

Reviews

CD REVIEWS

Balkan Bolero
Chamber Music of Isidora Žebeljan
Borislav Čičovački, oboe, oboe d'amore,
cor anglais, oboe sopile and ensemble
Oboe Classics CC2028



I have listened several times to this CD and it moves me and touches my heart. I am deeply impressed by both the compositions and the playing that is about the loftiest and deepest emotion. This is

not playing, singing and composing to impress, but music of a heavenly atmosphere.

I taught Borislav Čičovački in Amsterdam for two years, and his playing is excellent. He uses heavier and more open reeds than I do, with lots of pressure, that produces a broad and solid sound. Also, not many oboists can play so soft, so low. He is a warm and humorous person, but at the same time he is very aware of the long-standing conflicts in the Balkan region (and has written books about them): all these characteristics are present in his playing.

Oboe Classics is lucky to have landed such a big fish as Isidora Žebeljan! She is already well-known to insiders, and has been popping up in festivals throughout Europe. I think in time she will become as well-known as Arvo Pärt; both composers have an immediate appeal but, whereas Pärt takes you straight to heaven, Žebeljan's music is rooted in the rhythms, dances, melodies and passions of Eastern Europe. But she also has an enormous power to create a dream, a religious element, to create something universal. Add to this her humour, her many other influences (including jazz), and you have music with a wide international appeal.

Her partnership with Borislav Čičovački means she writes well for the oboe (and cor anglais, which has many tracks on this CD), and this includes quarter tones and other strange things. The ensemble includes a string orchestra and other standard combinations, but there is also a group (playing music originally written for the theatre) of

cor anglais, accordion and double bass. Among the other performers, the soprano Aneta Ilić is fascinatingly good in some more theatre music scored for soprano, flute, oboe, viola, double bass, piano and percussion. In Žebeljan's music there is not one instrumental cliché; her language is uniquely, refreshingly, her own.

One might imagine when one looks at this CD that it is only of interest for lovers of the oboe and of Balkan music, but I hope I have convinced you that the opposite is true. I can honestly say to musicians and music lovers that listening and getting to know this magical music – which really enriches the oboe literature – is a must.

Han de Vries

[Ed. The oboe sopile is a traditional folk instrument from certain parts of Croatia.]