CD REVIEW

The Symphonic Brass of London Dectet. Directed by Eric Crees

A Bridge Over The Pyrenees

Under the artistic direction of Eric Crees, the Symphonic Brass of London has garnered a formidable reputation since it first appeared on the musical scene in 2012. Performances have already taken the group to St John's Smith Square, the Northern Lights Festival in Norway and as guest artists at the National Brass Band Championships of Great Britain in London's Royal Albert Hall. With a roster of players that include some of the finest orchestral and session musicians in the UK, it was only a matter of time before they released their first CD, entitled *A Bridge Over The Pyrenees*, earlier this year.

As the title suggest, this disc features a variety of music from France and Spain, beginning with a three-movement work, La Triomphante, by the baroque composer François Couperin. The quality of the dectet is immediately evident, playing with clarity and verve in the opening track and contrasting this with mellifluous lyricism in the second movement, The Joy of the Conquerors. The final movement, Fanfare,

provides the listener with their first real opportunity to hear the group in full swing, demonstrating richness in tone throughout and immaculate intonation.

Chris Mowat's wonderfully creative transcription of Debussy's *Girl with the*

Flaxen Hair follows, before we hear the first music from 'over the Pyrenees' - Manuel De Falla's Ritual Fire Dance, arranged by Eric Crees. Again the ensemble playing is of the highest quality, with the ability to draw on an expressive palette of tonal colours throughout.

The highlight of the disc for me is Ravel's

Alborado del Gracioso, perhaps not the likeliest candidate for performance by a brass ensemble, but presented here in a highly effective and musically sensitive arrangement. With crisp articulation and virtuosic playing, it benefits from the fine addition of percussion to provide added rhythmic drive to this colourful and vibrant work.

The Ravel is neighboured by a suite of three famous pieces from Bizet's opera *Carmen*, heard in a classic arrangement by Roger Harvey, themselves juxtaposed by three equally Spanish-flavoured but less

> well-known piano works by Enrique Granados, again arranged by Eric Crees. The ensemble dispatches these pieces with aplomb, engaging the listener with carefully crafted interplay and beautifully translucent textures, yet able to engage the full magnificence of their instruments at a moment's notice!

Following a thrilling and stylish rendition of Gerónimo Giminéz's Intermezzo from his opera The Marriage of Luis Alonso, the disc ends with perhaps the ultimate finisher, Richard Bissill's arrangement of the popular song Granada. It showcases both the ensemble's virtuosity and lyrical playing in equal measure, proving a fitting conclusion to this exceptional release. Thoroughly recommended!

Huw Morgan

