

Night Chill. Catherine Meunier, marimba. Toronto: Centrediscs, 2009. 1 compact disc (58:44). CMC CD 15109. Contents: *Night chill* / Christien Ledroit (10:58) – *Essai sur la séduction* / Nicolas Gilbert (with Louis-Philippe Marsolais, horn) (6:25) – *The Riff* / Andrew Paul MacDonald (10:20) – *Song of the soul* / Paul Frehner (with D’Arcy Philip Gray, vibraphone and marimba) (4:09) – *diastemas [2005-1]* / alcides lanza (9:08) – *Hésitations* / Nicolas Gilbert (5:03) – *The Illuminations of Gutenberg* / Andrew Paul MacDonald (with D’Arcy Philip Gray, marimba) (12:41). \$17.98

Catherine Meunier has become a fixture on the Canadian new music scene over the past decade. On her first solo CD, *Night Chill*, the Sherbrooke-born percussionist includes seven works written between 2003 and 2006. Six of them were commissioned and premiered by Meunier.

One of the notable features of the CD is its focus on young composers. Four of the tracks are by three composers born in the 1970s: Paul Frehner (b. 1970), Christien Ledroit (b. 1975) and Nicolas Gilbert (b. 1979). The title track by Ledroit is for marimba and tape. In the liner notes, the composer states that “the music has a general sense of autumn in its textures, harmonies and rhythms.” While one can certainly hear the sounds of rustling leaves (especially in the electronic sounds) and the mysteries of cool nights in *Night Chill*, Ledroit’s vision of autumn bears no resemblance to the autumnal vision of, say, Brahms’s late works. Instead, this delightful piece is lively, light-hearted and at times humorous.

Frehner’s *Song of the Soul* is essentially a song without words. In section A of this ternary form, the vibraphone plays a beautiful melody to the accompaniment of the marimba. In section B, both players play contrasting material on marimbas.

Gilbert is represented on the album by two short programmatic pieces. While *Hésitations* for solo marimba did not leave a strong impression, *Essai sur la séduction* for marimba and horn is quite effective. The instruments—which have little to do with one another at the outset—gradually come together through the act of seduction.

The only work on the CD that was not commissioned by Meunier is *diastemas [2005-1]* for marimba and tape by longtime McGill professor alcides lanza (b. 1929). In this piece, the marimba plays a variety of riffs—some that alternate between just two notes, some with uneven meters, some that sound minimalist, and one that around the three-minute mark seems to reference the tangos of Piazzolla—to the accompaniment of computer-manipulated marimba sounds. Based upon improvisations by Gina Ryan (who commissioned the work), the tape part stays in the background at first, but becomes a stronger partner and more timbrally diverse as the work proceeds. *diastemas* is a fascinating travelogue of styles.

Melodic fragments are first put together and then deconstructed in *The Riff*, by Andrew Paul MacDonald (b. 1958). This showpiece is often exhilarating, but I found it ran slightly overlong. The other MacDonald work on the CD, *The Illuminations of Gutenberg* for two marimbas, has a richer harmonic palette and greater rhythmic interest. Inspired by Marshall McLuhan’s *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, the work not only imitates the mechanical pounding of a printing press, but

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also “illuminates” the transformative influence of Gutenberg’s invention on learning and technological advancement. With its unexpected starts, stops and turns, this playful track is one of the highlights of the CD.

Meunier and her collaborators, D’Arcy Philip Gray and Louis-Philippe Marsolais, are all virtuosos who play with passion and conviction. I hope we will hear more from them in the near future. This recording is highly recommended.

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