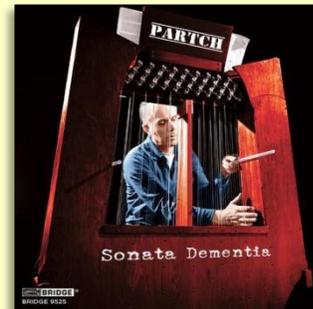


"The Double Bass: *Encore!*"
Robert Oppelt & friends
MSR Classics)



"Sonata Dementia," Music of Harry Partch, Vol. 3,
performed by the ensemble **Partch**
(Bridge Records)

In the follow-up to his earlier MSR release of collaborations for string bass and other instruments, *The Double Bass*, Robert Oppelt has come out with the keenly awaited sequel, *The Double Bass: Encore!* Besides presenting the second half, Numbers 7-12, of the 12 Waltzes for Double Bass by early virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti (1763-1846), the program allows Oppelt and his friends the chance to showcase several choice encores by Serge Koussevitsky (1874-1951), later renowned as one of the great conductors of the 20th century, plus three more recent works by American composers John Clayron, Sherwood Shaffer, and Evan Chambers (the last two of which are heard in recording premieres), and other riches besides.

Dragonetti modestly described his 12 Waltzes for solo double bass as "playful exercises," but they also served to illustrate his command over a giant instrument that had previously been relegated to little more than a supporting role in an ensemble. Dragonetti showed a sceptical world that the cumbersome-looking bass was in fact very agile in running up and down scales and accompanying its own melodies. And these waltzes are fun to listen to!

Elegy No. 1 for double bass and piano by Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889) is remarkable for its long phrases, delicate style and wide range, making it an ideal showpiece for one who was regarded in his day as the "Paganini of the Double Bass." Koussevitsky is represented by two short character pieces for bass and piano that displayed the range of his virtuosity: first Chanson Triste, Op. 2, written as an elegy to a friend who had died young; then, Humoresque, Op. 4, opening in a playful mood, but with a darker middle section (for "tragic relief," maybe?)

Prayer, a very moving piece by Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) from his 1924 suite *From Jewish Life*, is heard here in an edition that puts the bass part a full seven steps lower in the musical scale than the original cello version. The

Who but Harry Partch would have titled a piece of music "Sonata Dementia"? I've avoided reviewing anything by this iconic figure of the bizarre and strange for many years, probably because of his reputation as "some crazy son-of-a-gun who concocted weird stuff for voices and instruments whose names you couldn't begin to spell." Seen in *that* light, it would be hard to take him seriously as a composer, however visionary he might be. And of course, his approach to music *would* tend to polarize listeners.

We need to set aside the extremes of mindless revulsion and mindless adulation if we are to arrive at a true estimate of Harry Partch and his music. (Yes, *music!*) The Grammy winning ensemble **Partch**, whose reason for existence is to perpetuate his memory, makes it easier for us to do just that, thanks to their totally committed and razor-keen approach to the works heard in this program.

We begin with Ulysses at the Edge of the World (1962). Subtitled "A Minor Adventure in Rhythm," it makes for a nice warming-up exercise for the performers and an ear-opening introduction to Harry Partch for the listener. It is followed on the program by Twelve Intrusions (1950). These are three sets of three "songs" each, framed by instrumentals that form prelude and postlude to the texted compositions.

These speech-song compositions resonate from his conversations with the poet William Butler Yeats in Dublin in 1934, especially concerning Yeats' belief that the union of words and music should result in a composition where "no word shall have an intonation or accentuation it could not have in passionate speech." The poems themselves have titles that are pregnant with possibilities for stimulating the imagination of a Harry Partch: "The Rose," "The Waterfall," "The Wind," and "The Street." In "The Letter," the emotional impact of the text is sung strangely (by most people's standards) in order to blend with instrumental sounds that include a Kithara ritornello

resulting sound is awesome in its profundity.

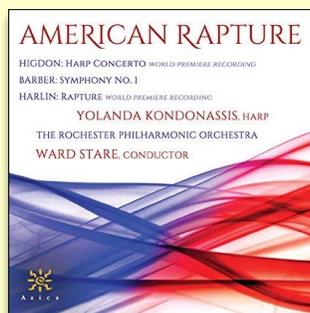
Canto for solo double bass by Sherwood Shaffer (b.1934) is as innovative technically as it is great music in every sense, including its lyricism. As Oppelt describes it, the piece calls for pizzicati on open strings with the left hand while simultaneously stopping other notes with the same hand and drawing the bow with the right hand, thus calling forth a deep, resonant sound from the open strings. (Don't try this at home!)

James Clayton (b.1952) studied double bass with Ray Brown, and later toured with the Count Basie Orchestra. After graduating from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University in 1975, he was for a time principal bassist with the Netherlands Philharmonic. His being well versed in jazz *and* classical idioms pays off in *Bach to Blues*, a poetic rendition, or rather re-imagining, of the Prelude from Bach's Cello Suite No. 1.

