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Compact Disc Reviews: Flute Music of Violeta Dinescu

Forgetmenot

Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu, flute
Gutingi 246 (2012)

Flutes Play

Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu, flute
Gutingi 254 (2015)

In the past few years, renowned Romanian composer Violeta Dinescu has issued two CDs of her music for flute: *Forgetmenot* (Gutingi 246 [2012]) and *Flutes Play* (Gutingi 254 [2015]). The fine Romanian flutist, Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu, a specialist in the performance of Dinescu's music, performs all of the works on the two CDs, which span a thirty-one year period, from 1980 to 2011. *Forgetmenot* presents a collection of eleven works for flute, piccolo, dizi and kazoo.

Flutes Play is a cycle of ten interrelated works. Six lengthy pieces, *Flutes Play I-VI*, composed for multiple flutes, are



realized through overdubbing. They frame four shorter works, scored for solo flute.

Forgetmenot opens with *Circuit I* for piccolo, the first of six sections of *Circuit* (2003), a work dedicated to Ștefănescu. It features a dialogue between the piccolo and the human voice, represented by audible breaths and vocal sounds. The two are linked through flutter-tonguing and other flute articulations. Dinescu explores the highest register of the piccolo. She presents a fleeting passage in harmonics, motives that recall birdsong, and microtonal pitches reminiscent of the timbres of a folkloric flute. This is music that displays a primeval intensity of expression.



Immagini for concert flute (1980) is the first of five works, stylistically similar to *Circuit*, which are presented in alternation with the sections of *Circuit* on the CD. In *Immagini*, Dinescu contrasts lyrical music in the low to mid-register of the flute with frenzied music, characterized by flutter-tonguing and overblowing, in the highest, shrillest register of the instrument. The material is often melismatic and microtonal. The work opens and concludes with lyrical motives. The liner notes state that Dinescu employs a "flexible notation" in this score to encourage creativity on the part of the performer, including the "reorganizing" of "rhythmic unities according to one's own ideas."

Circuit II for alto flute presents a colorful musical landscape in which extended techniques play a prominent role. At one point, a whistling sound punctuates the texture. *Circuit II* opens and concludes with sustained pitches that evolve coloristically before fading away. Pointillistic and melismatic material, tinged with modality, flow into breathy gestures. Dinescu isolates intervals to create tremolos and repetitive motives that resemble stylized birdsong. She also transforms some of the motivic material into short recurring modal tunes. Dinescu presents a passage in harmonics, more extended than that in *Circuit I*. This passage links the two sections, as does the reintroduction of a contrasting motive from *Circuit I*. At the climax of the structure, Dinescu combines all of the material in a contrapuntal exchange between the higher and lower registers of the instrument.

Doru for concert flute (1992) is a dramatic work characterized by pitches in the flute's highest register articulated with sharp attacks, tremolos, melismatic passages and the microtonal bending of sounds. In *Circuit III* for dizi (an ancient Chinese bamboo flute) and kazoo, Dinescu creates a sharp contrast between the two instruments. The music for dizi is meditative, with microtonality intrinsic to its delicate tone production. The music for kazoo is playful, with a rough-edged intonation. The kazoo brings an unexpected folk element to *Circuit*: a new version of the second motive of *Circuit II*, with a strong beat, accentuated by finger snaps and foot tapping.

There is a clear link between the buzzing of the kazoo and the flutter-tonguing in other sections of *Circuit*. Spoken sounds and breaths in *Circuit III* recall *Circuit I*.

Le Double Silence for bass flute (1995) was inspired by Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* (The Stranger). Dinescu creates an otherworldly atmosphere through her use of vibrato, sharp attacks, multiphonics and tremolos. She also employs overblowing in a manner that produces an array of harmonics.

Circuit IV for concert flute reintroduces motives from *Circuit I* and *Circuit II*. Harmonics become a dominant feature in *IV*, evoking the twittering of birds. In addition, vocal sounds take on a more aggressive character than earlier in the cycle.

