

proficiency in writing for these instruments as well as the virtuosity of the soloists of the Philharmonic. The use of percussion, however, sometimes seems somewhat awkward, appearing as an afterthought.

The final piece of the disc, *Jubilee Symphony* (2012), was also commissioned by the University of Missouri-St. Louis, this time celebrating its 50th anniversary. While the first and third movements, "Bel-lerive" and "Tritons Ascending," have serious moments and both contain fugal or imitative passages, the second movement, "Mirth Day Fiesta," is mostly dance-like and light-hearted, celebrating the variety of cultures within the university with a section of mariachi music. The end of the symphony comes with full-throated brass (one of the strongest sections in the performance) and strings swelling to the finish.

Harbach's symphonic music as represented here is listenable, skillfully composed, well orchestrated, well performed, and beautifully recorded. The program notes are useful and the CD cover striking. Those who are usually not fans of contemporary classical music will probably be enchanted; aficionados of contemporary music may prefer something more adventurous.

Readers interested in details of Harbach's wide-ranging career as performer, editor of *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, professor at the University of Missouri, co-founder of Vivace Press and the Hester Park recording label, and champion of women's music, are referred to Cynthia Green Libby's 2006 *Journal of the IAWM* article entitled "From Bach to Vivace Press: The Metamorphosis of Barbara Harbach." (<http://www.umsl.edu/~harbach/iawm.pdf>)

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## *Tapping the Furnace: Music by Dorothy Hindman*

Innova 848 (2013)

CAROL ANN WEAVER

*Tapping the Furnace* is Miami-based composer Dorothy Hindman's tribute to places and people in American history. Birming-

ham, Alabama, called "Magic City" due to its prosperous economy, receives a triumphant homage on this CD, but the title track and the centerpiece percussion composition refer to the furnace that drove Birmingham's steel economy, and whose dangerous operations claimed the lives of many workers, largely African Americans. *Needlepoint* for solo guitar serves as a tribute to Hindman's cancer-ridden mother who, between bouts of chemotherapy, created a sampler for her grandson. Other instrumental works, concerned with timbres, colors, and textures, seem to have no programmatic devices. Hindman's best work is frequently, but not exclusively, found in her ensemble rather than solo music.

Programmatic music must not only tell a story, it needs to continually hold the listener's musical attention. Hindman grapples with this challenge throughout the CD; some of her music works better without the stories, while others are more successful in the story-telling than in maintaining musical interest.

On a sheerly musical level, *Drift*, for saxophone quartet, is the most successful piece, creating imaginative, rhythmically intriguing textures throughout. The work maintains compelling shifts of pulsing patterns as energy is spread evenly across the quartet. Melodic and rhythmic gestures, often beginning as solo statements, result in rich, undulating polyphonies as the instruments ride in and out of various whole tone and free tonalities. Usually the saxophones have independent melodic and rhythmic patterns, but occasionally they come together in homophonic moments. *Drift* ends with a brief glimpse into a magical fairytale. The dexterous Atlas Saxophone Quartet attacks this piece with pizzazz and finesse, excelling in the jazz-like, percussive sounds and rhythmic precision required of this piece.

In *Magic City*, for orchestra, contrasting contours are created by interplays between families of instruments. Schenkerian analysis would reveal an extended upward progression by semitones, with the orchestration becoming increasingly dense. Musical tension, accentuated by the increasing brass and timpani presence and by incessant repeated-note articulations, finally gives way to a thinner texture in which violins and low strings call, while orchestral gun-like shots respond. However, in an evocative layering of orchestral bells

and chimes, the shots and urgent repeated chords seem, finally, to melt. The charm of *Magic City* is expressed by this final gentleness. The Kiev Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Robert Ian Winstin delivers a generally well-balanced performance, with particularly strong brass and articulate winds. The strings, frequently constrained to repeated note patterns, rarely soar, even in their melodic passages.

*Fin de Cycle*, for solo piano and electronics, is meant to be a pun on the French term *fin de siècle*, and alludes to the "continuously changing and developing relationship between live concert music and studio-produced music in our time" (liner notes). The work contains strong piano writing, and begins with fascinating contrasts and interplays between the two media. Fewer timbral interchanges occur than one may expect, as the piece soon settles into a sort of "concerto" format, with acoustic piano playing the solo role and electronics serving as a shy accompaniment. The harmonic/melodic palate, ever avoiding tertian or extended harmonies or singable melodies, employs secondal and Viennese tritonal constructions, with frequent melodic repeated notes, consistent with Hindman's style. The piece ends on a sudden electronic drop-off, implying there is no conclusion to this *end of century* dialogue. A more natural, acoustic decay would, for Hindman, afford the listener too much resonance, too much pleasure. Laura Gordy's piano work is arresting, articulate, and rhythmically strong, while the electronic components remain somewhat less compelling.

The title piece, *Tapping the Furnace*, for single percussion player and spoken word, alludes to Birmingham's previously mentioned dangerous furnace operations, and the music successfully reflects its subject. Hindman describes the piece as being "built around bombastic attacks with increasing levels of muting, deadsticking (dampened sound), and choked decays... inspired by the expenditure of energy both by the man and the furnace, eventually falling silent" (liner notes). This piece, which quotes a mid-twentieth-century furnace worker, could include more nuances of human pathos, fear, agony, anger, or grief. Musical interest wanes, as the almost-fifteen-minute piece remains relatively static with predictable exchanges between toms, cymbals, shaken object(s), and spoken word. The pained words remain percussive

with little nuance. The final sonic fade-out is vivid and chilling. Percussionist Stuart Gerber travels seamlessly among his array of drums, cymbals, and percussive spoken word, allowing the sounds to become the mechanical noises of the furnace that took human lives.

