

anfare

The Magazine for Serious Record Collectors

January/February 2009
\$8.50



Available on both CD and SACD

CAMERON CARPENTER

REVOLUTIONARY

"...he [Cameron Carpenter] challenges all preconceptions about organ music and its leading exponents..."

—*Wall Street Journal*

TELARC®



again; nor would I remember having heard them before if I did hear them again. Performances and recording are up to Naxos's usual standards of excellence. **Jerry Dubins**

COLLA *Fantasia*, op. 25.^{1,2} **Duo.**^{1,5} **Quartet**^{1,3,4,5} • Mario Carbotta (fl);¹ Carlo Balzaretti (pn);² Marco Bianchi (vn);³ Alice Bisanti (va);⁴ Guido Fichtner (gr)⁵ • TACTUS 780301 (53:15)

"A beautiful sound is of interest only to other flutists." This quote from the great flutist and professor Marcel Moyse always struck me as absolutely brilliant. It helped me get a grip on reality for the years I strove to acquire the cleanest flute tone, one that would mean liquid music to my audiences, one with no hint of air, no breathy undertones, and as little vibrato as possible: just pure, unadulterated flute soul. This had become almost an obsession. Moyse's opinion rocked my world.

Okay, so you get a beautiful tone. Then what? Ten minutes into the recital, the audience's ear is already used to the quality of the performer's tone (be it good or bad) and will need more. What ultimately matters is what one can do with the sound extracted from the instrument. This train of thought made its way into my head again because I listened to two recordings where, although the soloist's tone itself was not quite what I would fall in love with, the musical qualities quickly overcame the first slightly uncomfortable impact. The first was Rachel Podger's fifth volume of Mozart sonatas; the second was the present CD, featuring the music of Vincenzo Colla, an unknown composer of the late 18th century.

Colla was born in the Italian town of Piacenza, and worked in the civic theater at Voghera, then at Milan, and finally in Trieste, where he died. This CD displays his complete works for flute, which are aptly described in Mariateresa Dellaborra's elucidative liner notes: "If the composer does not achieve towering heights of introspection and elaboration, he nonetheless reveals an assured ability, tied to an elegance in the expression of his ideas." Quite so. The music is simple, but very lively and certainly fun to play. The fact that this last characteristic is immediately perceivable, speaks much on the interpreters' behalf. This excellent group of Italian musicians performs with flair and guts, unafraid to extract massive doses of lyricism (and at times, humor) from the material, taking welcome liberties with tempo and dynamics. Carlo Balzaretti infuses the piano part with flexibility and color and both string-players add warmth and interest to the work they take part in.

The flutist here is Mario Carbotta—and his sound is a bit edgy, with more vibrato than I feel is necessary (to my taste, vibrato should be added as coloring, not as an inextricable ubiquitous part of the tone). The guitarist, Guido Fichtner, does not represent my ideal conception of sound either. In the beginning, I confess, I was a bit bothered by the quality of their tones. But not for long. Carbotta and his partners play with enough élan and real empathy for the music to make up for any misgivings I might have had about the flute or guitar timbres. The ensemble-playing is fine, tight and competent. There is a high charge of electricity here, and the interpreters make a convincing case for the works they play. As good Italians, they clearly perceive the corniness in some of the writing, and instead of trying to hide it, they milk it all the way, taking complete advantage of every drop of sentimentality, at the same time sparing us any excess of seriousness. All the gestures are broad and passionate, and end up giving this music a new freshness that effectively sells it to the listeners.

The chosen repertoire helps. Who would not be teased into hearing the music of a composer who is so little known that not even *The New Grove Dictionary* carries a single word about the man? Recommended to all flutists, and to anyone who does not nurture a prejudice against Hausmusik. **Laura Rónai**

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

Although one can easily lose count, this may be the fifth release (including three on Naxos) to have appeared during the past 12 months alone, entirely devoted to the music of the prolific young American composer Carson Cooman. (Previous reviews can be found in *Fanfare* 31:3 and 31:5.) Cooman's output embraces the full range of musical genres—operas, choral works, songs, orchestral music, chamber music, solo keyboard works, etc. But what is more remarkable is this compos-

142 *Fanfare* January/February 2009

er's broad stylistic range, which extends from consonant, purely diatonic pieces all the way to atonal or quasi-serial works, not to mention many that combine those two poles in unusual ways. Most of Cooman's music is written on commission, and is explicitly intended for practical performance, of which there have been many. (In addition, he is active as an organist, performing only new music; and he produces recordings and writes criticism—for *Fanfare*, as well as other publications.)

