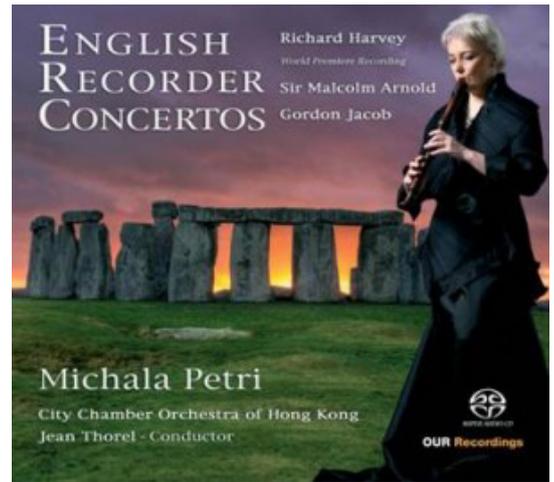


CD REVIEW 87

ENGLISH RECORDER CONCERTOS
RICHARD HARVEY Concerto Incanto (2009)
MALCOLM ARNOLD Concerto for recorder and orchestra Op 133,
GORDON JACOB Suite for recorder and strings.
Michala Petri, City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong,
Jean Thorel
OUR recordings LC27901 (59.06)

I have a few doubts about this CD.

I have no doubts whatsoever about Michala Petri. She is superb in her skill, intonation, interpretation and musicianship. She is the best of recorder players. Listen at the second movement of the Harvey concerto and admire her tone and her oriental style.



Richard Harvey is primarily a television and film composer and has had much success., He has worked with Elvis Costello (who, you may ask?) and, as an instrumentalist, performed in The Lion King and Harry Potter films. He also contributed to the Da Vinci Code film which film was prejudiced and an attack on traditional thought. He has worked with Kate Bush and Paul McCartney which may not lend himself to be considered as a serious composer.

His Concerto Incanto lacks logic. The five movements do not belong to each other. It is a collection of pieces and would fare better on their own as five separate pieces. The music is often formless and jumps from one idea to another without any link or progression. The music is often tedious and downright dull and yet I have to reiterate that Petri's playing is marvellous. I don't think this music is worthy of her. Of course, there are a few redeeming moments. The soprano and sopranino recorders in the scherzo are very telling.

Without any comments or other expression from me, this concerto was played to our gramophone society and no one responded to it with any enthusiasm. The usual comment was made. Is this composer a serious composer or a film composer or a composer and instrumentalist with pop singers? Can he be all these?

The great composers maintained a serious side to all their music but that did not exclude humour. Consider Haydn for example. If Bach were alive today would he work with McCartney? Can you image Beethoven composing a concerto for pop singer, pop guitarist and orchestra including a pop group drum kit?

But my objection to the Harvey concerto is not based on his associations or on prejudice but the quality of the music and its coherence.

Malcolm Arnold was a serious composer who could write humour and film scores yet there was quality in them even the St Trinians scores. He also wrote a work including a pop group which has apparently all that he writes disappeared. This was when he was under pressure and being made ill by the conduct of others.

His Concerto is a vastly better work. You can trace the tread through all that he writes and it makes sense and the thematic material is memorable and appealing. It give the soloist space even in the liveliest sections. The music breathes. It does not suffocate. The contribution of the strings is excellent.

The recorder glissandi is thrilling. The Lento does not drag and the pizzicato accompaniment is choice. The lyricism is touching. And is there a hint of those naughty St Trinian schoolgirls? There is some delicious humour. There is a natural climax not a forced one. The finale, a Vivace, is typical Arnold joy. He was a composer, despite his sad life, who could cheer others up and supply welcome therapy. Is it closing time at the Rose and Crown?

Gordon Jacob's Suite was written in 1957 for the legendary Carl Dolmetsch. Marvel at the tenderness of the opening prelude and the six movements that follow which includes an English Dance of tremendous vigour, a joyful burlesque and rumba, a touching Pavane and a final Tarantella. Compare this with the Harvey and you will detect the obvious and the greater value of the Jacob suite.

Marvellous playing from Petri and two fine works out of three is something to be thankful for.

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