

audite

UN BAL

Dances for
Harp Solo

SARAH CHRIST

FERENC FARKAS (1905-2000)

Danses hongroises du 17^{ème} siècle

- I. Danse du Prince de Transylvanie 2:28
- II. Danse hongroise 1:25
- III. Chorea 2:51
- IV. Danse 'Lapockás' 0:47
- V. Chorea 2:19
- VI. Danse de Lázár Apor 1:46

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918) / **LILY LASKINE** (1893-1988)

Valse romantique, L 71

Tempo di valse. Allegro moderato 4:18

HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803-1869) / **SARAH CHRIST** (*1980)

Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14a

- II. Un Bal 6:54

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Partita No. 1 in B-flat major, BWV 825

- I. Praeludium 1:53
- II. Allemande 4:24
- III. Corrente 3:11
- IV. Sarabande 5:22
- V. Menuet I & II 3:01
- VI. Gigue 2:37

MANUEL DE FALLA (1876-1946) / **MARCEL GRANDJANY** (1891-1975)

Spanish Dance No. 1 in A minor from 'La Vida Breve'

Allegramente e vivo 3:59

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Waltz No. 10 in B minor, Op. 69/2

Moderato 4:08

Waltz No. 6 in D-flat major, Op. 64/1

'Minutenwalzer' Molto vivace 2:19

Waltz No. 19 in A minor, KK IVb/11

Allegretto 2:34

ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921-1992) / **MARIA LUISA RAYAN-FORERO**

Milonga del Ángel 5:59

La Muerte del Ángel 3:20

Resurrección del Ángel 7:48

Dance is probably an archetypal phenomenon in music. Rhythm delineates its own, one could say “artificial”, time from the natural order, and in a collective movement motivated by the beat, a group of people assures itself of its shared identity. Even if the performance of classical music today does not usually involve the audience dancing, the physical element of music has remained as an internalised expressive gesture throughout the ages and is unmistakable even in such spiritualised works as Bach’s *Mass in B minor* or Schoenberg’s twelve-tone pieces.

This album by harpist Sarah Christ demonstrates the omnipresence of dance in the history of music: the pieces she has selected span the baroque period through to modernism. Equally wide-ranging is the spectrum of genres and original instrumentations from which the various dances have been selected and arranged for harp: it includes suites by Johann Sebastian Bach and Ferenc Farkas, a programmatic symphony by Hector Berlioz, piano pieces by Frédéric Chopin and Claude Debussy, as well as a short opera by Manuel de Falla.

A member of a musical family, at the tender age of seventeen Sarah Christ already performed with the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra under the baton of Claudio Abbado. Following her studies in Detmold, Lyon and Munich, she was offered a permanent position at the Vienna State Opera, which she gave up after two years in order to devote herself more intensively to her freelance work as a chamber musician and soloist. In 2006, Sarah Christ also became a member of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra and regularly performs with renowned ensembles such as the Berlin Philharmonic, the Dresden Staatskapelle and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

As with all passionately committed musicians, Sarah Christ was hit hard by the performing restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. She used much of the (almost) performance-free time to research attractive works for her dance album, whose guiding thread revealed itself almost by chance. In selecting the pieces, it was important for her to establish as wide a stylistic range as possible, going far beyond the usual harp repertoire.

Like the piano, the harp can perform polyphonic music as a solo instrument; on both instruments one can, as it were, accompany oneself, and also hear the complex polyphony in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. The B-flat major Partita is the first of six such works which Bach published in 1731. As solo works for harpsichord, they followed on from the earlier English and French Suites and were occasionally referred to as “German” suites, albeit without any obvious reason. In any case, the Italian title forms a counterpart to the French suite, and the four movement types – Allemande, Corrente, Sarabande and Gigue – to which, in the case of the B-flat major Partita, Bach added a Praeludium and two Minuets, referring back to the French model.

