Dolin Concerto; Evening Rain—Sunset; Guitar Concerto; Man-
ning; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky

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MILLS: Elan Valley; Mandolin & Guitar Concerto; Evening Rain—Sunset; Guitar Concerto; Mandolin Concerto
Daniel Ahlert, mand; Birgit Schwab, Sam Brown, g; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky

Claudio 6040—71 minutes

Mills is a clear adherent to the tradition of English nature composers, like Butterworth and Delius. The latter definitely comes to mind when hearing Mills’s frequent use of rich, open choral harmony in the strings. This is partly why the first track, ‘Elan Valley,’ immediately held my attention. It is an effective method for conjuring a specific atmosphere. Unfortunately, Mills falls back on this element in almost every piece, and it quickly loses its magic. The music is much too static and often feels empty. It wasn’t until I heard the charming folk song transcriptions in the guitar concerto that I realized that these attractive, yet one-dimensional textures are begging for inspired melody. I don’t get the sense that Mills has the inspiration, or at least the means to communicate it. The concertos aren’t virtu-
osic, which would be fine if there was anything else of interest. This record is maybe suitable for relaxing, nondescript background music.

PALOMO: Arabescos; Caribiana; Humoresca
Alexandre Da Costa, v; Joaquin Clemente, db; Castile & Leon Symphony/ Jesus Lopez-Cobos
Naxos 573693—61 minutes

Palomo is an accomplished Spanish composer who has not yet had a full album reviewed in ARG. His style is evocative Spanish impression-
ism, with Albéniz and Granados as clear influences. The violin showpiece Arabescos draws on the Moorish connections between Spanish and Arabic music. There are two main aesthetic-
ics in the piece: serpentine solos in the violin and woodwinds over dark undulations in the lower strings and more boisterous sections akin to Russian exoticism of the Scheherazade sort.

Caribiana is the boldest work on the record. It is a groovy choreographic tone poem with plenty of Caribbean flavor in the percussion
and melody. La Valse is a clear influence, with the playful dances threatening (by design) to lose control as the piece progresses. A sizable middle section is more meditative, opening with a delicate duet between harp and clarinet. The Humoresca for double bass and orchestra is also enjoyable. It is carefully orchestrated to maintain the balance between orchestra and soloist—not an easy feat for
such a muted timbre. Even with the softer sec-
tions, there are plenty of inventive details in
the orchestral color. This is a rewarding album
worth listening to.

LINDBERG: Steppenwolf; Tales of Galamanta; Peking Twilight
Rafael Altino, va; Odense Symphony/ Christian Lindberg

BIS 2308—58 minutes

Christian Lindberg is most comfortable com-
posing in several styles. He emphatically rejects any kind of categorization. His ideas direct the kind of music he composes, whether it be dia-
tonic, atonal, or something else. There are,
though, some discernible influences, like Si-
elian lyricism and abrupt Mahlerian changes
of mood. The viola concerto Steppenwolf is thoroughly enjoyable. Lindberg has a strong
narrative vision for the piece that is enhanced by the transformation of themes. The solo writing is fantastic, presenting intense kinetic pas-
sages alongside warm lyricism, each showing the viola’s special timbre. Tales of Galamanta is a violent ballet concerning the ostracization of youngsters, taking The Threepenny Opera as a
narrative influence by way of Lars von Trier’s Dogville. The music is exciting, but I would love to see the accompanying choreography, too. Peking Twilight is a surreal rhapsody inspired by the city of Norrkoping (known colloquially as Peking), commissioned by its orchestra for its centenary. The city as depicted is an enigma—boisterous, mysterious, dangerous, and awe-inspiring. Lindberg has a gift for writing music that is engaging, interesting, and unpretentious. He is utterly unconcerned with innovation, and his music is all the more original for it.

