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CONTEMPORARY VOCAL MUSIC



CLARE LESSER

SOPRANO

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Clare Lesser (soprano)

David Lesser (piano)

| | | | |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------|
| 01 | Song 15 (1976) | Michael Finnissy (b.1946) | 6.35 |
| | Hô – cinq vocalizes pour voix de femme (1960) Giacinto Scelsi (1905-88) | | |
| 02 | I | | 2.27 |
| 03 | II | | 3.32 |
| 04 | III | | 3.08 |
| 05 | Being Beauteous (1963) <i>(with David Lesser, piano)</i> | Hans Werner Henze (b. 1926) | 16.17 |
| 06 | Die Sieben Plagen (1974) | Milko Kelemen (b. 1924) | 9.29 |
| | Virgil Settings (1995) | David Lesser (b. 1966) | 7.34 |
| 07 | I | | 0.59 |
| 08 | II | | 0.36 |
| 09 | III | | 0.46 |
| 10 | IV | | 0.41 |
| 11 | V | | 0.46 |
| 12 | VI | | 0.30 |
| 13 | VII | | 0.28 |
| 14 | VIII | | 1.02 |
| 15 | IX | | 0.37 |
| 16 | X | | 1.02 |
| 17 | Stripsody (1966) | Cathy Berberian (1928-83) | 4.31 |
| Total CD duration: | | | 53.37 |

[1] Song 15 (1976)

Michael Finnissy (b. 1946)

Song 15 for solo soprano is a relatively early work showing Finnissy's style at its most typically highly ornamented and lyrical. The piece can best be viewed as an extension of the tradition of wordless vocalise. As with much of his work for solo voice it makes great demands on the performer both in the rhythmic problems posed and in its extended range.

[2-4] Hô, cinq vocalises pour voix de femme (1960)
Giancinto Scelsi (1905 -1988)

The reclusive Italian composer, Giancinto Scelsi wrote *Hô* in 1960. As in many of his vocal works, a conventional text is replaced by an abstract pattern of phonemes, which are used to return the music to the magical world of pre-linguistic invocation, and ritual, which Scelsi so often explored. The unusual linguistic approach is reflected in the music's free use of microtones, which distances it from the conventional sound world of Western music, and which evokes instead the timeless mystery of much of the sacred music of the orient.

[5] Being Beateous (1963)

Hans Werner Henze (b. 1926)

Henze's cantata *Being Beateous* originally sets one of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud's finest works for the very unusual ensemble of coloratura soprano, four 'cellos and harp; this recording makes use of the composer's own piano reduction. It was written as the result of a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation. Rimbaud's text reflects a mystical spirituality together with a sensuous awareness of flesh in a heady mixture of extraordinarily vivid imagery. This is echoed in Henze's setting with its rich harmonies, highly decorated lines and musical shadows of earlier composers, especially Alban Berg, which lend the music their own particular decadence.

Devant une neige,
un Être de beauté de haute taille.
Des sifflements de mort et des cercles de musique
sourde font monter, s'élargir et trembler
comme un spectre ce corps adoré.

Les couleurs propres de la vie se foncent,
dansent, et se dégagent autour de la vision,
sur le chantier.
Des blessures écarlates et noires éclatent
dans les chairs superbes.

Et les frissons s'élèvent et grondent,
et la saveur forcenée de ces effets
se chargeant avec les sifflements mortels
et les rauques musiques que le monde,
loin derrière nous, lance sur notre mère de beauté, –
elle recule, elle se dresse.
Oh! nos os sont revêtus d'un nouveau corps amoureux.

O la face cendrée , l'écusson de crin,
les bras de cristal!

le canon sur lequel je dois m'abattre à travers
la mêlée des arbres et de l'air léger!