Fisherstreet Duo for double bass and viola by Evan Chambers (b.1963) reveals his love of folk traditions, American and Irish. The title refers to a small village in Ireland that is a destination for lovers of traditional music. It is in two movements: Lament for JaFran, in memory of a friend and teacher, and The Barnacle and the Nautilus, a study in contrasted jigs, the first evoking a crusty old soul with a blues slant, and the second fast, circular and tightly wound in its excitement.

Duo Concertante for violin and double bass by Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki (b.1933) is serious and inspired, requiring a close collaboration between the performers. Driving, moving and scintillating, it packs a lot into the brief space of 4:38.

Kudos for Robert Oppelt and for his friends heard in outstanding performances: Christopher Koelzer (piano), Eric De Waardt (viola), and Irina Muresanu (violin).



"American Rapture," Higdon: Harp Concerto; Barber: Symphony No. 1 Harlin: Rapture - Yolanda Kondonassis harp; Ward Stare, Rochester Philharmonic (Azica)

"American Rapture" is a program of three works by U.S. composers, two of which receive their recording premieres. These are works that stretch our ears and

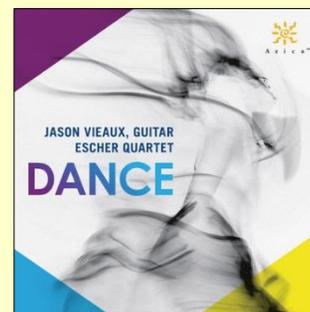
reinforced by tremolos from Bass and Diamond Marimbas. The pain, and urgency, of existence come across well here, as they do also in "Soldiers – War – Another War," fortifying the sense of sadness and despair in the text.

"Cloud Chamber Music," the longest of the Intrusions, adds the sounds of Adapted Viola and Native American deer-hoof rattles to the basic ensemble of Marimbas, Cloud Chamber Bowls (which originated in the atomic energy program), Guitar III, and Kithara. There's also a viola and guitar duet in microtones (another Partch penchant) to add to the flavor.

If you get the impression that Harry Partch was preoccupied with ideas for decidedly odd instruments to provide just the right timbre in the right place, like the Bass Marimba and the lighter-toned BooBam ("Bamboo" in reverse) that take on the roles of pursuer and pursued, inspired by the myth of Apollo and Daphne in Windsong (1958), you ain't heard nothin' yet.

The *pas de resistance* for Partch was the Chromelodeon, an instrument, or rather a device invented to negotiate 43 tone progressions per octave. He uses the instrument to describe the subtleties and the complexities of this tone scale (In some of his writings he talks of satirizing "people who write music in 43 tones to the octave," revealing a sense of humor and a healthy disinclination to take himself *too* seriously!)

We're talking, specifically, of Partch's Sonata Dementia (1950) which, together with Windsong, is heard in its first recording on this album. It is in three movements, I. Abstraction & Delusion, II. Scherzo Schizophrenia, and III. Allegro Paranoia. The titles reflect Partch's own fragility and sense of isolation at the time: "I'm getting touchy like a hermit. Incipient psychosis." Happily, he survived this period of his life, which he spent in self-imposed seclusion in the tiny, remote Northern California town of Gualala, and went on to compose endlessly searching and exploring music throughout his artistic life.



"Dance," music of Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Kernis, Boccherini – Jason Vieaux, guitar; Escher Quartet (Azica)

American guitarist Jason Vieaux joins forces with the Escher String Quartet in a fantastic program of music for guitar quintet, a genre that is still enough of a rarity in our recital halls to make this vibrant entry all the more

thrill and entertain us in the process. Under the alert leadership of their young music director Ward Stare, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra does them full justice.

Jennifer Higdon is that rarest of modern composers, one who writes music audiences really like to hear. Her latest is an unusually attractive Harp Concerto (2018), written for and dedicated to an artist it has been my pleasure to cite a number of times in the past, Yolanda Kondonassis, who worked closely with her in the preliminary planning stages. "YK" (as she is known to her fans) recalls that they agreed the new work should be "challenging but really fun to play, and it should have a groove that allows the harpist to catch a musical wave with the orchestra once in a while." They concurred that the harp should have "a clear voice without an overabundance of delicate filigree and participate fully in the sonic experience as a partner in the texture, not just a soft voice when all is quiet."

You can hear for yourself how well Higdon realized these goals. Most remarkably, even at the risk of controversy, she and Kondonassis agreed on an amp hook-up for the harp, so that the orchestra could play without feeling stifled and the harp could enjoy an increased presence. It all worked out beautifully. The concerto is in four clearly realized movements in which the harp interacts with various soloists and sections of the orchestra: First Light, Joy Ride, Lullaby and Rap Knock.

There's also a real Copland-esque handling of color and texture that gives each movement its unique character. Perhaps the most striking movement of all is the fourth in which the harpist leads the way with some sensational rappings on the soundboard and later strikes up big, plangent chords with a percussive sound that may be a revelation to those who still associate the harp with its capacity for playing soft, heavenly arpeggios.

