



bookends of the collection, Underhill's String Quartets No 3, *The Alynne* (1998) and No 4, *The Night* (2011) reveal less of a development than a sense of refinement. By avoiding any show of rhythmic virtuosity for its own sake, the composer instead focuses on, for lack of a better word, timbral virtuosity.

Although a couple of furious outbursts appear primarily to break his static textures, Underwood's primary attention lay in the sonorities themselves. Throughout both quartets, textures are so transparent that light shines through and timbres are so tangible you can almost reach out and touch them.

Ken Smith

Ziporyn

Big Grenadilla^a. Mumbai^b

^aEvan Ziporyn *bc* ^bSandeep Das *tabla*

Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

Cantaloupe © CA21081 (49) • DDD



Ecumenical concertos from the Illinois composer

Big Grenadilla, the title-track of the latest Cantaloupe release from Bang on a Can All-Stars founding member, composer and clarinet wizard Evan Ziporyn, refers to the type of wood from which a bass clarinet is manufactured. It is a 14-minute concerto for bass clarinet and chamber orchestra that takes its cue from concertos by great 19th-century virtuoso composer/performers such as Paganini and Liszt but in unmistakably 21st-century terms. It begins with an unaccompanied passage packed with extended techniques such as multiphonics and bent and slapped notes. The orchestra gradually enters, mirroring and expanding Ziporyn's solo licks, eventually settling into a swinging, asymmetrical groove where pentatonic harmony and open fifths dominate, as well as chatty yet never cluttered imitative writing. The percussion-writing grows increasingly elaborate and colourful as the piece progresses, although there are plenty of sparse moments, such as an extended 'arpeggio etude' cadenza punctuated by jabbing percussion rejoinders.

In *Mumbai*, I suspect that Ziporyn's deep-rooted involvement with Gamelan traditions informs the first movement's freewheeling, rhythmically complex interaction between tabla soloist Sandeep Das, the orchestral percussion and the strings' Steve Reich-inspired melodic cells. An extended tabla cadenza opens the central second movement and, later on, the tabla is discreetly augmented by orchestral percussion over eerie beds of sustained string-writing. Slow string music dominates the third

movement, despite the increasingly petulant and elaborate tabla-writing.

As usual with Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, precision and passion magically fuse. This is certainly the most ambitious and fascinating music I've heard from Ziporyn; and may his compositional range and sonorous palette continue to expand and evolve at this high, even rarefied level.

Jed Distler

'American Dreamland'

Kozumplik/Watson Total Collapse. Sakura

(we must love). As a Child.... Dialed Out. So Strong.

Waldo I. I Knew (we shouldn't). Road Trip. American

Elder. Alchemy II: Dreamland. All Good. Tulips

Loop 2.4.3

Music Starts from Silence © 700261 350592

(43) • DDD



Radical duo conjure musical snapshot of an America past

Although it bills itself, in part, as 'a nihilistic snapshot of the post-modern psyche', the duo called Loop 2.4.3's ode to the country's past may be just what MOR baby boomers could take a fancy to as their notion of easy-listening classical music. Or, perhaps, cool modern jazz.

What Thomas Kozumplik and Lorne Watson in their press materials explicitly flag for your kind attention include Edgar Allan Poe, *Easy Rider*, Minnesota's desolate plains, and Brooklyn, Baltimore and Detroit's post-industrial streets; where they wind up, however, after a series of often lyrical ballads, is happy (and concerned) and chilled.

Together with nine guest artists, Kozumplik and Watson, each of whom plays percussion instruments and unconventional things like 'knobs and screams' (Kozumplik) and 'E-log' (Watson), make an astonishing variety of brand-new yet iconic sounds that create a riveting aura, a genuine time warp – all in astonishingly intimate and dynamic, demonstration-quality sound. The purely drumming interludes, as in *Sakura* or *Alchemy II: Dreamland*, are visceral and satisfying.

Littered among the tracks are verbal interludes gleaned provocatively from an incongruous mixture of vicious headlines and nostalgia for fondly remembered pasts, like 'It's kind of throbbing, it's kind of vasiline-y, it's kind of fleshy, it's kind of psychedelic...it's really interesting'; then, later, 'We have the back of a Glock pointing'.

It's put together so seamlessly that if you don't turn up the volume too loud, 'American Dreamland' melts pleasantly into the background, like hearing all six *Brandenburg*

Concertos at once. The music's artistic punch, combined with the label's sophisticated use of an increasingly strong alternative classical music distribution network, should draw the attention of the establishment.

Laurence Vittes

'I Saw Eternity'

Buhr Agnus Dei Chatman Remember Corlis

Gloria^b. To see the cherry hung with snow Enns

I saw eternity Galbraith Let all mortal flesh keep

silence Halley Bring us, O Lord God^c Mozetich

Flying Swans^d Raminsh Psalm 23 Sirett Bless the

Lord for the good land Tiefenbach Nunc dimittis

Watson Henderson Missa brevis

Elora Festival Singers / Noel Edison with

^aStephen Pierre *cl* ^bJohn Marshman *vc*

^cLeslie DeAth *pf* ^dMichael Bloss *org*

Naxos Canadian Classics © 8 572812 (74) • DDD



Edison's choir sings sacred works by 11 Canadians

Naxos continues its Canadian Classics series with this glowing and varied programme of sacred works by 11 living composers. The offerings range widely in style, from traditional hymn settings to deftly coloured statements of faith.

With so many composers represented, it's not possible to list the salient qualities of each piece performed here. But one general statement can be made: all of the pieces reveal superb craftsmanship and keen sensitivity to texts.

The most expansive work, at 12 minutes, is Ruth Watson Henderson's *Missa brevis*, whose four deeply felt movements (there's no *Credo*) are exemplary in expressive concision. For sheer sonic beauty, there's the score that gives the disc its title, Leonard Enns's *I saw eternity*, which suspends time through floating shifts of choral sound that conjure the metaphysical aspect of Henry Vaughan's verses.

While the majority of works are scored for a *cappella* chorus, several employ piano and one, Paul Halley's *Bring us, O Lord God*, works euphoric enchantment with help from pipe organ. An altogether different world is depicted in Marjan Mozetich's *Flying Swans*, a haunting and modal beauty for undulating choristers mingling voices with moody clarinet and cello (the excellent Stephen Pierre and John Marshman).

The disc's repertoire is challenging in terms of balance, texture and ensemble, and the Elora Festival Singers, led by Noel Edison, rise to every demand. The chamber choir sings with exceptional cohesion and true intonation, revelling in the outpouring of sacred emotions summoned by gifted compatriots.

Donald Rosenberg