

Mp3 Nicole Narboni - The Solo Piano Music Of Jean Francaix



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A wonderfully energetic and colorful collection of piano works by Jean Francaix. 36 MP3 Songs in this album (67:01) ! Related styles: CLASSICAL: Piano solo, CLASSICAL: Contemporary Details: Piano Music by Jean Franaix: Charm, Color, Witet Vitesse! Notes from the bench by Nicole Narboni Jean Franaix (1912-1997) was a tremendously prolific composer. The story goes that even before he had finished one piece, he was already starting to work on another piece. He wrote for virtually every instrument, in every combination. But I had never heard his piano music until one of my students in Nebraska recommended that I play a short encore piece of hisa discovery that eventually led me from a library in Lincoln to the great music shops of Paris, tracking down every solo piano work by this French master that I could find. And I found plenty, the best of which youll find on this disc. How to describe it? I think Franaixs piano music is marked by charm, wit, humor, colorand speed! Franaix liked speed. There are no fewer than 37 cuts on this CD, some of which arent even a minute long! Proving perhaps, that brevity really is the soul of witclearly, Franaix was a man who possessed a tremendous sense of the absurd. Youll hear his puckish humor right from the start. In the Danse des Trois Arlequins (1958), Franaix is very successful in musically painting a picture of three clowns (buffoons) chasing each other, tripping over each other and causing general mayhem. You can sense the tug-of-war (either figuratively or literally) with the two-against-three figure that Franaix incorporates throughout the work. The Danse des Trois Arlequins is a wonderful, short romp, perhaps written to celebrate the simple joy of being alive. Perhaps the most comical of all the works contained on this disc are the Cinq Bis, or Five Encores (1965). In the preface to the score, Franaix quotes the 18th-century French author Nicolas de Chamfort Quand vous tes sur une scene, si vous ntes pas un peu charlatan, lassemble vous jette des pierres (When on the

stage if you are not a little of a charlatan, the crowd will stone you.) These pieces have all the elements of great encores. Pour allecher lauditoire (To entice the audience) is a sarcastic warm-up; Pour les dames sentimentales (For romantic ladies) is a wonderful combination of silly and serious. The last three Bis are best saved for a third or fourth curtain call: En Cas de succs and En cas de triomphe no translation required! The fifth and final of the Bis, En cas de dlire (In case of delirium) suggests a scene from a Victor Borge concert. The Sonate pour piano (1960) is one of Franaix's few forays (how's that for alliteration!) into traditional forms. This four-movement work is typical of a classical sonata with its fast-slow-faster-fastest arrangement. The Sonate was supposedly written for the annual piano competition at the Paris Conservatory. It is dedicated to the Turkish pianist Idil Biret, with whom Franaix may have had contact because both studied with the legendary composition teacher Nadia Boulanger, whose students ranged from Aaron Copland to Astor Piazzolla! I would describe the Sonate as a serious work, minus the characteristic humor found in so many other Franaix compositions. However, the writing is still quintessential Franaix, with the effervescence of a good champagne. The stately sustained melody in the second-movement Elgie is a wonderful contrast to the other, motivically derived movements: Prlude, Scherzo, and the concluding Toccata. In all the piano repertoire of Jean Franaix, there is no more charming a piece than the Cinq Portraits de Jeunes Filles (1936). Franaix has captured in this music the varied personalities of young women. Consider, for example La Capricieuse: Franaix creates the image of a woman who changes her mind on a whim, with an almost pointillistic melody. The dreamy La Tendre brings to mind a woman cradling a baby, perhaps singing a lullaby. By contrast, Franaix gives us La Prtentieuse, a whimsical character whose all about me personality sharply contrasts with her occasional moments of vulnerability. La Pensive is suitably introspective, and the last in the set is aptly titled La Moderne. Here is a woman whose antics remind me of Audrey Hepburn's Holly Golightly character in Breakfast at Tiffany's, a wonderful mixture of the qualities of the four other girls. Franaix suggests that he is in fact writing about the multiple personalities of just one girl by closing La Moderne with a repeat of the first five measures of La Capricieuse. The 1932 Scherzo is another free-standing work similar to the Danse des Trois Arlequins. This short piece practically skitters across the keyboard. Franaix dedicated the Scherzo to Isidore Philipp, the French pianist, teacher and composer (best) known for his Exercises for the Independence of the Fingers. Franaix and Philipp were friends and colleagues for decades, stemming from their days together at the Paris Conservatoire. Though it is named for the inventor of the