The two solo string pieces, *drowningXnumbers* for amplified cello and *Needlepoint* for guitar, present virtuosic writing techniques for both instruments. The cello piece, conceived in three sections (aggressive, percussive, quieter), exploits typical extended techniques—harmonics, growling, scraping, tapping, and percussive bowings—as well as numerous repeated-note double stops, vivid pitch contrasts, and many glissando, pizzicato, col legno, spiccato, and other bowing effects. Six minutes in, the piece becomes unusually lyric, mystical, and meditative, with intriguing dialogues between low and high ranges and numerous bowing patterns. As the piece enters into a gentle arco passage at the end there is finally quiet, but no sleep for this restless cello. Throughout, cellist Craig Hultgren meets these prodigious performing challenges with clear intonation, excellent bowing technique, and well arched dynamics.

As mentioned above, *Needlepoint* for solo guitar is a tribute to Hindman's mother who, weakened by cancer, experiences moments of clarity and productivity between savage chemotherapy rounds. Guitarist Paul Bowman travels effectively from percussive to mellow finger work, matching the musical ranges of this piece. The opening "needlepoint" patterns, possibly the most beautiful moments on the CD, could go on forever, with their quiet energy and subtle complexity. However, percussive guitar slaps and string-pulls interrupt these patterns, representing periodic dissonances experienced by the mother. The piece travels graphically between this "needlework" and increasingly varied percussive interruptions as Hindman seems to capture the non-linear, disrupted nature of her mother's everyday existence. The piece touchingly ends with a low trill, followed by a quietly percussive, low harmonic chord. Is this her end, or will she go on with needlepoint, yet again to be interrupted?

Hindman is fortunate to have her intriguing works showcased by the more-than-capable performers on this CD. The recording quality is clear, the sounds spa-

tially well situated, and the mastering expertly executed.

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## Janice Misurell-Mitchell: *Vanishing Points*

Southport Composers Series S-SSD 0138 (2013)

CAROL SHANSKY

*Vanishing Points* is a collection of eight works by Janice Misurell-Mitchell, a composer on the faculty of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Written for a variety of instrumental combinations, the pieces are linked by a sense of intensity, even danger. According to the disc's liner notes, *Vanishing Points* is "how the listeners perceive the development of musical material." This development is the key to listening to each piece, as Misurell-Mitchell continually changes and transforms musical motives through fragmentation, wide dynamic contrasts, and repetition. Her style draws upon gestures from rock and jazz, in addition to classical approaches, and it engages the listener's attention and imagination.

Tension and risk are present immediately in the first track, *Agitación*. Aggressive and angular in character, the music reminds one immediately of Ligeti's *Désordres* etudes for solo piano. While it moves eventually into a "cooler," less agitated section, which sounds almost like a movie soundtrack, the aggressive nature of the piece as a whole is never far away. The combination of the fluid piano and crisp mallet percussion works well here.

Based on the gospel tune "Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground" by Blind Willie Johnson, *Dark was the Night* straddles well the classical and popular music worlds. Opening with strums and single-note melodic lines common to solo guitar music, the occasional appearance of bent pitches reminds us of blues influence. String noise from the guitar, frowned upon in traditional classical playing, is audible, but

here it is not unwelcome. Misurell-Mitchell utilizes typical extended techniques for the guitar, such as slaps and slides, and while harsh accents create sounds that are almost unpleasant, they do not seem out of place. The piece has an improvised sound to it, although one assumes that it is fully composed. It would benefit the listener to hear the original "Dark Was the Night"; Misurell-Mitchell captures its haunting feeling, and the ending of her version is very reflective of early Delta blues guitar work. Maria Vittoria Jediowski delivers an impressive and satisfying performance.

*Vanishing Points/Quantum Leaps* is a three-movement work for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano that creates undertones of anxiety through silences and very soft long notes which alternate with brief, frenetic activity. Misurell-Mitchell makes effective use of clarinet trills and string tremolo on many of the long tones, enabling her to maintain the sense of agitation without having to sacrifice the ideas behind the melodic material. John Bruce Yeh (clarinet) and the Lincoln Trio offer an informed, persuasive performance of this complex work, each exhibiting a convincing technical and expressive proficiency.

Flute flutter tonguing, bends, and trills bring the listener right onto the slippery ice at the beginning of *On Thin Ice* as the marimba offers a steady arm for balance. Its unrelenting, repeating melody also provides the continuing sense of tension and risk that pervades all of the disc's compositions. The flute and marimba engage in a call-and-response dialogue, punctuated by harsh sung/played notes in the flute in a Jethro Tull-esque style. Writing for two such timbrally different instruments is a challenge well met by the composer; the contrast between the flute and marimba is exploited so as to avoid sonic confusion. Caroline Pittman (flute) and Gregory Beyer (marimba) skillfully engage in a spirited dialogue that sometimes borders on a duel.

Misurell-Mitchell's original *Deconstruction Blues*, for English horn and keyboard, was meant to challenge notions of the traditional settings for these instruments. This CD presents her arrangement of the work for Hammond B-3 organ and bass clarinet, a secondary "deconstruction" of sorts. Misurell-Mitchell does not just attempt to re-create the blues with an unexpected instrumental combination but instead offers a different perspective