

The Newest Music

DUBIEL: *Song of the Transformed; Down Time; Stanzas; Neither Here Nor There; Still Getting Nowhere; At Baia; Precis; Quartet*
Jeffrey Farrington, p, Mimmi Fulmer, s; Donald Palma, Hans Sturm, db; Michael Webster, cl; Kenneth Goldsmith, v; Karen Ritscher, va; Norman Fischer, vc; Pro Arte Quartet, Sonare Quartet/ James Smith—Centaur 2661—57 minutes

CRUZ: *Concerto Atlantico; La Luz del Aire; Latir Isleno; Soledad*
Guillermo Gonzalez, Project Gerhard, Czech Virtuosi, Helsinki Philharmonic/ Leif Segerstam, Jose de Eusebin—Col Legno 20242—62 minutes

MALEC: *Sonaris Causa: Ottava Alta; Exempla*
Raphael Oleg, v; Luxembourg Philharmonic/ Arturo Tamayo—Timpani 1086—73 minutes

BITTOVA: *Elida*
Robert Black, db; David Dossin, perc; Lisa Moore, p; Mark Stewart, g; Wendy Sutter, vc; Evan Ziporyn, cl—Cantaloupe 21027—47 minutes

LYON: *Sacred Amnesia; Red Dwarfs from Outer Space; Ex Cathedra; Liberation 1; None of Us Will Ever Be the Same; 1981*
Centaur 2711—67 minutes

MYERS & BAND: *Valen Lagoon; Cape Wiquen; Laventiya Bay*
Pogus 21035—50 minutes

FIELDS: *Khutzpah; Tsores; Simchas*
Paul Ellison, db; Houston Sinfonia/ Larry Rachleff
Centaur 2699—57 minutes

Elijah's Violin

David Amram, Abraham Ellstein, Nahahem Avidom, Efrem Zimbalist, Paul Ben-Haim, Julius Chajes, Paul Kirman
Zina Schiff, v, Cameron Grant, p
4Tay 4030—67 minutes

To Hear With Mouth

BARRETT: *Colloid; Colloid-E; Earth; GUY:* *Bichrome Terrors; Holyrood; DOYLE: Shindstu*
Magnus Andersson, g; Jonny Axelsson, trb; Jorgen Pettersson, perc; Sarah Lindloff, fl; Sven Aberg, mand; Barry Guy, db—Caprice 21713—77 min

GABEL: *That Old Song & Dance; Elegy; Island Phantasy; Hellenic Triptych; Spring Quartet*
Fear No Music—North Pacific 20—70 minutes

Red Leaves

Robert Saxton, Elisabeth Lutyens, John McCabe, Malcom Williamson
Teresa Cahill, s; Brunel Ensemble/ Christopher Austin—Signum 53—77 minutes

GILBERT: *Into the Gyre of Madder Dance; Certain Lights Reflecting; Unrise; On Beholding a Rainbow*
Susan Bickley, mz; Anthony Marwood, v; RNCM Wind Ensemble, BBC Symphony/ Clark Rundell, Andrew Davis, Garry Walker
NMC 105—74 minutes

13 Drums

Yasuo Sueyoshi, Maki Ishii, Akira Miyoshi, Hideki Kozakura, Toshi Ichiyangi, Minoru Miki
Mika Takehara, perc—BIS 1303—76 minutes

Time for Marimba

Minoru Miki, Keiko Abe, Toru Takemitsu, Akira Yuyama, Toshimitsu Tanaka
Daniella Ganeva, Gary Kettel, Graham Instrall, Graham Cole, Gillian McDonagh, perc; Simon Haram, sax—Signum 57—70 minutes

Joseph Dubiel's music bubbles with sophisticated personality. His two short piano works, 'Neither Here Nor There' and 'Still Getting Nowhere', frolic in a field with Milton Babbitt's piano works: quirky rhythms, counterpoint in extreme registers, highly intricate shifting of dynamics and texture. The two works for clarinet and piano, 'Down Time' and 'Precis', also dance with humor in the habit of Babbitt—but also want to illustrate some hushed textures and harmonies for their own beauty. Donald Palma's double bass supplies amusing (hyper-)active accompaniment to Mimi Fulmer's straight-ahead soprano singing in Dubiel's *Songs of the Transformed*. It's perhaps the most superficially original work on the program. Most of all, I enjoy Dubiel's stately and mysterious clarinet quartet. Each delicate note seems well considered; it takes nothing for granted. So when, for brief moments, its emotional intensity heats up, it feels exceptionally sincere—even when, at one point, it quotes Webern's Symphony, and, at its tranquil close, it conjures the ghost of Arthur Berger.

