


**CONNOLLY** *Verse*.<sup>1</sup> *Triad III*.<sup>2</sup> *Cinquepaces*.<sup>3</sup> *Poems of Wallace Stevens I* • John Alldis Ch;<sup>1</sup> Vesuvius Ens;<sup>2</sup> Philip Jones Brass Ens;<sup>3</sup> Jane Manning (sop);<sup>4</sup> Justin Connolly, cond; Nash Ens<sup>4</sup> • LYRITA 305 (57:11 )

In *Fanfare* 32:2, my colleague Jerry Dubins (in a review of music by Per Nørgård) made a list of the stylistic fingerprints of the post-Webern, avant-garde school of the 1960s and 1970s, and pointed out that one might as well complain about hearing V-I and IV-I cadences in music of the Classical period. It made me consider the nature of creativity. Every type of music has its staple sounds and procedures. Some composers are bound by them, even strangulated. Others, by dint of sheer personality (Beethoven, Wagner, Stravinsky) mold these characteristics to their own individual, identifiable ends. Most composers, I would attest, succeed in using their particular stylistic tools to create worthwhile art in some specific pieces, but fail in others.

It is a fact that the language of late 20th-century avant-garde music generally fails to resonate with audiences, (that is, most people hate it), making this a particularly difficult area in which to separate the special from the ordinary. The above CD brings us four works from the late 1960s by Justin Connolly (b. 1933), and it is my contention that two of the pieces are distinctive and two forgettable.

The distinctive two are *Verse* for unaccompanied vocal octet and *Cinquepaces* for brass quintet. The former sets two poems on the subject of time by William Drummond and Thomas Traherne. This poetry focuses the composer's response: stylistic effects such as whispering and elongated sounds—rolled Rs, for example—are there to underline points in the text. The interest in the brass quintet, *Cinquepaces*, comes from its subtle allusions to jazz: syncopated rhythmic cells that recall ragtime, and the occasional plangent trumpet line that suggests a cleaned-up Miles Davis. Connolly refracts these influences through the prism of his post-Webern language. (This is my personal take on it: I am not parroting the liner notes, which simply refer to the rhythm as “metric.”)

Connolly's music demands instrumental and vocal virtuosity, and his deft use of it is a primary strength. However, smartly written as they are, the other works fail to establish a personal world or a tangible reason for their existence. You may disagree. Either way, there are more impressive examples of obscure British music in the Lyrita catalog.

It only remains to be said that these performers are top-notch and meet every technical and expressive demand made of them. The analog recording, originally released on the Argo label, still sounds excellent. **Phillip Scott**

*ALBANY*  
**COOMAN** *Gold into Diamonds*.<sup>1</sup> *7 Haiku*.<sup>1</sup> *Lingering, Lonely Callings*.<sup>1</sup> *Chorale Preludes. New Dawn. Bell Mosaic. Oakdale Sketchbook. Yet Brighter Light. Rainshower. Kahlenberg. Winter Sonatina. Mountain Toccata* • Amanda Forsythe (sop);<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Grossman (pn) • ALBANY TROY 1053 (72:33)

Carson Cooman is a musician of boundless energy. Still in his twenties, he is active as a concert organist, a writer on music—he reviews for this journal, among others—a tireless promoter of contemporary music, and a composer whose opus numbers run well into the 600s. His compositions tend to be of limited duration: his Piano Concerto, op. 649, lasts less than nine minutes. In fact, Cooman gives every indication of being a young man in a hurry.

Prolificacy is often sneered at, or at least questioned. Martinů, Milhaud, and Villa-Lobos all encountered skepticism in the face of their creative facility and vast outputs. Each of those composers (whose work I love) infused every note of their music with a distinctive personality. Whether that is the case with Cooman is perhaps a little early to determine. Without question he is gifted, extremely musically literate, and able to pin down moments of spontaneous inspiration without overworking them. Dip into this mixed recital at any point and you will find both freshness and polish. I do not wish to underestimate those qualities.

On the other hand, most of these piano pieces register as sketchbook fragments with the rough edges smoothed out. The piano piece, *Rainshower*, is a textural snippet of a mere 52 seconds. Sure, rain showers are over quickly; yet the piece is too straightforward to be regarded as a distillation and, I think, too insubstantial to be granted an opus number.

