

Petite suite maritime. Quintette à vent Estria. Atma Classique ACD2 2391.

Contents: *Petite Suite Maritime* / Maurice Dela (11:15) ; *Suite for Woodwind Quintet* / James MacDonald Gayfer (12:57) ; *Suite for Woodwind Quintet Op. 13* / Walter Buczynski (10:48) ; *Fantaisie pour quintette à vent* / Jean Papineau-Couture (12:31) ; *Quatre Miniatures pour trio d'anches* / Jacques Héту (6:36) ; *Quintette pour instruments à vent, op. 13* / Jacques Héту (11:38).

Since its formation in 1997, the Quintette à vent Estria has demonstrated a remarkable dedication to contemporary Canadian music. The group has commissioned and premiered over twenty Canadian works for winds, and their first recording (reviewed in this journal, volume 33 number 1-2) presented five works written by Canadian composers between 1998 and 2003. In their second CD, *Petite suite maritime*, Estria looks to the early years of woodwind quintet writing in Canada. The disc contains five woodwind quintets and one trio d'anches written between 1946 and 1967. Ranging from one of the earliest Canadian woodwind quintets—Maurice Dela's *Petite Suite Maritime*—to one of the acknowledged masterworks in the repertoire—Jacques Héту's *Quintette pour instruments à vent*—this disc demonstrates the evolution of the genre during its first two decades in Canada. With the exception of Héту's *Quintette* and a single LP recording of Dela's *Suite* (issued in 1967), these are also the first commercially recorded performances of these works.

The first two works on the disc, Dela's *Petite Suite Maritime* (1946) and James MacDonald Gayfer's *Suite for Woodwind Quintet* (1947), are delightful treasures written in accessible and conservative idioms. Dela's *Suite* betrays more than a hint of Debussy as it charmingly evokes four maritime scenes: a skiff rocking gently on the waves, the screeching and soaring of seagulls, the magic of an enchanted island, and the brittle beauty of sea shells. Gayfer's *Suite* has a tendency toward light and entertaining circus music. The European influence is apparent in the titles of the individual movements: overture, waltz, dirge, interlude, march. Although there is only a ten year gap between the two earlier works on this disc and Buczynski's *Suite for Woodwind Quintet* of 1955, the stylistic difference is striking. Despite being grounded in tonality, Buczynski's harmonic language is rich and the potential for timbral variety among the instruments is exploited fully. This tendency is also apparent in Papineau-Couture's *Fantaisie pour quintette à vent* (1963). Beginning with a single note introduced successively on each instrument, Papineau-Couture expands the sonorities through various instrumental combinations and registers. Jacques Héту's *Quatre Miniatures pour trio d'anches* (1967) is a set of light and witty pieces for reed trio. Although less weighty than the quintet, the trio nonetheless demonstrates the composer's skillful command of woodwind writing. The final work, Héту's *Quintette pour instruments à vent*, is a challenging and richly rewarding work for the listener and the performers alike. Incorporating serial techniques at times, it is full of beautifully lyrical moments, vibrant instrumental colours, and stunning passages of instrumental virtuosity.

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The Estria Quintet's performances of these works is convincing and passionate throughout. Although wind quintets have a tendency to sound shrill, Estria's playing is infused with a warmth that gives these pieces an inner glow. The group's members have a clear affinity for this music and their vast experience with contemporary styles serves them well even in the earlier pieces on the disc. Mild dissonances are approached lyrically to integrate them seamlessly into the tonal contexts, the wonderful effects of instrumental colour are realized beautifully, and the technical challenges and intricacies are navigated with confidence and skill. The liner notes, written by the group's clarinetist Pauline Farrugia, are interesting and informative. The biographical sketches of the composers provide a solid background and the descriptions of each piece address musical styles and techniques in a helpful and straightforward way that provides listeners with insight and understanding into these compositions.

A highly commendable feature of this disc is the bold choice of repertoire. Instead of turning to an established wind quintet repertoire of mostly European compositions or presenting premiere recordings of new contemporary works, Estria has chosen a neglected and largely forgotten repertoire of early Canadian compositions. As this disc reveals, Canadian composers have been making notable contributions to the wind quintet repertoire for over sixty years. Still, many of these compositions languish in libraries where they remain unperformed, unrecorded, and unfamiliar (as many contemporary composers will attest, a first performance is easy, it is the subsequent ones that are difficult). By rediscovering these works and presenting them convincingly, Estria has demonstrated once again a strong commitment to the full range of Canadian music.

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