

# The Newest Music

**HAAS:** *In Vain*

Klangforum Vienna/ Sylvain Cambreling  
Kairos 1233—63 minutes

**HEGAARD:** *Triptych with Objects; 13 Short Pieces; Twine; The 4 Winds; Ambient Voices*

Danish Chamber Players/ Henrik Vagn Christensen  
Dacapo 8226501—67 minutes

**KOCH:** *In Memorium; Alice Under Skies; Memory of a Summer Day, Aria Interrupted; Earth My Likeness*

Susanne Elmark, s; Bjarne Hansen, v; Michaela Fukacova, vc; Mats Hedellius, ch; Odense Symphony/ Fedor Gluschenko, Justin Brown  
Dacapo 8226502—57 minutes

**ROSING-SCHOW:** *Piseq-Ritus III; Spiral Ladder II; Ritus II; Windgeboren*

Geir Draugsvoll, James Crabb, accordion; Die Michaelstrompeter, Duo Denum Touché  
Dacapo 8226506—56 minutes

**HOLTEN:** *The Marriage of Heaven & Hell; First Snow; A Time for Everything; Rain & Rush & Rosebush; In Nomine*

BBC Singers/ Bo Holten  
Dacapo 8224214—63 minutes

**DE LIO:** *Amounts To; SAUNDERS SMITH:* *By Language Embellished: I*

P Inman, narr; Kristen Loree, voice, perc  
Centaur 2633—50 minutes

**MELBINGER:** *Fleeting Visions; Divertimento; Some Things Are Dark; Insect Politics; 6 Madrigals*

Steven Weigt, p; Susan Gall, fl; Sarah Thornblade, v; William Kirkley, bcl; Andrew Childs, t; Janet Underhill, bn—Centaur 2659—68 minutes

**SCOTT:** *Paisajes Audibles*

Victoria Hansen, s; Bowed Piano Ensemble  
Albany 654—59 minutes

**New America Song Cycles**

**LARSON:** *My Antonia; HAGEN:* *Figments; MORAVEC:* *Vita Brevis; CIPULLO:* *Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House*

Paul Sperry, t; Margo Garrett, Daron Hagen, Paul Moravec, Tom Cipullo, p  
Albany 654—60 minutes

**SCHIFFMAN:** *Alma; Prelude & Variations; Chamber Concerto 2*

Maria Horvath, mz; Jane Perry-Camp, p; Accord Wind Quintet, Akademia Quartet, Budafok Chamber Choir, Gyor Philharmonic; Hungarian Philharmonic/ Matyas Antal

North/South Consonance 1035—63 minutes

**BEN-AMOTS:** *Hashkivenu—Song of the Angels; Celestial Dialogues; Shtetl Songs; Psalm 81*

Christopher Bowers-Broadbent, org; Alberto Mizrahi, Radka Petraskova, voice; David Krakauer, cl; Re'ut Ben Ze'ev, s; John Musto, p; Petr Hladik, Rostislav Mikeska, perc; BBC Singers; Permonik Children's Choir, Barcelona Symphony/ Kenneth Kiesler, Karl Anton Rickenbacher, Eva Seinerova

Naxos 559421—72 minutes

**Music from 6 Continents: 1999**

by Gerry Murphy, Akira Kobayashi, David Fetherolf, Stephen Parker, David O'Leary, Andrey Kasparov

Vit Musik, v; Moravian Philharmonic, Aichi University of Fine Arts Orchestra/ Jiri Mikula, Yuzo Toyama, Toshiyuki Shimada

Vienna Modern Masters 3049—59 minutes

**MMC New Century, Volume 16**

by Romeo Melloni, Franz Schubert, Deanna Hansen, Lauree H Palmer, Anna Larson, Michael Davis

Antoni Brozek, p; Vaslav Bazant, tpt; Silesian Philharmonic, Czech Radio Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic, Moravian Philharmonic/ Jerzy Swoboda, Vladimir Valek, Vit Micka

