

WIM HENDERICKX - RAGA I II III (Megadisc-MDC 7833)

by Hubert Culot (1999)

Wim HENDERICKX (born 1962)

Raga I (1994/6)a

Raga II "Tombeau" (1995)

Raga III (1995)

Gert François (percussion), Leo De Neve (viola), Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of Flanders, Grant Llewellyn

Recorded: De Blauwe Zaal, deSingel, Antwerp, July 1998

Wim Henderickx, born in 1962, studied percussion and composition (with Willem Kersters) at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp, and attended several Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt. A good deal of his present output has been influenced either by literary or extra-musical sources or by oriental philosophy. This is certainly the case with his large-scale cycle Ragas under review (each piece may however be performed separately). Henderickx never merely imitates oriental music, but rather transfers some elements of Indian music into Western musical terms. The three pieces roughly share the same basic characteristics, e.g. they are all structured in fairly symmetrical bi-partite arches and are based on simple cells progressively developed in more complex structures. Though they were composed between 1994 and 1996, all three pieces are very different from one another: Raga I is for percussion and orchestra, Raga II "Tombeau" is for large orchestra and is more in the form of a concerto for orchestra whereas Raga III is for viola and orchestra.

In Raga I the soloist plays a wide sample of instruments including some exotic ones such as Japanese temple bell and other oriental instruments as well as African djembés. The first part is predominantly lyrical, delicately scored whereas the second one is a rhythmically busy toccata moving at great speed towards its frantic conclusion.

Raga II "Tombeau" is the most symmetrically structured piece of the cycle. It is based on a morning raga. It opens in a mysterious, ethereal mood maintained for most of the first part which nevertheless ends in a big sound wave. The second part also begins dreamily (two solo violins supported by a few winds punctuated by softly tinkling percussion). The music becomes more agitated and builds up towards an impressive climax before reverting to the pensive mood of the opening.

In Raga III for viola and orchestra, based on a mid-day raga, the viola evokes the Indian fiddle sarangi while the orchestra supports the soloist in tabla-like fashion. The first part again begins dreamily, though in a somewhat darker mood. The first entry of the viola clearly has an improvisatory character (repeated notes, quarter-tone glissandi) before taking flight in long melodic lines. The

mood becomes more impassioned and the first part then fades into the second one. The music now dances along with much energy and rhythmical vitality. After a long cadenza, the music briefly regains its impetus before reaching the peaceful, ecstatic coda Evening Prayer.

Wim Henderickx's music is clearly contemporary, rhythmically complex (no wonder that the composer mentions Stravinsky and Bartok as potent influences), though very accessible, and his remarkable orchestral flair, gained from his experience as orchestral percussionist, is displayed to the full in these colourful, eventful scores that, for the present writer at least, are the peak of his present orchestral output.

In short, wonderfully inventive music in excellent performances and warm recordings. Really well worth investigating for Henderickx is undoubtedly one of the most endearing composers of his generation.