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Maurice Ravel Complete Works for Piano Solo

MAURICE RAVEL: Sérénade grotesque · Menuet Antique · Sonatine · Miroirs · Gaspard de la Nuit · Menuet en ut dièse mineur · Pavane pour une Infante Défunte · Jeux d'eau · Menuet sur le nom Haydn · Valses Nobles et Sentimentales · A la Manière de... Borodin / Chabrier · Prélude · Le Tombeau de Couperin

Håkon Austbø, piano

Ravel's music is sometimes perceived as cool and perfect. Austbø reads it differently, opening up for the dark side.

Håkon Austbø has a special place in the French repertoire, with his complete recordings of Messiaen and Debussy as references in the catalogue. Celebrating his 70th birthday this autumn Austbø releases the complete works for solo piano of another towering French composer – Maurice Ravel. And his readings reveal the darker side of Ravel's music.

"The more one penetrates into the complex and mysterious universe of Ravel as revealed to us through his music, the more one is left with riddles never to be solved. I must confess, having played his music all my life, that there are aspects about him still puzzling me," says Austbø – who also contributes with an enlightening personal note for this release.

Ravel for the piano

In 1906 Ravel wrote to the critic Pierre Lalo pointing out that various features of his work could claim priority over Debussy in the 'special manner of writing for the piano'. 'Jeux d'eau', he insisted, 'stands at the beginning of all the pianistic innovations that have been noted in my work. Inspired by the sound of water and the musical sounds emanating from fountains, waterfalls and brooks...' Austbø himself states: "Ravel's piano writing is as subtle and colourful as his orchestra writing. He used to say that the pedal was the 'orchestrator' of the piano; indeed his use of resonance evoking bells or water is unthinkable without ample use of pedal." For this recording Håkon Austbø performs on a Steinway Mod. D-274 from 1893.

A darker side

Ravel's music is sometimes perceived as cool and perfect. Austbø reads it differently: "Ravel probably did conceal some of his darkest sides behind a brilliant technical mastery. 'My goal is technical perfection', he stated, well aware that this would never be achieved. Still, many of his pieces put the dark corners of his world on display, as in the haunting Scarbo, or behind a mask as the tragic gracioso in Alborada. It is one of the few pieces where Ravel unveils himself to us, and the cataclysmic ending is not a nice sight: the buffoon's world falls to pieces. In a way, we are all this buffoon: who hasn't experienced this existential fear?"

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"– Austbø er en mester i å fremheve den reserverte elegansen hos Ravel [...] en rytmesans som gjør hans Ravel tolkninger til en glede å høre. Den fjærende rytmen i flere stykker kombineres med at stemmerikdommen kommer tydelig frem. [Arnfinn Bø-Rygg / Stavanger Aftenblad]"



"– Ja, Håkon Austbø er en av de tydeligste musikalske stemmene som noensinne har kommet fra Norge. Hans innspilling av Ravels samlede klaververk er en gullgrube av innfall. Den er et tolkningsdokument som fortjener inngående studier med dine og mine ører. [Magnus Andersson / Klassekampen]"

"– fremheve Austbøs kombinasjonen av solid fortrolighet med materialet og dyp personlig tilnærming. Samlet sett gir dette fortolkningene en umiskjennelig, særegen aura - i sannhet en sjeldenhet i dagens klassiske musikkindustri. [Emil Bernhard / Morgenbladet]"

"– Og også på denne komplette samlingen av Maurice Ravel sin musikk for solo piano er det et sterkt personlig bidrag fra Håkon Austbø sin side som gjør at jeg opplever denne musikken på ny. Det er et mørkt, men samtidig drømmeaktig slør over musikken som er direkte fascinerende. [audiophile.no]"



"– Die Zartheit und der Feinsinn im Spiel Håkon Austbøs erstaunen, bildlich sieht man die Bark auf dem Ozean (aus den Miroirs) oder das heitere Wasserspiel (Jeux d'eau) und auch die traurigen Vögel (ebenso Miroirs) klagen derart plastisch, als müsste man nur die Hand ausstrecken, um die anzufassen. [Olivier Fraenzke / www.the-new-listener.de]"



"Conscient de cette rencontre parfaite, Håkon – Austbø joue le texte dans une fidélité absolue, un peu comme Casadesus ou Perlemuter : non qu'il disparaisse derrière la graphie magique des portées de Ravel, mais il la donne à entendre et même quasiment à voir. [artmag.com]"