Marie-Antoinette in pre-revolutionary times, Balbastre died in poverty, having written music destined for mid-century salons but also composing *La Marseillaise*, complete with a set of variations. Balbastre's lifetime also saw significant developments in keyboard design and manufacture. Meyerson here plays on both a harpsichord and a fortepiano. This new release contains a fascinating interview of Meyerson made by Boris Kehrmann to add to an enjoyable survey of Balbastre by Philippe Beaussant.

We asked the Chicago-born Mitzi Meyerson for her reasons behind approaching the music of Claude-Bénigne Balbastre as the subject of her latest recording.

A full recording devoted to Balbastre's keyboard works is a rarity. Had you been intending to make such a recording for a long time and why use both a harpsichord and a fortepiano?

It is a great challenge to find a body of work by a relatively unknown composer that does have this secret worth. I do a great deal of research to locate each project. The current CD, Balbastre, is a very special case in point. I knew these pieces for many years, but always felt that about half of them did not work very well. This perplexed me, because some of the pieces were stunning, either by content or unusual writing devices; I could never understand why the rest sounded clumsy or just too frothy to play. It wasn't until I happened on a 1792 Broadwood piano that I realized why the pieces didn't sound right on the harpsichord. They did not succeed because they were intended for something else – the new possibilities of touch and dynamic available for the first time with the burgeoning development of the piano. The Broadwood in question was wrapped up in a concert hall, awaiting restoration. Fortunately I was permitted access to this instrument. I could hear immediately the incredible qualities it offered, being between a harpsichord and piano in touch and clarity. It is the missing link, and all things that had troubled me about Balbastre melted away. I immersed myself in this project with a wholehearted joy. As far as I know, this is the first time that this music has been recorded on both piano and harpsichord; I believe that there is no other recording of a *prélude non mesuré* on the piano. I wanted to play the pieces in an order that would bring the most contrast in terms of mood and key, and this meant switching back and forth between the instruments. As the piano was in a small concert hall in Berlin, it was necessary to bring a harpsichord to the same place so that the acoustic would be the same throughout the recording. I have an excellent copy of a Taskin in Berlin (Keith Hill, 1998) and I had no qualms whatsoever of blending these two instruments into one recording. I have played and recorded the original Taskin in the Russell Collection (Gaspard Le Roux, for Harmonia Mundi), and I can honestly say that the copy I own is extremely true to the original and in no way suffers by comparison. I could, of course, have played the harpsichord pieces on an antique instrument as well, but then there would have had to be two separate CDs, one for piano and one for harpsichord. The background sound and room acoustic would have been too different to mesh on one CD. I find the two instruments used on this recording to be perfect counterparts, and I am delighted that this solution could be found to make the project possible.

I would like to say a word about Balbastre's music, since most people will be unfamiliar with it. I know that sometimes listeners will be wary of something outside the usual scope of repertoire. There is simply nothing inaccessible about Balbastre! This is not deep dark fugal music, something that one needs to study in order to understand it. It is the "easy listening" music of the 18th century, probably mostly intended for a salon atmosphere. This would not be a setting for a proper concert – it would rather be an occasion to show off your new

dress and pass notes for your romantic liaison. You can best hear this CD while riding in your car, having dinner in a restaurant, or taking a power walk. I do not say this as a denigrating remark – we all know that a lot of the music we hear today is written just for this purpose. We like to have it around, but do not have to listen to it with the furrowed brows of concentration. There is no test to pass. It is just delightful to hear, perhaps to hum later, on the way to your liaison!

Where do your teaching and concert activities fit into this argument?

Besides this passion I have for unearthing lost musical treasure, I am deeply involved in my teaching (Universität der Künste, Berlin). I wanted to create an environment for learning that I would have wished to have myself, and so I provide my students with a great choice of instruments all together in one room. These belong to me, but I am happy to share them with my class. We have the Taskin copy I mentioned before (French), a double-manual Dulcken copy (Flemish), a small short-bass Italian harpsichord, a full-scale Italian harpsichord (previously owned by the great John Toll), a newly-restored Broadwood grand piano dating from 1820, and a modern Steinway grand. In this way we have a complete spectrum of sound possibilities to explore for a very extensive range of keyboard repertoire. I also share my scores, a CD player and all the CDs in my personal library, a recording machine for study purposes, tea and coffee service, chocolate, roses, and a massage chair.

In terms of concert work, I play mostly solo these days but also enjoy small groups very much. I play with Paolo Pandolfo always with great joy [they have recorded for Glossa together on both the Marin Marais 'Le Labyrinthe' and 'Grand Ballet' projects]; we have what seems to me to be a perfect symbiosis of musical taste. My favourite group is a form of The Bottom Line, my concept of a variable ensemble for bass and continuo instruments, called The Berliner Cembalo Ensemble. This is a group of two to five harpsichords together. It makes the most exquisite noise, unlike anything heard anywhere else. We work on a completely new programme every year, and now have an extensive repertoire including all the solo and multiple keyboard concerti of JS Bach, as well as Scarlatti, D'Anglebert, Handel, Soler, Couperin, Anna Bon, Rameau, and many others.

I am already working on the next CD project, about which I am very excited. This is music by the son of an extremely obscure composer. "X pere" is hardly recognized, and the music of his son is completely unknown. I could not believe how fantastic this music was when I first discovered it; there are many suites, and every piece is superb. I can hardly wait to show it to all of you!

MARK WIGGINS
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