Cooman's music on this showing is basically tonal and homophonic. Melodic lines or ostinatos are accompanied by deftly voiced full chords, an approach redolent of the organist. Counterpoint is


virtually absent. He writes comfortably for the voice, as for the keyboard, yet while his settings of poetry are generally atmospheric, there is little of the specific detailed response to mood and imagery that you find in Britten or Rorem. It is a real problem in the *Seven Haiku*; generality is the antithesis of that literary form.

Sometimes Cooman's influences seem not fully digested: take for instance the piano suite for children, *Oakdale Sketchbook*. This is a collection of 10 short pictorial impressions. Titles include "Cake," "Joggers," "The Raccoon," "Rainstorm," and "Squirrels." It is very much out of Satie's *Sports et divertissements*. However, Satie was unique; when the velvet gentleman was composing his early piano miniatures, everyone around him was imitating Wagner. Cooman's music sounds increasingly like Satie rewritten as the suite progresses. Music for children needs to be simple, but it still can have an individual inflection: look at the piano pieces for children by Chick Corea. In another instance, Cooman's use of folk-dance rhythms is rather literal. He does not transform them as Copland did, nor do they sound like part of the fibre of his being, as they do in the music of Edgar Meyer. What, one begins to wonder, is identifiably Coomanesque?

This collection is primarily of occasional pieces, written for friends' weddings and so on, of which there is a long tradition in American music. Perhaps I am asking too much of such ephemera, opus numbers notwithstanding. In the two main song cycles, particularly *Gold into Diamonds*, (to poetry by the soprano's mother Rebecca Forsythe), a heartfelt quality indicates real commitment over and above the composer's habitual care. This and the cycle of poems by Elisabeth Kirschner (*Lingering, Lonely Callings*) are the most substantial works here. Either would be effective in any mixed vocal recital.

Performances are first-class. Forsythe clearly is a singer in the early stages of a distinguished career; we will hear more of her. Grossman is similarly sensitive. Sound quality could not be better.

Overall, after listening straight through to this CD, I could not help feeling that the time and effort that went into composing these fragments (and producing the disc, which Cooman also did) might have been better spent working on a single, knockout opus. He has the talent and facility in spades to do that. **Phillip Scott**

**CORIGLIANO *Mr. Tambourine Man—7 Poems of Bob Dylan. Altered States: 3 Hallucinations*** • JoAnn Falletta, cond; Buffalo PO • NAXOS 8.559331 (52:05 )

Yes, it is *that* Bob Dylan, of *Blowin' in the Wind*, *Masters of War*, and *Chimes of Freedom*. These are some of the most famous folk-rock songs ever written. It takes real chutzpah to completely ignore 40 years of ingrained familiarity and reset these lyrics as contemporary concert art songs. Only a fool or a genius would try such a thing. John Corigliano is no fool.

Let me pay Mr. Corigliano the highest compliment I can: I was so swept away by the power of these songs and the brilliance with which they illuminate Bob Dylan's searing words that I quickly stopped thinking about the moxy it took to do this. While I find it hard to believe, as claimed, that Mr. Corigliano did not know the originals—how could anyone alive in the 1960s with a radio or friends have missed them?—it is pretty clear that he didn't refer to them. The poetry itself occasionally dictates a certain rhythmic similarity, but the result is completely reimaged. In an interview on Naxos's Web site, Corigliano says that he expects a sort of dual-listening experience, with both the original and the new playing through the listeners' mind. For the most part, that did not happen to me. It's not that these settings in any way replaced the originals. Rather, Corigliano's music underscores and intensifies the poetry in a way that the original settings never attempted, so that each lyric begets a completely new and often more disturbing experience. This isn't protest rally music; it is total immersion.

Stylistically, Corigliano is hard to pin down. He uses deeply expressive, essentially tonal melodies, but draws upon a wide range of modern musical resources to produce a uniquely communicative style. One may hear Barber, Berg, Bernstein, Weill, Irish ballads, or any number of other influences, but they are momentary—though "Clothes Line" does have some strong echoes of *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* throughout—and the styles are completely integrated into Corigliano's strongly individual voice. In *Mr. Tambourine Man*, Corigliano has created a powerful anti-war song