

## CD Review

Ekkehard Pluta (29 Dec 2006) in "**Klassik Heute**" on the newly released CD *La Note d'Or - Werke der Belle Époque*, featuring Verena Rein (soprano), The Čiurlionis Quartet, Sergej Okrusko (piano):

This is not just any compilation of French mélodies, but a thoughtfully programmed selection featuring four significant composers to demonstrate the new awakening of musical ars gallica in Fin-de-Siècle France. What is remarkable is that a singer of German tongue, along with musicians from Lithuania, has met this challenge with great skill and evident enthusiasm.

It is impossible not to be enchanted by the Čiurlionis Quartet's truly heart-warming style as they not only give an exemplary rendition of Ravel's "String Quartet in F Major" (1903), but also add the sort of warmth to the different lieder compositions often missing in solo piano versions. This becomes evident during "La Bonne Chanson", Gabriel Fauré's cycle of new lieder to texts by Paul Verlaine. The commonly-known version uses only piano accompaniment, because the composer had abandoned a version with additional string quartet to be performed in London in 1898, fearing it would be too complicated. He was wrong, however, since the colourfulness and sonic sensuality of this second version add considerable poetic depth to the songs.

Despite its folk song-like simplicity, "Perpétuelle", Ernest Chausson's chanson written the same year, was clearly influenced by the Wagnerism that was rampant during those years. This movement also had a devoted follower in early departed Belgian Franck disciple Guillaume Lekeu (1870-1894), whose "Nocturnal" included in this collection shows talent, but still lacks a distinct personality.

Soprano Verena Rein, with sensitive accompaniment by pianist Sergej Okrusko and the Čiurlionis Quartet, performs the lieder with great passion and a penchant for the dramatic, rather than with the distance and restraint we have come to expect from most French interpreters. While stylistically perhaps unorthodox, this performance is convincing all the same, thanks to the artistic seriousness and vigour, and, not least, the singer's vocal prowess."