

KOECHLIN Andante quasi adagio ("Au loin"). 4 Sonatines, op. 87. *L'Album de Lilian*: 1er Recueil, op. 139; 2me Recueil, op. 149. *Paysages et marines*, op. 63 • Michael Korstick (pn) • HÄNSSLER 93.220 (76:27) - Fanfare Review

If this doesn't make believers of the curious or wavering, nothing will. This generous and representative program is cunningly composed, so to speak, putting Koechlin's most smilingly accessible face—the four op. 87 Sonatines and the *Albums de Lilian*—Janus-like fore and aft, flanking the dozen *Paysages et marines*, whose landscapes and seascapes are esoteric inscapes registering the experience of a personality dominated by a strong psychic component whose evocations seem to range from the tenuous to the nebulous, until they settle on the avid ear and the receptive mind to reveal a delicate and telling poetry.

The aura of revelation owes largely to the divinations of Michael Korstick, who brings an effortless poise, point, and certainty where other, notably sympathetic, performers—Mireille Guillaume in the sonatines and Deborah Richards in *Paysages et marines* (cpo 999 054-2, *Fanfare* 16:3)—loom, in comparison, as tentative and searching. Korstick recently gave us one of the very few recorded performances of the Liszt Sonata since the turn of the century to, so to speak, make it new and viable to jaded ears (cpo 777 478-2, *Fanfare* 33:5). The hyper-virtuosic technique at work there underwrites these accounts, though the difficulties posed by Koechlin's keyboard writing are not of the usual virtuosic sort. Korstick has them all easily in hand, graced with delicate flourishes of color and an intuitive sense of Koechlin's dawning *luminosité* lending the sonatines a radiant playfulness and suffusing the little pieces composed for silent-screen actress Lilian Harvey with glowing charm. There is, by the way, more to the *Albums de Lilian* than these piano pieces—both collections, including the songs and chamber pieces, were given exemplary performances by flutist Fenwick Smith and colleagues in a currently out-of-print but indispensable issue (Hyperion CDA 66414, *Fanfare* 14:3) written into the Hall of Fame in *Fanfare* 15:3. In the upshot, some of Koechlin's most beguiling work has, at long last, received the loving attention of a major artist—and forth the particulars of rapture come! Korstick's piano is captured with an intimate, detailed, but never overbearing presence. Not merely enthusiastically recommended but urged upon you. Adrian Corleonis

**Classical music review: Koechlin: Piano Works Vol 1
The Guardian by Andrew Clements Rating: 3*/5***

Though it has still only scratched the surface of Charles Koechlin's vast and still scarcely known output, Hänssler has temporarily, at least, abandoned its

exploration of his orchestral works to begin a series devoted to the piano music. There are nine works included in this first instalment; none is very substantial. The longest movement is the early seven-minute Andante Quasi Adagio with which Michael Korstick begins his sequence, while most of the movements in the cycle *Paysages et Marines* completed in 1916, or in each of the four Sonatines Op 87, composed in the mid 1920s, lasts around two minutes. Slight they may be, but all are pieces of a very specific and refined sensibility; the almost childlike simplicity of some of the writing belies its technical difficulty. There's nothing pianistic about Koechlin's piano music, for all its echoes of Debussy, Ravel and Fauré. Korstick never even hints at those challenges; his performances have exactly the quiet authority and poetry this elusive music needs. He also supplies the fascinating and informative sleeve notes to this immaculately presented disc.

