

Fanfare Magazine: The French Album

Raymond Tuttle – January/February 2021 Issue



This program has been most carefully devised. It is bracketed by pavaues, and several of the pieces have a “Latin” flavor. (Osorio is Mexican by birth.) Also, Debussy’s “La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune” is immediately followed by Clair de lune. These are small things, perhaps, but they add up.

There is not much French music in Osorio’s discography, although he recorded both sets of Debussy’s *Préludes* (with Liszt on the side) for Cedille more than a decade ago. These, however, are new recordings from January 2020. Tempos are a little slower now than they were before, and Osorio’s playing is a little less volatile. Nevertheless, it remains as distinctive and as distinguished as before. Listeners who expect soft, wispy contours in Debussy, and who think muscle has no room in this music, might be shocked by what they hear on this CD. In pieces such as “La puerta del Vino” and “La cathédrale engloutie,” Osorio flexes his sizable technique, and the music comes across as larger and more macho than it usually does. Osorio effectively argues that the music is more accommodating than we often give it credit for.

I confess that when I was smaller I couldn’t get it out of my head that Debussy’s “collines” were Irish colleens. To this day I can’t hear this piece without thinking about a bunch of girls from Dublin on holiday, skipping around on the Neapolitan seashore. If anything, Osorio’s pointedly rhythmic performance of “Les collines d’Anacapri” reinforces that odd juxtaposition. I’m not complaining; it’s rather delightful, actually. The hint of a jig in the way that he plays this probably is in my imagination.

These are dramatic and emotionally outgoing readings, full of bright lights and brilliant colors. At the same time, Osorio is a nuanced player, and at no point did I feel that these performances lack sensitivity. In “Alborada del gracioso,” for example, Osorio constantly is on the lookout for the music’s shadings and gradations. He’s explosive, but the explosions are controlled.

Speaking of explosions, “Feux d’artifice” is another highlight of this CD. Osorio almost frightens the listener with his depiction of the fireworks’ mechanical whirring, and yet he also captures the beauty and erotic attraction of the flickerings and the sudden illuminations in the night sky. Throughout this CD, I kept thinking, “I’ve never heard the music played in this way before,” and I kept nodding in approval.

Osorio is also masterful in the trio of works by Rameau, inserted in the middle of the program between Debussy and Chabrier. *Les Tricotets* is played with a gentle and most alluring lilt, and the *menuets* are, in turn, innocent and grand. *L’égyptienne*, which closes the Rameau interlude, has an exotic sparkle. In all three of these pieces, Osorio uses the resources that the piano makes available to him without blowing the music out of proportion.

Osorio was not a new name to me when this CD arrived, and I already respected his artistic ability. Even so, *The French Album* has encouraged me to take a fresh look at this pianist, who will turn 70 this

March. This is an outstanding, exciting disc in every way, and I'm sure it will be among my top ten favorite new releases at the end of the year. Even if you know this music, you will know it differently after you hear The French Album.

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