

ARNAOUDOV The Way of the Birds • Tanya Kazandjieva-Chauche (sop); Ens • LABOR LAB7068 (42:33 )



[Way of the Birds](#)

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Oh, goody, this month it's me who gets the album of Minimalist-Bulgarian-contemporary-dance-scores-based-on-medieval-Bulgarian-literature to review. But my sarcasm dissipated pretty quickly on first listen. Born in 1957, the literary minded Gheorghe Arnaoudov has written a number of chamber, symphonic, and stage compositions, often taking his inspiration from ancient Bulgarian and Orphic texts, and we have here a collection of four tone poems, all written in the 1990s, stemming from his collaboration with choreographer Mila Iskrenova.

Confusingly listed as "three large fragments from Gheorghe Arnaoudov's cycle of three poems" (are these fragments or the complete cycle?), *The Way of the Birds* I, II, and III is a sparsely written, harmonically complex set of pieces for soprano and chamber ensemble based on medieval Bulgarian love poems. It is a very earthy, tribal start, with the tense, sustained violin line creating an uneasy, parched landscape for the solo flute's soulful but increasingly manic writing, a lone sign of life in this trancelike environment. If *Way of the Birds* I acts like some primal beginning, Arnaoudov skillfully builds the second part into a soaring climax, full of taunt, percussive rhythms and effects. It is here that we finally get to hear Tanya Kazandjieva-Chauche's flexible, expressive voice up close, in duet (dubbed with herself, maybe), and then with much higher writing in the third part, arguably the most melodic of the cycle. Here the beautiful vocal motif is set to the brutal percussion rhythms and the first section's open strings, creating a deft completion and summary of everything that has gone on before.

With *Footnote*, Arnaoudov creates a much fuller sound picture for his realization of James Joyce's erotic, unsettling *A Prayer*, from his collection *Pomes Penyeach*. The closely miked Sprechgesang part is brilliantly dramatized by Kazandjieva-Chauche, a frightening take on the carnal and disturbing imagery of Joyce's poem. Alluring and menacing at once, it

is a vivid, dramatic work, gradually paring down its orchestration to end on just voice and guitar. The allusion to Tristan und Isolde is less obvious, although it's a good fit to the poetic imagery of love and death. More perplexing still are the use of instruments on this album. Although not listed, there is definitely the use of brass and guitar in Footnote, as well as the uncredited vocal dueting. It would be interesting to see how this has been scored, with its very unusual effects, as I feel the list of performers is not quite complete.

The various echoing and whispering effects have been well handled on the recording, which is clear and sensibly balanced, and the notes, in rather florid and misspelled English, give valuable context. Good thing too, for although we get the poems printed in their original script, no one has a stab at translating the "virtually untranslatable" Middle Bulgarian texts, leaving the non-Middle Bulgarian clientele hanging somewhat. A genuinely surprising and beautiful disc, nonetheless.

–Barnaby Rayfield, *FANFARE*