In *Immaginabile* for piccolo (1993), the opening gesture is a stylized version of the twittering of a bird. Dinescu explores the full range of the piccolo, with much attention given to the highest register. Her use of this register at very loud dynamic levels displays a raw energy. By way of contrast, the composer introduces lyrical arabesque-like motives.

In *Circuit V* for bass flute, Dinescu continues to transform motives introduced in earlier sections of the work by employing multiphonics and harmonics. The flutist uses a technique that enables him to simultaneously play and "sing" motives in unison, giving the impression that he is humming into the flute while playing. At times, the flute plays harmonics one octave higher than the vocal pitch. Dinescu creates a progression throughout *Circuit* with her treatment of vocal sounds and flute pitches; originally distinct entities, they meld together in *Circuit V*.

Forgetmenot for piccolo, concert flute, and bass flute (2011) gives the CD its title. The name of the piece refers to a family of flowers. The melodic contours of the opening motive of *Forgetmenot* are reminiscent of Romanian folk music. Microtonally bent pitches dominate the texture, along with turn figures and oscillating thirds. Dinescu also evokes the sound of ancient Asian flutes. Portions of the work are characterized by shrill tones and overblowing, and the sound of the performer's breath is an intrinsic component of the music. As in *Circuit V*, vocal sounds, produced by extended flute techniques,

sometimes accompany the flute's pitches. Following an outburst for the piccolo in its highest register, Dinescu creates a strong timbral contrast by introducing the bass flute. The work ends with the decay of a microtonally bent pitch. *Circuit VI* for piccolo, concert flute, alto flute, bass flute, dizi, and kazoo serves as a grand finale for *Circuit* and the CD. Several of the motives from the other sections of *Circuit* return, often presented simultaneously through digital overlay. Dinescu produces the effect of a wind ensemble, bringing the work to an exciting conclusion.



The presentation of the cycle of works on the CD, *Flutes Play*, is reminiscent of the order of the works on the CD,

Forgetmenot. Just as the six sections of *Circuit* alternate with other works, creating an integrated listening experience, all but one of the pieces of *Flutes Play I – VI* are presented in alternation with the interludes of the cycle, *Walk among*, *Walk about*, *Walk away* and *Walk against*. The titles of the interludes are indicative of a gradual progression from harmonious interaction of musical elements to conflict between opposing forces. Dinescu states: “The soli are go-betweens and serve the dramaturgical purpose of enabling the listener to perceive the ten pieces as a curve.” Dinescu takes the listener on an otherworldly journey into the emotional / intellectual realm of the dream state.

Flutes Play I-VI are scored as follows: *I* for three flutes, *II* for six, *III* for eight, *IV* for sixteen, *V* for twenty-four, and *VI* for thirty-two flutes. The complete cycle of ten works is based on the intervallic play among major and minor seconds and thirds, as well as perfect fourths. A major inspiration for these pieces is Javanese gamelan music, in which seconds and thirds predominate. Dinescu creates an ingenious soundscape through her expansion of the motivic material, employing counterpoint, stylized stretto, solo lines with accompaniment and chordal masses. As in *Forgetmenot*, microtonality and extended flute and vocal techniques play a prominent role. Dinescu’s use of registration is masterful. The music evokes visual images, its timbral colors ranging from muted hues to metallic brightness. Continuity within the cycle is often achieved through the introduction of shared thematic material at the beginning and/or end of different sections.

The CD opens with *Flutes Play III* (eight flutes). Dinescu presents a moderately paced motivic design, tinged with microtonality. Two concert flutes interact in an interweaving, dance-like counterpoint in their mid-to-high register. This music returns in the fourth and tenth pieces, *Flutes Play I* and *VI*, respectively. The spare texture is frequently punctuated by outbursts of loud runs and flurries of dissonant clusters, performed by the entire ensemble in the highest register of the instrument. In addition, the music includes twittering sounds

and harmonics seemingly suspended in the air. *Flutes Play III* and the next piece, *Flutes Play V*, end with one of the main motifs of the cycle, an ascending minor third followed by a descending minor second that fades away with microtonal inflections.

