

approach to composing. No two of the ten tracks are similar in style or orchestration. In “Mr. Softee,” tabla, vocals, and string quartet vacillate between mixed-meter and scat-inspired vocals. In contrast, the rock-inspired “I Know What I Know” features heavy backbeat on drums with distorted guitar.

A reflective, somber mood is portrayed on “Mom in Autumn,” where Duggan maintains a slow, linear motive on piano underneath a steel guitar with various amplified effects (portamento, glissandi, etc.). More modern approaches to rhythmic composition are demonstrated in “Socorro,” where the groupings of four notes smoothly elide into and out of groups of three. Duggan’s chops really shine through on the straight-ahead jazz tune “Still Point.” “Madu,” “Miles to Go,” and “Fascination” round out the remaining selections. The performances of the supporting cast are impressive, and Duggan’s abilities as both a performer and composer make this a captivating recording.

—Eric Willie

Frey/Beuger: duos

duo Contour

Edition Wandelweiser Records

Stephen Altoft, English trumpeter, and Lee Forrest Ferguson, American percussionist, make up duo Contour in this release. The CD consists of two trumpet/percussion duos by Jürg Frey and Antoine Beuger. Frey’s “22 Sächelchen,” a set of 22 brief duos, most lasting less than one minute, opens the disc. The title translates, roughly, to “little things.” Each movement has a whimsical or evocative title such as “Cadillac,” “Flushing local,” “A Melody for William Street,” and “Union Station.” Subtlety of tone color characterizes the music and performance: superbly soft bass drum rumblings, a slight caressing of unrecognizable metallic percussion, ambiguously jazzy muted trumpet, sharp snare drum and trumpet blasts, miniature boastful marches, and the briefest carousel between vibraphone and trumpet.

The second work, by Antoine Beuger (clocking in at over 30 minutes), is titled “dedekind duos.” According to Beuger’s notes, Julius Wilhelm Richard Dedekind was “a mathematician who developed the idea of cutting into the continuum in order to define the irrational numbers and to comprehend the essence of continuity.” That search for continuity is present in long sustained whispers of bowed vibraphone and breathy muted trumpet, in between exquisitely lengthy silences. It is a music that is void of expression, a music that simply exists and sustains color and silence—light and shadow—at times on the brink of audibility. Clarity, subtlety, and nuance are the words that best describe the music and superb performance on this recording.

—John Lane

Kecak

Shinto Ueno and Phonix Reflexion

Musica Vivante

This CD features six works for percussion ensemble, performed by the percussion group Phonix Reflexion, led by Japanese percussionist Shinti Ueno. A showcase of both Eastern and Western composers, the CD contains “Optical Wave for Six Percussionists” (Isao Matsushita), “Afta-Stubal” (Mark Ford), “Kecak for Six Percussionists” (Akira Nishimura), “Celebration and Chorale” (Neil Deponte), “Gainsborough” (Thomas Gauger), and “Heterorhythmix” (Tokuhide Niimi). Several of the composers provide endorsements of their pieces’ recordings in the liner notes.

The performers demonstrate strong technical and musical abilities; especially impressive is the individual attention to the shaping of melodic lines from player to player on every piece. The most striking feature of this CD is its clarity and balance. While percussion music can often be tricky to record, the keyboard parts are articulate without sounding harsh, and non-pitched instruments (drums, cymbals, gongs, etc.) never seem overbalanced to other aspects of the music.

This CD should be appealing to a wide variety of audiences, from students and conductors looking to explore both familiar and unfamiliar works, to non-academic listeners who can appreciate an enjoyable listening experience.

—Jason Baker

Night Chill

Catherine Meunier

Centrediscs

Some of the best and most creative music for percussion occurs when percussionists collaborate with composers. *Night Chill*, the debut recording of Catherine Meunier, is a perfect example. Meunier states in the liner notes that she has chosen to work with composers to create an “original Canadian repertoire,” thus giving the project a cohesive vision and a socio-cultural identity.

Christien Ledroit, Nicolas Gilbert, Andrew Paul MacDonald, Alcides Lanza, and Paul Frehner are the featured Canadian composers. Each composition represents a unique approach to the marimba, expertly performed by Meunier. The title track, “Night Chill,” is Ledroit’s marimba and electronic imagining of “rustling leaves, bare trees, and cool nights.” Another work for marimba and electronics is Lanza’s “diastemas,” which includes an electronic soundscape of marimba improvisations and other wooden and metallic timbres. Meunier’s technical agility and accuracy is clear in her performance of Gilbert’s “Hésitations,” a work written for Meunier during the composer’s residency at Chapelle historique du Bon-Pasteur in Montréal.

