



Fauré authentique

aud 97.825

EAN: 4022143978257



Gramophone (2024.06.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Just as the musical world has moved on from the polarity of authentic versus modern performance, here comes the A-word again. This recital's claim to authenticity is first and foremost based on Francois Dumont's 1891 Erard piano, from the Musée de la Musique in Paris, illustrated in glossy photos in the digital booklet; its sound is light and transparent but not heard to its best advantage, I fear. The notes also bring up Marc Coppey's cello-playing as a marker of authenticity. But here the argument is soggy, resting on the assertions of his 'fully engaging with the fluid rhetoric of Faure's musical language' and eschewing 'a perpetual *espressivo*, which would be stylistically incongruous'.

Well, it's true that Faure's scores are not burdened by excessive indications, but *espressivo* certainly appears regularly, not least in the First Sonata. And whatever the theory, the cello sound falls short in terms of charm, sophistication and eloquence. The shortcomings of the current disc are particularly apparent in comparison with existing recordings, of which there are more than might be expected and whose numbers may swell as the centenary year proceeds. Particularly short-changed are those pieces that balance poise with pathos, such as the famous *Elégie*. Compare here the austerity and dryness of Coppey and Dumont with the elegantly weighted sound world of Isserlis and Devoyon or the quiet wistfulness of Gagnepain and Dayez on period instruments.

As with those discs, at the heart of Coppey and Dumont's programme are the two late sonatas. These are a far cry from the Fauré of sweet melodies and salon-music airiness. Darkly serious and densely textured, each sonata is a kaleidoscope of complex and unexpected harmonies and rhythmical patterns. The First, composed in 1917, clearly carries the scars of the Great War and its associated disillusionments; the jagged lines and a general feeling of unease of the first movement lead to a posttraumatic and elusive second and an impatiently flowing finale. Belonging to the period following Faure's resignation from the Conservatoire due to health issues, not least his incipient deafness, the Second Sonata is marked by greater inwardness and withdrawal, and even the playfulness of the dialogue of melodies in the first movement is now surrounded by a melancholic haziness. The second movement, echoing 'the *Elégie*', is a transcription of a funeral march composed for the centenary of Napoleon's death, to be performed at Les Invalides. Here again, I find Coppey and Dumont merely plodding, where Isserlis and Devoyon are majestic, and Gagnepain and Dayez are poetically mournful.

The interleaved shorter pieces return us to the Fauré of salon music, from the undulating melodies of the *Sicilienne* (originally incidental music to Moliere's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*) to the sunlit, Catalan-tinted *Sérénade* (dedicated to Casals) and the rather insignificant but charming *Morceau de lecture* for two cellos (one of Fauré's conservatoire exam pieces). There is also the obligatory 'Après un rêve' in Casals's arrangement, here stark and direct rather than amorous and longing. The closing *Berceuse* from the *Dolly* suite in Coppey's arrangement is no match for the magical ending of Isserlis's disc, with the cello and organ recorded in a church setting. If authenticity is still a thing, fit this bill far more persuasively.

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 'Fauré authentique'
 Complete Works for Cello and Piano
 Marc Coppey vc; François Dumont pf with
 Pauline Bartissol vc
 Audite (AUDITE97 825 - 67)

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 Selected comparisons:
 Isserlis, Devoyon (RC1 09026 68049-2 (3/95))
 Gagnepain, Dayez, Zigi-Zoni Terzaviva ZZUV70602 (4/07)

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Isserlis, Devoyon RCA 09026 68049-2 (8/95)
Gagnepain, Dayez Zig-Zag Territoires ZZT070602 (A/07)