MMC 2128—65 minutes

**Of Time and Place**

**FIRST:** *Intimate Voices; Shadow Play; HAKENBERG:* *Cube; Wild Landscape & Underbrush; LAPIDAKIS:* *Akira's Dream*

Davis Brooks, v; Kurt Fowler, Wolfgang Lessing, vc; Rene Lecuona, David Andres, p; Bernd Mallasch, perc; Thomas Loffler, bcl; Odysseas Karydis, cl; Arcadian Winds

Capstone 8728—54 minutes

What's in a label? Sometimes more than meets the ear. Sometimes less. Just as classical collectors have their own tastes and proclivities, so do the ones who make the discs. Usually for the better, sometimes for the worse, the preferences of the ones producing the discs can be discerned in the final product, particularly in the compositional styles represented. But sometimes, no guiding tastes are discernable.

In this batch, the discs from Europe show positive signs that inspired musical tastes are guiding the process. For the American discs, such positive signs are less evident.

Last time I reviewed, quite favorably, a debut disc by promising young Austrian composer Johannes Maria Staud on the Kairos

label. Besides Staud, a relative newcomer, Kairos's fledgling catalog boasts Lachenmann, Rihm, and Scelsi. They also issued two discs by young Austrian Olga Neuwirth, who recently made a splash with her opera based on the David Lynch film *Lost Highway*. This time around Kairos unveils another relative newcomer: George Friedrich Haas.

Haas's hour-long *In Vain* is top-drawer stuff. Its fluid velvety ruffles remind me of the cascading passages in Ligeti's Violin Concerto and Piano Concerto. Yet it has a kind of smooth continuity—what's been called "seal-skin"—like the forms in Roger Reynolds's and Tristan Murail's music. There are few sudden moves, few discontinuities.

Ten minutes into Haas's work, the textures thin out, to breathe light, microtonal breaths. The overtone-based harmonic hues recall the sounds of "spectralist" composers Grisey and Murail. Haas's music sculpts each chord gently and carefully, bending overtone pitches, fading them in and out delicately. Half-way through the work, the fluid, velvety cascading returns, sounding now, more than before, like MC Escher's visual illusions reinvented in sound. Powerful processes, prismatic surfaces; savvy, muscular music.

The Austrians are not the only Europeans busy, busy, busy producing top quality New Music discs; the Danes are at it too. They've launched a new series, Open Space, on their Dacapo label. (Don't confuse the Danish Open Space series with the small American publisher of New Music books, periodicals, and CDs, also named Open Space, based out of Red Hook, NY.) They call it a "new, visionary sub-label for contemporary Danish music".

Here are three of the four releases that launch the Open Space series and another release of contemporary Danish music, also on Dacapo. So far, I like what I hear. Either someone with definite, but not narrow, tastes is steering the ship or Denmark—a modest size population—is far more fertile ground for New Music than most other countries. Either way, it spells good news for the New Music collector.

Of the Danish discs, Lars Hegaard's chamber music sparks my enthusiasm the most. I rank it on a par with Haas's new disc. The style itself is not ground-breaking, but the ideas are fresh and vivid. Hegaard layers assorted atonal ostinatos in various intricate combinations. Though there's no lack of lyricism, cellular (mosaic) construction and cross-cutting montage textures dominate. The resulting brittleness and rhythmic liveliness suggest Stravinsky as a likely influence. Yet the harmonic sensibility and richness remind me of Stefan Wolpe.

In today's New Music landscape—so often preoccupied with new sound colors (timbres)

or post-modernist style references—Hegaard refreshingly stands out for concentrating on the creative possibilities of pitch (harmony, motive, melody, counterpoint) as the bearers of musical meaning. Hegaard's *Triptych with Objects*, in particular, emits audible, but subtle connections between form and process, created through his deft and imaginative ostinato layering. A pleasing balance between transparency and opacity pervades his music.

