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## **Chopin/Field Nocturnes - Bart van Oort - ClassicsToday**

### **THE ART OF THE NOCTURNE IN THE 19TH CENTURY**

Review by: Jed Distler   *Artistic Quality: 9*   *Sound Quality: 9*

This boxed set gathers John Field's pioneering piano Nocturnes alongside all 21 of Chopin's works in the genre, together with interesting nocturnes by their contemporaries, including Camille Pleyel, Frédéric Kalkbrenner, Clara Schumann, Charles-Valentin Alkan, and Maria Szymanowska, among others. Pianist Bart van Oort employs an 1823 Broadwood throughout the Field selections, and takes full advantage of the misty half-tints resulting from the instrument's sustain pedal. This is not to say that van Oort wallows in coloristic effects, for a strong, decisive left hand propels his brisk, no-nonsense tempos. The Seventh Nocturne's steady left-hand chords, for example, take on a twangy resonance that creates a hypnotic cumulative effect unlike any modern-instrument interpretation I've heard on disc. No. 11's left-hand triplet figurations also come to the fore with an almost Beethovenian urgency that transports the music from the salon to the saloon!

Similar qualities hold true in the Chopin Nocturnes, divided between an 1842 Pleyel and an 1837 Erard, where the instruments' wider dynamic compass and registral differentiation give convincing sonorous voice to van Oort's conceptions. He brings more nervous energy than usual to the "easy" G minor Nocturnes, and a long-lined sense of proportion to the often pounded-out middle sections of the F major (Op. 15 No. 1) and C minor (Op. 48 No. 1) selections. While Op. 55 No. 2's inspired two-part polyphony lacks clarity and Op. 62 No. 1's trills are not as sexy as they should be, van Oort more than compensates with stylish, well-considered embellishments in the posthumous C-sharp minor Nocturne, the A-flat Op. 32 No. 2, and the hackneyed Op. 9 No. 2. As both scholar and musical communicator, van Oort clearly knows what he's doing, and he complements his absorbing interpretations with equally cogent booklet notes. A release well worth seeking out. [8/11/2005]

## **Frédéric Chopin & John Field: The Complete Nocturnes Review by James Leonard - 4 1/2\*/5\***

A wonderful idea brilliantly executed, **Bart van Oort's** four-disc set entitled The

Art of the Nocturne is not only an in-depth examination of one of the most romantic of romantic musical forms, but also a really sexy set of seduction discs that cannot fail to warm even the coldest heart. The first disc in **Oort**'s survey includes all the elegantly expressive Nocturnes of Irish-Russian composer **John Field**, the second and third discs include all the supremely sensual Nocturnes of Polish-French composer Frédéric Chopin, and the fourth disc includes individual Nocturnes by various contemporaries of **Chopin**, of whom the best known are **Clara Schumann** and **Charles-Valentin Alkan** and the least known is **Ignacy Feliks Dobrzynski**. **Oort** is a sensitive and soulful player with supple technique, and, thankfully, he simply plays the music and doesn't impose an interpretation on it. Played on a clear, warm 1837 Erard, **Oort**'s superlative performances of **Chopin**'s Nocturnes may not beat the best ever recorded, but in context of his unsurpassed performances of **Field**, **Alkan**, and, it goes without saying, **Dobrzynski**, they are completely convincing and entirely satisfying. Brilliant's sound is clean and open.

## **Nocturnes (complete) - The Art of the Nocturne in the Nineteenth Century - MusicWeb Review**

### **Fryderyk CHOPIN (1810-1849)**

1. Nocturne Op. 9 No. 1 in B flat minor
2. Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2 in E flat major
3. Nocturne Op. 9 No. 3 in B major
4. Nocturne in E minor Op. 72 No. 1
5. Nocturne Op. 15 No. 1 in F major
6. Nocturne Op. 15 No. 2 in F sharp major
7. Nocturne Op. 15 No. 3 in G minor
8. Nocturne Op. 32 No. 1 in B major
9. Nocturne Op. 32 No. 2 in A flat major
10. Nocturne Op. 62 No. 1 in B major
11. Nocturne Op. 62 No. 2 in E major
12. Nocturne in C sharp Op. Posth.
13. Nocturne in C sharp minor Op.27 No.1
14. Nocturne in D flat major Op.27 No.2
15. Nocturne in G minor Op.37 No.1
16. Nocturne in G major Op.37 No.2
17. Nocturne in C minor Op.48 No.1
18. Nocturne in F sharp minor Op.48 No.2
19. Nocturne in F minor Op. 55 No.1
20. Nocturne in E flat major Op.55 No.2
21. Nocturne in C minor Op. Posth.

