

Nancy Boston
*American Women: Modern Voices in
 Piano Music*

Nancy Boston, piano. Works by Nancy Galbraith, Judith Lang Zaimont, Beata Moon, Beth Anderson, Emma Lou Diemer, and Nancy Bloomer Deussen. Nancy Boston (2006)

JOHN WINZENBURG

A challenge for any accomplished performer of contemporary music is finding works that present fresh musical ideas and sufficiently stimulate one's playing capabilities, while at the same time appealing to a broad listening audience. Nancy Boston's *American Women: Modern Voices in Piano Music* assembles a collection of works that go far toward achieving these purposes.

The CD is the product of a recent sabbatical project (Boston is on the faculty of Mansfield University of Pennsylvania): a series of concerts highlighting piano music by living American female composers. Boston's selection of works, all composed between 1988 and 1999, also reveals an effort to cross conventional audience lines. Indeed, the subtext of her repertoire is unmistakable: a presentation of newly composed classical pieces must be tempered by popular elements in order to avoid old-fashioned associations of being excessively academic, modernistic, and esoteric. *American Women* so cautiously—and successfully—straddles this line that the substantive focus on women composers is at least partially blurred.

One cause for equivocation lies in the absence of descriptive notes for the individual selections. Ironically, the liner notes are limited to brief composer biographies that, while relevant, contain information that is readily retrievable from the respective Web sites. Perhaps more illuminating would have been brief accounts of the impetus behind certain titles and concepts. For example, why is Nancy Bloomer Deussen's *Cascades* parenthetically subtitled *A Toccata* when there is little of the improvisatory language one expects in such a genre? The answer may lie in the cleverly schematized array of styles, lengths, and nuanced alternations of lighter and more virtuosic tracks. The collection introduces an amalgamation of

single- and multi-movement works whose individual movements range from two to eight minutes in length, while the flow within and between works creates a story of moods, reveries, and dances that no doubt satiated Boston's concert audiences.

Ultimately, the success of the set rests upon the story teller herself. Nancy Boston has so convincingly conceived the aims of these pieces that, in some cases, her interpretations elevate the musical quality to a level that perhaps surpasses that of the original scores. At other times, Boston builds upon scores that possess adequate vigor in themselves. *Jazz Waltz* by Judith Lang Zaimont melds popular, jazz, and classical elements into a single work, successfully capturing the effect of transcribed improvisatory material. Musicians who have worked with Emma Lou Diemer's compositions will not be at all surprised at the alluring mixture of rhythmic verve, harmonic zest, and technical challenge in her *Piano Sonata no. 3*. "Tango Fantastique," the final movement of the *Sonata*, offers an amply robust finale to the CD. Diemer begins with a faster section, which slightly counters stylistic expectations, but then fulfills those expectations by including the more constrained, "suave" tango style in the inner sections so that the two "moods" interact throughout the movement. Only the meandering middle section lacks the doubtful shadowing and tension trajectory that is necessary, even in a contemporary work, to fully capture the recapitulatory effect when the opening material inevitably returns.

The six *American Women* at hand were born between 1927 and 1969, and their biographies reveal a wide variety of backgrounds and interests. Listeners who favor a potpourri of styles and mood pieces will most fully appreciate the late-twentieth-century idiom at play in *Modern Voices*. Those not averse to contemporary classical pieces will likely enjoy a core of the lineup, particularly the multi-movement pieces, thanks to Nancy Boston's artful conceptualization, preparation, and execution of these recent works.

John Winzenburg is an assistant professor of music at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta. Winzenburg has a DMA in orchestral conducting, as well as degrees in choral conducting and East Asian studies. He spent the 2004–5 school year on a Fulbright fellowship researching Chinese-Western fusion concertos in Beijing, and he has lived a total of nine years in Asia.

Woman's Work: Music for Solo Piano

Charlotte Mueller, piano. MSR Classics MS 1160 (2006)

NADINE SINE

Pianist Charlotte Mueller recorded her recital given on International Women's Day in Norway on March 8, 2005. The music—some of it rarely performed or recorded—spans 130 years, with works by seven women composers from four countries. The CD, *Woman's Work: Music for Solo Piano*, is consistently appealing and listenable without sacrificing substance.