Samuel Barber's Symphony No. 1 (1936), still in need of champions after all these years, gets a decided boost from a spirited performance by Stare and the orchestra. The single-movement work unusually omits the recapitulation, and instead makes use of the three themes, which Barber describes as "main, lyrical, and closing," that are heard in the initial Allegro non troppo, in the process of developing the work. On first hearing, the opening section struck me as an evocation of a primeval wilderness (which was strictly my own impression, as this symphony qualifies rigorously as "pure" music without any conscious program by its composer). The most memorable section is the third, an Andante tranquillo in which a lyrical theme of great beauty is heard in the oboe over muted strings. Its songlike quality reminds us that Barber (1910-1981) was almost unique among the great composers in that voice (in this case, his memorable baritone, still to be heard on recordings) was his own primary instrument.

Patrick Harlin (b.1984) is a talented upcoming composer whose music is informed by his interdisciplinary studies in soundscape ecology, a field that aims to "better understand ecosystems through sound." If all that sounds

welcome. On tap for our enjoyment are Guitar Quintet, Op. 143 by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, 100 Greatest Dance Hits by our American contemporary Aaron Jay Kernis, and Guitar Quintet No. 4 by Luigi Boccherini, a program chosen to display the full range of what the instrument can do in combination.

I reviewed an earlier release by the Escher Quartet, consisting of Adam Barnett-Hart and Aaron Boyd, violins; Pierre Lapointe, Viola; and Brook Speltz, cello (*Classical Reviews*, 4/2018). At the time I described their sound as "brilliant, sinuously incisive, and surprisingly warm in spite of the typically cool ethic for which they consciously strive." That makes for a perfect partnership with Vieaux, who has often been praised for both his precision and his deeply soulful artistry, traits that beautifully serve the music heard on this program.

It all begins with Quintet for Guitar and Strings, Op. 143 (1951) by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968). The prolific Italian composer wrote it for his friend, the great Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia, in order to enrich the scanty chamber music literature for his instrument. With its flowing lyricism and concise form, freely handled sonata-like structure and non-traditional key relationships. It qualifies as one of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's finest works in any genre. The opening movement, Allegro, vivo e schietto (lively and sincere) wanders happily through multiple tones, ending in the home key of F major, with the memorable gestures heard at the very opening serving as a recurring motto.

The slow movement, an Andante mesto (sad) allows the guitar to spin delicate tracery over the sound of muted strings, engage in a charming duet with the first violin as a *Souvenir d'Espagne*, and even play a quasi-cadenza of its own. The Scherzo is a brilliant march with string harmonics and capricious dance rhythms. The finale is an impassioned Tarantella, with a moody Habañera in the middle as another souvenir of Spain before the Tarantella resumes, leading into a wild, frenzied close.

Contemporary U.S. composer Aaron Jay Kernis lifted the title of his 100 Greatest Dance Hits from his memories of 1970's K-Tel ads on late-night TV for "100 Greatest Motown (or Soul) Hits." This is the sort of stuff that currently graces the shelves of the better thrift stores everywhere, but for Kernis it inspired a work in four movements that looks back affectionately at our pop-music past while at the same time poking fun at it. The titles tell us a lot about the work's humorous style and intent: "Introduction to the Dance Party," "Salsa Pasada" (literally "Salsa passes," or exceeds its use-by date), "MOR Easy Listening Slow Dance Ballad," and "Dance Party on the Disco Motorboat." Despite the self-deprecation implied by the tag MOR (i.e., middle-of-the-road) the third movement contains the deep point of the entire work in a moving, nostalgic duet between guitar and viola before the music swings and accelerates into a jazzy, double-time climax.

Guitar Quintet No. 4 by Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), a prolific Italian composer who spent much of his creative

daunting, his Rapture (2011) may help to clarify what he means. It was inspired by the experiences of “ultra-cavers,” explorers with a passion for penetrating the most profound depths on earth in deep caves where they may experience, after hours and even days spent in a disorienting environment of absolute darkness and deafening sound, an almost crippling emotion known as “The Rapture.” Harlin’s music, starting quietly and then building to several overwhelming climaxes, evokes this very emotion, more extreme than a mere panic attack, which some cavers have described as a near-religious experience. Very impressive!



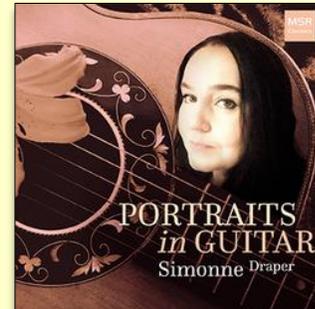
“Myth and Romance,” Chopin, Paderewski, Szymanowski
Marta Szlubowska, violin; Svetlana Belsky, piano
(Sheridan Music Studio)

Violinist Marta Szlubowska and pianist Svetlana Belsky, natives of Poland and Ukraine, respectively, are both engaging new artists who have spent some time in the U.S. performing and taking part in music competitions. Together and individually, they present an attractive program of music by past and present Polish composers, beginning with their account of *Mythes*, Op. 30 by Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937). The work is in three sections, inspired by Greek mythology: The Fountain of Arethusa, Narcissus, and Dryads and Pan. As befits the impressionistic style, the effects are quite subtle, starting in the opening section with irregular broken chords evoking the bubbling of the fountain, in legend the source of wisdom and artistic creation.

