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## ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

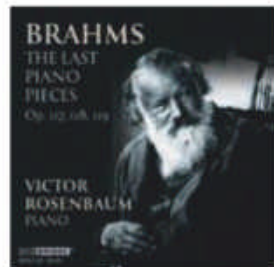
*A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada*

### Brahms

Piano Pieces – Op 117; Op 118; Op 119

Victor Rosenbaum *pf*

Bridge ⑤ BRIDGE9545 (65' • DDD)



Victor Rosenbaum begins the first of Brahms's Op 117 Intermezzos at

a brisk pace, bringing cross-rhythmic lines to the fore. However, expressive emendations assiduously add up like extra kilos over the holidays, resulting in the main theme recapitulating nearly twice as slowly. The pianist similarly probes No 2 for detail, yet falls short of Arthur Rubinstein's centred focus and directness. By contrast, No 3's dark undercurrents absorb Rosenbaum's propensity for wiggle room.

If you share my view that Op 118 No 1's main theme is one of Brahms's most annoying creations, Rosenbaum's inflated rhetoric will turn you off as well. Yet subtle variations in touch and nuance keep the pianist's slow tempo in No 2 afloat – by the skin of its teeth! No 3 unfolds at a prosaic chug, while No 4's interplay between the hands lacks the suppleness and momentum we hear from Kempff, Katchen, Hough, Perahia and dozens of others.

But Rosenbaum's poetic shaping of the polyphony in No 5's central episode is nothing less than gorgeous, while he justifies his deliberation over No 6 by intelligent dynamic scaling and allowing the climaxes to fully resonate. The same can be said for Op 119 No 1, although the pianist's laying into No 2's accents somewhat pacifies the music's *agitato* nature. Unfortunately, Rosenbaum pretentiously underlines and over-points No 3, eradicating any trace of *grazioso*. He imparts a welcome sense of line to No 4's block chords but weighs down on the *détaché* left-hand writing; here Emanuel Ax (Sony, 6/96) achieves better balances between the hands and more overall fluidity. In short, Rosenbaum plays Brahms best when he avoids expounding.

Jed Distler

### Cunningham

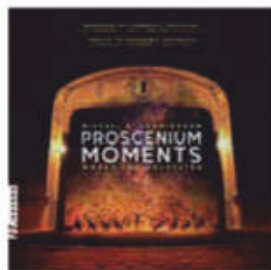
'Proscenium Moments'

Cunningham A Bach Pre-Symphony<sup>a</sup>. Counter Currents, Op 16<sup>b</sup>. Impromptus, Op 149<sup>c</sup>. Symphony No 7, 'A Cummings Synchrony', Op 293<sup>c</sup>. Time Frame, Op 90a<sup>b</sup>. TransActions, Op 90b<sup>b</sup> Fauré Nocturne No 6, Op 63 (arr Cunningham)<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra /

Stanislav Vavřínek; <sup>b</sup>cMoravian Philharmonic Orchestra / <sup>b</sup>Petr Vronský, <sup>c</sup>Pavel Šnajdr

Navona ⑤ NV6314 (70' • DDD)



I welcomed Navona Records' ninth disc devoted to the music of Michael G

Cunningham (*b*1937) last May, archival recordings of chamber and instrumental pieces composed in 1969-72 when he was teaching at Indiana University. This new album features orchestral works written, with one exception, after that time in adroitly turned-out renditions from the Moravian and Janáček Philharmonic Orchestras, two of Navona's Czech Republic-based house bands, recorded between June 2018 and March 2020.

Navona's publicity suggests Cunningham's works are 'nestled in style between early Prokofiev and late Shostakovich', a statement that does him no favours. There are influences and resonances of other composers here, for sure, as in the earliest work, *Counter Currents* (1966). Given here in its string-orchestral version, it sounds like a vivid, compelling essay from a composer who has listened to and learnt from Bernard Herrmann. *Time Frame* and *TransActions* (both 1980) are more advanced and edgy in tone, forming a contrasted pair of studies in sonority, whereas the two Impromptus (1999) – 'Glimmerings' and 'Gambol' – are more of a diptych.

*TransActions* appeared on an earlier Navona disc ('Paragonia', NV5982); so, too, have the Impromptus and Symphony No 7, paired on the mixed-composer 'Dimensions, Vol 3' (NV6311). The Symphony, subtitled here *A Cummings*

*Synchrony* (but not so on the earlier disc), is inspired by four poems by EE Cummings, traversing the four elements – Wind, Fire, Rain and Earth – and designed to accompany recitations of the verses. If the definition of a symphony as 'the large-scale integration of contrasts' holds true, then these four brief atmospheric studies do not pass muster. *A Bach Pre-Symphony* is more engaging, a neat reworking of a trio sonata as a string-orchestral score, contrasting nicely with the arrangement for wind ensemble of the Fauré Nocturne. Navona's sound is crisp and clear.