Eskimos: Four Characteristic Pieces, op. 64, composed by Amy Beach in 1906, is a case in point. Although she had originally rejected Dvořák's 1893 suggestion encouraging American composers to adopt African-American and Native-American folk music to create a national style, Beach came around to his view and, beginning with *Eskimos*, made considerable use of monophonic tunes printed in Franz Boas's 1888 monograph, *The Central Eskimo*. In these four short pieces, virtually all of the melodic material is derived from eleven different Inuit tunes, which Beach "enhanced" through harmonization and modulations and by creating larger formal structures. While Beach intended *Eskimos* as teaching pieces, the reaction of the noted theorist, Percy Goetschius, who found them "exquisite, original, very striking indeed," perhaps encouraged her to include them on recitals. The folk songs contain many minor thirds, repeated notes, and a pentatonic flavor; Beach begins each piece (except "Exiles") with at least a partially unaccompanied statement of the borrowed tune. The composer creates a distinctive sense of place with a spare, yet highly chromatic, background.

Indeed, a sense of place comes through in nearly all of the pieces on the CD. Although Beach never felt comfortable quoting African American tunes, that music is duly represented by two African American women, Florence B. Price (1887–1953) and her student, Margaret Bonds (1913–72). While Price's fame rested on the 1933 groundbreaking performance of her symphony by the Chicago Symphony, the bulk of her work was in songs and arrangements of spirituals. In the preface to her 1953 *Dances in the Canebreaks*, Price remarked that they were "based on authentic Negro Rhythms." Lively, syncopated rhythms dominate these pieces, conjuring images of cakewalks in the sun-drenched south of the early twentieth century. By contrast, Margaret Bonds' *Troubled Water* presents a virtuosic treatment of the familiar spiritual, *Wade in the Water*. She combines varied harmonic treatment of the spiritual

in several keys with syncopation, thick chords, and pianistic flourishes.

There is no mistaking the French origin of the pieces by Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983) and Lili Boulanger (1893–1918). Both Tailleferre's *Romance* (1924) and the *Trois morceaux pour piano* (1914) by Boulanger begin quietly and end even more quietly. In *Romance*, Tailleferre wrote a lyric tune that seemingly comes out of thin air—it refuses to emphasize the downbeat—and never really ends but rather builds to a substantial climax in remote keys with constant rolling movement before dissolving into a reharmonized return of the opening. Perhaps significantly, the French pieces owe no debt to pre-existing melodies or rhythms. While all of the music on the CD is tonal, Boulanger's *Trois morceaux* contains the most daring harmonies, even though the pieces were written in 1914. "D'un jardin clair" is notated in B major, for instance, yet there is not a single root position B-major triad in the piece, including the last prolonged chord containing an added sixth. "D'un vieux jardin" barely clings to its C-sharp minor tonality.

Both the "Notturmo" and "März" (March) from *Das Jahr* by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel are clearly stamped with Hensel's German background. This is particularly true of "März" due to the inclusion of the familiar chorale "Christ ist erstanden" in a four-part setting, which is then developed into the pianistic and virtuosic climax of the movement. Both works—recorded multiple times—make considerable demands on the pianist.

The Norwegian composer Agathe Backer Grøndahl (1847–1907) studied with Hans von Bülow and Franz Liszt, so it is perhaps not surprising that her *Suite for Piano*, op. 20 (1887) sounds more Germanic than any other nationality. Both her playing and her compositions were much admired by George Bernard Shaw, who commented in 1889 that the piano compositions reminded him "strongly of Mendelssohn by their sensitiveness, their clear symmetrical form, and their perfect artistic economy" (liner notes). The *Suite*, with the exception of "Nocturne," clearly borrows from standard eighteenth-century dance types.

Charlotte Mueller's performances on *Woman's Work* are largely well-played with nuanced phrasing and rubatos. One might welcome more distinction between *piano* and *mezzo forte* in several pieces, and clean staccato playing and a real *sotto voce* where indicated in *Eskimos*. Likewise, greater emphasis on the chorale tune in the bass in "März" would help to clarify its structure. Mueller seems most comfortable with the French and German works and least at ease in Price's *Dances*.

Despite Shaw's high praise, Grøndahl's work is little known or recorded in the States, and Mueller's inclusion of it on this CD doubtless results from the location of the recital. Mueller has included brief notes on each piece, but since this reviewer found it impossible to locate a score for the Suite and since many of the other pieces are relatively rare, it is a pity that she did not indicate her sources. I append a list of the editions I located.

