

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

Elbphilharmonie Opens

John Adams's 70th

Philip Glass at 80

La Serenissima at Carnegie Hall

Kahane's Weill Festival

Seattle's Shostakovich Festival

Ukraine Symphony Tours US

US \$7.99
May/June 2017



Over 450 reviews

Puzzles

Creston, Lennon, Leszczynski, Lunde, Sekhon
Adam Estes, sax; Stacy Rodgers, p
Albany 1658—68 minutes

University of Mississippi faculty members present a recital for saxophone and piano that concentrates on American composers past and present. Three of the works are acknowledged standards—the Paul Creston sonata (1939), the Lawson Lunde sonata (1959), and the John Anthony Lennon *Distances Within Me* (1979).

The other two are responses by young up-and-coming composers to group commissions. Washington based composer John Leszczynski (b. 1987) offers *Almost Out of the Sky* (2011) after a poem of the same name by the Nobel Prize winning Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904-73); and University of South Florida professor Baljinder Singh Sekhon contributes the title work, *Sonata of Puzzles* (2015), a clever manipulation of pitch and rhythm through hocket and developing variation.

Estes and Rodgers play with spirit, feeling, tight rhythm, nice phrasing, and superb fingers and articulation. They also make good cases for the Leszczynski and the Sekhon. The sonics, though, are disappointing: the saxophone is thin and cloudy, sometimes spreading at loud volumes and in the high register; the piano is treble-heavy and sometimes too laid back in the texture; and the space is somewhat dry. Serious listeners will want more clarity and polish.

HANUDEL

Mexican Connection

HD Duo
Cala 77021—72:22

The HD Duo (David Howie and Michael Duke) is based at the Sydney Conservatory in Australia. They have a previous disc on Cala: “Australian Portrait”, works by contemporary Australian composers; and a 2013 disc for Saxophone Classics, “Incandescence”, devoted to music by women. The present disc was the result of a grant that allowed the duo to commission works for a tour through Mexico and Australia. There are seven large works, four of them by women.

Probably the best known among the group is Gabriela Ortiz, based at UNAM in Mexico City, whose *Mambo Ninon* leads off. Ninon refers to the dancer-singer Ninon Sevilla, a film star in Mexico in the 40s and 50s. The

work begins in a romantic haze and eventually drives to a polyrhythmic finale.

Sendero Naciente (Rising Path), in three movements, by Lilia Vazquez Kunze, is more impressionist and atmospheric, with harmonies and effects (trills in both saxophone and piano) that evoke early 20th Century Paris. Catherine Likhuta is originally from Ukraine, with a background in jazz piano; she is completing a doctorate in Queensland. *Secrets of Water* is one of the most modern of the works included, with expressive multiphonics for the saxophone and cascading dissonant harmonies (think free jazz) for the piano. Miriama Young is a Kiwi by birth, took her doctorate at Princeton, and is now at the University of Melbourne. *This Earthly Round* is a musical rendering of the effects of climate change, with a minimalist use of repetition and limited vocabulary of pitches and harmonies.

All at Sevens and Eights (“at sixes and sevens” means to be in confusion, disarray) by Paul Sarcich includes the tenor saxophone, the most common instrument in jazz, rarely heard in classical music as a soloist. Much of the work is slow and dreamlike, with a more athletic conclusion. *Spectrax* (by Enrico Chapela) is entirely structured around saxophone multiphonics. Finally, *Danzon 6* is the most conservative in idiom, based on the popular dance-song from Cuba.

This collection offers an excellent portrait, both of a fine ensemble, and of contemporary compositions in 2017.

T MOORE

American Voices

Bunch, Constantino, Kimber, Larsen, Wilson
Waldland Ensemble
MSR 1541—71 minutes

In 2013, University of Denver clarinet professor Jeremy Reynolds, University of Tennessee viola professor Hillary Herndon, and University of the South piano professor Wei-Chun Bernadette Lo formed the Waldland Ensemble, dedicated to expanding the repertoire of the clarinet-violin-piano medium and promoting conservation efforts. Here, five active American composers contribute their works, all written specifically for the group or commissioned by a consortium that included members of the group.

