

GRAMOPHONE

USA CANADA SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

V Bond

'Soul of a Nation - Portraits of Presidential Character'

Soul of a Nation^a. The Indispensable Man^b. The Crowded Hours^c. Pater patriae^d

^aGabriela Vargas fl ^bJohn Bruce Yeh cl ^cMark Ridenour tpt ^dFrank Almond vn ^eAdrian Dunn,

^aHenry Fogel, ^aRay Frewen, ^bDavid Holloway narrs

^{bcd}Chicago College of Performing Arts Wind

Ensemble / Stephen Squires; ^aRoosevelt

University Chamber Orchestra /

Emanuele Andrizzi

Albany © TROY1723 (62' • DDD)



At a time when presidential character has become a focus of international debate,

Victoria Bond's optimistic quartet of narrated musical portraits of Washington, Lincoln and the two Roosevelts – presidents known for their character – seems out of time and place. Perhaps they would be ideal fare for Midwest summer concerts – and perhaps such inspirational fare is what is needed.

Bond infuses into her portraits lots of rollicking Americana humour and characteristic energy, as in the opening of *The Crowded Hours*, devoted to Teddy Roosevelt and featuring stunning playing by the Chicago Symphony's trumpeter Mark Ridenour and involving narration by Ray Frewen.

Each of the four is subtitled a concerto and each demands a virtuoso's chops but they are equally well described as hybrid entertainments in which the words are brilliantly illuminated by Bond's kaleidoscopic scoring. The freewheeling range of musical influences, from Yankee fife-and-drum tunes to circus calliopes and Broadway jazz, combine to give size and visceral excitement to the experience.

For *Soul of a Nation*, the most intoxicating of the four, Bond based her music on an edition of Corelli's *La folia* found in Jefferson's library. The angelic ending under Frank Almond's soaring violin solo concludes a particularly touching love letter.

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Jeffrey Douma

The conductor of Yale Choral Artists discusses the music on their new album, 'Statements'



How did you compile this programme?

David Lang, Ted Hearne and Hannah Lash all have deep connections to the Yale School of Music. David and Hannah teach composition at Yale, and Ted did his graduate work here several years ago. I've worked with all three on various projects over the years, and was excited about doing something that brought them together. Also, some of the themes addressed by these works (exploring the language of consent, contemplating life in a society characterised by unequal opportunity) seemed particularly timely.

How do the musical languages vary?

Each of these composers has a unique and profoundly original voice, but they share an incredible attention to craft and a penetrating thoughtfulness in all of their music.

What were the challenges for the choir?

All of these works presented unique challenges for the musicians. The primary

challenge in David's piece (for both singers and instrumentalists) was conveying the directness and defiance of the Eugene Debs text he chose to set. The singers had to negotiate *Consent's* highly complex musical and textual layers, often one to a part. And Hannah's vocal and instrumental writing in her stunning new Requiem is so intricate and refined – with each note you feel like you are adding one more small detail to a perfect, delicate sculpture. But when new works are this engaging, the singers relish the challenge.

What are your forthcoming plans?

We have recently performed a lot of new music, so we're going a different direction next and exploring well-known works by Herbert Howells and Heinrich Schütz.

The playing by the four soloists must have been a composer's dream. Each does their best to identify with their theme and is partnered with great enthusiasm by a talented chamber orchestra and wind ensemble from Roosevelt University, where the excellent recordings were made between 2012 and 2017.

Laurence Vitte

Daugherty

Dreamachine^a. Relections on the Mississippi^b. Trall of Tears^c

^aAmy Porter fl ^bCarol Jantsch tuba

^aDame Evelyn Glennie perc

Albany Symphony Orchestra / David Alan Miller

Naxos American Classics © 8 559807 (78' • DDD)



Michael Daugherty (b1954) has 20 concertos to his name and this highly enjoyable Naxos disc draws together three of his most recent. The centrepiece here is Evelyn Glennie's scintillating performance of *Dreamachine* (2014), his third percussion concerto following *UFO* (1999) and – for timpani – *Raise the Roof* (2003). *Dreamachine* was inspired by fantastical machines in its first three movements ('Da Vinci's Wings', 'Rube Goldberg Variations' – Goldberg being



