

KYLE GANN

Consumer Guide

It says something about this year's impoverished concert schedule that I can afford to run my Guide in April, at season's apex. But note what a strong showing women are making on disc lately. Comparing apples and screwdrivers as usual, I give Coates Pick Hit over Feldman partly because she's such an exciting and belated discovery.

JON APPLETON:

Contes de la memoire

(empreintes DIGITALes)

The guru of the synclavier has released here a couple of new works, but mostly old pieces that hadn't been available in decades. Appleton's pieces stand apart from electro music's technology-driven history, often with refreshing, purposeful naiveté. In 1969 he made a piece called *Newark Airport Rock* by recording the answers of passing strangers to his question, "What do you think about the new electronic music?" That's here with its 1996 sequel, in which the best answer is "I don't know what you're talking about, I've just come from England." The early works using ethnic music and environmental sounds seem timely in today's sampler-driven scene, and I like the dreamy simplicity of the synthesized *In Media Res*. Naturally, the disc ends with the once famous *Chef d'Oeuvre* of 1967, based on a Chef Boyardee TV commercial.

A MINUS

Strings," is written for string orchestra playing mostly open strings (plus her characteristic glissandos) tuned at first to the scale B-flat, C, D-flat, F, G-flat, and retuned in later movements to the usual C G D A E. The music's Bartókian intensity belies the bizarre stratagem. Sounding like distant storms, Symphonies 4 and 7 are marked by the same mixture of militarism and melancholy found in another American woman's music, Nancy Van de Vate's, but smoother and more mystical, with masterful handling of slow transitions and large texture masses. The Fourth Symphony's first movement weaves sliding glissandos over a mournful chorale which, on examination, turns out to be Purcell's "Dido's Lament." Seekers of the next post-Mahlerite after Allan Pettersson need look no futher, while my new-music ears appreciate Coates's gloomy sincerity, and the originality of her writhing sonic surfaces. **A**

COMMON SENSE: Common

Structural Adjustment bring postminimalism a new level of emotional control. The crowd-pleasing closer is Randall Woolf's *My Insect Bride*, an elephantine spoof whose Mussorgskian lumbering threatens to burst the boundaries of its chamber medium. **B PLUS**

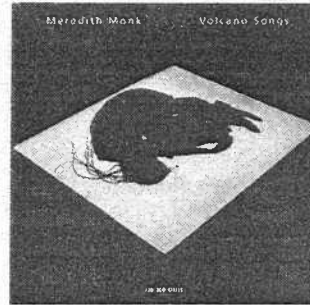
MORTON FELDMAN:

Durations; Coptic Light (CPO)

Coptic Light (1985) is one of Feldman's last, amazing orchestral works, 24 minutes of a textural metamorphosis that defies words: it's too fluid to shimmer, too continuous to evanesce, too weighty to float, too changeable to be meditative, and so on. Long famous by underground reputation, it's less dark and glowing than his *For Samuel Beckett*, less prickly than *Turfan Fragments*, with an interplay of melodic fragments so thick that your ear never finds a place to rest. The German Symphony Orchestra of Berlin, under the baton of Michael Morgan, brings it to disc in delicate splendor. It's preceded by all five pieces of Feldman's early *Durations* series of 1960-61, in his classic, rhythmless sustained-note mode, and in smooth-as-silk performances. **A**

SORREL HAYS: *Dreaming the*

World (New World) Southern novelists get celebrated, but little notice has been paid to the special qualities of southern composers. The chief quality



Pick hit: Meridith Monk

Adams protégé lacks the irreverent wit of his first (on Audioquest), which featured a pedal steel bass guitar. In fact, in *Range of Light* he goes whole-hog classical, with mezzo soprano Catherine Robbin singing back-to-nature John Muir texts over lush, Ravelian orchestrations. I prefer *The Fifth Lake* for tinkly Celtic harp, regular harp, mellow guitar, and occasional light percussion as more unconventional, floating in a sea of silence. It'd seem conservative if it weren't so unpretentiously devoid of climax or direction. **B**

MEREDITH MONK: *Volcano*

Songs (ECM) The only thing likely to surprise Monk fans is this disc's striking intimacy; from the opening, dancelike breathing sounds, this is Monk in her most personal chamber mode, and closely recorded. Though titled for the brief solos and duets that make up *Volcano Songs* the disc mostly consists of more substantial works that New Yorkers have been enjoying at

is his underlying theme, and titles like *Chemistry of 7* clue you in to his pitch and rhythmic concerns. Two of the most interesting cuts involve layers of ambient sound added by DJ Spooky, whose muted industrial noises contrast nicely with Neill's calm trumpet playing. Not since Laurie Anderson has new music made such a strong crossover bid. Will it work? **B PLUS**

NEIL ROLNICK: *Requiem Songs—For the Victims of Nationalism* (Albany)

Subsequent to his travels in the former Yugoslavia, Rolnick set sopranos Amy Fradon and Leslie Ritter singing Balkan-style in a kind of electronic folk music.

