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French Saxophone - 20th Century Music for Saxophone & Orchestra

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Audiophile Audition (John Sunier - 2004.07.01)

As a fan of classical saxophone it was surprising to me to see that all the concertos on this new CD were premiere recordings with the exception of the familiar Debussy Rhapsody. Evidently some of them have been recorded, but in transcriptions for sax and piano or smaller ensembles than the original full orchestra heard here. The ascent of the saxophone in American jazz in the 1920s obscured the fact that the instrument was invented by a Frenchman in the early 19th century and in fact was praised by Hector Berlioz and used in some of his works. He appreciated “the flexible beauty of its accent” and that it could be “passionate, dreamy or melancholy.” Many new works for the classical saxophone were commission by a French woman who married a Boston doctor and used the sax as therapy to combat her progressive deafness. The Debussy and Caplet works here both resulted from these commissions. The lovely Tomasi concerto may remind one of Ravel in spots, and the writing in the Ostinato final movement of Constant’s work for sax and 12 instruments sounds like Hindemith. All the works verify the wide range of expression and tone possible in classical music with Adolph Sax’s unique invention. Tres bien.

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