



French Music for Horn and Piano

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The familiar (to horn players at least) nestles alongside a couple of welcome rarities in this impeccably played horn and piano recital. The horn is a notoriously difficult instrument to record well. The instrument's bell usually faces the wrong way, and it's easy to end up with too much boomy resonance. The sound on this Audite release is impeccable. Guglielmo Pellarin is principal horn of the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, and his expressive, very European sound is captured close-up. Which means here that there's a lovely, breathy softness to the horn tone, especially when it's played quietly. Saint-Saëns's two Romances are unpretentious salon pieces, both exploiting the 19th-century valve horn's new-found chromatic agility.

Poulenc's *Elégie* is one of the most disquieting pieces by this still underrated composer. The 12-note opening theme rapidly cuts into edgy staccato writing, the violence perhaps suggesting the tragic demise of the horn player Dennis Brain, to whose memory it was dedicated. The *Sonate* by Jean-Michel Damase makes brilliant use of the extremes of the horn's range; Pellarin's fruity low register delights here. Jean-Michel Defaye was a pupil of Nadia Boulanger; his *ALPHA* is occasionally dissonant and unsettling before it lets the horn sing. A superbly executed recital, beautifully accompanied by pianist Federico Lovato.