Albrecht Mayer - Bonjour Paris (2010)

01. Debussy - La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin (from 24 Preludes) 02. Faure - Pavane Academy of St. Martin in the Fields 03. Debussy - Clair de Lune 04. Francaix - L'Horloge de Flore - 3h - Galant de jour 05. L'Horloge de Flore - 5h - Cupidone bleue 06. L'Horloge de Flore - 10h - Cierge a grandes fleurs 07. L'Horloge de Flore - 12h - Nycanthe du Malabar 08. L'Horloge de Flore - 17h - Belle de nuit 09. L'Horloge de Flore - 19h - Geranium triste 10. L'Horloge de Flore - 21h - Silene noctiflore 11. Odermatt - Trois Images Pour Hautbois et Orchestre, Op.18 - 1. Eté 12. Ravel - Pavane Pour Une Infante Defunte 13. Faure - Sicilienne 14. D'Indy - Fantaisie sur des themes populaires francais, Op.31 - 1. Lent 15. Fantaisie sur des themes populaires francais, Op.31 - 2. Gaiment et pas trop vite 16. Satie - Gymnope No.1 17. Hahn - A Chloris
Albrecht Mayer – oboe Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Mathias Monius - conductor

The French call the oboe the "noble wood". Some of the most important works for the "haut bois" have originated in France. Perhaps because the vibrant, singing soul of the instrument and its closeness to the human voice have always fascinated French musicians.

Over the years, the German oboist Albrecht Mayer has taken his instrument out of its orchestral niche and into the classical limelight. When he blows into the "noble wood", music turns to language – be it with complicated solo pieces or in the reworkings of familiar masterpieces. No one elicits such sensuous sounds from the instrument as the solo oboist from the Berliner Philharmoniker, and no one has explored the oboe repertoire more comprehensively than he.

His secret is simple: Albrecht Mayer is a musician out of passion. "I actually came to my instrument rather by chance, at some point in time I stood in front of a case with an oboe and fell instantly in love." Since his youth, he has cut canes for his mouthpiece from reeds, worked meticulously at his playing and breathing techniques, and quested for inspiring repertoire. The oboe has become an extension of Albrecht Mayer's expressive world. And because he is an

avid visitor to France, because he loves the finesse of its culinary lifestyle and the indolent dreamy moods of the city on the Seine, it was a natural step to cast about for French oboe works.

Albrecht Mayer is standing on a rooftop in Parisian heaven. The Eiffel Tower is visible in the distance, below him is the Latin Quarter, the artists' quarter. Mayer has been on a musical-historical tour of the city, uncovering the French sounds of the nineteenth century which resonate right into the present day. At their heart stands the onomatopoeic musical imagery of Impressionism. The dreamy sounds of Mayer's oboe and its sister instruments, the oboe d'amore and the English horn, seem just made for the mood-set of Bohemian Paris.

Searching for clues in Paris, Mayer also gleaned some unexpected findings: in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the oboe professors at the Paris Conservatoire encouraged composers to write oboe pieces for its competition. This resulted in many new pieces for oboe, but only a small number of the musical elite in France composed solo works for the "noble wood". The impressionists Debussy and Ravel, who disputed the very notion of Impressionism, certainly introduced the oboe's tonal colours into La Mer and Daphnis et Chloé, but wrote no solo works for the instrument.

"The thrill is that in this way, you suddenly hit upon quite different composers", says Albrecht Mayer. One of these discoveries is Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931), who was as much influenced by his teacher César Franck as by Richard Wagner's endlessly flowing melodies. Like many in France, he attempted to embed German Romanticism into French consciousness with his Fantaisie sur des thèmes populaires français. This was later the aim of Jean Françaix too, who in 1959 composed his L'Horloge de Flore – a musical flowering clock, which for every hour of the day and night describes a plant in music, from the gladiolus to the cactus. But alongside these discoveries of musical history, it is also a particular and necessary challenge for Albrecht Mayer to affirm his instrument in the face of composers' neglect. "For me it's quite straightforward: when I like a piece, it's a summons for me to test it out for the oboe. I try to imitate the tonal colours, or to create new ones." And to that end, Mayer has now turned his hand to the French greats. Arrangements of Gabriel Fauré's Pavane and Erik Satie's celebrated piano pieces Gymnopédies were created for him so that through his oboe, he could capture the compositional spirit of Paris. Mayer also plays an adaptation of the ode À Chloris by the friend of Marcel Proust, Reynaldo Hahn. "I heard the wonderful countertenor Philippe Jarrousky sing this work, and was transported. I knew at once that for a French disc, I had to borrow this piece from him", enthuses Albrecht Mayer, and lets us hear once more how the enchantment of French music lies in its proximity to the human voice and soul. Time and again on his tour of Paris, Albrecht Mayer encounters the spirit of the Grande Nation.

And it quickly becomes obvious that Paris was at the heart of Europe: here, international influences fused into new styles. Mayer is filled with enthusiasm for French music, and engages with its unique tonal colours. He joins forces once more with the British orchestra the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and waxes lyrical about the sensitivity of its playing. “On the one hand I think that the spirit of French music can only be understood if one is acquainted with Paris, but on the other that it becomes clear only if one is conscious of the many differing influences on this metropolis”, says Mayer.

To round off his musical journey, he has borrowed three of the piano’s greatest hits for his instrument, the oboe: La Fille aux cheveux de lin and Clair de lune by Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel’s Pavane pour une infante défunte. In Mayer’s oboe interpretations, these piano works come closer still to the human voice. In this way he succeeds in allowing classics of the repertoire to emerge anew into a different sound world. “I think that for me also it has always to do with finding the unknown in the known”, he says. And so it is only logical that Mayer’s excursions through France should include a contemporary composition, tailor-made for the oboist by the Swiss Gotthard Odermatt. He imagined how it would be were Ravel to have written an oboe concerto today. The result is an astounding wash of sound that is technically so difficult that it could in all probability only be mastered by an Albrecht Mayer.

Bonjour Paris is a journey in time through the dreamy French metropolis in the company of one of the greatest of oboists – a tour of the city which opens our ears to the French soul. --- deccaclassics.com

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