

Richard Stoltzman: PERSPECTIVES II on MMC



Classical Reviews - Miscellaneous Collections

Written by [William Zagorski](#)

Thursday, 16 April 2009

PERSPECTIVES II • Richard Stoltzman (cl); 1,2,5 Richard Drexler (pn); 2 Karolina Rojahn (pn); 2 Greg Vitale (vn); 1 Chuck Sherba (vn); 1 Consuelo Sherba (va); 1 Jan Pfeiffer (vc); 1 Emmanuel Feldman (vc); 1 Pascale Delache (db); 1 Claudia Hübl (pn); 4 Vit Micka, cond; 3,6 Moravian PO; 3,6 Kirk Trevor, cond; 4 Slovak C Players; 4 Jerzy Swoboda, cond; 4,5 Warsaw Natl PO 5 • MMC 2175 (78:45)

DREXLER Flaming Spirit. 1 BARABBA 3 Meditations. 2 GIACOMETTI Quando i venti del mondo mi portarono la voce dei tamburi. 3 GIESEN Goodbye Paul Celan. 4 ELKANA Tru'a. 5 GATES The Phoenix Rising 6

So many of the MMC releases that have crossed my desk over the years, most recently the first of this series, reviewed by me in *Fanfare* 31:5, have proved to be showcases for clarinetist Richard Stoltzman's estimable talents. This next installment—with Richard Drexler's *Flaming Spirit*, Jason Barabba's *Three Meditations* for clarinet and piano, and Amos Elkana's *Tru'a*—is no exception.

Richard Drexler's *Flaming Spirit*, a double concerto for clarinet, piano, and string ensemble, with its seemingly improvised jazz licks in a rigorously structured context, is particularly ingratiating, and provides Stoltzman with yet another fine vehicle. It shows its composer to be a master of variation form in the classical tradition, its engaging jazz cum blues material notwithstanding. The intervals and time values of the clarinet's opening statement and the piano's answer to it fluently and organically morph into a variety of musics conveying a panoply of contrasting emotions. Drexler was born in Illinois in 1957. Since 1985 he has resided in Florida, where he currently teaches in the jazz department of the University of Central Florida in Orlando as well as in his own private studio. An arranger and record producer with a long track record, he is also a multi-instrumentalist (piano and bass) who has performed with numerous jazz and pop notables, and has lately been exploring the fusion of classical music with jazz and Latin forms. He is decidedly not a crossover musician—a stupid and misleading linguistic category invented decades ago by the gurus of American marketing—but a more than well-equipped musician who naturally embraces the vital value of musical cross fertilization. This virtue can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to all the other composers who grace this release.

Los Angeles-based Jason Barabba studied composition at the University of California at Irvine and UCLA. The notes to this release tell me that he is often inspired by literature. In the case of *Three Meditations* for clarinet and piano, it was by Ursula K. Le Guin's "rendition" (her characterization) of the *Tao Te Ching*, a 6th century B.C. text written by the sage, Lao-tzu, which has served as the underpinning of the Taoist school of philosophy. Barabba's deeply meditative and somewhat melancholy music is far more aphoristic than Drexler's. One way to describe it is as if it were something from the Second Viennese School with many of the intermediate tones restored.

Nonetheless, in its sparseness, it recalls, to me at any rate, Satie's *Socrate*. Both Stoltzman and pianist Karolina Rojahn rise to its challenges. Stoltzman's sheer concentration here recalls his superb performance of Messaien's *Quartet for the End of Time* with Tashi recorded by RCA back in 1975.

Antonio Giacometti, born in Brescia, Italy, in 1957, has impressive credentials as a well-published musical educator. The translated title of his piece, *When the Winds of the World Led the Voice of the Drums to Me*, defines its general thrust. Its first part, "The Winds," recalls some of Bruno Maderna's devices as found in *Hyperion*—a lot of orchestral noisemakers worked deftly into the quietly evolving texture, which persist through the following percussion riff that flowers into level upon level of complexity, and leads, bit by bit, to "The Voice of the Drums," which is based on a folk song included in the Brazilian dance "Tambor de Crioula"—an evocation of the primordial power of rhythm. In its intricacy it becomes Silvestre Revueltas meets Carlos Chavez, meets Heitor Villa-Lobos, meets African drumming. I found it bracing.

Tobias Giesen's homage to the late poet Paul Celan is the most overtly modernistic piece on this release. Born on Dec. 26, 1970, in Rheine, Germany—eight months after Celan's suicide—Giesen found himself haunted by that increasingly cryptic Holocaust-survivor poet. Though he has referenced Celan's poetry in several prior works, this is Giesen's final piece dedicated to him. Giesen studied mathematics and computer science for two years before switching to music. His teacher was Heinz Winbeck, an avant-gardist based in Würzburg. For want of a better means of classification, *Goodbye Paul Celan* continues the structural and esthetic philosophies of the Second Viennese School. It is a complex and finely wrought work for piano and chamber ensemble that starts abstractly and gradually, and quite logically reveals its at-first-hidden jazz underpinning. This is cerebral, rigorously organized music, but music that, paradoxically, conveys maximum emotion in minimum time. Pianist Claudia Hübl and the Slovak Chamber Players under Kirk Trevor are more than equal to the task.

Amos Elkana was born in Boston in 1967. An avid guitarist who spent his formative years in Israel, he returned to the U.S. after the completion of his military service and made his way to the New England Conservatory, where "he discovered contemporary music while taking lessons with William Thomas McKinley and met such jazz legends as Dave Holland and Bob Moses." Along the way, Elkana became a purveyor of computer-derived electronic music, which makes its influence known in *Tru'a* (Hebrew for fanfare), a 10-and-a-half-minute piece that was written for Richard Stoltzman, and that is also Elkana's personal homage to Witold Lutosławski. This is music anchored by sustained pedal points—a case where purely acoustical instruments sound as if they were computer generated. It demands from Stoltzman a huge dynamic range, extreme interval leaps, sustained glissandos, and multiphonics. Stoltzman rises to the occasion, and the accompaniment by the Warsaw Philharmonic under Jerzy Swoboda—an ensemble that has distinguished itself over the years in the realization of cutting edge music—cannot be faulted.

Matt Gates is a film composer and art-music producer who has won a number of awards, including the BMI Jerry Goldsmith Film Scoring Award in 2005. *The Phoenix Rising* is culled from the film "Pilgrim's Progress." The music is tonal, harmonically simple (utilizing synthesizer derived human voices), and moving. This is, to the more conservative listeners, the least problematic score on this

offering, but it underscores MMC's intent—to provide a momentary snapshot (the ancientness of that term betrays me) of where music is at the current moment. We have come a long way from the notion that so-called classical music develops along a single line—a long way from the debates of the 1970s between the advocates of atonalism vs. those of tonalism. The composers of the present moment are not as doctrinaire as I may have been in my youth and older years. They pick and choose from all options, and that approach is eloquently supported by this release.

Despite the fact that these tracks were all recorded at different times and venues, the sound is both remarkably consistent and gratifying. William Zagorski

Last Updated (Thursday, 16 April 2009)

[Close Window](#)