

21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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The David Cleary Issue

JANICE TUCKER RHODA

RHODA: You're perhaps best known as a music critic. Who do you write for, and what exactly do you cover?

CLEARY: These days, I'm involved with three publications. I cover the Boston area new music scene for *21ST-CENTURY MUSIC* and the *New Music Connoisseur*, also sending them critiques of recently released contemporary music CDs from all over. In addition, I review the Brockton Symphony Orchestra for that city's local newspaper, *The Enterprise*. The last of these affords opportunities to write about standard literature, which the other two journals don't permit. A few years prior, I also produced a number of pop CD reviews for a web site, the *All Music Guide*; some of those critiques were reprinted in the book *All Music Guide to Rock* (2nd edition). The albums were by groups as far afield as The Cramps, B-52's, Billy Bragg, and Dead Kennedys. So my experience is pretty wide ranging. As, I might add, is my musical taste.

RHODA: What do you look for in a piece of music when you review?

CLEARY: Every critic has certain predilections and emphases that are his own. I find myself returning over and over again to the notion of form and structure as an important consideration in new music. Regardless of the aesthetic, I believe good music addresses these parameters in one way or another.

RHODA: Are you thinking of form in the traditional sense?

CLEARY: Not necessarily. In fact, hearing a piece that slavishly adheres to, say, classic rondo or sonata form is a bit of a turn-off for me. There ideally ought to be some wrinkles that make the structure personal to that composer. To use my own music as an example, I employ a rondo format in the last movement of my *String Quartet No. 2* -- but each reentry of the "A" section is a strong variant of the opening, and each of these sections becomes more fractured and disjunct, to the point where the last exhibits a dizzying change of ideas and tempos, much in contrast to the opener's strongly directional sense. Even composers as diverse as Feldman and Reich think about structure, though in highly personal ways.

RHODA: How about performance considerations? How much weight does the printed score carry for you?

CLEARY: A lot. I'm very keen on the notion of players being faithful to the score as much as can be done. Gunther Schuller's book *The Compleat Conductor* is a real eye opener in this regard. The liberties some conductors take with what's on the printed page can be breathtaking! Of course, the composer isn't *always* right—look at the last movement of Kodály's *Sonata for Solo Cello*, for example. Some of the things he asks for (and at some of the tempos he requests) just can't be done exactly as written. It's an interesting dilemma, when to be exact and when to fudge things a little while still putting the composer's intentions across. But there's no excuse for such things as leaving out exposition repeats.

RHODA: Have you written about music in any other capacity besides reviews?

CLEARY: Yes. About eight years ago, someone approached me (on the recommendation of Marshall Bialosky) at Gale Research to write a chapter on composing careers for *The Performing Arts Career Directory*, part of a series of "how to get started in your chosen field"

books they publish. I also contributed some sizable entries to *Music and Women in America since 1900: An Encyclopedia*, forthcoming from Oryx Press. Most of these are on pop music subjects: tracing the development of woman singer-songwriters or all-female pop/rock bands, entries on Deborah Harry and the Staple Singers, things like that. I'm always happy to do more of that kind of thing when the chance arises.

RHODA: What motivates you to write criticism?

CLEARY: Various things. For starters, there's a very busy and vital new music scene here in the Boston area (second in size in the U.S. only to New York, to my best guess) that richly deserves some national visibility. I'm happy to be able to provide that spotlight. Reviewing definitely keeps me abreast of the cutting edge in recent composition, both here and elsewhere (I've been sent CDs by composers from around the country whom I've never heard of, some of which are really good). And there's the added advantage of name visibility, which as any composer will tell you, is paramount. There's always a chance a performer or conductor may see my reviews and wonder, "Hmmm -- what's his music like? Maybe I should look at some scores."

RHODA: Okay. Hmmm -- what's your music like?

CLEARY: Actually, that's one of the hardest questions for a composer to answer just in verbal terms. Briefly put, it's for the most part dissonant but not beholden to serial procedures, tonally focused but not usually triadic. Normally, I don't indulge in use of extended techniques or indeterminacy, though I have a few pieces that do so. I care a good bit about writing idiomatic music for the players, though I'm not at all shy about composing stuff that's challenging to perform; I'm pretty careful about not setting bad vowels on high notes in the voice, for example. And yes, thinking about structure and format matters a lot to me. I'm also very fussy about clear notation in score and parts. I've done a good bit of cello performing in my day, and I hated like heck to get parts with sloppy penmanship, confusing notation, and bad page turns. Those things matter a lot towards getting the player's good will and assist greatly in getting the best performance possible.

RHODA: Any composers that might be considered big influences?

CLEARY: Hard to say. I've heard people mention that my music shows influence of one composer or another. Funny thing is, people rarely agree on which composer: I've heard Stravinsky, Bartók, Scriabin, Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Carter, and Shostakovich, among others, all invoked. It's an interesting list. The first piece I ever heard when I was a youngster was Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and it remains one of my all-time favorites. That might be as good an influence to mention as any.

RHODA: Does pop music influence your style at all?

CLEARY: Only a little bit, in the sense that I have a predilection for rhythmically energetic ideas and sometimes try to imbue my music with a certain level of clarity that rock exhibits. I'm not writing stuff that's heavily influenced by vernacular idioms the way that, say, the Bang on a Can folks do.

RHODA: What are you working on now?

CLEARY: I just completed a commission for the American Composers Forum's Continental Harmony program. It's a piece for the same scoring as Schubert's *Trout Quintet*, and is to be played in November by the Castalia Ensemble out at Penn State University. Titled *Crosscultural Variations*, it will be done in conjunction with a weeklong seminar about Lewis and Clark; because of this, they wanted something that addressed the issue of interaction between Native Americans and European settlers in some way. To that end, the quintet is an unusual set of double variations. It starts with a Shoshone Sun Dance tune (Sacagawea, who served as Lewis and Clark's guide for a good bit of their trip, was of Shoshone ancestry). The variations that follow are at first concerned with elements of this melody -- but about halfway through, material starts appearing from another source. This source is finally revealed at the end of the work to be William Billings' "Chester," a famous Revolutionary War era marching tune (for all we know, members of the party may have sung the melody while trudging towards the Pacific Ocean). Anyway, fragments from "Chester" begin to be more prominent as the piece goes on, interacting with the Sun Dance snippets.

RHODA: How do you reconcile these two source melodies? You'd think they might be pretty different, given that they're from strongly contrasting cultures.

CLEARY: Fortunately, there are intriguing ties between them. Most notably, the Shoshone melody uses a number of open melodic perfect fourths, while Billings' tune has a bunch of fourths filled in stepwise. It was a lot of fun to exploit these kinds of things during composition. What's unusual about this piece for me is that there's a good bit of frankly triadic writing here—but that's to be expected given the tonal focus of the source melodies. That aspect proved a bit of a departure for me, though.

RHODA: People talk about stylistic periods in composers, such as early, middle, and late Beethoven. Are there any such divisions in your music that you can point to?

CLEARY: The work I wrote while in college (over about a ten year span) shows a good bit of experimenting with jagged rhythms and special instrumental effects while still maintaining the harmonic language that's most characteristic of my music. Forms tend to be non-prescriptive and intuitively based. Over the next ten years or so, I began to take a relatively neoclassic approach to structure, using formats based more clearly on 19th century models while still altering them in personal ways. I also began thinking of ways to articulate these forms more convincingly from a harmonic underpinning standpoint—while maintaining the dissonant sound world I prefer using. After all, classic sonata forms are at heart based on harmonic articulation, not theme manipulation. My rhythms also simplified noticeably while (I'd like to think, anyway) maintaining solid energy. The last few years have generally gotten away from these kinds of models and back to non-traditional ways of thinking about structure, while still keeping the pitch articulations of form and the driving yet fairly straightforward rhythmic sense.

RHODA: What college degrees did you obtain? Tell me if the university experience was helpful to you as a composer and critic.

