

Cobalt. Music of Jocelyn Morlock. Toronto: CMC Centrediscs, CD-CMCCD 20014, 2014. 1 compact disc (65:21). Contents: *Music of the Romantic Era* (10:54) (Windsor Symphony Orchestra, John Morris Russell, conductor) – *Cobalt* (7:14) (Jonathan Crow, Karl Stobbe, violins; National Arts Centre Orchestra; Alain Trudel, conductor) – *Disquiet* (4:13) (CBC Radio Orchestra, Alain Trudel, conductor) – *Asylum* (10:00) (Duo Concertante [Nancy Dahn, violin; Timothy Steeves, piano] with Vernon Regehr, cello) – *Oiseaux bleus et sauvages* (10:52) (Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Bramwell Tovey, conductor) – *Golden* (10:54) (Philippe Magnan, oboe; Pacific Baroque Orchestra; Marc Destrubé, conductor and concertmaster) – *Solace* (11:14) (Mark Fewer, violin; Zoltan Rozsnyai, cello; Vancouver Symphony Orchestra; Bramwell Tovey, conductor).

This recording of seven works by the Vancouver-based composer, Jocelyn Morlock (born 1969), reveals her expertise in writing for orchestra, large and small, in addition to the piano trio called *Asylum* (2010). She has stated that these works date from 2001 to 2010, but unfortunately the notes provided with the recording neither gives the date for each composition nor all of the performers' names. The details above about all of the participants were drawn from the listing on the Canadian Music Centre site and corroborated with the composer. The performances of the first five works are those of their premieres in re-mastered digitized recordings of the originals done by the CBC. To help finance *Cobalt* Morlock launched an online campaign that surpassed its goal and allowed her to cover the artists' fees as well as providing more extensive distribution to prospective orchestras and conductors.

Born and raised in Manitoba, Morlock first experienced opera and symphonic works through watching the film, *Amadeus*. Before that she had done some improvising on the upright piano in her home. The revelation of classical music led her to pursue a music degree at Brandon University where her composition teacher was Patrick Carrabré. Later she obtained masters and doctoral degrees at the University of British Columbia under the guidance of Stephen Chatman, Keith Hamel and the late Nikolai Korndorf. During the past twenty years she has developed her unique, imaginative voice as can be heard in the works included on this disc.

It opens with an enthralling tongue-in-cheek look at *Music of the Romantic Era* (2005), which tantalizes sometimes with only two or three notes from works by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and others. The listener is also constantly jolted to find surreptitious resemblances of standard classical tropes such as the opening cadences, or the Alberti bass, when the piano prominently breaks into the mix. Is that Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto—but there are added cluster notes in those chords! The presence of the hunting call motif and resemblances to bird calls also gives us hints of the influence of nature as a starting point for many of her compositions.

Cobalt (2009), a commission of the National Arts Centre Orchestra, gives its name to the album as well as being her favorite colour. Morlock discovered that the element is poisonous, magnetic, and radioactive as well as having many other associations. All of these aspects influenced her procedure in expressing its essence, but most of all it was the impact of the night sky, just before it becomes completely dark. As she states in her note: "What sustains life can also destroy it; beauty is transient and fleeting." Essentially this double concerto for two violins begins with short phrases which are tossed back and forth between the soloists. Gradually the phrases become longer and the whole orchestra becomes involved.

Commissioned by the CBC for the Shostakovich Festival, *Disquiet* (2006) uses four required notes (D, E flat, C, and B flat) as a basic motif. Many of Morlock's ideas for this work came from her association with Korndorf (1947-2001), the Russian-Canadian composer/conductor who told her about his difficulties pursuing his goals in Russia. To musically portray the situation in the former Soviet Union that Shostakovich faced, she has a texture of very low register and many interweaving melodic lines that are extremely high in pitch. With no musical presence in the middle of the texture, the listener senses an ominous quality in the sound that suits the composition's title.

The piano trio, *Asylum* (2010), was a commission for Newfoundland's Tuckamore Chamber Music Festival that also marked the 200th anniversary of Schumann's birth. It opens with the four notes of Schumann's "Mondnacht" from his *Liederkreis*, op. 30. Morlock states that she has been fascinated by the composer's dual personality which he expressed as Florestan and Eusebius. In this work she refers to exploring the combinations of ecstasy and horror that Schumann experienced and the range of emotions veering from one to another. The title also refers to the institution in which he lived his final years.

Oiseaux bleus et sauvages (2003), a CBC commission, was the first work written for full orchestra by Morlock. In CBC interviews, Morlock stated that while the initial ideas came from bird sounds she heard around her home, she always has had a fascination for birds, their behavior, and how they can fly and eat several times their body weight. She does not copy actual bird-songs à la Messiaen, but writes sounds first. These take on patterns to which she adds in a contrapuntal manner. For example, the flute and piccolo parts heard at the opening provide the basic interlocking melodic fragments of the whole composition. Morlock has developed a taste for a wide range of music. She worked as a copyist for The Chieftains and in the same role later toured with Elvis Costello and Diana Krall. She has composed for instruments of Eastern cultures and plays in the Vancouver-based Balinese gamelan group, Sekaha Gong Gita Asmara. The ending of this orchestral composition definitely has an Eastern flavor.

Originally written for the Pacific Baroque Orchestra, *Golden* (2001, rev. 2003) is scored for soprano and Baroque strings consisting of seven violins, two violas, violoncello, and violone plus percussion instruments. Korndorf had been commissioned, but had only started a composition at the time of his death. Morlock thus dedicated her work to his memory. In the original version, the soprano's text is based on the following story: "Iron pyrite is a metallic crystal that glitters in the sun. There is a pool fed by a stream in Manitoba that carries the mineral in its sediment. Swimmers who immerse themselves in the waters of the pool emerge sparkling as if with flecks on their skin. If you swim in this water, you will emerge golden." In this recorded revision, the soprano line is played by the oboe. Musically, the work is about transformation as the opening short and percussive sounds provided by tapping on the cello and violone has added to them the wooden wind chime and bells. The violinists begin to whisper, "Ssswim in this water," and then begin to play rippling water-like lines. The oboe further transforms the basic material until the listener is carried to the final ethereal space with the harmonics produced by rubbing the rims of two wine glasses.

Solace (2001), later revised, was initially composed for the Brandon Chamber Players. The performing ensemble is divided into three groups. The first group largely quotes from Josquin's Mass based on *L'homme armé*. The second group of five violins plays long sustained harmonics which to my ears suggest the drones produced by the Chinese mouthorgan or sheng. The third group consists of the violin and cello soloists. The solo violin soars in its high register like a singing bird, while the cellist, playing in the instrument's lowest octave, represents the yearning of the human heart.

Morlock becomes the fifth composer-in-residence for the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra on September 1, 2014. Accordingly we can expect to look forward to more finely crafted orchestral works from her distinctive voice. Tonally-based but not in the classical sense, she often establishes home pitches through the use of the perfect fifth interval and drones over which she spins emotionally-charged melodic lines. Truly this recording documents an outstanding Canadian creator of music.

Elaine Keillor

Distinguished Research Professor Emerita

Carleton University