Belsky next performs Chopin’s Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2. The melody, heard initially in the higher register, is hauntingly beautiful, even spooky, in this performance, evoking a mood of desolation in the middle section, as of moonlight shining through the windows of a deserted ballroom.

Two Polish women composers are heard from next. Polish Caprice for violin solo by Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-1969) lives up to its name as a warm, lively bit of whimsy, ending abruptly and impudently. It ought to be better known as a delectable encore. The very sonorous Hommage à I.J. Paderewski for piano by Marta Ptaszynska (b.1943) condenses into a mere three minutes the qualities of mind and character that made its honoree a great man as well as a great pianist and composer.

life in Spain, is one of his finest works in any genre. The first two movements, Pastorale and Allegro maestoso are beautifully realized and idiomatic. The most effective movement here is the third, *Grave assai*, an intimate, moving dialogue between guitar and muted strings that seems to end without resolution until we realize its true purpose has been to serve as an introduction to the finale, “Fandango.” The allusion is to a Spanish dance in moderately fast triple time. It is characterized by a rich but mostly static harmonic basis in the lower part that invites (and *really* receives in this performance) spirited improvisations in the upper part.



“Portraits in Guitar,” Simonne Draper, guitarist and composer, and her friends on guitar and percussion
(MSR Classics)

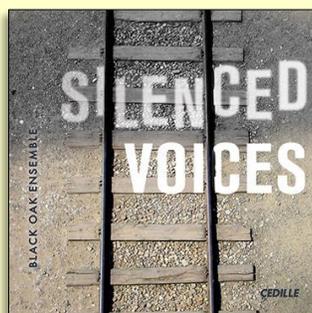
Simonne Draper is a versatile young artist and composer who has already taken awards in both songwriting and composition in competitions in the United States and Europe. She was born in the former Czechoslovakia and grew up in Moravia. Of special significance in her music studies were the guitar classes at the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory in Prague, working with noted guitarist and composer Milan Tesař. She found these studies particularly satisfying as regards the exploration of innovative guitar techniques.

Several of her song titles are heard in arrangements for guitar on the present album: *Finesa*, *Canzonetta dell’Acqua*, and *Dolorosa*, the first-named a duet with guitarist Patrik Henel, the second a guitar solo backed up by her own electronic orchestra writing, and the third a guitar duet with Helena Slaviková, also featuring percussionist Jiří Zmek. All this reflects her love for her work as a performer in guitar duos and trios.

The ten pieces heard here are direct in their appeal and often hauntingly beautiful and evocative. Several of the titles express her fascination with the culture of Spain: *Española* and *Nostalgitana* (Gypsy Nostalgia). Other titles celebrate the beauty of the sounds and sights of the natural world expressed in musical terms: *Canzonetta del Sonno*, *La Danza dei Ritmi*, *Canzonetta dell’Acqua*.

Simonne Draper’s musical language is direct and popular, in the best sense of both words. It reflects her abiding love of both pop and classical music, in a fusion of the best qualities of both. Let no one speak of “crossover” music, a term that has always irked me

Finally, we have Violin Sonata, Op. 13 by Ignacy Jan Paderewski himself (1860-1941) presented memorably by Szlubowska and Belsky in an account that makes us wonder why we haven't heard this great work performed more often in recitals. It opens with an Allegro con fantasia that makes use in passing of a tantalizingly familiar folk melody. The Intermezzo movement is quick and lighthearted, making a contrast with the finale, Allegro molto quasi presto, which begins in a mood of passionate intensity and works its way, stridently and magnificently, to one of confident affirmation.



"Silenced Voices," music by victims of oppression: Kattenburg, Kuti, Krása, Klein, Hermann, Frid. The Black Oak Ensemble (Cedille Records)

Initially, I approached this CD release of music by Jewish composers who were silenced by the Holocaust rather like filmgoers did Stanley Kramer's 1950 movie *The Men*, which was the story of paraplegic G.I.'s who had suffered crippling injuries in the war. People went to see the movie out of a sense of obligation and ended up staying to the end to applaud Fred Zinneman's direction and the very moving performances of Theresa Wright and a newcomer to film named Marlon Brando.

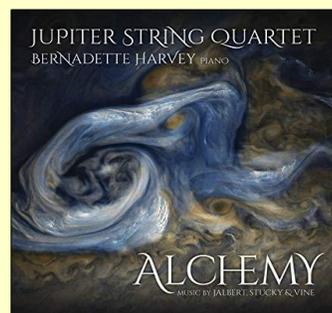
My reaction to "Silenced Voices" was kind of like that. While I never forgot that the lives of five of the composers covered in this album were unjustly snuffed out by a monstrous atrocity, I gradually came under the influence of some really engaging music that represented the best strain in the European music of its day. And, yes, I was entertained as well as moved!