CLEARY: I have a BM from the New England Conservatory, MM from Hartt College, and DMA from the University of Cincinnati -- and yes indeed, that experience was extremely useful. When I came in as a freshman comp major at the New England Conservatory, the post-1945 concert works I knew were the Shostakovich symphonies, Bernstein's *Candide Overture*, Lutoslawski's *Concerto for*

Orchestra, and little else. Nor did I know any works by the Viennese serialists, any Stravinsky after the three famous early ballets, or much Bartók besides the *Concerto for Orchestra*. My first comp teacher, Donald Martino, did the best thing he could have—he sent me to the library to listen to as much stuff as I could. It was a real eye-opener, but I absorbed a lot and began groping out a style based on more *au courant* stuff. Martino also imbued me with the importance of cleanly notated scores and parts -- his stuff of course looks immaculate, and I took this standard of notation to heart. My other teachers, Malcolm Peyton, Donald Harris, Norman Dinerstein, Thomas Pasatieri, and Mordechai Scheinkman, all imparted much that was helpful. Peyton in particular did a lot for me, simultaneously giving me a sense of compositional self-confidence while getting me to develop a critical eye for pitch language and form in my work. And various other classes, such as the numerous music history courses I took, have proven invaluable to both my composing and criticism. The notion that academia is an oppressive wasteland for creative types never rang true with my experience.

RHODAR: For a while, you were active in the Composers in Red Sneakers. Were you in on the ground floor of that group?

CLEARY: Actually, no. They started in 1981 from a one-shot concert, incorporating as a permanent entity the next year. When I was asked to join in 1994, the Sneakers had been dormant for a good few years. Herman Weiss, the last link to the old heyday of the collective, wanted to rev things up and start giving concerts again. At that time, he asked me, Beth Denisch, Howard Frazin, and pianist Kathryn Rosenbach to join him in doing so. The presentations that resulted were, at least to my way of thinking, solid artistic successes. Besides our own stuff, we gave some excellent works by John Harbison, Donald Martino, Yehudi Wyner, James Yannatos, and other less-known local worthies. In 1997, I was voted the group's president and held that position for three years. It was a lot of work, but good experience.

RHODA: You're no longer active in the group?

CLEARY: No. My last performance on a Sneakers concert occurred in 1999.

RHODAR: Why did you leave?

CLEARY: Various reasons. One was that it had become a real treadmill, frantically pushing out new pieces and digging up old ones that hadn't been played. During the time I was active, I had a work on every concert they gave, and at that point we were giving three concerts a year. And I was doing a good bit of cello performance there as well. It just got to be too much. Given what I've heard from other former Sneakers, burnout after a few years of frantic activity in groups such as this is fairly common. In addition, we began to get less media visibility (as far as I can tell, no presentation by the group has been reviewed since 1998), which can be a bit discouraging after doing all the hard work of putting on a concert. The local papers have cut back noticeably on area coverage of classical music events in general the last few years, and I guess we were not immune to that. Besides, my reviewing had really begun to heat up and I wanted to spend more time on that, as well as on commissions that the Sneakers couldn't present. It was a great experience while it lasted, though.

Concert Reviews

Sick Puppy

DAVID CLEARY

Summer Institute for Contemporary Piano Performance. June 24, Williams Hall and Brown Hall, New England Conservatory of Music, Boston, MA. Through June 29.

Stephen Drury, director of the New England Conservatory based Summer Institute for Piano Performance, takes impish glee in stating that this festival's acronym (SICPP) is pronounced "sick puppy." After hearing the parade of remarkable pianists presented this week, your reviewer was left thinking not of trembling Chihuahuas or anemic Yorkshire Terriers, but of strapping Saint Bernards and rangy Great Danes. These keyboard virtuosi were hale and accomplished, able to play the toughest music of the last hundred years of so with aplomb.

The opening concert was devoted to two huge works that date from the beginning of the 20th century. The Charles Ives *First Sonata* (1901-09) is a mould-shattering masterpiece, if a cantankerous and challenging one, that needs some tender loving care in presentation to avoid appearing disjointed or sprawling. A run-of-the-mill pianist can all too easily neglect such necessities as melodic shaping and balance/differentiation of sections. It is hard to imagine this sonata receiving a better performance than the one Drury gave it this evening. His presentation (from memory) sported a stunning range of dynamics and touch, remarkable sensitivity to line and voicing, scintillating technique, and careful delineation of structure. The other piece, Leo Ornstein's *Sonata for Two Pianos* (1925 -- an adaptation by the composer of his *Piano Concerto*) is a rarely heard entry that merits a listen. Distilled within its confines are heard echoes of many composers of the time and slightly before: Bartók, Debussy, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and most especially Scriabin. Yet Ornstein is able to impart sufficient personality of his own to the music; the harmonic language, tonal yet not functional in nature with notable octatonic and whole tone elements, sounds quite fresh. One wonders what the piano and orchestra version sounds like. Jeanne Golan and Christopher Oldfather played it with eager passion and professional precision.

Tuesday's evening of music showed three long-time stalwarts of the festival playing against type. Shannon Wettstein gave a strong accounting of Franco Donatoni's *Rima*, a strangely obsessive two-movement piece that strongly delineates sections by the type of figuration contained therein. It's not the most successful entity for a couple of reasons: the sections (all toccata like to varying degrees) consistently lurch from one to the next without real transitions or a compelling reason to go there, and the piano writing sounds both leaden and ungrateful. Wettstein, who with her smooth technique and warm tone excels in felicitous sounding fare, performed it with an appealing feistiness and laser focus. John Mark Harris's three program items were low key and subtle, demanding great control and concentration—and Harris, a pianist who can do power-packed music with the best, came through splendidly. *Sleet* by Joseph Cancellaro takes its cue strongly from Morton Feldman's oeuvre; quiet in dynamics and leisurely in unfolding, it could be a style study except for a tendency to progress a bit more quickly than much of this seminal minimalist's output. For all that, it's an effective listen. Feldman's *Palais de Mari* is of course the real deal, exhibiting a unique formal sense in the bargain.

Here, a ritornello gesture appears at the outset and between sizable passages that focus on varied frozen figurations; not until the last major section does the piece finally get around to developing the ritornello idea. It's a work plenty long in duration that remains fascinating nonetheless. The answer to the question posed by the Robert Helps piece *Shall We Dance* is, "well, sort of." The music here is in triple meter, consistently hinting at terpsichorean origins without obviously indulging in them. It also contains a good bit of Chopin-inspired *fioratura*, further making the point that, like the great Polish composer sometimes did, one can write music inspired by dance idioms without being overt about it. While showier than the Cancellaro and Feldman (how could it have been less so?), it's still a selection long on subtlety. A steely, lively tone quality and showy technique are hallmarks of Yukiko Takagi's playing style. The two selections she participated in, Karen Tanaka's *Crystalline* (a solo piece) and George Crumb's *Eleven Echoes of Autumn* (for mixed quartet) demand a different approach. The former's sonic universe is East Coast jagged, though mostly requiring evocative high register splashiness (only the third of the four sections here allows the pianist to play loud, explosive material). It's a good composition to hear. Crumb's entry contains fragile figures loaded with special effects that demand exquisite refinement of tone and care in execution. Takagi performed both successfully, imparting all the sensitivity and clarity a listener could want. Violinist David Fulmer, clarinetist Michael Norsworthy, and alto flautist Linda Bento-Rei (as part of Drury's wide ranging ensemble entry, the Callithumpian Consort) assisted wonderfully well in the Crumb.

Wettstein returned on the June 26th concert to perform *Suite Sweet Errata* by this year's composer in residence, Linda Dusman. This five movement set of substantial, yet humorous character pieces is cast in a harmonic language that finds an effectual midpoint between East Coast grit and tonal focus, able to incorporate patterned material without at all suggesting process stylings. Structurally, the music is idiosyncratic, yet satisfying, and the piano writing is idiomatic without being especially flashy. Wettstein's presentation imparted warmth and understanding to Dusman's quirky musical speech without sacrificing anything technically. Winston Choi next took stage to present two late 20th-century piano masterworks, *Night Fantasies* by Elliott Carter and *Incises* (2001 revision) by Pierre Boulez. Both are showy yet durable entries demanding the utmost virtuosity in terms of technique and musicality -- and Choi was more than up to the challenge. His playing was simply stunning: brawny, virile, and exciting, featuring razor sharp finger work and careful attention to overall pacing. In short, he's a major young talent with star potential. The evening drew to a close with an extemporized realization of "Unlimited" from Karlheinz Stockhausen's conceptual *Aus den Sieben Tagen*. As these things go, it was very enjoyable, definitely not a goofy scrape-fest among friends best kept to the privacy of one's living room. Members of the BSC (a group of eight playing everything from theremin to contrabass) mainly kept things on the quiet, thin textured, extended techniques, and electronic end of things.

