

MILHAUD: *Creation du Monde; Boeuf sur le Toit; Suite Provencale; L'Homme et Son Desir*

Tomoko Makuuchi, s; Jian Zhao, mz; Mathias Vidal, t; Bernard Deletre, b; Lille National Orchestra/ Jean-Claude Casadesus

Naxos 557287—69 minutes

These performances of the first three listed works are lethargic and rhythmically square. The percussion section is about the dullest I've ever encountered. And Casadesus can't swing to save his life. In *The Bull on the Roof* and *Suite Provencale* for full orchestra, it sounds as if any sonic edge is trapped behind a proscenium stage; bland violins are crammed into the left speaker. Overall, the effect is music that needs much more projection. Even Arthur Weisberg on Nonesuch, for all his formality, makes music out of *Creation*, and Charles Munch's unbridled *Suite Provencale* with the Boston Symphony on RCA is everything this performance is not.

So, does the seldom-performed *Man and His Desire* give this album at least some value? Written in 1917-18, it was Nijinsky's swan song with the Ballet Russe. It took place in Brazil, where native rhythms inspired this polytonal, polyrhythmic 20-minute ballet. It's written for four wordless singers, strings, solo winds, and a large percussion section. The soprano, mezzo, and tenor have wiry voices that blend neither with each other nor the orchestra, and the bass is all but inaudible. In several rhythmically neat passages for percussion alone, complete with whistles, sirens, and tapped boards, the players sound bored. This is no way to be introduced to a work.

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