EDITIONS OF SCORES

- Beach, Mrs. H. H. A. *Eskimos: Four Characteristic Pieces*, op. 64. Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, 1943.
- Bonds, Margaret. *Troubled Water*. Edited by Helen Walker-Hill. Santa Barbara, CA: Sam Fox Publishing, 1967. Reprinted in *Black Women Composers: A Century of Piano Music (1893–1990)*. Bryn Mawr, PA: Hildegard Publishing, 1992.
- Boulanger, Lili. *Trois morceaux pour piano*. In *Women Composers: Music Through the Ages*, vol. 6. Edited by Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Schleifer. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.
- Grøndahl, Agathe Backer. *Suite for Piano*, op. 20. Christiania: Carl Warmuth, 1887. (unavailable)
- Hensel, Fanny Mendelssohn Bartholdy. *Notturmo in Ausgewählte Klavierwerke*. Edited by Fanny Kistner-Hensel. München: G. Henle Verlag, 1986.
- Hensel-Mendelssohn, Fanny. *März from Das Jahr*. Edited by Liana Serbescu and Barbara Heller, 2 vols. Kassel: Furore Edition, 1989. Revised edition based on a fair copy by Hensel. Edited by Barbara Gabler. Kassel: Furore Edition 138, 1998.
- Price, Florence B. *Dances in the Canebrakes in The Florence Price Collection*. Los Angeles: Affiliated Musicians, Inc., 1953.
- Tailleferre, Germaine. *Romance*. Paris: Éditions Max Eschig, 1924.

Nadine Sine teaches music history at Lehigh University, where she chaired a growing department for fourteen years. Her scholarly work is on turn-of-the-century topics: Mahler, Strauss, Schoenberg, and more recently Alma Mahler and Amy Beach. During this sabbatical year she also studied Bernstein's conducting scores of Mahler symphonies.

Tina Davidson

It is My Heart Singing

Works by Davidson performed by the Cassatt String Quartet and others. Albany Records, Troy 842 (2006)

JENNIFER BERNARD MERKOWITZ

If one were to imagine a heart singing, what would it sound like? Composer Tina Davidson, who has also released a disc entitled *I Hear the Mermaids Singing*, is attuned to such questions. Her most recent CD, *It is My Heart Singing*, is a collection of lyrical and energetic works that involve string quartet plus additional instruments.

The disc contains three compositions: the title track, a piece for piano quintet (rescored from the original string sextet); a quartet entitled *Delight of Angels*; and a work for triple string quartet (two recorded quartets plus one live quartet) called *Paper, Glass, String and Wood*. The Cassatt Quartet, an all-woman ensemble named for the American Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt, performs all of the works. The disc also features the performances of cellist Caroline Stinson and pianist Stephen Manes.

In the liner notes, Davidson says that “to sing of myself is to be visible and speak my truth.” In her music, she is deeply concerned with being true to herself and with writing music that has her own personal stamp. As a result, listening to this music feels somewhat like an intimate conversation with a good friend. Nothing is concealed; there is a sincerity and openness that can only come from a person who is truly comfortable with herself and her audience.

It is My Heart Singing was commissioned by the Wilmington Music Festival for the celebration of the Brahms centennial in 1997. Davidson writes that many of her works grow out of a single pitch, and this work is no exception. Beginning with a long sustained note that serves as a seed for everything that follows, the work pays homage to Brahms's spirit, clearly heard in the lush harmonies and undulating accompaniment. However, the work draws from other traditions as well. There is a moment that reminds me of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*, and the music also feels very cinematic at times in its treatment of tension and release. Davidson creates a stable yet dynamic texture from which beautiful lines emerge and fall back, gradually expanding outward and gathering momentum.

Delight of Angels and *Paper, Glass, String and Wood* were both commissioned by the Fleisher Art Memorial as part of Davidson's three-year residency between 1997 and 2000. *Delight of Angels* is meant to depict the continual joy and dancing of celestial beings. It is divided into two sections: the first is a song about “that ceaseless moment of being,” and the second depicts the “quiet rapture in the presence of the divine.” Delightful shifting accents, additive rhythms, groovy riffs, and blues-inflected solos punctuate the first section. The short motives on small pitch sets give one the image of angels flitting about in heaven. The second section has a vocal quality to it, alternating between active polyphony and still, chorale-like textures.