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[6] Die sieben Plagen (1974)**Milko Kelemen (b. 1924)**

Milko Kelemen was born in Croatia and studied with Olivier Messiaen and Wolfgang Fortner. His music has evolved from displaying the influences of folk music and neo-classicism in his earliest works to his use of microtonality, exotic colours and elements from music theatre that can be seen in his mature works, many of which are for the stage. *Die sieben Plagen* sets a text by Fernando Arrabal, which is based upon the biblical Seven Plagues of Egypt. It uses a huge range of vocal effects from lyrical singing, purring and croaking, to spitting, snoring and screaming, and has sections in four different languages.

[7-16] Virgil Settings (1995)**David Lesser (b. 1966)**

These ten settings for unaccompanied female voice of texts from the first book of Georgics are arranged to form a seasonal progression from spring to winter and on to the return of spring again. The *Virgil Settings* are dedicated to Clare Lesser.

- [7] I) vos, o clarissima mundi
lumina, labentem caelo
quae ducitis annum,
- [8] II) Vere novo, gelidus canis cum
montibus umor
liquitur et Zephyro putis se glaeba
resolvit,
- [9] III) cum se nex plurima silvis
induet in florem et ramos curvabit
olentis:

- [10] IV) Multa adeo gelida melius se nocte
dedere,
aut cum sole novo terras inroat Euos.
- [11] V) Nec minus ex imbri soles et aperta
serena
prospicere et certis poteris
cognoscere signis:
- [12] VI) Quid tempestates autumni et
sidera dicam,
atque, ubi iam breviorque dies
mollior aestas,
- [13] VII) omnia ventorum concurrere
proelia vidi,
quae gravidam late segetum ab
radicibus imis
sublimen expulsam eruerunt,
- [14] VIII) frigida Saturni sese quo stella
receptet,
uos ignis caelo Cyllenius erret
in orbis.
- [15] IX) hic vertex nobis semper sublimis;
at illum,
sub pedibus styx atra videt
Manesque profundi
- [16] X) vos, o clarissima mundi
lumina, labentem caelo
quae ducitis annum.

[17] **Stripsody (1966) Cathy Berberian (1928 - 1983)**

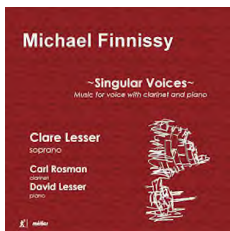
Cathy Berberian is probably best remembered as one of the outstanding interpreters of contemporary vocal repertoire, having had pieces written for her by many of the leading composers of the post-war avant-garde. However, she also produced a small body of excellent compositions of which Stripsody is the best-known example. It was commissioned by the Bremen Radio Contemporary Music Festival and is basically a collage of vignettes from comic strips and assorted onomatopoeia with accompanying actions in some places. Stripsody could even be seen as a microcosmic evaluation of modern life with its absurdities and problems.

Clare Lesser studied performance and musical history at the University of Birmingham and Birmingham Conservatoire before undertaking research at the University of Sussex into the music of B. A. Zimmermann. She studied with Linda Hirst, Annette Merriweather and Françoise Kubler. She has sung throughout Europe and the Middle East, including at the Gaudeamus and Avignon International Festivals. In 2003 she was nominated for the Royal Philharmonic Society's singing prize.

David Lesser studied performance at the Royal College of Music in London, and composition at the University of Huddersfield. He is active as a composer, performer, lecturer and teacher. His music has been widely performed in Britain and Europe by Ensemble Aleph, Accroche Note, Linda Hirst, Ian Pace and others. As a performer he specialises in the music of the Twentieth century, vocal repertoire, and has given a number of world and British premieres.

On this CD he accompanies his wife, Clare, in Henze's *Being Beauteous*.

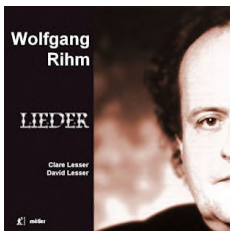
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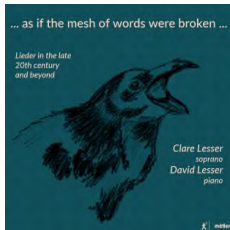


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