MYSTIC ENCOUNTERS

EKTORAS TARTANIS Chamber Music Works

[TYXart CD TXA24190]

Review by George Kyrkos-Tayas

15 February 2025

This disc brings music composed by Chief Conductor of the Niederbayerischen Philharmonie Ektoras Tartanis (b. 1987), but one would be wrong to presume that this is another case of Kapellmeistermusik - a derogatory term meant to describe the well-constructed but uninspired. For, although the pieces presented here are not particularly innovative in terms of style and composition technique, they form interesting additions to their respective genre and, in the case of the two sets of Lieder after texts by Paul Celan, important ones in the context of the Romanian Jewish poet's reception in music.

The first track, titled "The Lost Nereid", consists of a virtuoso sonata for piano solo (the subtitle of the cd is rather misleading: strictly speaking, chamber music does not include instrumental music for one instrument; it excludes vocal music too). According to the notes in the booklet, the piece is supposed to let us witness what an ancient Nereid's song would sound like today. French pianist Paul Drouet's committed account of this complex score (there are shifts of rhythm due to constant changes of time-signature and an almost uninterrupted torrent of semiquavers) is certainly a pianistic feat and, given the obvious French influences, explains why it sounds so idiomatic. For me, this is more of an aural picture of a nymph's play in the sea; her singing (from letter I in the score), poignant as it is with the long trill just before the first climax, feels rather short; but this is a matter of interpretation.

Equally sensitive is the rendition of the Sonata for bassoon and piano titled "The Horae" (tracks 14-16). It is in three movements, each given the name of one of the ancient goddesses of order in nature. In the booklet, Tartanis links them to beauty but this is valid only by extension: one of the Horae's task was to superintend the moral world of mankind. *Eunomia* benefits from a good theme for the soloist, Susanne Keck, but *Diki* I cannot relate to the idea of Justice: in spite of the Presto marking, it is played like a fast Allegro (crotchet= 138), yet ensemble-wise it sounds precarious. In any case, the score indicates (p.23) that the bassoonist play rubato and not keep exactly to the beat of the piano line. In *Eirene*, it seems to me that the bassoon (as the chosen instrument) does not translate adequately the appassionato element of the movement (bar 31 onwards), although it does the job well in the misterioso passages.

The bonus of this disc, however, are the two sets of Lieder based on poetry by Paul Celan. They are testament to Tartanis's deep grounding in the German musical tradition and to his aptitude for the genre. That he has been First Kapellmeister at the Freiburg Theatre since 2019 may account for his understanding of the voice. Soprano Irina Jae-Eun Park gives a poised performance of the four "Fadensonnen", the gem of which is No 3, *Du warst mein Tod*; imaginatively set in a major tonality (D flat) and marked leggiero mosso, it comes as a surprise given the sombre tone of the first verse. Of the eight "Atemwende", sung in a highly inflected manner by baritone Michael Borth, the last three have the edge. The Schubertian resonances of No 7, *Als uns das Wasser anfiel*, will enthuse some, while the last song of the cycle, *Einmal, da hoerte ich ihn*, is evidence of what the composer has achieved here: the same text, set to music by Giya Kancheli, creates an atmosphere; Tartanis makes it tangible by virtue of his focus on the words.

This release is a mixed bag but it is also promise of interesting things to come from this composer in the future. The performances are captured in excellent sound and the accompanying booklet offers (in both German and English) much information about the music, the poems and the artists. Perhaps the only minus is that it is too lavishly illustrated with photos of the composer. Surely, for someone so fond of ancient Greek philosophy, he must know that, according to Aristotle, less is more.