

## **FEATURE REVIEW by Carson Cooman**



**MONSTEROLOGY • U Iowa Ensembles • ALBANY TROY900 (62: 19)**

**FRITTS Monsterology. Musicometry I. M. ECKERT Echo's Song. Point of No Return. GOMPPER Kata Muela (Old Stick). An Elm We Lost**

This release features primarily ensembles from the University of Iowa and contains two pieces each by the three principal composition faculty members at the school.

Lawrence Fritts (b.1952) is director of the electronic music studios, and his musical output consists primarily of works involving electronics. *Monsterology* (2004) is scored for chamber orchestra and fixed electronics. It is inspired by the Fischer-Griess "Monster" group, a set of mathematical relationships. *Musicometry I* (2004) is for clarinet and electronics and is performed by the new-music specialist Esther Lamneck, for whom it was written. The work is based upon some of Lamneck's improvisations, which Fritts recorded to serve as the source material. *Monsterology* is particularly noteworthy for the superb integration of the electronic sounds with the acoustic instruments. The blend is seamless and never less than timbrally compelling. Michael Eckert's (b.1950) *Echo's Song* (2005) is a work for unaccompanied chorus, a setting of a poem by Ben Jonson. *Point of No Return* (2003) is scored for mixed sextet and was written in memory of the NASA space shuttle Columbia disaster.

David Gompper serves as director of the university's well-known Center for New Music. *Kata Muela (Old Stick)* (2001) is a quartet for flute, bassoon, piano, and percussion. It is based on an American Indian (Yaqui) melody that is not heard directly until the end of the work. The bassoon receives the primary focus throughout. The piece could be seen as a related composition to Gompper's *Butterfly Dance* (2001) for clarinet and piano trio, based on a Hopi tune and one of his finest chamber works. *An Elm We Lost* (2002) for tenor and baritone soloists, chorus, and orchestra is one of Gompper's few works for chorus. It was commissioned for a September 11 memorial concert and thus strikes an elegiac tone. The text is two poems of Marvin Bell, an emeritus member of the English faculty at University of Iowa. The poems are beautifully understated and not specifically about 9/11, which means that the resulting work avoids the typical over-specificity of most 9/11 memorial compositions. Gompper's superbly expressive setting creates a haunting and deeply poignant atmosphere throughout. Unfortunately, 10-minute works for chorus and orchestra are difficult to program, but this is a piece that deserves further hearings. (And I wish that Gompper would write more choral music.) **Carson Cooman**