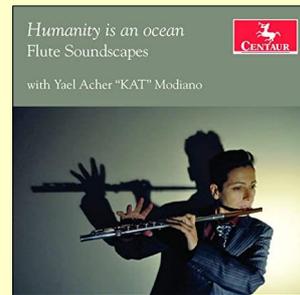




Fauré: The 13 Barcarolles
Namji Kim, flutist
(Centaur)



"A Musical Bouquet," Shannon Lowe,
bassoon, and friends
(MSR Classics)



"Humanity is an Ocean," flute
soundscapes – Yael Acher "Kat"
Modiano, flute (Centaur)

Korea-born pianist Namji Kim holds degrees from the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique (Paris) and the Juilliard School and the Manhattan School of Music (New York). A competition prizewinner and a sought-after concert soloist, she is currently Professor of Piano at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

Kim brings all her experiences into play in her accounts of the 13 Barcarolles of Gabriel Fauré. That's important because these works must be performed with the naturalness that is the last fine accomplishment of the true keyboard artist. They exemplify the paradox we often find in great music in that the simplest-sounding music is often the most difficult to play and to perform with conviction.

Fauré composed his 13 Barcarolles over a period from 1880 to 1921. There is little information to suggest they enjoyed any great popularity or that the composer ever played them in public. They are still under-performed today. That's a pity because there are so many utterly delightful moments in these pieces, as Kim reveals for us.

They tend to fall into two groups. Numbers 1-6 were composed in the main part of Fauré's career, and one finds numerous passing nods in tribute to his predecessors such as Brahms, Schumann, Liszt, and especially Felix Mendelssohn, in various pieces that play like songs without words. 7-13 were products of his later period and exhibit greater dissonances, frequent use of chromaticism, and whole-tone scales, in part a response to what was then happening in French music.

Shannon Lowe, currently Assistant Professor of Bassoon and Aural Skills at the University of Florida, is really a dynamite performer on her chosen instrument, as we find abundantly on display in "A Musical Bouquet," together with a little help from her friends. The program ranges from the 17th century to the present era and allows her to display the bassoon's best assets: its hauntingly rich, deep voice and its ability to scamper up and down scale passages with an alacrity you might not have guessed in so large an instrument.

All the resources of the double reed come into play in a contemporary work, *Dança de Lisboa* (Dances of Lisbon) for bassoon and string quintet by French composer Alexis Ciesla (b.1967). Coruscating dark raw umber colors in the opening give way to brighter hues and scintillating rhythms, with even some *Fado* influence, never failing to explore the expressive voice of Shannon's instrument.

Playful call-and-response between the bassoon and the two violins is only one intriguing feature in *La Vendetta* by 17th century Venetian composer Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677). Together with the beautiful use of cantilena by the composer, who was also a celebrated singer, we are given a lot of musical pleasure in the space of only two and a half minutes.

Two French contemporaries, François Devienne (1759-1803) and Edouard Du Puy (1770-1822) are represented, respectively, by a Quartet in G minor and a Quintet in A minor, both of which show how the bassoon, thanks in part

Yael Acher, a.k.a. "KAT" Modiano is a unique phenomenon on a number of counts. The flutist is equally fluent in jazz and classical music, as the present album bears witness. She began learning the flute at the age of 9, and went on to study in Israel and Denmark before moving to New York to study composition at NYU and receive a Master of Arts degree in Liberal Studies from Empire State College in 2018, specializing in Music for Social Change. She is involved in acoustic and electro-acoustic music in all sorts of idioms: contemporary, classical, improvisatory, progressive jazz, electronic-acoustic, and tango, in settings ranging from live music for silent films to music for choreography.

"KAT" starts off the program with an inspired arrangement of J.S. Bach's Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007, originally for solo cello, that preserves the semi-improvisational character of the original while realizing it in terms of what the flute does best. In a work in which the solo instrument has to assume the roles of both melody and accompaniment, the greater flexibility and fluency of Kat's flute makes a very favorable impression. In particular, the movements evocative of the dance (*Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, *Menuet*, and *Gigue*) seem lither, more dancelike, in the arrangements we are given here.

