

# Gold Indeed...

by Richard S Foster

During the fourth quarter of 2002, Glenn Armstrong released the first set of records in his historically important *L'Archet d'Or* subscription series (See issue 24). When I say historically important, I do not use the words lightly. These records, preceded by the last *Coup d'Archet* releases, brought to our attention a school of classical musicianship that had long remained in the realm of the wealthy specialist. Indeed, having been bitten by this highly infectious bug myself, Armstrong's latest releases have proven both a relief to my bank balance and a further revelation to me.

When I first ventured into the mysterious world of French recordings it was as though I had to relearn everything I had previously held to be true. Of course in retrospect, it seems absurd to me that it could be possible for say, a Russian to be able to understand French music better than a French player, but there it is. I don't think I would be wrong in saying that many of us (most of us?) have been guilty in this, our prejudices encouraged by faceless publicists in the major record companies. The thought that Heifetz was once considered the paragon of violinistic expression, today, is beyond me.

The ocean of music, classical or otherwise, is wide and deep with talent. To believe that the only good musicians are from this or that country or belong to this or that school is not only to limit one's understanding but also one's pleasures. Believe me. I do not believe in limiting my pleasure! Over the last few years I have had the opportunity

to listen, with the help of several of my European friends, to artists from Spain and Italy in addition to my penchant for the French. I have heard many excellent performances

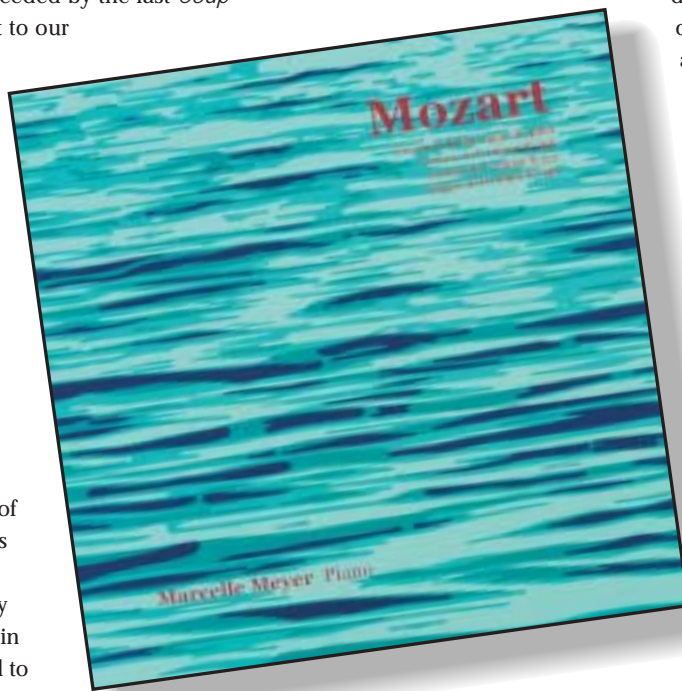
by musicians who never developed a reputation outside their own country – an 'International Career' if you will. This is a discussion I look forward to pursuing another time, but my point is not to dismiss an artist you have never heard of, on a label you have never heard of, just because... you get the picture. You may just be in for the surprise of your life.

Anyway, it's that time of year again, and Armstrong is about to unveil his second collection. Needless to say, I have been chomping at the bit

to hear it. You will not believe what

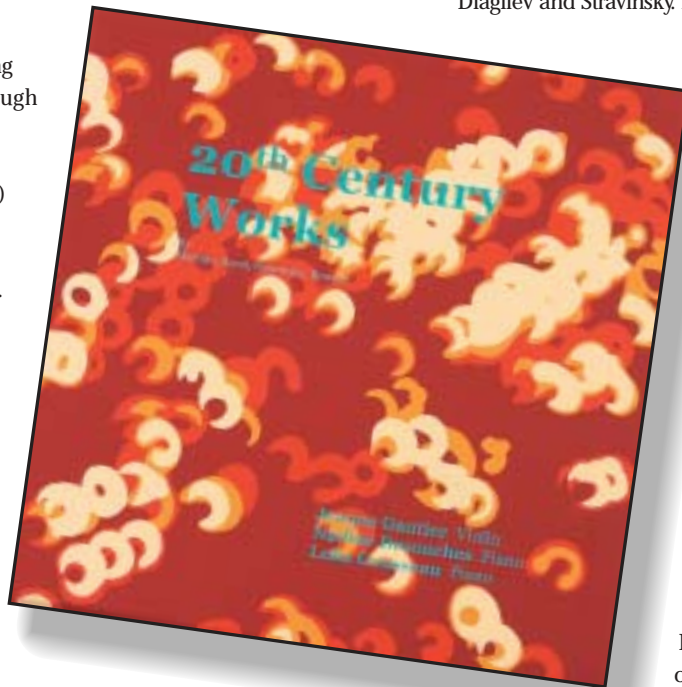
treasures lie in wait. Only one artist is featured here who appeared in the first series, the fabulous Jeanne Gautier, violinist extraordinaire. While *L'Ad'Or* included the great Norwegian-American Camilla Wicks, *L'Ad'Or II* is profoundly and solidly French. Two of the new faces are Marcelle Meyer, well known for her highly collectable releases for Les Discophiles Français in the fifties, and Maurice Maréchal, the most renowned and respected of all French violoncellists. However, the artist who will prove the greatest surprise is one of my all time favourites, the pianist Agnello Bundervoët, a player of truly the most extraordinary talent.

