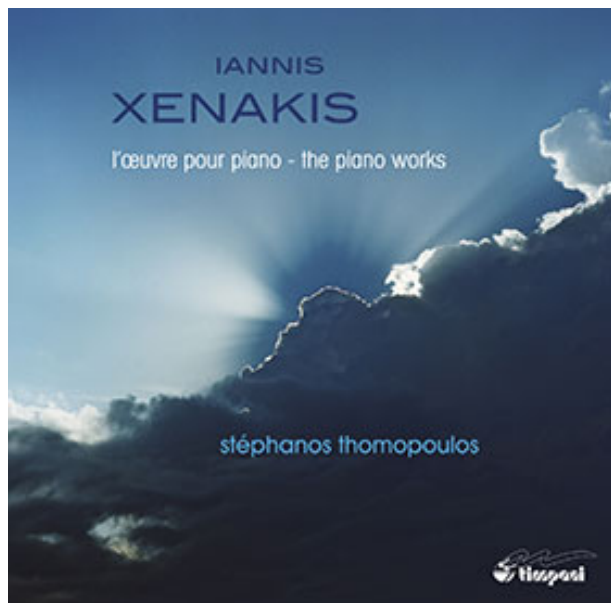


Stéphanos Thomopoulos

/// Iannis Xenakis – the piano works ///

/// cd release /// mars 2015 /// label timpani ///



This recording features for the first time Xenakis' complete works for solo piano, plus *Zyia* for soprano, flute and piano. Along with the already known piano works we can find three little unpublished pieces that the young Xenakis had composed in 1949 for the classes he was taking with Honegger and Milhaud.

The programme is organized in two parts: the major piano works, in chronological order of their composition, then the three youthful works (*Six chansons pour piano*, *Zyia* and the three unpublished pieces), in which another Xenakis is presented, he of the so-called pre-stochastic period.

Being sensitive to phenomena of light, especially natural ones: lightning, clouds, fires, sparkling sea, sky, volcanoes... Being much less sensitive to plays of light in films, even abstract ones, theatre and opera sets.

Preferring natural spectacles away from Man. Preferring the dizziness created by the abyss of the star-studded sky, when plunging our head in it, forgetting the earth where our feet stand. Or else the surrealism of dreams in which two clairvoyant moons simultaneously climb in the black sky. In fact, everything that, in light, is close to music by its most abstract sides: forms, movements, intensities, colours, expanses... Imagining them, combining them, knocking them together, making them evolve like luminous landscapes of galaxies and intra-stellar gases illuminated by young blue suns, or then in gigantic movements, blown up by explosions of supernovae. Luminous music for the eyes, symmetrical to sound music for the ears.

Xenakis, « Polytopes », Festival d'automne à Paris 1972-1982

Tracklist

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Herma (10'04) | 8 Trois moines crétois (1'59) |
| 2 Evryali (10'51) | 9 Aujourd'hui le ciel est noir (2'20) |
| 3 Mists (14'24) | 10 Sousta, danse (1'24) |
| 4 A R. (2'43) | 11 Zyia pour soprano, flûte et piano (13'21) |
| Six Chansons pour piano | Trois Pièces inédites |
| 5 Ça sent le musc (1'08) | 12 L. 1 (1'24) |
| 6 J'avais un amour autrefois (0'56) | 13 Air populaire (0'42) |
| 7 Une perdrix descendait de la montagne (1'29) | 14 Allegro molto (0'47) |



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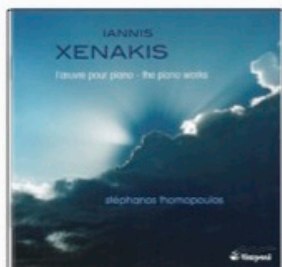
Stéphanos Thomopoulos

Iannis Xenakis – the piano works
Stephanos Thomopoulos
Timpani Records 1C1232

Xenakis: IX – Pleiades; Rebonds
Kuniko
Linn Records CKD 495

► The music of iconoclast modern composer Iannis Xenakis has by now been mostly released on disc. There are a few firsts, though, in these two new discs. Stéphanos

Thomopoulos, a Greek pianist now living in France who did a doctorate on Xenakis' piano music, has delved into the archives to dig out some early pieces completed while the composer was studying composition in the years 1949–52: *Six chansons pour piano*, and *Trois pièces inédites*. There is very little “Xenakis” in these pieces, but they are interesting and quite well written for the piano. The collection is eclectic, not traditional but not avant-garde. Thomopoulos adds the early trio, *Zyia*, for soprano, flute and piano, to his exploration of Xenakis' juvenilia. This has been recorded before, and is quite a substantial work, a rather strange mixture of simple modal melodies, virtuosic flurries, low clusters and mathematical (Fibonacci) ostinato patterns. There is nothing here to be heard of Xenakis' groundbreaking works *Metastaseis* and *Pithoprakta*, even though they appeared just a few years later. On the rest of the disc



thewholenote.com

Thomopoulos presents excellent readings of Xenakis' four mature piano works: *Herma*, *Evryali*, *Mists* and *À R*. I thought I heard a piano string snapping at a climactic point in *Herma*, but there are a few other snaps, pointing to hot levels during the recording. The sound is otherwise clear and full.

