

puzzling and arouses doubts as to whether all these excerpts are truly what they purport to be.

No such reservations arise about the final offering—a heavily cut final act of *Der Rosenkavalier* from 1945. Since the most drastic cuts occur in the Ochs-Mariandl scene, only crocodile tears need be shed. Octavian is Stevens, who, as Mariandl, assumes Despina's "doctor" voice. The result is neither funny nor credible, but in any case the dim acoustic makes nonsense of Strauss's gorgeous orchestration. The ageing Lehmann, in the role she was most identified with, can be experienced in far better voice and sound on the old EMI set. Here at the age of 57 some of the bloom

has gone from the voice and several top notes are missed or transposed, but she still remains a minor marvel. Alvary is a most respectable Ochs, who really sings with fine tone; and Nadine Conner is a more than adequate Sophie, if perhaps without quite the ideal beauty of timbre for the role.

In summation, it must be questioned for whom this set is intended. Collectors of historic material are likely to object to so much intervention with original sources. Other collectors will probably favor finer sounding, modern recordings.

LHF

The Newest Music

HACKETT: *Metamorpheus*

Steve Hackett, g; Underworld Orchestra
InsideOut 4088—57 minutes
(1601 Banksville Rd, 2nd flr, Pittsburgh PA 15215)

JALBERT: *Trio; Toccata; Transcendental Windows; Quartet; Visual Abstract*
Gasparo 361—68 minutes

SCHLEIERMACHER: *Echo; 3 Reconciliations to Heiner Muller; 12 Soundscapes; Lila*
Steffen Schleiermacher, p
MDG 613 1255—78 minutes

Donaueschingen Music Days 2003

by Pierre Jodkowski, Arnulf Herrman, Enno Poppe, Sergej Newski, George Friedrich Haas, Isabel Mundry, Peter Ablinger, James Clarke Benjamin Kobler, Ernst Surberg, keyboards; Jakob Diehl, narr; Salome Kammer, mz; Teodoro Anzellelli, accordion, Klangforum Wien, Ensemble Mosaic, SW German Radio Symphony/ Fabrice Bollon, Sylvain Cambreling, Robert Platz
Col Legno 20230 [2CD] 124 minutes

BEHRMAN: *My Dear Siegfried; QRSL; Viewfinder; A New Team Takes Over; Touch Tones; Pools of Phase Locked Loops*
Thomas Buckner, Eric Barsness, Maria Ludovici, vocals; Ralph Samuelson, shakuhachi; Peter Zummo, trb; David Behrman, Katherine Morton Austin, keyboard, electronics; Jon Gibson, Frankie Mann, Arthur Studifole, performers
XI 129 [2CD] 116 minutes

In Nomine

Works by Bryan Freneyhough, Klaus Huber, Gyorgy Kurtag, Hans Zender, Salvatore Sciarrino, Wolfgang Rihm, et al
Kairos 1244 [2CD] 143 minutes

Violin Vision

Works by Mario Mary, Kaija Saariaho, Kent Olofsson, Stan Link, Ivar Frounberg
Bodil Rorbech—Albany 728—70 minutes

New Music Series 4

Works by Franklin Cox, Thomas DeLio, Robert Morris, Anneliese Weibel, Jerry Tabor
Neuma 450102—70 minutes

ROSENZWEIG: *Melpomene; Partita Intreccata; What Follows is a Song From the Same Fragmented Masque; Just One Step Beyond; Trace*

Gerald Elias, v; Carlton Vicker, fl; Scot Lewis, vb; Jed Moss, Markus Stange, Susan Wenckus, p; Daniel Buess, Laszlo Hudacek, perc, Canyonlands Ensemble/ Morris Rosenzweig
Albany 710—61 minutes

ACKERMAN: *Dances; 3 Aphorisms; Suite; Conversations; Aubade; Planet of Abundance*
Robert Ackerman, fl, sax; Steven Silverstein, cl; Pam Purvis, vocals, narr; Slovak Radio Orchestra/ Tristan Wilems—Albany 733—74 minutes

FOX: *Descansos, Past*
Barry Newton, db; Erika Duke-Kirpatrick, Jessica Catron, Aniela Perry, Rachel Arnold, vc
Cold Blue 21—15 minutes

COX: *Fade*
Rick Cox; g; Thomos Newman, p; Peter Freeman, db—Cold Blue 20—25 minutes

Steve Hackett's *Metamorpheus* is a slow, atmospheric, romantic guitar concerto inspired by the Orpheus myth. It's pleasant enough as a flashback to various guitar music styles from Soler to Rodrigo—even Bach lute suites. The string orchestral accompaniment is

boldly conservative, reminding me not just of Britten's, but also Grieg's and Elgar's.

