

the Basque art song, or the four sublime settings from Mompou's *Combat del somni*, representing the Catalan. The folk arrangements are frequently very striking: Nin's set of three Galician songs, for example, is far more original harmonically than the three art songs (by Bascuñana, Rafael Ferrer and Cristóbal Halffter respectively) that precede them, which leads one to suspect that the necessity to preserve their modal melodic integrity dictated unusual harmonic solutions. On the other hand, this is not the case with Padre Donostia's Basque folksongs, which positively revel in lush sentimentality, and it is here that Itziar Galdos is at her best; in general I find her vibrato somewhat unsubtle and an obstacle to the genuine colour in her voice.

The odd man out here is the cycle by Lamote de Grignon, in that the texts are poems by Tagore translated into Catalan. Musically they are affectingly Debussian, while García Morante's versions of three of the best-known Catalan folksongs, including 'El cant dels ocells', aim for transparency. A disc for the specialist, this.

Ivan Moody

## 'A French Baroque Diva'

'Arias for Marie Fel'

**Fiocco** Laudate pueri - Laudate pueri; A solis ortu; Alleluia **Lacoste** Philomèle - Ah! quand reviendront nos beaux jours? **Lalande** Exsurgat Deus, S71 - Regna terrae. Te Deum laudamus, S32 - Sinfonie; Tu rex gloriae; Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem. Cantate Domino, S72 - Viderunt omnes termini terrae **Mondonville** Daphnis et Alcimadure - Gasouillats auzelés. Venite, exultemus - Hodie si vocem; Venite adoremus **Rameau** Castor et Pollux - Un tendre intérêt vous appelle...Tristes apprêts. Platée - Amour, lance tes traits. Les surprises de l'Amour - La lyre enchantée **Rousseau** Salve regina

**Carolyn Sampson** *sop*

**Ex Cathedra / Jeffrey Skidmore**

Hyperion © CDA68035 (73' • DDD • T/I)



This is a brilliantly planned and executed, musically illustrated biography of Marie

Fel, one of the great 18th-century divas and muse of Rameau, admired by the Philosophes and adored by Paris audiences. So don't be put off by the apparently recherché repertoire: this is a programme that pleases as much today as it did in hers, guided by Graham Sadler's beautifully crafted booklet-notes.

Fel made her Opéra debut in a 1734 revival of Louis Lacoste's *Philomèle*,

singing the role of Venus. Carolyn Sampson, in superb form, is joined here by the choir of Ex Cathedra, who sing with precision and clarity of articulation in a lovely bright acoustic. As well as at the opera house, Fel also performed at the public concerts held in the Tuileries, where she was a soloist in Latin choral and orchestral music by Lalande, Mondonville, Rousseau and the Italian Fiocco, as well as in private performances of the theatre works by Mondonville and Rameau at Fontainebleau and Versailles included (mainly excerpts) on this disc.

The orchestra of Ex Cathedra, led by Margaret Faultless, provide stirring and sympathetic accompaniments for this varied succession of virtuoso vocal vehicles. Flautist Rachel Brown performs the exquisite solo and *concertante* lines in Mondonville's *Venite, adoremus* and illuminates the sound of the lyre with her piccolo in Rameau's divertissement from *Les surprises de l'Amour*. There is also sensitive *concertante* playing by the bassoonists in 'Tristes apprêts' and, with the addition of the oboist Gail Hennessy, in the movement from Lalande's *Cantate Domino*.

Best of all, the longer we listen to Sampson's voice, the more she seems to inhabit the aura of Fel, clearly a skilled and charismatic yet deeply affecting performer. Fel's artistic flexibility is further demonstrated by the inclusion of the Fiocco (here performed with ornamentation Fel wrote into her part), Mondonville's frothy pastorale – obliging Sampson to sing in Fel's native Occitan – and Rousseau's bang-up-to-date *Salve regina*, which obliges the soloist to blend her voice with the horns. Sampson's performance is the more admirable for evoking the spirit of another singer.

Start to finish, Jeffrey Skidmore devotedly shapes and paces the programme to achieve a fittingly vivid portrait of Mlle Fel.

Julie Anne Sadie

## 'Le jardin de Monsieur Rameau'

'A wander through the heart of French vocal art from the Enlightenment' With music from operas by **Campra, Dauvergne, Gluck, Grandval, Montéclair and Rameau**

**Daniela Skorka** *sop* **Emilie Renard** *mez*

**Benedetta Mazzucato** *contr* **Zachary Wilder** *ten*

**Victor Sicard** *bar* **Cyril Costanzo** *bass*

**Les Arts Florissants / William Christie**

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