

FOLIAS AND FANTASIAS • MARAIS Folies d'Espagne; TELEMANN 12 Fantasias; Cavatina Duo (Eugenia Molinder, flute; Denis Azabagic, guitar) ; BRIDGE Bridge 9541 (70.44) 

How wonderful to meet your significant other; and how amazing when they are both world class musicians. This certainly leads to thoughts of performing together, and that's basically the story of the Cavatina Duo. Of course, the more common the instruments involved the easier it is to establish a repertoire. The music stores aren't bulging with flute/guitar duets; but no great problem. We are the inheritors of all the composers who ever lived; and after the copyright expires, we can choose any piece and adapt it for our use. Here we have two rarities: Folies d'Espagne, in the form of an extended theme and variations; and Telemann's 12 Fantasias for Any Two Instruments In The World (not the real title, but Telemann would be happy with it, since it was good for sales). I refer to this piece as a rarity although there are 9 different versions available on Arkiv. But I think that can be explained by stating that there are many more outstanding flute players than there are outstanding chamber pieces for flute, or flute + 1.

We have seen the name of Marin Marais many times in Renaissance and Baroque vocal compilations, usually in short instrumental breaks. I've wondered about him. His name rolls off the tongue like a champagne cocktail (especially if you have trouble swallowing, I guess.) He was quite successful in his time; maybe there are a few masterpieces in an old trunk somewhere? But this is the first time I've encountered this particular music, and by far the longest. The piece starts, of course, with the statement of the theme. And the first notes we hear from the Cavatina Duo. Aha, we're in for a treat. But as we approach minute #5, we begin to wonder how we can so easily predict what the next variation will sound like. By minute #10, we are fairly sure that Marais didn't deserve these musicians. And by minute #18, when the last variation sinks slowly in the west, like a stegosaurus into the La Brea Tar Pits, there is no one in the room left to witness it. Telemann is not an unknown quantity. We usually know what to expect when listening to a Telemann piece that is new to us (which it usually is, considering the mountain of music he produced). And once again, we wait for the memorable tune, the excitement we have heard him demonstrate on occasions---and it doesn't come.

The accompanying booklet advertises six previous releases by the Duo, most by obscure composers,

I haven't heard any of them, but I'm going to recommend them, and the current one besides. Why? Well, because we get to hear the Cavatina Duo. Many of us have multiple recordings of Mozart and Beethoven. For me, the answer is comparison. The vast amount of music available sometimes makes listening like the Classical Olympics. On this record, our attention is constantly drawn away from Denis Azabagic's guitar; the sound of the flute demands attention. But the experienced listener can quickly determine how much he adds to the proceedings. I'd love to hear a solo recital from him. But the flute cuts through, purely because of its nature. So it's easier to come to conclusions about Eugenia Moliner: in a word, superb. She has it all: technique, intonation, emotion, the ability to tear off a page full of 16th notes---nothing is missing. But there are other virtuosi. What we hear in this performance is the emotion, the awareness of what these two are creating together. To be an accompanist, one has to understand his role in this creation, and Azabagic clearly does.

I'm not sure how music lovers will be able to find an item like this, except for reviews like this one. And I don't think the music itself will become a favorite that is always with you. But I can state that as a flute fancier and owner of a shelf-full of flute recordings, I am not sure that anyone alive can play the flute better than Eugenia Moliner.

David Reznick