Pierre Jalbert's music seems genuine, sufficiently rich to hold the attention, and mostly tasteful. His trio is alive with a spiky, Bartok-infused rhythmic propulsion—uneven meters like 5 and 7 jump out from clashing semitone dissonances. *Transcendental Windows* develops from a delicate tissue of murky tonality anchored by a slow harp ostinato, like a distant cousin of Stravinsky's *Orpheus*.

To all atonal modernism fans out there, I strongly recommend Steffen Schleiermacher's latest offering of piano music. It's a beautiful immersion in atonal harmonies. *Echo* compares favorably to Feldman's piano works of the 50s, 60s, and 70s as it softly revisits a family of chords in various permutations. The next piece begins with an angular staccato ostinato that slowly shrinks down to a pair of pitches and then expands back out. It then proceeds on to other pregnant processes. *12 Soundscapes* is a much lighter set of character pieces; it reminds me of Milhaud's and Satie's.

The 2003 Donaueschingen Music Days collection is excellent—better than the last two I reviewed. In Jodkowski's *People/Time*, diverse vivid sounds combine evocatively, producing a novel sort of continuity. Very effective. Georg Haas's *Natures Mortes* presents a seemingly endless series of thick, smoothly-connected chords. They weave an intense pulse minimalism that shuttles between the worlds of Scelsi and Reich. The rhetoric develops slowly over nearly half an hour. By fading mechanically pulsed harmonies in and out, he smears one into the next in a perpetual state of development. The other pieces are less ear-catching but worth a listen.

Experimental music veteran David Behrman's new release has two facets: one disc presents a political musical work he recently created; the other documents his interactive electronic works since the late 1960s (one of them uses portions of a Nixon press conference). In *My Dear Siegfried*, a WW I antiwar statement is read over a wash of *musique concrete* and calm, slick, portamento-connected synthesizer chords. Its text-plus-sound concept is a bit like Robert Ashley's opera *Improvement*—a detached, modern day sort of melodrama. Yet Behrman's piece is less humorous entertainment and more earnest political statement. The works on the second disc sound a bit dated as hypnotic electronic mood pieces, but they're enjoyable anyway. I most enjoy the most recent of these, *QRSL* (1998), a process work whose form emerges from a gradual change in a glissando oscillation. Clever ear candy wrapped in clear form.

The *In Nomine* is a 16th and 17th Century

English instrumental musical genre. Composers wrote instrumental works based on a short cantus firmus derived from the antiphon 'Gloria tibi Trinitas', which was set by John Taverner to the words "In nomine Domini" around 1528. It's no surprise that in the 21st Century, to be "based on a cantus firmus" is an entirely different affair from what it was four or five centuries ago. So the 42 works in *The Witten In Nomine Broken Consort Book* seem less instances of *In Nomine* than artifacts riding the wake of its inspiration; there's no attempt to imitate the genre. One might expect this *In Nomine* collection to serve well as a survey of the present state of European—especially German—contemporary music. (Unlike samplers, the concept of the collection allows it to avoid resorting to mere excerpts.) Despite the contribution of 35 or so composers, the stylistic range is narrow, relieved only by the arrangements of Purcell, Tallis, and Taverner. Many of the participating composers demonstrate strong individual voices elsewhere. Yet one is hard pressed to distinguish their styles based on their *In Nomine* contributions. Disappointed, I have to say I do not recommend this as an introduction to the latest trends in European music or as the best these composers have to offer.

Bodil Rorbech's *Violin Vision* collects four works for violin and electronics. With its pre-recorded trees rustling, birds chirping, and humans whispering, 'De la Terre' from Kaija Saariaho's ballet *Maa* emits a delicious naturalist aroma. Kent Olofsson's *Sogna di Tartini* fuses the naturalistic with the futuristic. His violin writing is rarely lyrical, choosing instead a mixture of slow impassioned weeps, eerie harmonics, declamatory tremolos and trills, terrifying double-stops, and traveling whispers of melody soaring always out of ear's reach. Ivar Frounberg's *Songlines* particularly grabs my ear—its first few seconds sound like a dulcimer gone tipsy; other vivid sounds follow. Many sonically gripping moments leap out of the electronic layers of Rorbech's program.; the fact that all of the pieces incorporate solo violin seems almost secondary, as if the violin is serenading the electronics to urge them on.