So here, without further ado, is the line-up for *L'Archet d'Or Series Two* with one or two comments from yours truly.



- OR V - Marcelle Meyer  
Mozart  
*Sonata in B flat major K 498a*  
*Fantasy in C minor K 396*  
rec 11.05.53  
*Sonata in F major K332*  
rec 11.05.55  
*Adagio in B minor K 540*  
rec 27.10.56

Mozart's *sonatas* are among my favourite works. Although the majority were written while he was still young (wasn't he always young?) they display the simple profundity that characterises all his work. My two all time favourite interpreters of these delightful pieces are Lily Kraus and Clara Haskil. One really does need a light touch for Mozart and these ladies knew him inside out. To my mind, no one else ever came close. (There is a performance by Lazare Levy, the great teacher and pedagogue of *K330* and *K331* on a super-ultra rare 10" Ducretet- Thomson that explains much to me regarding the origin of the 'simple - add nothing' technique for playing Mozart). Meyer has acquired a 'bad rap' for not playing Mozart to the same level as her other repertoire. Some have said that she didn't understand Mozart and played him like Beethoven, with too much gravity. She performed a 'not bad' little *K331* on a Discophiles 7" EP and on another Les Discophiles release, she performs two of the Mozart *piano concertos* (No. 20 *K.466* and No. 23 *K. 488*), the Orchestra conducted by Maurice Hewitt. I think everyone was having a bad day during those sessions. Heavy handed was Ms. Meyer and I'm very surprised this record was even released. Even the orchestra is not up to snuff. A classic example of a hard to find, rare recording not containing a fine performance (oops, that's another article). I don't know how Armstrong found the pieces on this record or what kind of necromancy he is into, but he has proven to me that Meyer can play Mozart. And well. Although *K498A* is not one of my 'desert island' *sonatas*, she does a fine job. Meyer really shines on the little Fantasy



and by the end of side two (a dream!) I was left wondering. Why? How? I can only presume that she figured she had made enough records and really ought to leave something for Lili and Clara. Apart from her achievements with Discophile Français, Marcelle Meyer should best be remembered for her major role in Twentieth Century French piano music through her close relationship with the 'Groups des Six', Ravel, Debussy, Satie, and the Ballet Russes of Diaghilev and Stravinsky. Meyer was in short, their

muse. EMI issued, in their *Les Introuvables* series, three Meyer box sets with a total of fifteen compact discs. These are now collectibles in the used CD market, but if you want to hear more of Meyer, this is about as affordable as you're going to find. There are four French EMI late 1970's double record sets [EMI French Reference series] containing music by Chabrier and others; Rameau; Couperin; and Ravel. Marcelle Meyer is one special artist.

- OR VI - Jeanne Gautier -  
20th Century Works  
*Ariette - Martinu*  
*Berceuse sur le Nom de Fauré - Ravel*  
*Scherzo (from The Firebird)*  
*Berceuse (from The Firebird)*  
rec 01.01.56  
*Prélude et Ronde des Princesses (from The Firebird)*  
*Chanson de Paracha (Russian Maiden's Song) 3-6*  
*Stravinsky/Dushkin*  
*Ballad (from The Fairy's Kiss) Stravinsky/Gautier*  
rec 24.07.56  
Jeanne Gautier – violin  
Nadine Désouches – piano  
Albert Roussel  
*Sonata Number 2 opus 28 for Violin and Piano*  
rec 13.04.57  
Jeanne Gautier – violin  
Lelia Gousseau – piano



► Moving on to the Gautier recording, I can tell you I was stunned. I do not own any of the music from side one except the Ravel *Berceuse*, so this was a whole new experience. This and the Martinu caught my attention, but the Stravinsky transcriptions are absolutely gorgeous. The *Ballad* from *The Fairies Kiss* is Gautier's own, worked on with Stravinsky himself. This record alone is worth the price of admission. Side two holds the greatest *Rousse! No 2* I have ever heard. Although my favourite has always been with another great French violinist, Pierre Doukan - on Erato LDE3119 mono only - the Gautier performance offers so much more insight. (By the way, should you find a mint copy of this Erato, the cost would be as much as the four records in this feature!) I wish I could tell you something of Gautier, but there is nothing in the books and at the time of writing this review Armstrong is keeping what he has to himself. (I'll remember this Glenn!) He tells me there will be inserts with notes and photographs with each of these records on their release, and for those who have subscribed to *L'Ad'Ol*, an insert for the Camilla Wicks disc!