Portland (OR) native Kenji Bunch (b. 1973) offers *Four Flashbacks*, an evocative duet for clarinet and viola that recalls the two decades he spent in New York; Anthony Constantino (b. 1995), a recent graduate of the Manhattan

School of Music, presents his boldly dissonant *Ritual Songs*; Ithaca College professor Dana Wilson (b. 1946) turns to Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes for inspiration in *A Thousand Whirling Dreams*, premiered at ClarinetFest 2014 at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge; the former Kronos Quartet violist (b. 1945) contributes *Vanishing Woods*, a haunting duet for clarinet and viola that mourns the rapid disappearance of the Earth's forests through human activity.

Libby Larsen (b. 1950) closes the program with *Ferlinghetti*, a compilation of six movements—or “riffs” as Larsen calls them—that cast into music colorful fragments from the work of San Francisco beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. 1919).

The Waldland Ensemble gives intense and thoroughly committed performances, handling well the gamut of compositional ideas, from the immediate to the abstract and from the quiet to the thrilling. Lyrical lines are heartfelt; hushed passages whisper and weep; turbulent episodes are full of vigor and technical bravura; and furious outbursts are edgy and strident. Clarinetists and violists will have fresh ideas for recitals, and chamber music fans will find much to like.

HANUDEL

Facets

Bartok, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Damase, Dorff, Granados, Pujol, Rodrigo, Schocker
Cline-Cuestas Duo
Cline 0—68 minutes
(800-529-1696; 800-BUYMYCD)

With an assortment of original works and arrangements, the Cline-Cuestas Duo presents a mixture of familiar and new pieces for flute and guitar. Gary Schocker's two-movement *Silkworms* is presented for the first time on records. Flutist Jenny Cline plays with a sound that is pure when she wants it, enhanced with a vibrato that can be vocal and velvety. Guitarist Carlos Cuestas is crisp, clear, and expressive enough to enchant any listener sometimes. The two are recorded close enough to convey the energy they put into the performances. This release is worth having especially for the uncommon selections by Daniel Dorff and Jean Damase.

GORMAN

Garden of Joys & Sorrows

Aguila, Debussy, Dubois, Gubaidulina, Takemitsu
Hat Trick
Bridge 9472—60 minutes

This is an enjoyable and varied program for flute, viola, and harp, including the first two works for that combination, the *Terzettino* (1905) by Theodore Dubois and the *Sonata* (1915) by Claude Debussy. Three others have a basis in poetry, and one of them is brand new.

In 2013 this trio and Brigham Young University commissioned *Submerged* from naturalized American composer Miguel del Aguila (b. 1957) with a request that he incorporate text. The text he chose is the 1934 poem 'Me at the Bottom of the Sea' by Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938). His work consists of panels of joyous and energetic Latin-American character with an underwater section in the middle. Much of the writing for viola involves pizzicato playing to imitate a *charango*, the South American cousin of the guitar. All the sound colors are vivid and practically too good to be true.

The published score to the Debussy entered the public domain in 1990, but it was only recently that musicians learned that the primary edition was not entirely accurate. A new edition by Carl Fischer contains changes of some sort in 1/3 of the measures. This is the first recording to present the work as Debussy intended, and it's done very well.

April Clayton is the flute professor at Brigham Young University; her partners are based in New York and Boston. The impeccable sound (from the American Academy of Arts and Letters) conveys their precision, sensitivity, and verve. The booklet—color on the cover, black-and-white inside—has background, texts, pictures, and biographies. Some of these pieces are becoming increasingly available, so you might have at least one of these already.

GORMAN

Poems and Dreams

Rebecca Jeffreys, fl; Alexander Timofeev, p
Jeffreys 0—50 minutes (800-529-1696)

Byzantine Dances (2016) by Russell Nadel begins with the pianist inside and out of the piano, and later has him drumming on the lid. It's an assortment of folk-like and modal clichés without the pejorative meaning. If that sounds impossible, you have to hear the accessible result.

Intermezzo is ordinarily the title of a work that goes between, but here it's a suite of three short pieces by Francis Kayali that I hate to insult and misrepresent by calling them tonal and simple. They're also thoughtful and worth hearing again.

The *Romantic Sonata* by Jeffrey Hoover