



## Reviews - Fanfare Magazine - Nov/Dec 2014

The indefatigable Palisades Virtuosi, a trio comprising flute, clarinet, and piano, presents us with volume five of new music composed for the group by seven talented contemporary composers. Opening the recital is *Palisades Amusement*, a divertissement by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec. The twists and turns of the lines of this quite complex work evoke the roller coaster of the now-defunct Palisades Amusement Park in New Jersey. The composer's description of the piece as "impish and mercurial" is right on the mark, and the work demonstrates (in case you doubted it) that even essentially atonal music can be fun.

*Time Unheard* is described by composer James Chwalyk as attempting to depict the passing of time that is not directly experienced by humans. This includes such things as the millennia that have elapsed before we were born, and the friendships and actions of others. The work is cast along modal lines and evokes feelings of nostalgia and reminiscence to my ears. Heard in the midst of the work is a poem written by the composer's grandmother shortly before she passed away. *Time Unheard* is fun too, even as different as it is from the opening piece.

David Sampson has contributed his *Undercurrents Redux* to the present recital. The motivation for this piece was the composer's recollection of the long childhood summers during which he enjoyed playing in the streams near his home in Camden, South Carolina, and observing the various forms of life immediately above and below the surface of the water. The work begins with a long and wandering line in the solo flute, which is shortly joined by the clarinet in similar material. This quiet opening suggests a tranquilly flowing stream, while the later more vigorous and playful sections might be meant to portray the activity of the insects and other life forms that the composer encountered in these venues. The sections of the work are tied together skillfully, and the work concludes quite dramatically.

Donald Reid Womack offers a four-movement suite of some 13 minutes' duration. Its title, *'Aina*, derives from a Hawaiian word meaning variously "land," "mountains," "the sea," and even "the world." Its opening features reiterated bass notes in the piano underscoring mysterious low notes in the bass clarinet and bass flute. The movement title "Lo'ihī" refers to the creation of the island off the east coast of Hawaii, and symbolically to the creation of the 'aina itself. After the mysterious opening, the rhythmic activity increases, and the tessitura of the two winds moves into their upper ranges. "Pele's Hair" reverts to ordinary B♭ clarinet and C flute and is characterized by short figures in both winds tossed around in interesting fashion. The title of this movement refers to the volcanic glass which is formed when bits of lava, thrown into the air, are "spun" into thin filaments by wind currents. "Makai" is a scherzo-like movement with a *moto perpetuo* run of quick notes in the winds with occasional interjections by the piano. The title is the Hawaiian word for "sea," and the piece is meant to depict the various dartings about of the denizens of the deep. Lava makes a reappearance in the suite's closing "Echoes of a Long Frozen Fire," but in this case the movement seeks to depict the massive fields of cooled lava which are ubiquitous in this island chain. The music in this movement seems as timeless as the fields it's seeking to portray.

*Between Worlds* by Raymond Wojcik is, at 24-plus minutes, the most extended work in this recital, and was written in 2010 as an expression of the massive disruption of the composer's life caused by his diagnosis of cancer a few years before. Its title is meant to indicate the personal upheaval caused by this diagnosis in the midst of an otherwise normal life. I do hear a good bit of anguish in this music, well suggestive of the composer's intentions. There is also drama, including the occasional unison passages between the three instruments, as well as irony and sardonic humor. The latter shows up particularly in the composer's quotation from a polka that he wrote at the age of nine. Perhaps this quote signified to him the limited span of his life (which sadly ended at the age of 57, at just about the time that I wrote this review), but Wojcik's acceptance of his fate is suggested by a repeated piano figure, continuing as if into eternity. Of all the works in this collection, this one in particular demands repeated hearings to bring it into focus for the listener, who will then find its considerable rewards.

