

Schafer, R. Murray. Three Solos. Performed by Bradyworks. CMC Centrediscs (CMCCD/DVD 12006)

Now well into his seventies, the internationally known R. Murray Schafer continues to be one of this country's most important composers of art music. Schafer's five decades of work has produced a prolific body of compositions, of which his eleven string quartets and ten-part music drama *Patria* are central. Incredibly, though, Schafer's compositional work is just one aspect of this multi-faceted artist, for his creative activities embrace such roles as dramatist, music educator, music journalist, musicologist, creative writer, and visual artist (the latter can be witnessed by the many illustrations placed in his scores). His numerous accolades include such important awards as the Canada Music Council's first Composer of the Year award (in 1977), the first Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music (again, in 1977); the 1985 Banff National Award in the Arts; and the first recipient of the \$50,000 triennial Glenn Gould Award (1987).

This latest addition to Schafer's ever expanding discography contains three solo compositions played by the Toronto-based ensemble Bradyworks. The opening work, *Music for the Morning of the World* (1970), is performed by the soprano Annie Tremblay; Tim Brady performs the guitar piece *Le Cri de Merlin* (1987); and *Deluxe Suite for Piano* (1995) is performed by Brigitte Poulin. The pieces provide a perspective of works from a period of twenty-five years. Further, the first two compositions also utilize electronics, illustrating another aspect of Schafer's art.

The compositional work on *Music for the Morning of the World* began following Schafer's visit to Turkey and Persia in 1969. Schafer notes that the piece bears a relationship with the orchestral work *Divan I Shams I Tabriz*, in that it is another piece influenced by the "mystic" nature of Schafer's experience in this region of the world. The thirty-four minute work is hauntingly beautiful; to my ears it strikes a perfect balance between Annie Tremblay's stunning vocal work and the accompanying electronic sounds. Unfortunately, Centrediscs saw fit to not publish the texts that Schafer used (a cost saving measure that this label frustratingly continues to practice), making it difficult to comment upon any text-music relationships that the composer may have employed in the work.

Schafer's inspiration for *Le cri de Merlin* was based upon his interest in the stories told of Merlin, the Wizard of King Arthur's court. The work's arresting opening gives way to a dizzying array of special effects, scalar passages, percussive attacks, beautiful melodic gestures and harmonics, all of which no doubt refer to, as Schafer comments in his program notes, the magician's ability to "transform himself into any form he wished: dwarf, greyhound, stag or damsel." An interesting feature of *Le cri* is its ending. Here Schafer requests that the guitarist include a soundtrack of native birds in his/her performance, thereby evoking an unusual quality to the piece. Simply put, Brady's

performance of the composition is incredible; he handles even the most extreme finger-numbing passages with absolute aplomb.

The final work on the CD is the *Deluxe Suite* for piano. Written for the Canadian pianist Janina Fialkowska, the one-movement composition is comprised of several divergent sections and moods. The virtuosic demands are extreme, and Poulin is in absolute control of the piece at every moment, creating an on-the-edge-of-your-seat listening experience. Yet despite the attractive features of the composition—and there are many—its narrative and harmonic language are the most conventional of the three compositions on this recording. My comment is not meant so much as a criticism of the piece, but perhaps as a means to explain why I find it marginally less interesting than the other two compositions.

The three performances on the CD are all outstanding; in fact, I would find it difficult to imagine finding more committed performances elsewhere. The caveat is whether one prefers *Le cri de Merlin* on the originally intended acoustic classical guitar or Brady's electric version. The work was originally written for guitarist Norbert Kraft, and his recording of the work is available on the Chandos label, for comparison.

The sound quality, clarity and ambience all meet the excellent standard of current CMC Centredisc releases. The program notes by the composer are first rate.

Finally, I should note that this release contains two formats: a standard CD and a DVD that is a 24 bit, 48Khz mix of the included CD (the DVD can be listened in both Surround 5.1 and Stereo).

This is an important release by one of Canada's most important voices. Very strongly recommended.

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