CHILD: Jubal/ Adirondack Voices/ Shanti
Boston Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose

BMOP 1057—65 minutes

This album was my introduction to the music of Peter Child. Like Lindberg’s works, Child’s
music is multi-faceted and adaptable to whatever idea is at hand. The wild and exuberant

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Jubal is essentially a symphony-concerto for orchestra, compressed into one 15-minute movement. Adirondack Voices consists of settings of folk songs that were brought to America from UK and spread through Adirondack logging communities. These aren’t simply transcriptions: the textual content of each song informs the musical content. These texts revolve around death, as in the logging tragedy depicted in III. He makes it clear how near death was to people in those communities.

Shanti is the central piece here and a significant achievement for Child. Informed by his studies of Karnatic music theory, he combines the many scales and permutations of the mela-karta system with transformative techniques in western music, like inversion and retrogression. The piece stands as a cultural exchange between two related, yet distinct systems of music theory. He fully engages with and respects the material, which is more than can be expected of many composers today. Each of the eight movements is based on a rasa (aesthetic emotion). Each movement contains different styles and tones, like the Prokofieff-like pastiche of IV, Hasya (humor) and the influence of Messiaen’s Turangalila symphony in VI, Raudra (rage). This is a fantastic album. Gil Rose and BMOP continue to deliver exciting releases and I look forward to hearing more of Child’s music.

ROSKOTT: Violin Concerto & Sonata
Akemi Takayama, v; Silvan Negrutiu, p; Shenandoah Conservatory Symphony/ Paul S Kim
Centaur 3626—61 minutes

Composer-conductor Carl Roskott (1953-2008) began his compositional career attempting to break into the avant-garde. He was ineffective, because the idiom didn’t speak to him and he was chasing innovation for its own sake. These works show him composing in the styles of composers whose works he often conducted, like Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and Stravinsky. A truly original voice lies at the center of this seemingly archaic, unabashedly tonal aesthetic. In the concerto, Roskott turns to traditional diatonicism for his themes, using dramatic bitonal passages at climaxes. III shows him at his most playful, presenting variations on a theme in the guise of a Eastern European folk dance, an eerie mystery, and an American hoedown. In the more adventurous sonata, he moves closer to a more modern, neoclassical idiom. IV is directly influenced by (but not derivative of) ‘Shrovetide Fair’ from Petrouchka, which Roskott had recently conducted. My only gripe is in the production for the concerto: the mike placement results in a distant, muffled sound. Roskott should be better known; he would work well programmed alongside Barber or Bernstein. His philosophy made me reflect on my critical writing: “Is this a musical experience I want to have again?” It doesn’t finally matter if his music is innovative or not—this is indeed an experience I want to have again.

The Newest Music II

GORDON: Clouded Yellow
Kronos Quartet
Cantaloupe 21140—61 minutes

Michael Gordon’s works are lush, infused with elements of metal and rock, and use the string quartet in unusual and pleasing ways. Clouded Yellow employs downward glissandos that reverberate into sonic space above a steady bass line, gradually easing into a murky mush of glorious string sound. ‘Potassium’ begins with downward glissandos that slowly turn into different chordal destinations; a distorted sheen makes the music sound just low-fi enough to feel brilliantly topical, unusual enough to grab the listener’s ear and demand notice. The Sad Park employs several recordings of a little girl’s voice, the clips repeated again and again slowed down more each time with a continuous, driving rhythmic bass line beneath; cloying, haunting. This work reminds me of all the horror films I’ve seen with young children or dolls as the main characters. It is exciting and morose. Gordon’s use of the choir in this work feels very similar to the string writing in the other pieces on this album, with glissandos going every which way and distorting into a different sonic world than the piece started out in. Kronos is masterly in these works, though I feel sorry that I didn’t get to hear them play much more here than straight 8ths and 16ths.

HONSTEIN: Economy Of Means
Doug Perkins, vib; Karl Larson, p
New Focus 202—63 minutes

This is an album of works for solo vibraphone and solo piano that shows Honstein’s compositional style as nearly pointillistic in nature, with many sharp and small points creating grand canvases of musical imagery. The album begins with the vibraphone work An Economy of Means. The movement ‘Filigree’ is bright and clear, notes dripping into the ear in quick succession like a delicate strand of pearls.