

## CD REVIEW 91

ELIZABETH MACONCHY

Suite: The Land

Concertino for piano and chamber orchestra

Music for wind and brass

Symphony for double string orchestra

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Odaline de la Martinez.

Lorelt LNT133 (64.05)



This really is a welcome disc of some works long ignored. And what splendid performances these are in a wonderful sound.

The Suite The Land is really a setting of the four seasons. Winter is beautifully conceived and evocative. Spring is bright and cheerful, a marvellous study in orchestration as well. Summer really conjures up a pleasant warm summer's day with a violin solo that could be a bird song and a glowing warmth. It is a rural piece away from noise and bustle and it develops in triumphant sound. Again the orchestration is superb. It is most original and does not seem to owe anything to anybody else. Autumn is also delightful with humour perhaps depicting swirling brown leaves. It is a strong piece. No wonder Sir Henry Wood was so pleased with this work that he premiered it at a Promenade Concert in 1930 when Maconchy was 23 years old. That it was called a triumph by a girl composer seems a little unfair. Holst and Vaughan Williams loved it. That it was inspired by the poem of Vita Sackville-West may not be relevant to the music itself which stands on its own as a masterly and impressive piece.

The orchestra and conductor are really on top form.

The Concertino of 1928 was also premiered in 1930 on the composer's twenty third birthday. This was in Prague and the soloist was Erwin Schulhoff. Its greatest feature is the deeply-felt slow movement with a memorable theme and shifting metres. The counterpoint is exquisite and the gorgeous climax is approached musically and not like a sudden clap of thunder. Everything is under control and flowing.

The Presto finale is full of wit and carefree. It sparkles and a luscious theme appears at 2.30 or thereabouts.

The Times reported on a Promenade Concert performance of this work in 1936 describing it as a very good little work indeed. It is not a great work but it is charming

The Music for wind and brass should be known as Music for woodwind and brass. It also includes a part for timpani. It dates from 1966 when Maconchy had developed her own style. It has a feel of a pageant about it but the thoughtful music is as good as the powerful sections. It was written for the Thaxted Festival which Holst had started in 1916 and Maconchy took into account the acoustics of Thaxted Church.

Maconchy is rightly renowned for her writings for strings and her thirteen string quartets are undoubtedly the most successful from a British composer. But this Music for woodwind and brass dispels any idea that she could only compose for strings and, as we have seen, her orchestration is quite superb.

The Symphony for double string orchestra would be better described as Symphony for two string orchestras and dates from 1952 and 1953 and first broadcast and performed by the Royal Philharmonic

Orchestra in 1954. The opening allegro molto does not maintain that description and there is a delightful passage pizzicato and a solo violin part in 7/8 time. The counterpoint is praiseworthy.

The slow movement is very successful beginning with the violas. There is a gentle lilt and the solo violin makes another appearance. There is both melody and tension. The best music of the symphony is here. The scherzo has high spirits which are not maintained as the music has contrasted sections. It is the quick music that makes this a scherzo. The finale is a passacaglia marked Lento sostenuto with an allegro section which is a fugato and there is a calm ending.

This is a welcome disc of a fine composer and we need to hear more of her work. The sound and performances are excellent. Her daughter Nicola's sleeve note are of the highest order. The cover picture is of a painting of a landscape by her father William LeFanu.

*([See article on this site about Elizabeth Maconchy](#))*

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