


CD Review by Peter Burwasser

 **SPIRALS—AMERICAN MUSIC IN MOSCOW** • Igor Dronov, cond;^{2, 5, 6} Stanislav Malyshev (vn);¹⁻⁵ Inna Zilberman (vn);^{1, 5} Anna Burchik (va);^{1, 5} Olga Kalinova (vc);^{1, 6} Oleg Tantsov (cl);² Mona Haba (pn);²⁻⁶ Ekaterina Markova (va);^{2, 3} Olga Galochkina (vc);^{2, 6} Sergey Kolesov (sax);⁴ Marina Rubinstein (fl);⁶ Andrey Vinnitsky (perc);⁶ Ekaterina Fomitskaya (vn)⁶ • **ALBANY TROY 1095 (75:07)**

HU The Wash of Water and Red.¹ **DAH N Penumbrae.**² **GOMPPER Spirals.**³ **Crossed.**⁴
DANGERFIELD Piano Quintet.⁵ **KILSTOFTE Ballistic Etude 3.**¹⁶

It is telling that this recital begins with music by an American of Chinese heritage, in a style strongly influenced by Asian musical models. This begs a question suggested by the title of the album, namely, what is American music? Hu imitates the ancient pipa in his scoring, and employs whole-tone melodic sequences to evoke Asian influences. But he is just as eager to borrow Baroque forms and contemporary gestures, going cheek to jowl with his familial culture. In an environment that is so rich and varied, how can a single nationalistic school emerge? Does it matter? The eclecticism of the American scene is both a joy and a burden.

And then there is the added dynamic of playing American music in Moscow, with Russian musicians. Perhaps I am reading too much into this scenario; after all, is not the ultimate question simply whether or not this is good music, despite all of the extraneous elements? Of course, and yet it is irresistible to imagine that the young players were not responding to the sardonic overtones of David Gompper's work, recalling Shostakovich, or the Rachmaninoff-like turgidness of Joseph Dangerfield's Piano Quintet. The minimalist, superbly concise music of Luke Dahn falls into a more cosmopolitan camp, and the Moscow ensemble delivers with a high-level of professionalism. Mark Kilstofte's quirky, angular music was written for these players, but I get the sense that they miss the last degree of rhythmic flow, lacking, perhaps, an innate mastery of a truly American musical characteristic, syncopation. They play with passion and commitment, but they do not get up and dance. Unlike their American counterparts, the Russians are both enriched and perhaps restrained by their traditions.

The above comments are casual observations. On the whole, I found this disc to be highly compelling and even provocative, in a subtle way. Anyone else can forget the musical politics and simply enjoy a sampling of fine young American composers, as expressed by musicians from a culture that, despite ongoing upheavals, remains one of the most vital on earth. It is one hell of a combination. **Peter Burwasser**