

Review: Légendes

Caroline Léonardelli, harp, Matthew Larkin, organ, Centaur Harp Classics, 2011.

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by Alison Young – NPR Minnesota Broadcaster
Rating: 4 ¾ out of 5

What an unusual and captivating combination in the new disc of music for harp and organ, *Légendes*! While my first thought might be that the music would have a churchy, overly religious sound, I was immediately transported to a day in Paris a few years ago when my husband and I ran from one church to the next to catch a bit of an organ recital here and a bit of a service there to try to hear who was in town and coaxing out the best sounds from these world-famous instruments. The music was as rich, varied, and stimulating as the music on this disc.

Though on that day in France, we didn't have the added sonic interest of the harp. It's a sounds that is startling and delightful-it's the tactile, decaying, tinkly quality of the harp contrasted with the sustained and lavishly swollen sound of the organ that even on my Sony headphones send vibrations through my body. And as one ensemble, they become something altogether new.

Originally from France, Caroline Léonardelli is the Principal Harpist of the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra. She plays with an easy and smooth technique and a heavenly tone. Organist Matthew Larkin draws out a creamy tonal palette that highlights the symphonic qualities so needed to make this combination work.

Only a few of the pieces were conceived for the two in combination. The first by another French transplant Marcel Grandjany and his only try in this combination. We hear a simple melody in the harp accompanied by arpeggios, which at first might seem easily left to the harpist. But when the organ joins, it is a delight for the senses, the overtones in the harp enhanced by the sustained sound of the organ.

Completely unknown to me is turn-of-the-century German organist Rudolf Zingel. His son was a harpist, so it only seems natural he would compose something for the two of them to tackle. His *Légende* is an expressive tone poem with a story we can only guess at, and gives the ensemble a chance to speak in dialogue, with Matthew proving the organ truly is the king of instruments by showing us its myriad timbre possibilities. This was by far my favorite performance on the disc and itself is the best reason to own this disc. I warn you though, that you might laugh a bit when you hear an exact quote from the cadenza in Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker".

Absolutely riveting is the arrangement by German organist Joachim Dorfmüller of the famous Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth Symphony. It is an entirely new piece in the hands of these artists. While I miss the breath of strings and the volume of 50 musicians, Caroline and Matthew capture the longing and ultimate peace in this incredible movement.

The mood is altogether different in the beguiling *Légende* by Alfred Holy, a harpist hired by Mahler for the Vienna Philharmonic and later the Boston Symphony. It gives me chills to think Holy may have played the famous harp notes in the Adagietto with Mahler himself.

Closing the CD is a concerto by famed organist Leo Sowerby. Never performed or published in his lifetime, a few friends managed to have a transcription written for harp and organ. It sums up this CD ideally.