Koechlin: L'Ancienne Maison de Campagne Op 124; Sonatines Op 59; 12 Esquisses Op 41 etc – review - Michael Korstick
The Guardian Review by Andrew Clements Rating: 4*/5*

The third instalment of Michael Korstick's exploration of Charles Koechlin's piano music is, if anything, even more engaging and teasingly elusive than its predecessors. For Koechlin was one of the most protean of composers, impossible to categorise or to fit comfortably into a neatly ordered scheme of 20th-century music, and always liable to spring a surprise. Styles vary even within a single collection of miniatures – the 12 Esquisses, for instance, composed between 1905 and 1910, conjure up associations with Bach, Chopin and Scriabin in turn. Other pieces register their natural French affiliations more obviously, whether the connections are with Ravel, Satie or Fauré, while the childhood memories evoked in the 12 pieces that make up *L'Ancienne Maison de Campagne*, from the late 1920s, are couched in a language that pushes often pushes the boundaries of tonal harmony. Korstick also plays the two of the *Dances pour Ginger* Op 163 written for solo piano, a tribute to Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire and a product of Koechlin's deep fascination with Hollywood movies. Like everything else on this charming collection, he allows their flavour to come through perfectly naturally.

Amazon Review by J. Scott Morrison Rating: 5*/5*

Charles Louis Eugène Koechlin (1867-1950) was born into a rich family originally from Alsace (hence the Germanic surname which is pronounced approximately kaykLAN, the 'n' nasalized). He was a student of Massenet, Gedalge and Fauré and became known primarily not as a composer but as a teacher and theorist.

However, he was extremely prolific, amassing over 200 opus numbers. He wrote in all forms and is perhaps best remembered for his orchestral works, some inspired by the works of Rudyard Kipling (e.g., 'The Jungle Book', 'Les Bandar-log'). He was obsessed with movie stars and wrote dozens of works inspired by a now-forgotten early movie star, Lilian Harvey. He also wrote a 'Symphony of Seven Stars' with movements inspired by the likes of Harvey, Douglas Fairbanks, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and Charlie Chaplin. He also wrote much piano music and the works on this disc are the third in a series of piano works recorded by the adventuresome German pianist Michael Korstick, a remarkably talented pianist whom I first heard as a student and was impressed by at the Aspen Music Festival thirty-odd years ago. Korstick has recorded other French music, including all of Milhaud's piano concertos [Milhaud: Complete Works for Piano & Orchestra](#), as well the complete Beethoven sonatas.

This disc contains mostly miniatures comprising thirty-six tracks, some lasting less than a minute. It begins with two 'Dances pour Ginger', inspired by Ginger Rogers. The first is a little jazzy and the second clearly takes Satie's Gymnopédies as its inspiration. The neoclassical Sonatines, Op. 59, Nos. 1 & 3, for children, use melodies sung by the composer's young son. The 'Andante con moto' lay undiscovered and unplayed in a drawer for over 100 years. It is given its first performance here.

The suite 'L'Ancienne Maison de campagne' ('The Old Country House') has thirteen small character pieces inspired by Koechlin's memories of a summer spent at the old family place on Lake Zurich. Among the pieces is 'The Old Fountain' which must have been somewhat faulty as one hears dripping rather than flowing. 'The Piano Lesson' depicts a young student struggling with a Clementi sonatina and then dreaming of other things before bringing it to a prestissimo conclusion with a bang. 'Games' depicts children's games like Puss-in-the-corner. 'Rowing on the Lake' shimmers and quotes both Milhaud and Fauré. 'Morning in the Woods' is a memory of running in the dense woods and pretending to be lost in a jungle. The final section is 'Youth Viewed from the Threshold of Old Age', a kind of summing up.

'Pièce pour piano' was written for a sight-reading class. It demands much of the sight-reader as it is partially polytonal. 'Douze Esquisses' ('Twelve Sketches', first series) have a calm probity reminiscent of Koechlin's most influential teacher, Gabriel Fauré. Bach is also hiding in the background. Michael Korstick, in his note in the booklet, comments that he hears traces of Scriabin in Esquisse No. 4 and Chopin appears in the left hand of No. 10.

This is an utterly absorbing disc which repays multiple hearings. I kept finding new things to marvel at. Korstick's playing is both convinced and convincing about the music's worth.

Scott Morrison