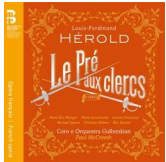


Louis Joseph Ferdinand HÉROLD - Le Pré aux Clercs (Paul McCreesh) [2015]



Disc 1 1. *Le pré aux clercs: Ouverture* 5:44 2. *Acte I Scène 1: No. 1, Introduction "Ah ! Quel beau jour de fête"* 2:52 3. *Acte I Scène 2: Dialogue "Ah ! Reposons-nous"* 1:57 4. *Acte I Scène 2: No. 2, Duo "Les rendez-vous de noble compagnie"* 6:28 5. *Acte I Scène 3: Dialogue "Holà ! ho !"* 1:16 6. *Acte I Scène 4: No. 3, Air "Ce soir j'arrive donc"* 4:20 7. *Acte I Scène 5: Dialogue "Ah les chiens !"* 0:13 8. *Acte I Scènes 6, 7 & 8: No. 4, Morceau d'ensemble "Allons ! Dressons la table !"* 5:14 9. *Acte I Scènes 9, 10 & 11: Dialogue "Quelle rencontre inattendue !"* 8:15 10. *Acte I Scène 12: No. 5, Final "À la Navarre"* 10:30 11. *Acte II Scène 1: No. 6, Entracte et air "Jours de mon enfance"* 10:27 12. *Acte II Scène 2: Dialogue "Mauvaises nouvelles"* 3:20 13. *Acte II Scène 3: No. 7, Trio "Vous me disiez sans cesse"* 8:09 14. *Acte II Scènes 4 & 5: Dialogue "Je sens les gouttes d'eau"* 3:05 Disc 2 1. *Acte II Scènes 6 & 7: No. 8, Mascarade "Ah ! Quel plaisir !"* 5:43 2. *Acte II Scène 8: No. 8, Mascarade (Suite) "L'ambassadeur de Navarre !"* 4:55 3. *Acte II Scènes 9, 10, 11 & 12: Dialogue "Le Roi les mander ensemble"* 5:09 4. *Acte II Scènes 13 & 14: No. 9, Final "Tout est dit"* 3:31 5. *Acte II Scène 15: No. 9, Final (Suite) "Je suis prisonnière"* 4:00 6. *Acte III Scène 1: No. 10, Chœur, morceau d'ensemble "Que j'aime ces ombrages"* 2:35 7. *Acte III Scène 1: No. 10 (Suite), Ronde "À la fleur du bel âge"* 4:51 8. *Acte III Scène 2: Dialogue "Eh bien !"* 1:55 9. *Acte III Scène 3: No. 11, Trio "C'en est fait !"* 2:07 10. *Acte III Scènes 4 & 5: Dialogue "Ah ! les voilà"* 4:45 11. *Acte III Scènes 6, 7 & 8: No. 12, Final "Je frémis !"* 3:40 12. *Acte III Scène 9: No. 12 Final (Suite), "Nargue de la folie"* 6:41

Isabelle de Montal – Marie-Ève Munger Marguerite de Navarre – Marie Lenormand Nicette – Jeanne Crousaud De Mergy – Michael Spyres Cantarelli – Éric Huchet Girot – Christian Helmer De Comminge – Emiliano González Toro Le Brigadier – Leandro César Archers – Tiago Batista, Nuno Fonseca Un Exempt du guet – Manuel Rebelo Coro e Orquestra Gulbenkian Conductor – Paul McCreesh

Operaphiles are indebted to the likes of Opera Rara and Palazzetto Bru Zane for dredging up long-lost works and reviving them both in performance and on disc. The former specialises in Italian bel canto, while Palazzetto Bru Zane, though based in Venice, is devoted to the rediscovery of French rarities. Ferdinand Hérold is best known now for his infectious ballet *La fille mal gardée*, but *Le Pré aux clercs* ('The Clerks' Meadow') was hugely successful in its day,

notching up 1600 performances by 1949 at Paris's Opéra-Comique, where the production associated with this release was mounted in 2015.

The opera revolves around the romantic, political and religious intrigues at the Palais du Louvre and the grounds of the 'Pré aux clercs' inn 10 years after the 1572 St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The king's sister, Marguerite de Valois, married to the king of Navarre, is being held as a hostage of peace at the Louvre, accompanied by young Countess Isabelle. Navarraise envoy Baron de Mergy, in love with Isabelle, turns up and complications arise, mostly involving the dastardly Comte de Comminge, who desires Isabelle for himself. Lighter, comic elements surround Nicette (Marguerite's god-daughter) and her wedding to Girot, host at the Pré aux clercs. True love wins the day, the opera ending with Isabelle and Mergy reunited after the latter has dispatched Comminge in a duel. Think of it as Les Huguenots but with laughs.

Hérold's effervescent music is performed with tremendous charm by Paul McCreesh and the Gulbenkian Orchestra. The best arias go to Isabelle and Nicette. Isabelle's 'Jour de mon enfance', which opens Act 2 in duet with a splendid violin concertante, finds Marie-Ève Munger in exquisite form, coloratura cascading like champagne. Jeanne Crousaud is a spirited Nicette, while mezzo Marie Lenormand is a fine Marguerite. Male roles are dominated by tenors, led by the stylish Michael Spyres as Mergy. Ensembles fizz and it's a joy to hear the mostly francophone cast in acres of dialogue. As always with Palazzetto Bru Zane, the discs are encased in a lavish hardback book, containing the libretto (bravo to any English translation including the exclamations 'Gadzooks!' and 'Egad!'), a synopsis and a series of essays in both French and English. Chapeau! --- Mark Pullinger, gramophone.co.uk

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