In Sergio Garcia-Marruz's two-movement work *Palisades Rush* we find its composer seeking to portray his life in the unique megalopolis known as New York. The first movement, "Fantasia para Tres," deals primarily with the textural possibilities of the three instruments, whose intertwining, combined with the laid-back Latin feel of the piece, somehow suggests the ambience of the area. The contrasting second movement, "Monday in New York," is overt in its depiction of the crazy, honk-infested rush hour encountered by every New Yorker who is crazy enough to drive in to work. Its fast-paced tempo might seem to belie the speed of the average automobile in that scenario, but hey, New York is fast, even when you're stuck in the middle of a traffic jam. The piece works beautifully, and is one of my favorites on the CD.

The disc closes with Steve Perillo's *Tour De Force*, another two-movement work consisting of "Kaleidoscope" and "Rondo." The former is supposed to demonstrate the composer's love of both Bach and 19th-century Italian music, although I hear little of either in this tonal piece. Still, it's a delightful confection of styles and moods. The rondo movement is a non-stop adventurous romp in the style of Poulenc or Françaix as filtered through an American lens, and full of rollicking good humor.

This recital has a good combination of styles—always a good idea when the tonal resources of the instruments involved are relatively limited—and each work receives an expert, polished performance by the Palisades Virtuosi. Highly recommended to woodwind enthusiasts, and to those who enjoy exploring new repertory by worthwhile composers. **David DeBoor Canfield**

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Palisades Virtuosi specializes in music for flute, clarinet, and piano, still not a very commonly encountered combination, although its members certainly done their share to remedy that: as flutist Margaret Swinchoski points out (see above), Palisades Virtuosi is responsible for "nearly 70 new works," nine of which (by seven composers) appear on *New American Masters*, the trio's latest release. The music runs the gamut from extended "symphonic" essays (pianist Ron Levy's word for Raymond Wojcik's 24-minute *Between Worlds*), to transplanted Italian folk songs (my response to Steve Perillo's lyrical bent, as heard in *Kaleidoscope*) and high-spirited entertainment (his "Rondo: Kaleidosope" and Rondo together comprise *Tour De Force*); from exotic portraits of alternately lush and forbidding Hawaiian vistas (Donald Reid Womack's 'Aina) to poetic evocations of a life well lived (James Chawalyk's *Time Unheard*); and from busy, at times hectic counterpoint (Paul Moravec's *Palisades Amusement*) to Sergio Garcia-Marruz's Latin holiday in busy New York City—leisurely and sensual one moment and rhythmically infectious the next ("Palisades Rush: Fantasia Para Tres;" "Monday in New York"). Overall, this is "accessible" music, even when spiky or mildly abstract—no pointillist mathematical exercises here. True "virtuosi," the performers aren't daunted by the occasionally demanding scores, but penetrate easily to the heart of each singularly different offering. This is the fifth CD in Palisades Virtuosi's series devoted to their many commissions. Based on the quality and variety on display, I would guess that the others would be well worth hearing. In addition, Ron Levy promises a forthcoming disc of "corruptions," i.e., arrangements of well-known music, including Holst's *The Planets*; Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of*

*the Animals*; Beethoven's "Spring" Sonata; Debussy's *Children's Corner*; and scores by Menotti and Khatchaturian, among others. Should be fun. **Robert Schulslaper**

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A stimulating collection of world premiere recordings of newly commissioned works, this disc acts as a working conspectus of youthful American music of now. A fair amount of music by Paul Moravec (b. 1957) has been reviewed previously in *Fanfare*; the lively 2009 piece *Palisades Amusement* (referring to the Palisades Amusement Park, New Jersey, that closed in 1971) is featured here. Spiky, cheeky, and scored with a sure hand for flute, clarinet, and piano, it is nicely descriptive of the fun and excitement (and apprehension) of the fair. Moravec is a 2013 Guggenheim Fellow. Very different is *Time Unheard* by James Chwalyk (b. 1987). While the title refers to deep matters, those of the time before we are born and after we die, "containing millions of friendships of which we never hear, the deafening silences, the heroic actions others have undertaken and will perform, the tragedies and victories of mankind" (from the booklet notes), the general demeanor of the music is eminently approachable and almost carefree. There is an inserted spoken poem by the composer's grandmother, originally given in American Sign Language to the music. The poem is reproduced in the booklet.