Their names and dates are: Dick Kattenburg (1919-1944), Sándor Kuti (1908-1945), Hans Krása (1899-1944), Gideon Klein (1919-1945), and Paul Hermann (1902-1944). Only Géza Frid (1904-1989) was able to escape the Nazis by fleeing to the Netherlands and changing his residence numerous times. The others weren't so lucky.

Would any one of these composers, had he lived, have attained the stature of a Bartók or Kodály, a Prokofiev or Shostakovich (to cite figures whose influence is felt in this program)? Probably not. But, as I've often stressed in this column, one of the great things about music is that you don't have to be one of history's great composers in order

because I could never get over the suspicion that it was patronizing. This is neither a case of the classics "gone slumming" or of pop music "putting on airs." Rather, it is a refreshingly different musical experience, one that Draper's own heroes as a budding music student, Dvořák, Smetana, and Janáček, understood so well when they were incorporating the invigorating spirit of the folk songs and dances of Moravia and Bohemia into their own compositions.

The ten tracks on this album cover but 40 minutes playing time. That need not dismay you, as you will probably want to encore the entire program!



"Alchemy," Music by Pierre Jalbert, Steven Stucky, Carl Vine. Jupiter String Quartet with Bernadette Harvey, piano (Marquis Classics)

From the Toronto label Marquis comes "Alchemy," an unlooked-for delight in three ear-opening accounts of contemporary music by the Jupiter String Quartet. This outstanding foursome, consisting of violinists Nelson Lee and Meg Freivogel, violist Liz Freivogel (Meg's sister), and cellist Daniel McDonough, give it all they've got, together with Australian pianist Bernadette Harvey, in music that shows us that great music for piano and string ensemble is still alive and has a lot remaining to be said to modern listeners.

All the works on this program were premiered at various times at the Tucson Winter Chamber Music Festival. We begin with American composer Pierre Jalbert's Piano Quintet (2017), a beautifully balanced work in four movements. True to the descriptions, there is a lot of variety here, starting with "Mannheim Rocket," utilizing an 18th century device based on rising scalar figures that build in volume and launch into space, with ethereal harmonies in the strings. "Kyrie" reflects Jalbert's fascination with medieval music, the principal idea being stated between first violin and viola as a chromatically transformed chant-like motif.

"Scherzo" is a really ingenious movement in which piano and strings engage, sometimes imitating or reacting to each other, and at other times synchronizing to form interesting blends. Finally, "Pulse" consists of perpetually moving 8th notes, sometimes harmonically static but always pushing forward with great driving energy.

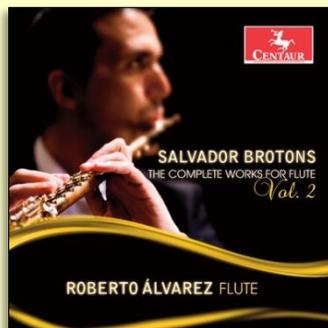
The late Steven Stucky (1949-2016) showed his

to say something vital to your listeners.

The exuberant *Trio á Cordes* by the then-19 year old Kattenburg packs a lot of musical substance into a mere five minutes, to say nothing of the youthful composer's personal style. Kuti's *Serenade for String Trio* is in three movements: an *Allegro giocoso* that combines the spirit of Hungarian folk music with audacious tone clusters, a *Scherzando* with machine-like drive reminiscent of some of his Russian contemporaries, and an *Adagio ma non troppo* in the mood of a lament. Krása's *Passacaglia and Fugue* uses the baroque variation form with freedom and originality, combining sombre material with the dynamism of railroad train-like motifs that have the impudent sonic "bite" characteristic of his music. His *Tánc* (Dance) is a virtual parody of Czech dance motifs, framed by more sounds of trains in motion.

Klein's *Trio for Violin, Viola and Cello* has propulsive themes in the outer movements framing a central theme-and-variations of some persuasiveness based on a Moravian folk song. Hermann's *Strijktrio* (String Trio) combines a wealth of melody in an intriguing mixture of rondo and variation form. Finally, Frid, who hailed from a border region between Hungary and Romania that was unusually rich in folk traditions, mixes the rustic sounds of hurdy-gurdy and bagpipes to create a rich harmonic landscape in the opening movement. The middle movement, a *Cantabile* in 9/8 time, features a remarkable *agitato* episode that interrupts the peaceful rural scene.

The performers heard on this CD are the string trio, consisting of violinist Desirée Ruhstrat, violist Aurélien Fort Pederzoli, and cellist David Cunliffe that is at the heart of the Chicago-based Black Oak Ensemble. They get top-class tech support from producer James Ginsburg, engineer Bill Maylone, and editor Jeanne Velonis.



