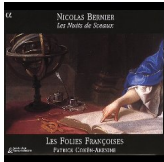


Nicolas Bernier - Les Nuits de Sceaux (2004)



I. Apollon Ou Le Dieu Du Jour - Première Cantate Ou Divertissement 1-01 Ouverture 1-02 Apollon: "Pasible Nuit..." 1-03 La Nuit 1-04 Apollon: "Pourquoi Donc Chassez-vous..." 1-05 Gravement, Apollon: "C'est Une Autre Minerve" 1-06 Air, Gravement 1-07 Menuet 1-08 Rondeau Du Menuet 1-09 Reprise Du Menuet 1-10 Apollon: "Verrons-nous Pour Ses Jeux..." 1-11 La Nuit: "La Scène Aura Son Temps..." 1-12 Marche, Comus: "Honore Comus..." 1-13 Comus: "Nos Jardins..." 1-14 Choeur: "Unissons-Nous..." 1-15 Sarabande, Gravement 1-16 Rigaudon, Gayement 1-17 Premier Passe-Pied - Second Passe Pied 1-18 Musette 1-19 Menuet De Musette 1-20 reprise Du Choeur

II. L'Aurore - Seconde Cantate Ou Divertissement, Avec Symphonie

1-21 Ouverture 1-22 Sommeil, Mercure: "Verse, Verse, Divin Sommeil..." 1-23 Air Tendre, Mercure: "Dormez Oiseaux..." 1-24 Choeur Des Muses: "Verse Divin Sommeil..." 1-25 Prélude, Mercure: "Quelle Clarté Nouvelle..." 1-26 L'Aurore & Mercure: "Que Des Honneurs..." 1-27 1e Muse, 2e Muse & Mercure: Ah! Laissez Reposer..." 1-28 L'Aurore & Mercure: "Que Des Honneurs..." 1-29 Choeur: "Que Des Honneurs..." 1-30 2e Muse: "Vous, Dont La Clarté..." 1-31 Symphonie, Grand Choeur: "Que Des Honneurs..."

Bass – Alain Buet Soprano – Anne-Marie Jacquin, Gaëlle Mechaly, Hanna Bayodi-Hirt Tenor – Robert Getchell Violone – Patrick Cohën-Akenine Chantres du Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles

Nicolas Bernier: Les Nuits de Sceaux may not be quite as revelatory as other entries in a remarkable series of Renaissance and Baroque discs issued by France's Alpha label, but it has plenty to interest lovers of the French Baroque, and indeed anyone interested in what French music of the period might have sounded like beyond the court and the circles of the powerful Lully and Rameau. The Château of Sceaux was the part-time residence of the Duchess of Maine, the wife of Louis XIV's son and an enthusiastic patron of the arts and sciences. She mounted elaborate musical entertainments, most of which have been lost; Nicolas Bernier's large two-part cantata Les Nuits de Sceaux (1715) is the most substantial survivor.

The chief innovation of the Alpha series is the inclusion with each album of a reproduction of an artwork contemporary with the music on the disc. The happy choice here is a painting by François de Troy (1645-1730) of the Duchess herself, seated at a table next to an armillary sphere, receiving an astronomy lesson. The notes on the music and on the painting, although written by different people and apparently uncoordinated, complement each other wonderfully in portraying the sense of a world in which classical traditions were giving way to new rationalist ideas.

Bernier's 70-minute cantata, for four soloists and chamber orchestra, isn't quite on a level with Alpha's other recent rediscoveries. It lacks dramatic tension, consisting as it does of an elaborate paean of praise to the Duchess. The solo parts represent supernatural and metaphysical entities: the gods Apollo and Comus, Night, Dawn, and two Muses. The first part of the cantata lauds the Duchess, a known insomniac, for her knowledge of wonders of the night that are far finer than mundane sleep; the second part is a fairly flashy musical depiction of dawn. Each half opens with a French overture and is interspersed with instrumental dances. Though there are some terrific individual passages (Dawn's "Muses, still you sleep! Awaken at my voice!," No. 26, will get your attention and would even by a good choice for programming into the alarm-clock function of an mp3 player), the cantata doesn't sustain high interest over its entire length. Nevertheless, there's a certain party-all-night quality to it that's compelling, and the performance by Les Folies Françaises under Patrick Cohën-Akenine is state-of-the-art. The disc is definitely recommended for anyone interested in the history and music of the early eighteenth century. ---James Manheim, Rovi

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