

imaginable. Temple favours brisk tempos, constantly driving the restless dramatic undercurrent. This energetic impulse is leapt on by the Evangelist, Robert Murray, whose light, expressive approach is a long way from Pears's laboured mannerisms. Ashley Riches, too, captures Jesus's utterances with a heartbreaking simplicity. Frankly, none of the soloists could be bettered, nor the superb continuo team, led by organist Peter Jackel. It is also worth buying this recording just to savour Reiko Ichise's viola da gamba obbligato. Congratulations to all concerned on producing such a buoyant, absorbing and sonically thrilling recording. **Malcolm Riley**

Clérambault

Magnificat, C136. Monstra te esse matrem, C132. Motet à 3 voix tiré du Psaume 76, C130. Motet pour la canonisation de Saint Pie, C150. O piissima, o sanctissima mater, C135. Panis angelicus, C131. Salve regina, C114. Sub tuum praesidium, C104

Ensemble Sébastien de Brossard /

Fabien Armengaud org/hpd

Paraty © PARATY516141 (75' • DDD • T/t)



Those steeped in the finest lineages of the French Baroque acknowledge

Clérambault as a master of the keyboard and a prolific composer of cantatas. What these eight pristine motets for three *concertante* male voices confirm is an extraordinarily imaginative and accomplished creator of keenly observed devotional musical texts, both dramatic and reflective.

While the majority of the works are dominated by common Marian themes, the resourcefulness of scoring, gesture and colour take the listener into realms of contrast belying the conformity of the subject. Indeed, the joy of this project lies in two traits deeply resonant in Clérambault's favour: a fastidious attention to detail (almost, but not quite, fussy) gleaned from his preparation as a prolific publisher of his work and, not unconnected, an almost evangelical projection of ideas demanding to make themselves heard.

The economic but telling graphic imagery of Psalm 76, with 'the waters shaken by fear', or the more opulent panegyric on the canonisation of Pope Pius V demonstrate a broad instinct moving effortlessly between the indigenously lyrical and the comparatively *rappresentativo* elements of Clérambault's Italianate models.

It's the former that the singers of the Brossard Ensemble seem to relish with the deftest sensibility: the *Salve regina*, on the surface at least, draws on the kind of inward vocal rhetoric and subtlety of Couperin's three *Leçons de Ténèbres*. The only spoiling happens when the haute-contre (the notoriously perilous and specialist tenor *fach* which Charpentier and Rameau drew upon so characteristically) sears through the ensemble with an uncomfortably astringent timbre.

Most convincing are the tightly scored dovetailing trios, such as the glorious 'Et misericordia' from the *Magnificat*. This is music crying out for suppleness and, again, one too often wishes for a softer-edged and more finessed vocal production to make this a release of real distinction. Clérambault's genius still shines through despite the reservations and a rather boxy recorded sound. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Debussy • Fauré

'Fêtes galantes'

Debussy *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*. Fêtes galantes - Set 2. Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé Fauré *Cinq Mélodies 'de Venise'*, Op 58. La chanson d'Ève, Op 95

Bettina Smith *mez* Einar Røttingen *pf*

LAWO Classics © LWC1116 (56' • DDD • T/t)



The Norwegian mezzo Bettina Smith collaborates here with her compatriot, pianist

Einar Røttingen, on a fine if shortish programme of French song-cycles in which 'jouissance turns to tristesse', as the booklet-notes inform us. Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* and Fauré's *La chanson d'Ève* are recorded together for the first time since Dawn Upshaw's 'Voices of Light' and they make a striking pairing, with Bilitis's naive sexuality nicely contrasted with Ève's gathering awareness that God's Eden ambiguously encompasses desire, danger and intimations of mortality. The two cycles are separated by the erotic wit of Fauré's Venetian songs, the disillusionment of Debussy's second *Fêtes galantes* set and the cautious rapture of his three Mallarmé settings.

The disc is, however, uneven. Smith's darkish mezzo reveals occasional constriction at the top when singing softly. Everything is very reined in, with dynamics carefully shaded. Yet, as Véronique Gens's very differently programmed 'Nèère' (Alpha, 1/16) admirably proved, French song need not always be about restraint, and there

are moments when you wish Smith would sometimes let the voice out more and adopt a broader interpretative spectrum. The richness of the sound suits Ève but makes Bilitis too overtly knowing – and Upshaw more successfully, and subtly, conveys the half-voiced emotions of both cycles.

Cinq Mélodies de Venise, meanwhile, lies high and occasionally lacks charm. But the Mallarmé songs sound languidly voluptuous, and Set 2 of *Fêtes galantes*, with its regretful, bitter colloquies, is delivered with an insistent intensity that makes it utterly engaging. Røttingen, meanwhile, provides more consistent pleasures with playing of beguiling elegance and beauty throughout. **Tim Ashley**

Chansons de Bilitis, Chanson d'Ève – selected comparison:

Upshaw, *Kalish* (2/05) (NONE) 7559 79812-2

Donizetti • Mayr

Donizetti *Messa di Gloria*. Credo.

Ave Maria Mayr Sanctus. Agnus Dei

Siri Karoline Thornhill, Marie-Sophie Pollak *sops*

Marie-Sande Papenmeyer *contr* Mark Adler *ten*

Martin Berner *bass* Simon Mayr Choir; Members of

the Bavarian State Opera Chorus; Concerto de

Bassus / Franz Hauk

Naxos © 8 573605 (86' • DDD • T/t)



After hearing Rossini's *Stabat mater*, the French writer

Théophile Gautier remarked, approvingly, that Italian church music was 'toujours en fête'. It's party time with a vengeance in the *Messa di Gloria* concocted by conductor Franz Hauk from assorted individual movements by the young Donizetti. There are moments of impressive solemnity, both in the *Messa di Gloria* (ie *Kyrie* and *Gloria*) and the Credo in D, reworked from an earlier Credo in E flat for a performance in Donizetti's home town of Bergamo. But from the tootling, clarinet-led march that launches the 'Christe eleison', the Ordinary becomes a pretext for a vocal-instrumental concert. The first clarinet (unnamed here) has a starring role both in the soprano aria 'Laudamus te' and the 'Domine Deus', an operatic-style cavatina-cabaletta for baritone. Horn and soprano duet amiably in the 'Qui tollis peccata mundi', while in the 'Qui sedes' a solo violin swoops and skitters above the tenor. Even when Donizetti embarks on a fugue, as in 'Cum Sancto Spiritu', operatic jollity is never far away. Haydn's late Masses and Rossini's *Petite Messe solennelle* seem positively austere by comparison.