The Neuma label's New Music Series, Volume 4, deserves repeated hearing. Robert Morris's *Three Musicians* exudes an elegant grace as its intricate counterpoint brings the English horn, bass clarinet, and cello into tight and colorful interactions. The variations in speed and independence of the parts supply ample food for the ears. Anneliese Weibel's *C.I.R.C.A.* crackles and simmers with extreme percussive pointillism in a Stockhausen sort of way. Jerry Tabor's piece, an extremely minimalist violin and viola string quartet, sustains a very high pitch with a ponticello timbre. Over time we

begin to hear the inevitable subtle changes in its sound, like seeing the subtle shimmering gradations in color and texture when staring at a Rothko painting. Thomas DeLio scores his cantata *Center* for soprano, percussion, flute, clarinet, and violin. It pleasantly reminds me of Boulez's *Improvisations sur Mallarme* and Crumb's *Ancient Voices*. More than those works, however, DeLio's more explicitly explores the dual facets of singing: the percussive colors of words' consonants and the pitch-melodic potential of their vowels. In response to the singer, unpitched percussion expounds on the former as the other instruments do on the latter. An excellent eclectic collection of atonal chamber music.

Morris Rosenzweig's program presents beautiful, colorful, supple, lyrical, atonal music. I especially admire the bubbly pairings of flute and vibraphone, harp and marimba. The cello sings an athletic song in front of this. In his *Melpomene*, the harmonic fields are gor-

geously rich, the textures wonderfully intricate, as in Stefan Wolpe's best chamber music.

Ackerman's music mixes jazz, the Second Viennese School, and neoclassical styles: hear Ellington's 'Satin Doll' strewn on a Bergian blanket of atonal harmonies; the styles of Hindemith and Bartok walk by, holding hands, visiting the neighborhoods of Mancini, Copland, Stravinsky, and Webern.

There are two releases from California's Cold Blue label. Jim Fox's *Descansos, Past*, for cello quartet and double bass, speaks a very slow romantic minimalist dialect, often with dark, moody harmonies. Despite its relentlessly subdued mood, low register, and slow pace, it is creative enough to hold interest. Rick Cox's *Fade* achieves similar results through completely different means: electronic signal processors applied to electric guitar, piano, and bass.

MAILMAN

Videos

ALFANO: *Cyrano de Bergerac*
Roberto Alagna (Cyrano), Nathalie Manfrino (Roxane), Richard Troxell (Christian), Montpellier Opera/ Marco Guidarini
DG 4407—133 minutes, 16:9, Stereo-Dolby 5.1

Roberto Alagna in Paris

with Lamoureux Orchestra/ Anton Guadagno
DG 4408—86 minutes, 16:9, Stereo-Dolby 5.1

VERDI: *Un Ballo in Maschera*
Placido Domingo (Gustav III), Leo Nucci (Renato), Josephine Barstow (Amelia), Florence Quivar (Ulrica), Sumi Jo (Oscar); Vienna Philharmonic/ Georg Solti
TDK CLOPIBUM—145 minutes, 4:3, Stereo

DONIZETTI: *L'Elisir D'Amore*
Luciano Pavarotti (Nemorino), Kathleen Battle (Adina), Juan Pons (Belcore), Enzo Dara (Dulcamara), Metropolitan Opera/ James Levine
DG 4050—128 minutes, 4:3, Stereo-DTS

BELLINI: *I Puritani*
Edita Gruberova (Elvira), Jose Bros (Arturo), Carlos Alvarez (Riccardo); Liceu/ Friedrich Haider
TDK OPIP—159 minutes [2DVD],
16:9, Stereo-DTS

XENAKIS: *La Legende d'Er*
Computer generated music integrated with slides of the Diatope at Pompidou Center/ Xenakis
Mode 148—47 minutes, 16:9, Stereo-DTS

This issue's mailbag began with an opera and story in and out of the public eye since its cre-

ation in 1936. Jose Ferrer won a 1950 Oscar for his *Cyrano* and that is available on DVD and has a loyal following. The new DVD with Roberto Alagna was released in May, the same month that the Met presented its first production with Placido Domingo. Two of the world's top tenors should guarantee a hit, and both were critically praised. The Académie du Disque Lyrique awarded Alagna the 2005 Orphée du Meilleur Interprète for his CD performance.

The reviews were mixed for both productions, reflecting a story that can be a star vehicle while the music is pedestrian. It seems to have a Hollywood style, the notes marching across or along the scale but lacking melody and rhythm. Often it is redeemed by the shimmering harmonies that punctuate the story's melancholy. Alfano was a journeyman composer and musician working in many formats beside opera; I've not heard any of his other works.

Alagna is the DVD centerpiece and deserves his kudos for acting, passion, singing, and being almost always on stage (not to mention his lithe performance in the opening sword-fight). Manfrino (Alagna's sister-in-law) is a strong young soprano, revealing her inexperience sometimes but holding up her end of the complex romance with Christian and Cyrano. The costumes and sets are excellent and capture the era and the dandified guard's life (David and Frederico Alagna did production and set design). Cyrano's nose is Pinocchio comic-size and while it may be about right for