

**FANFARE** scheduled for the January, 2018 issue      **Collections: Ensemble**

**MUSIC HERE AND NOW** • Society for New Music • INNOVA 970 (2 CDs: 128:37)

**ROB DEEMER** *Cantos*. **RICARDO ZOHM-MULDOON** *Jácaras*. **GREGORY WANAMAKER** *Music from "A Story Within a Story"*. **ZHOU TIAN** *Morning After the Deluge*. **JORGE VILLAVICENCIO GROSSMANN** *Whistling Vessels*. **MICHAEL WOODS** *Libations*. **MARK OLIVIERI** *Stress Test*

The Society for New Music, based in Syracuse New York, is an advocacy organization for new music by composers working in the Central New York region. Founded in 1971, it commissions, performs, and records new compositions, using musicians from the region. Committed to music education, it maintain a strong presence in the public schools of the area and even offers seats on its community-reflective governing board to high school and college composers. It is an organization with an impressive list of programs and accomplishments, including a series of recordings highlighting the Society's work, of which this is the fourth on Innova Records.

Innova's two-CD release offers an eclectic mix of chamber works by seven composers, none of whom are new to silver disc. All of the composers have impressive vitae and all have—or had at the time of the commission—academic appointments at upstate New York colleges and universities. Like any such venture, the results vary in distinction and in the ability to engage the listener—this one, at least—but all are solid and professional. Most are much better than that.

A couple of the works are tied to multimedia projects. Experienced film composer Rob Deemer's *Cantos* (2012) is the audio component of a film project with Courtney Rile in which the production of images and music was collaborative from the start. It shows, for while the three continuous movements—"Hammer," "String," and "Wind"—effectively support Riles images in samples on YouTube, the powerful, quirky, and often exquisite music stands very well on its own. The other such work is *Music from "A Story Within a Story"* (2011) by Gregory Wanamaker, a composer whose music I have admired before. It is powerfully apposite in the context of visual artist Carrie Mae Weems's 2012 civil rights video *The Madding Crowd*—also on YouTube—with its strong images and clips of dialog. I suspect it works equally well with the dance segments of the larger work. It has been revised to stand alone—actually with a dancer in live performance—and it is evocative and often quite lovely. Shorn of images, sound design, words, and movement, however, its spans of atmospheric stasis cannot command attention commensurate with its 42-minute length. Ironically, its most compelling segment, "Memorials," seems to take its stylistic cue from Philip Glass scores.

I occasionally found the same issue with Mark Olivieri's *Concertino: Stress Test* (2010), a work not associated with film, but rather one which fuses pop styles and gestures into classical forms. There are touching but too ruminative tributes to his father and mother in the second and fourth of the four movements, but even in the rock-infused "Glossolalia" that opens the work and jazzy "Hyperactive Sofa" which stands third, the musical density and imagination were inadequate to the nearly 27 minute length.

Much more compelling is Mexican-born composer Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon's *Jácaras* (2006), a set of variations, contrapuntally spellbinding and full of color and movement. It is based on an earlier song cycle and conjures up a diversity of folk music from Mexico. (It is the one work here not originally commissioned by the Society.) Equally captivating is Chinese-born

Zhou Tian's *Morning After the Deluge* (2014), a powerful response to William Turner's Romantic, proto-Impressionistic painting *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*. Zhou Tian acknowledges inspiration from Chinese folk dance, but the warm, melodic score—never saccharine—is often reminiscent of mid-20th-century American populist music, as well. Delightful. So, too, is Jorge Villavicencio Grossmann's uneasy and haunting *Whistling Vessels* (2013), with a trio of the ancient Inca instruments of the title—ocarina-like—adding a remarkable cloud of dissonance and primitive color. Finally, “Doctuh” Mike Woods's heady and upbeat *Libations* (2010) for jazz combo of piano, violin, bass, and two percussion is spirited and virtuosic. It combines written-out solos for violin and vibraphone with improvisations for piano and bass, the last played by the composer and accompanied by his trademark unison scat singing.

Cynthia Johnson Turner, then at Cornell, but now at the University of Georgia, conducts the more involved scores with ensembles of six to 11: the Deemer, Wanamaker, and Olivieri. Grossmann conducts his own work. The piano trio in the Zohn-Muldoon, the string quartet with piano and clarinet in the Zhou, and the Woods jazz combo are conductorless. The program insert includes lists of the fine musicians involved, composer profiles, work notes, and a well-deserved bio and appreciation of James S. Abbott, who provided the excellent production work for all but one of the pieces, recorded in various venues in up-state New York between 2008 and 2015. My only complaint about presentation is the cardstock gatefold carrier, which I hate. Otherwise, those who have followed earlier releases by the Society for New Music will need no encouragement to try this new release. Others are encouraged to give this attractive selection of new works a listen. **Ronald E. Grames**