The first half of Thursday's concert concerned itself with two works by Japanese composers. The appearance of harpsichordist Takae Ohnishi proved that this festival happily accommodates keyboard players other than pianists. Her presentation of Lei Liang's *Some Empty Thoughts of a Person from Edo* was a strong one, exhibiting mastery of many techniques and moods, the latter ranging from delicate Oriental gestures (nicely suggested via lute stop) to outsized cluster work. Which was precisely the difficulty with Liang's piece -- it tried to synthesize a broad range of approaches without making all these extremes appear to be a part of the same entity.

And sadly, no sense of structural shape was apparent here. Drury's Callithumpians reconvened as a trio (Drury, Norsworthy, and cellist Rafael Popper-Keizer) to present a dynamic performance of the intriguing *Vertical Time Study* by Toshi Hosokawa. The work, somehow sounding dissonant in a European instead of American fashion, erected a cogent entry from punctuation figures interspersed with long held material; the former expanded out later to small fragments, then to choppy flourishes in a fairly systematic way. Following intermission was one of the most unusual solo piano experiences your reviewer has ever encountered: Marc Ponthus gave three pieces (Anton Webern's *Variations for Piano, Op. 27* sandwiched between *Mists* and *Evryali* by Iannis Xenakis) in a manner that mixed elements of the visionary and eccentric. The triumvirate was played with only brief pauses in between (no formal acknowledgement that a piece had ended occurred). By doing so, Ponthus correctly pointed out the main similarity between them: all are concerned with controlled fragmentation, building cogent edifices from what might seem to be unpromising bits and pieces. His playing, featuring a heavy, commanding tone quality and spot on control of fingers and figures, served the Xenakis entries well. And Webern's work was shown to have a perceivable level of drama and guts that some performances wrongly suppress. But this approach had its drawbacks, too -- Ponthus unfortunately overdid the energy level in the *Variations*, making them restlessly feverish and squelching the wise warmth also to be found there (in particular turning the fizzy second movement into a raging, overdriven monster). His outsized sound sometimes crossed the threshold into banging. And his stage deportment reached Glenn Gould levels of idiosyncrasy, full of humming, grimaces, and foot kicks, and featuring spots where he dropped his coat on the floor and stood up while playing. Unique it certainly was, and thought provoking.

June 28th's presentation saw the busy Wettstein take the stage yet again. Three on a match may be unlucky, but three on a festival was great news in this case. The piece she gave was a good one; *Shimmer, for Piano and Tape* by Andrew May goes out of its way to make its prerecorded material sound piano-like, nicely melding the two so that they sound like a strange super-piano from a parallel universe—familiar, yet really not. Its structure is clearly and interestingly delineated, consisting of two large contrasting sections (the former busy in texture and dissonant, the latter more sparse and tonal sounding), which then recapitulate in truncated versions, resulting in an A-B-a-b construct. Wettstein wisely recognized that this piece, despite being filled with notes, was at heart a relaxed, friendly affair; she harnessed her formidable finger technique to successfully complement a sound quality that was warm, almost buttery at times. Stockhausen's music was encountered again this week in the form of two late *Klavierstuecke*. Number 13 in the series, subtitled "Lucifer's Dream," is a lengthy, bizarre selection that demands a virtuoso pianist. The performer is expected to not only play the keyboard in standard fashion, but also master myriad extended techniques (including one your reviewer had not seen before, playing large clusters and glissandos with one's derriere), make a host of vocal sounds, jingle some bells, and put forth a stage persona beyond the standard pianist-sitting-at-the-keys. The piece itself is intriguing in its way, if long and a bit shapeless; it also does as great a job of integrating standard and experimental modes of playing—a notoriously hard thing to do. Nino Jvania's presentation (from memory) was terrific, theatrically putting forth the notion of the pianist as devilish, demented vamp in addition to displaying a big tone quality, first rate digital dexterity, and marvelously controlled execution of special effects. The German master's *Klavierstuecke XVI* shows just how far along his notion of "piano piece" has gone since the 1950's. Here, one finds the bulk of the sound being produced by samples controlled by an electric keyboard, enhanced by piano playing that almost exclusively consists of extended techniques.

The number of notes played conventionally on the keys could be counted on the fingers of two hands. Intriguing in sound, the piece is further enhanced by a good sense of duration, being significantly shorter than the preceding *Klavierstuecke XIII. Red Arc/Blue Veil*, composed by John Luther Adams and scored for piano, percussion (crotales and vibraphone), and tape, is a good example of West Coast ambient music—and by "good," this critic also means a value judgement. The work, more or less pentatonic in sound, traces a clearly defined sense of shape (gradually up-the-hill to down-the-hill in instrumental register and dynamics, with prerecorded sounds periodically washing over the proceedings like incoming waves) and is only long enough to make its point clearly—not a jot more. It's a fine listen. Would that Moiya Callahan's *Magnify* had exercised as judicious a use of blue pencil. This piano and percussion duo certainly has the right idea, built as it is from sections consisting of bubbly, energetic, usually pointillist staccato material tossed back and forth between the two players, culminating in a laid-back coda where the piano finally hits and holds the chords. But sorry to say, it's too repetitive and lengthy to sustain interest. These last three selections were wonderfully well given by Ensemble Sirius (Michael Fowler, keyboards and Stuart Gerber, percussion). Both performers demonstrated a fine sense of ensemble balance, spot-on control, fully capable technique, and crisp rhythmic delineation in passages that called for it.

A most enthusiastic "hats off" goes out to Drury and his dog pound of talented pooches, a far from mangy bunch that would make any new music listener howl with delight.

Weekend Warebrooker

DAVID CLEARY

Warebrook Contemporary Music Festival. July 12, Irasburg, Newport, and Derby Line, VT. Through July 14.

The weekend of July 13-14 was picture perfect in the northeastern part of the Green Mountain State, warm and not the least bit humid. Under these circumstances, it takes something really special to coax a visitor to the area to spend the weekend indoors. Sara Doncaster has of course known the answer to this challenge for years. As director of the Warebrook Contemporary Music Festival, she has been putting on a terrific mid-July weekend of concerts in Northeastern Vermont for eleven years now. This was no exception.

The first half of the July 13 concert was loaded with first-rate selections. Michael Leese's *Solus* for flute alone is a winsome, nicely turned delight with a well-considered sense of unfolding, cleverly basing much of its material upon oscillations between tritones and perfect fifths. The three brief movements that make up *Diaphonic Suite No. 2 for Bassoon and Violoncello* by Ruth Crawford Seeger are anything but inconsequential. Craggy and dripping with confidence, they are packed with craft and depth—drops of hot acid to be reckoned with. The splendid, eloquently written *Fantasia for String Trio* by Irving Fine is a piece eminently worthy of revival. It makes pervasive, yet never ostentatious use of imitative writing in its triumvirate of movements, cutting an effective middle ground between Bartók-like vigor and serial integrity. A careless listen to the marimba/cello duet *Salva'dai* by Allen Anderson might lead one to focus unduly on its dizzying changes of mood and texture -- a serious error to make, as one would miss the work's clever large scale ternary organization and tight gestural world.

It's showy and well written, a pleasure to hear. After intermission, the music got, as they say in *Alice in Wonderland*, "curiouser and curiouser." Scored for clarinet and piano, Elena Ruehr's *Black and White* sports a solid measure of charm, but strongly invokes memories of Stravinsky in its bouncy, often motoric, jazz-influenced writing. Its employment of pitch material, derived from the five-note grouping outlined by the piano's black keys, is deftly handled, though. If an award for the "Piece Most in Need of a Valium" were given out at this festival, the hands-down winner would have been Yu-Hui Chang's solo violin selection *Subliminal Waters*. Every figure in this tough-to-play entry is so choppy and nervous that it would make a shrew's metabolism seem placid. But a linear sense does lie buried in the music, however herky-jerky it may be. It took much work to listen to but did provide a payoff of sorts. Stravinsky's influence surfaced in spades in the eccentrically scored *Quartet for Clarinet, Horn, Cello, and Side Drum* by Bohuslav Martinu. Written in 1924, it sounds as if it's stitched together from outtakes and scraps discarded from *Histoire du Soldat* -- though a modicum of facile charm does surface on occasion.

