

Estria. Outremont, QC: ATMA/Classique ACD2357, 2005. 1 compact disc. \$17.99. Performances by Quintette à vent Estria. Contents: *Quintette*, op. 38 / by Stewart Grant (14:11) – *Nature/Nurture* / by Chan Ka Nin (16:25) – *The Mechanics of Stardust*, op. 62, for reed trio / by Andrew P. MacDonald (6:34) – *Débâcle* / by Robert Lemay (10:29) – *4 Jeux à 5* / by Denis Gougeon (17:00).

Canadians have long benefited from the efforts of our many chamber music ensembles. Not only do these groups set standards of excellence in the area of performance, they are also tireless promoters of Canadian music who make immeasurable contributions to our culture by commissioning, recording, and programming new and innovative works by Canadian composers and arrangers. This dedication to Canadian music has been especially true in the area of the wind quintet. Beginning with the pioneering efforts of the Toronto Wind Quintet in the 1950s and 60s, and continuing with groups such as the York Winds in the 1970s and 80s, Canadian wind quintets have been singularly active in founding and maintaining an impressive repertoire that is broad in its diversity and rich in its excellence. A recent addition to this legacy is the Quintette à vent Estria. In all respects, it is a worthy successor to carry this mantle.

Since its inception in 1997, the Estria quintet has been active within its region of the Eastern Townships of Québec (this area, known in French as l'Estrie, is the origin of the group's name). In addition to its own productions and regional tours, the ensemble has performed nationally and internationally, participated in numerous concert series, and presented a workshop for young composition students who worked with

the group to create five new works. Although the ensemble's members perform repertoire from all eras, they are strongly dedicated to the music of our time and regard themselves in particular as spokespersons for the composers of their region and their province. To date they have commissioned and premiered over a dozen new Canadian works, many of them written by local composers. Estria's dedication to Canadian music is amply demonstrated on the CD: all of the works are by Canadian composers and most were written for or commissioned by the group.

The different musical styles presented on the CD is impressive: the range includes works that are easily accessible to works that are thoroughly modern in both the compositional procedures and the playing techniques. Falling easily into the first category is Stewart Grant's *Quintette* of 1999. In its rhythmic organization and melodic contour, it is highly reminiscent of Stravinsky. The first movement, "Pastorale," sets the mood for the entire work which makes use of the wind instruments in a characteristic way that is strongly evocative of the outdoors. Chan Ka Nin's *Nature/Nurture* (2002) augments the quintet format with an additional performer on the marimba. The result is an extremely compelling work in which the marimba provides contrast with the lyrical lines of the wind parts while simultaneously bringing out

the percussive aspects in the wind articulations. The final three works are much more contemporary in style. Andrew P. MacDonald's *The Mechanics of Stardust* (2003) combines pure pitch (traditional sounds) with mixed pitches (multiphonics) and noise (percussive key clicks) in a meditation on the idea that all life began with stardust. The three different sound types are part of a larger use of the number three as a compositional starting point. Robert Lemay's *Débâcle* (1998) makes effective use of pitch bending and *portamento*. In addition, the players are separated spatially to produce two duos (flute/oboe; clarinet/bassoon) with the horn situated in the middle in order to echo and tie the two groups together. Denis Gougeon's *4 Jeux à 5* (2001) draws on a number of different techniques including imitation, mirrors, kaleidoscopes, inversion, and speed that the composer considers as games (hence the title). The result is a vibrant and colourful work that exploits the myriad sound possibilities of the five instruments.

The playing, at all times, is excellent. The Estria quintet is clearly involved in and enthusiastic about this repertoire and their dedication is apparent in these nuanced and carefully

prepared performances. Moreover, the quality of the performances is matched by the excellence of the recorded sound. Although wind quintets are notoriously difficult to record, the sound here is crisp and clean without losing the necessary warmth. The ambiance is natural yet not overwhelming allowing the finer details of these works to be heard clearly. Even the CD booklet betrays evidence of the group's dedication. Accompanying each piece is a detailed description by the composer and a lengthy biography. The texts are presented in both French and English with most of the translations undertaken by the group members themselves. There is ample information to provide insight and guidance in listening to these pieces.

Overall this is a CD with much to offer. For professional ensembles, the repertoire will be of interest since these are compelling works that deserve to be programmed and performed. For student ensembles, these are performances to be heard and emulated. And for anyone who is simply interested in contemporary music for wind quintet, this is a recording to be enjoyed.

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