

## Seabourne

September, Just Septembers<sup>a</sup>.

Steps, Vol 8: My Song in October

<sup>a</sup>Karen Radcliffe *sop* Michael Bell *pf*

Sheva Contemporary (SH326 • 75' • T)

<sup>a</sup>Recorded 2004



During the almost quarter-century since Peter Seabourne (b1960) made his

belated return to composition, the *Steps* piano cycle has grown to sizeable proportions, with 10 volumes to date (earlier instalments were reviewed in 9/13, A/14 and 4/17). *My Song in October* (2021) is the eighth, its subtitle 'Nineteen album leaves caught by the wind' hinting at the content therein.

Inspired partly by the death of the composer's wife, these pieces are mostly reflective – often inwardly so – if never overtly sombre in feeling. Each one takes its cue from a poem (printed in the booklet or available online) ranging over several centuries, but the connection is more metaphorical than literal. Listeners might try the sixth (after Shelley) with its limpid pathos, the 10th (after Rilke), which pivots between the ecstatic and fatalistic, or the 19th (after Hughes), whose 'voice in the wilderness' evinces a Messiaenic aura achieved by very different means.

His catalogue now encompassing most genres, Seabourne has written several song-cycles, of which *September, Just Septembers* (2002) comprises nine settings of Emily Dickinson. These are given focus by their passing from the fulfilment of summer, via the rumination of autumn, to the desolation of winter; specific numbers alluding to the broader song tradition, here with a distinctive sensibility those at all familiar with his music will recognise as being typical of this composer. At barely 20 minutes, this is also a cycle that needs to be experienced in total.

It could not have had a more eloquent advocate than the late Karen Radcliffe, her perceptive account from 2004 eminently worth releasing. Michael Bell proves as dedicated an accompanist here as he is insightful in the piano cycle, making this the most absorbing release of Seabourne's music so far.

Richard Whitehouse

## Visée

Folies d'Espagne. Pieces – in C minor; in D minor; in G. Suites – in A minor; in D; in E minor

Jakob Lindberg *theorbo*

BIS (BIS2562  • 79')



Robert de Visée was the foremost guitarist and lutenist at the court of Louis XIV

and a member of the Sun King's *Chambre du Roi*, which performed for the monarch's private enjoyment. That sense of intimacy comes across very strongly in this marvellous, generous recital. While some of de Visée's works survive in versions for both lute and guitar, these pieces are taken from a lute manuscript, and the selection that Jakob Lindberg has assembled focuses exclusively on the theorbo (bass lute, also known as *chitarrone*). There are three formally designated suites and a selection of pieces grouped by key, which includes de Visée's arrangements of pieces by Couperin, Purcell and Lully as well as his beautiful lament in memory of two of his children.

On paper, this is straightforward music, often consisting of no more than two lines with occasional chordal fillings-in, but Lindberg's theorbo has such a commanding presence that one is simply enthralled – especially when tuned a tone lower than modern pitch, following the practice at the French court: the depth and timbre of its lowest courses must be heard to be believed. Lindberg has always written very movingly of his rapport with his lutes (only recall the recordings he devoted to Weiss, on which he played a restored 18th-century instrument; here he plays a modern replica of a 17th-century instrument he has had for nearly 50 years), and his playing brings out the very best in them: a wonderful top line, very sparing but judicious vibrato and, again, bass notes to die for. The sprightly dance pieces are charming and deftly executed but in the slow movements (such as the G minor *Sarabande* or the C minor *Plainte*) the symbiosis between player and instrument hints at a Platonic ideal. This is deeply intelligent and sensitive playing; I urge you to hear it. **Fabrice Fitch**

## 'Landmarks of Recorded Pianism, Vol 3'

**JS Bach** English Suite No 6 in D minor, BWV811<sup>a</sup>

– Gavotte; Musette. Partita No 2 in C minor,

BWV826<sup>a</sup>. *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, Book 2 –

Prelude and Fugue in F minor, BWV881<sup>a</sup> **Bargiel**

Bagatelle in D, Op 42<sup>a</sup> **Brahms** Capriccio in

B minor, Op 76 No 2 (exc)<sup>b</sup>. Piano Sonata No 3 in

F minor, Op 5 – Scherzo (exc)<sup>b</sup> **Chopin** Piano

Concerto No 2 in F minor, Op 21<sup>c</sup> **Dett**

Barcarolle<sup>d</sup>. Mammy<sup>d</sup> **Gade** Ringeltanz in

A minor, Op 36 No 4<sup>a</sup> **Handel** Suite No 7 in

G minor – Allegro<sup>a</sup>. Suite No 14 in G, BWV441 –

Allegretto<sup>a</sup> **Mayer** Étude, 'Grace', Op 149 No 5<sup>a</sup>

**Mendelssohn** Andante sostenuto in E flat,

Op 72 No 2<sup>a</sup> **Mozart** Piano Sonata No 11 in A,

K331 – 1st movt (exc)<sup>b</sup> **Paradies** Sonata No 6

in A – Toccata<sup>a</sup> **Ravel** Sonatine – Menuet<sup>a</sup>

**Schubert** Impromptu in A flat, D899 No 4 (exc)<sup>b</sup>

**Schumann** Arabeske, Op 18<sup>a</sup>. Blumenstück in

D flat, Op 19 (exc)<sup>b</sup>. Piano Concerto in A minor,

Op 54<sup>e</sup>. Rondoletto, Op 118 No 1<sup>a</sup> **Tchaikovsky**

Piano Concerto No 1 in B flat minor (exc)<sup>f</sup>

<sup>f</sup>Simon Barere, <sup>d</sup>Nathaniel Dett, <sup>b</sup>Katharine

Goodson, <sup>a</sup>Elsie Hall, <sup>e</sup>Adelina de Lara, <sup>c</sup>Jan

Smeterlin *pf* **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra /**

**Ian Whyte; <sup>c</sup>Boston Symphony Orchestra / Serge**

**Koussevitzky; <sup>f</sup>orch / Andre Kostelanetz**

Marston (52076-2  • 158')

Recorded 1919-63



This third festival of (mainly) hiss-and-crackle rarities is a very mixed bag indeed.

Only the most curious pianophiles need apply. Opening disc 1, they will be amused to hear the hilariously enthusiastic announcer for CBS's *The Pause That Refreshes* from 1943 introducing the great Simon Barere (1896-1951). They will, perhaps, be not as happy hearing him prostitute himself in a medley of themes (6'28") from the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1. While any opportunity to hear this (admittedly controversial) virtuoso is to be welcomed, especially with orchestra, and though the opening piano salvos are played with enormous gusto, I'm unlikely to return to it any time soon.

This is followed by what, to me, are two of the most irritating piano pieces I have ever heard: 'Barcarolle' from *In the Bottoms Suite* and 'Mammy' from *Magnolia Suite* composed and played (in 1919) by Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943). Percy Grainger recorded two other numbers from the former suite ('Juba Dance' and 'Prelude: Night') which offer a far more welcome glimpse of the composer.

Then comes a real find: Jan Smeterlin (1892-1967, who, like Barere, made no commercial concerto recordings) is heard in a live performance of Chopin's F minor Concerto under the baton of Serge Koussevitzky, no less. The introduction must be the fastest and feistiest on record while Smeterlin, considered a Chopin specialist, storms his way through the work's virtuoso pages as if it's Rachmaninov. Yet there are many expressive passages along the way to which Smeterlin brings a touching grace and elegance. Broadcast in February 1936,