

CD of the Living Music

JEREMY BECK

"In Yet Longer Light's Delay: Music from the Setting Century." Music by Dorothy Hindman, Hayg Boyadjian, Charles Norman Manson, Violeta Dinescu, and Emma Lou Diemer. Living Music Foundation Recordings, Volume 1: CD, 1996.

The debut CD from Living Music Foundation Recordings bodes well for this new independent label. As the subtitle suggests, this first volume offers a diversity of works from all over the world.

The opening composition, Dorothy Hindman's "drowningXnumbers" (1994) for amplified cello, won the 1995 NACUSA Young Composers' Competition. Hindman wrote the piece for Craig Hulgren, who plays the work brilliantly, covering the full dynamic range and a variety of moods. From the fire and aggression of the first section, through a percussive middle, to the quietly desolate conclusion -- Hindman and Hulgren take the listener on a fascinating and colorful journey. "drowningXnumbers" is a piece which deserves to be played and heard more often.

Hayg Boyadjian is a Parisian-born composer of Armenian descent, who later emigrated to Argentina and the United States, finally settling in the Boston area. Boyadjian's "String Quartet No. 2" is titled "Azad" ("Freedom"). The first of three movements recalls the essence of traditional Armenian folk music without being of the tradition itself. At one early highpoint the members of the string quartet speak and shout "Azad!" Later the discourse becomes more fragmented, alternating between scherzo-like material and other passages which explore various timbral effects. This fragmentation, however, is less convincing than the opening, in that the scherzo-like passages seem overly reminiscent of Bartók or early Lutoslawski, while the freer sections recall Webern.

The lyrical second movement brings back Boyadjian's own voice -- darkly lyrical, with an underlying sinister pulse that suggests unpleasant possibilities lying ahead. For the third movement, Boyadjian curiously introduces a dance-like movement which is "in a joyous happy mood," representing "the sound of villagers dancing [for joy] over the achieved freedom." Hollywood may write such happy endings, but I doubt the appropriateness of it here, given the Armenian experiences under Soviet rule.

The Franciscan monk Gerard Manly Hopkins reveals inner doubts and struggles with many of the precepts of Catholicism in his pensive and disconsolate poem, "I Feel the Fell of Dark." Charles Norman Mason's setting (for soprano, cello, and percussion) is based on the captures the inner drama of text. Moments of quiet contemplation swell into outbursts of repressed emotion. While a male voice might project the intensity of Hopkins's thoughts even more effectively, this remains a moving and heart-felt work.

Violeta Dinescu, a Romanian composer currently living in Germany, offers a work for cello and piano, "...when joyful tears flow...", borrowing its title from a Mozart aria. Dinescu avoids actual Mozart quotations, but instead "gradually brings in different amounts of recognizabl[y] Mozartian material." Not for this listener, who finds nothing particularly Viennese here. This highly discontinuous work provides challenges for an auditor seeking continuity, clarity, and sustained interest.

A strong showing is Emma Lou Diemer's "String Quartet No. 1," commissioned in 1988 by the National Capital Area Composers Consortium for their fifth anniversary. This one-movement work unfolds as a large-scale ternary construction -- the outer sections exciting and dramatic; the inner meditative, lyrically wistful, and quite beautiful, with finely-woven contrapuntal lines. Diemer's harmonic language effectively invokes a mixture of tonal and atonal materials, often in a surprisingly but always effective manner. Diemer shows herself her to be a mature and experienced composer: a clear sense of purpose coupled with an expert technique.

For devotees of the newest of the new, "In Yet Longer Light's Delay" makes a fine addition to any collection. Ordering information may be obtained from Living Artist Recordings, P.O. Box 2264, Birmingham, AL 35201.

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