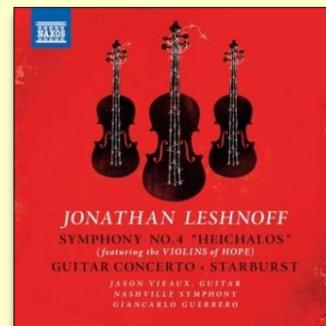
Brotons: Complete Works for Flute, Vol. 2
Roberto Alvarez, flute
(Centaur)

Salvador Brotons (b.1959, Barcelona) is a man of remarkably versatile mind and talents, being an inspired composer, conductor, flautist, and teacher. Beginning in 1985, he left Spain, sojourning 12 years in the United States, where he received a Doctorate in Music from Florida State University and both taught and conducted at Portland State University in Oregon. Since 2001, he has

considerable ingenuity in structuring his *Piano Quartet* (2005) as a single-movement work in easily discernable sections that replicate the form of a sonata. Bell-like sonorities, heard first in the piano and later taken up by the strings, are a remarkable feature of this work. Another is the noticeable lyricism in the strings in the slow movement (*Lento, molto cantabile*). An energetic scherzo, complete with rhythmic "hiccups" and affectionate memories of pop music, is followed by another slow movement for the finale, with a coda recalling the bell-like sounds of the opening.

Fantasia for Piano Quintet (2013) by Australian composer Carl Vine is in a single movement that doesn't adhere to a formal structure with repetitions or recapitulations. It is instead a remarkable organic growth, following Vine's characteristic procedure: "I always start with little essays, pointillistic fragments of melody, rhythm, texture, and jot down observations that grow into a continuum of sound much as points in a crystal garden grow and begin to relate to one another." The central section is warm, gracious, and delightful beyond description.

We conclude with Jalbert's *Secret Alchemy for Violin, Viola, Cello, and Piano* (2012). Its title was inspired by the air of secrecy and mysticism in which the composer imagines a medieval alchemist at work. It is in four movements: "Mystical," "Agitated, relentless," "Timeless, mysterious, reverberant," and "With great energy." Pizzicato strings, turbulent piano writing, and quickly alternating rhythmic patterns characterize the second movement, while the finale features very rapid tremolos in the strings and deep, muted tones from within the piano. The third movement reflects Jalbert's ongoing fascination with medieval chant, heard in the strings, with reverberant piano harmonies that suggest the spaciousness of a great cathedral.



Leshnoff: Symphony No. 4; Guitar Concerto; Starburst -
Jason Vieaux, guitar; Giancarlo Guerrero, Nashville
Symphony (Naxos)

American composer Jonathan Leshnoff gives us three reasons why he is a rising figure in the musical world whose works have already been performed by more than 60 orchestras worldwide. The first, Leshnoff's *Symphony No. 4*, is subtitled "Heichalos," reflecting this composer's abiding interest in his own Jewish heritage. The Hebrew word itself connotes "rooms," and refers to the ancient

been back in his native Barcelona, teaching at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya.

The current release, Vol. 2 in Brotons' Complete Works for Flute, is presented with consummate artistry and style by fellow Spaniard Roberto Alvarez and his associates in Singapore. The title is somewhat misleading because the flute, though present in every one of the six works on the program, is never cast in the spotlight as a soloist. Rather, it is a participant in a variety of works that reflect Brotons' passion for chamber music. We have, in fact, seldom heard so much distinguished writing for the woodwinds, both as a quintet and in combination with other instruments, since the time of *Les Six*, and Francis Poulenc in particular. It says something about the disciplined art of this composer, himself a world class artist of the flute, that the instrument is never allowed to indulge in empty virtuosity for its own sake, but has many enchanting things to say along with its fellow instruments.

The program opens with *Essentiae Vitae* for Woodwind Quintet. The title refers to the four elements of ancient times: Earth, Air, Water, and Fire. Each is depicted by Brotons in terms of timbres that express the essential qualities of these four basic elements of life. Wind, for instance, conveys the blustery element by means of ingenious tonguings, percolations, and wispy sounds that may have been induced by blowing into an instrument with the valves closed. In the finale, the thematic materials are blended to signify the end result, Life.

Virtus for Flute, Violin, Viola, Cello and Piano takes its inspiration from the four Platonic Virtues of Prudence (a.k.a. Wisdom), Fortitude, Temperance and Justice. In case this sounds familiar, these are the same virtues emblazoned, or depicted in the case of Fortitude, on the Great Seal of our own State of Georgia (and conspicuously absent in our political life). An elaborate process brings the motives associated with each virtue back again, ending quietly on a C major chord.

Theme, Variations and Coda for Woodwind Quintet allots one delicious variation each to the five instruments, according to its salient characteristics. The oboe variation, for example, is slow and lyrical, while the flute is very energetic in fast 7/8 time, and the bassoon is described by Brotons as in a burlesque mood, exploiting the instrument's facility for scampering up and down scale passages. A sensational Coda has plenty of virtuosity for everyone.

Suite for Flute, Oboe and Clarinet is a flavorful piece in six contrasting numbers – Introduction, Divertimento, Berceuse, Scherzo, Recitativo, and Finale – all played without interruption. Along with Sax-Quintet for Flute, Oboe, Alto Saxophone, French Horn, and Bassoon, it dates from 1977, Broton's 18th year, when the precocious composer was writing beautifully characteristic music for the members of his very musical family and their friends, demonstrating a maturity far beyond his years.

