

Tapestries: Music by George Fiala and Heather Schmidt. Performers: Christina Petrowska Quilico, piano; Canadian Ukrainian Opera Chorus; Wolodymyr Kolesnyk, conductor (tracks 1-3); Petrowska Quilico, piano; Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, Daniel Warren, conductor (tracks 4-6). Toronto: Centrediscs, CMCCD 17011, 2011. 1 compact disc (65:32). Contents: *Concerto Cantata* / George Fiala (40:31) – Piano Concerto No. 2 / Heather Schmidt (25:00). \$13.98

Christina Petrowska Quilico once again displays her virtuosic command of the piano with this live recording of the world premieres of two piano concertos. Over the course of her illustrious career, Petrowska Quilico has performed numerous contemporary concertos and, with this CD, she has now recorded eight Canadian works of this genre. Her earlier recordings of concertos by Glenn Buhr and Larysa Kuzmenko earned Juno nominations. The Ottawa-born pianist was recognized early for her excellence, making her debut at fifteen at Town Hall in New York. While she also performs the traditional repertoire, she is known mainly as a specialist in contemporary music, giving recitals in Canada, the US, Europe, and the Middle East. Canadian composers have been on her repertoire list since the early 1970's. She has premiered numerous works and a number of them have been dedicated to her. In the past decade, Petrowska Quilico has been the recipient of honours and awards from the Canadian Music Centre and the Canadian League of Composers.

Tapestries brings together two very individualistic works that were chosen by Petrowska Quilico for this recording. In the CD liner notes, she writes that she admires their logical structures, lyrical and expressive melodies, edgy rhythms, and colourful instrumental writing. She also refers to her Ukrainian background which drew her to George Fiala, who studied music in his native Ukraine before coming to Canada. In contrast, Petrowska Quilico's connection with Heather Schmidt stems from the fact that they both studied piano at the Juilliard School in New York.

The first three tracks of *Tapestries* consist of Fiala's *Concerto Cantata*, originally recorded at its November 8, 1987, premiere at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto. Although the work was commissioned three years earlier for the millennium of Christianity in Ukraine (988-1988), it had a much longer gestation period going back to Fiala's arrival in Montreal in 1949.¹ The Ukrainian text of the *Concerto Cantata* tells three stories from Ukrainian folklore. The scoring, according to the 1985 version, is for piano and choir (SATB). However, for the premiere, a chimes obbligato part was added at the suggestion of the conductor, Wolodymyr Kolesnyk.

¹ While researching this review, I discovered that, according to *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Oct. 25, 1987), Fiala had "toyed with the idea of a 'Concerto-Cantata'" since 1949 – a fact not mentioned in other sources.

The first movement, *Maestoso*, has an overall structure that could be described as Baroque. The characteristics of a Baroque solo concerto are apparent in the contrast between vocal and piano sections, the former playing the role of *tutti* in a relatively simple style while the solo piano sections contain improvisational, fantasia-like material. On the other hand, the Baroque elements of a choral cantata are also present in the vocal sections, with the pianist acting at times as accompanist. Fiala fuses the two genres in an interesting way using non-functional tonal harmony with chromatic inflections. The choral writing uses Baroque contrapuntal techniques including imitative entrances, strict homophonic sections, and *a cappella* for short periods, with a diversity of textures (one to eight voices). There is thematic interplay between the piano and vocal parts as well as a return of earlier material.

The second movement, *Adagio*, uses “the lyrical song about the sad fate of a seagull losing her young to heartless strangers – an obvious allegory to the tragic history of Ukraine” (liner notes). To create a sense of mourning and loss, Fiala sets the introductory melody as an *a cappella*, homophonic and wordless choral chant. The piano, entering at bar 5, maintains this sorrowful mood, with a relatively simple accompaniment, and the choral writing, in a thinner texture (one to four parts), now presents the narrative of the seagull. In the conclusion, Fiala heightens the sense of drama by repeating and extending the opening material a semitone higher with piano accompaniment.

The final movement, *Allegrissimo ritmico*, borrows “a traditional Ukrainian New Year’s melody (Shchedrivka), which in its development is subjected to various transformations and modifications” (liner notes). In addition to the stylistic elements of the previous movements, Fiala adds a touch of realism by making use of hand clapping, recitation, whistling, and hissing in the choral parts. The theme from the opening movement is brought back to create a sense of unity and closure.

Unfortunately, discussion and analysis of this work is limited by the fact that the CD booklet contains neither the text in Ukrainian nor an English translation. The score is available from the Canadian Music Centre, but it contains only the Ukrainian text. There is no reference to a literary source or poet, other than the text is based on folklore. This reviewer spent considerable time searching for a translation but to no avail. The lack of a translation makes this work problematic for non-Ukrainian speakers. One can only wonder what the choir is passionately singing about. Even listeners who are familiar with the language would doubtless appreciate the option of having the text to read. The liner notes only give a skeletal summation, as illustrated above for the second movement.

Schmidt’s Piano Concerto No. 2, which was written for Petrowska Quilico, comprises the last three tracks of *Tapestries*. Recorded at its premiere on May 4, 2001, at the Open Ears Festival in Kitchener, Ontario, this live in-concert performance was a Juno Award nominee for Classical

Composition of the Year in 2012. The Concerto, in three movements, follows the standard orchestration of this form. The first movement, *Maestoso*, which opens and ends on *fortissimo* chords, contains much musical drama. There are interesting textures and colours, including solos for the orchestral instruments, while the piano has more of an accompanist role with continuous fast passagework. Overall, there is a good balance between the pianist and orchestra both in terms of the composition itself and the recording, with clean orchestral playing highlighting the various timbres. The second movement, *Larghetto*, continues to use non-functional harmony with chromaticism, but the piano is more prominent both as soloist and accompanist. The first violins' soaring melodies are a contrast to the prevalence of woodwinds in the first movement. The concluding *Allegro vivace e molto energico* showcases the virtuosity of the soloist and the orchestra, this time giving more prominence to the percussion and brass instruments.

The sound quality of the CD is excellent and the bilingual liner notes briefly outline the biographies of the composers and performers, as well as giving concise descriptions of the works. Both works are well performed, with Petrowska Quilico demonstrating her ability to interpret the contrasting compositional styles. The Opera Chorus for the *Concerto Cantata* and the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony for the Piano Concerto are well prepared and conducted, with both performances closely following the scores. The enthusiasm of the performers and the rapt attention of the audiences are evident throughout. Let us hope that this fine recording will encourage further performances of these works.

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