

by Thomas Josenhans

**Música virtuosa.** Josep Fuster, clarinet; Isabel Hernández, piano. Johan Wenzel Kalliwoda: *Morceau de Salon*; Luigi Bassi: *Fantasia de temas de Verdi "Rigoletto"*; G. Meister: *Erwinn Fantasia* (arr. Langenus); Leó Weiner: *Peregi Verbunk*, Op. 40; Ramon Carnicer: *Fantasia*; Alamiro Giampieri: *El Carnaval de Venecia*; J. Bautista Meseguer: *Meditación*; Donato Lovreglio: *Fantasia de temas de Verdi "La Traviata."* EDICIONS ALBERT MORALEDA 0180. Total time 77:25. (Web site: <www.gaudisc.com> or contact the artist: <jfuster1@telefonica.net>)

One's first trip to the penny candy store is often a treasured childhood memory. Upon entering, the bell on the door jingles cheerfully. The air is thick with the smell of chocolate and sugar, like cotton candy at the fair. Standing on tip-toe, you strain to peer over the edge of the counter into the cases overflowing with innumerable varieties of mouthwatering confections, and as you move about the store, choosing one treat seems impossible, as each looks more delicious than the last.

Listening to Josep Fuster's recording, **Música virtuosa**, creates a strangely similar sensation: the CD is loaded with 77-plus minutes of bonbons for the clarinet, each more daring and outrageous than the last. The CD showcases pieces that are typically either reserved for the end of a recital or used as encores. One programs these particular works with the expectation that the audience will jump to its feet and leave the concert greatly satisfied with a sweet "taste" in their ears. They are the final trick in a magic show, the death defying

feat, the lion tamer placing his head into the jaws of the beast, the juggler with flaming swords.

Fortunately, and to the listener's pleasure, Fuster masters all the challenges of each virtuosic piece with the greatest of ease. The performances on this CD are truly remarkable. Listening to this CD is like listening to a great coloratura soprano at her best: one forgets about the difficulty of the passage and is instead drawn into the magic of the moment, afraid to breathe before the last note is sung. Not only does Fuster breeze through the technical passages with accuracy, but he brings lyricism and sensitivity to these showy works. Fuster's musicianship seems to transcend the demanding nature of these pieces and the idiosyncrasies of the clarinet.

Born in Valencia, Spain, Fuster began his studies at the Academy of Music in Valencia and completed them in Barcelona. His teachers include Romero, Sebastián, Panyella and Tordera. He has made several recordings, including the complete works for clarinet of Jesús Rodríguez Picó. He currently teaches at the Academy of Music of Catalonia and plays with the National Orchestra of Catalonia and the Symphonic Orchestra of Barcelona.

With few exceptions, the pieces on this disc are fantasies in either title or effect: each is built on familiar or simple themes, is interspersed with cadenzas, and grows in intensity and virtuosity as the piece progresses. Two works stand out as particularly worthy of notice, as much for the quality of performance as the variety that they lend to the contents of this collection.

*Peregi Verbunk* reflects the folk influences on Hungarian composer Leó Weiner's musical style. Composed in the form of a *verbunkos*, a recruiting dance performed by gypsy musicians, *Peregi Verbunk* is immediately appealing for its sultry melodies, unusual harmonies and coloristic variety, all of which are ably rendered by Fuster and pianist Isabel Hernández. The cadenzas that occur toward the end of this work are particularly captivating, and Fuster plays them with passion.

J. Bautista Meseguer's *Meditación* is also worthy of mention. Slow and lyrical, this piece utilizes simple melodies that seem almost improvised at times. Open harmonies remind one of a more popular idiom and are reminiscent of the works of

Alec Wilder. As he does throughout this disc, Fuster plays with a focused yet supple tone, well suited to the subtleties of expression demanded by this work.

**Música virtuosa** would be an excellent addition to anyone's library of clarinet recordings, filled with exciting repertoire and virtuosic playing. I urge everyone to sample the confections offered in this collection.



THE CLARINET