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## ***Romances for Voice and Guitar*, arranged by Hector Berlioz. ATMA Classique ACD2 2800, 2020 [review]**

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## Audio Review

*Romances for Voice and Guitar*, arranged by Hector Berlioz. ATMA Classique ACD2 2800, 2019.

Performers: Antonio Figueroa, tenor; Magali Simard-Galdès, soprano; David Jacques, guitar.

Contents: 1) Romance by Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian, “Amour, on doit bénir tes chaînes” (composer unknown); 2) Romance by Jean-Baptiste Bédard, “Fais mon bonheur” (poet unknown); 3) Romance (perhaps) by Guillaume-Pierre-Antoine Gatayes, “Objet charmant” (poet unknown); 4) Romance by Nicolas-Marie Dalayrac from *Gulnare, ou L’Esclave persane*, “Rien, tendre amour” (text by Benoît-Joseph Marsollier); 5) Romance by Charles-Henri Plantade, “Bocage que l’aurore embellit” (poet unknown); 6) Romance by Florian, “À Toulouse il fut une belle” (composer unknown); 7) Romance by Charles Lintant, “La Trompette appelle aux alarmes” (text by Florian); 8) Romance by anonymous, “Depuis une heure je l’attends” (text probably by François-Nicolas-Vincent Campenon); 9) Romance by Florian, “Vous qui loin d’une amante” (music by François Devienne); 10) Romance by Antoine Meissonnier, “Le Sentiment d’amour” (poet unknown); 11) Romance by François-Adrien Boieldieu from *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, “Le Noble Éclat du diadème” (text by Théaulon de Lambert); 12) Romance by Antoine-Joseph-Marie Romagnesi, “Faut l’oublier” (text by Jean-Aimé-Nicolas Naudet); 13) Romance by Jean-Pierre Soulier from *Le Jockey*, “Il faut quitter ce que j’adore” (text by François-Benoît Hoffman); 14) Couplets from the opera *La Romance* by Henri-Montan Berton, “Mon Cœur s’ouvrait” (text by François Loreau *jeune* and C.-L. Lesur); 15) Arrangement of *Le Troubadour du Tage* by Jean-Joseph-Benoît Pollet, “Fleuve du Tage” (text by Joseph Hélicas de Meun); 16) Romance by Pierre-Antoine-Dominique Dellamaria from the opera *L’Opéra-Comique*, “Que d’établissements nouveaux” (text by Joseph-Alexandre, Vicomte de Ségur, and Louis-Emmanuel Mercier-Dupaty); 17) Romance by Nicolas Dezède from the opera *Blaise et Babet*, “Lise chantait dans la prairie” (text by Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel); 18) Romance by François-Joseph Naderman, “Je pense à vous” (text by Hureau); 19) *Romance favorite de Henri IV* perhaps by Pierre Lélou, “Viens, aurore” (poet unknown); 20) Couplets from the opera *La Romance* by Henri-Montan Berton, “Du tendre amour je chérissais l’empire” (text by François-Loroux *jeune* and C.-L. Lesur); 21) Air by Nicolas-Marie Dalayrac from *Philippe et Georgette*, “O! Ma Georgette” (text by Jacques-Marie Boutet de Monvel); 22) Romance by Pierre-Antoine-Dominique Dellamaria from *L’Opéra-Comique*, “Ah! pour l’amant le plus discret” (text by Joseph-Alexandre, Vicomte de Ségur, and Louis-Emmanuel Mercier-Dupaty); 23) Romance from the opera *Félicie* by Joseph Catrufo, “La Sympathie” (text by Louis-Emmanuel Mercier-Dupaty); 24) Romance by anonymous, “Minvane au tombeau de Ryno” (text by Marie-Joseph Chénier); 25) Romance by François-Adrien Boieldieu, “Le Rivage de Vaucluse” (text by Jean-François Marmontel).

The charming *romance* that opens this welcome new recording, “Amour, l’on doit bénir tes chaînes,” has three small attributes that may have attracted the young Berlioz. First, the poem is gently mysterious, suggesting that couples ought to bless the pangs of love because suffering *à deux* means dividing the pain in half, while love knows how to double the pleasure. Second, the setting is in A major, which, ever since “Là ci darem la mano,” has been the key of love. Berlioz, who had absolute pitch, was presumably aware of that key connotation—he is said to have composed a guitar accompaniment for Mozart’s famous duet, although this has never been found—and seven of these twenty-five *romances* are in A. Third, the opening—unlike most of the music recorded here, which is overwhelmingly made up of two- and four-bar phrases—is cast as a lone three-bar phrase. Irregular phrase structure is arguably the quintessential element of what the mature Berlioz took to be the preeminent ingredient of his musical style: *l’imprévu* (the unexpected). Of that, in this collection, there is very little indeed.