During her years at the Fleisher Art Memorial, Davidson created a Young Composers program to teach inner city children how to write music through instrument building, improvisation, and graphic notation. No doubt this

project was part of the inspiration to create *Paper, Glass, String and Wood*, which has an additional goal of enabling young and amateur musicians to play alongside the two pre-recorded Cassatt Quartets (on this recording, the Cassatt Quartet plays all twelve parts). The piece translates the classic elements of earth, air, fire, and water into the artistic materials of paper, glass, string, and wood. Davidson gives each element a spiritual character, associating paper with dreaming, glass with transparency and brittleness, string with weaving connections, and wood with building. While the programmatic associations are not always clear, one can sense the pensive, wistful quality in *Paper*, the fragility of *Glass* through its constant fleeing movement, the melodies weaving in and out and alternating with a folk-like love theme in *String*, and the solid rhythmic underpinning of *Wood*.

The players perform admirably throughout the CD. They possess the rhythmic accuracy necessary to execute Davidson's frequent metric shifts, but they also give the music an emotional intensity. Each player moves fluidly between the role of soloist and member of a dynamic organism. The recording quality is decent and each individual instrument can be heard very clearly. There is a bit of boominess in the low register at times (particularly during some loud chords in *It is My Heart Singing*), so the listener must take care that the oft-turned-on-and-forgotten-about bass boost is off in order to hear the disc at its best.

Davidson, a student of Henry Brant and Vivian Fine, makes her living as a composer mostly through residencies, commissions, and grants. As a result, her music is delightfully free of some of the issues faced by more "academic" composers. She is not afraid to burst forth with moments of unabashed tonality, nor is she hesitant to set up a rock-influenced ostinato or restrict her pitch material to a simple blues scale. The effect can be very poignant and powerful. My only complaint is that while these devices are refreshing upon first hearing, Davidson returns to them again and again. When listening to the whole disc at once, one finds connections between the pieces that might not be intentional and therefore undermine the unique beauty of each individual piece. For example, the end of *Delight of Angels* blends into the beginning of *Paper, Glass, String and Wood* as if it were one thought. On the other hand, Davidson's musical language is consistent and consistently hers, and that makes *It is My Heart Singing* a successful album worth a listen.

Jennifer Bernard Merkwowitz recently completed a DMA in composition at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. She is a visiting assistant professor of music at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Alexandra Gardner

Luminoso.

Innova Recordings CD 662 (2007)

ANNA RUBIN

Alexandra Gardner's CD, *Luminoso*, is comprised of six pieces, all of which are composed for a solo instrument with electronics. Featured instruments are guitar, saxophone, marimba, bass clarinet, alto flute, and trombone. This format allows Gardner to create a mini-concerto for each of the instruments. She is particularly fond of laying a melismatic solo on top of thickly-layered, electroacoustically-generated backgrounds, which may include subtly processed samples of the solo instrument itself. The prolific composer wrote these works between 2002 and 2004, during a two-year composer residency at the Institut Universitari L'Audiovisual/Phonos Foundation of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain.

Gardner composed *Luminoso*, for guitar and sampled sounds (2003), for guitarist Enrique Lop. The composer writes:

The guitar part combines flamenco and classical guitar techniques with percussive sonorities played on the body of the instrument. The electronic part of *Luminoso* is comprised entirely of acoustic guitar sounds, some of which are easily identifiable, and others of which have been processed into completely different forms using a variety of software tools (liner notes).

Gardner's language is a flexible mix of modal, tonal, and atonal elements. A quasi-improvisational quality and rubato rhythm pervade the work.

The soprano saxophone is featured in *Tourmaline*—a Roma or Eastern European element flavors the elaborate melodic ornamentation of the solo line. A mysterious thwack introduces the work and reappears at various points as a gesture that frames the lyrical saxophone; it also supplies an occasional pulse. Gardner builds up a dense background of long tones that thicken in close harmonies, only to resolve to unisons. Delicious tone bending and subtle microtonal inflections are supplied by the persuasive saxophonist, Xelo Giner.

In *Ayehli*, for marimba and electronics, Gardner often uses the soloist's repetitive motives against their delayed echoes—all of them awash in a kind of watery soup. Her rhythmic elaboration here is quite different from the earlier pieces and emphasizes pulse and jazzy syncopation. Commissioned by Paul Cox, the work is performed on this recording by the accomplished Robert Armengol.

