

FEATURE REVIEW by Jerry Dubins

FLUTE SKETCHES • Samantha Chang (fl); Khai Nguyen (vn); Amy Laing (vc); Ellen Meyer (pn) • SAMANTHA CHANG 326118 (62:29)

TAN *A Caged Partridge's Longing*. **WOODALL** Serenade. **TAFFANEL** *Fantasy on Mignon*. **SCHULHOFF** Sonata. **PIAZZOLLA** *Oblivi3n*. **REINECKE** Ballade. **DOROZIO** *Exodus Partita*. **GOOSSENS** *4 Sketches: Romance; Humoreske*

SENTIMENTALE • Samantha Chang (fl); ¹Mark Camilleri (pn); ¹John Maharaj (db); ¹Mark Inneo (drums); ^{2,7}Conrad Chow (vn); ^{2,7}Ellen Meyer (pn); ³Christopher Lee (fl); ^{3,4,6}Dona Jean Clary (pn); ⁵Chen Liu (pn) • SAMANTHA CHANG 270222 (67:08)

¹**BOLLING** Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio: *Sentimentale; Irlandaise; Fugace*. ²**DOPPLER** Andante and Rondo. ³**DOROZIO** *Pescara Pastorale*. ³**HUGUES** *Grand Concerto Fantasy on Themes from Verdi's Un Ballo in Maschera*. ⁴**TAN** *2 Lyrics of Yi People*. ⁵**BIZET** Intermezzo from *Carmen*. ⁶**BORNE** *Fantaisie Brilliante on Themes from Bizet's Carmen*. ⁷**IBERT** *2 Interludes*

The two CDs under review are as distinguished for extraordinary playing as they are for their highly diverse and unusual programs. Many of the composers whose works appear on these discs, such as Reinecke, Taffanel, Ibert, Schulhoff, Piazzolla, Bolling, and Bizet, will be familiar, though not necessarily from the pieces presented here. Other composers, such as Mizi Tan, Tod Paul Dorozio, Luigi Hugues, Franois Borne, and Albert Woodall, will likely be unknown to most readers.

The last named may be the most interesting of all, if for no other reason than that no one seems to know much of anything about him other than that he was British, that he may have died in World War I, and that he seems to have written one and only one piece of music, the Serenade for Flute, that has survived. It's a lovely Arcadian song for flute and piano that melds the out-of-doors English pastoral tradition with the indoor salon style.

Luigi Hugues (1836–1913) was born in Casale Monferrato, today a province in Italy's Piedmont region. He was an amateur flutist who trained as an engineer and eventually ended up in Turin, teaching geography at the university there. Though music was but a pastime for him, he wrote a number of virtuosic works for his instrument that have been praised and criticized in the same sentence for their "brilliance and vacuity." Of Hugues's *Grand Concerto Fantasy on Themes from Verdi's Un Ballo in Maschera* for two flutes and piano, flutist and teacher Fenwick Smith has said, "With a flutist's knowledge of the instrument, which permits him to conjure more notes per square inch than Verdi ever dreamed of, and with the Italians' sure sense of drama, Hugues has concocted a paragon among potboilers." Potboiler perhaps, but Samantha Chang, joined by flutist Christopher Lee and pianist Dona Jean Clary, have an absolute ball with the piece, no pun intended.

Tod Dorozio (b.1968) is a native of Vancouver, British Columbia, and currently resides in Toronto. His instrument is guitar, for which he has composed extensively. His *Exodus Partita*, however, is a six-minute soliloquy for unaccompanied flute. Dorozio describes the piece as a musical re-enactment of “Israel’s movement from bondage to freedom in the second and third books of the Bible.” The piece is made up of three undivided sections. The first “depicts both Israel’s yearning for freedom and eventual release from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 1:13-14)”; the second is “a sound-picture of Israel’s 40 years spent wandering in the wild lands of Egypt and Arabia (Exodus16:2-3)”; and the final section “conveys Israel’s long-awaited and jubilant entry into the Promised Land. (Deuteronomy 1:7-8).”

The ability of music to convey such specific imagery is, of course, questionable, all the more so in the case of a piece for solo flute that, absent any composer-provided narrative, could just as easily represent the ritual mating dance of a peacock. Dorozio, however, relies on the well-worn formula of repeated melismas that circle around the augmented second that occurs between the sixth and seventh degrees of the harmonic minor scale, a cliché we’ve been conditioned to associate with the ancient Middle East—read that caravans, camels, and nomads roaming the desert dunes. To the extent that *Exodus Partita* conjures such imagery, one could say it’s reasonably effective, but Dorozio’s MO is hardly original. Chang, nonetheless, brings to the piece a great deal of color and finesse.