Proving that Open Space doesn't bow to a single style or ideology, Jesper Koch's music is an entirely different kettle of fish. Mahlerian breadth, Brucknerian sweep, Shostakovichian pathos drive the opening work, *In Memoriam*, a passacaglia for orchestra. The optimistic spaciousness and occasional rhythmic exuberance of the second work, *Alice Under Skies*, brings Copland's *Appalachian Spring* to mind, though Koch's harmonic language is more chromatic and tonally murky than Copland. *Memory of a Summer Day* flows in the same vein as Berg's *Lied der Lulu*. Soprano Susanne Elmark sings deliciously. *Earth My Likeness* begins with a Boulezian percussion choir, then melts into leisurely-paced, tension-building atonal counterpoint in the strings. The overall feel bears uncanny resemblance to the final movement of Berg's *Lulu Suite*, the Adagio Sostenuto, based on the final scene of the opera. I can't complain about the resemblance: I enjoy every minute of it.

Niels Rosing-Schow's disc corroborates my suspicion: discerning but broad tastes are behind the wheel of Dacapo's Open Space. Rosing-Schow's music centers on gradual processes, what the liner notes call "exploring the forces of growth, transformation, and decay". Ligeti and Reich are obvious influences. Music like this is all surface; there's nothing subliminal or sub-rosa. Most of Rosing-Schow's works build their forms from varied rhythmic repetitions, cascading or climbing pitch patterns, and gradual shifts of harmony or sound-color. The finale of the last work, *Windgeboren*, for three trumpets, derives from a Gregorian chant. It's beautifully regal, yet melancholy—a nice conclusion to a program of sophisticated but accessible New Music. (Minimalist lovers beware: Rosing-Schow's music, though minimalist, is almost purely atonal, modernist. So it lacks the pop-music flavor that some minimalist music has.)

Danish choral conductor, composer, and critic Bo Holten's disc is good also, but disappointing compared to the three Open Space discs. Traditional sweet tonal choral sonorities wander freely, creating an ethereal soothing effect. They sometimes melt into veiled but bitter dissonant clouds—here I'm reminded of Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna*. Jarring chromatic shifts spice up the flow, but rarely. *A Time for Every-*

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*thing* builds slowly to an intense climax, reminding me of Schoenberg's late-romantic choral work *Friede auf Erden*, replete with post-climactic cascades settling into relaxing harmonies that warm the heart.

For whatever reason, composers on the Centaur label tend not to adhere to any mainstream compositional ideology, tradition, or trend. They tend to be mavericks. The group of text-sound-theater works by DeLio and Saunders Smith is an example. For his work *amounts. to.*, composer Thomas DeLio's collaborates with avant-garde poet P. Inman. The poetry is more word-sculpture than traditional poetry. The music electronically sculpts the sound of Mr Inman reading his word-sculpture poetry. On the one hand, *amounts. to.* sounds almost like a parody of avant-garde musical theater or sound art. On the other hand, the electronic sounds and processing do actually complement the spoken text, encouraging the ear to appreciate its sonic qualities.

Stuart Saunders Smith's *By Language Embellished: I*, for narrator and percussion, is amusing and well performed by actress Kristen Loree. Its eccentric theatrical humor reminds me fondly of Samuel Beckett's absurdist plays.

Thomas Melbinger's disc, also on Centaur, is much less eccentric, but no less enjoyable. Its atonal modernism makes no apologies. The intricate and rhythmically nimble piano work, *Fleeting Visions*, brings Donald Martino's 12 Piano Preludes to mind; the flowing weave of Webern-like gestures in the *Divertimento* recalls Stefan Wolpe's chamber works; the atonal figuration and neo-Vivaldian rhythmic drive of the *Six Madrigals* conjures the sound of Charles Wuorinen. You get the picture.

Little discretion seems to guide the Albany label's New Music programming. The quality of the music is all over the map. Generally, however, it is anti-avant-garde, anti-modernist, conservative, moderate, inoffensive, polished, safe. Don't look for thrills or challenges here.