Jewish mystical discipline embodied in the two thousand year old text *Heichalos Rabbasai*. Through the means described in the text, the initiate meditates himself into a succession of "rooms," enlarging his spiritual awareness as he moves ever closer to an ultimate communion with the Divine. (For those who wish to sign up for the journey, Leshnoff cautions us that "The Rabbis who were qualified to teach and attempt this type of meditation have long ago ceased to walk the face of this earth.")

The symphony is in two parts, connected by the majestic theme heard at the outset. Part I is the journey itself as the believer passes by meditation through the various "rooms" in which he comes first to understand everything that will happen in the terrestrial world, then on to another room where he comprehends the secret thoughts and deeds of men, moving ever onward to his ultimate goal: communion with the One Who Lives Forever.

Due no doubt to the subject, Leshnoff describes the character of his writing in Part I as darker in hue than anything he has previously written. There is a lot of excitement generated by a Copland-esque collision of powerful rhythms and thematic materials. By contrast, in Part II, which he characterizes as "a love song between humanity and God," we are given nuanced string writing enhanced by the soft sonorities of violins, harp and percussion. Leshnoff equates this with the Jewish concept of *hod* (humility) whereby one acknowledges the smallness of himself in order to discover an appreciation of others.¹ At the beginning of this part, the composer writes, "Who do you love?" and at the end, "Where are they now?" Are they dead or alive, are they still a part of your life? The performers are encouraged to dwell on these thoughts as guides to a sensitive interpretation.

Next, the celebrated guitarist Jason Vieaux joins the Nashville Symphony Orchestra and conductor Giancarlo Guerrero in Leshnoff's Guitar Concerto. The composer was at first hesitant to begin the project because of the difficulty of reconciling the guitar's inherently soft acoustic with the presence of an orchestra alongside it without running into the problem of "blackout zones." Happily, he has, in the presence of Vieaux, an artist capable of meeting all the dynamic and expressive challenges of the music, starting with the opening movement in which the guitar meditates on several subjects while the orchestra mirrors them sensitively, like a reflecting pool. In the slow movement, the orchestra subordinates itself to the eloquent musings of the guitar by reducing itself to violins, harp and percussion. The finale counterbalances this lovely meditation with more spirited music imbued with high dance rhythms in the Spanish style. Pure fun!

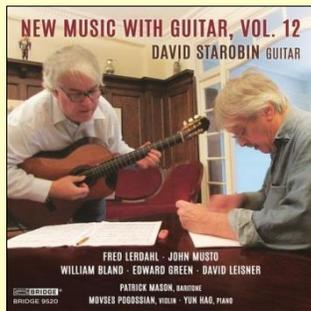
As an encore, we are given Starburst, a 2010 work in eight minutes that is getting a lot of exposure these days as a rousing concert-opener. Leshnoff tells us his object was to write a piece "with energy and excitement while exploring new corners and avenues." I'd say he succeeded!

¹ Hmm...Somehow, I doubt if this would go over in Donald Trump's America.

Ad Infinitum for Flute, Viola and Harp dates from a year earlier, in the Fall of 1976. This fairly impressionistic work looks, as its title implies, “towards the infinite,” as Brotons hints in its opening and ending. The long, slow, graceful melody is heard first in the flute over a harp accompaniment and a counter-melody in the viola. A harp interlude follows, then a flute-viola duo and a more agitated middle section over harp glissandi, all of which trade successfully on the things each instrument does best. The ending is soft and mysterious, fading out into silence as the title *Ad Infinitum* would suggest.

Emphasis for Woodwind Quintet, in a single continuous movement, is an even earlier work, written in the Winter of 1976 and revised extensively by Brotons in 2012 with a considerable lengthening of the middle section. It is a relatively uncomplicated work with a long, beautiful flute melody (*what else?*) in the middle.

Continued in the next column ==>

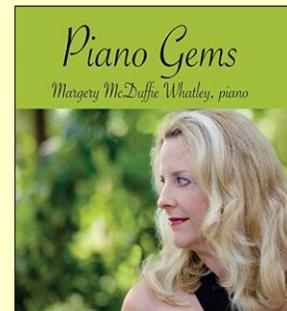


New Music with Guitar, Vol. 12
David Starobin, guitar
(Bridge Records)

After listening to the latest album in David Starobin’s New Music with Guitar series, a long forgotten line from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* suddenly popped into my mind: “Nothing of him but doth change / Into something rich and strange.” Somehow, it seemed appropriate as a metaphor for a program of infinite riches by five composers who have little in common except their own strong individual profiles.

All, happily, are still among the living. *Three Bagatelles* (2017) by Fred Lerdahl finds its inspiration in quotations from Arnold Schoenberg. With violinist Movses Pogossian as partner, Starobin’s guitar serves to enlighten, and even humanize the decidedly strange, austere, and almost subliminal quotations from Schoenberg’s String Quartet and his String Trio, Op. 45, that Pogossian encounters and explores so deftly.