Stylistically, this music shows Bach’s masterful appropriation of international influences; for instance, when in the second Minuet, in the lovely words of the harpsichordist Colin Tilney, the “slightly French” meets the “not quite Italian”. In the Praeludium, the richly ornamented main part, written in fast note values, wanders back and forth between upper, lower and middle registers. The Allemande is characterised by continuous semiquaver phrases with intervening syncopated accents, whilst the Corrente, set in delicate two-part harmony, stages a clash of triplets and dotted rhythms. The beautiful Sarabande resembles an aria sung with great patience. After the two Minuets, the work is led to an effective conclusion with a virtuoso Gigue, whose main part runs rapidly through the various registers, accompanied by triplets with shortened first quavers.

Many composers, especially French and Russian ones, loved and mastered the Spanish soundscape, but among the “real” Spaniards who had this tonal language at their command, Manuel de Falla was the most famous. His short opera about the “short life” (*La Vida Breve*), which premiered in Nice in 1913, not only displays stylistic links to Bizet’s *Carmen*, and, in its tragic-realistic plot, to the Italian *verismo* tradition, but also contains several purely instrumental dance scenes. The opera tells the story of a young woman who confronts her unfaithful lover at his wedding with another woman and then dies. As a counterpoint to the sombre plot, the Spanish dance recorded here is heard at the beginning of the second act and forms part of the festivities. Its main theme, undergoing elegant modulations and accompanied in the original version by the sound of castanets, seems to make several attempts to leap upwards before finally succeeding. The middle section with its heavy accents evokes the rustic atmosphere of life in the countryside.

Ferenc Farkas also had the rural world in mind when he wrote his *Old Hungarian Dances from the 17th century* for wind quintet. “Setting out from early baroque harmony and counterpoint, I tried my hand at a kind of Hungarian rural baroque”, Farkas explained, following the example of his teacher Ottorino Respighi’s treatment of early Italian lute music. He added additional parts to the dances, which were only rudimentarily notated between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, and arranged a selection into a charming suite. Farkas, who spent a quarter of a century teaching in Budapest as a highly respected professor, chronologically comes between Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, founders of the great twentieth century Hungarian music, and György Ligeti and György Kurtág, who both studied with him. As a composer, he was guided more by Bartók’s neoclassical intuitions than his brusque modernity.

“Tiene ángel” – literally: “he/she has the angel” – is an expression used in Buenos Aires to describe gifted musicians who possess “that certain something”. Astor Piazzolla certainly fell into that category, even if his path to success and recognition as a central composer of the twentieth century was anything but straightforward. Homesickness and wanderlust characterise the expression of his “Tango nuevo” in equal measure – possibly also because Piazzolla himself led a nomadic life. Born in Argentina, he moved with his family to New York when he was still a child, and then back to his homeland. After studying composition in Paris, he travelled back and forth between Europe, South and North America during his professional life. By rejuvenating the tango into his “Tango nuevo”, the composer initially met with resistance from traditionally-minded representatives of this musical genre in Argentina. In fact, Piazzolla, who was strongly inspired by Bach, Stravinsky, Bartók as well as jazz, revolutionised the tango through polyphonic structures and novel harmonies and rhythms. Moreover, Piazzolla’s tangos are concert pieces and therefore no immediate “invitations to dance”; and even if they are inspired by the spirit of improvisation, each note is meticulously written out.

Of his total of five angel tangos, the composer wrote three in 1962 for Alberto Rodríguez Muñoz’ play *Tango del Ángel*. It tells the story of an angel who tries to save the souls of poor people in a suburb of Buenos Aires, but ends up being killed himself in a knife fight. Piazzolla added the composition *Resurrección del Ángel* to the cycle in 1965.

As is also often the case in Piazzolla’s music, the plot of the play combines glamour and dirt, the sublime and the wicked, heaven and hell. This ambivalent nature is also reflected in the genesis of the famous Argentinean dance and its most important instrument: the bandoneon was invented in Germany and sometimes used as a mobile organ substitute in church services. In Buenos Aires, however, it was first used in dubious bars and brothels. The *Milonga del Ángel* is a simple song of great urgency with the syncopated rhythms characteristic of this form and an urgently moving middle section. The tango *Muerte del Ángel* is characterised less by mourning than by turmoil. The wild opening theme is treated fugally and returns again at the end, after a magnificently free lyrical passage in the centre of the work. The third work in the series – *Resurrección del Ángel* – continues in the vocal style of the *Milonga* and initially seems to look back sadly on the death of the angel. A vigorous second episode and the energetic final passage following the return of the lament make it clear, however, that the angel of tango has returned.