The July 13 song recital contained a decent helping of essential listens. Your reviewer encountered Martin Boykan's *A Packet for Susan* a second time with great pleasure, having heard it on a Dinosaur Annex concert in February. For mezzo-soprano and piano, the piece handles its serial sound world with a relaxed command of technique, scattering consonant fourths and fifths throughout its prevalingly dissonant harmonies and imbuing the whole with a significant depth of feeling. Crawford Seeger's marvelous soprano/piano duo *Five Songs* puts forth a crafty palette of clangorous verticals, matching Carl Sandberg's quintet of perfectly chiseled poems with music that excellently combines vital sturdiness and exquisite sensitivity. *Two Supernatural Songs* continues Doncaster's fascination with the verses of William Butler Yeats, being an excerpt from the central portion of a projected trilogy setting this poet's work. Expertly treading the fuzzy line between consonant and dissonant sonic universes, it's loaded with lyric, lush writing for voice and piano that never cloys. The biggest sin of Donald Jamison's *Three Threshold Songs* for soprano, clarinet, and cello was to run in impossibly fast company. It's a reflective, heartfelt collection, written in response to September 11th's terrorist tragedy, that regrettably doesn't plumb the depths of feeling exhibited by the Boykan, Crawford Seeger, or Doncaster collections. Its unabashedly triadic writing draws heavily from 19th century traditions tinged with earlier modal stylings. *Portraits and an Etude* proved to be four of Virgil Thomson's solo piano *Portraits* and a tango-inflected study in parallel octaves. At their best, these tonally-based, ethnic-hued miniatures are affable and sweet, at their worst corny and insubstantial—a mixed offering, to say the least.

Girasol by Ursula Mamlok, a sextet for Pierrot grouping plus viola was the highlight in a Saturday evening concert loaded with worthy items. This work's wide ranging, multi-hued textures are neatly harnessed within a carefully gauged variation procedure. And despite employing a spiky serial manner of speech, it's airy and uncluttered, never turgid. *Range of Light*, a trio for cello, piano, and percussion by Erica Muhl, is attractive to hear. Simultaneously furtive and variegated, it handles its non-triadic verticals with careful confidence and makes smart use of extended techniques. Marjorie Merryman's setting of Baudelaire poems entitled *La Musique* provided a strong contrast to these entries. Scored for mezzo-soprano, viola, and piano, its three movements are dusky-hued and crisply spoken, striking a persuasive midpoint between romantic luxuriance and a more contemporary harmonic ethos. The remaining program items shared the same scoring but otherwise differed greatly. Charles Fussell's enjoyable selection for this ensemble consists of six character studies with subtitles such as "Aria" and "Dirge," all cast in a fairly gritty, yet tonally focused language.

These span the range from neoclassic verve to crepuscular introspection. By contrast, Edward Cohen's entry is almost unrelentingly serious minded, full of chunky, earnest serial counterpoint and darkly brooding moods. Both give its individual players ample opportunities to shine in exposed solo passages.

A pair of string trios held sway at the July 14th finale. Samuel Headrick's *Fall Suite 2001* makes capable use of movement contrast, framing its sizable elegiac centerpiece (yet another lament regarding September 11) with shorter divertimento style partners. The whole sounds nearest to Copland, though thickened with added discords. The pricklier *String Trio* of Mario Davidovsky deals with a more foreground oriented sense of contraposition, though expressed on more levels -- alternating sections of ferocious vim with hushed stillness. It's a first-rate piece. A threesome of a different sort (flute, clarinet, and bassoon) is called for in William Pfaff's *Trio*. This clangorous, granitic selection performs the neat trick of cobbling together lots of fractious doodads into an intelligently cogent and satisfying whole during its relatively brief duration -- no mean feat. Its two halves are respectively perky and pensive. *Elegy* by Verne Reynolds gives its horn soloist a doleful yet fluent melody to sing, interspersing tiny recurrent motives throughout its length. These serve to give the composition depth and grounding -- it's not just another plaintive tune. *Canzone e Tarantella sul nome Petrassi*, a clarinet/cello duo, shows composer Donald Martino in a light, puckish mood reminiscent of his other birthday card pieces like *B,A,B,B,I,T* -- and like the latter, it too employs *soggetto cavatto*. Its canzona is gossamer and lovable, its tarantella bouncy and engaging, floating in and out of a showcase section of Verdi quotes with deceptive ease.

As is always the case at this festival, performances were at a uniformly high level. Note should be made of the forthright, energetic virtuoso presentation of the Davidovsky, Fine, and Headrick by the Concordia String Trio; the top-shelf singing (featuring a huge, expressive soprano range projecting wonderfully from top to bottom and able diction) in the Crawford Seeger, Doncaster, and Jamison cycles by Lisa Jablow; the inspired violin playing that made exquisite linear sense of Chang's fractured writing style by Sarah Thornblade; the wonderfully showy cello performances of Rafael Popper-Keiser; the splendid mezzo-soprano vocalizations in the Boykan and Merryman by Paula Dellal; the first-rate, sensitive accompanying by pianists Donald Berman and Paula Ennis, cellist Bonnie Thurber-Klimoswki, and clarinetist Steven Klimowski in the afternoon's vocal selections; the richly toned and expressive horn playing in the Reynolds by Whitacre Hill; the excellently balanced sound heard in the wind threesome of Matthew Doherty, Mark Margolies, and Janet Underhill in the Pfaff; the delightful presentation of the Ruehr by Klimowski and Paul Orgel; the able trio performances of the Cohen and Fussell by Heidi Braun-Hill, Mark Simcox, and Shuann Chai; the sturdy solo turns by Doherty and Chai; and the adept, colorful presentation, expertly conducted by Paul Brust, of Mamlok's entry. The various performance venues provided good acoustics, though a bit of outside noise intruded in Friday's presentation at Irasburg Town Hall and Saturday's voice recital at Goodrich Memorial Library. Pianos heard at all locations proved a bit less than optimal, though all keyboard players did their best to get decent sound from these instruments.

With music-making this good, we'll forego the bucolic rural pleasures of Vermont for the concert hall any day. Bravos all around.

Record Reviews

All-CD Flight

DAVID CLEARY

Composers Collaborative. *Solo Flights*. CRI CD 864

Founded in 1987, the New York-based organization Composers Collaborative Inc., is the creation of composer/pianist Jed Distler, his wife Celia Cooke, and a few friends. Since 1994, the group has presented something called the *Solo Flights* festival in which pianists (who may or may not also be composers) give recitals of contemporary music and feature informal dialogues between the artists and audience. This CD contains live, unedited performances that have occurred on these festivals in years past.

Most of the compositions heard here are brief; some are light and charming while others revel in, as we used to say in high school, "copping an attitude." Examples of the latter include *Carny* (1992) by John Zorn (a splendid work that jumbles and jump cuts a wild array of styles from all walks of classical, jazz, and pop), *Opposites Attract* (1996) by David Del Tredici (a cheeky, clever sendup of material from Wagner's *Tristan* and Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All*), and *The Anthem at Woodstock* (1996) by Distler (a curious entity that purports to be a pianist's reaction to Jimi Hendrix's legendary festival performance of "The Star Spangled Banner" but owes as much to Ives as anyone else). The elder statesman tonemeisters provide the bulk of this disc's lighter fare. Two of Thomson's *Portraits*, one of composer Lou Harrison (1945) the other of visual artist Robert Indiana (1966) appear here, as do Ursula Mamlok's serial *Three Bagatelles* (1987) and Robert Helps' Debussy-like *In Retrospect—5 Pieces for Piano* (1977). All are well crafted, delightful listens.

The rest prove brief but earnest, generally being decent pieces. Eleanor Hovda's *Spring Music with Wind* (1973) is a nicely timed exercise in extended techniques, drawing a series of roaring and scratching sounds from inside the piano and decorating them with vocalizations. *Triftmusik* (1991) by Laura Kaminsky and *Our Mingling Arms* (1997) by Molly Thompson juxtapose music that is by turns forcefully intense or sparsely atmospheric; Kaminsky's work takes an especially imaginative approach here by gradually shortening the two types of material as the piece progresses, nearly piling them on top of each other by the conclusion. Distler's other selection here, *The Woman Who Danced* (1991), containing echoes of Debussy, Copland, and jazzy pop, unfolds slowly but deftly traces a clear structure. The *Two Sonatinas* (1995) by Andrew Violette are showy virtuoso stuff, often old-fashioned sounding in a Lisztian manner in spite of the presence of such later idioms as tango derived material; they strike this reviewer as diffuse and odd.

