



RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Erkki MELARTIN (1875-1937)

The Solo Piano Works

CD 1

- 1 "Ro, ro, fiskarmor" / Leise, Fischmutter, leise 1'27
- 2 Suvi-illan vieno tuuli / Der Wind am lauen Sommerabend 1'24
- 3 Keinutan kehtoa, laulatan lasta / Ich schaukele sacht den Wiegenkorb 1'31
- 4 Jeg synes, at verden skinner / Ich fühle, dass die Welt mir scheint 1'00
- 5 Ej har jag hem och ej har jag härd / Ich habe kein Heim, und ich hab' keinen Herd 1'53
- 6 Jag vill stilla tacka dig i den stilla / Ich möchte still Dir danken in dieser stillen 0'48
- 7 Legend II, Op 12 / Die Legende II, Op 12 / The Legend II, Op 12 5'06
- Surullinen puutarha , Op 52 / Der traurige Garten, Op 52
- The Melancholy Garden, Op 52
- 8 1 Me kaksi / Wir zwei / We Two 4'59
- 9 2 Lemmentie / Liebesgasse / Love Alley 2'43
- 10 3 Kerjäläislapsen kehtolaulu / Wiegenlied eines Bettlerkindes
- The Beggar Child's Lullaby 2'44
- 11 4 Sade / Regen / Rain 3'59
- 12 5 Yksinäisyys / Einsamkeit / Solitude 5'10
- Lyyrisiä pianokappaleita, Op 59 / Lyrisches, Op 59 / Lyric Pieces for Piano, Op 59
- 13 1 Barcarole 2'37
- 14 2 Romance 2'38
- 15 3 Berceuse 2'01
- 16 4 Intermezzo 1'49
- 17 5 Impromptu 2'53
- Den hemlighetsfulla skogen , Op 118, Sex pianostycken
- Der geheimnisvolle Wald, Op 118, Sechs Klavierstücke
- The Mysterious Forest, Op 118, Six Pieces for Piano
- 18 1 Höstbild / Herbstbild / Autumn Image 1'37
- 19 2 Den hemlighetsfulla skogen / Der geheimnisvolle Wald / The Mysterious Forest 1'10
- 20 3 Häxan / Die Hexe / The Witch 0'41
- 21 4 Trollruna / Beschwörung / The Spell 1'24
- 22 5 Irrblossen / Irrlichten / Will o' the wisp 0'57
- 23 6 Trolldans / Trolltanz / Troll's Dance 1'30
- Sex pianostycken , Op 123 / Sechs Klavierstücke, Op 123
- Six Pieces for Piano, Op 123
- 24 1 Aftonro / Abendruhe / Evening Peace 3'13
- 25 2 Marcia funebre 3'03
- 26 3 Idyll / Die Idylle / The Idyll 1'36
- 27 4 Procession – Der Festzug – Procession 2'29

CD 2

24 Preludier Op 85 / 24 Präludien Op 85 / 24 Preludes Op 85
 1 Grekisk Offerhandling / Griechische Opferhandlung Old Grecian Ceremony 2'02
 2 Capriccio 1'03
 3 Studie 1'10
 4 Méditation 1'19
 5 Körsbärsblom i Japan / Japanische Kirschblüte / Cherry Blossoms in Japan 2'24
 6 Afton i Venedig / Abend in Venedig / Evening in Venice 2'12
 7 Speldosan / Die Spieluhr / The Musical Box 1'21
 8 Tung Afton / Schwerer Abend / Evening before the Storm 1'19
 9 Lugn Afton / Stiller Abend / Quiet Evening 1'15
 10 Vinterväg / Winterweg / Winter-Road 2'27
 11 Canon 1'10
 12 Folkvisa / Volkslied / Folk-Song 1'14
 13 Scherzino 1'33
 14 Höstnatt / Herbstnacht / Autumn-Night 1'42
 15 Romans / Romanze / Romance 2'49
 16 Ballatella 1'16
 17 VÅrmorgon / Frühlingsmorgen / Spring-Morning 1'09
 18 Robustamente 2'06
 3 Intermezzo 1'25
 20 Tempo di Mazurka 0'55
 21 Aning / Vorahnung / Presentiment 1'21
 22 Beslutet / Entschluss / Decision 0'52
 23 Löftet / Versprechen / Promise 1'18
 24 Energico 1'37
 Noli me tangere, Op 87
 Stämmingsbilder / Stimmungsbilder / Impressions
 25 1 Snöstämning i skymningen / Dämmerung in Schnee Twilight in the Snow 1'49
 26 2 Helgdagsmorgon / Feiertagmorgen / A Holiday Morning 1'54
 27 3 Aning / Vorahnung / Presentiment 2'07
 28 4 Dödsstund / Todesstunde / The Hour of Death 2'29
 29 5 Höstvind / Herbstwind / Autumnal Wind 1'47
 30 Legend I, Op 6 / Die Legende I, Op 6 / The Legend I, Op 6 3'34
 31 Sonata I Op 111 (Fantasia apocaliptica per il pianoforte) 15'56
 Maria Lettberg (piano)
 rec. 13-15 November 2008. Studio Gärtnerstraße, Deutschlandradio. DDD
CRYSTAL CLASSICS N67048 [69:05 + 66:49]