This latest, "New Dawn," is the most rewarding of the all-Cooman discs I have heard. Comprising three song cycles and assorted short pieces for piano solo, the program concentrates on the most tonal, consonant aspect of his output. (His larger works, for larger forces, tend to represent the less tonal, more dissonant side of his compositional voice.) I hasten to add that it is not the conservatism of its language *per se* that I find so appealing about this music, but rather, how sincerely and meaningfully Cooman is able to express himself within this language. The music is largely warm and uplifting, with an unmistakably American flavor, suggesting an intersection between the styles of Copland and Rorem in their simplest, most direct pieces. A particularly personal device is the frequent use of cluster-chords as sonic enrichment within diatonic contexts, rather like the overtones of a carillon. Some pieces, e.g., *Bell Mosaic* and *Kahlenberg*, display a sense of serene tranquility that suggests an openness to recent, more meditative or contemplative styles. Some, which seem to emphasize pure harmonic sonority, occasionally call to mind the music of Messiaen.

The most ambitious selections represented here are the three vocal works. The largest of them—*Lingering, Lonely Callings*, a cycle of eight songs dating from 2004–05, set to lovely, poignant poems by Elizabeth Kirschner—is the most compelling and consistently rewarding music I have yet heard from Cooman. These songs reveal a consistently fluent lyricism and exquisite sensitivity, conveyed through the simplest of means, resulting in a beautifully touching group of songs, shaped into a coherent cycle. Given both their simplicity and their immediacy, I would imagine that these songs—both individually and as a group—will prove to have great utility for voice students. One might argue that such direct, straightforward expression is a fundamental prerequisite from which a legitimately meaningful, more sophisticated compositional voice may be derived.

Comparably rewarding is the shorter, more recent (2007) cycle entitled *Gold into Diamonds*. This group of four songs was commissioned by soprano Amanda Forsythe as a gift for her mother, Rebecca Forsythe, whose poetry serves as the texts. Perhaps slightly more complex harmonically, these songs are no less affecting than the earlier group. The poetry is verbally direct, yet subtle and profound in meaning, and Cooman's settings are aptly suited to them.

Seven Haiku was written for the wedding of the soprano and her husband in 2005. They are sensitive micro-miniatures set to texts by the Welsh-American composer-poet Hilary Tann.

Soprano Forsythe has a light, flexible voice whose lovely, intimate quality is very well suited to the spirit of Cooman's vocal writing. Only at the most stressful moments does her control begin to fray. Pianist Jeffrey Grossman remains a sensitive and fluent accompanist throughout.

The nine short piano pieces, played with flair and conviction by Grossman, are largely examples of Cooman's *Gebrauchsmusik*, pieces just a few minutes in duration that he often composes to commemorate special occasions, or as gifts for friends. Some of these "occasions"—the program notes for *Rainshower* describe it as "a musical postcard on a particularly rainy day in Cambridge, Massachusetts"—call to mind the comment, attributed to Milhaud, that simply coming down to breakfast was for him sufficient inspiration to prompt a musical composition. However, Cooman's pieces of this type are rarely trivial, usually displaying real care, sensitivity, and a convincing expressive impetus; some are real gems. The music they call most readily to mind is Bernstein's *Anniversaries*, or perhaps Virgil Thomson's series of musical "portraits." Cooman's efforts clearly hold their own in this company, comparing favorably in many cases. Especially effective is the recent *Mountain Toccata*, a rough-hewn, Appalachian-flavored piece written for pianist Grossman. *Oakdale Sketchbook* is, as op. 52, one of Cooman's earliest (age 15) efforts, a group of 10 tiny pieces intended for children. These are, again, remarkably evocative, imaginative, and varied, in view of the simplicity of their means, although several are beyond the technical reach of most beginning pianists. Only the *Chorale Preludes* (1999) do I find to be less than satisfying.

