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Mademoiselle (review)

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Notes, Volume 66, Number 3, March 2010, pp. 636-637 (Review)

Published by Music Library Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.0.0267>

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opening segment explores what Artemis cellist Eckert Runge describes as “a four-way marriage” (“*Heirat zu viert*”) between the quartet’s members, a complex relationship that demands extraordinary dedication and sacrifice, a willingness to share one’s strengths and to improve upon one’s weaknesses, and the ability to make compromises for the sake of the whole. In the film’s second act, the give-and-take of this unique relationship is made more tangible as Monsaingeon takes viewers inside the Artemis Quartet’s rehearsal space as they continue their then two-year journey through Beethoven’s *Große Fuge*. As the ensemble works meticulously to clarify their interpretation and to reach a common understanding of the piece, it becomes clear that no detail is too small to escape the quartet’s attention. For example, a lengthy discussion about an articulation yields two different interpretations that violist Volker Jacobsen, who is recruited to decide between the two, believes to be so similar that he “can’t tell the difference” between them. Just as passions begin to take over, violinist Natalia Prischepenko diffuses the tension by suggesting that the quartet play one of the proposed articulations with their eyes closed, and, after following her advice, the musicians return to laughter. This vignette offers great insight into the complicated and nuanced musical and social dy-

namics of the string quartet and serves as a valuable masterclass in communication.

Strings Attached concludes with the Artemis Quartet’s 2001 performance of Beethoven’s *Große Fuge*, which confirms the value of such a detailed approach by presenting a nuanced performance of this dense work that reveals not only its extraordinary counterpoint but its manic emotional range without sounding overwrought or hysterical. The second film, culled from the same Paris recital, gives further evidence that their approach yields interesting musical experiences that gratify intellectually and emotionally, particularly in their readings of Beethoven’s Op. 18, No. 2 quartet and Webern’s Six Bagatelles, Op. 6. Monsaingeon skillfully directs the viewer’s attention toward the subtle communicative acts that are required to create a convincing musical message, using tight shots to capture the eye movements of the individual musicians and wide-angle shots to highlight the interpersonal dialogue of more conversational passages. As a result, this DVD stands not only as an insightful portrait of one of the most engaging contemporary string quartets but as required viewing for anyone who seeks to understand the complex processes of musical collaboration.

TRAVIS D. STIMELING
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Mademoiselle. DVD. A film by Bruno Monsaingeon. [France]: Medici Arts: Idéale Audience International. 2007, 1977. DVD5DM41. \$25.99.

This recently released DVD of Bruno Monsaingeon’s film about Nadia Boulanger’s approaches to teaching, students, and musical taste, is little changed from its original 1977 production. Although it lacks the original’s iconic opening, a clip from the movie *Love Story* in which Boulanger is mentioned, the remaining material provides a brief glimpse into Boulanger’s studio, and in particular the famous Wednesday classes held at her Paris home.

Viewers are treated to nearly an hour of footage of Boulanger working with an assortment of students on works by Mozart, Stravinsky, Schumann, and Bach. Filmed just two years before Boulanger’s death in 1979, and before her health began to de-

cline seriously, the documentary captures aspects of Boulanger at her intellectual peak as well as showing her as she often was during her last years. In the former, we see her use of the Socratic method in group teaching as she cross-examines a class of students during an analysis of Schumann’s *Davidstbündlertänze*. While seated for the lesson, she is animated, snatching the pianist’s hands away from the keyboard to ask about the progressions that have just taken place, asking the students to sing the melodic line, and pushing them to dig past the obvious answers to her sometime—and perhaps deliberately—vague questions to find meaning and structure beyond the basics of the work. During the same session, though, we see glimpses of the older woman in a

moment of reverie during Mozart's *Fantasie* in C minor in which she dreamily narrates the harmonic events of the first movement as they go by. Here she is clearly speaking more to herself than the students clustered around her, and her commentary rarely goes beyond marking the large-scale events of the work, noting a modulation here, a cadence there, the return of a motif.

The film is too short to serve as an in-depth portrait of Boulanger either as a teacher or as a champion of new music during the twentieth century, although interviews with Igor Markevitch and Leonard Bernstein allude to her promotion of Stravinsky and the interest she took in young American composers during her long career. An interview with Monsiegeon interpolated through the film touches on her belief in God as the creator

of musical gift in individuals, and her belief that musicians so gifted have a responsibility to pass on and further that knowledge for others, as she has.

The DVD's packaging and accompanying booklet make it clear that *Mademoiselle* has not been updated since its 1977 release, and unfortunately the transfer for this release is rather poor. Especially disappointing is the lack of an audio remastering; the sound fades in and out, and worse, there is considerable distortion in the music that is played, making listening to the excerpts and performances in the film almost painful. Nonetheless, *Mademoiselle* is an interesting if by no means comprehensive record of Boulanger's last years of teaching.

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Wagner's Mastersinger, Hitler's Siegfried: The Life and Times of Max Lorenz. DVD. Directed by Eric Schulz and Claus Wischmann. Leipzig: EuroArts Music International, 2009, 2008. 2056928. \$24.99.

Tannhäuser in 80 Minuten, Opernparodie nach der gleichnamigen Oper von Richard Wagner. DVD. With Robert Meyer and Neue Wiener Concert Schrammeln. Music by Carl Binder. Libretto by Johann Nestroy. [Germany]: Phoenix Music Media, 2008. 804. \$29.99.

Max Lorenz is acclaimed universally as one of the greatest Wagnerian tenors of all time, but his reputation has been tarnished somewhat over the years by his alliance with the Bayreuth Festival during the years when Winifred Wagner openly accepted Hitler and the Nazi party as partners in reinvigorating the festival after years of decline. Lorenz made his debut there in 1933 and became the most highly prized singer on the roster, particularly as Siegfried. Like many artists of that time, Lorenz chose to distance himself from politics and stayed in Germany for his art. He was married to a Jew and was known to be homosexual, but his artistic clout saved him and his family. While he figured prominently in the Nazi propaganda that came out of Bayreuth, he was never a party member and after the war was allowed to travel abroad to perform, including to New York and Paris. In his later years he was highly regarded as a teacher and mentor, with the American helden-

tenors James King and Jess Thomas among his students.

This recent documentary makes no attempt to hide Lorenz' association with the Nazis, but it does not judge him, and it does cite his protection of his Jewish family and homosexual colleagues at Bayreuth. The focus of the film is Lorenz the artist, and the many audio and video clips of him attest to his greatness. Preeminent among the commentators are the singers Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Rene Kollo, Waldemar Kmentt, and Hilde Zadek, and it is delightful to watch their expressions as they listen to Lorenz sing: smiles, raised eyebrows, knowing glances, and lip-synced text reveal their admiration for their colleague. Film clips include a dress rehearsal for the 1934 *Götterdämmerung* at Bayreuth with Frida Leider and several television appearances from the 1960s, with performances of Strauss' song "Zueignung" and Otello's death from Verdi's opera, in which the