

me. *YTA III* was composed in 1986. “Yta” means surface in Swedish, and this is the third in his series of same—the only one for cello, perhaps. In his words, it describes “the death of an organism as the musical gestures arise in spasms before dying away, music that is violent and ugly”. Thank you, sir. I agree.

Knock, breathe, shine is more religious in content, a 15-minute three-movement suite with a knocking pizzicato first movement, a lyrical setting of ‘Dona nobis pacem’ in II that tends to fall off the cello on occasion, finally rising into the harmonic stratosphere. ‘Shine; brings us momentarily back into the resonance of low-register double-stops, but then whisks up above hearing range and about our ears in various ways, putting our cellist through some demanding playing that she handles with ability and with seeming accuracy, though there is no way she can sound comfortable in this kind of apocalypse. The music doesn’t.

Now we have music from a set of 31 Mystery variations on Italian Baroque composer Giuseppe Colombi’s Chiaccona, originally commissioned of Saariaho on behalf of cellist Ainsī Karttunen, whose recording of all of them was made not too long ago (Toccatà 171, M/J, 2013). After Salonen’s Sarabande for a coyote, we have the Chiacconi itself and then we’re on to Saariaho’s ‘Dreaming Chaconne,’ his contribution to that series. That all takes less than ten minutes.

Now Saariaho takes over. *Petals* was written in 1988 and can be played with or without electronic amplification. The music is made up of gradual shifts in style from inaudible rustling in the depths to slithers into the stratosphere with harmonics, tremolo, and more. Smith’s unelectrified interpretation takes less than nine minutes; Madeleine Shapiro’s recording takes 14 (Albany 726, J/F 2006, p. 240). That can happen if your music has no development to it but sound and fury. Shapiro takes longer because her sound blows up with the electronics and she gets involved with bending and stretching and giving your ears a rest on occasion. Yes, her interpretation sounds important, but the musical content does not demand all that, and Smith is just as effective. Scott Roller uses the electronics on the Wolpe Trio’s recording of much of Saariaho’s chamber music but takes only as long as Smith to play it (Kairos 12412, J/F 2005).

7 Papillons, written in 2000, is a depiction of butterflies. I expect them to flutter in the air but Smith’s seem to spend more time digging

in the earth. I liked Alexis Descharmes better in Saariaho’s complete cello works (Aeon 637, N/D 2006) and Elinor Frey in *Dialoghi* (Yarlung 78876, J/F 2012).

Finally we go around in magic time with ‘Spins and Spells’ (1996), a six-minute exercise in squeak, slither, crunch, sway, and splat that brings this strange collection of anti-cello sounds to a long-awaited end. Smith’s rival here is Roller in the Kairos CD and they both seem to handle it well. There is no end to the hunting and pecking, squeaking and scratching of all of this material. I can’t take it, but enjoy it if you can.

D MOORE

SCHMELZER: *Le Memorie Dolorose*
Tenet Vocal Artists; Acronym
Olde Focus 914—74 minutes

Recorded here for the first time is Johann Heinrich Schmelzer’s oratorio *Le Memorie Dolorose* on a text by Nicolo Minato. It was originally performed in Vienna on Good Friday of 1678 before the effigy of Christ’s tomb in the Hofburgkapelle. The drama takes place in the moments immediately following Christ’s burial. There is nothing particularly new in the drama itself. In fact the performance of an Easter play involving Angels, the Virgin Mary, Apostles, the three Maries (Magdalene, Cleopas, and Salome), and Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea—11 parts in all—goes back to the rich medieval history of the Passion play. The tradition continued well into the modern era. What is new is the organization of the drama into ten pairs of meditations, juxtaposing mourning with joyful reminiscences about Jesus’ life. In addition, Acronym inserts three sonatas by Schmelzer at logical breaks between scenes.

