

Jeu des portraits. Music of Ana Sokolovic. Toronto: Centrediscs CMCCD 11406, 2006. 1 compact disc (53 :59). \$17.99. Ensemble contemporain de Montréal, Véronique Lacroix, conductor. Contents: *Ciaccona* (13:26)—*Jeu des portraits* (12:35) —*Cinq locomotives et quelques animaux* (12:56) —*Géométric sentimentale* (14:54).

Ana Sokolovic's exceptional talent was recognized immediately upon her arrival in Canada from Yugoslavia in 1992. In the period since, she has received numerous commissions from ensembles and orchestras, as well as prizes at the SOCAN Young Composer's Competition and the CBC/Radio-Canada National Competition for Young Composers. She is much admired in Quebec, especially in Montreal, where she resides and collaborates with prominent musicians of today.

One such musician is Véronique Lacroix, the energetic and gifted conductor of the Ensemble Contemporaine de Montréal. Founded by Lacroix in 1987, the ECM has been the Ensemble in Residence at the Conservatoire de musique de Montréal since 1995. A leading exponent of new music, the ECM has commissioned and performed 115 works by young Canadian composers. With this new CD, the first to be devoted exclusively to Sokolovic's music, the Ensemble's skills are well displayed.

The CD contains four of Sokolovic's works: *Ciaccona*, *Jeu des portraits*, *Cinq locomotives et quelques animaux*, and *Géométric sentimentale*, all composed between 1996-2002. The first piece, *Ciaccona* (2002), is a one-movement chaconne for seven instruments. The rhythms are somewhat reminiscent of the Dutch composer, Louis Andriessen, especially in their constant beat, repeated notes, and motives in loop. However,

Ciaccona is more delicate and less aggressive than Andriessen, with a good sense of detail woven into the texture.

The second piece, *Jeu des portraits* (1996), written for ten instruments, has four movements that pay tribute to Canadian composers. "I have not tried to make a pastiche of their language," writes Sokolovic in the liner notes. "Rather I have tried to show, with my own cultural baggage and through the filter of my own sensibility, the different impressions that their music suggests to me and evokes in my imagination." While some of the harmonic material of "*Vagues—Homage to Rodolphe Mathieu*" is drawn from Mathieu's Three Preludes for piano, the calm mood is evocative of the "sacred minimalism" of Aarvo Pärt.¹ The rhythmic, bouncy second movement, "*Vents—Homage to Jean Papineau-Couture*," is reminiscent again of Andriessen. "*Plages—Homage to Serge Garant*" suggests Garant in terms of its use of a moving cluster with pointillistic materials in the percussion and piano parts. However, with Sokolovic (and unlike Garant), the irregularity of the pointillist music becomes rhythmic and stable. The fourth movement, "*Chants—Homage to Claude Vivier*," shows the color treatment typical of Vivier, who was known for his interest in the music of Bali. Towards the end, however, the piece returns to the constant repetitive rhythm apparent in Andriessen.

¹In the English liner notes, "homage" is misspelled as "hommage."

The third piece, *Cinq locomotives et quelques animaux* (1996), is a one-movement work for eight instruments. This is the most theatrical piece on the album. It vividly conveys some theatrical images, as well as “a country, half-real, half-imaginary,” according to the notes. In my opinion, the piece is less impressive than the others on the recording because of its rather literal evocation of animals and locomotives, sounding a bit like children’s music.

The fourth piece, *Géométric sentimentale* (1997), is in three movements: “Triangle,” “Cercle” (circle), and “Carré” (square). In her liner notes, Sokolovic says the piece is influenced by a William Faulkner novel in which three witnesses recount a single story. “Triangle” portrays beautiful instrumental color and effects, sometimes mixed with a collage of different elements. The second movement, “Cercle,” is eurhythmic and calm. Compared to “Vents” (the second movement of *Jeu des portraits*), it is written in simple minimalist language. Finally, “Carré” exhibits a more characteristic animated rhythmic texture,

seemingly blended with musical quotations from other composers, with the piano predominating.

Overall, I find this album is very convincing. Most of the performances are precise and energetic. The quality of the recording is excellent. Even the last piece, *Géométric sentimentale*, despite being recorded live in-concert, is of good quality. Although it might have been interesting to include other instrumental combinations or even solo pieces on the album, *Jeu des portraits* is, nonetheless, a good portrait of the composer. The cover is appealing, and Sokolovic’s program notes are quite helpful with respect to the background and inspiration of each composition. The liner notes are in French and English, with photos of the composer and the conductor during the recording session.

Jeu des portraits, which was produced jointly by Centrediscs and the CBC, is highly recommended for all Canadian music collections.

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