Performances are strong, especially considering the lack of editing. Del Tredici, Distler, Helps, and Violette play well here, as do freelance piano stalwarts Phillip Bush, Sarah Cahill, Sara Laimon, and Kathleen Supove. Sound tends rather towards the archival, presumably reinforcing the off-the-cuff feel of this enterprise. It's all worth a listen.

Exchange Bureau

DAVID CLEARY

Exchange Latin America. CRI CD 848

This compilation CD, consisting exclusively of solo or small chamber works by composers hailing from Latin America, shows a broad diversity of styles -- not all of which demonstrate influence of music from their respective composers' birthplaces

Only one track here, the sentimental and triadic clarinet quintet *Pacific Serenade* (1998) by Miguel del Aguila does so unabashedly. Some, such as Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon's Pierrot ensemble and percussion essay *Paramo* (1999) and the string quartet *Casi Cueca* (1997) by Miguel Chuaqui filch Latino melodic or rhythmic basis material and build Westernized edifices from them. Other selections merely hint at aspects of ethnic styles by subtly incorporating elements of this music's scoring or gesture in otherwise thoroughly European late 20th-century idioms; Awilda Villarini's *Three Preludes* (1985) for piano and Milton Estevez's *Cantos Vivos Y Cantos Rodados* (1996-97) for mixed ensemble and tape fall into this category. *Notebook* (1993) by Jorge Mario Liderman, another Pierrot and percussion piece, derives its source material from African Jewish, not Western Hemisphere based sources.

Nearly half the pieces here concern themselves solely with recognizable *au courant* concert music approaches. *Calacas Y Palomas* (1990) for piano four-hands by Carlos Sanchez-Guiteriez and Orlando Jacinto Garcia's choral piece *el sonido dulce de tu voz* (1991) delight in personal reinterpretations of minimalist styles, respectively those of John Adams and Morton Feldman. A clever updating of Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms* series is encountered in Carlos Delgado's *Polemics* (1997), a work for piano and electronic sounds. And Carlos R. Carrillo's *Como si fuera la primavera* (1996) for mixed quartet shows influence of the colorist writing of two of his teachers, George Crumb and Joseph Schwantner.

This reviewer responded most positively to the driving energy and able construction found in the Chuaqui, Delgado, Estevez, and Zohn-Muldoon tracks as well as the hushed color writing in the Garcia.

Performances vary in quality from passable to excellent; the efforts of solo pianists Villarini and Max Midroit as well as the duo Continuum (Cheryl Seltzer and Joel Sachs) deserve special citation, as do the presentations by the Florida International University Concert Choir (John Augenblick, conductor) and The Furious Band (Paul Vaillancourt, director). Editing is excellent. Sound quality varies a bit from piece to piece though never falls below acceptable levels; demerits for audible extraneous noise (coughing and sneezing among them) in what appears not to be a live performance of the Liderman must be noted, however.

Feld(er)(man)

DAVID CLEARY

David Felder. *In Between*. Coleccion Nocturna. Morton Feldman. Instruments II. The Viola in My Life, IV. EMF CD 033

The long-running *June in Buffalo* summer festival has seen two directors over its 25-year history. This disc contains music for orchestra and chamber orchestra (with and without soloists) composed by both these individuals, Morton Feldman and David Felder

The latter's selections are widely spaced chronologically. *Coleccion Nocturna* (1983-84) is essentially a double concerto, featuring a highly prominent solo part for a clarinetist (playing bass and soprano instruments) and a somewhat more subsidiary one for pianist. The piece exists in versions with backing by either chamber orchestra or tape, and it's the former that appears here (the smaller-scale one is found recorded on the Mode label CD "...a pressure triggering dreams..."). The sound world is unabashedly East Coast, though quite colorfully scored and mindful of dramatic shaping. Clarinet writing is especially showy, shot through with klezmer inspired special effects such as wide vibrato and pitch bends. Written fifteen years later, *In Between* demonstrates a softening of the Atlantic seaboard sonics to include triadic entities and a further heightened sense of gripping profile. The featured percussion part is less a true solo line than a semi prominent obbligato, emerging periodically from the surrounding textures like an occasionally breaching whale sighted during a harbor cruise. In some ways, it can be seen as a response of sorts to vintage items from Feldman's oeuvre, consisting primarily of slowly unfolding vertical events that are varied and enhanced by vibrant orchestration and filigree. Structurally, the work traces a four-part format, with two large climactic peak areas preceded by more laid back material, the whole winding up in a brief atmospheric coda. Both are excellent listens.

Feldman's pieces, though composed within a few years of each other during the early 1970's, show significant differences. *Instruments II* (1975), for a chamber ensemble largely bereft of strings, is the sort of work one typically associates with this vanguard minimalist: unremittingly soft in dynamics and concerned texturally with largely unadorned dissonant chords surrounded by silences, scattering occasional disjunct melodic fragments throughout. The usage of horizontal motion by half step (at times interspersing major seconds), both in the small tune snippets and chord progressions, serves as an effective unifying device. Scored for full orchestra and viola soloist, *The Viola in My Life IV* (1971) makes more conspicuous use of melodic gestures, not only in the solo part but in the accompaniment as well (note the recurring pizzicato fragments in the cello and contrabass, as an example). And while still prevailingly quiet, the piece does rouse itself to put forth some sections marked "forte." In this sense, it hearkens back to Feldman's earlier output such as *Rothko Chapel*. Both works possess this composer's signature intuitive-yet-perfectly-right sense of balance and pacing. They're essential works, as is true of most Feldman.

Performances are excellent. Top shelf efforts are turned in by soloists Daniel Druckman (percussion), Jean Kopperud (clarinets), Jesse Levine (viola), and James Winn (piano). The June in Buffalo Orchestra (a freelance group cobbling together regularly performing guests of this festival), ably led by Harvey Sollberger and Jan Williams, puts forth a well drilled, sensitive sound. Both production and sonics are professional all the way. This fine disc is very strongly recommended.

May the Flute Be With You

DAVID CLEARY

Flute Force. *Eyewitness*. Innova 556.

Sheryl Henze, Gretchen Pusch, Rie Schmidt, and Wendy Stern make up the all-female quartet of flautists alliteratively titled Flute Force. Judging from this release, one can confidently state that this foursome is highly accomplished, performing with splendid ensemble sensitivity, possessing finger technique both fleet and spotless, and boasting a wonderfully blended group sound. They also actively commission new repertoire for themselves to perform, but sad to say, a good bit of the music presented on this CD doesn't do justice to Flute Force's excellent playing

The best selection heard here by far is Robert Dick's two-movement work *Eyewitness*. While it can be seen as a veritable catalog of striking special effects for the flute, the piece fortunately doesn't stop there. In fact, Dick goes to great lengths to craft a capable entry that exhibits a decent sense of long-range architecture and manages to combine the extended techniques convincingly with more traditional styles of playing. It's a pleasing listen that possesses substance. *Travelogue* by Elizabeth Brown also utilizes unusual modes of sound production, if not as extensively as *Eyewitness*. But Brown's piece stumbles by trying to combine them with a tonal idiom shot through with self-consciously old-fashioned items such as Alberti bass figures. Somehow, it all proves too dissimilar to reconcile—in brief, a noble roll of the dice that comes up snake eyes. Adding a string quartet to the four flutes, Eric Stokes' *Tantamounts* constitutes the most professional sounding of the triadic based compositions, consisting of distinctive, confidently molded material put together with a modicum of cogency. It's a little bit of a lightweight, though, and the string quartet writing seems rather cramped (this latter perhaps stemming from an understandable desire not to have the strings overshadow the flutes).

Compared to the remaining two entries on this disc, however, the Stokes piece projects an almost Shakespearean gravity. Despite some pop music colorings, Gary Schocker's perky quartet *Nymphs* is so close in sound to neoclassic Ravel and Stravinsky that it could be a style study. To give due credit, it does also exhibit a certain flashy flair in its scoring. And despite its problems, it is still a better listen than David Alpher's *Land of the Farther Suns*, a work that adds piano and narrator to the four flutes. Sadly, *Land's* lengthy last movement balances poorly in relation to the seven that precede it. And the music, strongly redolent of jazz and pop stylings and sentimental to the point of being corny, proves to be a singularly ill fit with the well turned late 19th century poetry by Stephen Crane read with it.