It was about three years ago that I welcomed a [Phoenix Edition](#) disc of the Schnittke piano concertos in which Maria Lettberg was the excellent secondo to Ewa Kupiec's primo in the Double Concerto. Since then her cycle of the Scriabin sonatas has been celebrated here by [Dominy Clements](#). Her recorded repertoire choices have been intelligently informed by her grasp of the diversity of piano repertoire to which other celebrity pianists often seem deaf.

The Finnish composer Erkki Melartin was no revolutionary as we can hear. His life was loosely enclosed by that of Sibelius. While to the best of my knowledge he never wrote anything as original or as strikingly imaginative as *Luonnotar* or *Pohjola's Daughter* he did produce some superbly craftsmanlike piano music and six pleasing and sometimes dramatic symphonies. The latter were recorded by Ondine and reviewed here by [Lance Nixon](#). On the other hand Melartin's piano solos often outstrip the rather unspecial piano solos profusely produced by Sibelius.

The Op. 7 1900 piano pieces include some lissom romantic miniatures. These have a sense of poetry and emotional turmoil without all that stormy. The Legend I and II (1900) and *The Melancholy Garden* (opp. 7 and 52) gently ripple, suavely sidle and slyly smile always in liquefaction. There is something of the metropolitan boulevardier life in *The Melancholy Garden* (1908) but things become much more heady in the third movement of that sequence. Other pieces, including the fourth, chime quietly in rippling speed. The last of the Op. 52 set is subtly shaded and harmonised has a potent romantic charge. The first, at 1:40, lays hold of a morbidly attractive bass ostinato. The effect is colouristic rather than subtly impressionistic - it's like a step towards Chopin through Godowsky.

The *Four Lyric Pieces* op. 59 (1909) are sensitive stems and blossoms - slender yet prone to grand statements on occasion. They can be Rachmaninovian but are predominantly superb lyrical effusions. *The Mysterious Forest* of 1923 comprises six pieces in a much more advanced idiom. Here harmonic experimentation, carefully placed dissonance and Pierrot grotesquerie are fully engaged. From the next year come the *Six Piano Pieces* which stand somewhere between the Rachmaninov *Etudes-Tableaux* and the darker Bax piano solos like *Winter Waters*. Melartin breaks free for the effervescence of the third of the op. 123 pieces which takes us back to the early Macdowell-inflected pictorial floral pieces. It's a brief moment of delicious recidivism.

The second disc launches with the 24 Preludes - a rite of passage for so many composers. These date from 1913-20 and are in part redolent of his countryman Selim Palmgren's own sequence. This is a substantial and ferally imaginative and romantic set. Some of the music is redolent of Rachmaninov but also of Scriabin, Ravel, Chopin and late experimental Liszt (18). It is instinct with halting starlight, with the longing lyricism I associate with Moeran and Godowsky's brilliance of mood painting. Each of them has a title.

There are six short pieces in the sequence *Noli me tangere*. These are fascinating and masterful in their fragile and poised traversal of blended sorrow and beauty. The harmony ranges adventurously.

The disc ends with the fabled *Fantasia apocaliptica*, Melartin's piano sonata lost for many years, found in the 1970s and first recorded in 1984. It has a grand romantic sweep and the aristocratic mien of Rachmaninov and the open lyricism of Grieg. This is however shot through with darkness. In her liner notes Dr Ture Ranta-Meyer refers to it as 'very expressive and expressionistic'. I agree. It's a fascinating work that should appeal strongly. Some of it is dark indeed. It is played with grand gestures and élan. This is music in a constant state of glorious climactic eruption which while exciting might be something of a weakness. It is however quite glorious.

Melartin is no mere pictorialist or water-colourists - no purveyor of toothsome bonbons - not that there's anything wrong with such. Here instead is a composer whose piano music holds both surprises and the attention with a considerable grip.

In the interpretative hands of Maria Lettberg this music reaches its toweringly imaginative potential. Romantic flair immersed in fantasy and heroic spirit..

Rob Barnett