


## CD Review by Colin Clarke

 **VIVA CONCERTANTE!** • Kirk Trevor, cond; <sup>1</sup> Igor Dronov, cond; <sup>2</sup> David Gompper, cond; <sup>3-8</sup> Wolfgang David (vn); <sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Kropfitch (vn); <sup>1</sup> Scott Conklin (vn); <sup>4</sup> Christine Rutledge (va); <sup>5</sup> Olga Galochkina (vc); <sup>2</sup> Anthony Arnone (vc); <sup>3</sup> Hanna Holman (vc); <sup>3</sup> Michelle Crouch (sop); <sup>6</sup> Michael Norsworthy (cl); <sup>7</sup> Volkan Orhon (db); <sup>8</sup> Slovak RSO; <sup>1</sup> Moscow Conservatory Studio for New Music; <sup>2</sup> Center for New Music Ens <sup>3-8</sup> • **ALBANY TROY 1110 (2 CDs: 119:11)**

**GOMPPER Spirals.** <sup>1</sup> **DANGERFIELD Winter Rites.** <sup>2</sup> **NEZ beyond release.** <sup>3</sup> **Ching-Chu HU A Tempered Wish.** <sup>4</sup> **ROBERTS Lines of Life II.** <sup>5</sup> **WEBERN (ed. Cain)** <sup>2</sup> **Songs.** <sup>6</sup> **ZÄHLER Clarinet Concerto.** <sup>7</sup> **DONATONI Lem II** <sup>8</sup>

The idea behind this release is to showcase works for chamber orchestra that involve some measure of soloistic display, with all works either written or revised in the last 12 years.

David Gompper (b. 1954) studied at the Royal College of Music in London and at the University of Michigan. He is currently professor of composition and director for new music at the University of Iowa, a post he has held for some 17 years. His *Spirals* of 2007 is scored for two violins and chamber orchestra and plays with the Fibonacci series and its extension, the Stolarsky array. Cross-rhythm is a vital component of the composer's array of techniques here, as are tonal references ("common-practice tonality regarded through the prism of time," as Gregory Marion's detailed notes so accurately put it). The tonal allusions seem to add a sense of regret to the work's affect. Interestingly, although Gompper conducts other composer's works, he does not conduct his own. Wolfgang David and Elisabeth Kropfitch are the dedicated violinists who work extremely well and diligently together, imbuing Gompper's lines with a sense of tensile determination. The final moments of the piece feature glassy, interweaving harmonics that are most impressively given by the soloists. Gompper's music has received a varied reception from Fanfare critics: Michael Cameron and Stephen Swanson (for Gompper's *Mrs. Bixby's Sons* on Albany 1056, Fanfare 32:4) and Robert Carl (for *Hommage à W. A.* on Albany 1069, Fanfare 32:5) enjoyed Gompper's work (I side with them, on present evidence); Walter Simmons was less complimentary about the piece called *Anon* on *Centaur* 2451 (Fanfare 24:3).

The chamber concerto for cello and ensemble, *Winter Rites*, was written as recently as 2008 by the young (b. 1977) Joseph Dangerfield, a student of Gompper's. It is dedicated to Gompper's wife. There is much beauty here. Dangerfield has a keen ear for sonority and is indeed blessed to have a soloist who commands the expressive spectrum in the shape of Olga Galochkina. There are three movements: "Oak and Feather," "Solstice" (which includes a stunningly played cadenza), and "Birth of the New Sun." The writing is exuberant and often joyful. Everything is beautiful. There is only one other piece by Dangerfield on the Fanfare Archive database. It would be good to hear more from this source.

This appears to be the first recording of a work by Ketty Nez (b. 1964). You can sample her work online at <http://people.bu.edu/knez/compositions2.html>. The work here, *beyond release*, is given by its dedicatees, the cellists Anthony Arnone and Hanna Holman, both faculty cellists at the University of Iowa. Nez's beautiful tapestry of a composition spotlights the soloists at notable structural points. The influence of Messiaen is fairly obvious here. Ives and Stravinsky also contribute, but the result is far more than an amalgam of these three famous names. Nez has her own, interesting voice. The work's opening seems to imply a minimalist perspective (the pull of

minimalism returns near the end), but Nez's horizons are far too broad to be restricted to this mode of expression. If more Dangerfield would be instructive, more Nez would be a delight as well as an intellectual challenge. I can imagine happily spending an hour or so with her kaleidoscopic music.