Onice was written for the acclaimed Dutch bass clarinetist Harry Sparnaay. The composer writes about the Spanish title: “Traditionally the stone called onyx is believed to absorb and transform negative energy—to help bring us into contact with our actual realities by assisting in the gradual release of all that is not in harmony with our present lives.” In the first part of this work, the clarinetist has a very acrobatic part with almost constant motion against an agitated, noise-inflected background replete with cicada-like chirpings. The piece attains serenity with gorgeous multiphonics and thick harmonies but concludes in an up-tempo mood.

Snapdragon, for trombone and sampled sounds, was written for Monique Buzzarté, longtime IAWM member and in 2007 selected as one of eight “soloist champions” by Meet the Composer in honor of her long and distinguished record of commissioning and performing new works. Some of the delights of this piece include an entrancing rhythmic background against which Buzzarté coaxes a huge variety of timbres out of the trombone. Later in the work, water sounds and excavation-like noises alternate with mysterious pulses. A tender lyricism closes the piece.

The final work on the album is *New Skin* (2003–4), “a sunrise meditation” for alto flute and computer written for flutist Barbara Held. The composer has combined a variety of location recordings at dawn and brings to the work her desire to evoke a ritualistic sense of “respect and thankfulness.” She describes the flute part as a structured improvisation. We hear again the composer’s love of both watery backgrounds and thick sampled textures against which the soloist weaves a sinuous and soothing journey. The last work is the most peaceful and gentle of the album and a fitting conclusion to a beautiful collection of virtuosic music-making marked by Gardner’s sensitivity to texture and timbre.

Anna Rubin’s music has been heard on four continents, and recently her works have been performed in Berlin, Chicago, and New Delhi. She composes for acoustic and electroacoustic media and is an associate professor of music at University of Maryland/Baltimore County.

Luisa Indovini Beretta

Duende: Opere per Chitarra e Flauto.

Maria Vittoria Jedlowski and Claudio Ballabio, guitar;
Rose-Marie Soncini, flute. Casa Musicale Eco (www.casa-musicaleeco.com) (2006)

CINDY COX

These “dark sounds” are the mystery, the roots thrusting into the fertile loam known to all of us, ignored by all of us, but

from which we get what is real in art. . . . [A]ll the Arts are capable of possessing duende, but naturally the field is widest in music, in dance, and in spoken poetry, because they require a living body as interpreter—they are forms that arise and die ceaselessly, and are defined by an exact present.

—Frederico García Lorca, “Theory of Function of the Duende,” in *Poetics of the New American Poetry*.

This excerpt from an incandescent Federico García Lorca essay attempts to define the *duende*, a term for the ultimately indefinable but always perceptible passion, soul, and humanity in art, which Lorca maintains one recognizes when one encounters it. Luisa Indovini Beretta selected *Duende* as the title of a new CD featuring recent works for guitars and flute. An Italian composer trained in piano and guitar, Beretta began her career in poetry and painting, and more recently she has moved on to music in an attempt, as she puts it, to “paint her musical spaces.” Beretta’s musical language is reminiscent of the modal, jazz-inspired populists Gershwin and Barber, and although her music is not innovative, it is pleasant and well constructed. Throughout the CD, her works are sensitively and expressively performed by two ensembles: *Duende*, a guitar and flute duo and *Les Divertissements*, a guitar duo.

Suite in Jazz, performed by *Les Divertissements*, is the CD’s strongest work and is perhaps a conscious allusion to the *Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano* by the celebrated French jazz pianist, Claude Bolling. The duo’s name captures the spirit of this four-movement work—diverting, swinging, bright, and engaging. The first movement, “Improvisation One,” begins in a moderate tempo with antiphonal statements between the two guitarists and continues in a sweetly modal and jazz-inflected manner. “Rag,” “Improvisation Two,” and “Blues” complete the composition, each with its unique musical identity.

The concept of musical crossover is made manifest in *Fusion*, for flute and guitar duo, with styles and titles ranging from the classical *Impromptu* to *The Blues*. The work opens with the guitar playing in both modal and pentatonic modes. Apart from some flutter-tonguing, the writing is quite contained and conservative in range and registration. The five-movement *Schizzi* for solo guitar begins slowly with contrasting major, minor, and modal chords. The poignant mood and gentle character of the opening movement permeate the entire work.

