



Yardani Torres MAIANI (b. 1988)

Asterias – The Starlit Night

- Lamento gitano (farruca)* [6:02]
 - Fandango popular (fandango de Huelva)* [5:37]
 - Yahaïouni (compas moro)* [5:29]
 - De roche et de jade (minera)* [11:51]
 - El afilaor de Torremolinos* [6:22]
 - Le Rhône d'Albaron (cancion de cuna)* [6:36]
 - Conductus Maris (solea)* [2:49]
 - Abbaye de sel (tientos)* [8:06]
 - Amaro drom (tango flamenco)* [6:03]
- Yardani Torres Maiani (solo violin)
 Armande Galloway (violin); Raïlo Helmstetter (guitar);
 Elisabeth Geiger (harpsichord); Anton Florenza Fabregat
 (double-bass); Natalie Forthomme (cello); Guillaume Leroy
 (viola)

rec. La Courroie, Entraigues-sur-la-Sorgue, France; date unspecified

HARMONIA MUNDI HMN916116 [59:01]



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On paper Yardani Torres Maiani is an Andalusian-born violinist and composer; reading between the lines, however it is perhaps more pertinent to describe him as a pragmatic musical traveller. In *Asterias* he has attempted to combine the flavours of his personal musical experience which encompasses *flamenco* (his birthright), formal musical training (his conservatoire studies locally in Málaga, further afield in Avignon and Geneva), and French gypsy music (via his extended sojourn in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, the Camarguais epicentre of that tradition). As it is difficult from my own perspective to pithily characterise Maiani's objectives in *Asteria*, it might be helpful to quote the composer's own words (adapted from Harmonia Mundi's excellent documentation):

"*Asteria* was conceived in such a way as to avoid any facile reference to *flamenco* as a genre. The intended result is, on the contrary, to refine, to discard all that is extraneous, to keep only what's essential in the hope arriving at the heart, at the quintessence of this fascinating and sometimes mysterious music we call *flamenco*. *Asteria*... Is not a set of instructions, nor is it a musical form, or a type of ensemble, or a feeling, or simply a piece of music.... *Asteria* is none of these.... and yet all of these at once! "For *Asteria* – like *flamenco* – is a way of life, an ethos, like the night sky filled with stars, its unity lies in its multiplicity."

In a nutshell then, each of Asteria's nine panels seek to meld melody, harmony, rhythm and colour drawn from a diversity of seemingly discrete musical traditions, but at the core of each of them is the essence of *flamenco*. Maiani himself takes up the soloistic duties at the head of a flexible ensemble/continuo which consists of string quartet with harpsichord, guitar and double-bass. A couple of the pieces additionally incorporate a voice (Luis de la Carrasca) and *flamenco*-style *palmas* (hand-claps).

The opening *Lamento gitano* is a darkly slow piece led by cello and harpsichord. It recalls Astor Piazzolla at his earthiest. The delightful guitar stylings that emerge halfway through lighten the load and draw out some passionate gipsy spontaneity from Maiani's violin. The playing is simultaneously raw and sophisticated; of a sudden it rushes to a rapid, abrupt conclusion. It's followed by a peppery *Fandango popular*, punctuated by those *palmas* and a gipsy guitar that recalls prime Hot Club Django Reinhardt. Luis de la Carrasca's throaty tenor soars plaintively over the central section. It ends rather tartly. *Yahaïouni (compas moro)* is an exotic violin solo which hints both at North African influences and contemporary music. It constitutes a pungent and pithy calling-card for Maiani's own compelling fiddling, brusque and raw on the one hand, ethereal and soulful on the other.

The structural and emotional hub of *Asteria* seems to be its extended fourth section, *De roche et de jade*, one of only two movements which make use of the entire ensemble. Clocking in at just under twelve minutes, it begins in a dustbowl of strident string shards which recall the rough-hewn textures of (for example) the opening movement of Manuel de Falla's Harpsichord Concerto. The chordal interjections that separate them intensify, and some more jazzy guitar begins to compete with the two violins. A couple of harmonic progressions seem especially 'Andaluz'. A Scarlattian harpsichord break presages a change in mood and pace, and the movement morphs into a stately, but overwhelmingly morose *chaconne*-like procession, led by yet more of Rãilo Helmstetter atmospheric, Metheny-esque guitar work. The solo violin now returns to riff around some of these guitar ideas. I found this the most profound and compelling section in the whole sequence. Although it makes use of all the instruments, Maiani tends to deploy just three or four at any one time. The overall effect is of an oddly sepulchral Mediterranean jazz chamber music which lingers long in the memory.

El afilaor de Torremolinos is surprisingly astringent and more experimental than the companion movements. Even when an approachable lyricism breaks out in the solo violin, it is swiftly inundated by the wild dissonances of the harpsichord-led chordal accompaniment. The booklet describes it as 'sensual buzzing'; it's not a phrase to which I can really connect here. The music does briefly assume a more identifiably Iberian personality before reconnecting with its overwhelmingly acerbic character. It's likeable, if challenging. *Le Rhône d'Albaron* weaves a set of seemingly diffuse threads into an affecting lullaby which disintegrates into its original, singular components. The brief, rather tough *Conductus Maris* interpolates more *palmas* into a sea of densely arranged string dissonances. *Abbaye de sel* is another sun and sea-drenched number in which strings, by turn dissonant and impassioned encase another delightful guitar solo; the breathing textures at its end evoke bracing marine breezes. *Amaro drom*, a spiky duo for Maiani's solo violin and cello fuses *tango* and *flamenco* elements and completes the cycle.

There is a lot to like here: imaginative and impassioned playing on the part of the players, a compositional structure which is both strikingly original and varied enough to sustain focused listening and first-rate engineering by the excellent Alban Moraud which effortlessly blends suavity and earthiness. For my part, I have to confess I found my interest waning a little towards the end of the hour; I suppose some listeners may feel their attention is challenged by the homogeneity of Maiani's sound world – I would argue it might be worth playing two to three of the movements at a time, while the long fourth movement *De roche et de jade* actually constitutes an effective stand-alone piece.

In the final analysis *Asteria* is an aesthetically apt addition (the tenth) to Harmonia Mundi's new Harmonia Nova strand devoted to young artists, and I shall be keeping a close eye on Yardani Torres Maiani's future endeavours – he's clearly an intriguing figure with a magpie spirit who promises much in both instrumental and compositional terms.

Richard Hanlon