

**Wild Bird.** Toronto: Centrediscs, CMCCD 16110, 2010. 1 compact disc (66:50). Performers: Duo Concertante (Nancy Dahn, violin; Timothy Steeves, piano), with Barbara Budd, narrator. Contents: *Duo for Violin and Piano* / R. Murray Schafer (17:22) – *Late in a Slow Time* / Chan Ka Nin (29:56) – *Supernatural Love* / Kati Agócs (11:14) – *Wild Bird* / R. Murray Schafer (8:40). \$13.98.

This is the fifth recording by the Duo Concertante ensemble, and the second that features all-Canadian composers. Although widely different in style, the works on this disc are all admirable additions to the contemporary violin and piano literature that warrant repeated listening, and the performances are first-rate; this disc is a rare find, and deserves widespread attention.

The disc opens with Schafer's *Duo*, a work in three movements. The tonally rooted harmony and warm lyricism make this piece immediately accessible, as do the allusions to Brahms and to Romanian folk music. Arch shapes in the structure are clearly audible, and they provide a unity that is satisfying.

*Late in a Slow Time*, by Chan Ka Nin, is a fascinating seven-movement work, interwoven with the poetry of Carole Glasser Langille and narrated by the renowned broadcaster, Barbara Budd. There are striking contrasts in style that reflect the mood and imagery of the poems, with percussive sounds, vocal interjections by the musicians, and other colouristic effects. At times the music is in dialogue with the narration (as in "The Quiet in Vermeer") and at times is in unison with it (as in "Not in the Warm Earth"). One particular poem, "Phone Survey," is a tour-de-force of colouristic effects, with electronic voice modification, dissonant interjections by the violin and piano, and nonsense syllables in the text. Much of the poetry is dark in mood, and the musical writing always leaves the text in the forefront. Budd not only recites the poetry, but she provides characterization that gives the story-telling nature of these poems a vibrant and entrancing quality.

*Supernatural Love* by Agócs is a three-movement work, played without breaks; its more dissonant harmony stands out in contrast to the other compositions on the disc. The opening *Spectral* paints a bleak mood which, despite what the title might suggest, is extended into the middle *Open and Warm* movement. The finale, "With a Spirit of Emancipation," is reminiscent of some of the colouristic writing of Messiaen.

The disc comes around full circle to close with Schafer's *Wild Bird*, a work originally for harp and violin, masterfully transcribed for piano by the pianist Steeves. Written as a tribute to violinist Jacques Israelievitch, it is intended as a showpiece for the violin and, as such, makes virtuosic technical demands throughout. The writing is more dissonant and strident than in *Duo*, but much of the same sense of structural tightness holds the work firmly together.

The performances on this disc are immensely praiseworthy. Both Dahn and Steeves have outstanding command technically and musically, and the tight quality of the ensemble playing speaks to years of successful collaboration. Throughout there is an intense energy to the playing, coupled with a remarkable ability to project a spacious quality in open-textured passages. Even in dark passages, the playing is never overbearing. This duo has an exceptional ability to hold every note in suspense and captivate the listener, no matter how disparate the compositional styles that are present on this disc. The outstanding sound engineering and interesting liner notes, largely written by the composers and performers themselves, nicely complement these fine performances.

*Jon Gonder*  
*School of Performing Arts*  
*SUNY Geneseo*