

# Tandem

*...hear the other one think...*

Where does the idea of recording repertoire for 2 violins originate from?

RO: *At the beginning stands our friend-violinmaker Jacques FUSTIER. We got acquainted in his workshop in Lyon, somehow planned by him.*

FA: *Raphael and Jacques had been close friends for many years and he felt that our personalities and characters could match and create an interesting musical combination.*

RO: *Anyway it would have been a dramatic loss for music if we hadn't met! (laughter)*

FA: *...and that is why we caught up on lost time by preparing this musical testimony. Raphy must have thought that it could work because we were so often we were so often coming out with the same nonsense at the same time... (laughter)*

You do have lots of things in common: your violins by FUSTIER, your bows by Denis Bergeron, your teacher Gérard Jarry and Frédéric's father who has been flight instructor for both of you. Why this title TANDEM? The pleasure of team flying?

RO: *Because we love beautiful planes....*

FA: *...and the Stampe on the pictures is a Belgian plane....Belgian as Ysaÿe was...*

RO: *Do you realise? Isn't it amazing! (lol)*

And the French-Belgian school that Ysaÿe so well represents?

FA: *In those days there was the French-Belgian school, the Russian school etc., but nowadays what is left of it is a global school because of all the crossings and exchanges and it would be a nonsense to proclaim oneself as a representative of the French-Belgian school today. The only references at our disposal are old sound archives, some of which may actually cause prejudice to the image of these great artists of the past...*

RO: *There are no more "schools" anyway. The concept was valid as long as communications were underdeveloped and as long as learning was taking place in more or less closed structures. Today it is impossible to ignore what the others are doing and not to be influenced. Everything is diluted in a marvellous global soup. Nevertheless, in Lucien Capet's book [...] -thorough description of F-B school characteristics- one can read that-roughly put-the left hand plays the notes, the right hand makes Music.*

And today?

RO: *Both hands just play the notes (lol)*

FA: *The note is not interesting; it is like a chain of nice words in a meaningless sentence: leave it to politicians! And I think that with Raphy it was obvious we would put our musical instincts together to serve the text.*

RO: *Everything found its place around this sonata for 2 violins by Ysaÿe that nobody plays in spite of its generosity and extraordinary beauty. I wanted to take my time to study it, dig in it for pleasure.*

Let's talk about the sound density of this sonata: it gives the illusion of a string quartet...

RO: *Originally, the duo was composed as a gift to the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, amateur violinist herself, with whom Ysaÿe had a friendly relation. But the difficulty of the piece was so high that Ysaÿe had to produce a simplified version involving 2 violins and a viola to make the Queen's part more "affordable"...*

What changes faces a violinist who knows the solo sonatas by Ysaÿe -with their technical challenges and polyphonic blossoming- when he turns to the sonata for 2 violins?

RO+FA: *He feels less lonesome!*

FA: *It is a common aesthetical quest even if each of us realises it with his own means. One feels the urge to make this music sound as if it were one eight-stringed violin, a polyphonic SUPER-violin, conceived by a violinist-composer in complete mastery of his technical skills.*

RO: *When listening to the sonic fusion of our instruments and the way we make music together I sometimes cannot tell who plays what anymore.*

What did each of you add to the interpretation? Complementary exchanges? Evolution through each other's talent?

FA: *Playing with a musician like Raphy can only be an occasion for sharing. He is not interested in guiding, imposing his ideas but in building together with his partners a common concept of Music. This is a real "play together" experience. Of course his musical and instrumental skills set a very high standard, which makes this encounter even more interesting for me.*

*I think music is an art in which you learn until your last heart beat. Raphy's friendship has brought me a lot since our first meeting, both musically and affectively.*

*Well, how much did you say you were ready to pay me for saying this? (lol)*

RO: *(lol) there are things with Fred, his spontaneity, his enormous overwhelming hearty bursts that explode in the music, I just love it! I am effectively more analytical by nature and that balances me well. What I also love -and that only happens with very few people- is the fact that we don't need to talk much. When the essential is already there without the talking, one can go much deeper, it is easier to accept all kinds of differences, contradiction, even confrontation of diverging points of view until a third common way is found.*

This particular complicity is it based on a thorough preparation work or on that mutual esteem that allows relying on each other in any situation?

FA: *One implies the other (and vice versa)*

RO: *Sick minds think alike! And if you listen really carefully, you can hear the other thinking....*

What would be your ideal partner?