In the description I have given of the contents of this recording, I have made minor additions and corrections to what is printed in the brochure that comes with the disc, but have not been able to modify the opening song’s “composer unknown.” In the autograph manuscript, here as on four other occasions, we see “musique de \*\*\*.” Inasmuch as three of the five composers labelled by Berlioz by asterisks have been identified, we cannot claim, as we might have been tempted to do, that the provincial teenager was disguising his own authorship. Nonetheless, there is a moment here that seems to me to foreshadow the melody at the end of the first stanza of “Le Pêcheur,” the song—in the same key, in the same six-eight meter (on a text by Albert Du Boys imitating Goethe’s ballad “Der Fischer”)—that opens *Le Retour à la vie*, the intriguing and insufficiently appreciated sequel to the *Symphonie fantastique*: in “Le Pêcheur,” at the words “tout à coup sur le lac” (mm. 19–20), we find a repeated three-note figure, descending first from E to C-sharp, then from D to B, of a sort that occurs in the *romance* “Amour, l’on doit bénir tes chaînes,” at “Et semer quelques fleurs sur ce triste chemin” (mm. 29–33). The gesture is far too brief to represent some kind of “self-borrowing,” of which Berlioz, particularly in the early years, did a great deal. But it did strike my ear, and it does remind us that these early melodies—the first music, let it be remembered, that has come down to us in Berlioz’s own hand—played a meaningful role in the development of the boy’s melodic imagination. That is justification enough, it seems to me, to listen closely to these youthful experiments—arrangements—by a fellow who would soon make a professional career of excoriating precisely that category of composition, the “arrangement,” which, despite his protestations, was eminently characteristic of his time.

Antonio Figueroa, a Canadian tenor with native French, has precisely the kind of voice that these songs require: a light timbre, a narrow and concentrated vibrato, a sonority that is comfortable in the register above the staff. The voice of Magali Simard-Galdès, a Canadian soprano also with native French, is less happily suited to these simple tunes: the sonority is pretty, the range is right (although she does transpose “Du tendre amour” down a fourth, and “Minvane au tombeau de Ryno” down a third), but the vibrato is too broad for the requirements of intimacy. Singers these days are trained to project to the back of the hall; few manage the far more difficult task of producing an eloquent line in pianissimo. In her biography, Ms. Simard-Galdès’ publicist writes of the singer’s “magnetic presence” on the stage. Here, reciting the prose of Marsollier in the fourth item on the program, for example,

the *romance* by Dalayrac, she might have attempted something rather more magnetic to underline the poet's quotation of the fictional lover's exhortation, "Ami, console-toi!" Did she read the story of the young Persian master Osmin and his Persian slave girl Gulnare, known throughout the Orient for her talent and beauty and in the play (a "comédie mêlée d'ariettes") a figure of remarkable passion? Such magnetism might have raised the silly ditty up to something ever so slightly dramatic. It happens that the dynamic mezzo-soprano Stéphanie d'Oustrac has also recorded this song ("Une Soirée chez Berlioz," Harmonia Mundi HMM 902504), and while she, too, suffers at moments from a vibrato that is too wide, she brings to the tune a bit of the fire that it deserves. Ms. Simard-Galdès is revealingly not well served in the single duet of this collection, "À Toulouse il fut une belle," in which she and Mr. Figueroa sing together the first and last of the eleven stanzas of Florian's poem, and alternatively the intervening nine. This exposes her partner's greater aptness and aptitude for this repertory. "À Toulouse," attractively set in parallel thirds with the tenor above (which results in parallel sixths), is in spirit rather like the sparkling *duettino* that brings Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict* to a close. In Berlioz, enthusiasts may have noticed, early and late are by no means always stylistic opposites.

The straightforward chordal guitar accompaniments are no challenge for the Canadian guitarist David Jacques, who plays on an instrument made at Mirecourt, in 1829, by Jean-Joseph Coffe. The sound engineers have done professional work here, but I would have liked to hear more of the Coffe guitar, which is modest and round in tone. "La guitare est un petit orchestre," the program booklet begins, "The guitar is a small orchestra": the point is made—according to the author of the text, Michael Stegemann, who is also the editor with Matthias Henke of the edition of the songs presumably used by the performers (*25 Romances for Voices and Guitar* [Heidelberg: Chanterelle-Verlag, 1986])—on page 104 of the third edition of Jacques Barzun's mighty *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*. But the point is not made on that page. Professor Stegemann does correctly cite Berlioz's poetic thoughts on the guitar, in the *Traité d'orchestration*, where he suggests that despite the growing prominence of the piano, the "melancholic and dreamlike character" of the instrument does make it highly suitable for vocal accompaniment. Stegemann might also have cited what may be Berlioz's most important comment in this regard: that "it is almost impossible to write well for the guitar without being able to play it oneself"—as, of course, Berlioz did. He would later call for the guitar in *Huit Scènes de Faust* (1829), *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838), *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), and *Béatrice et Bénédict* (1862).

