

with a remedial grasp of its tuning structure and a sense of musical adventure. Having studied its classical tradition in Taiwan, the quixotic Roberts (also a double bassist) also brings his own traditions of jazz, blues and solo improvisation to the table. While starting somewhere near its traditional core, Roberts bends his instrument in new directions entirely, turning it sideways even as he faces east.

Kan Smith

Rouse

Transfiguration
String Quartet - No 1, No 2, *Compline*
Calders Quartet (Benjamin Jacobson, Andrew Hultcrantz, Jonathan Munschen, Erik Byers) with *Daniel Alexander* & *Alexia Lee* of *Sinus Magnus* by **E1 Entertainment** © KCCD/7737 (35' • DDD)
Rouse's disquieting quartets are given powerful performances by the Calders



Three intense works by Baltimore-based Christopher Rouse make their recorded debut in appropriately hair-raising performances by the Calders Quartet. It may not

be music you'll take home to mother, but as riveting externalisations of an inner world in turmoil, this is pretty much state-of-the-art.

The music spans 15 years beginning in 1982. The 16-minute quartet No 1 is a relentlessly brutal homage to Bartók, with an epilogue in memory of *Azouz el-Sadat* who had recently been assassinated. The 20-minute quartet No 2, written after Rouse visited the Soviet Union in 1987, projects a grim mood made more depressing by the profoundly ambiguous embedding of Shostakovich's D-S-C-H as a mechanism to express rage, perhaps at the nightmare suffered by artists and intellectuals during Stalin's reigns.

Even during the occasional gaiety of the 20-minute *Compline*, written for the same instruments as Ravel's Introduction and Allegro and commemorating a trip to Rome, there are occasional shadows, in particular a fleeting moment of soulless panic like the Teutonic knights in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* trapped beneath the ice. While ruthlessly analytic on its surface, the music continually reveals hidden emotional veins that give the three 20th-century masters a new and darker relevance.

Rouse has the right champions in the Caldres Quartet, who maintain the composer's carefully plotted-out moods and variations to a hair's breadth precision while projecting a sense of dimensionality which allows the warmth at the heart of the music's fantastically intricate structure to convincingly signal its existence.

Good sound, engaging programme notes and whimsical, scribbly artwork by Dave Muller complete the package.

Laurence Vitess

E Schwartz

Chamber Concertos I-VI
Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose
BMP/Source © 1012 (37' • DDD)
Schwartz's eclectic concertos are ably and attractively presented by BMP



This is a fine tribute from the highly acclaimed Boston Modern Orchestra Project to 30 years of Elliott Schwartz's idiosyncratic output.

Each of the six chamber

concertos, four in first recordings, features a single soloist in a continuity ranging from monologue to free-ranging superimposed textures. Schwartz describes his technique as "different strategies for dealing with the 'concerto' principle - six variations, not on a theme, but a genre". An essential part of his idiom is quotation from older styles, actual or implied but often unobtrusive. These tonal implants give a depth and resonance to a completely personal musical discourse.

A memorable example is the piano concerto, which draws on Vaughan Williams, a longstanding interest of Schwartz, whose book on the symphonies came out in 1964. At times the texture is hectic but there are regular appearances of scraps of modal melody and familiar chords. Schwartz is drawing on his long perspective with VW to produce a fascinating piece full of intriguing moments.

It ought to sound like fun but rarely does, except briefly in the last section of the violin concerto based on the life of Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the US and an amateur violinist. The clarinet concerto concludes with wistful tonal passages evoking Bartók and Mahler; the bassoon concerto was revised for the late William Waterhouse and this version is subtitled "Water Music" in his memory.

The CD is well produced with generous notes and attractive cover art from Dorothy Schwartz.

Peter Dickinson

Shostakovich • Tchaikovsky

Shostakovich Cello Concerto No 1, Op 107
Tchaikovsky Variations on a Russian Theme, Op 13
Kim Cook is Violigrafil Symphony Orchestra / Edward Slesin

MS1289 (4F • DDD)
In a crowded market, this recording doesn't do enough to stand out



This rather grisly-sounding disc (reminiscent of Soviet-era recordings) showcases cellist Kim Cook, a Nebraska native now on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania

in Philadelphia. Cook has a solid technique and an attractively firm, smooth tone that's especially effective in lyrical music. Indeed, it's in the slow movement of Shostakovich's First Concerto that she's heard at her best. Mstislav Rostropovich, for one, gives us far more expressive detail in his classic 1977 account with Ormandy (Sony, 104P) but the way Cook makes the solo parting string is eloquent none the less. She handles the difficult cadenza ably, too, though it's lacking dramatic intensity, relatively speaking; the concert movements also require greater rhythmic grip and tonal bite than Cook musters here.

Much the same can be said for the cellist's interpretation of Tchaikovsky's *Rosses Variations*. Cook sustains the arching melodic lines of Variations 3 and 6 quite nicely, so that even though her readings are emotionally reticent, the results are wise enough, with remaining variations as well as the theme, however, are pretty charmless. This is partly due to the Volgograd Symphony Orchestra's uneven execution but also to the plainness of Cook's phrasing and her lack of rhythmic poise. The orchestra's gritty style is better suited to Shostakovich's music, though two-disc microphone placement blurs a great deal of its potential power. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Weiss

L'Infidèle
Suite in F major (Dresden manuscript, Mus 2941-V)
Toujours sur le bord de My Conno de Luigi Arrivetti
1721 (London manuscript, Add M1875, Suite in E minor (Dresden manuscript, Mus 2941-V-2)
Edoardo Egiccia Jr

MA Recordings © M078A (4F • DDD)

One of Bach's most talented contemporaries shines on this disc



Sylvius Leopold Weiss challenged JS Bach, made a king's ransom in salary and he was widely considered the best harpsichordist in the world in the first half of the 18th

century. But when an instrument fades in popularity, even the best performers must fade with it. Thankfully Weiss also was a composer and we can recapture his brilliance as harpsichordist. Eduardo Egiccia has done in this outstanding effort. For the record, while Weiss is said to have gone head-to-head with Bach in a competition of improvisatory skills, the two contemporaries (they both died in 1750) were likely friends and are believed to have admired each other's compositional ability. You can be why here in this superb disc.

Playing on a 13-course lute, Egiccia draws the listener into this music with relaxed, almost conversational phrasing. Indeed, he is a storyteller as much as an interpreter, each performance a reading. It's a particularly effective approach in *Suite L'Infidèle*, an evocative sonata that may have