Flute Force's choice of accompanying players is much more successful. The Meridian String Quartet (Sebu Sirinian, Lisa Tipton, Liuh-Wen Ting, and Wolfram Koessel), pianist Alpher, and narrator Garrison Keillor are first-rate. Sound is all right, if sometimes a little stuffy or wan, and editing is fine.

Foxy Last Things

DAVID CLEARY

Jim Fox. *Last Things*. Cold Blue Music, CB0001

Jim Fox is a composer in California -- probably Los Angeles, as the sketchy booklet notes make a few mentions of this city and its environs (unfortunately, no composer bio is found here). His stylistic touchstone for the two sizeable selections on this disc is Brian Eno's atmospheric ambient oeuvre such as *Music for Airports*. Both the title track and *The Copy of the Drawing* are quietly meditative and painfully slow to unfold. But surprisingly, this does not prove to be dull music for those listeners who possess boundless patience.

Copy, consisting entirely of stage-whispered text enfolded by a carpet of electronic sounds, shows an interesting procedure underlying the latter. One initially encounters a series of brief electronic accompaniments that leisurely succeed each other in a series of loosely defined sections—but as time passes, later such passages begin to loop back and incorporate earlier material, to the point where some final segments consist of small bits of older gestures calmly following on each other's heels. Bass clarinet is the solo instrument in *Last Things*, and Fox here glacially moves the player's succession of single pitch events (sometimes embellished with grace notes or pulsed vibrato) from the bottom of his tessitura to the top. And both tracks exude an appealing sound world that is not only enveloping but haunting and rather eerie -- thus one is inclined to be a bit more forgiving of being buttonholed for upwards of forty minutes at a time and give the music a chance to do its thing. Your reviewer cannot with confidence say that he'll revisit this CD in the future (ultimately, the selections are pretty prolix and shapeless), but can pronounce it eminently worthy of exploration for those keen on ambient West Coast and downtown New York idioms.

Performances are nicely executed. Marty Walker handles the bass clarinet material in the title track especially well. Janyce Collins (voice), Rick Cox (glass guitar), Chas Smith (pedal steel guitar), and the composer (piano, electric keyboards, and electronics) acquit themselves capably. Sound and production are of solidly professional quality.

Angels and Maurer's

DAVID CLEARY

Laurel Ann Mauer. *Angel Shadows*. 4TAY-CD-4006

Laurel Ann Mauer's *Angel Shadows* is evenly divided between flute/piano duos and selections for solo flute (or alto flute in one case), and it's the latter triumvirate that provides the most consistently pleasing auditory experience. Meyer Kupferman's *Arcana I for Solo Flute* fruitfully explores the dichotomy between its two primary ideas, one bouncy and cellular, the other warm and long breathed. But these materials possess sufficient similarity of detail that they interact and mesh well together, culminating in a nicely spoken amalgam by work's end. The title track (1993), an alto flute solo by Augusta Read Thomas, essentially inverts the procedure Kupferman employs, splitting its attractive opening phrase in two and proceeding to imbue each with recognizable personality while playing them off each other. Thomas's utilization of a readily perceivable repetition of the opening measures transposed up an octave serves as recapitulation and helps ground this excellent work structurally. *Fantasy-Sonata for Unaccompanied Flute, Op. 45* (1979) by Dana Paul Perna is a brief, effective three-movement composition that finds a convincing middle ground between the two title genres. Sonata boundaries are present, if loosely established, providing a viable skeleton for Perna's rhapsodic melodic outpourings.

While the duos presented here can be characterized as neoclassic Americana in spirit, only Walter Piston's *Sonata for Flute and Piano* (1930) is the real deal, being written during the heyday of this ethos. It's a clear, well-made composition that puts forth its traditional structures with confidence and imagination. And for a work of this ilk, it's surprisingly brooding and dissonant. All in all, fine stuff. Both the *Sonata for Flute and Piano Op. 23* (1987) by Lowell Liebermann and *Six American Folk Songs for Flute and Piano CN341* (1990) by Thom Ritter George look back to this historical era and to varying degrees veer perilously close to being style studies. That being said, the two-movement Liebermann sonata is by far the stronger selection of these. Like the Piston, the mood encountered is highly charged, not fleecy, featuring a well built first movement that alternates nervously hushed and vigorously explosive music and a drivingly kinetic perpetual motion finale. Despite suffering in a few places from overwritten piano accompaniments that swamp the flautist, there's much worthwhile listening here. George's piece can be cited positively for being fantasias, not slavish statements, of the folk songs mentioned in movement subtitles. But regrettably, the effect here is often sentimental, even corny at times—ultimately the modern equivalent of what one used to call "parlor music" a century ago.

Flautist Laurel Ann Maurer performs well here, exhibiting a strong, full tone quality and good control in slow passages as well as able finger technique in most fast segments. The only exception to this occurs in the first of George's *Folk Songs*, where Maurer scrambles at times to keep up with her fleet footed accompanist. Both Mark Neiwirth and Joanne Pearce Martin provide rock steady piano backing. Sound quality varies a good bit on this disc, at its best in the Perna and Thomas selections, a bit stuffy and distant in the George, Kupferman, Liebermann (first movement only), and Piston, and weak in the Liebermann finale, where crackling background noise is audible. Production is generally good.

McColloughmerican

DAVID CLEARY

Teresa McCollough. *New American Piano Music*. Innova 552.

New American Piano Music, the result of a nationally placed call for scores by pianist Teresa McCollough, contains an attractive clutch of recent keyboard works exhibiting various degrees of tonal focus. The harmonic languages heard range from the pop oriented clarity of *Vernacular Dances* (1996) by Charles Griffin and barely clouded functionality of Henry Martin's *Prelude and Fugue XIII—A Slow Drag* (1996) to the jazz hued spikiness of Alex Shapiro's *Sonata for Piano* (1999) and dissonant East Coast leaning etudes by David Rakowski (though this last is harmonically grounded by employment of ostinato figures and repeated notes). This wide-ranging gradation of tonal employment imparts a good bit of overall variety to the release.

Your reviewer especially liked the Rakowski and Shapiro selections. The latter, while obviously derived from older models, manages to avoid imparting a sense of cookbook recipe to the format. The scherzo closer, while fluffy and short in relation to the two substantial preceding movements, works surprisingly well, coming off as a slam bang coda in the way the last measures of Beethoven's first Razumovsky quartet do. Rakowski's three selections [*BAM!* (1991), *Nocturnal* (1991), and *Close Enough for Jazz* (1995)] make effective colorist use of piano writing and demonstrate a nicely expressed sense of structural balance. And pieces by both composers contain a palpable level of motivic economy, confident and easy manner of melodic speech, and clear if not attention-getting sense of crafty sophistication.

Martin's essay (excerpted from an extensive prelude and fugue set) hews very closely to ragtime conventions but neatly foils expectations by having the fugue blossom organically in the middle of the prelude without unduly upsetting the basic Joplinesque architecture. Elizabeth Pizar's *Strains and Restraints* (1984) shows profoundly strong sonic kinship to Debussy but manages to make its lack of flashiness a virtue and does a good job of spinning out material from limited resources without becoming long-winded. The outer movements of the Griffin composition, while containing obvious influence of pop, blues, and Latin American idioms, demonstrate a more bedrock affinity to process music while notably shortening up the rate of unfolding. Stitching together sections of repeated fragments, these bookend entities come across as drastically truncated replies to works such as Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*. But for the most part, Griffin manages to pace these fragments well—just before one has had enough of a particular gesture, another supplants it. The sweetly expressive central slow movement, reminiscent of pop ballads, provides a welcome contrast.

Sonata No. 2, Op.121 (1985) by Tomas Svoboda is a bit less successful. While putting forth a certain easygoing charm, the work speaks in a manner extremely reminiscent of Stravinsky and Copland and cleaves more obviously to hoary structural formulas than might be ideal. Steve Heitzeg's *Sandhill Crane (Migration Variations)* (1998) contains a fetching underlying ecological program but seems underdeveloped and scattered musically. It yokes together tiny fragments that don't connect all that effectively to each other, possessing more variety of expression (ranging from extended techniques to Cagelike silence to process bursts) than can be ably reconciled in an eight-minute selection.