Stegemann dates the fair copy of these *romances* to the years 1825–1830, giving as the source of this information pp. 74ff. of D. Kern Holoman's *The Creative Process in the Autograph Musical Documents of Hector Berlioz*. Once again, there is no such information on those pages: Holoman dates these pieces to 1821–1822 on page 25 of that book, which foreshadowed his publication of the *Catalogue of the Works of Hector Berlioz*, now in its second edition, open and available to all [online](#). In fact, a comparison of the autograph manuscript of the *romances* (there is a one-page facsimile in volume 22b of the *New Berlioz Edition*) with the autograph manuscript of Berlioz's copy of the score of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*, which we know he made in 1822 (there is a one-page facsimile in Richard Macnutt's privately printed *The Macnutt Berlioz Collection*), does indeed suggest that Berlioz copied the *romances* no later and probably somewhat earlier than

the Gluck, probably *prior* to his maiden voyage to Paris in October of 1821. In the later autograph of the *Messe solennelle*, which dates from 1824 (a facsimile appears in volume 23 of the *New Berlioz Edition*), we see that Berlioz's hand—his drawing of the G-clef, for example—has changed considerably from what we see in the two earlier instances.

Faulty page references, like paper cuts, are minuscule. But they are irritating, and, perhaps unfairly, they cast doubt on all the rest—such as the assertion that the *Symphonie fantastique* was “conceived on the guitar,” which, flatly stated, is absurd. It is likely that Stegemann's original German text, which we do not have (the booklet is in French and English), was a bit more circumspect.

Stegemann's comments on the individual *romances* seem well researched. However, some of his conclusions have been superseded by the modern edition of the works in volume 22b of the *New Berlioz Edition*, edited by Ian Rumbold (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2004). The *Romance de Florian* in this collection, whose music is identified in the program booklet as by Jean-Paul-Égide Martini, is in fact by François Devienne, the first professor of flute at the new Conservatoire de Musique in Paris and the author of the *Méthode* that Berlioz used for his own study of the instrument. The *romance* from Boieldieu's *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* has a text by Théaulon, “an author,” we read in the booklet, “about whom it has not been possible to learn anything.” But it has: Marie-Emmanuel-Guillaume-Marguerite Théaulon de Lambert was the prolific author of over two-hundred brief verse comedies, many put on at the Odéon, the scene of Harriet Smithson's Parisian triumphs and the venue that witnessed Berlioz's incipient pathological obsession with the Anglo-Irish actress.

The first item in Berlioz's collection, “La Trompette appellée aux alarmes,” occurs on this disc as No. 7. (Why the singers chose to disregard Berlioz's ordering of the twenty-five *romances* and to make one themselves is not clear. The explanation of “artistic preference” would certainly be good enough for me.) The shape of that first item, with its two upbeats and rising fourth, is reminiscent of *La Marseillaise*, as is the text itself, because “Jeunes amants, c'est de nos armes que dépendra notre bonheur” (“Young lovers, our good fortune will depend on our arms”) is not that far from “Allons enfants de la patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivé”! I do not at all begrudge Mr. Figueroa and Ms. Simard-Galdès for rearranging the songs, but Berlioz may have had a reason for setting down the pieces as he did. Was he perhaps amused by the five-bar vocal phrase that opens “La Trompette”? Was he tickled by Lintant's final cadence, a tripartite Italianate gesture of the “felicità” sort that Berlioz later mocked?

What might Berlioz have learned from copying these tunes as he pursued his hobby at La Côte-Saint-André while preparing to embark upon a medical career in the big city? Something about text underlay and the limitations of identical music for multiple stanzas? (The second and subsequent poetic units do not always fit the melody invented for the first, and the mute E always requires special treatment.) Something about manipulating simple harmonies? (The accompaniments never go beyond major and minor, relative major and relative minor, and occasional secondary dominants.) Something about characteristic melodic patterns? The graceful formula used to set the words “[Premiers rayons] annoncent le retour” in Naderman's “Je pense à vous,” for example, is identical to the figure that Berlioz employed, in the *Strophes* of *Roméo et Juliette* (mm. 104–6), for the words “[premiers serments] de deux amants.” A tiny recollection of something that had struck him twenty years earlier on?

The mature Berlioz would blend the elements of the simple *romance* with those of the more sophisticated *mélodie* (the French word whose plural designates the serious art songs we Americans call *Lieder*) into works of enduring beauty, including *La Captive*, many of *Les Nuits d'été*, *La Mort d'Ophélie*, and, in *Les Troyens*, the “Chant d'Iopas” and the “Chanson d'Hylas.” These are works that reveal a lifetime with song. We hear the infancy on this disc.

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