I cannot muster much enthusiasm for Zulema de la Cruz's music. Her heavy, gloomy, repetitive, bombastic, almost demonic, piano concerto exudes craft but not taste. Fans of Schnittke—don't count me in—might enjoy several of Cruz's works here, including this one. The chamber orchestra work *Soledad* is striking at first, but then disappoints me with banal rhythms and syncopations. Screechy clusters enter and then some arresting effects pop up here and there. Yet what does it add up to? Too much heat, not enough light, not enough imagination.

The mood of Ivo Malec's music is similar,

but his means are sparser—more like Scelsi's or Kancheli's. It leaves few traces of romantic warmth. Searing dissonances, crushing clusters, and glimmering glissandos flower into fountains of uncompromising fear. Sonically, there's much to enjoy in Malec's orchestral music, but don't play it to young children.

On the lighter side there are Iva Bittova's songs performed by the Bang-on-a-Can All-stars. Pseudo-art music is what I'd call them. They have their moments but they are no more than extremely eccentric pop music sung in a foreign language and performed on classical music instruments. I'm disappointed that one of the better new music groups has glorified these songs by giving them their own recording.

The up-to-date music concrete of Eric Lyon's *Sacred Amnesia*'s proceeds as a seemingly random series of juxtapositions. I enjoy *Read Dwarfs* more as it evolves in "brooding textures" but, as if to pander to people with short attention spans, a barrage of techno-dance music intrudes. A lot of extraordinary, striking sounds jump out of this release; but the continuity necessary to sink one's teeth into them as music is lacking. Here's electro-acoustic music for adults with Attention Deficit Disorder. Lyon seems more technological wizard than mature musical artist.

Though perhaps less hi-tech, David Lee Myers and Ellen Band's collaboration is more to my taste. It's based on "feedback principles" and blending "sonic environments and specialized electronic circuitry". The aesthetic is minimalist but it's not at all simplistic. It wafts atmospherically but sizzles intricately; I can put it in the background or make it the focus of my attention, and it works both ways.

Fields's *Sages of Chelm* begins with a pedestrian romantic Americana style but then develops into an intricate web of chromatic tonal counterpoint economically orchestrated, comparable to Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony—but of course not as good. Unfortunately the string section of the Houston Sinfonia is not up to the task, sounding absolutely miserable: ragged, out of tune—it's enough to make you seasick. Most new music enthusiasts won't be too interested in Fields's Copland-meets-early-Schoenberg project, but there's no denying his craftsmanship. But the paltry performance makes it difficult to enjoy.

The recital by Zina Schiff, a Heifetz protegee, presents a series of works by Jewish composers, taking the Egyptian-Jewish fairy tale of "Elijah's Violin" as its theme. The styles are mostly tonal but chromatic, ranging from Ravel to Prokofiev to Hindemith. The synthesis of 20th Century classical styles and Sephardic folk music is by and large tasteful and not banal—with the possible exception of

actor-violinist Efrem Zimbalist's *Orientele*. Schiff's soulful playing has real conviction but never gets out of control. "New" this music isn't, but Schiff shows us other charms here.

Ensemble Son's program is for the adventurous. The frenetic Ferneyhough-like pointillism of Barrett's solo guitar work *Colloid* employs extended playing techniques and special effects in the extreme, somewhat like Lachenmann. At first the piece repelled me but the liner notes persuaded me to persist. I warmed up to it. Barry Guy's *Bichrome Terrors*, in a similar vein, is based on prescribed actions, treating the resulting sounds as almost incidental. But *Holyrood* strikes my ears with a rich palette of sound colors. They're atmospheric and evocative, the harmonies just right to promote their nuance. Roger Doyle's *Shindstu* pits sonic extremes against each other, creating some lively discontinuities. The whole program gallops handsomely off the beaten track.

Jack Gabel's chamber music is much lighter and more conservative. The style is somewhat original but roams in the regions of Ravel and Bartok. *That Old Song and Dance* displays a sense of humor by mimicking the sound of warming up and tuning up before a performance. Yet I find *Hellenic Triptych* a bit awkward, as the style of its viola line feels quaint next the futuristic electronics that accompany it.

The Brunel Ensemble dedicates their program mainly to works by Saxton and Lutyens. Saxton's style reminds me of early Lutoslawski swirling strings in cascading cluster dissonances—Bartok on steroids. It teeters on the brink between tonality and tension-building atonality. Lutyens's writing is more colorful and punchy, less draped in traditional rhetoric of tension and release. It's almost Webernesque—but smoother. All the music here is conservative by 21st Century standards, but it's tasteful, serious, not trivial. I recommend it.

Gilbert's serious atonal style plays in the same ballpark. I find the opening work, *In the Gyre of a Madder Dance* the most striking and novel. Tough dissonances applied with short but thick brushstrokes create a vivid texture. It's not far off from Birtwistle. The architectonic pace and restrained intensity of the other works remind me most of Peter Maxwell Davies's symphonic works, though Gilbert displays some colorful orchestral flourishes I've never heard from Davies. Recommended to collectors of atonal modernism.