Whether the strategy works politically is open to the usual debate, but the innocent simplicity of the vocals is an effective foil to such sardonic lyrics as "Ethnic Cleansing" and "The Wedding Party": "Why are you drinking? Why are you dancing? The bride you were bringing was killed last night." Meanwhile, Todd Reynolds fiddles and Rolnick provides electronic distortions with a light, reverent touch. On the virtual flip side, *Screen Scenes* is a lively experiment with computer-triggered quintet improvisation. **B PLUS**

DAVID ROSENBOOM AND ANTHONY BRAXTON:

Two Lines (Lovely Music) One of Rosenboom's basic paradigms is to take a drone

The title of *Bridge*, from 1984, partly implies a bridge between Tenney's twin idols, John Cage and Harry Partch; while the textures have a Cagean sparseness, the pianos are tuned to a 22-pitch just intonation scale (five-limit) in which one piano takes the sharp keys, the other the flat ones, around a central implied tonality of A. Pointillism as unforgiving as Boulez's *Structures* will give way at times to harmonic clashes in which the tuning discrepancies become deliciously sour. *Flocking* (1993) is more pragmatic, less theoretically elegant: a graphic score in which two pianists realize the same graphs on pianos tuned a quarter tone apart. **B**

LENORE VON STEIN:

Blind Love = PoRno? (LVS)

I thought all love was blind and pornography was visual, but what do I know? Never have I heard a stream of consciousness so accurately produced and captured on recording as this 1995 live performance at Roulette. Snippets of old songs flash into Von Stein's head, come out her mouth, and are gone before your brain has time to say, "Wait, isn't that . . . ?" Meanwhile, Michael Rabinowitz on bassoon and Michael Jeffrey Stevens on piano and synthesizer/organ create their own dada moments (listen to Rabinowitz fall into an old TV theme song in "Fuck

music?" That's here with its 1996 sequel, in which the best answer is "I don't know what you're talking about, I've just come from England." The early works using ethnic music and environmental sounds seem timely in today's sampler-driven scene, and I like the dreamy simplicity of the synthesized *In Media Res*. Naturally, the disc ends with the once famous *Chef d'Oeuvre* of 1967, based on a Chef Boyardee TV commercial.

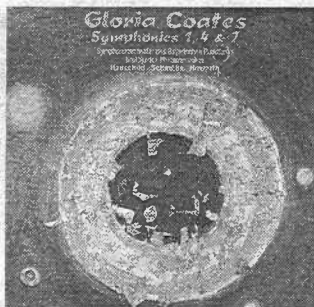
A MINUS

BLASTULA (Atavistic) John Myers and his other three electric guitarists hail from Glenn Branca territory, but Blastula's music is simpler, more graspable, more post-minimal, less mystical than Branca's—not watered down or less ambitious, just more pragmatic. If Branca engulfs you in a cathedral of noise, Myers whisks you on a train ride through a disturbing landscape with plenty of tunnels. *Flifire* and *Perception* ramble through minimalist patterns, *Dive* groans with slow, David First-style out-of-tune glissandos. And few postminimalists have achieved texture changes as thrilling, or tunes as down and dirty, as in *Tuned Stone*. At 23 minutes, this is a brief debut, but filled with promise. **B PLUS**

GLORIA COATES: Symphonies 1, 4, & 7 (CPO) Forget Gorecki and Giya Kancheli. Perhaps the most original and moving symphonist of our time turns 60 next year, still almost unknown. Gloria Coates's Symphony No. 1, subtitled "Music for Open

more mystical, with masterful handling of slow transitions and large texture masses. The Fourth Symphony's first movement weaves sliding glissandos over a mournful chorale which, on examination, turns out to be Purcell's "Dido's Lament." Seekers of the next post-Mahlerite after Allan Pettersson need look no futher, while my new-music ears appreciate Coates's gloomy sincerity, and the originality of her writhing sonic surfaces. **A**

COMMON SENSE: Common Sense (CRI) New York first heard the group of pieces recorded here at Roulette in June 1994. Three years later, they're wearing well. In general, I'm more taken with the group's pensive adagios than their nervous perpetuum mobiles, and so Melissa Hui's Gagaku-inspired *Solstice*, using only a few meditative pitches, moves me, as does Carolyn Yarnell's brooding *Sage*,



Pick hit: Gloria Coates

politically incorrect in its frank, depressive romanticism. But the smoothness of this new chamber style in the hands of Dan Becker, Belinda Reynolds, and John Halle is itself impressive; the repeated anxious buildups of Halle's

ments so thick that your ear never finds a place to rest. The German Symphony Orchestra of Berlin, under the baton of Michael Morgan, brings it to disc in delicate splendor. It's preceded by all five pieces of Feldman's early *Durations* series of 1960-61, in his classic, rhythmless sustained-note mode, and in smooth-as-silk performances. **A**

