

LEON BOSCH – The Hungarian Double Bass

Hungarian music, both traditional and ‘academic’ (i.e. ‘composed’), has always had a powerful element of both the folkloric and secular and the deeply mysterious. On this CD, his fifth for Meridian and also his fifth collaboration with pianist Sung-Suk Kang, Cape-Town-born London resident Leon Bosch fearlessly ventures into sonic and tonal territory that (to this reviewer’s knowledge at least) marks a new departure for the bassist. And what an undertaking this is! After only a first inspective listening, ‘The Hungarian Double Bass’ quickly emerged as my favourite of Bosch’s recorded output to date. The selection of pieces, the quality of the transcriptions, the flawless intonation, the increasingly telepathic communication with Kang (*vide* the unison passages 13 minutes into Jenő Takács’s ‘Alte Ungarische Hofballmusik Op. 115’, the ‘Allegro’ from Ferenc Farkas’s ‘Népdalszonatina’, or the ‘Animato’ from Elisabeth Eszlary’s ‘Sonatina’), not to mention the comprehensive annotations – all these elements contribute towards making this an exhilaratingly adventurous and deeply satisfactory date.

Ostensibly inspired by the influence of his erstwhile (Hungarian) mentor and professor Zoltán Kovats, Bosch has chosen a series of pieces that are equally moving and technically demanding (e.g. Béla Bartók’s ‘Sonatina’). Difficult as this choice is (there is no selection here that is anything less than strong), my favourites include the measured opening track, Zoltán Kodály’s ‘Adagio’, Kodály’s ‘Epigrams’, a stunning transcription (by Bosch himself) and rendition of Franz Liszt’s ‘The Trauergondel’/ ‘La Lugubre Gondola’, Vilmos Montag’s ‘Silhouette’, Lajos Montag’s ‘Extrême’ and Pal Járdányi’s ‘Melody’.

I would go so far as to suggest that this recording represents a milestone not only in Bosch’s (and Kang’s) own discography but also in the recorded documentation of (some of the most riveting compositions in) 20th century music. A superlative achievement!

Kai Horsthemke/ March 2011