

# Classical Recordings: Mazurkas, Moody Soundscapes and Miniature Suites

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## TRISTAN MURAIL: 'Winter Fragments'

*Erin Lesser, flutist; Argento Chamber Ensemble, conducted by Michel Galante. Aeon AECD 0746; CD.*

RECENT concert seasons in New York have been greatly enriched by the efforts of the Argento Chamber Ensemble, an ambitious group founded by the conductor Michel Galante in 2000. The ensemble, whose roster includes some of the city's finest young musicians, specializes in toothier strains of contemporary composition. And it renders them not merely approachable but positively delectable through its mix of technical command and urgent advocacy.

The group's debut recording features five works by Tristan Murail, a co-founder of the atmospheric French spectral school and a professor of composition at Columbia University. Three of the pieces prominently feature the flutist Erin Lesser. "Unanswered Questions" (1995) is a brief, ghostly soliloquy. In "Feuilles à Travers les Cloches" ("Leaves Through the Bells," a reversal of a title of Debussy's; 1998), a quartet of flute, strings and piano evokes rustling leaves and tolling bells. In "Ethers" (1978) Ms. Lesser blows gusty sighs and inquisitive figures over a desiccated landscape of creaking strings, groaning trombone and hissing maracas.

Flanking those works are two substantial recent pieces. "Winter Fragments" (2000), for instrumental ensemble and electronics, intertwines a thematic kernel from the Prologue of Gérard Grisey's "Espaces Acoustiques" with crystalline plucks and frigid

swirls. Mr. Murail conjures the eternal flux of nature in the largest work here, "Le Lac" ("The Lake"; 2001). The sounds of rain, thunder, birds and frogs are represented in musical terms in this restless, eruptive and often voluptuous tapestry.

The Argento players offer secure, committed performances throughout, abetted by an exceptionally rich, detailed recording. Unfortunately, the disc, issued by the adventurous French label Aeon, is not available in the United States. It can be ordered from French Internet retailers, including Amazon.fr and FNAC.com.

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