In addition to Meunier’s strong solo performances, two tracks feature guest performers: Louis-Philippe Marsolais (horn) on Gilbert’s “Essai sur la seduction” and D’Arcy Philip Gray (marimba) on MacDonald’s “The Illuminations of Gutenberg, op. 61.” The latter is a virtuoso display for two marimbas representing the “image of mechanical pounding of a printing press—both physically and as a disseminating source of public information.”

—John Lane

Percussionique: The Complete Percussion Music of Michael S. Horwood

Toronto Percussion Ensemble

Albany Records

This ten-track CD chronicles the percussion ensemble music of Canadian composer Michael S. Horwood from his early work as a teenager in 1964 to 2008. Expertly performed by the Toronto Percussion Quartet (John Brownell, David Campion, Mark Duggan, and Beverley Johnson) as well as a few extra players on the larger works (Romano DiNillo, Roger Flock, Andy Morris, Jamie Drake, Richard Moore, Timothy Francom, and Ed Reifel), the sound quality sparkles and reveals every nuance of music that evolves from early influences by the 1960s avant-garde to a more refined style in Horwood’s later compositions.

Horwood’s early works share a similar overall flavor that reflects the turbulent and disjunctive nature of many classical compositions written in the 1960s. “Piece Percussionique No. 1” relies on non-tuned percussion motives and rhythmic cells as the basis of a multi-sectional one-movement work. “Piece Percussionique No. 3” shares many of No. 1’s approaches but includes theatrical gestures (e.g., coughing) and humorous “spoofing” of well-known classical and film music conventions. Continuing in the avant-garde vein, Horwood uses the number “four” as an organizational element in “Piece Percussionique No. 4” as he experiments with unusual instruments (e.g., flower pots, buffalo bells), and jagged textures.

Written for a 1968 student film, “Dynamite” is a grating metallic minimalist duet for piano and cymbals. “The Shadow of Your Drum” is an aleatoric work for two players on a single bass drum that explores the many timbres of the drum and is a word play on a pop-tune title from the 1960s. Employing two percussionists and tape, “Piece Percussionique No. 5” highlights the electronic music movement’s influence on Horwood.

“Little Bowed Piece” is only a *partially* true title; the 13-minute piece requires players to bow over 70 different objects in this ethereal musical soundscape. The

marimba/vibraphone duet “Fragments” is a slightly more structured, loose fugue-like work that showcases Duggan and Johnson. Conducted by Gary Kulesha, “Piece Percussionique No. 6, Requiem” concludes the recording and is a collage of fragments of Horwood’s other works.

—Terry O’Maboney

Psappha: 20th Century Solo Percussion Masterpieces: Vol. I

Shinti Uéno

Musica Vivante

This impressive solo percussion CD contains several works that are considered “standards” in 20th-century percussion repertoire. Works include four movements of “Eight Pieces for Four Timpani” by Carter (“Recitative,” “March,” “Moto Perpetuo,” and “Improvisation”), “Zyklus” by Stockhausen, “Optical Time” by Matsushita, “Ground” by Fukushi, and “Psappha” by Xenakis. One delight of this CD is the excellent recording quality; idiomatic instrument sounds and performance nuances come through undistorted and true to the performance atmosphere of a live concert hall. This holds especially true for the timpani works (selections from “Eight Pieces” and “Optical Time”).

Uéno’s 15 minute interpretation of “Zyklus” is musical, tasteful, and influenced by his studies with Christoph Caskel, who premiered the work. “Optical Time” was commissioned and premiered by Uéno in 1987 and relies heavily on the performer’s sensitivity to tuning changes and pedal effects. The five sections of “Ground” (wood, metal, leather, metal, and wood) speak through the recording with passion and energy as Uéno exhibits a strong command over the musical forces that make up the work.

While every work on this CD is exceptionally performed, “Psappha” is a real highlight of the collection as Uéno draws inspiration from Silvio Gualda (a former teacher of Uéno and the one to whom this work is dedicated) as well as encounters with Xenakis himself. Uéno’s chosen instruments/timbres blend exceptionally well, and his performance is methodical, precise, and emotional.

—Joshua D. Smith

Vibes Beyond

Roland Neffe

JazzHausMusik

Get ready for something new and different with this recording of vibist Roland Neffe’s trio. The group, featuring Neffe on vibes and marimba, Achim Tang on bass, and Reinhardt Winkler on drums, opens up the harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary with these original compositions by Neffe. One can detect influences from many styles including rock, funk, contemporary western classical, Frank Zappa, and, of course, jazz. The texture of