

FANFARE, Jan/Feb 2007

LEVIN *Anima/Breath of Life*.¹ **BURWASSER** *Flux*.² **CUNNINGHAM** *Wakefield Autumn*.³ **MCKINLEY** *Lightning*.⁴ **GIACOMETTI** *Il tempo, grande scultore*.³ **RENO** *Simple Motives in Minor Modes*.⁵ • Carl St. Clair, cond;¹ Marin Alsop, cond;² Vít Míčka, cond;³ Kirk Trevor, cond;⁴ Gerard Schwarz, cond;⁵ Warsaw PO,¹ Concordia C Ens;² Moravian PO;³ London SO;⁴ Seattle SO⁵ • MMC 2147 (68:17)

Volume 18 of MMC's "New Century" series includes music by six contrasting yet complementary composers. Rami Levin's *Breath of Life* explores a wide variety of moods in its 16-minute duration, from Shostakovich-like dances and Stravinskian neo-Classic scorings and rhythms (both exemplified perfectly during the course of the earlier part of the work) through to expressive chorales. The work is actually in three movements, although MMC accords it only one track. Compositionally secure, there is an infectious exuberance here. Levin seems at her most impressive in the slower, more reflective, moments.

Originally intended as a work for string quartet, Daniel Burwasser's *Flux* harbors a harmonic language that is fairly romantic, maybe even indulgent. Burwasser's strength seems to be that he has a keen ear for the actual color of specific harmonies, and can use those colors effectively—some of the chords simply glow! It would be interesting to hear more of his music to be in a position to make a more rounded judgment, but on this 10-minute showing there is much talent here.

Michael G. Cunningham describes his *Wakefield Autumn* as a "pastoral idyll" on a small town in Michigan's Northern Peninsula, although, interestingly, Cunningham has never been there; the portrait is based on a friend's description. Certainly, Cunningham has an ear for setting up atmospheres—in particular, a section of pizzicato strings answered by staccato trumpet notes with a bubbling background is memorable.

I was impressed by the music of McKinley's Second Viola Concerto in MMC 2148. His *Lightning*—an overture—is another outstanding work. The advocacy of an on-form London Symphony clearly helps the work's cause. Slashing chords represent lightning (very excitingly played), while the calmer sections subtly retain the threat of storms underneath their surfaces. There seems to be some sort of kinship between the McKinley and the Giacometti (unintentional on the part of the composers, I'm sure) as the one flows well from the other. *Il tempo, grande scultore* ("Time, the great sculptor") effectively conjures up an ominous atmosphere. As Peter Bates's booklet notes put it, "this piece deals in contrasting tone clusters or bolts of sound." Bates also refers to optimism in the shape of a Copland-like melody (it sounded a little out-of-place to me).

Robert Reno's *Simple Motives in Minor Modes* is a happy way to close the disc. This is very approachable music, of no great depth but of great imagination. Truth be told, I nearly played it again straight after hearing it the first time. Reno is another composer of wide-ranging scope. The Seattle Symphony clearly enjoys itself. **Colin Clarke**