

***L'errance...* Music of Robert Lemay.** Performers: Silver Birch String Quartet (Christian Robinson, Geoff McCausland, violin; Jane Russell, viola; Alexandra Lee, cello); Yoko Hirota, piano. Toronto: Centrediscs, CMCCD 19513, 2013. 1 compact disc (44:28). Contents: *L'errance : hommage à Wim Wenders* (10:27) – *Structure/Paysage : hommage à Eli Bornstein* (16:55) – *Territoires intérieurs (Hommage à Bernard Emond)* (17:06).

Robert Lemay's catalogue currently comprises around ninety individual pieces, of which *Les yeux de la solitude* from 1987 is among the earliest, and the set of nine *Clés* for flutes (2012) the most recent. Pieces for saxophone and for percussion (sometimes in combination) feature strongly across his output, with percussionist François Gauthier and saxophonist Jean-Marie Londeix two early sources of inspiration. Another thread running through Lemay's work is a series of tribute pieces, either honoring filmmakers old and new (*La chambre verte : hommage à François Truffaut* (1992); *Dial M for...* for Alfred Hitchcock; *La redemption*, for Martin Scorsese, *La soif du mal*, for Orson Welles; *In the dark*, for Lars von Trier; *Love streams*, for John Cassavetes), the actor director Claude Jutra (*A tout prendre*, 1995), or visual artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (*Gelb, Rot, Blau*, which exists in various versions), Hélio Oiticica, Paul Klee, Barnett Newman, and Hans Hartung (*Quadrichromie*, 2012).

Like the works on this new CD, of which the first two are for string quartet and the third for quartet and piano, many of his other pieces are likewise for chamber-sized ensembles, although over the past fifteen years he has also released several compositions for large orchestra, such as *Le miroir d'un moment* (2007), *Mouvance* (2010), and his violin concerto, the title of which – *Et une porte d'ombre se referme* – would not be out of place in the work-catalogues of Debussy or Henri Dutilleux (one thinks immediately of Dutilleux's *Tout un monde lointain*, for example, or of Debussy's *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*). Not that one can easily make useful comparisons between the compositional styles of these three composers, though: rather, Lemay acknowledges the influence on his writing of such figures as Brian Ferneyhough, John Cage, and Elliott Carter, all of whom he met while a student at SUNY Buffalo. Other influences come from the "musique spectrale" movement; from poetry; and from abstract painting. He regards atonal music as more expressive than tonal, and makes occasional use of a modified serial technique. Finally, his interest in spatial concepts in performance is reflected in such works as his *Konzertzimmermusik* of 1992. He currently teaches at the Laurentian University in Sudbury, where the Silver Birch Quartet is currently quartet-in-residence, thus allowing opportunities for regular and close collaboration between composer and artists.

The works on the new CD, which represent Lemay's complete output for string quartet, continue his series of "hommage" pieces. The four-movement *L'errance*, revised in 1997 but here performed in its original version from 1990, honors filmmaker Wim Wenders. *Structures/Paysage*, which premiered in Montreal in spring 2009, is a tribute to artist Eli

Bornstein, while *Territoires intérieurs*, celebrating the director-screenwriter Bernard Émond, is the most recent work on the disc, having received its first performance at Banff in 2011 by the same artists who perform it here. Lemay's wife, Yoko Hirota, is the pianist for the recording, and can also be heard playing his *Hiroshima, mon amour* on Centrediscs CD 18713. As well as being available on physical CD from the Canadian Music Centre, the contents of both discs can be found in the online Naxos Music Library, as Naxos is CMC's distributor.

Making useful and appropriate comments on the musical content of the three pieces has been somewhat hampered by not having copies of the scores to consult (they are all available for purchase from the CMC, however). A question that came into my mind several times was whether, if I had not already known the chronological order of composition of the pieces, I would have been able to work out which was the earliest. Perhaps so, perhaps not, for *L'errance* already uses the wide range of string effects that is characteristic of the later *Structure/Paysage* and *Territoires intérieurs*: glissandi, pizzicato/arco contrasts, and some *col legno*, for example. The highly contrasted and sharply sectional nature of all three works does, however, seem at its most intense in *Territoires intérieurs*, which given its title was perhaps Lemay's intention: there is some sort of deeply internalized experience going on here, with each minute of the seventeen-minute work so densely packed with material that it is possible at times to lose oneself in it. *Structure/Paysage*, too, is multi-sectional, contrasting moments of stasis with great bursts of energy. Perhaps the four-movement structure of *L'errance* is ultimately what marks it out as the earliest of the set, with Lemay more courageously adopting a broader compositional sweep in the other two works. The musical language throughout, while somewhat dissonant, is not militantly so. These are thoughtful and expressive works that have much to charm and intrigue the ear, while the excellent standard of recording on the CD allow the pieces to make maximum impact.

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