

Maurice EMMANUEL Sonata for Violin and Piano in d.¹ *Suite on Popular Greek Airs.*¹ *Musiques*² TOCCATA 0231 (72:35)

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Recently the music of Maurice Emmanuel (1862–1938) has been receiving more recorded exposure, and that music is turning out to be an important discovery. You can read reviews in *Fanfare* 35:3 by Steven Kruger and Barry Brenesal of a recording of his two symphonies, both very positive. David Johnson was also enthusiastic some years ago (in 17:3) about an earlier recording. This intelligently programmed mixture of instrumental and vocal music adds to the picture, which is that of an important musician not at all deserving of the neglect with which the music industry has saddled him.

Emmanuel taught music history at the Paris Conservatoire from 1909 to 1936, and was also a professor at the Schola Cantorum. He taught some of the most important French (and French-influenced) composers of the 20th century, including Messiaen, Dutilleux, and Honegger. His own compositions evidently had a real audience between the wars in France and to some degree in Europe, but in the post-World War II era they faded.

His music has influences, to be sure, from his predecessors and contemporaries (Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, and Franck all shaped him), but he was his own man, and as one listens more and more one hears Emmanuel's voice (and one also hears the influence that he had on Messiaen in particular). He was interested in the music of the East, in ancient and Eastern modes, and in folk music. Some of the traditionalists in Paris circles, Delibes for one, were put off by Emmanuel's exoticism.

The violin sonata is the earliest work here, dating from 1902, and in some ways the most traditional, with a particularly lovely slow movement. But his use of chromaticism in, for example, the transition between the second and third movements is quite original, as is the slow and lovely interruption of momentum in that finale. This work would find a welcome place in the repertoire of any violinist who is sympathetic to the Franck Sonata, and would please any listener who enjoys that work.

The *Suite on Greek Airs*, dating from 1907, had its origins as music Emmanuel arranged for a talk he was giving on Greek folk music, and has as its source the same material that inspired Ravel's *Greek Songs*. The arrangement is for violin and piano, not vocalist, and at just over 10 minutes it too would make a charming and energetic recital piece.

Musiques is a cycle of 12 songs on texts from *Crépuscules et Nocturnes* by Louis de Launay. It was composed in 1917–1918 (not the 1908 indicated in the heading of that section of the accompanying notes), and as such is more adventurous than the earlier works. This is darker, more inward-looking music, appropriate for the atmosphere during the war (in which Emmanuel served as a nursing orderly). Ironically, the son of the poet Launay was killed in battle in 1918, and his death inspired Emmanuel's First Symphony. That symphony uses as its basis the "Berceuse" that is the eighth song in this cycle. The piano writing is dramatic and strong, not at all a mere accompaniment to the singer, and the vocal line goes from lyrical and gentle to intense and declamatory. Emmanuel's interest in exotic modes and the use of chromaticism as an expressive device are given full rein in this half-hour cycle.

The performances here are persuasive and committed. We of course don't have any points of comparison, and I could perhaps imagine something even more successful with a violinist and a singer with more inherently beautiful timbres. But these are at a level that is more than serviceable, and they convey the essence of the music thoroughly. Pianist Killian is particularly strong. The recorded sound is very well balanced and natural in the violin-piano works, though I find just a bit too much air around the voice. But do not let that stand in your way. The helpful, informative notes and texts and translations round out what is a very important release of music that should be a wonderful discovery for most listeners. **Henry Fogel**