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PETER EÖTVÖS'S COSMIC THEATRE

26 February 2011 - Strasbourg

An extraordinary discovery of an abundant musical universe. When Ensemble Linea records an album, we enjoy a magnificent event, a rare and precious moment.

Currently being "ensemble in residence" for five years at Royaumont Abbey, which consecrates their international dimension, Jean-Philippe Wurtz and Ensemble Linea from Strasbourg have released a monographic record that offers a captivating panorama of Peter Eötvös's recent chamber music works. Two pieces of twenty minutes each are the album's supporting pillars, ornamented with finely chiselled miniatures. Just to remind you, if necessary, that the Hungarian master doesn't only compose flamboyant operas.

The opening track *Sonata per sei* (2006) pays homage to Bartok's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, adopting its principle of a dialogue between pianos and melodic percussions. However, the additional use of a synthesizer permits to explore a wider sonic landscape. From yesterday to today, a continuous renewal of musical language has indeed taken place, exploring new phenomena such as microtonal music, but without denying the roots. The constantly surprising inspiration ties in with both the stellar mirroring and the tragic gravity of the model – one movement evokes Bartok's crossing of the ocean which leads him to his tragic end.

While there's a cosmic dimension at work in the imagination, it's definitely a sense of theatre that constitutes the underlying texture of the record, as pointed out by Jean-Philippe Wurtz in a luminous introduction. This dramatic quality is most eloquently exemplified in *Octet Plus*, created during Musica festival in 2008, where a soprano part – integrated into the ensemble or, more often, a cappella – is layered over a pre-existing wind octet. Here, we can hear fragments of a radio play by Beckett that introduce contrasting characters somewhere between gossip, vain chatter and insignificance.

Listening closely, we understand what makes this encounter, this close collaboration between Linea and Eötvös so outstanding: the master's artistic dispositions, his taste for scenic gestures, his sense of burlesque, and especially the alliance of precision and transparency that characterises his direction – all of these elements give a unique shape to

the music. The pianists and percussionists of the *Sonata* as well as the soloists of the octet sound amazingly clear. With exciting versatility, soprano Allison Bell alternates between different Beckettian figures before her performance takes still another turn due to the blather in Russian taken from Chekov's *Three Sisters*.

The final part of the record invites the listener to take a closer look into the composer's inner life, thanks to two dreamful pages for piano poetically detailed by Benjamin Kobler. *Psy*, a curious trio for cimbalom, flute and cello (1996), presents an inward journey, an introspective self-portrait, before Mario Caroli's flute unifies dirge and bird chirping in the final Cadenza. Linea offers an anthology full of invention and humanity that might receive the same laurels as the album Ivo Malec ten years ago.

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Ensemble Linea plays Eötvös, BMC Records 2010