printing press, the Huit Variations sur le nom de Johannes Gutenberg is the only piano composition of Franaix that was not typeset; the score is in Franaix's own handwriting, which is rather unusual for postwar composers. Franaix himself premiered the commissioned piece as part of a ceremony honoring him with the Gutenberg medal (given by the mayor of Mainz, Germany) in 1982. Monsieur Franaix, in his characteristic humorous style, includes a note at the end: Gutenberg se déclare satisfait de ses Variations, et se dirige vers la Maison Schott pour les y imprimer lui-même. (Gutenberg considers himself satisfied with his Variations and proceeds to the House of Schott to print them himself.) Typical of Franaix's compositional style, the eight variations are light in nature, very energetic, harmonically clear and rhythmically sharp. Interestingly enough, any relationship between the theme and the name Gutenberg is purely happenstance. Dating from 1983, Trois esquisses sur les touches blanches (Three sketches on the white keys) is another characteristic and captivating set of Franaix pieces. The titles Le Chruvin provisoire (The temporary angel), Le Rveur pendant la leçon de piano (The dreamer during the piano lesson) and Le diabolin libéré de la leçon de piano (The liberated devil in the piano lesson) suggests a little boy whose behavior rapidly deteriorates during his piano lesson. As a teacher who has had my fair share of diabolitins, I can relate. De la Musique avant tout chose (Music before everything else: Ten children's pieces for piano) was composed in 1975. This series contains 10 graded pieces for the beginning pianist and like so much of Franaix's music, the titles suggest both personality and situation. The last three pieces are considerably more challenging, with a focus on more sophisticated rhythms and articulations. From conversations with the composer's eldest daughter Claude Franaix (an accomplished pianist herself), it is clear that Jean Franaix loved ambiguity and subtle word play. Upon the death in 1945 of the poet Paul Valéry, Franaix created a little six-movement suite called loge de la Danse, a series of six pigraphes based on the words of his late poet friend. Again, all describing a single woman: Elle semble d'abord, de ses pas pleins d'esprit, effacer de la terre toute fatigue, et toute sottise Elle tait l'amoureuse tait jeux et pleurs, et feintes inutiles les oui, et les non, et les pas tristement perdus Elle trace des roses, des entrelacs, des toiles de mouvement, et de magiques enceintes Elle cueille une fleur qui n'est aussitôt qu'un sourire. Elle a fait tout son corps aussi d'ali, aussi bien lui qu'une main agile Ma main seule peut imiter cette possession et cette facilité de tout son corps Elle clabrait tous les mystères de l'absence elle semblait quelquefois effleurer d'ineffables catastrophes Voici le chœur ailé des illustres danseuses!...C'est un bosquet aux belles branches toutes agitées par les brises de la Musique! At first she appears, with her

