

of *Left Behind* seems ideal for Ellsworth, Williamson is not always in control of the extremes of pitch and dynamics, as well as the variations of vibrato.

The disc proved to be a tribute to the richness of Silverman's work—the depth and thoughtfulness of her purpose, her understanding of the possibilities of both singer and instrumentalist, and her conception of sound. In all of her compositions on this disc, Silverman captures the essence of chamber music and its intimacy, finding in this medium the perfect vehicle for her stories.

Margaret Lucia is a pianist and faculty member at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania. Trained at Indiana University (B.M., M.M.) and the University of California, San Diego (Ph.D.), she has presented numerous concerts of contemporary piano music by women composers. She has also recorded and performed works by contemporary Latin American composers, appearing twice in concerts at NYC's Weill Hall.

Jane Wang considers the dragonfly...and other music by Elena Ruehr

Sarah Brady, flute; Alexei Gonzales, cello; Benjamin Seltzer, clarinet; Heng-Jin Park, piano; Sarah Bob, piano. Albany Records TR 1117 (2009)

TAMARA CASHOUR

What would the world sound like if humans could hear the multitudinous movements of atoms and molecules in the air? What is the music of ions, electrons, and protons floating and bumping into one another, and then moving away? Might I whimsically suggest that Elena Ruehr's delightful CD vies as one sonic representation of that microcosmic, invisible protocol? *Jane Wang considers the dragonfly* offers a musical interpretation of the more delicate phenomena and cyclic routines of our natural universe. Ruehr's programmatic titles, accompanied by broad stroke, childlike cover art by Misaki Kawai, belies the deep, intellectual—indeed scientific—curiosity parlayed by her aesthetic platform. Her compositional terrain in this CD incorporates minimalism in the form of stable ostinati pitted against short, recurring musical motifs in most of the chamber pieces represented here. The result is one that brings science and aesthetics together in novel ways.

The Law of Floating Objects is a digital synthesis of separately tracked, variously-ranged flutes. The alto alternates a perfect-fifth figure as a basso ostinato with a somber, stable melody, over which treble flutes hover and intertwine, integrating a prominent sixteenth-note triplet figure into their own melodic figures. Ruehr cites as inspiration for this composition Galileo's famous refutation of Aristotle's theory of the physics of falling objects; think not of cannonballs dropping from the Tower of Pisa, but rather feathers, goose down, or spring blossoms.

Blackberries is based upon a poem scripted by Ruehr's daughter Sophie when she was ten; it is her first-person account of a day of blackberry-picking on Cape Cod, and revels in vivid images of the natural beauty of the region. The benign innocence of the text is sharpened by a "sneaky" move on Sophie's part to eat some of the blackberries, whereby the juicy evidence stains her face and hands! Whether this element of guilt was in mother Elena's mind or not is uncertain, but the movement delves into a darker, "sleight-of-hand" quality, particularly in its middle section. The piece opens suavely with a plaintive, melodic cello line, quickly dispersing into tautly-struck piano chords as the clarinet offers its perspective in a fully-sung melody. Each instrument thereupon takes its turn at thematic prominence—a "sneaky (!)" sixteenth-note quadruplet is featured—and then recedes into accompaniment. The

Ninth Festival of Women Composers International

The Department of Music, College of Fine Arts, at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) will present its Ninth Festival of Women Composers International on March 18-20, 2010. The Festival will feature Deborah Kavasch, composer, soprano, and specialist in extended vocal techniques; Rosephanye Powell, choral composer, researcher, interpreter of African American spirituals; and Hasu Patel, world-class artist performing the classical sitar music of India.

In celebration of IUP's twentieth anniversary of the International Festival of Women Composers (founded in 1990), the sessions and concerts will highlight the following:

historical and contemporary vocal and chamber music of women composers;

piano repertoire by women: solo, piano duets, two pianos—four-hands;

women's contributions to world music cultures;

women's engagement in American musical genres including jazz, popular, spiritual, folk, and gospel;

women composer and choreographer collaborations.

For information, please contact the Festival Directors: Dr. Sarah Mantel and Dr. Susan Wheatley at sjmantel@iup.edu and wheatley@iup.edu. Indiana, PA 15705-1071. Phone: 724.357.2390. Fax: 724.357.1324. The Festival of Women Composers is endorsed by the IAWM, and we encourage you to attend.

movement features continuing duet material between the clarinet and cello (early on as parallel minor sixths, and later, in octaves) as the piano hastens on in a mostly subdued ostinato. Again, Ruehr favors the ostinato technique as grounding for more playful motivic figures.