The most serious work on the CD is the four-movement *Duende* (alto flute and guitar, dedicated to Duo *Duende*). Although weaker compositionally (it flits around without settling on any substantial musical idea) and a bit darker than the other works, it serves as a good foil to the lighter *Suite in Jazz*. “Preludio” begins in a rather stiff manner with rhetorical flute statements answered by the guitar in shifting modal and major keys. The work continues with

darting musical material and remains in this character through the rest of the movements. The exception is the last movement, “Danza,” which alternates engaging percussive guitar strikes with fast flute riffs. Brief jazz allusions often appear over the course of the entire piece, but the overall sense is much more controlled and reserved than the music of *Suite in Jazz*.

The two remaining works are *Hildegard*, a two-movement, modal work for solo guitar dedicated to guitarist Jedlowski and inspired by the visionary abbess, and *Tre Improvisi* for Les Divertissements, a three movement work that is a tribute to jazz guitarist Joe Pass in the middle movement. In my opinion, Beretta’s compositions do not exhibit Lorca’s concept of *duende*; they are simply too cautious and cleanly articulated. They are, however, well-crafted, enjoyable pieces that are excellently performed and recorded. With time, Beretta’s vision of unifying painting, poetry, and music may lead her into a deeper, more sophisticated musical language and experimental means of expression.

Radical, traditional, original, archetypal—neither modernist nor neotonal, Cindy Cox derives her “post-tonal” musical language from acoustics, innovations in technology, harmonic resonance, and poetic allusion. Her music is recorded on the Albany (forthcoming), Capstone, CRI, Arpa Viva, Mark, and Valve-Hearts of Cologne labels. She is professor of music at the University of California at Berkeley, and her music may be accessed at www.cacox.com.

Beata Moon

Beata Moon, piano. Naxos CD 8.570347 (2007)

MARY KATHLEEN ERNST

Thirty-eight-year-old Beata Moon is an accomplished pianist and emerging composer whose piano works from 1996 to 2006 are included in a newly released CD entitled *Beata Moon*. Based in New York City, Moon, a Korean American, trained at the Juilliard School under international teaching icon Adele Marcus and is currently a teaching artist at the Lincoln Center Institute. In her fifteen-year composition career, the self-taught composer has written for voice, piano, and chamber ensemble. Moon’s compositional style is eclectic. She combines small musical ideas in collage fashion without much formal development, sporting references to many of the late, great Romantic and contemporary composers. Moon uses sound in a pictorial way, much as Debussy did in his Preludes. As a result, her music can sometimes sound derivative.

The centerpiece of the CD, the seventeen-minute Piano Sonata (2006) in four movements, showcases her

melting-pot style and her significant talents as a pianist. The opening chords of the lengthy *maestoso* movement are reminiscent of the famous *grave* introduction to Beethoven’s “Pathétique” Sonata. But the music slips into a section of Debussy-esque *ostinato*, morphs into a jazzy passage à la Bernstein, then bursts into resonant chords recalling the opening of the Sonata. The second movement, “Easygoing,” has the programmatic nature of a contemporary film score. Employing a charming *ostinato* pattern, it seems to evoke a stroll down a quiet street. “Placid” takes quiet, Copland-inspired chords through interesting harmonic territory, but the movement is overlong with sentiment and repetitive motives. “Robust” opens with a lively but stunted bass tune juxtaposed with declamatory parallel octaves in the treble. The basso *ostinato* that follows resembles *moto perpetuo* style, but the simple counterpoint weakens the ending.

Submerged (1999) is a short, atmospheric piece with a calm, slow-moving *ostinato* at its core, sprinkled with short glissando effects. Moon is at her best in concise works like *Toccata* (2000), a fast, intense piece interspersed with sparkling glissandi that melt into short episodes of calm. Repeated machine-gun-like staccatos, fast changing rhythms, and sudden, shimmering pianissimos are well executed by the pianist-composer. Another beautifully-shaped and colored gem is “Sub (conscious) Way” from *Transit* (1999), a suite depicting New York City life. *Ode* (1998), composed in admiration of Debussy, is infused with East Asian-inspired motives and harmonies and lively descending cascades of sound.