RO: *Fred. (lol) more seriously, what I expect from a chamber music partner is a little like in sports, for example tennis, someone who can return your balls (!) but not necessarily in the centre, it has to be stimulating...*

FA: *I'm really sorry, but for me, it would rather be a 6 feet tall blonde....(lol)*

Is there a risk of losing oneself in such a fusion with another voice?

*What you gain in the process is much more important than what you might lose. The analogy with aviation makes sense completely here. One flies the aircraft, the other one does the navigation in absolute mutual trust. Roles can be exchanged regularly but the final quality of the journey is the result of this fruitful collaboration. Our musical path follows the same logic. One does the talking while the other one draws the landscape around...then we switch, sometimes very swiftly. The interpretation is in command and the trip is always different but we always reach our final destination!*

Let's talk about the Sonatine by Arthur Honegger: premiered in 1920 by the composer and his friend from le Groupe des Six (the Group of Six), Darius Milhaud, to whom the piece is dedicated.

RO: *This piece too, is inspired by friendship...*

Let me quote Arthur Honegger: "Music must be straightforward, simple, with great style; the people don't care about technique and fiddling about." What do you think of this?

RO: *These characteristics are present in the Sonatine. One can also sense in this piece the influence of Milhaud's music, by a certain naïve way of expression that can be found in his "provençales" works or the Sonata for 2 violins and piano.*

And the little fugue in the last movement which –once again in Honegger's music- proves his admiration for J.S. Bach?

RO: *I think he wanted to write something unusual, peculiar, -starting with the choice of such a chromatic, tortuous, slightly pervert theme- but still following the rigorous rules of revered counterpoint.*

If, in the Sonatine by Honegger one feels this (fake) naivety, I hear in Prokofieff's piece a search for a genuine, very personal way.

FA: *Here, we were seeking something earthier, "agri-cultural", with the smell of freshly dug ground. (lol)*

In the works Prokofieff wrote to fulfil the expectations of the Soviet Ministry of Culture, one often feels the imposed "simplicity of the people", a certain emotional distance, classicism, a (fake?) transparency – in the Sonata for 2 violins this is a different Prokofieff, more personal, less "official" .

RO: *Politically very incorrect music? Yes, I think that's what it is. Wild music, no compromising, but elate in its transgression.*

The second movement (Allegro) is highly percussive, merciless. Are the bowings Prokofieff's?

RO: Yes, but first of all it is meant to be ugly, and I think we achieved it. (lol)

FA: On the other side, in the slow movement, it is more desperate and with the mutes on we are in a sort of reminiscence, as if it were already too late. Music beyond the mirror...

How was the recording process? There was Raphaël Angleraux (Frédéric's brother), -at that time studying sound engineering- and Jacques Fustier. You locked yourselves in the Fontevraud Abbey...

RO: *It was a rare privilege to be hosted in this magic atmosphere of the Abbey in mid-winter.*

FA: *The Abbey is a place of incredible beauty and peace, very appropriate for recordings. Jacques and my brother formed the perfect technical and artistic team for this production. A high level of technical skills and demand allied to strong and sincere relationships. It is so easy to work with people who know us well, who know how to give us their opinion on a take for example! We were like a quartet for this 2 violins recording.*

RO: *...and in every recording session, there are moments of high tension, but not in this one. Yes, sometimes though, when it came to choosing the wine at the Auberge de l'Abbaye...*

#### Who has been in charge with the editing?

FA: As I had the equipment and also some experience in this field, I did most of it at home. I prepared some gross work, various options, transferring the takes into the software, etc...because of geographical and technical facilities: Raphy and Jacques were stopping by my place in Lyon every now and then to work on the project. Once again this shows that this is really a self production based on self investment, competence and friendship, from the early beginning to finalisation. It bears this special "signature" of shared feelings. We never had an "empty" take – we just had different options, the difficulty was to keep a coherent flow throughout the editing.

#### Why isn't there a broader repertoire for 2 violins? Besides Leclair, Bartok and some older composers...

RO: But the violin is such an awfully poor instrument...

FA: ...violinists don't stand competition...

RO: ...and on top of it: find 2 violinists who get along is such a challenge!

FA: it's true that it is such a bad breed! (lol)

#### Now, let's proceed to the crucial question of this interview: what are the "little rabbits" in your work? I've heard so much about them... Where and when do they appear?

RO: In the fields. As a matter of fact, we look into the scores to spot at what point the rabbit is going to jump across the screen, cartoonlike. And that is where you can find them.

FA: That's right...but remains inexplicable...

#### I have spotted lots of them in this CD.

RO: They do breed very fast...

FA: They proliferate...(lol)

Interview of Raphaël Oleg and Frédéric Angleraux

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