

3 Concerti. Christina Petrowska-Quilico, piano; with various orchestras and conductors. Toronto: Centrediscs CMCCD-15610, 2010. 1 compact disc (71:25). Contents: *Concerto for piano and orchestra* / Alexina Louie (32:02) – *Piano concerto no. 1 for piano and orchestra* / Violet Archer (18:32) – *Piano concerto* / Larysa Kuzmenko (20:51). \$17.98

Christina Petrowska-Quilico is one of Canada's most celebrated pianists. Although her repertoire is broad and extensive—from Bach to the present day—she has truly distinguished herself in her passionate advocacy of the music of our time. Petrowska-Quilico has premiered sixteen piano concertos and over one hundred new compositions. The composers she has championed are a “who's who” of Canadian art music. Her dedication was recognized in 2007, when the Canadian Music Centre and the Canadian League of Composers honoured her with the prestigious Friends of Canadian Music award.

Petrowska-Quilico's latest recording contains piano concertos by three Canadian composers—Violet Archer, Larysa Kuzmenko and Alexina Louie. As the pianist notes in the CD booklet, the idea for the recording came from a Gender and Performance course she taught at York University. She writes that, “I wanted the students to hear the brilliance of Canadian women composers, especially in live performance.” None of these works have been commercially released before, nor are the performances new. Rather they are broadcast performances from the past for such CBC radio programs as “In Performance” and “Two New Hours.” Given the quality of all three pieces and the stature of the composers, the disc is an essential purchase for all music libraries.

The first work on the disc is Louie's Concerto from 1984. The piece was a CBC commission written for Robert Silverman, who premiered the work with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Simon Streatfield, in February 1985. The present recording dates from 21 June 1986, with Alex Pauk conducting the National Arts Centre Orchestra. The Concerto is in the traditional three movement format of fast-slow-fast. The first movement is itself a type of ternary design: the arresting, aggressive opening gives way to the more lyrical, subdued middle section. The second movement is also a ternary design: the contemplative and atmospheric opening gradually develops into the thrilling tutti in the middle, only to return to the subdued nature of the opening. The final movement, cast in theme and variations form, is energetic and sparkling. Along with the bravura piano writing, the extensive use of percussion instruments such as the glockenspiel and crotales contribute to the movement's brightness.

Violet Archer's Concerto dates from 1956 and is the result of a residency project while at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire. The work was premiered in 1958 by pianist William Stevens with the CBC Orchestra; Victor Feldbrill conducted the performance. The present recording was recorded on 13 November 1981; John Eliot Gardner conducted the CBC Vancouver Orchestra. Like Louie's work, Archer's Concerto is written in three movements. However, where Ravel's influence is found in Louie's Concerto (particularly in the

second and third movements), Bartók is the spiritual figure behind Archer's composition. Neoclassicism is a hallmark of Archer's style and this Concerto is a textbook example. The first movement is a straightforward sonata design, complete with an invigorating, propulsive first theme that contrasts with the subdued and lyrical subordinate theme. The second movement is an attractive arch-design. It opens with the solo piano and orchestra in dialogue. The plaintive, hymn-like material gradually develops to the soaring and lengthy melodic lines played by the strings. The opening dialogue returns, bringing the movement to a gentle repose. The final movement is, like the first, a sonata. Here the thematic contrast is more rhythmic in nature, where the propulsive opening theme gives way to a scherzando subordinate theme.

Larysa Kuzmenko's Concerto is the only one on the recording that was specifically written for Petrowska-Quilico. The composition was premiered by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra with Bramwell Tovey, conductor, on 23 January 1996. A revised version of the piece was performed with the Toronto Symphony, conducted by Jukka Pekka Saraste, on 10 October 1996; it is this version that appears on the disc.

The first movement, marked "Preludio con Cadenza," is a type of rondo: the refrain is a piano and orchestra dialogue that contrasts with two solo piano cadenzas. The second movement is a theme with four variations—although an arch design, one based on texture, correlates with these variations. For instance, the opening theme is peaceful and ethereal; the material in the first two variations becomes gradually more animated in character, leading to the dark and ominous third variation; variation four and the short coda gradually return to the tranquil restfulness of the opening. Movement three, marked "Toccata," is simply high octane energy from beginning to end. The first theme is a barbaric, propulsive dialogue between the orchestra and soloist. The subordinate theme is also aggressive, with the orchestra taking a supportive role for the piano's melodic material. Like the other two works, a spiritual influence is felt throughout—Shostakovich, in this case, particularly in the piano writing.

Petrowska-Quilico's playing is nothing less than stunning, and the three orchestras give first-rate performances under their respective conductors, negotiating difficult and, at times, virtuosic music. An unfortunate weakness is the quality of the recording in Archer's work. An inexplicable reverb in the piano seriously mars the enjoyment of this composition that, in the words of Kenneth Winters (quoted in the CD booklet), "leaves the listener appalled that a work of this calibre should be played so seldom." The informative booklet in French and English contains valuable details about the composers, works and conductors.

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