David Sampson (b. 1951) has had several pieces reviewed previously by *Fanfare*. He is a pupil of Dutilleux and Corigliano, amongst others. His *Undercurrents Redux* grew out of a 2007 solo flute piece, *Undercurrents* of 2007. This is a 2010 blossoming for trio. In formal terms a set of variations, *Undercurrents Redux* is inspired by streams near Camden, South Carolina and happenings above and below the waterline. There is a clearly active musical imagination, and the performance here is of the very first rank (the piece moves from contemplative to significantly more active).

Several pieces by Donald Reid Womack have been reviewed for *Fanfare*. The Hawaiian word "aina" means, among other things, "land," in all its various guises. Womack has chosen to present a set of character pieces to reflect various images of Hawaii. The composer's own notes point to a deep love of this island, and in his music he seeks to invoke Pele, the Hawaiian Goddess creatrix/destroyer. The first movement, "Lo'ihī," describes the creation of an island forming off the east coast of Hawaii, and also the creative act itself. Musical descriptions of bubblings of subterranean origin are perhaps graphic, while Womack's response to "Pele's Hair," volcanic glass formed by lava thrown into the air and manipulated by the wind into long strands, is unfailingly delicate and beautiful (like the strands themselves, one assumes). The word "Makai," which heads the third movement, means in Hawaiian both "sea" and the creatures that dwell there. Again the music seeks to depict natural events, this time not only the darting maneuvers of the fish but also the arrival of a shark (which takes on a spiritual resonance, as sharks are worshipped as ancestral spirits in Hawaii). This active movement receives a sterling, clean performance.

There is only one previous entry on the *Fanfare* Archive for music by Raymond Wojcik (b. 1957), and that was a review by myself: a single-composer disc reviewed in *Fanfare* 32:5. There, I wrote that it was "an entertaining disc. No great depths are plumbed, but sometimes that's no bad thing." It's difficult to apply that to *Between Worlds* (2010), which is obviously of serious intent. A read of the attendant booklet note explains why: It is a response to a 2006 cancer diagnosis, and the composer is right to describe this piece as a "dense, dark and conflicted work." The transcendence of the end is intended to reflect a state which the composer actively seeks rather than has attained. A musical motif is used to represent cancer itself. As a musical response, we hear the shock of the initial diagnosis (the rather discombobulatory opening), the time the composer spent with his young daughter after learning the news (music of unutterable tenderness) and the composer's succumbing to sadness (the word he uses is "grief," although it is unclear exactly what shape that grief took—anticipatory, one assumes). Heard in this light, the piece is massively affecting. Spread over some 24 minutes, it is clear there is a fair amount of self-examination involved in the processes here. Despite the length, the piece does not sprawl, nor does it fall into any feeling of feeling sorry for itself. It is a mature

examination of the composer's emotions, presented in a composition of the highest caliber. One wonders if other cancer sufferers could take some solace in this piece, recognizing the various emotional stages *Between Worlds* describes as part of its emotional trajectory.

The name of Havana-trained Sergio Garcia-Marruz is new to me and, it would appear, the *Fanfare Archive* as well. He studied classical guitar with Leo Brouwer and has been involved in film and television music (TV and radio commercials). His *Palisades Rush* is in two movements: "Fantasia para Tres," a decidedly contemplative statement, followed by "Monday in New York," a musical depiction of the Manhattan morning rush hour with wonderfully witty end.

One disc of music by Steve Perillo has been reviewed, positively, by John Story in *Fanfare* 23:3. A student of David del Tredici, Perillo makes reference to a variety of styles. The title of the piece here, *Tour De Force*, was actually by the Palisades Virtuosi (the composer originally called it simply "Trio"). The first movement is titled "Kaleidoscope" and is a quirky homage to Bach and 19th-century Italian music. There is wit aplenty; the final movement, "Rondo" is helter-skelter, inspired by, in the composer's own words, the "sheer joy of speed." As everywhere on this disc, the players respond with both virtuosity and style; the actual standard of recording is of the very highest throughout. **Colin Clarke**

*Since this review was written, we have learned that Raymond Wojcik, the composer of *Between Worlds*, has passed away. He was 57 years old. Ed.*