

Review

The Clarinetist, November 2011

I have received an interesting and (regarding programming) somewhat unusual recording from clarinetist Peter Stoll. Entitled *Where Words and Music Meet*, it presents seven works in varying styles, of music for one or two singers plus chamber ensembles which vary from two-to-seven instrumentalists. The chamber ensemble is an assemblage of strings, winds, percussionist, and pianists known as the Talisker Players. The ensemble roster indicates a membership of 13 players, and it is an ensemble-in-residence at Massey College, a graduate student residence college located in Toronto.

Toronto-based Peter Stoll is the clarinetist with the Talisker Players, as well as serving as principal with the Toronto Philharmonia at the Toronto Centre for the Arts. He is an active soloist and player of contemporary music, and is on the faculty of music at the University of Toronto. A valuable article about the clarinet music of Krzysztof Penderecki by Peter Stoll was recently published in *The Clarinet* (Sept., 2010, pp. 56–60).

In addition to works by Beethoven, Stephanie Moore, Ippolitov-Ivanov, and Alexander Rapoport, programmed on this release are three pieces, that to varying degrees, feature the clarinet: Poulenc: *Le Bestiaire* for mezzo soprano, flute, clarinet, bassoon and string quartet; Andrew Ager: *Ellis Portal* (excerpts) for mezzo soprano, baritone, clarinet/bass clarinet, and string quartet; and Osvaldo Golijov: *Tenebrae* for soprano, clarinet and string quartet.

Le Bestiaire is a set of six miniatures, settings of brief poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, written by a 20-year-old Poulenc. At four minutes and 15 seconds, it may be the shortest song cycle in existence. Poulenc's and Apollinaire's *Le Bestiaire* (Beast-Fables) include the "The Dromedary," "The Goat from Tibet," "The Grasshopper," "The Dolphin," "The Crayfish" and "The Carp." The character of the poems is masterfully captured by the music, which is exquisitely sung by mezzo Norine Burgess. This is a mature work by a young composer, and a delight of wit and grace.

The Ager piece, *Ellis Portal*, with text by Rex Deverell, is presented here in part. The complete work is in nine short scenes. Andrew Ager explains, "The title of this work, Ellis Portal, is taken from the name of [a] Toronto subway-tunnel entrance... For a number of years this name plate caught my fancy, and I always thought about writing a suite of songs about the city and naming it after the tunnel, as the subway is so much a part of Toronto's landscape... Rex Deverell was enthusiastic about the project,

and came up with a number of vignettes that describe the city in all its beauty and squalor, as seen in darkness."

The four songs heard here are sung by baritone Alexander Dobson and mezzo soprano Vicki St. Pierre. The clarinet part is often prominent and Stoll is heard on bass clarinet (with a very rich tone) throughout two songs, and soprano clarinet in the remainder. The music is instantly accessible and appealing, and is expectedly theatrical in nature (at times Broadway is not far away). The up-tempo songs have obvious jazz elements and musical content which is sure to please.

About the very effective closing work on this disc, composer Golijov writes: "The title *Tenebrae* comes from the evening services of the Christian Holy Week, in which the readings are taken from the Lamentations of Jeremiah for the fallen city of Jerusalem; each section begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet." The five sections of this 12-minute piece flow seamlessly into each other. The auditory effect created by soprano Teri Dunn's essentially vocalise, the melismatic clarinet, and the string quartet, is stunningly beautiful. The sensual and spiritual quality of this work cannot help but draw the listener into its sound world, a world that is somewhat akin to that of the late Henryk Górecki or Philip Glass. The composer says, "I wanted to write a piece that could be listened to from different perspectives ... I lifted some of the haunting melismas from Couperin's *Troisième Leçon de Tenebre*, using them as sources for loops, and wrote new interludes between them, always within a pulsating, vibrating, aerial texture. The compositional challenge was to write music that would sound as an orbiting spaceship that never touches ground." Golijov succeeds in this music that elevates the spirit. It is a high point of this release.

The performances by this rather large cast of characters are all first-rate. Peter Stoll is an accomplished player who sounds terrific, is interpretively dead-on, and impresses this writer with his versatility. (He also plays the birbyne.)

This disc was recorded at the Humbercrest United Church and Toronto. The sound is spacious, clear, well balanced, and the release, of over 75 minutes of music, is attractively produced with notes, song texts, bios and photos. Where Words and Music Meet (TPCM 1109) is available through the Canadian Music Centre. After entering the CMC site, go to CMC Services / CD Distribution /CMC Boutique.

This music shows an innately gifted melodist, trained in structure, and who has written a remarkably mature original work at an early age.

The performers play with commitment and precision throughout, and produce a mellow, well-balanced sound. Inner lines are well heard. Ray Kireilis possesses a sweet, even tone quality which is always controlled. His staccato is impeccable. These are well-conceived and musically-convincing performances from this impressive ensemble.

The recorded sound is close-up, quite natural and appropriate for chamber music. There seems to be no digital processing enhancing these analogue recordings. The original LP recording was on the Spectrum label (SR-127) and was recorded in 1980. A few almost inaudible "ticks" in the Bliss lead me to think that this CD was remastered from a very good vinyl copy rather than tape — nothing to concern oneself with, the listening experience is wonderful.

English Clarinet Quintets is with-out a manufacturer's label and is available through the net at: Ramon J. Kireilis, or from Van Cott Information Services (www.vcisinc.com).

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