

**... hear the other think ....**

Raphaël Oleg and Frédéric Angleraux on the recording of 'double-je'

**Where does the idea of making a recording with a repertoire for two violins come from?**

Raphaël Oleg (RO): At the beginning this was a suggestion by our violin maker and friend Jacques Fustier. We met in his studio in Lyon, it was premeditated on his part.

Frédéric Angleraux (FA): Raphael and Jacques were long-time friends and he insinuated an interesting potential because he thought that our personalities could match easily.

RO Anyway it would have been a huge loss for the music if we had not met! (laughter)

FA (laughter) - and that's why we caught up in preparing this musical testament. Raphaël seems to have told to himself that it might work between us since we shared the same sense of humour.

**You do have many things in common:**

**Your instruments 'Fustier', your bows 'Denis Bergeron' and Gérard Jarry was your teacher.**

**What can you tell me about the Franco-Belgian school where Ysaÿe was a star figure?**

FA At that time there was the Franco-Belgian violin tradition, the Russian school etc.. Today there remains only one global school because of multiple crossings and it would be completely absurd to speak of a representative of the Franco-Belgian school nowadays. The only references we have are some historical recordings, some of which can even devalue the image we have of these previous performers.

RO Today it is impossible not to know what others are doing and not to be influenced. Everything has been diluted in a wonderful international soup. Nevertheless, in works such as Lucien Capet's "The Superior Technique of the Bow" - an archetypal description of the Franco-Belgian school - we read that - roughly speaking - the left hand makes the notes, the right hand the Music.

**And today ?**

RO The left hand and the right hand make the notes. (laughter).

FA The note is not interesting, it's like an alignment of beautiful words in a meaningless sentence: there is no sense. We both could feel the desire to serve this music by mixing our interpretations.

RO It all revolved around this Ysaÿe sonata for two violins that no one plays despite its generosity and extraordinary beauty. I wanted to take my time to work on this piece, to mature.

### **Let's talk about the denseness of the Ysaÿe sonata: we think we hear a string quartet ...**

RO Originally the duo was a gift for Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, an amateur violinist with whom Ysaÿe had established a friendly relationship. But the difficulty of the royal violin part turned out to be such that Ysaÿe had to make a simplified arrangement for two violins and viola...

### **What changes for a violinist who already knows Ysaÿe's solo sonatas - with their technical requirements and their polyphonic structure - when playing the sonata for two violins?**

RO He feels less alone!

FA It's all about sharing. One feels the desire to make this music sound as if it was a single eight-stringed violin, a polyphonic SUPER-violin, conceived by a composer-violinist who mastered the technique of his instrument perfectly.

RO Listening to the fusion of the sounds of the two instruments and the way we make music together, I do not even know anymore who plays what.

### **What did everyone contribute to the interpretation? There was complementary exchange? An evolution thanks to the talent of the other?**

FA Playing with a musician like Raphaël is pure sharing. What interests him is not to guide, to impose his idea, but to build a common idea of Music together with his partner. There is a real notion of "playing together". Of course, his instrumental and musical means set the bar very high, which makes this collaboration even more interesting for me. Raphaël's friendship has enhanced me a lot since our first meeting, both musically and emotionally.

RO What I love about Fred is his spontaneity, his emotional impulses in Music, it explodes and overflows everywhere ... As I am actually more at my ease in the analysis, this is a very complementary experience to me. What I love too - and it's something that happens to me with very few people - is that we do not need to talk. When the essential is there at an unspoken level, one can go very far and then accept plenty of differences, contradictions, with different points of view on the music until creating a third way.

### **This very particular complicity, is it based on an efficient preparatory work or on mutual esteem that you can count on one another in any situation?**

FA One does not go without the other.

RO Shakespeare wrote "sick minds think alike." (laughter) And if we listen carefully we hear the other think ...

### **How would you describe your ideal partner?**

RO It's Fred. (laughter) More seriously what I expect from a partner in chamber music is comparable to a similar situation in sports, eg in tennis: your partner should be someone who knows how to return the tennis ball but not necessarily to the center. It should always

be stimulating!

FA I'm sorry, but for me it would be a blonde of one meter eighty .... (laughter).

**Can we lose something of ourselves by intertwining with another voice?**

FA What we gain is more important than what we could lose. The roles are regularly reversed and the quality of the travel is the fruit of this collaboration. Our musical approach is based on the same logic. The roles are exchanged, sometimes even very quickly. The itinerary may be different each time, but the destination will always be reached!

**Let's talk about Arthur Honegger's sonatine: created in 1920 by the composer and his friend of the Six, Darius Milhaud, the dedicatee of the work.**

RO It's a sonatine linked to friendship, too.

**So let me quote Arthur Honegger: The music must be straight, simple, *de grande allure*, people do not care about technique and fine tuning. What do you think ?**

RO These character traits are present in the Sonatine. We also feel that this piece is inspired by the music of Milhaud, by a certain naivety of expression, a little air of "Provençal".

**And the little fugue of the last movement which - once again - proves Honegger's admiration for J.S. Bach?**

RO I think he wanted to write something apart - already the choice of such a twisted, chromatic, almost unhealthy theme - while remaining in the rigor of the rules of the revered counterpoint.

**If in Honegger's Sonatina one feels this "false" naivety, there is for me in Prokofiev's work a sort of search for the authentic, the very personal.**

FA Here we searched for almost something earthy, peasant. It feels the furrow freshly returned.

**In some works by Prokofiev that he had composed to satisfy the expectations of the Ministry of Soviet Culture, one often feels the dictation of the 'simplicity of the people', a certain emotive distance and a (false?) transparency - in the sonata for two violins I feel another Prokofiev, he seems more personal, less 'official'.**

RO Politically very incorrect music? Yes, I think that's it. Wild music, uncompromising, but jubilant in its transgression.

**The second movement (Allegro) is very percussive, without mercy. The bows are Prokofiev?**

RO Yes, but above all, it must be ugly and I believe that we have arrived there. (laughter)

FA On the other hand, in the slow movement, it is rather the despair and using the sourdines, we find ourselves almost already in a reminiscence, as if it was already too late. A second degree music.

**How did you proceed in the recording sessions? There were Raphaël Angleraux, Frédéric's brother - at that time a student sound engineering - and Jacques Fustier. You locked yourself in the Abbey of Fontevraud ...**

RO It was a privilege to record in the magical atmosphere of the Abbey in the middle of winter.

FA: The Abbey is an incredible place full of beauty and peace, very conducive to recording. Jacques and my brother formed an ideal technical and artistic team for this production. A high level of know-how coupled with a very strong and sincere relationship. It's so easy to work with people who know us, who know how to express an opinion. We were a "quartet" for this two-violins recording.

RO ... and, normally, there are moments of tension in every recording session, but not in that one. Or, wait, perhaps when it came up to choose the wine sometimes ...

**Who did the editing?**

FA As I was equipped and already had some experience in this field, I did the main editing by myself. We never had a take that was 'hollow' - we just had different options, the difficulty being to keep a coherent speech for editing.

Raphael and Jacques used to come over to my home in Lyon from time to time in order to work on the project.

Again this shows that double-je is a production based on artistic engagement, on skills and friendship, from the first encounter to the finalization. It bears this 'signature' of how we feel for each other.

Interview with Raphaël Oleg and Frédéric Angleraux by Graziella Contratto, 1998