McCollough performs well, exhibiting an attractive tone quality, good sensitivity to voicing, and able technique. Editing is very good. Sound quality is generally fine, though pedal noise is often audible in soft passages. There's much to like here -- definitely worth a listen.

Maximalist Miniatures

DAVID CLEARY

MMC Orchestral Miniatures, Volume V. MMC Recordings, MMC 2081

You write music and have been allotted approximately 3-8 minutes on a mixed composer orchestral CD. And you naturally want to make a favorable impression, to stand out from everybody else on the release. So what kind of work do you provide? If you guessed a splashy, attention-grabbing showpiece, you're thinking the same way many of the folks who contributed compositions to this disc did.

Certain traditional ways of delineating this flashy type of music can be found here. Marchlike gestures (Eugene McBride's *Four for Orchestra* and Alexandra Pierce's *Short Suite Overture*), driving Stravinskian figures like those found in *Le Sacre* (David Stock's *Fast Break* and Carol Barnett's *Overture for a Greek Drama*), fanfares (Pierce again and Amy Reich's *Three Fanfares*), and dance-derived material from genres like the bacchanale and waltz (Stephen Rush's *Possession* and Persis Anne Parshall-Vehar's *Light/Lux/Svietlo*) are encountered here. *Spring Music* by Gary Philo manages to be showy while avoiding these more predictable approaches, opting instead for an unusual juxtaposition of Impressionist and Expressionist writing. Given this, those electing to tread a more restrained route ironically manage to push themselves into higher relief. Whitman Brown's *Zudnick* and Charles Alan Beeler's *Homage to Roger Sessions* and *Mad Song for Orchestra* employ warm East Coast derived gestures while still imparting notable contrast and shape to the proceedings.

While all the selections here prove reasonably listenable at the bare minimum, this reviewer found his favorites in the Stock, Philo, and Brown tracks. Stock's piece proves a spiffy romp, colorfully festive and relentless without taking itself gravely seriously; while an ideal pops concert piece, it's utterly devoid of the slick sellout feel. Philo's aforementioned style mix is handled expertly well, somehow managing to let its two approaches coexist smoothly. And the work's structural sense is both expertly outlined and unusual. The Brown possesses a sturdy warmth and smoothness not encountered elsewhere on this disc. And all three contain an especially memorable, accomplished manner of speech.

Performances, by six different Eastern European orchestras, are capably attractive. Editing is excellent and sound is generally good, the only definite exception occurring in the McBride work where sonics contain rather less presence (most notably featuring a wanly recorded piano). In sum, this is a solid, recommended listen.

Where No Music Box Has Gone Before

DAVID CLEARY

John Morton. *Outlier: New Music for Music Boxes*. Innova 553.

The music on this CD is most enjoyable. Unlike many experimentalists, John Morton is concerned not only with attractive sounds (and make no mistake, this is a most fetching disc from a purely sonic standpoint) but thoughtfully considers how to express them within a larger context. The release's tripartite magnum opus *A Delicate Road* (2000-01), for music boxes, sound processing, piano, and guitar, is an ideal illustration. It progresses in surprising, yet cogent fashion, expressing long-range structure in convincing, yet non-traditional ways. And the four "instruments" employed complement each other handsomely; piano and guitar are almost never played in standard fashion, instead mirroring the less prescriptive sound sources called for. Happily, Morton also takes to heart the old Shakespeare observation "brevity is the soul of wit." The twenty-three minute *Delicate Road* is in fact the exception here; over half the selections are no lengthier than a typical pop song. Morton keenly knows how long his material will sustain itself and asks only what it can reasonably bear, thus making these little confections seem eloquent and self-assured, not long-winded and monstrous.

All but one of these works prominently feature the sound of music boxes -- but these are in no way sentimental salon trifles. Morton takes standard music boxes and, to paraphrase the sketchy liner notes, mutilates and recomposes their remains. The resultant sound retains the tinkling timbre one normally associates with these entities while imposing all sorts of unusual pitch and rhythmic figures. Abundant influences of non-Western idioms and jazz further explode convention. The title track (2001), a selection for music boxes and sound processing, uses a basis ostinato redolent of African kalimba playing. The trio *Lulabell* (2000), awash in thick upper tertian chords, strongly suggests kinship with standard jazz ballads; here the music box line participates as an equal partner with its vibraphone and piano compatriots. Jazz leanings also infiltrate *White Tara* (2000), though with its more dissonant verticals and complex rhythms resulting from multiple overlays of music box lines, the influence is subtler, confined to certain aspects of the underlying piano and bass material. Morton's roots are encountered in the older *Slurry* (1987) for three clarinets. Present here is the use of layering heard in the more recent pieces, though handled with a bit less finesse (some of the tripartite clarinet passages sound densely cluttered instead of riotously sparkly) as well as a thoughtful sense of unfolding, texture, and pacing.

Performances, by David Loewus (clarinets), Ted Piltzecker (vibes), William Blossom (bass), Steve Hardwick (guitar), and the composer (everything else), are excellent. Sound and production are first-rate. Your reviewer was left only wanting bios for the composer and performers and more extensive program notes. This charming and imaginative release is strongly recommended.

Moyses Divine

DAVID CLEARY

Louis Moyse. *Works for Flute and Piano*. CRI CD 888

Louis Moyse is one of a host of multitalented musicians who has toiled in relative obscurity for many years. Born in France ninety years ago and currently living in Vermont, he is perhaps best remembered as a virtuoso flautist and noteworthy teacher of this instrument, though he was also an accomplished pianist and worked for many years as an arranger and editor for the publishing firm G. Schirmer. This release showcases yet another of his abilities, that of composer.

The three works heard here are substantial sized selections for flute and piano duo, all of which reveal Moyse as a dedicated neoclassicist. His two sonatas for this scoring, written in 1975 and 1998, follow the standard four-movement pattern exhibited by 19th- and early 20th-century examples of the genre. The first is more obviously French in feel, with the first and third movements putting forth a frothy insouciance reminiscent of Poulenc, the slow movement containing a supple Debussy oriented midsection, and the understated waltz-like finale mirroring certain aspects of Ravel's output. Only the fugato development section of the opening movement and the measured, foreboding outer parts of the slow movement furnish non-Gallic gravity. Sonata no. 2 demonstrates a more severe sound without obviously resorting to Germanic trappings. Its scherzo is gleefully bumptious, its outer movements contain fugal material, and its slow movement employs static accompaniment patterns and a cadenza section all containing roots in late Schubert but showing no overt similarity. Despite the aforementioned influence of various early 20th-century French masters, Moyse does not usually employ slavishly imitative harmonies in either work, generally putting forth a more clangorous sonic palette that admits polytonality and similar techniques. Your reviewer had previously reviewed the work *Introduction, Theme, and Variations* (1980) at an Ought-One Festival live performance. This rehearing revealed less overt Debussy kinship in the selection's sound world than seemed apparent at first listen. True enough, certain passages are frankly Impressionist, but much of the piece shares the same comparatively spiky sound exhibited in the sonatas. However, it still conceives of its variations as widely varying individual entities without a broader overarching shape. In brief, the contents of this CD are ably written, if fairly tradition-minded. Flutists who want a break from more standard repertoire will want to give this music a hearing.

The performances here are excellent; flautist Karen Kevra and pianist Paul Orgel clearly love this music and make a compelling case for it. Both play with a substantial tone quality and handle the technical challenges of this body of work with fluid ease. Sound is good and editing is fine.

Dream Journal

DAVID CLEARY

Network for New Music. *Dream Journal*. Network for New Music. Albany, Troy 488.