OR VII - Maurice Maréchal  
 Brahms and Beethoven Cello Sonatas  
*Brahms 'Cello Sonata No 1 in E minor, opus 38*  
 rec 13.10.59  
*Beethoven 'Cello Sonata No 2 in G minor,*  
*opus 5 No 2*  
 rec 01.01.58  
 Maurice Maréchal – cello  
 Cécile Ousset – piano

Maréchal and Ousset give us a very warm, tender and sensitive reading of Brahms *First Cello Sonata*. The tempi are perfect and the recording is solidly balanced, neither

instrument dominating the proceedings. It is a grand and captivating affair, which manages to combine great drama with great intimacy. You really will feel quite windswept by the time its last notes fade! With the Beethoven we are treated once again to a close, personal interpretation that offered me a very new perspective of this oft-recorded work. Maréchal's playing has a gentle nobility, and a sense of barely suppressed power that is totally enthralling.

There is no doubt that his understanding of these works is complete and he makes them live in a way I have never heard before. It's great to have a Maréchal record in my collection, they are SO rare, and the only record I had ever heard featured Ginette Doyen playing what seemed to be a forty foot piano! This was for Pathé and you could buy subscriptions for the next five years of *L'Ad'Ol* for the price of that one horrible record. Maréchal had already reached legendary status

during the first part of the century and was considered by his peers 'the Jacques Thibaud of the cello'. In 1917 he was the dedicatee of Debussy's *Cello Sonata*, and in 1922 with Hélène Jourdan-Morhange gave the world premier performance of Ravel's *Duo for Violin and Cello*. This is a tremendous record, full of life, all the more remarkable for the old boy being 67 years old at the time of recording!

OR VIII - Agnelle Bundervoët  
 Ravel and Debussy  
*Ravel - Gaspard de la Nuit*  
 rec. 10.11.59  
*Debussy - Images Book One*  
 rec. 09.01.60

It's as if, for me anyway, the best is saved for last.

Agnelle Bundervoët is a pianist I am completely over ►

► the top about. I have three of her four commercial recordings. By the time she was in her early thirties she had already developed a considerable following and her recitals were always rapturously received. After one of them, a critic who never had anything good to say about anyone raved about her, and arranged to meet her. He introduced himself as a director of the French label, Ducretet-Thomson and expressed his deep admiration. "Well", says she, 'why don't you make a recording of me?' The resulting disc was a Bach recital, an extraordinary record, which I am very proud to have in my collection. She never received a penny from the record, but was awarded a 'Grande Prix du Disque'. Late in the fifties, she made three more records with French Decca. They featured Liszt, Brahms and Schumann recitals. However, in 1956 she had already decided to devote her time to teaching and her family. She taught at the Paris Conservatoire for thirty years.

I believe this record to be of extreme importance: Not because it is un-issued repertoire by a highly collectible artist; not because it is one of the most beautiful records I have ever heard; but because it fills in a very important space in the colouring book of French pianism. Born in 1922, at the age of ten Bundervoët was receiving private lessons from Lazare-Levy at the Paris Conservatoire and continued to study under him until he was removed by the Vichy government in 1940. Moreover, when in 1942 she asked him to write her a piece for her first public recital, he accepted with his *Themes et Variations*. For the uninitiated, Lazare-Levy was a leviathan of the piano who looms large over the development of French

piano music of the first half of the 20th century. Okay, that's enough for now.

Bundervoët's *Gaspard* is, in a word, ravishing. It is like nothing I have ever heard and it has left me speechless – which, those who know me will agree, is saying something. It's just the best I have heard – even my beloved Martha Argerich isn't in this league. Debussy's *Images*. I found myself scratching around

for performances I could compare this to. Ferber on Ducretet... Michelangeli on DGG... Beroff? A pointless exercise. Nothing compares to this issue. The playing is delicate, and like the Ravel, totally captivating. As Armstrong promised 'the most sublime and poetic I have ever heard'. And now he tells me that next year's set will have her playing Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and *Valses Nobles et Sentimental*! (The bastard! I want it now!) I am afraid lack of space allows me only one word

about the hand printed jackets

designed yet again by Armstrong. Amazing.

To say that L'Archet d'Or is musically rewarding would be a gross understatement. This series is a revelation. The sound quality is outstanding and I will never tire of listening to these performances. No-one who considers himself a serious music lover should be without this. Armstrong has outdone himself. Again. Highest recommendation. When I say "Highest recommendation" it is meant from the heart. Do pursue this series, it's musically important and I want it to continue...for all of us.

Price: £300

Net. [www.coupdarchet.com](http://www.coupdarchet.com)

