

A l'aventure! Musique de/music of Denis Gougeon. CMC, 2006. Centrediscs CMCCD 11506. 1 compact disc (71:53). Contents: *À l'aventure!* (12:11), Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal, Walter Boudreau, conductor/chef d'orchestre; *Heureux qui, comme...* (14:17), Marie-Danielle Parent (soprano), Ensemble de la SMCQ, Walter Boudreau, conductor/chef d'orchestre; *Jeux de cordes* (19 :00), Quatuor à cordes Erato; *Clere Vénus* (26:25), Marie-Danielle Parent (soprano), Ensemble de la SMCQ, Walter Boudreau (conductor/chef d'orchestre).

Quebec composer Denis Gougeon won the 2007 JUNO Award for Classical Composition of the Year for his piece *Clere Vénus*, from his recent Centrediscs release *à l'aventure! Musique de/music of Denis Gougeon*. Gougeon has composed more than eighty works in various genres, including solo and orchestral, concerti (piano, guitar, English horn, piccolo), chamber opera, musical tale and ballet. He also received the Jan V. Matejcek Concert Music Award in 2001, 2002 and 2003 while teaching composition at the Faculty of Music at the University of Montreal. In 1989, Gougeon was appointed composer-in-residence by the Montreal Symphony, and was the first to hold that position. His title track, *A l'aventure!*, was featured on the orchestra's South American tour early in his tenure. It was also selected as Best Orchestral Work in the 1991 SOCAN competition. Originally performed by the Orchestre Métropolitain under Walter Boudreau's direction in 1990, that premiere performance is presented on this recording.

This Centrediscs release features four representative works: *A l'aventure!* (1990) and *Heureux qui, comme...* (1987), both previously available, and two new releases on CD, *Jeux de cordes* (1995) and the 2002 composition *Clere Vénus*. Walter Boudreau conducts both the Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal and the SMCQ Ensemble

(Société de musique contemporaine du Québec) in three of the four tracks; the 4th track features the impeccable ensemble playing of Switzerland's Erato String Quartet.

The first track, *A l'aventure!*, is a sonic adventure, an orchestral kaleidoscope of colours and textures from the lyrical, brooding and spare phrases to the unpredictable and the unexpected. Strong contrasts and elements of surprise characterize this piece. Gougeon's score is dynamic and energetic, dramatically captured by the capable playing of the Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montreal. Like *À l'aventure*, the exuberant and exhilarating song of joy *Heureux qui, comme*, featuring soprano Marie-Danielle Parent and the ensemble of the SMCQ, has been previously available on compact disc. It is an extended vocalise for soprano and chamber ensemble, showcasing Marie-Danielle Parent's pure, crystalline, lyric coloratura soprano. The music is technically demanding yet accessible to the listener, as Marie-Danielle soars with ease through these phrases with her nimble voice. Dynamically and color-wise, she switches on a dime. Orientalism and pentatonic scales are sonorities exuded by this piece, for Gougeon's aesthetic is concerned above all with communication. He describes himself as an "intuitive" composer who wishes to touch the listener emotionally, and he admits to being influenced by the

music of Claude Vivier and instrumental 20th-century French music.

Available for the first time is the effervescent *Jeux de cordes*, a five-movement work performed by the Erato String Quartet and recorded in the studio of Radio Suisse Romande in Geneva. Each movement or playing session lasts from three to five minutes. The vigorous ensemble playing of Switzerland's most renowned string quartet is electric. Again, the unpredictable is prevalent in these rich and moving melodic cells.

These three earlier works are complemented by the 2002 vocal composition on the final track, *Clere Vénus*. This work takes its inspiration from the 16th-century poet Louise Labé, who through her own oeuvre and the example of her literary salon, was one of the first to assert women's right to literary creation. Gougeon takes seven sonnets as his text for this work, which is also performed by Marie-Danielle Parent. Combining perfect diction, meticulous shading and exquisite phrasing, Parent again reveals the liquid gold of her voice, heady in emotional

power, matchless in line and legato. One hears incandescent tone both in her powerful singing and in the emotionally charged spoken delivery of the Labé sonnets, all of which is a testament to Gougeon's formidable skills in the handling of formal design and orchestral colour, features for which he has been justifiably celebrated.

The selections are well chosen, for they provide a good cross-section of his oeuvre. The sound engineering is first rate, the performances superb and compelling throughout. Highly recommended for your music library.

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