Percussion fans are in luck this month: both of the new percussion discs are worth buying. Both mix marimba with unpitched percussion. Mika Takehara's is strictly a solo recital, whereas Danielle Ganeva combines her marimba playing with other percussionists, even a saxophonist. Takehara begins with

Yasuo Sueyoshi's *Mirage* for marimba. Here lush ripples of atonal harmonies and flourishes give way to explosive flurries. Outside of jazz, I've never heard a marimba sound so expressive. Takehara sculpts the flow with flare and sensitivity. *13 Drums* builds slowly but forcefully to a rousing conclusion. All the compositions are first rate, the performances exciting.

On the whole, the music on Ganeva's program is a little less intense. What I enjoy most is

Videos

NEWEST OPERA VIDEOS in a HOME THEATER

BIZET: *Carmen*

Grace Bumbry (Carmen), Jon Vickers (Jose), Mirella Freni (Micaela), Justino Diaz (Escamillo), Vienna Philharmonic/ Karajan
DG 4352—163 mins, 4:3, Stereo-DTS

PUCCINI: *Tosca*

Raina Kabaivanska (Tosca), Placido Domingo (Cavaradossi), Sherrill Milnes (Scarpia), Philharmonia Orchestra/ Bruno Bartoletti
DG 4349—115 mins, 4:3, Stereo-DTS

ROSSINI: *The Barber of Seville*

Hermann Prey (Figaro), Teresa Berganza (Rosina), Luigi Alva (Almaviva), Enzo Dara (Bartolo), Paolo Montarsolo (Basilio), La Scala/ Abbado
DG 4279—140 mins, 4:3, Stereo-DTS

PUCCINI: *Madama Butterfly*

Mirella Freni (Cio-Cio-San), Placido Domingo (Pinkerton), Christa Ludwig (Suzuki), Robert Kerns (Sharpless), Vienna Philharmonic/ Karajan
DG 4282—145 mins, 4:3, Stereo-DTS

VERDI: *Aida*

Janusz Monacha (King), Cornelia Helfrich (Amneris), Eszter Sumegi (Aida), Kostadin Andreev (Radames); Brno/ Ernst Marzendorfer
EuroArts 2054058—150 mins, 16:9, Stereo-DTS

RAUTAVAARA: *Rasputin*

Matti Salminen (Rasputin), Lilli Paasikivi (Tsarina), Jorma Hynninen (Tsar), Jyrki Antilla (Yusupov), Finnish Opera/ Mikko Franck
Ondine 4003—150 mins, 16:9, Stereo-Dolby 5.1

RACHMANINOFF: *The Miserly Knight*

Sergei Leiferkus (Baron), Richard Berkley-Steele (Baron's son), Albert Schagidullin (Duke), London Philharmonic/ Vladimir Jurowski
OpusArte 0919—95 mins, 16:9, Stereo-DTS

These DVDs include four "opera films" from DG's vaults, made in the 1960 and 70s. These films were all photographed on celluloid insuring the best image and color quality of that time, but are really distinguished by their cine-

matography and non-opera house locations. I will also refer to the 1984 opera film *Bizet's Carmen* directed and produced by Francesco Rosi. Amazon reports this is the best selling opera DVD, and it defines what I consider the benchmark for an opera film. We also have *Aida*, a recent summer festival work produced in a mine quarry. Opera films offer the promise of better sets (or none at all), imaginative camera angles and framing, with faultless staging and singing through re-takes and splicing. These benefits are offset by mimed sound track synchronization errors, the loss of the stirring emotion found in an actual performance, and the missing opera house magic.

Karajan directed and conducted this *Carmen* production in Salzburg in 1966 and 1967. The film was shot on a Munich soundstage with new sets, and the music was recorded in Vienna. It is a lavish production with brilliant colors amidst cascading folds of dress material on skilled performers. The Ballet of Spain delivers Spanish authenticity in the tavern scene (and some extra dancing to Bizet's Farandole). Grace Bumbry, early in her career, sings a sultry and coy Carmen, usually in the flashiest dress and with seldom a hair out of place. Her smile and eyes say it all, though her Carmen seems more likely to reveal a Madrid debutante than an Andalusian gypsy.

Jon Vickers does a good job as a middle-aged and stolid soldier, ignited by Carmen unto his psychopathic end. The scene-stealer is Mirella Freni's Michaela, just a few years after her debut, with a crystal soprano and innocent visage delivering the heartfelt messages to Don Jose. The Philharmonic is up to the usual standards and the DTS re-mastering sounds very good. Mr Lucano (March/April 2005) reviewed a 1970 audio recording of the same principals with the Paris Opera under Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos. He thought Bumbry's vocal performance was top drawer but

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