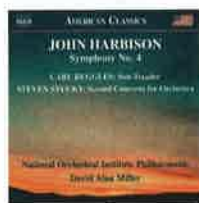
Power and blend: the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic and David Alan Miller are convincing in works by John Harbison, Carl Ruggles and the late Steven Stucky

a cartoonist and inventor – and an illustration by Fritz Kahn of an electric eel-powered light bulb), although the finale, ‘Vulcan’s Forge’ relates to the iconic, logic-driven Mr Spock from *Star Trek*. Full of vividly scored music for soloist and orchestra, *Dreamachine* must be great fun to see live; on disc it seems, at 35 minutes, a touch overlong. (Compare it with Jennifer Higdon’s Pulitzer Prize-winning Percussion Concerto to hear the difference.) Nonetheless, Glennie plays it with her customary élan and there are worse ways to spend a half-hour-plus.

The flute concerto *Trail of Tears* (2010) – Daugherty’s third for the instrument – also has extramusical inspiration, ‘the forced removal of peoples from their homeland for political, economic, racial, religious, or cultural reasons’, specifically, the enforced trek of the Cherokee in winter 1838 – the ‘Trail of Tears’. The concerto ends, however, with a vibrant evocation of the Sun Dance, indicative of the tribe’s triumph over oppression. Amy Porter is in scintillating form in the solo role. So, too, is Carol Jantsch in Daugherty’s tuba concerto *Reflections on the Mississippi* (2013), a nature-poem in four movements, concise in length and highly evocative, as can be discerned from the section titles: ‘Mist’, ‘Fury’, ‘Prayer’ and ‘Steamboat’. The Albany Symphony accompany here, as throughout, superbly. **Guy Rickards**

Harbison • Ruggles • Stucky

Harbison Symphony No 4 **Ruggles** Sun-Treader
Stucky Second Concerto for Orchestra
National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic /
David Alan Miller
Naxos American Classics 8 559836 (65' • DDD)



This appears to be the second time on CD that David Alan Miller pairs John Harbison and the late Steven Stucky – composers who have little in common besides the ability to orchestrate with flair and confidence. Stucky’s Pulitzer Prize-winning Second Concerto makes most of its points through brilliant textural manipulation. The opening ‘Overture (with friends)’ features murmuring carpets of woodwind ostinatos that are punctuated by brass and percussion outbursts. Towards the end, playful brass polyphony gathers steam over sustained chords. The central Variations movement conveys more melodic direction, retaining much of the Overture’s chattering woodwind flourishes and rapid string-section work. The finale hovers between tonal and atonal and between rhythmic and amorphous, leaving Stucky’s boundless repertoire of dazzlingly generic orchestral effects to fend for themselves. While BIS’s recording with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra benefits from the authority of the composer’s supervision, I find Miller’s

faster tempos and wider degrees of inflection more convincing.

Harbison’s five-movement Fourth Symphony has a lot more to say. Contrary to the annotator, I don’t perceive the opening Fanfare as bombastic but rather playful and unpredictably jazzy. By contrast, the Intermezzo presents a back-and-forth discourse between sections of the orchestra, characterised by strategic silences, long resonances and expansive string solos. At first the central Scherzo’s syncopations seem to have been appropriated from the Copland/Bernstein playbook, yet Harbison’s voice ultimately governs the music’s dry wit and lightness of being. The Threnody’s sense of melodic tension and release proves quite harrowing. If the finale’s opening section and concluding dance seem more conventionally symphonic and less inventive by comparison, an arresting passage featuring mallet percussion more than compensates. One cannot fault the sheen and precision that Ludovic Morlot and the Boston Symphony brought to their live 2011 recording, yet the nod goes to Miller’s faster and shapelier treatment of the Scherzo and more variegated string phrasing in the Threnody.

For all of the undeniable power and focused blend that the remarkable young National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic musicians bring to Carl Ruggles’s *Sun-Treader*, I prefer the closer, more vivid detailing, clearer linear strands and more