Humanity is an Ocean, Kat's own composition in three variations on an original motif, is based on a saying of Mahatma Gandhi that counsels us to trust in humanity: "If a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty." Kat puts a lot of herself

What is a barcarolle? Essentially, it is a music genre inspired by the romantic songs of the Venetian gondoliers, almost invariably set in a swaying 6/8 metre in moderate time that suggests the oar-strokes of the singer. Do not expect any of Fauré's barcarolles to resemble the most famous example of the genre, that of Chopin in F-sharp major with a passionate upsurge of emotion in the second half. Fauré was not that kind of composer. Mostly, his barcarolles win us over with their soft caresses in the way of dreamy melodies, liquid tonalities, and a kaleidoscope of subtly changing colors.

A good example is No. 6 in E-flat major with its sunny mood, its perky melody in start-and-stop phrases, and its demure second theme, leading to passages in quirky dynamics in which quiet, gracefully phrased statements are answered by loud outbursts before the return of the sunny main theme. As do so many of the 13 Barcarolles, this one seems to have been born for a popularity that has somehow managed to elude it. That is an omission that performances like those we are given here by Namji Kim may help to rectify.

to its distinctive penetrating tone, can stand out amidst an ensemble of strings. The former is an example of Devienne's mature galante style, with the violin competing with the bassoon for pride of place in the graceful, handsome soloistic sections that offer the listener much pure delight. The Du Puy, product of a composer who was also a violinist and singer, combines virtuosic writing for the bassoon with intriguing thematic developments in a well-crafted work that never fails to charm the listener.

Potpourri on *Zampa* by Carl Jacobi (1791-1852) recalls themes from Louis Hérold's once-celebrated opera that is remembered today mostly for its absolutely delightful overture. The carefree rhythms, musical hijinks, and technical fireworks of the original, superbly recalled by Jacobi, still make news in a sparkling account by Lowe and her friends.

Finally, *Die gute nacht, die ich dir sage* (The good night which I say to you), a token of endearment by Clara Schumann to her husband Robert, benefits from Shannon Lowe's own intelligent and expressive setting, making a satisfying conclusion to the present program.

Let's not forget to credit Shannon's friends, whose contributions add so much to a thoroughly enjoyable album: Kristin Pfeiffer Yu and Ken Davis, violins; Laurel Yu, viola; Steven Taylor, cello; and Maurice Belle, double bass.

into her performance, visualizing "a time when nonviolence, inclusiveness, selflessness, and unconditional love for all nature and all beings are fundamental values in our cultures." (How timely *that* message is for present-day America!)

The latter half of the program is devoted to Kat's compositions based on poetic texts by her contemporary Ilya Bernstein. The poems themselves are cryptic enough, in a pithy style that may strike the reader as having something of the nature of Haiku in an American setting. The spareness and the focus on the individual image are certainly there in such a lyric as "A pigeon glides so slowly to the top of a streetlight that you could almost think it was a red-tailed hawk," an observation that recalls the often-paradoxical manner of Haiku.

Another memorable Bernstein line from *The White Sail of Solitude* captures the awareness that "Focusing on the pavement with my footsteps I feel awake so deeply I might as well be asleep," the paradox being, I suppose, that our minds are never so active as when we are sleeping. Of a desire for permanence, Bernstein counsels the reader, "If you want to walk far along the ocean, I can tell you you must walk the narrow way on hard sand. Walking on that sand, right after water drains from it, you leave behind the clearer footprints."

The best tribute I can think of in regard to Kat's solo flute pieces inspired by Bernstein's poetry is that they track the poet's thoughts as perfect correlatives, in beautiful sine curves of sound that enrapture and illuminate our minds.