Creating a lesser impact, *Guernica* (2003) displays Moon’s compositional bent toward short motives and driving rhythms as well as her ability as a pianist to play rapid, articulated runs and to quickly switch gears to warm, cantabile playing. The work has Broadway show appeal—its catchy tune grabs the listener instantly only to digress into an unrelated style with a vague development of the opening theme. Other works possess theatrical qualities but do not quite stand on their own as solo works. “Zo,” the snappy, energetic finale of *Inter-Mez-Zo* (2006), cries out for staging, dialogue, and lyrics. Moon has a gift for this type of composition, and it makes sense that she has been garnering commissions from dance troupes like SENSEDANCE. The inclusion of *Nursery* (1996) and *The Secret* (2005) on the CD seems redundant, since they stem from the same opening chord as the “Placid” movement from the Sonata. The last work on this recording is *Prelude* (1996), a four-minute piece combining a short, flowing bass motive repeated in rhythmic combinations of four, five, six, and seven notes, with a contrasting four-note motive above. The two musical elements are pleasant but would be more effective if the work were shorter.

Throughout this CD, the composer makes extensive use of repetitive material, rather simple imitation, interesting musical thoughts that seem to call for further development, and ostinato as a core musical idea. One hopes that Moon, who is gifted as both a performer and composer, will cultivate a more distinctive voice that encompasses greater cohesiveness and development of musical ideas.

Mary Kathleen Ernst is a pianist specializing in performances internationally of music by American composers. She has served on the faculties of the University of Virginia and Shepherd University in West Virginia. Her CD *Two By Three* features music by women.

American Women Composers

Piano music by Flana Sandra Cotton, Mary Jeanne van Appledorn, Hillary Tann, and Binnette Lipper. Max Lifchitz, piano. North/South Recordings N/S R 1043 (2006)

CHARLOTTE MUELLER

American Women Composers is a stunning collection of piano pieces by four living American woman composers. Pianist Max Lifchitz captures the essence of each composer's style with sensitivity and power of expression. He was inspired to make this recording by the favorable response of live audiences to these pieces.

The styles of the four composers contrast, yet this collection benefits from a delightful balance among the works. Flana Sandra Cotton's *Music for Midwinter* brings into play a combination of Eastern and other modalities with Western musical structures and conventions. The richness of her sonorities, the rhythmic layering of groups of five and four in meter and phrasing, and the interplay of modal melodies are very appealing in this five-movement work. Lifchitz demonstrates his capacity for expression in a full range of tone color and subtle nuance. His timing is exquisite.

Mary Jeanne van Appledorn's *Fantasie*, a short but compelling work, provides the listener with a colorful palette of sounds via her use of the octatonic and whole-tone scales. A quasi-improvisatory piece, it is structured in rondo form with a refrain built around two dynamic chords. It is the most dissonant work in the collection and is so captivating that the listener wishes it were longer.

The third work, *Light from the Cliffs* by Hillary Tann, is inspired by the Welsh landscape of the composer's early home as well as her love of nature and folksongs of the Adirondacks. She shows her fondness, too, for the music of Japan in her clever use of the pentatonic scale.

Binnette Lipper's work is represented by two compositions: *Sonata for Piano no. 3*, a three-movement work in contrasting but interrelated movements, and *Bagatelles for Piano*, a delightful set of seven pieces. Pianist Lifchitz's mastery of line and subtle nuance matches well with Lipper's technique of building long lines on ever-expanding and developing motivic cells. While both works are striking, the color and range of expressivity and musical ideas of the *Bagatelles* make this a composition the listener wants to return to time and time again. Each of the movements is unique, and each is an expressive stepping stone in the development toward the work's climactic finale entitled "Adventure." *American Women Composers* is a recording that should not be missed.

Dr. Charlotte Mueller heads the piano program at Lee College in Baytown, Texas. She appears as guest clinician at colleges and universities giving lectures and recitals as an advocate for the recognition and understanding of music by women composers.

La Musica

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Music and a Surprise

Carol Plantamura, soprano; Jürgen Hübscher, lute, archlute, Spanish Baroque guitar; Beverley Lauridsen, viola da gamba; Julie Kabat, soprano, glass harmonium, saw; Ben Hudson, violin. Leonarda Productions LE 350 (2005)

WENDY SUITER

La Musica, a compilation of early Baroque Italian songs, is especially significant for its inclusion of music by women: Barbara Strozzi, Francesca Caccini, Settimia Caccini, and Francesca Campana. Together with the "Surprise" (six works by contemporary composer Julie Kabat), more than sixty percent of the music on this CD was composed by women. The liner notes provide biographies of the composers and details about each of the works. The song texts are reproduced in Italian alongside an English translation at the end of the liner notes, but including the texts in the main body of the program booklet would have been more useful.