The program begins with a five-part Sonata in A minor. A four-part Sonata in A minor precedes the scene involving the three Maries, and a five-part Sonata in G minor comes before the scene of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

The drama unfolds in a series of dialogs between characters, mostly in recitative over basso continuo. Arias are simple, strophic pieces with instrumental ritornellos between stanzas. The aria ‘More Christo’ comes at an especially poignant moment at the end of the scene involving the three Maries (Kate Maroney, Elizabeth Baber Weaver, and Dianna Grabowski). In recitative the Virgin Mary (Jolle Greenleaf) sings ‘Udite, Udite un Altra’ as she

happily remembers how the people of Jerusalem cheered as Jesus entered the city. She recalls how they cut down tree boughs as a sign of their rejoicing; but joy turned to savagery when only a few days later they cut the tree trunks to make a cross. The aria that follows is gentle, full of pathos, sung over the descending tetrachord in the accompanying violin and continuo parts. The emotion continues, ineffably, into the ritornellos.

The end of the final scene, beginning with ‘Christo More’ makes a powerful statement. Here a trio consisting of Mary Magdalene, Maria Salome, and the Virgin Mary balance against an ensemble of Apostles (Andrew Fuchs, Brian Gieber, and Jesse Blumberg). The trio of women acts as a refrain between Mary Magdalene’s exclamations of sorrow. There is a better feminist argument to be made here than the ungainly one that follows, but here goes. Predictably, while the women give voice to the emotion of grief, the apostles declaim the theological significance of the scriptural events. It pits the thundering (low-range) voice of the Petrine church against the emotional (high-range) voice of the Magdalene church. The oratorio concludes with the entire ensemble in a final pietistic statement—essentially, if Jesus did this for me, whatever can I do for him? “In eterno piangerò” (I shall weep eternally).

The performance is absolutely gorgeous. The singers’ voices are full of expression, and ornamentation is spot on. The instrumentalists play with complete understanding of the performance practice. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

SCHNEIDER: *Berlin Punk; Cri Muet; As Times Go Bye*

Clair-Obscur Saxophone Quartet; Tebe Poem Choir; Siberian Symphony/ Vladimir Lande
Wergo 5119—53 minutes

The Berlin saxophone quartet Clair-Obscur presents the first recordings of four saxophone works by German businessman, film composer, and former theory professor Enjott Schneider (b. 1950).

In July 2018 the group traveled to the south central Russian metropolis of Krasnoyarsk to record *Cri Muet* (Silent Cry, 2016) and *Berlin Punk* (2016) with the Siberian Symphony, led by music director Vladimir Lande, and the Tebe Poem Choir, coached by chorus master Konstantin Yakobson.

Written in memoriam for the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, *Cri Muet* is an emotionally packed modernist tone poem that pits the saxophone quartet against full orchestra and choir. By contrast, *Berlin Punk* is a five-movement homage to the rebellious 1970s rock aesthetic that, while led by the Ramones in New York and the Sex Pistols in London, resonated strongly with West Berlin youth growing up in the ruins of postwar Germany and struggling with the global forces that had divided the city.

In September 2018, Clair-Obscur collaborated with Berlin Philharmonic English horn player Dominik Wollenweber on ‘Pavane’ (2016), a single-movement neo-Renaissance piece for English horn and saxophone quartet. Three members then recorded *As Times Go Bye* (2003), a neo-Baroque suite for saxophone trio with references to JS Bach.

The performances are thoroughly professional and convincing. While Clair-Obscur shares some sonic philosophy with the renowned German saxophonist Sigurd Rascher, the group’s sound is very clear, easily handling the most sensitively scored passages in one selection and then cutting through massive amounts of noise in the next. The contrast between the avant-garde orchestral works and the backwards looking chamber music is so great that some listeners, depending on their taste, may shun half the album. At the same time, the execution and commitment of each performer is so compelling that many more listeners will buckle their seat belts and enjoy the ride.

HANUDEL

SCHNITTKE: *String Trio*; see MOZART

SCHOENBERG: *Piano Pieces*

Yoko Hirota
Navona 6214 — 53 minutes

Schoenberg is not easy to listen to, but Hirota’s precise playing is compelling. A champion for contemporary piano repertoire, she has participated in several new music festivals and concert series, including her own 5-Penny New Music Concerts.

Though his piano pieces sort of blur into each other after a while, texturally, fans of Schoenberg will find this a delightful album. Besides the regular “piano works,” short pieces in 12-tone, the album contains 17 fragments, the more engaging works for me. Her liner notes do a wonderful job of sketching influ-

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