Like Piazzolla, Hector Berlioz also knew about the glories and miseries of an artist’s life. In his *Symphonie fantastique*, there is a harsh collision of beauty and the grotesque, vision and hallucination, the soul’s delight and melancholy. Sarah Christ herself arranged the second movement, “Un bal”, for her instrument, which also plays a central role in the original version. In this movement, the artist hero meets his beloved lady at a ball, but she apparently wants nothing to do with him. The introduction to the famous waltz is decorated with festive garlands by two harps, which also later on repeatedly intervene in the action. Berlioz shifts from the graceful dance to the protagonist’s inner world several times through a change of perspective when the *idée fixe* – the musical symbol of the beloved – is heard.

Berlioz’ music demonstrates that dance feasts can also be attended in one’s imagination when they cannot take place in reality – as is currently the case during the crisis of the pandemic. May this CD therefore help to bridge the time to that future when more direct forms of communication – between artists and their audiences as well as dancers and their partners – are possible once again.



SARAH CHRIST

Born in 1980, Sarah Christ began playing the harp at the age of 10. At the age of 13, she gave her debut as a soloist with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra in the Berlin Philharmonic hall. Since then, she has played as a soloist with the Jenaer Philharmonie, the Sinfonietta Köln, the Kurpfälzisches Kammerorchester, the Prague State Opera, the Dresdner Kapellsolisten and the Turku Philharmonic Orchestra, just to name a few.

In 1999, Sarah Christ embarked on her studies in Detmold (Germany) with Catherine Michel, continued by studying in Lyon (France) with Fabrice Pierre and later completed her studies with a Meisterklassendiplom Kammermusik after having studied with Helga Storck in Munich (Germany).

In 2002, at the age of 21, her engagement in the Wiener Staatsoper Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera made her one of the youngest members of the orchestra. Sarah Christ left the Vienna State Opera after two years in order to pursue the fields of chamber music and solo performance. She also continued to play in orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Bavarian State Opera, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. On invitation of Claudio Abbado, she has repeatedly taken part in the Lucerne Festival Orchestra since 2004.



In 2005, Sarah Christ and her brother Raphael Christ (violin) won first prize in the competition of the *Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft*. She also received a scholarship from the *Deutscher Musikrat*.

Sarah Christ has performed chamber music in festivals such as Tanglewood Festival, Kammermusikfest Lockenhaus, the Edinburgh Festival, the Lucerne Festival, the Moritzburg Festival and the Schwetzingen Musikfestspiele.

Concert appearances have led her to venues such as Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Berliner Philharmonie, and the Semperoper Dresden, playing together with renowned artists such as Emmanuel Pahud, Wolfgang Schulz, Jan Vogler, Albrecht Mayer, Renaud Capuçon and Eckhardt Haupt. She gave her debut in Wigmore Hall in a Schubert Liederabend with baritone Matthias Goerne in 2013.

Sarah Christ released several CDs, among them her solo album *La Passione dell'Opera*, the duo recording *Meditations* with Céline Moinet (oboe) and Bach's *Goldberg Variations* in an arrangement for septet.

Not exclusively involved in playing, Sarah Christ is also well acquainted with the art of teaching. She has taught in the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, the Sommerakademie der Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra Academy and was invited as a guest professor to the Orchesterzentrum Dortmund.

In January 2021, the cultural lockdown of the Covid pandemic has inspired Sarah Christ to create a new project entitled "EMPTY SPACES": in what have become deserted spaces she brings new lease of life and energy with her virtual concert series. Videos of these musical moments are artistically produced by her husband Harald Heim and can be viewed on *Sarah Christ's Harpworld* on YouTube.

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recording:
September 22-24, 2020
recording location:
Weinbergkirche Pillnitz
executive producer:
Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff
recording producer / editing:
Dipl.-Tonmeister Martin Rust
recording format:
PCM 96khz, 24bit
instrument:
Lyon & Healy: Style II gold (2001)
photos:
René Gaens
art direction and design:
AB•Design

trailer on 

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stereo & surround
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audite

info@audite.de

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