

New CD captures PSO's tremendous 2010 performance

Reviews

Thursday, August 25, 2011

By Andrew Druckenbrod, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Rebecca Droke

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's recording of Mahler Symphony No. 3 is more of a document of the sound of the PSO under Manfred Honeck than any of the previous discs with him.

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra "Mahler Symphony No. 3." (Exton)

Heinz Hall is underrated nationally. Its acoustics may not match the pristine environments of Carnegie Hall in New York or Severance Hall in Cleveland, but it certainly is one of the best of the rest. But no matter the quality of a hall, it is difficult for a recording to match the live experience.

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 3 on the audiophile label Exton, however, comes awfully close. Conducted by its music director Manfred Honeck, the performances of the work in 2010 were a tremendous conclusion to the 2009-10 season, and they sound just as luminous and charged as they were then.

The recording features mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung, who subbed for singer Jane Irwin after the opening night of the concerts. Exton had to pick one of the singers and they did well to choose Ms. DeYoung. Her radiant tone reverberates on disc and so do the many solos by Peter Sullivan (trombone), Cynthia DeAlmeida (oboe), George Vosburgh (trumpet) and William Caballero (horn). The women of the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh and the Children's Festival Chorus come through with presence.

But most crucially for the PSO, this is more of a document of the sound of the PSO under Mr. Honeck than any of the previous discs with him. Now several years into his tenure, the orchestra is on-board with the maestro's interpretations. In particular, the members are committed to his predilection for highly contrasting levels. These typically drive sound engineers crazy, but come out brilliantly here.

One historical note: The recording marks the last concerts of Andres Cardenas as PSO concertmaster, and he also offers splendid solos to put an exclamation point on his tenure here.

The disc is only available domestically through the PSO at this point; it will reach U.S. retail outlets in fall.

Now Ensemble "Awake" (New Amsterdam)

The title track of this impressive album by the New York-based Now Ensemble was written by Patrick Burke, a Duquesne University composer. Composed for flute, piano, clarinet, bass and electric guitar, "Awake" gently opens its eyes quietly and stretches with Mahler-influenced woodwind licks. Gradually it grows louder and expansive with layer-upon-layer of sweeping sound built on simple harmonic progressions.

It's symbolic of how most days are filled with repetition yet also contain unpredictable and complex thoughts and events. "Awake" is indie-classical at its finest -- thoughtful yet energetic music that bridges worlds (hints of Javanese Gamelan) and genres (pop and classical).

Chatham Baroque "Alla Luce" (Self produced)

Pittsburgh-based Chatham Baroque is up to its old tricks on this disc: superb playing of, well, old music. The album also is another example of the period ensemble's dedication to expanding the world's early-music knowledge and repertoire by providing a deeper look at a lesser-known composer.

This time it is Giovanni Kapsperger (1580-1652), a composer and crack lute player who pushed musical style as it moved from Renaissance to baroque aesthetics.

The disc is a mix of instrumental works and songs, including rural villanelle (similar to madrigals). The latter are sung with appropriate earthiness by guests Philip Anderson and Gregory Purnhagen. It's another first-rate effort by the local gem, Chatham Baroque.

Nancy Galbraith, Stephen Schultz, Cello Fury "Other Sun" (Centaur)

Pittsburgh native (Millvale) Nancy Galbraith's vibrant textures, bouncy rhythms and optimistic strains compellingly emerge here in works performed by the rock trio Cello Fury and flutist Stephen Schultz, her colleague at Carnegie Mellon University.

Mrs. Galbraith explores a simplified harmonic and steadfastly tonal language in the works on this disc -- aspects that fit Cello Fury's driving energy and Mr. Schultz's agile tone. His paradoxical "electric baroque flute" is reason enough to listen to this album.

The works -- "Other Sun," "Traverso Mistico," "Island Echoes" and "Night Train" -- project a potent popular vibe, but they also yield subtle sophistication, such as the harmonically renegade harpsichord ticking beneath the title track.

Andrew Druckenbrod: adruckenbrod@post-gazette.com; 412-263-1750. Blog: www.post-gazette.com/classicalmusings. Twitter: @druckenbrod.

First published on August 25, 2011 at 12:00 am

More from Post-Gazette.com

[More drugs added to state's banned list](#)

[Chicken Little Gore goes on a tirade](#)

[Pittsburgh Symphony European Tour 2011](#)

[PSO to embark on tour of European festivals](#)

[Ex-bartender, Joe Sapienza, and music director Eugene Reichenfeld, both reach milestones](#)

More from the Web (sponsored)

[Wife can nab bigger Social Security cut \(Bank Rate\)](#)

[Kurt Cobain Hated Dave Grohl and Guns N' Roses? Apparently. \(StyleCaster\)](#)

[Demi Moore Pictures \(StyleBistro\)](#)

[Soros Made Girlfriend Sit at Kid's Table: Report \(The Daily Beast\)](#)

[The Hottest Black Models in Fashion \(StyleBistro\)](#)

[\[what's this\]](#)