Best not to confuse composer Ching-chu Hu (b. 1969, associate professor of composition and theory at Denison University) with the pianist/composer Chih-Long Hu, whose work, *Formosa Caprices*, recently so impressed me (Fanfare 32:5). The use of Chinese modes is obvious in Hu's *A Tempered Wish*. What is subtle is Ching-chu Hu's treatment of them, sometimes highlighting their character, sometimes bringing more traditionally Western elements into play to coexist with them. The instrumentation includes temple blocks, Chinese cymbals (not "symbols," as the booklet suggests), and crotales. There is a leisurely procession of solo instruments, with the violin here very much a first among equals. Delicacy predominates, until a peculiar mix of Orientalism and hoe-downish Americana is introduced for a fugato. Praise is due to Scott Conklin for his faultless assumption of the featured violin part.

Jeremy Dale Roberts is a U.K. composer born in 1934 who has studied with Prialux Rainier and William Alwyn. During 1999–2000, he was a visiting professor at the University of Iowa (hence the connection here). His music is immediately more acerbic than anything heard thus far. Subdivided into two sections entitled "Voices" and "Kinderszenen" (there is no break between the two), the piece *Lines of Life* is subtitled "lyric episodes for ensemble." The structural machinations are complex, as are the textures (the work was written for the specialist U.K. ensemble Lontano). The viola part is properly concertante as opposed to solo, surfacing as and when required, as opposed to being subject to any type of relentless foregrounding. Despite the length of 21:36, there is a Weberian sense of distillation to all of this score—appositely, given that the very next item is Webern, albeit in arrangement. Rare Webern, at that. Jerry Cain is a musicologist at the University of Iowa who specializes in the study of the sketches of the Second Viennese School, currently focusing on the unpublished songs of Anton von Webern, 1914–1924. The German texts (by Karl Kraus, 1874–1939) and English translations of the two songs of 1918/19, "Vallorbe" and "Vision des Erblindeten," are provided. Both texts dwell on the wonder of nature in the light of day. Michelle Crouch's light voice seems ideally suited to this fragile music. Her diction and pitching are beyond reproach, as is her ability to project long, legato lines in which disjunct intervals seem entirely natural. A highlight.

The title of Noel Zahler's piece takes us away from the stated concertante basis of this issue into that of true concerto. His *Concerto for Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra* (2003, revised 2007) originally included a part for interactive computer, although the 2007 revision has dispensed with this. The opening features the soloist dwelling for approximately 90 seconds on one note (G), the composer playing with both our sense of time and our predictive faculties. Upon the stealthy entrance of the ensemble, things get progressively more complex and demanding, culminating in multiphonics, with brass-players being asked to sing and play at the same time (not as new a technique as it may seem: listen to Weber's *Concertino* for horn and orchestra, where the Romantic composer specifies chords in the cadenza). Michael Norsworthy is the intrepid clarinet soloist, who makes the best possible case for this interesting, pluralistic, postmodern work that takes in nods towards jazz as part of its expressive remit. Again, Zahler (head of the Carnegie Mellon School of Music) is a newbie to the Fanfare Archive.

Amazingly, there are only a couple of pieces listed on the Fanfare Archive by the influential, important Franco Donatoni, music that is well known to modernists. A student of Pizzetti and Maderna, he was a regular attendee at Darmstadt and taught a number of notable composers of today, including Magnus Lindberg and conductor/composer Esa-Pekka Salonen. *Lem II* was written in 1996 and features a fiendishly difficult part for double bass (expertly rendered here by

Volkan Orhon). Lem II is a rethinking of Lem of 1983 for solo double bass and Lame for solo cello (1982), and offers a glimpse into the miraculous spaces of Donatoni's imagination. Although this review has praised many of the composers presented here, Donatoni is just in another league. There are no instrumentalist biographies in the booklet, but there should be, for Volkan Orhon deserves full credit for his virtuoso achievement. Dialogue between solo and tutti initially seems to be the mode of delivery, but as the piece progresses, so does a more integrative mode of thought. The inclusion of instruments such as vibraphone and marimba in addition to piano and harp adds a depth to the available sonorities. The soloist seems to weave in and out of the texture until, finally, he has the last word in a gesture that finds it plunging downwards to the depths of its registral capability. Stunning. **Colin Clarke**