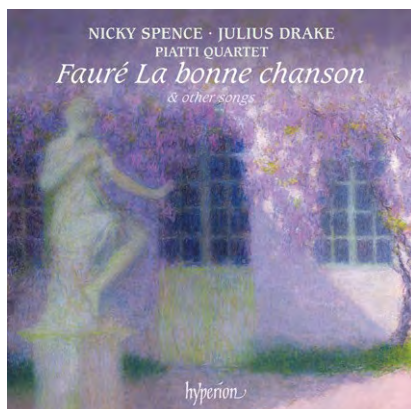




MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

Fauré: *La bonne chanson* & other songs.
Spence, Drake, Piatti Quartet. Hyperion.

Gabriel Fauré's output was relatively small, one of the occupational hazards of being not only a church organist but also a working critic, teacher, and administrator. He was most at home in his songs, the music for piano, and his chamber music. His works in these genres are notable for their refinement and fastidious craftsmanship, and for their dense textures (often with flowing arpeggiated piano figuration) and rhapsodic linkage of ideas. The songs, in particular, are probably the finest embodiment in music of the aesthetic proposed by Baudelaire in the lines, "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté." But it was Verlaine, a generation younger than Baudelaire, to whom Fauré turned more frequently and whose poetry dominates this offering—in the nine songs of the cycle *La bonne chanson* (in Fauré's 1898 arrangement for voice, piano, and string quintet), and in his settings of *Mandoline*, *En sourdine*, and *Clair de lune* (all treated memorably by Debussy as well). *La bonne chanson* is a treat, rapturous and remarkably sensuous, while the songs with piano accompaniment alone sound ever so slightly reverberant in places. Spence's serviceable but non-native French is only a minor drawback in light of his keen attention to the underlying emotion. **TL**

Further Listening: Vaughan Williams: *On Wenlock Edge* (Spence, Drake, et al./Hyperion)



MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

Overtures & Dances. Mëla Guitar Quartet.
TRPTK.

I'm truly impressed by a few recordings each year, and rarely am I overawed, like I am by Mëla. It's not only that these four guitarists play as one or that they do so with palpable allure and glamour, but that they also have the most accurate fingers I've heard yet in the classical guitar world. Can four nylon-stringed hollow bodies replace an orchestra? When they play this merrily and with such attention to tonal variety, abso-damn-lutely. The opener is Glinka's *Overture to Ruslan and Lyudmila*, and the quicksilver scales in the main theme, passed back and forth between players, are both disturbingly fast and disgustingly clean. Debussy's *Two Arabesques* dance like sprites while the Bacchanale from Saint-Saëns' *Samson and Delilah* is both sultry and a little unhinged (here, to be fair, I do miss some orchestral heft). These guitarists coax some delectable, gossamer tonal surprises out of their instruments, evoking harps, bells, marimbas, and pizzicato violins. My prose waxeth purple, but for once I'm liking Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*, which usually chloroforms me; the tangy detuned strings are a nice touch. Holst's *Fugal Overture* even gets a bit jazzy. Don't miss the most enjoyable album of the year. **SE**

Further Listening: Anthony Burgess: *Complete Guitar Quartets* (Mëla Guitar Quartet/Naxos); *Maracaípe* (Beijing Guitar Duo/Tonar)



MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

Gone with the Wind: Max Steiner's Classic Film Score. Gerhardt, National Philharmonic. Vocalion (SACD Hybrid Stereo).

Vocalion's latest SACD reissue from the RCA Classic Film Score Series is Max Steiner's *Gone with the Wind*. Vocalion has previously released *Sunset Boulevard* (Franz Waxman), *Citizen Kane* (Bernard Herrmann), *Spellbound* (Miklos Rozsa), *Lost Horizon* (Dimitri Tiomkin), and *Star Wars/Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (John Williams). This is a remarkably coherent 44-minute orchestral suite or symphonic poem that contains virtually all of the substantive music from Steiner's score. The original sound was audiophile level, but this is even better, especially in how it better delineates the fine inner detail of the dense orchestration (especially the massed strings) without fragmenting the nearly flawless Kingsway Hall acoustics and orchestral soundstage. So why do we need still another release of this recording? First and foremost is the SACD sound. It has never sounded as good as this before. Second, Charles Gerhardt's conducting is as close as you can come to perfect, and finally, this musically seamless presentation is probably the best arrangement ever made of any film score. To accomplish that with a score with the size and scope of *Gone with the Wind* is amazing. **Arthur Lintgen**

Further Listening: *Sunset Boulevard: The Classic Film Scores of Franz Waxman* (Gerhardt/Vocalion SACD)