In John Musto’s *The Brief Light* (2010), based on six poems of James Laughlin, Starobin supports the impressive artistry of baritone Patrick Mason, another artist with whom he has often collaborated. These are poems that address the darker, earthier, steamier side of love in the ambivalence of a lover who has been there before. We sense a keen awareness of passing time in a man of older years who knows his mistress has had a score of lovers before him. All of which pales beside his perception that “the stars are waning” and he feels “the sadness, and even the terror, of the long night that is coming on.” David Starobin considers many of these poems to be masterpieces in John Musto’s compelling



“Piano Gems,” Haydn, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Gershwin, Poulenc, Liszt, Rubinstein – Margery McDuffie Whatley
(ACA Digital)

Margery McDuffie Whatley, much esteemed as a gifted teacher as well as superb pianist, is currently on the faculty of the Birmingham Southern College Conservatory of Fine and Performing Arts. In this album, she displays her prowess in a wide range of piano styles and periods. She opens with Franz Joseph Haydn’s Piano Sonata No. 50 in C Major. This delightful work in which Haydn makes use of staccato and marcato throughout, was written at the time of his second sojourn in London, and was styled to suit the characteristics of the new English pianos that had a heavier sound, one that lent itself to a grander style than he had previously cultivated, with treble notes that tended to resonate even after the damper pedal had been applied. Haydn accordingly indicates an open pedal in several places in the first movement.

I don’t know how closely Margery follows this admonition on the modern Steinway D on which she performs, but the resulting sound has a wonderful clarity. There’s also a good deal of musical joking, for which Haydn was famous, including “wrong notes” that are not really flubs at all, as well as rolled chords, frequent passages in parallel thirds, and increased use of extreme upper and lower registers that tends to have a humorous effect. There are also moments of unexpected warmth that give this sonata more heart than one might have expected in a work with so many innovations.

The artist follows with the Berceuse, Op 57 and the Three Ecossaisses, Op 72, No. 3, by Frédéric Chopin. The former, a lullaby, makes much of the gentle rocking

settings, and who am I to disagree with him?

Sonata No. 4 (2016) by William Bland combines old and new conventions that abound in blues, rock, and popular music alongside such classical forms as cadenza, cantabile and recitative. One fine moment, in a work where Starobin is joined by pianist Yun Hao, occurs in the Blues finale in which a surprise cadenza, occurring just as we expect things are winding down, carries the music onward to what Bland would term a “deconstructed” ending.

Genesis: Variations for Solo Guitar (1974) by Edward Green takes inspiration from the credo of the American poet/philosopher Eli Siegel that “All beauty is making one of opposites.” Starobin obviously enjoys the opposites of hard and soft, sharp and smooth, agitated and calm, heavy and light in these Genesis Variations, which is perhaps the most inherently popular and accessible work on the program. Just why this fine 1975 recording has had to wait so long for its first release is a real mystery.

Finally, *Three James Tate Songs* (2007) by David Leisner, a composer who incidentally is a guitarist of some note, explores the violent contrasts and stunning imagery of a poet for whom a multi-colored sunset of “peaches dripping opium, pandemonium of tangerines, inferno of irises,” is an occasion for panic and sheer terror (*Never Again the Same*). Even the perception that the sounds and objects, the drama and movement we imagine from our vantage point on a fogbound island of the mind are mere illusions, is more unsettling than otherwise (*From an Island*). Once again, Patrick Mason and David Starobin aid the composer in making something rare and memorable out of poetry that is not exactly what we might term “easily accessible.”

motion of a left-hand arpeggio while the right-hand melody sings a song of sweetness and warmth that is not as naïve as one might imagine. The Ecossaise was originally a Scottish folk dance in 2/4 that had made its way into the parlors of the European bourgeoisie, where it was admired for its infectious up-beat rhythm. The first écossaise is particularly forward-looking, with a “stride” in the left hand and a syncopated melody in the right.

Felix Mendelssohn’s Fantasy in F-sharp minor, Op. 28, is subtitled *Sonate écossaise*, and is actually a highly imaginative work with features of both a fantasy and a sonata in three continuous movements. As the word écossaise will suggest, it contains elements of the original Scottish folk dance, including its irrepressible bounding rhythm, and a good many other elements.

George Gershwin comes next, in “novelty” arrangements of his songs *Fascinating Rhythm*, *S Wonderful*, and *I Got Rhythm*. With their frequent use of cross-rhythms, syncopations, rippling arpeggios and “stride” style, they were pitched towards good pianists who wanted something more than just a simple straightforward arrangement – and did they get it!

Franz Liszt’s *Au bord d’une source* (Beside a Spring) combines an innocent melody with an underlying accompaniment whose deceptive, irresistible flow will challenge the technique of any pianist less adept than Margery McDuffie Whatley.

For lack of space, I haven’t said anything about the three excellent Novelettes by Francis Poulenc or the colorful and virtuosic Valse-Caprice by Anton Rubinstein. I leave them for you to come across yourselves in your own voyages of discovery!