Ruehr's programmatic platform continues in *Three Preludes* for piano, titled after Debussy and likewise offering up landscape imagery. The first appropriately spare prelude—*solitary figure at water's edge*—softly repeats a three-note figure on one pitch while shaping an angular tune in the treble. The uppermost melody moves downward into the lowest register before dissolving. *A Storm Approaches Land* gives us a storm, which is more routine than fierce, as Prokofievian high-range pointillism and arpeggiated roulades, originating in the deep bass register, climb upward and arch over an awaiting earth. *Swing Set*—which integrates a twelve-tone set with jazz styles—offers more bombastic fare than *Prelude 2* in the form of sixteenth-note “moto perpetuo furioso” material. The piece is actually in two distinct parts: in Part II Ruehr incorporates piano styles she cut her teeth on: there's a bit of Gershwin, Oscar Petersen, and Joplin thrown into a Rachmaninoff/Chopin mix. “Swing” is clearly meant as a double-entendre, in keeping with the “innocence/cognizance” or “naïve/studied” thematic juxtaposition that this CD revels in.

Clouds turn to water and back again in *Of Water and Clouds*. At first, featuring flute flutter-tongue in a somewhat impatient “¾-feel!” and then a meandering piano, the ensuing flute melodies calmly hover. A spastic piano line finally accepts its new molecular state—it transforms into a serene, puffy cloud, as raindrops gently begin to fall to the moist earth, at first slowly and intermittently, then in a pitter-patter of intertwining sixteenth notes.

Black and White, as the program notes state, “uses a 5 note series from the black notes of the piano as a basis for its melodies, harmonies, form and rhythm.” The clarinet is featured in a formidable melody; the piano only occasionally steps out in front in a duet with its partner in snippets of previously stated melodic material. A brief chordal mid-section has the piano calmly underpinning the singing, wayfaring clarinet beautifully.

And at last: *Jane Wang considers the dragonfly*. Ms. Wang, a friend of the composer's and Professor of

Theoretical and Applied Mechanics, studies the unsteady aerodynamics of our insect friend. The codifying scientist (Wang) and the interpreting artist (Ruehr) blend in this composition. Conceived for solo flute and digital delay, and meant to simulate a dragonfly's flight pattern and/or asymmetrical wing-beating techniques, halting digital ostinati underpin the flute's wild take-off. The live flute improvises in the upper-middle of its range, while the digital loop holds sway on lower repeated notes punctuated by rests, a seemingly “earthbound” motif. Ms. Wang is clearly well-schooled in the flighty (pun intended) ways of the insect world. You may find her erudite and illuminating article “Dragonfly Flight” online at http://ptonline.aip.org/journals/doc/PHTOAD-ft/vol_61/iss_10/74_1.shtml#bio.

The performers, Sarah Brady, flute; Benjamin Seltzer, clarinet; Alexei Gonzales, cello; Heng-Jin Park and Sarah Bob, piano, comprise a first-rate team, which effectively conveys Ruehr's semiotic intent. Brady's performance is particularly notable for her ability to coax a kaleidoscope of tone colors and variant shades from her instrument. Bob's *Swing Set* skillfully appropriates a *mode de jazz* approach: laid-back, never heavy-handed, a fine fusion style. She is equally comfortable as a soloist and accompanist. Seltzer's vibratoless, matter-of-fact tone provides intelligent, understated commentary rather than heavy emotional involvement. Elsewhere, this quality might have proven a drawback, yet here it is the perfect foil for the playful goings-on around him. Pianist Heng-Jin Park is assigned a more accompanimental role, and she executes her duties in fine, if somewhat studied, form.

I must confess that I am not normally a fan of minimalism. A good deal of minimalist composition—whether in chamber music or in the larger forms such as opera—utilizes deadening *overkill* protocol, putting me squarely and hastily in a state of abstract ennui bordering on the comatose. However, I was surprised and renewed by Ms. Ruehr's tasteful and creative use of minimalist techniques to juxtapose the systematic, statistical world of natural science with the more contemplative ways of the artist, vis-à-vis the natural world. There is a childlike wonder to all of these arrangements, aided and abetted by the fanciful, colorful depictions of Ms. Kawai. Never does this CD descend into clichéd representation, even though the images from nature are highly familiar, having been depicted in many different art forms as well as dissected and analyzed by science.

Tamara Cashour is a composer-pianist, soprano, and organist. She is Adjunct Professor of Instrumental Accompanying at William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ, and has been on the Vocal Collaborative Pianist/Recital staffs of both the Manhattan School and Mannes College of Music. Her book of poetry The Blue Hour was published in 2006 by Airleaf Press. Website: www.tamaracashour.com.

Sally Beamish Interview

Kathryn Mishell's interview with the Scottish composer Sally Beamish is posted on the “Into the Light” Website at <http://www.intothelightradio.org/news.html>. They discuss Beamish's current project, her compositional process, and how she handles family and professional life. Beamish also provides commentary for several of her works.