This release is an excellent introduction to the music of Cooman, one of the most fascinating

of today's youngest generation of composers. It is recommended especially to those who wonder whether there is anything that remains to be said within a purely tonal, diatonic musical language.
Walter Simmons

CORELLI *Sonatas da chiesa*: in G, op. 1/9; in A, op. 3/12. **Violin Sonatas**: in G, op. 5/3; in d, op. 5/12, "La folia." *Sonatas da camera*: in A, op. 4/3; in G, op. 2/2, "Ciaccona"; in e, op. 2/4. **Gamba Sonata** in D, op. 5/11 • Purcell Qrt; Richard Campbell (vc) (period instruments) • HELIOS 55240 (57:02)

Personal disclosure: for no defensible reason, of all the great composers, Corelli may be the most poorly represented on my shelves. Consequently, I was pleasantly surprised when this disc arrived from command central in Tenaflly. And I'm even more pleased after listening to it. It's not only a useful reminder of what I've been missing all along, but also a splendid demonstration of fine, spirited music-making. The members of the Purcell Quartet (Catherine Mackintosh and Elizabeth Wallfisch, violins, Richard Boothby, cello and viola da gamba, and Robert Woolley, harpsichord and chamber organ), joined by cellist Richard Campbell, are well acquainted with the idiom, and they play it with admirable finesse and infectious enthusiasm. I would have given Hyperion's original 1986 release a warm recommendation; at Helios's reduced fare it should be well nigh irresistible. **George Chien**

CRAMER *Variations on "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen wüñst Papageno sich."* See DUSSEK.

CRUMB 11 *Echoes of Autumn*.^{2,3,4,5} *The Sleeper*.^{1,5} *Vox balaenae (Voice of the Whale)*.^{3,6,5} *5 Pieces for Piano*.⁵ *Dream Sequence (Images II)*.^{2,6,5,7} • Jamie Van Eyck (mez);¹ David Bowlin (vn);² Claire Chase (fl);³ Joshua Rubin (cl);⁴ Jacob Greenberg (pn);⁵ Kivie Cahn-Lipman (vc);⁶ David Schotzko (perc)⁷ • BRIDGE 9261 (70:52)

George Crumb continues a Western musical awakening that can be traced back to 1889, when Claude Debussy visited the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris and heard Javanese gamelan music for the first time. From that experience he came to embrace even-tempered pentatonic scales, but most crucially, came to realize the importance of pure sonority both on the structural organization and the affective power of music. This epiphany resonated, to a greater or lesser extent, in his subsequent music, and inspired such following and diverse composers as Henry Cowell, John Cage, and Lou Harrison, among others. That influence continues to our day, and most eloquently so, in the music of George Crumb.

In *Fanfare* 25:1, I enthusiastically reviewed Volume 4 of this ongoing series, which offered *Zeitgeist* and *Music for a Summer Evening*, the last of which was, via a splendid Nonesuch recording from the 1970s, my initiation into the wonders and powers of Crumb's well-honed language. The release under review is Volume 12, and it is graced by the virtues of the aforementioned Volume 4—performers with incredible chops by the highest of international standards who are deeply in tune with Crumb's language and are fully capable of executing his extended-technique requirements. The excellent sound quality delineates Crumb's subtle instrumental timbres and textures even in the quietest of pianissimos, and conveys the full scale of his often-extreme dynamic range.

The choice of *Eleven Echoes of Autumn* for violin, alto flute, clarinet, and piano of 1965 and 1966 to open this release was an apt one in that it posits philosophical themes and attitudes that inform all that follows. The cycle of seasons, in Crumb's musical hands, seems like a window into infinity. Given that, *Eleven Echoes of Autumn* is, in a more traditional sense, profoundly autumnal music uttered by a finite human being. It is infused with melancholy—a longing for past brighter days—and an anticipation of the winter to come. Here the silences convey the same expressive power as the sounds that surround them. According to the liner notes by Steven Bruns, Crumb, in a May 2008 interview, "singled out this work as among his most difficult to perform, because it requires intense and unbroken concentration from the players," which, I might add, it receives here in droves.

The Sleeper, composed in 1984, was written for Jan DeGaetani and Gilbert Kalish. The text is by Edgar Allen Poe, but it is altered and condensed by Crumb in a way that expunges its 19th-century theatricality and shows its inherent timelessness. Mezzo-soprano Jamie Van Eyck has a beguilingly compelling voice, and is superb in all technical aspects. Her intonation and phrasing are beyond reproach, but more to the point, she fully realizes the composer's intent in the piece's melis-