

Françaix, Tomasi, Jolivet, Villa-Lobos: Bassoon Concertos - Rác, Klumpp

[Ars Produktion](#) ARS 38 174

Stereo/Multichannel Hybrid

Classical - Orchestral

Françaix: Concerto for bassoon & 11 strings (1979); Divertissement for bassoon and strings (1942)

Tomasi: Concerto for bassoon, strings & harp (1961)

Jolivet: Concerto for bassoon, strings, piano & harp (1954)

Villa-Lobos: Ciranda das sete notas for bassoon & strings (1933)

Matthias Rác, bassoon  
Stuttgarter Kammerorchester  
Johannes Klumpp

## **Review by Adrian Quanjer - February 5, 2016**

Matthias Rác, one of those bassoonists for whom the notion 'difficult' does not seem to exist, and (this time) members of the Stuttgarter Kammerorchester, led by a guest conductor, young and inspiring Johannes Klumpp, has done it again in this second installment of Bassoon concerti, so gloriously recorded by ARS-Produktion.

Whereas there is no shortage of music written for the bassoon, its usage and popularity has shifted over time. In the Baroque era it played an important role in the 'basso continuo', until its solo qualities became popular. Vivaldi wrote no less than 37, or may be even more, concerti. In the romantic period it was notably less in demand, because the technical aspects of the instrument could not keep up with musical requirements. However, the 20th century saw a clear revival of its solo usage due to important technical advances. From a now abundantly available repertoire Matthias Rác has chosen 5 bassoon concerti of French origin (in fact, only 4 are French in the proper sense; the fifth one comes from Brazil, but has a French slant).

The prolific composer Jean Françaix (one doesn't have to wonder where he is from!) is twice present: a Divertissement for bassoon and orchestra (1942) - dedicated to William Waterhouse, composed when he was 30, originally meant for bassoon and string quintet, and a Concerto for bassoon and 11 strings (1979), when he was 67 years old. As he was totally against atonality and other forms of experimental wishy-washy, his music may best be characterized as neo-classical. Notwithstanding its complexity of the score and difficulty for the soloist, the tone is lighthearted, mostly witty and easy to follow. His style is very recognizable and has remained pretty constant over the years, be it that the earlier, short Divertimento has a pleasant hint of French children tunes, whereas the concerto is more mature in structure.

Hernri Tomasi is a composer of Corsican descent, admiring, and possibly influenced by, his fellow French composers, often picturing himself as a kind of consolidator and propagator of French 20th century music. Whatever the case, his compositions are colourful, trying to unite traditional forms of typical French music with modern gestures and techniques, of which his seldom heard Concerto for Bassoon, Strings and Harp (Susanne Kabalan) is a fine example. Moods are constantly changing and, in tune with his time (think of the second movement of Ravel's violin sonata), even jazzy elements are to be found in the second movement (Serenade Nocturne: Andantino) of this concerto. However, in view of his advancing deafness in conjunction with an increasing anguish for what may be called 'post-war disillusionment', some of this 'Angst' is already noticeable in this concerto.

From here to André Jolivet, another French composer with a, for many, much more familiar name, is not such a big step. Both use similar compositional techniques, be it that Jolivet conformed much more to modern French 20th century composing. In his bassoon concerto (1954) he employs, like Tomasi, an additional harp and, furthermore, a piano (Markus Stange) to complement the strings. It's a short work in two brilliant movements, capturing the imagination of the listener in that it begins with a somber texture in the first, changing in the second movement to dance-like rhythms and, in the words of Klumpp: "When you finally notice that the violins provide the crucial element, it is already too late. They offer transfiguration and ascend to the heavens, only to fall back to earth again".

Villa-Lobos has, indeed, a pertinent link to Paris, where he stayed for many years during the 1920-ies. His interaction with contemporary French composer resulted, however, in his realizing that he should devote more effort to Brazilian inspired composing. He is best known for his 9 Bachianas Brasileiras, but here Matthias Ràcz regales us with a not so often heard, but recently nonetheless (sparingly) recorded on RBCD, 'Fantasia' in one movement: 'Ciranda das sete notas' (The Riddle of the Seven Notes) for Bassoon and String Orchestra. A Ciranda or Cirandinha is a child's singing game based on Brazilian folk melodies. It's also a kind of story in which the bassoon is the story teller and the strings the 'responsive audience'. Ràcz' rendition with a rounded, mockery tone, questioned and teased by the alert strings, is a pleasure to listen to.

This is an excellent disk to familiarize oneself with French composing for the bassoon in the 20th century. Not only for listening to Matthias Ràcz playing so perfectly and joyfully his beautiful sounding instrument, but also for savouring the quality of the supporting musicians led by the young conductor, Johannes Klumpp. Although the Stuttgarter Kammerorchester is not Klumpp's permanent orchestra (which is the 'Folkwang Kammerorchester-Essen') he demonstrates here a privileged and inspiring bond with them, maybe because Stuttgart is also his hometown.

By the same token ARS-Produktion should be complemented for the way they have captured soloist and orchestra in optima forma, with an array of microphones, mixed to perfection, allowing the listener to reconstitute it through an adequate multi-channel sound system for maximal realistic joy.

Blangy-le-Château

Normandy, France

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Performance: \*\*\*\*\* Sonics (Multichannel): \*\*\*\*\*