The quality of sound is one of the main features of the Kuniko disc, presenting two of Xenakis' important works for percussion, *Pléïades* and *Rebonds*. They have both been recorded

before, but never has *Pléïades*, a 40-minute opus for six percussionists, been done by one player! (It is multi-tracked, of course.) The label, Linn Records, is connected to the high-end audio company based in Scotland. This hybrid disc lets you listen in pristine surround sound (requiring SACD capacity) or in stereo. If you get the chance, listen to the surround version: it is amazing – the intricate layers of rhythms and instruments coming at you from all round. Kuniko is a fine percussionist, and she clearly has taken much care with this recording. I especially enjoyed the sound of her Sixxens, metallic instruments specially fabricated for this piece. In concert, the sound can be quite harsh, but here we get all the details, the sound a cross between Indonesian gamelan and Harry Partch micro-tonal percussion. The disc closes with the solo work, *Rebonds*, for drums and woodblocks. She plays well, the one surprise being the substitution of a marimba-like instrument for the woodblocks.



James Harley

/// Iannis Xenakis – the piano works ///

/// critic : the whole note ///



Stéphanos Thomopoulos

/// Iannis Xenakis – the piano works ///

/// critic : diapason ///

Iannis Xenakis

1922-2001

Ψ Ψ Ψ Ψ L'œuvre pour piano.

Stephanos Thomopoulos (piano).

Timpani. Ø 2010. TT : 1 h 04'.

TECHNIQUE : 3,5/5



La Sonate n° 2 de Boulez et les Klavierstücke de Stockhausen ont eu leur Pollini. Ce n'est pas faire injure à

Georges Pludermacher et Claude Helffer de souligner que les œuvres pour piano de Xenakis n'ont à ce jour pas eu le virtuose de renommée internationale qui aurait pu les sortir de leur relative marginalité. Le concert, mieux que le disque, permet de prendre la mesure du combat physique que doit livrer l'interprète. La complexité, en terme de rapidité de tempos, d'écarts, de densité, de cette écriture qui prend sa source sur une base aléatoire, statistique (appelée « stochastique »), est littéralement effrayante. A telle enseigne qu'un disque (Neos) a carrément remplacé le pianiste par un ordinateur : cela nous prive de l'effort, de la sueur qu'on doit voir ruisseler sur le visage du soliste – de la même manière que jouer le Concerto pour la main gauche de Ravel des deux mains enlève une

bonne part de sa tension, née de la contrainte.

Herma (1963), qui signifie embryon, fondation, s'apparente à une nébuleuse de gestes et de sons à l'effervescence furieuse. La méticulosité de Stephanos Thomopoulos, ancien élève de Jacques Rouvier et Marie-Françoise Bucquet, fait vivre la moindre nuance, ressortir chaque timbre de cette « musique symbolique ». On peut préférer le happening volcanique créé par Pludermacher (Warner), la vision fougueuse, quasi romantique d'Helffer (Montaigne), la netteté inquiétante du créateur Yuji Takahashi (Denon).

Evyrali (1973) – du nom de la sœur de Méduse – apparaît plus traditionnelle d'une certaine manière : on a l'impression d'une partition que l'auditeur et le pianiste peuvent suivre. Le jeune interprète s'y montre remarquable de précision, d'endurance, de lisibilité. Il va encore plus loin qu'Helffer. Seul Takahashi,

rapide, tranchant, complètement habité, lui dame le pion.

Dans Mists (1980), œuvre sans doute moins forte, Thomopoulos est plus lent de deux minutes qu'Helffer. Son approche rythmique et dynamique se fait moins impitoyable que celle du grand aîné. Par exemple, le triple forte des mesures finales ne possède pas l'explosivité attendue.

Outre un petit hommage à Ravel – que contrairement à Harry Halbreich on n'imagine pas un instant en « bis tout indiqué » – le reste du programme consiste en des essais de jeunesse (relative, le compositeur avait près de trente ans) laborieusement redevables, en partie, de Bartok et une pièce pour soprano, flûte et piano à prendre comme un bonus. Des œuvres d'une difficulté incommensurable et un guide très recommandable.

Bertrand Boissard

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DIAPASON | 119