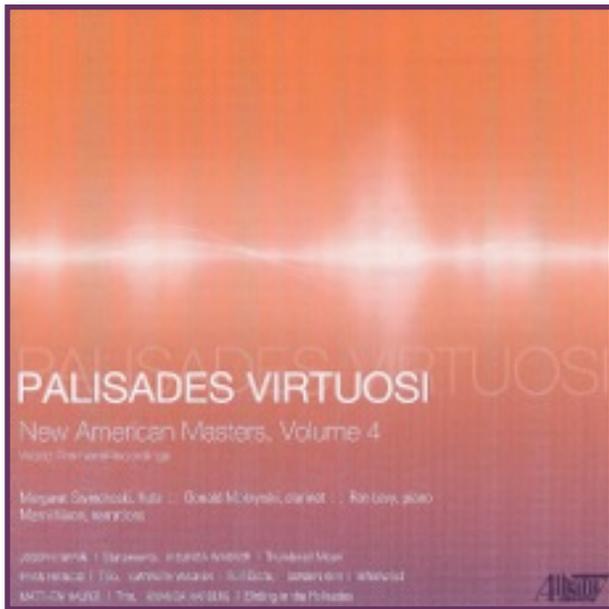


# New American Masters, Vol. 4 - Palisades Virtuosi

## 2012 - Albany Records



The members of Palisades Virtuosi (Margaret Swinchoski, flute; Donald Mokrynski, clarinet; and Ron Levy, piano) have been commissioning and recording works of “New American Masters” since 2006. Volume 4 of the series holds works by many masters, indeed, with composers racking up achievements such as the Pulitzer Prize in Music, the Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Fulbright Award, and receiving commissions from prestigious organizations such as the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, American Composers Orchestra, Da Capo Chamber Players, and the New Juilliard Ensemble.

Throughout the CD, the listener is treated consistently to impressive ensemble playing. Intonation, rhythm, and note shapes have been diligently rehearsed, and the musicians are skilled at conjuring up warm, full sonorities. I especially noted Swinchoski’s sensitive playing when blending with the clarinet in soft passages; her subtle use of vibrato and her delicate

articulations matched perfectly with Mokrynski’s soft timbre.

The most successful work on the CD is a very gracefully written piece titled “Thumbnail Moon,” by Melinda Wagner. I heard a great interplay of sounds among all players. Three minutes in length, the piece is too short: I wanted more.

Marni Nixon’s soulful, spirited poetry reading is a delightful addition to the works of Gwyneth Walker and Amanda Harberg. The third movement of Harberg’s work, “Birding in the Palisades,” effectively conjures up the tension between humans and crows in Japan. The bold piccolo and clarinet playing is wonderfully engaging, which left me wondering why the clarinetist waited until the last four minutes of the CD to show me that type of sound. That sort of biting, sarcastic sound would have come in handy in a number of key moments throughout the disc.

Though most of the works on the CD are quite traditional in style, “Whirlwind” by Sunbin Kim includes Swinchoski’s fantastic use of an edgy/breathy tone and aggressive rips up to the highest notes of the flute. Impressively performed by all players, this piece provides a welcome contrast to the other works in this volume.

This album is an excellent and worthwhile addition to the “New American Masters” Series. I highly recommend it, especially for advocates of contemporary music and for flute teachers and performers who need to gain repertoire ideas. —*Molly Barth*