Like Woodall, Francois Borne (1840–1920), also seems to be remembered for a single work, the *Fantasy on Themes from Bizet’s Carmen* for flute and piano. So popular among flutists is the piece, however, that ArkivMusic lists 28 recordings of it. Borne played principal flute for the Grand Theater of Bordeaux and was professor of flute at the Toulouse Conservatory. He was also a recognized authority on flute design, having contributed to the development of the modern flute’s split-E mechanism.

The fantasy, dating from 1900, was orchestrated as recently as 1990 by arranger Raymond Meylan. Not unlike Hugues’s Verdi fantasy, Borne’s piece puts the flute through its paces, challenging the abilities of the soloist and showcasing the full range of the instrument’s capabilities. Chang rises to the occasion with spectacular playing in a work sure to delight listeners with its variations and spinoffs on Bizet’s familiar tunes.

Chang is a former student of composer Mizi Tan (b.1936) whose piece for solo flute *A Caged Partidge’s Longing* opens the first of the two discs. Written in 1987, it sounds Oriental in much the same way that Dorozio’s *Exodus Partita* sounds Middle Eastern. In Tan’s case, the cliché is the reliance on pentatonic scales and melodic fragments that suggest the fluttering of wings to paint a musical portrait of a bird attempting to escape the confines of its caged existence. It’s an attractive piece, the largely quiet and peaceful demeanor of which belies any serious desire or frantic attempt by the bird to fly the coop.

Turning now from the little-known and unknown composers on these two discs to those whose names are apt to ring a bell, we come to Claude-Paul Taffanel (1844–1908), the famous late 19th-century flute virtuoso and pedagogue who is generally held to be the father of the French flute school. His fantasy on Ambroise Thomas’s opera *Mignon* is a real charmer, managing to make more of its meager material than might be expected. In their day, Thomas’s operas—he wrote two dozen of them—gained great popularity among French audiences; *Le Caïd* alone was staged some 400 times. As confessed in the past,

I'm not an opera authority, but my general sense is that with the possible exception of *Mignon*, Thomas's operas are not often mounted in today's houses.

Listening to *Taffanel's* fantasy, it's easy to understand why. There's hardly anything memorable to take away from it, which is not Taffanel's fault, other than for choosing *Mignon* as the basis for his piece in the first place. It's actually a credit to him that he is able to spin such an elaborate web from such flimsy floss. Once again, Chang proves herself an able technician and a most charitable supporter of some of music's lesser lights. She avoids the temptation to program the more obvious and popular solo flute repertoire items, like Debussy's *Syrinx*, instead putting together recitals that boldly embrace diversity and much that is rarely heard.

Which brings us to Eugene Goossens's Romance and Humoreske from his *Four Sketches* for flute, violin, and piano, op. 5. Goossens, of course, earned something of a reputation as a conductor, not to mention as a charged criminal in a scandal involving witchcraft and pornography, but we don't often encounter him on records as a composer, though his catalog of works is of quite a respectable size. Chang plays the third and fourth numbers of the *Four Sketches*. I'm aware of only one recording that contains the complete set, a Chandos CD featuring flutist Susan Milan. I have that disc, which also includes several other Goossens works, and the comparison between Milan and Chang in the two pieces is a tough one. Chang's tone shimmers with a silvery gleam, but I'd have to say that Milan's violinist, Jan Peter Schmolck, is a bit more poised than Chang's violinist, Khai Nguyen, who is not always spot-on with his intonation. Not to shortchange Chang's other partners; cellist Amy Laing and pianist Ellen Meyer are musical equals in every way.

Nor is it my intent to pass over the many other wonderful pieces of music on these two discs. The Claude Bolling pieces performed by Chang and a trio of jazz players—Mark Camilleri on piano, John Maharaj on double bass, and Mark Inneo on drums—are "soft" jazz, easy-listening pieces that are very pleasurable—two of them are, anyway. The third, *Fugace*, is, just as you would expect from the title, a fugue. What you might not expect is the fugue subject, which is a nifty imitation in the style of Bach which, as it develops, undergoes some very un-Bach-like jazzy treatments that are a real ear-tickling delight.

Franz Doppler (1821–83), another famous flutist, must have gotten an extra portion of the gift for melody when the endowments were being passed out because his Andante and Rondo for flute, violin, and piano are stunningly beautiful, and so beautifully played by Chang, Meyer, and a different violinist this time, Conrad Chow.

Granted, not every single item on these two programs is a masterpiece, but even the lesser ones are miniature gems worth hearing. And except for minor and fleeting intonation imperfection of violinist Khai Nguyen in the Goossens, all of the players here are first-rate, and the recordings couldn't be bettered. As for Samantha Chang, well, she's the star of these shows, and she more than earns her top billing on the marquee. These releases receive my very strongest recommendation. **Jerry Dubins**

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