



Danielpour A Child's Reliquary. Ludwig Concerto for Violin and Cello. HAGEN Masquerade.

Sarah Hicks, Troy Peters, cond; Jamie Laredo (vn); Sharon Robinson (vc); Vermont SO BRIDGE 9354 (78:19)

Written by Robert Markow | May/June 2012 Issue

Double concertos for violin and cello are not plentiful. There were examples before Brahms, but none on his level of achievement—from Vivaldi (three of them!), Johann Christian Bach, Leopold Hofmann, Josef Reicha, Carl Stamitz, Antonin Vranicky, and Donizetti. Following Brahms's example, the next major figure to write such a concerto was Delius (1916). Other significant works for these soloists are Miklos Rozsa's Sinfonia Concertante (1966) composed for Heifetz and Piatigorsky, and Robert Starer's concerto of 1968. For some reason, there seems to have been a flurry of double concertos for violin and cello, or compositions featuring them as soloists, written in recent years: by Anatol Vieru (1980), Arvo PArt (1981), Lou Harrison (1981, with the accompaniment of a Javanese gamelan ensemble), Ezra Laderman (1986), Carl Roskott (1989), Ellen Taffee Zwillich (1991), Stephen Paulus (1994), Ivan Tcherepnin (1995), Ned Rorem (1998), Lalo Schifrin (1999), Richard Danielpour (2006), Gordon Chin (2006), Daron Aric Hagen (2007), and David Ludwig (2008).

It would be hard to find a disc with a more integrated theme than this one. Beyond the obvious scoring of the three works for solo violin and cello with orchestra (Triple Doubles is the title of the disc), they were all written for the soloists who play them here (a married couple at that), all were composed within the past few years, all are about the same length (just shy of half an hour), and all have programmatic implications relating to love, loss, and lament. Most importantly, I am pleased to say, they are all winners.

Richard Danielpour's concerto, titled A Child's Reliquary, is undoubtedly one of his finest works, comparable in its sustained interest and passionate intensity to his Cello Concerto and Anima Mundi. It is one of the most gorgeously orchestrated works I have encountered in the past quarter century. The music features long-arching melodic lines of poignant beauty and a harmonic language that is Danielpour's own, yet born of deeply ingrained romantic impulses. Originally written for piano trio in 1999 and orchestrated in 2006, A Child's Reliquary was inspired by the death of conductor Carl St. Clair's son. Danielpour calls it "not unlike a musical shrine, with the outer first and third movements evoking public and private aspects of mourning, while the middle movement represents a flashback or snapshot of somewhat happier times." That second movement flashback is as joyful, snappy, and rollicking as anything Bernstein gave us.

I had never heard of composer David Ludwig before, but on the basis of his Double Concerto, I am going to be on the lookout for more of his music. Ludwig orchestrates with the skill and sophistication of a Ravel, and generates the power and thrills of a John Williams adventure film score. At times the barbaric splendour of Bloch's Schelomo or Walton's Belshazzar's Feasts comes to mind. The opening grabs you immediately dark, ominous chords for the low brass set against

throbbing drums. The soloists enter to manic figuration. Offsetting all this drama is a second subject of haunting beauty-yearning, infinitely lyrical, gently rocking. The central Adagio is deeply soulful, while the third movement is a madcap dance set to irregular rhythms. The music is thoroughly engaging on its own but takes on deeper layers of meaning when heard in tandem with the program notes. Each movement is about a different kind of love. Want a teaser? The first depicts "one of the most intense evenings in all mythology," writes Ludwig, "the night before Odysseus leave the goddess Calypso." Ludwig depicts the scene in music supercharged with electrical energy and raw emotion. Daron Aric Hagen's Masquerade takes as its point of departure the commedia dell'arte. In the upbeat, jaunty opening movement, the soloists "take on the roles of musical lovers [whose] courtship is told by two harmonically and melodically elusive contrasting themes," according to the composer's notes. Bright sonorities and crystal-clear textures of neoclassical Stravinsky meet Komgoldian romanticism. The second movement is a "lament for lost love," its sense of benumbed grief not unlike that of "The Entombment" from Hindemith's Mathis der Maler symphony. The third movement brings achingly beautiful romanticism and lush orchestration to the fore as the former lovers "are reunited at the bedside of a mutual friend [and] they reconnect, no longer as lovers but as old friends and soulmates." The finale brings a satisfying sense of cyclic closure as the two "relive the open hearted joy in singing of their childhoods before parting forever."

I listened to Masquerade before reading Hagen's notes and what I imagined previously was not far off from what the composer intended, so vividly drawn and cogently developed are his musical arguments. The soloists are almost always integrated into the orchestral fabric, which is kaleidoscopic in its variety and colors. This, like the other two works, is as much about the orchestra as it is about the soloists. **How long the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, now in its 77th year, has been fully professional I cannot say, but it has certainly reached that level on the basis of this, its first commercial recording. The orchestra has a full-bodied, unforced sound, captured in a vivid, embracing acoustic that perfectly balances brilliance and warmth.** Percussion is prominent in all three scores, and they impress with the weight and depth of sound, not just the volume. Guest artists these days include a gallery of stars like Leon Fleisher, Lang Lang, Andre Watts, Midori, Tony Bennett, and Arlo Guthrie. Its home is in Burlington's Flynn Center, but it plays all over the state (80 percent of its concerts are given elsewhere). For its 50th anniversary season in 1985-86, it performed in every one of the state's 281 cities and towns. **Soloists Jamie Laredo and Sharon Robinson are obviously deeply committed to these works. They toss off the wildly virtuosic passages with raw energy and draw richly sustained tones from their instruments in the lyrical, elegiac passages. Robinson is at her absolute expressive peak in the slow movement of the Ludwig concerto, with sumptuous tone to boot. Violin-and-cello duos need look no further for another solo work besides the Brahms concerto to make their mark. The only real difficulty is in deciding which of these three magnificent works to choose. This release is definitely headed for my year-end.**

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