

THE ART MUSIC LOUNGE

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**PETITGIRARD: *États d'âme (States of Mind)*.⁺ *Solitaire. Le Marathon.* Flaine /*
⁺Michel Supéra, *a-sax*; Balász Kántor, *cello*; Hungarian Symphony Orch.
Budapest; Laurent Petitgirard, *cond* / Naxos 8.574034**

French composer Laurent Petitgirard, born in 1950, is described as an “accessible” modern composer of classical works. I was a bit wary of this description because, in my experience, “accessible” normally equates with Romantic or drippy music, but Petitgirard really does write fascinating pieces.

The principal piece on this album is his saxophone concerto *États d'âme* or *States of Mind* for alto sax and orchestra. This way well be the most intelligent use of the saxophone in a purely classical context I have ever heard. The soloist plays lyrical but bitonal lines around which the *orchestra* swirls in rising and falling figures, shifting in intensity from quiet to roiling and back again. Like many of the old-time concerti you may be used to, what the instrument plays is not always a reflection of what the ensemble plays; it is as if the soloist were giving a soliloquy to a fairly large and somewhat hostile audience that didn't much like what he had to say. And yet, at the same time, Petitgirard uses contrasting themes in a very creative way, sometimes developing and sometimes juxtaposing them, to create an overall ambience of sound that keeps morphing and shifting as the music goes on.

In the brief liner notes, Petitgirard explains that he has long been “disturbed by the ‘vocal’ dimension of the saxophone,” and thus saw creating this concerto as a natural extension of his thoughts. Both soloist and orchestra certainly explore a certain moodiness in the slow second movement, which contains more purely lyric moments for the orchestra as well as the soloist yet often shifts towards subtly disturbing harmonies. The restlessness one feels in the music comes not from its complete abandonment of tonality, as in the case of so many modern composers, but rather the fact that tonality is but one more place the music “visits” in its course and that it does not visit for long periods of time. When you reach a consonant passage, even if it lasts a minute or two, you know that sooner or later you're going to have a shift in an unexpected direction.

In the third movement, Petitgirard abandons whatever moments of comfort one felt in the second movement to produce music in a fast tempo, seemingly combining modern classical and Middle Eastern harmonies. A constantly repeating drum beat pattern is also set up, with a few moments of respite, behind the orchestra, and at the 2:25 mark he cleverly combines the solo alto sax with other reed instruments from the ensemble for a few bars. One of the many reasons why I liked this piece was because of its varied approach to composition in addition to the fact that Petitgirard knows how to pull these various elements together to create a cohesive whole. The music slows down around the 5:45 mark to allow the soloist to play a cadenza before resuming its drive towards the finale.