Soprano Carol Plantamura has a rich voice with fine dynamic shading. Her skill in singing rapid passages seems effortless, with only rare lapses in pitch on a few high notes. She provides a dramatic delivery of the songs of heartbreak and pain, and she imbues the more jubilant songs with *joie de vivre*. The instrumental accompaniment is well executed, and the recording quality is excellent with

good balance between the voice and the instruments.

As one would expect from Baroque music, each of the songs in the collection reflects a single emotion. Sigismondo d'India's *La tra'l sangue*, on a very dramatic text about heartbreak, is slow and solemn, reflecting deep despair and sadness. In contrast, Francesca Campana's *Pargoletta*, about a butterfly, is highly melismatic with lively word painting. Barbara Strozzi's *Tradimento*, despite being about the betrayal of love, is a very animated piece that clearly expresses the agitation of the betrayed person.

Julie Kabat's *Five Poems by H. D.* (Hilda Doolittle) is very dramatic, employing word painting and other effects to underline the meaning of the text. The accompaniment by the glass harmonium provides a beautiful legato sound, gentle but insistent. This music incorporates expressive gestures similar to the Baroque works, even though it uses very different instruments, harmony, and techniques.

In Kabat's *Invocation in Centrifugal Form*, the final work on the CD, the composer sings a vocalise and nonsense syllables and accompanies herself on the glass harmonium. For me, the work seems inaccessible and does not have sufficient appeal to maintain interest.

The CD offers a worthwhile collection of early Baroque music by both female and male composers, but the similarities of its timbral world make listening for sheer aural pleasure a doubtful experience. The addition of music by Julie Kabat complements the earlier works by reflecting on Baroque compositional techniques. Yet understanding the relevance of this "Surprise" requires specialized knowledge, indicating that perhaps this CD would be better appreciated by musicians than a general audience.

Wendy Suiter is an Australian composer of both contemporary art music and computer music. She is interested in exploring how meaning is conveyed in music from the time of "the doctrine of affections," when the practice was acknowledged and codified, until the twenty-first century.

Teresa LeVelle *The Shadowlands.*

Mark Menzies, violin; Danilo Lozano, flute; David Dees, saxophone. Innova Recordings 659 (2006)

M. J. SUNNY ZANK

Teresa LeVelle has assembled an outstanding group of performers for this superbly recorded collection of

her work. Her compositions exhibit diverse influences including Native American Indian elements, the *shakuhachi* (a Japanese flute used in Zen ritual), and Webernesque compositional techniques. The composer currently teaches at Whittier College and has been a featured composer for workshops and symposiums, including the Midwest Composers' Symposium and the Yellow Barn Festival in Putney, Vermont.

Epitaph, the shortest of the works on the CD, delivers a powerfully emotional impact. Violinist Mark Menzies establishes the calm opening mood by playing with an exceptionally rich tone in the low register of the instrument.

LeVelle states that the work was written following the death of her mentor at Bowling Green State University, but the listener is not overwhelmed by grief as much as by a sense of starkness. In *The White Buffalo*, flutist Danilo Lozano evokes the quiet meditation, perhaps even wonderment associated with a Zen *shakuhachi* performance. The recorded sounds of wind and hint of drums create a soundscape of the open prairies.

LeVelle's title track, *Shadowlands*, a three-movement concerto for soprano saxophone and string quartet, is the most substantial work on the CD. The first movement begins with a cadenza that presents the materials to be used throughout the work. The second movement begins with the strings in a setting reminiscent of Ives' *The Unanswered Question*. The third movement is the most dissonant of the three, with the strings moving in parallel seconds at times. The saxophone presents a reflective, meditative cadenza mid-way through the movement. The pace slows briefly, the strings rejoin the soloist, and all the instruments race to the end of the composition.

LeVelle composes in a genre with a broad appeal for those seeking works evocative of Native American and world music. Her classical training is evident, and her music offers moments of great beauty, while avoiding an overly-popular style. Although each piece is well-composed, the album as a whole displays only one aspect of the composer's style. One would like to have heard a broader spectrum of compositional techniques, instrumentation, and structures.

M. J. Sunny Zank is professor of music at Ohio Northern University, where she teaches music theory, composition, and several courses in world music.