Flutes Play V (twenty-four flutes) and the following interlude, *Walk among* for concert flute, begin with the same meditative line, tinged with Romanian embellishments. The music is played more vigorously in the former work, however. The splashes of bright colors in *Flutes Play III* develop into whizzing kaleidoscopic polyphonic and chordal masses in *Flutes Play V*. These masses collide with a solo flute line, played at a moderate pace, which continues to move in its own orbit. The flutes' evocation of twittering birds recalls electronic music, yet never seems mechanical. The player as vocalist uses extended flute techniques to produce a rustling sound that calls to mind the timbre of a distant snare drum.

Dinescu uses the element of surprise very effectively. In *Walk among*, for example, the composer presents the first interval of a quiet motif in the flute's low range.

It is immediately followed by a run that begins with mid-range vocal sounds and grows into a metallic splash of color in the flute's highest register.

Flutes Play I (three flutes) marks a turning point in the cycle, as its profile is markedly different from the preceding pieces. It has a more pensive mood than the works that lead up to it. Using the extended flute technique of singing into the instrument, the performer often doubles the concurrently played flute line, either in the same register or an octave below it. Dinescu employs the opposite ends of the registral palette, simultaneously and in alternation, giving prominent roles to the bass flute and piccolo. The piccolo writing is characterized by colorful virtuosic passages. The following piece, *Walk about* for solo piccolo, features bright sparkling lines and twittering harmonics.

Flutes Play IV (sixteen flutes) begins with muted tones in the bass flute and voice.

Dinescu presents a polyphonic motivic design consisting

of oscillating patterns. The music is faster-paced than that of the preceding pieces. As in *Flutes Play V*, runs and chordal masses played by the piccolos in their highest register collide with single and multiple flute lines. In this work, interactions between the parts occur more frequently. The return of the opening motif of *Flutes Play III* and *I* is one of many elements that unifies the cycle.

The timbres that open *Flutes Play IV* immediately return in the next work, *Walk away* for bass flute. The most striking element of this short piece is Dinescu's transformation of the performer's voice from an instrument, humming and producing otherworldly sounds, into a human singing voice. The player sings along with the flute line, using the vocal syllable, "da," on each pitch. *Flutes Play II* (six flutes) resembles *Flutes Play I* in its slow pace and meditative flute lines. Dinescu introduces a new type of event that has its roots in *Flutes Play V*. The material that previously collided with a solo line, yet left it intact, now interrupts the line. The composer creates the effect of a musical conversation.

In *Walk against* for concert flute, Dinescu presents a solo line that occasionally divides into two distinct elements, due to her assignment of contrasting dynamics to different registers. This enables a dialogue to take place, structurally linking this work with *Flutes Play II*.

Flutes Play VI (thirty-two flutes), the finale of the cycle, is a flute symphony with voice. Dinescu reintroduces all of the motivic designs and gestures from the previous nine works and presents one seemingly new element: clusters of seconds played in the high register of the flutes that produce the pure sound of the flute stop of a Baroque organ. The composer creates a colorful, intricate polyphonic soundscape. Despite the wealth of aural information, the listener feels a sense of tranquility as the work concludes.

Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu's performances are sensitive, deeply expressive and technically flawless. His control of timbral nuance is exquisite. The engineering of *Forgetmenot* is masterly, presenting the listener with a seemingly live acoustic.

The sound engineers for *Flutes Play*, Stephan Schmidt (DLF) and Florin Tudor (Bucharest), do an impressive job. The overdubbing is imperceptible.

One should note that in live performances by multiple flutists, beats occur among the parts. Dinescu's use of overdubbing enables her to create a unique sound that combines electronic and acoustic elements. Her musical palette, so rich in both traditional and extended techniques, brings the listener into a highly variegated musical landscape.

Traducerea rezumatelor: **Alina Bottez**