Stephen Scott's latest disc of bowed piano music is disappointing. I've been enthralled by his music in the past. But now it seems that Scott and his team have refined the bowed piano technique too much. With the novelty gone, it sounds dated, resembling 1980s synthesizer washes like the soundtrack to Wolfgang Peterson's classic U-boat thriller *Das Boat*. It's not the bowed piano's fault entirely: the combination of a hackneyed light-rock drum pulse overlaid with harmonic minor-scale ostinatos and melodramatic soft-pop chord oscillations is unlikely to enthrall the New Music enthusiast, no matter what instruments are playing. Worse yet, when the text is spoken over the music, it's like a parody of a

politically correct new-age nature documentary. I do enjoy the climactic Spanish pathos of the 13th movement, about the weeping guitar. Yet I find the Spanish Slow Dance that follows soon afterward exceedingly maudlin.

Few except tenors should get excited about Paul Sperry's disc, also on Albany. Sperry has a beautiful voice. Mostly, the songs employ an expansive, but tired, American-romantic rhetoric and thin humor, stylistically conservative, with little harmonic or melodic imagination. A bright spot, however, is Moravec's *Vita Brevis*. His adventurous chromatic tonality recalls Strauss's Ophelia Lieder and other emotionally charged turn-of-the-century Austro-German songs—the early (late-romantic) songs of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, and Zemlinsky as well as the so-called “Munich School”.

Sometimes it is not so much the tastes of a label and its producers but the agendas of non-profit organizations that influence programming. Since 1980, North/South Consonance, Inc. has sponsored an admission-free concert series in New York City and a line of CDs. It is “devoted to the promotion and performance of music by composers of all aesthetic persuasions” and brings “important new music by composers from the Americas and elsewhere to discerning listeners in New York City”. Between the lines, read: “uptown” music (academic serialism or modernist atonality) and “downtown” music (minimalism, post-minimalism, “totalism”) tend to dominate in NYC; North/South Consonance fills the gap with music that bows to neither of these two factions.

Harold Schiffman explores various shades of neoromanticism. *Alma* (2002) is enjoyably easy to follow as its modal tonality varies from mildly eerie to bright and cheery—approximately Respighi's range of style and mood. The contrapuntal choral and string writing feel natural and fluid, sometimes with a Brahms-like smoothness. A folksy romantic lyricism, like Mahler's and Dvořák's, is also there.

Schiffman's *Prelude and Variations*, a much earlier work (1970), is far thornier. Here I'm pleasantly reminded of the nostalgic second of Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces*, 'Verganges' (yesteryears), as well as of Schoenberg's 12-tone *Variations* for orchestra. By the end of the Schiffman's *Prelude and Variations*, it becomes clear it is based on a 12-tone row, though the liner notes avoid any such suggestion.

The Milken Archive of Jewish Music sponsors the disc of American-trained Israeli composer Ofer Ben-Amots. The all-too-brief opening work, *Hashkivenu—Song of the Angels*, impresses me the most. It sounds more British than Jewish, though. Fans of Stephen Hartke's

*Tituli*, which I raved about in January/February, will enjoy this. To imagine Psalm 81, the final work on the disc, imagine Bulgarian choral music (*Le Mystère des voix bulgares*) punctuated by apocalyptic percussion.

I enjoy the two longer works on the discs much less. *Celestial Dialogues* combines soulful Jewish song, sung by a real cantor, with Janacek-like violin obbligato and interjections of "klezmer" clarinet. *Shtetl Songs* remind me of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*, Kurt Weill's cabaret songs, and Hindemith's piano writing. With sophistication and polish, Amots fuses the Jewish folk music tradition with 20th Century Western classical music styles. Yet as New Music it offers little that is new.

Though not explicitly governed by an agenda, the various anthology series nonetheless have their own stylistic biases—sometimes by design, sometimes by default. Either way, the biases are veiled to maintain credibility. For instance, quoting from the their website, the "Vienna Modern Masters [series] has no stylistic, gender, ethnic, geographical or other bias in its choice of music to appear on the label. Its only criterion is merit." Yet a tendency toward bombast and general lack of subtlety pervades much of VMM's *Music from 6 Continents*, 1999.

