

Full Spectrum. Performer: Vernon Regehr, cello. Toronto: Centrediscs CMCCD 18112, 2012. 1 compact disc (63:51). Contents: *Fantasy for solo cello* / Larysa Kuzmenko (15:17) -- *From the Edge of Mist* / Matthew Whittall (9:07) -- *Stigmata* / Vincent Ho (11:15) -- *Lamentations* / Clark Winslow Ross (11:39) -- *Interludes I and II* / François-Hugues Leclair (8:10) -- *Versprechen* / Kati Agócs (8:23).

Full Spectrum is a well-assembled, high quality recording of cello music by two generations of Canadian composers whose birthdates range from 1956 (Kuzmenko) to 1975 (Whittall, Ho, and Agócs). The works on offer are varied both in style and subject matter. That by Whittall, a Canadian composer now living and teaching in Finland, is the oldest and the only “pre-millennial” of the set, having been composed in 1999, with the pieces by Ross (2002), Ho and Agócs (both 2004), Kuzmenko (2008), and Leclair (2010) making up the remainder.

Several of the pieces make reference to earlier composers or models. The second of Leclair’s *Interludes*—dedicated, incidentally, to Vernon Regehr, the performer on the CD—has a section devoted to Brahms, while Kati Agócs’ *Versprechen*, or “Promise,” is based around Bach’s harmonization of “Ist Gott mein Schild und Helfersmann,” the concluding number of his Cantata, *Ich bin ein guter Hirt*. In addition, a significant part of Whittall’s *From the Edge of Mist* is based on a Scots folksong, “The Mist-Covered Mountains.”

Scores of several of the pieces are available from the Canadian Music Centre, and at least two of them (Ross’s multi-sectional *Lamentations* and Leclair’s well-contrasted *Interludes I and II*) can be obtained as open-access downloads from these composers’ websites. It’s a sign of the times that composers are increasingly making their music available for sale or download in this way, perhaps deliberately avoiding the major traditional music publishing houses in favour of dealing directly with musicians who want to buy their pieces, even though this particular acquisitions model can cause libraries some problems.¹

The solo cello already benefits from a large repertory that runs from the Baroque period right up to the present day, a very recent Canadian example being John Beckwith’s *Breaking Silence* (2012). What makes the cello so attractive to composers? Several ideas spring to mind, starting with the cello’s wide dynamic range and compass, which stretches well into the treble clef and even above it when harmonics are specified. Furthermore, the cello seems to have multiple

1. See the composers’ websites at www.larysakuzmenko.com, www.vinceho.com, www.clarkross.ca, www.huguesleclair.com, and www.agocsmusic.com. Information on Matthew Whittall can be obtained at the Finnish Music Information Centre website, www.fimic.fi.

personalities. It is frequently called upon for its ability to play lyrical music of elegy or lamentation, but it is also capable of great agility. The multi-coloured palette presents a “full spectrum” of possibilities, which may explain the CD’s title (we are never officially told). The fact that classical cellist Yo-Yo Ma has collaborated with so many different types of musicians in recent years is also, surely, further proof of the instrument’s versatility.

In the end, listeners of this CD will find their own favourites. Personally, I feel that Vincent Ho’s piece is the most aurally intriguing and perhaps also the most uncompromising, although Agócs’ *Versprechen*, which uses serial technique, shares some of these same qualities. Kuzmenko’s four-movement *Fantasy* is perhaps the most accessible and personal. It includes a Scherzo second movement apparently inspired by a kitten—thus surely earmarking it to become background music for a multitude of feline YouTube videos—and a fourth movement Toccata (the opening Prelude is dedicated to a deceased friend, while the remaining movement is headed “Intermezzo”). Whittall’s piece is a freer sort of fantasy in all but name, often rhapsodic and lyrical, and held together by its folksong model. The work by Ross, full of interesting details, repays repeated hearings. The eighth of its ten sections, “He has burned in Jacob like a fire that consumes everything,” is imaginative and elemental as befits the subject matter. A rising triplet arpeggio figure plays a significant role in much of the piece, whose final section returns to its opening. Finally, the first of Leclair’s two *Interludes* is rather like an “unmeasured” prelude, with scordatura tuning of the cello’s fourth string. The Second Interlude recalls Bach in its figuration, and finishes by returning to the character of Interlude No. 1 in a short section that, as if to confirm my earlier comment, is headed “sans mesure” (although Interlude No. 1 never uses this instruction). The final word must be given to the performer, Vernon Regehr of Memorial University, whose performance is outstanding throughout.

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