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Artistic: 10 / Technical: 10 (highest rating)

COPLAND: Rarities and Masterpieces. Steven Richman, conductor; Harmonie Ensemble/New York. Eugene Drucker, violin; Lawrence Dutton, viola; Diane Walsh, piano. Bridge Records CD 9145

Here is a fascinating disc from the first to the last second. The sound recording, perfect, the sense of the characterization, the beauty of the colors, precision and rhythmic verve, accuracy, the desire for making music together: it's all there. With, the cherry on the cake, the beauty of the music of Copland, which is pictorial (*Appalachian Spring*), lyric (*Ballads for violin and piano*) or intoxicated with rhythm (*Music for the Theatre*).

The Harmonie Ensemble of New York consists of 23 musicians who can work in all sonoric configurations. They are operating here in *Music for the Theatre*, in a version of optimal clarity, perfectly articulated. **This rhythmic clearness never becomes arid, nothing like an exercise. One has especially the impression of an entire body of sound which inter-reacts, breathes in common, and immerses one into the universe of Copland. The tone has been ideally found, at the same time relaxed and rigorous with very successful changes of atmosphere and an instrumental quality (the clarinet, the trumpet!) without equal.** The Interlude never descends into sentimentalism, whereas the Burlesque seems to be a pastiche of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*.

This **superior musical quality** is confirmed in the original version for 13 instruments of *Appalachian Spring*, with **an absolute concentration, a magic of coloring, devoid of the least indulgence.** The qualities are the same ones here, notably **the innate sense of the transitions.**

Between the two scores interpreted by the ensemble, Eugene Drucker, first violin of the Emerson Quartet plays a world premiere, accompanied by Diane Walsh, *Two Ballads for violin and piano*, sketches of a concerto for violin for Isaac Stern (1957). They are **two very lyric, splendid pieces.** Following them are the *Elegies for violin and viola* (1932), which later served as thematic material for *Statements* and the *3rd Symphony*. The cherry on the cake, Diane Walsh interprets a transcription for piano solo of *El Salón México*, which Toscanini had put together to prepare a performance of the work. It too is a world premiere. **What more could one ask?**

Christophe Huss