"Merit" is most likely influenced, directly or indirectly, by VMM president Nancy Van de Vate, the composer whose composition *Chernobyl* was paired with Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* on a 1988 disc that evidently took mass mortality as its theme.

The idea of interpreting international news events with angst-ridden bombast continues on this 1999 grouping with Gerry Murphy's overblown post-modernist Corigliano-esque *Good Friday: Belfast 10-4-98*. Fetherolf's work is also heavy-handed and too serious; Parker's is needlessly optimistic Hollywood movie fluff; and Kasparov's Schnittke-esque snarling falls flat. Kobayashi's *Constellation*, by contrast, earns its explosive rhetoric through rugged, muscular varieties of sound color, recalling Boulez's early works, such as *Notations*. O'Leary's *Crash*, another bright spot, avoids overwrought emotionalism in favor of lively rhythm, in the spirit of Reich's *Piano Phase* and Louis Andriessen's *De Staat*. Serious Wagnerian tension briefly rears its head. But then O'Leary's fusion of the *Rite of Spring* with the ominous da-dum da-dum from the *Jaws* soundtrack gets me chuckling. *Crash* is great fun. Too bad most of the disc is not.

Three of the five contemporary works on MMC New Century Volume 16 are bland neoromanticism of one sort or another. Don't bother with them. Davis's 'One Last Waltz' is also neoromantic but with bittersweet melancholic undercurrents reminiscent of Walton's

First Symphony and *La Valse*. Ann Larson's Adagio for trumpet and strings begins in a Wagnerian vein, then develops into the delightfully mysterious atmosphere of Ives's *Unanswered Question*. As I mentioned in my review (Jan/Feb 2004) of Howard Richards's disc, also on MMC, the Moravian Philharmonic leaves much to be desired: egregious flaws of intonation occur right and left. Despite the appeal of the Davis and Larson works, I do not recommend this.

The Capstone label also produces an anthology series, the Society of Composers. This time, the executive producer of that series, Richard Brooks, becomes producer for his own collection, which combines works of three composers born in the year 1960. It turns out well.

The styles of the composers vary. Tense, dissonant, thorny, angular gestures and ostinatos dominate American composer CP First's piano trio, *Intimate Voices*. Matters get theatrical in its third movement, when the musicians start saying strange things to each other while playing. German composer Stefan Hakenberg's bass clarinet, cello, and percussion trio, *Cube*, has no pulse or meter to speak of. Instead, it sculpts the timbre and overtones of one or two pitches at a time. The pacing, texture, and sometimes even the harmonic language of Hakenberg's *Wild Landscapes and Underbrush* remind me of Ligeti's early *Six Bagatelles* for wind quintet. Atonal clarinet trilling and smooth multiphonics pepper Greek composer Michael Lapidakis's *Akira's Dream*. Think of Boulez's *Dialogue L'homme Double*, but in a more introspective mood and without the surround-sound element. Though none of these works is especially original, together they offer a stimulating hour of New Music listening. Among the Capstone label's releases, the ones produced by Richard Brooks maintain a high quality of repertoire and performance.

MAILMAN

**ANDERSON:** *March Swale; Pennyroyal Swale; New Mexico Swale; Angel; January Swale; Rosemary Swale; Concerto*

Rubio Quartet; Andrew Bolotowsky, fl, picc; David Rozenblatt, perc; Jessica Marsten, s; Joseph Kubera, celeste; Andre Tarantiles, harp; Darren Campbell, db/ Gary M Schneider

New World 80610—67 minutes

**McKINLEY:** *Wind, Fire, & Ice; Mostly Mozart; Silent Whispers*

Victoria Griswold, p; London Symphony, Liverpool Philharmonic, Warsaw Philharmonic/ Roger Biggs, Gerard Schwartz, Robert Black

MMC 2134—55 minutes