

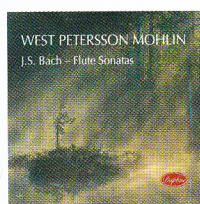
recording is flawless. I first encountered Ensemble Odyssee live at last November's International Early Music Festival in Blackheath, London. On this recording their enthusiasm for Babel's music and passion for making music at the highest level together shines through, conveying superbly the energy and freshness of their live performance. The combination of this rare and unjustly neglected repertoire and Ensemble Odyssee's dazzling performance is a winning one.

Helen Tawn

'J. S. Bach – Flute Sonatas'

**Kristine West – recs, Stina Petersson –
baroque cello, Marcus Mohlin – hpscd
Sonatas for flute and basso continuo
BWV 1034 & 1035**

**Sonatas for flute and harpsichord
(obligato) BWV 1030, 1031 & 1032
Daphne Records 1058**



The flute sonatas of Johann Sebastian Bach have been for a long time a staple 'stolen jewel' for recorder players. The

construction, form and pace of the musical argument as well as the beauty of the music are considerable reasons for transcribing the sonatas across for the recorder. With any arrangement or transcription, this of course can cause added difficulties, or indeed reduce problems – usually the former. Different composers require different approaches, and with Bach this is no different. An understanding of the grand form, the harmonic, rhythmic and metric architecture, the proportions and the beauty contained within these structures, are part the key to performing these works.

Kristine and her colleagues have recorded a beautiful CD. Within a very short time, I was invited to really listen to the music – the performers clearly have a deep understanding of the pieces presented here, and their choices of tempi, pacing, articulation and so forth created a space which allowed the musical discourse to unfold. When Kristine and her team add any ornamentation, it is always an enhancement of the affective moment of the music. The performances sound as if they were always intended for recorder, and are not in any way compromised by leaving the sound world and dynamic potential of the traverse flute. Compromises have to be made, so even if the bass line in the E minor sonata, here in

G minor on alto, is a little high, there is no sense of struggle or challenge in the sound.

In some other recordings on both flute and recorder we can hear break-neck allegro tempi, and indeed slower movements that move at a tempo that could be described as controversial. It is wonderful here to be allowed to listen, to really listen, without being rushed. If tempo is a condition, dependent partly upon acoustic, and recordings are therefore an 'unnatural' acoustic, it becomes even more important to consider this from the perspective of the sound engineering and recording process. The sound here is very natural, well balanced and very present.

In short, a very musical, intelligent and refreshing recording, that for sure will bear much repeated listening – joyful, and thoughtful.

Chris Orton

Aztec Dances – New Works for Recorder and Piano

**Jill Kemp – Recorder and
Aleksander**

Szram – Piano Prima Facie, PFC052



'Aztec Dances' is a most interesting collection of new works, most written specifically for the

recorder and exploring the instrument's wide range of colours and tones. Both the recorder and piano are played with great agility and expertise as Jill Kemp and Aleksander Szram explore the melodic dialogue between the two instruments. The musical pictures they paint take us through sparkling staccato passages on the descant and sopranino recorders to darker, more mellow phrases played on the tenor which is counterbalanced by some unusual but complementary percussive techniques on the piano strings.

The first piece, Edward Gregson's *Aztec dances*, takes us on a journey through soundscapes of widely varying colours and moods conjuring up bold visual images which would be very well suited to being combined with modern dance. It includes some beautiful sweetly melodic sections which are a perfect contrast to the technically challenging staccato phrases in the animated finale.

Garden of the Gods by Gregory Rose develops his piece by demonstrating the different personalities of the recorder and presents the mischievous sounds played

on the descant recorder in 'Greek Dance', before leading on to the melancholy deeper more sonorous tones of the tenor. His understanding of the recorder range is clearly evident here and beautifully interpreted by the players.

David Bedford's *Kempton Races* is a miniature jewel and is a testament to his skill as a composer. Sadly, one of the last pieces he wrote before his death in 2011 it is one to be treasured as despite its apparent simplicity it is a beautifully constructed piece. Though only just over seven minutes in length, it shows clearly the way in which a skilled composer can stop time for a moment and allow the listener to enjoy a slightly dreamlike 'funfair' experience in the blink of an eye leaving a feeling of warm satisfaction after a 'day out at the races'.

Dance Suite written in 2011 by George King is a short composition in four sections which showcases the recorder's breadth of interesting textural variety with complex rhythmic interplay between the recorder and piano accompaniment. The third section, 'Minuet', is a hauntingly melodic dialogue between the two instruments followed by the final section, 'Bebop' which is in direct contrast to this, ending abruptly.

This CD finishes with the final composition, written by Daryl Runswick in 2013 which takes the listener once again through the range of textural voices of both recorder and piano sometimes into a rather 'other worldly' soundscape showcasing many of the bird sounds which are often heard in the recorder repertoire. This composition asks the listener to 'go with the flow' and allow themselves to be taken along with the music which is more freeform and where the piano and recorder travel for a time along their own particular musical paths moving towards the haunting finale played expertly on the tenor recorder.

This recording is of generous length, with a playing time of well over an hour, and is made up of shorter works, all complete in themselves. Many of the pieces require the listener to enter strange and sometimes sinister musical worlds. To be fully appreciated, the individual compositions on this CD may be more enjoyable if digested as one would a delicious meal, little by little, allowing oneself the opportunity to absorb the flavour of each piece. The instrumentalists are skilled and a pleasure to hear as they interpret and present us with these new works.

Nina Murray