Presented on *Dream Journal* (Albany) are four pieces commissioned by the Philadelphia-based Network for New Music Ensemble. All prove to be worthy listens by composers of much ability

The finest of the foursome by a hair's breadth is *Concertino* by Bernard Rands. The featured instrument here is the oboe and the solo part is a daunting though idiomatic one, loaded with lightning quick passage work and expressive linear figures. The composer's handling of textures, scoring, and melodic material—both in the oboe and seven backing ensemble members—is masterful. And structurally, the piece is most unusual and effective, laid out in two primary sections. The first of these gradually builds upon the oboe's busy cadenza-like opener into a skittering and playful entity, while the second alternates expressive and showy music, culminating in a reprise of the bubbly initial material. *Passion Prayers* by Augusta Read Thomas, a composition for solo cello accompanied by an ensemble of six, might seem to the inattentive listener to be a series of unrelated mood snippets, ranging from expressive to intense to soulful to spooky to nervous. But in fact, Thomas expertly ties in these wide ranging emotional states by utilizing tightly motivic construction -- ultimately, it all comes off rather like a set of free variations -- furnishes smooth transitions between each section, and provides a recapitulation of the opening forceful music to ably suggest a return home. The cello writing takes full advantage of this instrument's ability to put forth a delicious melodic line and the ensemble backing, while often sparse, is attractively colorful.

The two selections by composers based in Philadelphia occupy opposite ends of the tonal spectrum. Jennifer Higdon's mixed sextet *wissahickon poeTrees* owes much in sound to the oeuvre of Copland, Debussy, and similar folk. Given that the piece depicts the four seasons in a local urban park, one might wonder if bucolic flabbiness is the order of the day. Happily, this pejorative description does not apply. Throughout, even in the slow movements, there's an undercurrent of gutsy energy that imparts momentum and backbone. And the presence of ritornello style linking sections (in best Mussorgsky *Pictures* and Stravinsky *Octet* tradition), which here get varied in overlay fashion, provide formal grounding for the widely contrasting movements. Sonic debts to tape-and-live-instrument composers such as Mario Davidovsky can be heard in James Primosch's *Dream Journal*. Scored for two pianists, two percussionists, and tape, the piece exudes an especially clangorous, disjunct harmonic language. But this is no style study: events are clumped in clearly defined larger sections that behave in less mercurial fashion than more typical East Coast fare. And its use of texture can be powerfully striking, as in the mysteriously atmospheric start to the first movement or the explosion of bell sounds at the climax of the finale.

The ensemble, conducted with flair and sensitivity by Jan Krzywicki, acquits itself well despite a few intonation glitches in the Higdon. Cellist Scott Kluksdahl and oboist Richard Woodhams expertly handle the solo parts. Editing is very good and sound is fine with the exception of one passage in Higdon's piece, where some distortion is noticeable. This strong CD is definitely recommended.

Eclipse Rands

DAVID CLEARY

Bernard Rands. *Eclipse*. TMC Recordings CD-1423

Eclipse (TMC) features three relatively recent orchestral pieces by Pulitzer Prize winner and Harvard faculty member Bernard Rands. All are first rate listens, deserving of the widest possible exposure, lovingly presented.

The single movement *London Serenade* (1988), unlike the *London Symphonies* of Vaughan Williams and Haydn, is not named for the English city. Rather, the work is a gift composed in honor of Rands' friend Edwin London, a composer and conductor based in Cleveland. It's a most wonderful tribute, too, a well scribed selection that liberally quotes material from other of Rands' pieces and is built from juxtapositions of small sections alternatively turbulent and calm in mood. Wisely, the composer does not allow this pattern to result in a simple back-and-forth roller coaster ride; here, Rands tones down the agitated material in the central part of the work to produce a large scale ternary feel, letting the outer sections exhibit much wider emotional swings. It's also a relatively tonal piece in relation to the rest of this composer's oeuvre—many of the lovely calm sections are frankly triadic in sound. Like all this tonemeister's work, *London Serenade* contains stunningly effective and colorful scoring, with especially ample opportunities presented here for solo wind players (particularly flute and clarinet).

Madrigali (after Monteverdi/Berio) (1976) is the oldest of the items presented, an imaginative deconstruction of music by the aforementioned early Baroque master. The work's parameters can be traced back in one way or another to elements from Monteverdi's eighth book of madrigals, with references to Luciano Berio's transcription of *Il Combattimento*. Despite being derived from music written in a functional harmony vein, the first four movements of the work find an inimitable world of verticals able to sound late 20th century sophisticated while felicitously accommodating the borrowed basis material. The last, containing a full quote of "Amor-Lamento della Ninfa," employs chance operations which cloud the triadic material in a manner at once vaguely reminiscent of Copland style pandiatonicism yet very different from it. In short, this fine piece is very much Rands' own, not a lazy arrangement.

The three-part *Canti* trilogy may well be the best-known entity in this composer's sizable portfolio. Presented here is the last of the three to be composed, *Canti dell'Eclisse* (1993) for bass singer soloist accompanied by either orchestra or chamber ensemble (the former version appears on this recording). Mirroring the uneasy relationship between sun and moon (the subjects of the first two cycles in the set) found in an eclipse, the sound world is anxiously expressionist while still finding much variety within this baseline approach. Despite being the latest of the works on this recording, it's the most dissonant in sound. And the dark timbres do not end with the employment of a bass soloist; one prominently hears plenty such lower register material, with bass clarinet emerging as a particular presence. It's a splendid listen, a worthy equal to the earlier settings of solar and lunar poetry.

Singer Thomas Paul (for whom *Canti dell'Eclisse* was written) is excellent, featuring able diction and a voice both resonant and well focused. Despite occasional errors of pitch and ensemble (most of the former occurring because of an out of tune harp passage in *London Serenade*), the playing of the Kiev Camerata as led by Virko Baley is extremely good. Sound is very good and production top-notch. Highly recommended.

Chronicle

November 2

Composer Portrait: Elliott Carter -- The Complete String Quartets [1-5]. Columbia University, New York, NY.

November 8

NACUSA String Fling, including Sondra Clark's *Sierra Seasons*, Anne Baldwin's *Quartet No. 1*, Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Saratoga*, Lori Griswold's *Here Is the Ocean*, Flana Cotton's *Taking Leave*, and music of Dale Victorine, Steve Ettinger, Warner Jepson, Brian Holmes, Ken Takara, and John Beeman. Art Center, Palo Alto, CA.

November 12

Festival of New American Music, with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, in a concert including the world premiere of Zhou Long's *The Five Elements*. California State University, Sacramento, CA. The program is repeated November 25, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco.

November 18

Joseph Kubera and Sarah Cahill in music of Josef Matthias Hauer, Ingram Marshall, Michael Byron, Terry Riley, Morton Feldman, Larry Polansky, Robert Ashley, and "Blue" Gene Tyranny. Mills College, Oakland, CA.

November 21

Kurt Erickson's *Angels: Fallen and Otherwise*. Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, CA. Through November 24.

Communication

Dear Editor,

While I realize that it is generous for David Cleary to submit so many reviews to your magazine you must be aware of just how prejudiced he is against tonal, melodic music and when you print reviews by him involving tonal music you are printing an extremely biased viewpoint.

In his review of the *Ought-One Festival* he describes my *Two Pieces for Violin and Piano* as "mushy sentiment and fluffy superficiality." Something is very wrong about Cleary's description as the first of these two pieces won an audience award on a New England radio station as one of last year's favorite works and I frequently receive E-mails and letters from people from all over the world who have either heard these pieces over the radio or come upon the CD by chance and they tell me how much the pieces have moved them. In fact, I might say that they are among my most beloved works. The reaction these pieces have generated from this many people speaks volumes above anything Cleary can ever say.

This, incidentally, is only one of several assaults upon my music by Cleary. If one reads the review one can see that Cleary is equally unenthusiastic about all the tonal works which he reviewed at this concert. In fact, one might even say that in regard to tonal music his words are spiteful and sarcastic.

Because of his obvious bias against tonal music I decided to attend the performance at the festival of Cleary's *Bilbies* for flute. It was, as I imagined it might be: a typical exercise in atonality -- what I term a hee-haw work, that uses wide intervallic (hee-haw) skips, and exercises in trilling and double-tonguing. I have heard it all before, over and over again. There was an attempt at writing some sort of a melody but what emerged was completely unmemorable. When one is as critical as Cleary, one would hope that he has his own excellent work as an example but alas, this was not the case with his *Bilbies*.

I think it high time that reviewers, and this includes Cleary, should get with the flow of what is actually occurring in contemporary concert music. The "hee haw" days are coming to a close and we are returning to accessible music with form, melody, new concepts of tonality and emotion. The audience wants music that moves them not intellectual exercises. Like it or not, this is what is happening and those who resist this forward motion will just be forced into states of complete angst and frustration.

Nancy Bloomer Deussen
Palo Alto, CA