SORREL HAYS: Dreaming the World (New World) Southern novelists get celebrated, but little notice has been paid to the special qualities of southern composers. The chief quality of Hays's music is a joyously earthy mysticism, especially apparent here in *Turnings* for string quartet, grounded in rural folk-fiddling. The electronic performances are especially engaging; her "electronic symphony" *Structure 123* bounces with aplomb, and *Take a Back Country Road* has a kind of down-home romantic tonality despite its timbral squiggling, like music Giacinto Scelsi might have written had he grown up in Tennessee. The 35-minute title cut, a vehicle for baritone Tom Buckner with percussive natural sounds and Seminole texts, doesn't come across as well on recording, its ritual elements left to the imagination. **B**

SASHA MATSON: Range of Light/The Fifth Lake (New Albion) New Yorkers may roll their eyes at the too-pretty of it all, but Matson carries on the tradition of Daniel Lentz's languid unhurriedness and Lou Harrison's aimless tonality. The second disc by this postminimalist and John

ing in a sea of silence. It'd seem conservative if it weren't so unpretentiously devoid of climax or direction. **B**

MEREDITH MONK: Volcano Songs (ECM) The only thing likely to surprise Monk fans is this disc's striking intimacy; from the opening, dancelike breathing sounds, this is Monk in her most personal chamber mode, and closely recorded. Though titled for the brief solos and duets that make up *Volcano Songs* the disc mostly consists of more substantial works that New Yorkers have been enjoying at Monk's concerts, particularly the rare solo piano piece *St. Petersburg Waltz* (played by Nurit Tilles) and *Three Heavens and Hells*. The latter especially is a minor Monk masterpiece, in which she and three cohorts apply a delightful variety of chanting styles to a child's poem about three heavens and hells for people, animals, and things. The *Waltz* is charmingly sad, and *New York Requiem*, an AIDS piece for Monk's voice and piano, burns with a passion her playful music rarely allows, but which she brings off exquisitely. **A**

BEN NEILL: Triptycal (Antilles) If Neill made overtures to the ambient rock crowd with *Green Machine*, he's lunging at them with *Triptycal*. Faced, like Mozart in Vienna, with the problem of appealing to the connoisseurs and plebeians at once, he offers the latter a smooth, techno-slick rock surface and the former a background of sophisticated computer operations controlled by his invention, the mutantrumpet. Alchemy

effective tool to such sardonic lyrics as "Ethnic Cleansing" and "The Wedding Party": "Why are you drinking? Why are you dancing? The bride you were bringing was killed last night." Meanwhile, Todd Reynolds fiddles and Roinick provides electronic distortions with a light, reverent touch. On the virtual flip side, *Screen Scenes* is a lively experiment with computer-triggered quintet improvisation. **B PLUS**

DAVID ROSENBOOM AND ANTHONY BRAXTON: Two Lines (Lovely Music) One of Rosenboom's basic paradigms is to take a drone, amplify it until you can hear microscopic variations in the sound, record those, and then subtract the drone. That's how he arrived at the music for *Two Lines*, a 26-minute work in which he on piano and Braxton on flute and saxophones often play complex patterns in rhythmic unison. In shorter spinoff pieces like *Lineage* and *Enactment*, the two improvise as a computer interprets their input and shoots it back via a sampled piano using Rosenboom's HMSL software. Frequently it sounds like virtuosos and computer are trying to play all the notes at once, but it's amazing how focused Rosenboom's algorithmic improv is, even when that focus is constantly moving. **B PLUS**

JAMES TENNEY: Bridge & Flocking (Hat Art) It's good to get music on disc that reflects Tenney's rethinking of western tuning, though the resulting abstract piano monuments may prove daunting to noncomposers.

and pornography was visual, but what do I know? Never have I heard a stream of consciousness so accurately produced and captured on recording as this 1995 live performance at Roulette. Snippets of old songs flash into Von Stein's head, come out her mouth, and are gone before your brain has time to say, "Wait, isn't that . . . ?" Meanwhile, Michael Rabinowitz on bassoon and Michael Jefry Stevens on piano and synthesizer/organ create their own dada moments (listen to Rabinowitz fall into an old TV theme song in "Fuck Tradition"). Some cuts are allegedly Vernon Duke and Willie Nelson covers, but you can hardly pick them out of this continuity that wanders obsessively but with sure feet. Sort of a Zen cocktail music for those who want the ambience of a smoke-filled bar without the musical clichés. **B**

Consumer News
IMPORTANT RERELEASES: 1750 Arch's historic 1977 disc of electronic music by women—including early Laurie Anderson pieces, the first Johanna Geyer recording, and Pauline Oliveros's seminal *Bye Bye Butterfly*—has been brought back out by CRI under the title *New Music for Electronic and Recorded Media*; and *Annea Lockwood's The Glass World*, from 1970, reappears on What Next? Recordings. More crucially, Da Capo Press has finally republished *Harry Partch's* irreplaceable *Genesis of a Music* after decades of neglect.

ADDRESSES: **Albany Records**, P.O. Box 5011, Albany, NY 12205-0011. **Atavistic**, P.O. Box 578266, Chicago, IL 60657. **CPO**, Lübecker Str. 9, D-49124 Georgsmarienhütte, Germany. **LVS**, 1687, Inc., P.O. Box 1687, Old Chelsea Station, New York, 10113.