Bart van Oort (piano) Pleyel 1842

Recorded September 1998 and June, September and October 2003, Maria Minor,

Utrecht

**John FIELD (1782-1837)**

1. Nocturne in E flat major H24
2. Nocturne in C minor H25
3. Nocturne in A flat major H26
4. Nocturne in A major H36
5. Nocturne 5 in B flat major H37
6. Nocturne in F major H40
7. Nocturne in A major H14e
9. Nocturne in E flat major H30
10. Nocturne in E minor H46b
11. Nocturne in E flat major H56a
12. Nocturne in G major H58d
13. Nocturne in D minor H59
14. Nocturne in F major H62a
15. Nocturne in E major H54f

Bart van Oort (piano) Broadwood 1823

Recorded 26-29 June 1995, Doopsgezinds Kerk, Haarlem

**Camille PLEYEL (1788-1855)**

Nocturne alla Field in B flat major

**Frederic KALKBRENNER (1785-1849)**

Nocturne in A flat major Op.121 No.1 \*

Nocturne in F major Op.121 No.2

**Clara SCHUMANN (1819-1896)**

Nocturne in F major Op.6 No.2 from Soirees Musicales

**Louis LEFÉBURE-WÉLY (1817-1870)**

Nocturne in D flat major Op.54

**Edmond WEBER**

Nocturne in D flat major Op.1

**Charles-Valentin ALKAN (1813-1888)**

Nocturne in B major Op.22

Notturimo Innamorato in F sharp minor Op.63 No.43

**Mikhail GLINKA (1804-1857)**

Nocturne in E flat major

**Maria SZYMANOWSKÁ (1789-1831)**

La Murmure – Nocturne in A flat major

**Ignacy Feliks DOBRZYNSKI (1807-1867)**

Nocturne in G minor Op.21 No.1

Nocturne in E flat major Op.21 No.2

Nocturne in F minor Op.24 No.1

Nocturne in D flat major Op.24 No.2

Pozeganie-Nocturne in G minor

Bart van Oort (piano) Erard 1837

Agnieszka Chabowska (piano) \*

Recorded January and June 2003, Maria Minor, Utrecht

**BRILLIANT CLASSICS 92202** [4 CDs: 58.21 + 49.39 + 66.30 + 66.58]

Brilliant have had the imagination to construct a box that contains the embodiment of the Nocturne – the works of Field and Chopin – and its subsequent late nineteenth century realisation. Invariably it's the final disc, with so many intriguingly familiar and unfamiliar names, that will draw the most interest but the heart consists of the reissued and here consolidated performances of Field and Chopin that van Oort recorded in 1995 and 1998 (though he recorded a number of the Chopin Nocturnes in 2003 to complete the set). The results are valuable if interpretatively uneven.

His Chopin is hit and miss. The famous E flat major Op.9 No.2, which he plays on an 1842 Pleyel (his other Chopin instrument is an 1837 Erard), is rather metrical, with overstressed left hand and rather charmless ornaments. Op. 72 No.1 is equally disappointing and very superficial, and the F major Op.15 No.3 sees the melody line disappear in the left hand under a welter of undifferentiated voicings. Maybe it's the Pleyel but I can't help feeling it's van Oort. But then his Op. posth, C sharp minor, is intriguingly different with a slow and rather backward start contradicted by some increasingly confident and crisp playing. These were all recorded in 1998 and it's significant that his 2003 recordings show a marked improvement in his playing. There's a good climax to Op.27 No.1 and some well judged dramatic contrasts and the D flat major from the same set is sensitive if quite slow. I very much enjoyed Op. 55 No.2 and felt overall that I wished he'd re-recorded the first CD in the light of his increased experience and command in the repertoire.

His Field hasn't the Romantic span of such as Myra Hess or Denis Matthews but neither has it the more vertical astringency of, say, Richard Burnett. Van Oort plays an 1823 Broadwood, whilst Burnett played various fortepianos of the time – an 1815 Viennese model and a Clementi cabinet of 1825. Van Oort is very much intent on bringing out the singing legato of Field's writing whereas Burnett is determined to bring some salt and brine into the sedate salon. The result – though I wouldn't want to take the comparison too far – is that van Oort's Field is serious and meditative and Burnett's is full of piquant harmonies and hesitations and humour. In the E flat major for example (H24) we find that van Oort is more lateral and romanticised (not unattractively so) whilst Burnett is more vertical chordally and has a more incisive and mobile bass. It would be caricature to say that van Oort is all legato and Burnett all staccato but that represents some divergence of approach. But Van Oort's A major, one of Field's most beautiful, takes a long time to get going and doesn't ever really take flight. Seriousness need not necessarily preclude lightness of tone and texture.

Disc Four, entitled Nocturnes of Contemporaries, is something of a delight. Pleyel's dedicatory Nocturne alla Field begins in wonderfully mysterious fashion, Clara Schumann pays obeisance to Chopin in her F major work and little known Edmond Weber gives us echt Chopin tracery in his Op 1. No fireworks from Alkan here, just attractive imitation, and one of the most beautiful of these works is Glinka's – nearly six minutes of undiluted pleasure. Maria Szymanowska announces theatre in her A flat major Nocturne with its dramatically incisive rolled chords and Ignacy Feliks Dobrzynski displays a simple and charming generosity in his contributions to the genre – there are five here and the F minor has an especial gravity, with its repetitively mobile left hand. Van Oort responds to these works with freshness and care.

Given that this is more a conspectus than a first choice set I would recommend you sample van Oort's way with Chopin and Field to see if you appreciate it – in this respect CD3 is far preferable to CD2 when it comes to Chopin. Those inquisitive as to the influence of the Nocturne in France, Poland, Germany and Russia might want to acquaint themselves with the final disc in the set, which is enjoyable all the way. Such are the perils of a boxed set.

***Jonathan Woolf***