

Invocation is a setting for choir and trumpet of Edward Thomas's famous *Adlestrop*, a poem I have long considered unsuitable for musical setting. Cooke's piece, more of a pastoral tone poem than a choral work – complete with long trumpet cadenza – has certainly opened my ears to the possibility. The composer writes that he decided on the title because he was aiming at 'something that bewitches the listener and ... stays long in the mind'. I'm not sure that the tolling bass notes of *The Hazel Wood* are really what are needed to get to the heart of Yeats's poem, but the cumulative effect of this 'dramatic cantata' is mightily powerful. The expertly scored accompaniment is for organ and brass quintet.

Onyx Brass is splendidly sonorous in *The Hazel Wood*, and Timothy Parsons is on fine form indeed in the organ-accompanied works. Selwyn College Chapel Choir is clearly an accomplished group. Its members sing fervently and are obviously committed to the repertoire. Blend is good and unanimity of attack is exemplary. The music poses quite severe tuning problems in places, most of which are dispatched by the choir without too much difficulty. There are a few fragile moments in the many, very tricky solos. The choir is well recorded in the pleasing acoustic of its own chapel, and the programme is admirably directed by Sarah MacDonald.

One final point: choral conductors will appreciate, as I have appreciated whilst preparing this review, the composer's enlightened decision to post PDF scores of his music on his website. **William Hedley**



Signe Bakke and Liv Elise Nordskog

Tore Hegdahl

orchestral version made a year later (where the designation changed from 'chant et piano' to 'grand soprano dramatique et orchestre').

The performance on this new disc is extremely beautiful, poised and well prepared. Liv Elise Nordskog's soprano is flexible and secure, and her tone is lovely: the melismatic alleluias at the end of the first song are very well managed even if the last, high phrase shows a little strain – as in virtually every performance I've ever heard. Her French is very good and she's fortunate indeed in being partnered by Signe Bakke, a pianist with a great range of colour at her command as well as a sensitive and responsive accompanist. The whole cycle is done as convincingly here as in any other version for voice and piano that I can recall, including Messiaen's own with Lise Arseguet (a version he was never entirely happy with since the singer could not match the power and range of Marcelle Bunlet, the original soprano soloist) and orchestral versions of which Felicity Palmer's with Boulez is much the finest I've heard. The early *Trois Mélodies* include Messiaen's only setting of a text by his mother, Cécile Sauvage. This tender memorial – 'Le Sourire' ('The Smile') – was composed just after she died, and it is surrounded by a delicate opening song ('Pourquoi?') and 'La Fiancée perdue'. Again, the performance on this new LAWO disc is exceptionally assured, and preferable to most of the existing competition.

However, the exceptional interest here is the recording of *L'Âme en bourgeon* ('The budding soul'), the song cycle composed by Delbos to poems by the mother-in-law she never knew (Sauvage died in 1928; Messiaen and Delbos were married in 1932). The first performance on April 27th, 1937 – at the same concert as the complete premiere of the *Poèmes pour Mi* – was given by Bunlet and Messiaen and the songs were subsequently published, but they have seldom been performed since, and have hitherto been known only to a few Messiaen specialists. This new recording is one that makes a compelling case for Delbos's songs:

there's a capriciousness in her writing quite different from anything her husband could ever write, though in other places there are hints of stylistic similarities – Delbos and Messiaen clearly looked over each others' shoulders during that idyllic summer.

Delbos was already dogged with fragile health (though her tragic mental decline started later), and it cannot have been easy for her to set these poems about Messiaen when he was still in the womb, not least because she had already suffered more than one miscarriage of her own. But the result is a cycle that is intensely intimate, harmonically resourceful, written with a secure sense of effective vocal writing, and with a fine instinct for the expressive twists and turns of Sauvage's extraordinary poems. Nordskog and Bakke deserve the highest possible praise for what they have achieved in this performance: a wholly convincing account of a work that deserves to be heard more often. This fine recording will surely help that, and the sound is excellent too.

The notes are admirable (though some acknowledgement of the sources consulted might have been helpful), and the cover photo is one of a very extensive series taken during the summer of 1936 in Petichet. The whole production is well prepared, though purchasers of this disc expecting to find English translations of the poems in the booklet will be disappointed: they are given in French and Norwegian only. It's a small shortcoming in what is otherwise an exemplary disc, and an extremely enterprising one. **Nigel Simeone**

Pour Mi

New CD/SACD

Delbos *L'Âme en bourgeon*.

Messiaen *Poèmes pour Mi*.

Trois Mélodies.

Liv Elise Nordskog (soprano); **Signe**

Bakke (piano).

LAWO Classics LWC1051 (full price, 52 minutes).

French texts and Norwegian translations included.

Website www.lawo.no. *Producer* Vegard Landaas.

Engineer Thomas Wolden. *Dates* February 22nd-

25th, 2012.

Comparisons:

Poèmes pour Mi:

Arseguet, Messiaen

(Essential Media) ALDVN5429 (c.1960)

Palmer, BBC SO/Boulez (Decca) 478 0352

(1972, download only)

This is a release that will be of the greatest interest to anyone who is fascinated by Messiaen's music from the 1930s, and especially by the enchanted summer of 1936 – the first to be spent in the newly built house by the lake in Petichet with his first wife Claire Delbos. The results were two song cycles, one by each of this composing couple. Of the two, Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi* ('Mi' was his pet-name for Claire) is well known and often recorded either in its original voice-and-piano version or the

Sacred Choral Music

New

Desenclos *Messe de Requiem*^a.

Nos autem. *Salve regina*.

Poulenc *Litanies à la vierge noire*, SP82^b.

Villette *Attende Domine*. *Hymne à la vierge*. *O sacrum convivium*.

Choir of King's College, London/David

Trendell with ^a**Christopher Woodward**,

^b**Richard Hall** (organs).

Delphian DCD34136 (full price, 1 hour 10 minutes).

French/Latin texts and English translations included.

Website delphianrecords.co.uk. *Producer/Engineer* Paul Baxter. *Dates* June 23rd-25th, 2013.

Since Fauré's celebrated *Requiem* established itself in the repertoire, French composers have made something of a speciality of Requiem settings that play down the blood and thunder in favour of something more consoling. Choral conductors are familiar with the beige Durand vocal scores. The finest of them is Maurice Duruflé's masterly setting from 1947, based on Gregorian plainchant themes, superbly written for the choir and a profoundly moving experience. The Breton composer Joseph Guy Ropartz completed his *Requiem* in 1938, and this disc presents us with yet another, from Alfred Desenclos (1912-71).