spirited steps, to wipe from the earth all weariness, and all inanity She was loveshe was amusement and weeping, useless pretenseshe yeses, nos, and steps sadly lost She traces roses, interlacing, stars of movement, and of miraculous pregnancyShe cuts a bloom that is at once a smile She made her entire body so slender, so closely tied to an agile handOnly my hand can imitate this ownership and this ease of her entire body She lauds all the mysteries of absenceshe seemed at times to touch upon ineffable catastrophes Here is the winged choir of illustrious dancers! Its a grove of beautiful limbs rustled by the breeze of Music! The music of these six dances captures the symbolic quality found in the poetry. I find that the dances are less programmatic than the other sets. - Nicole Narboni Known for her silvery tone, inspiring master classes, and broad solo and chamber music repertoire, Nicole Narboni is a pianist, teacher, blogger and advocate for broadening access and understanding to classical music in traditionally underserved communities. During the 2008-2009 academic year, Nicole Narboni will use her skills as an educator, musician, and innovator as part of her Piano in Tow tour. This series of concerts, part of her outreach to new audiences, will focus on visits to middle and high schools in western Nebraskas rural communities. The funding for this tour has been made possible by a grant from the Layman Foundation and will allow Dr. Narboni to take her Yamaha C-7 to areas that may not have many opportunities to hear live classical music. In addition to Dr. Narbonis musical pursuits, she is Senior Lecturer in Piano at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music, where she has won awards for her innovative and inspired teaching. As testimony to Dr. Narboni's commitment to teaching excellence, she has just been awarded the UNL Parents' Outstanding Teaching Award for 2007-2008. This is the third time that she has been so honored. It is a testimony to her ability to interest, engage, and enliven the musical experience for students. Dr. Narboni has a B.M. degree from the University of Texas, a M.M. from the Shepherd School of Music, Rice University and a DMA from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. She has studied with renowned piano masters Reah Sadowsky, John Perry and Yoheved Kaplinsky. Nicole Narboni is an accomplished performer and recitalist both in the U.S. and abroad. As as champion of 20th-century French keyboard music, she frequently performs and presents lectures here and in France on such composers as Jean Francaix, Germaine Tailleferre, Olivier Messaien, Claude Debussy, and Maurice Ravel. She has often performed as a guest artist at the prestigious Cercle France-Amrique in Paris. Narbonis acclaimed concert performances have been broadcast on WQXR in New York, WETA/WGMS in Washington DC, and on more than 200 NPR stations nationwide via American Public

Medias Performance Today. She frequently serves as an adjudicator, speaker, and presenter at conferences, competitions, and festivals. Nicole Narboni has conducted masterclasses at the Ameropa Chamber Music Festival in Prague and the Chamber Music Institute at the University of Nebraska--Lincoln. As a recording artist, Nicole Narboni has issued CDs of works by Germaine Tailleferre, Francis Poulenc, Bla Bartk, Paul Bowles, Randall Snyder, and Bohuslav Martinu. Her forthcoming release, a multimedia CD/video project supported in part by a grant from the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts, will be devoted to the solo piano works of Jean Franaix. For many years, Dr. Narboni collaborated with musical partner Mark Clinton as the Clinton-Narboni Duo. They won a number of significant prizes, including the 1994 ProPiano New York Recital Competition, the 1995 National Federation of Music Clubs Ellis Duo Piano Competition, the Alvin Perlman prize at the Fifth Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition, and the 1996 Concorso Internazionale Carlo Soliva (four-hand division). The Clinton/Narboni Duo made their New York debut at Carnegie Recital Hall in February 1995, their Chicago debut on the prestigious Dame Myra Hess Series in July 1996, and their European debut in Paris in June 1997. They gave the world premiere performance of Ned Rorem's Six Variations for Two Pianos in Miami in December 1995. Clinton and Narboni's debut compact disc of Works for Two Pianos and Piano Four-Hands by Germaine Tailleferre (ELAN CD 82278) received high praise from Gramophone magazine which selected it as an "Editor's Choice" selection in the November 1997 issue and declared it "...absolutely first rate, with an immensely engaging spirit, delicacy, variety of touch and subtle shadings...an irresistibly joyous disc." Nicole Narboni, a Steinway Artist, has been a faculty member at the School of Music at UNL since 1995. She can be reached at nnarboni1@unl.edu. You can also find her unique perspectives on music, the arts, and life in Lincoln, Nebraska on her blogsite: drnan.wordpress.com.

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