



June



'One of the striking facets of Ticciati's conducting and the SCO's playing is the clarity and detail that spring from the score'

Geoffrey Norris is exhilarated by Ticciati's second Berlioz recording for Linn

Berlioz

Les nuits d'été, Op 7. Roméo et Juliette - Love Scene. La mort de Cléopâtre

Karen Cargill *mez*

Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Robin Ticciati

Linn © 2013 CKD421 (66' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Robin Ticciati have already demonstrated their glowing credentials in Berlioz with last year's release of the *Symphonie fantastique* (5/12). That performance combined a gripping sense of astutely paced drama with a spectrum of orchestral sound that fully echoed Berlioz's characteristic palette of instrumental timbre. It was at the same time a performance of great finesse, a quality that also dignifies this new release combining *Les nuits d'été* with the Love Scene from *Roméo et Juliette* and the dramatic cantata *La mort de Cléopâtre* that Berlioz wrote unsuccessfully for the Prix de Rome in 1829. Gone are the phantasmagorical images of the *Symphonie fantastique*, and in their place are the tenderness, rapture and wistfulness of two works – *Les nuits d'été* and *Roméo et Juliette* – linked by Berlioz's infatuation with the works of Shakespeare. Both of them reveal his rich lyrical propensities, with *Les nuits d'été* attesting to his maturity and sensitivity in

the matching of music to words, something that underpins and animates the emotional intensity of *La mort de Cléopâtre* of some years earlier, even if the Prix de Rome jury thought otherwise. There is a marked difference of scale and intent when these works are set against the *Symphonie fantastique* but once against the SCO and Ticciati gauge the perspective to a nicety.

Berlioz's scoring is so apt in *Les nuits d'été*, so inextricable from the sense and sensibility of his friend Théophile Gautier's poetry, that it is hard to imagine that the songs and the orchestration were not initially conceived side by side. Originally for voice and piano, and completed in 1841, the six songs that Berlioz selected from Gautier's 1838 collection *La comédie de la mort* were orchestrated at various times later on, two for particular singers and the remaining four at the instigation of the Swiss publisher Jakob Melchior Rieter-Biedermann. The title of the cycle is a deliberate reference to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *Roméo et Juliette*, Berlioz's *symphonie dramatique*, had been first performed in 1830.

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Les nuits d'été is the clarity and detail that spring from the score. This is not effected in any obtrusive, mannered way but rather it is an indication of Ticciati's insight into Berlioz's subtle touches of colour and textural variety. There is a notable instance in the very first song, 'Villanelle', where, in the second verse, the rhythmically regular woodwind accompaniment is graced with wisps of violin and cello counterpoint. To say that these don't stand out might give the wrong impression, but the important thing is that the orchestral playing just lets the ear know that these little nuances are there. This is typical of the playing throughout *Les nuits d'été*. Ticciati can coax a bleached, almost vibrato-less sound at moments of despair or introspection in 'Au cimetière' and 'Sur les lagunes'; the woodwind can take on an ominous darkness; but equally the sonority can blossom and burgeon in the final song, 'L'île inconnue'. And in between these two parameters the refined, natural calibration of dynamics and the supple weaving of the orchestral fabric are an absolute joy.

The SCO's collaboration with the mezzo soprano Karen Cargill is also an entirely felicitous one. She relishes Gautier's words as much as Berlioz does, and when, for