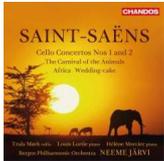


Saint-Saëns - Cello Concertos Nos. 1 & 2 and other works (2015)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 29 March 2019 15:48 -

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Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33 1. I. *Allegro non troppo* 6:01 2. II. *Allegretto con moto* 5:05 3. III. *Allegro non troppo* 9:10 Cello

Concerto No. 2 in D minor, Op. 119

4. I. *Allegro moderato e maestoso - Andante sostenuto* 11:43 5. II. *Allegro non troppo* 6:26

Le carnaval des animaux, R. 125 (Arr. for 2 Pianos & Orchestra)

6. I. *Introduction et marche royale du lion* 2:04 7. II. *Poules et coqs* 0:41 8. III. *Hémiones* 0:37

9. IV. *Tortues* 1:42 10. V. *L'éléphant* 1:24 11. VI. *Kangourous* 0:53 12. VII. *Aquarium* 2:18

13. VIII. *Personnages à longues oreilles* 0:49 14. IX. *Le coucou au fond des bois* 2:08 15. X.

Volière 1:20 16. XI. *Pianistes* 1:15 17. XII. *Fossiles* 1:15 18. XIII. *Le cygne* 2:33 19. XIV.

Finale 2:02 21. *Wedding Cake - Valse-Caprice for piano & strings, Op. 76* 5:58 22. *Africa - Fantasie for piano & orchestra Op. 89* 9:58

Truls Mørk (cello) Louis Lortie (piano) Hélène Mercier (piano) Bergen Filharmoniske Orkester
Neeme Järvi - conductor french composer, kompozytor

The Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Neeme Järvi present this unusual collection of popular works by Saint-Saëns, for orchestra and piano or cello.

Truls Mørk, this season Artist in Residence with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, is the soloist in the two contrasted cello concertos. His 'seemingly flawless technical command' is tested in the suave, expressive, famous No. 1 as well as in the many taxing solo passages, huge leaps, and double-stopping flourishes of No. 2.

The indefatigable duo Louis Lortie and Hélène Mercier join in the posthumously published Carnival of the Animals, after a highly successful recording of Concertos by Poulenc with Edward Gardner, Disc of the Week in The Sunday Times. They offer the original version, which features a glass harmonica (normally substituted by a glockenspiel). Louis Lortie is also the

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soloist in the entertaining fantasia Africa, which incorporates folk tunes of the different countries in which it was composed and which is brought off with consummate zest, as well as in the most characteristic and probably challenging of the composer's keyboard pieces, the Caprice-Valse Wedding-cake, written for the second wedding of the composer's virtuosic pianist friend Caroline Montigny-Rémaury. ---prestomusic.com

I like the idea of a CD where top billing passes from one star soloist to another. And I like a programme that demands different levels of involvement from the orchestra. Thus, after the two cello concertos, Truls Mørk is happy to play second fiddle (so to speak) to Louis Lortie and Hélène Mercier in Carnival before Lortie takes over the solo spot for the two piano-and-orchestra works.

This is one of those recordings where it seems invidious to look for faults and which just encourages you to sit back, relax, listen and wallow. Mørk brings his characteristic incisiveness and mountain-spring tone to the concertos, adopting somewhat broader tempi in all three movements of the A minor (No 1) than such rivals as Steven Isserlis and Jamie Walton (their timings are remarkably similar). Conversely, in the fluctuating pulse of the first movement of the D minor (No 2), Mørk is slightly brisker.

The Grande fantaisie zoologique receives one of its most successful performances on disc (sans narrator) with just the right balance of instrumental virtuosity, sensitive musicianship and, where the opportunity presents itself, fun. Chandos has gone to the trouble and expense of hiring a glass harmonica and its player (Alasdair Malloy) for 'Aquarium', while Lortie and Mercier actually made me laugh out loud in 'Pianistes' with their grade 3 attempt at ensemble. They sound genuinely unrehearsed and incompetent (as many pianists play this section straight as those who try too hard and over-egg the comedy). 'Le cygne' is elegantly phrased and gracefully paced – more Thames than Tuonela – and in fact my only reservation about the whole Carnival is why the two pianos are so dominant in 'L'éléphant'.

Lortie dispatches the Wedding Cake and Africa with an appropriate light touch and Gallic insouciance, clearly revelling in the digital challenges Saint-Saëns presents, matched every step of the way by the spirited Bergen players and Järvi. It is the best version of these two enchanters since Stephen Hough in 2001, but if you want this particular Chandos selection there is no competition. Lovely programme. Lovely recording. What's not to like? ---Jeremy

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