Guy Rickards

### Dehlinger

'At That Hour'

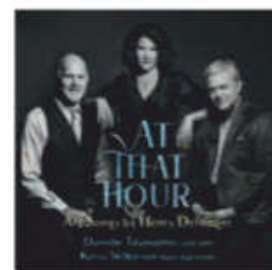
Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa. A Dream. Fragrance. The Mount. Ten Poems of James Joyce. Questa fiamma. Requiescat.

Shir Hashirim

Danielle Talamantes *sop* Kerry Wilkerson *bass-bar*

Henry Dehlinger *pf*

Avie ⑤ AV2424 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Henry Dehlinger is a gifted and versatile musician.

As a pianist of exceptional fluency, he has teamed with soprano Danielle Talamantes on recordings of works by Spanish composers and his own arrangements of songs by Duke Ellington. On Dehlinger's newest disc, 'At That Hour', he collaborates with Talamantes and another dynamic singer, bass-baritone Kerry Wilkerson, in his recorded debut as a composer of art songs, whose verses he has transformed through disarming music.

Among the poets is James Joyce, who receives lavish treatment by Dehlinger, a master of myriad styles planted largely in tonal soil. *Ten Poems of James Joyce* takes up half of the album, the songs assigned evenly to soprano and bass-baritone. Each piece reveals the fastidious way Dehlinger shapes music to illuminate the meaning of the text. The songs are diverse in atmosphere and harmonic language, as



Gifted and versatile: Henry Dehlinger accompanies two singers, soprano Danielle Talamantes and bass-baritone Kerry Wilkerson, on an album of his own songs

befits the narratives, and the writing is rich, often rapturous, as voices and piano meld with urgent purpose.

Joyce's English texts give way to two songs set to Italian verses by Dante Alighieri. The first, 'Questa fiamma', is drawn from Dehlinger's rhapsody for voice and orchestra, *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*, based on the TS Eliot poem, which employs the Dante verses. In 'Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa', soprano and baritone intertwine lines to celebrate a wedding, apropos here with married couple Talamantes and Wilkerson caressing phrases.

They use their vibrant voices to similarly lustrous effect in the remaining finely honed Dehlinger mini-dramas: 'A Dream', set to a sonnet by Edgar Allan Poe; two songs, 'The Mount' and 'Fragrance', with texts by the album's only living poet, Mark Riddle; 'Shir Hashirim' ('Song of Songs'), biblical Hebrew verses shaded by ancient modal influences; and a jazzy take on Oscar Wilde's 'Requiescat', about the writer's dead sister, that likely would raise Wilde's eyebrows in ironic delight. Recorded with crystalline clarity at Sono Luminus Studios in Boyce, Virginia, the performances whet the appetite for further Dehlinger repertoire.

**Donald Rosenberg**

## Karchin

'Five Compositions'

Barcarole Variations<sup>a</sup>. Chamber Symphony<sup>b</sup>.

Postlude<sup>c</sup>. Quest<sup>d</sup>. Rochester Celebration<sup>a</sup>

<sup>d</sup>Alice Teyssier *fl* <sup>c</sup>Sam Jones *tpt* <sup>a</sup>Renée Jolles *vn*

<sup>d</sup>Ashley Jackson, <sup>a</sup>Susan Jolles *hp* <sup>c</sup>Han Chen,

<sup>e</sup>Margaret Kampmeier *pf* <sup>b</sup>The Washington

Square Ensemble

Bridge © BRIDGE9543 (54' • DDD)



While all of Louis Karchin's music here is highly enjoyable and rewarding for both participants and listeners, the most memorable moments occur in his *Barcarole Variations* (2015) for violin and harp, each a jewel, which stands out even beyond its automatic recommendation to all violin-harp duos on the circuit. Dedicatees Renée and Susan Jolles, the daughter-and-mother combination from the Eastman and Manhattan Schools of Music, give performances that are virtuoso in an intimate way, alert to every change in sound and nuance.

Not that Karchin's *Chamber Symphony* from 2009 isn't full of wonderful cascades of similarly inventive sound on a larger scale. It is recorded here by the

commissioning Washington Square Ensemble – 14-strong, with no viola, plus conductor for the occasion – in a performance that demonstrates why, despite an occasional sense of standing around, it has been played at Indiana University, the University of Iowa and the Festival of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood.

Static movement becomes less of an issue in the shorter pieces. Karchin's lovely *Postlude* for trumpet and piano is the second of two works the composer has written for Sam Jones, in this case with a bucket mute. The rolling waves of his *Rochester Celebration*, commissioned by the Eastman School of Music to honour Barry Snyder, is played with rich, romantic freedom by Snyder's student Margaret Kampmeier.

The recordings, which were made in and around New York City, each capture the vivid palette of musical sounds that Karchin wields so effortlessly. Christopher Carey's booklet notes give a detailed account of the music. **Laurence Vittes**

## 'Playing on the Edge 2'

**Babcock** Watcher of the Sky **Burwasser**

Puck's Game **Fong** Variations on Emotions

**GJ Harris** String Quartet No 1, 'Landscapes'

**Kinney** The Canary Who Sang **Summers**

String Quartet - 1st movt