

KYLE GANN

Consumer Guide

As even the middle-sized labels sink ever deeper into commercial self-censorship, more and more of my best CDs are self-produced by the composer, with label names I don't recognize and often optimistically numbered "001." It's fantastic that that's become possible, but I sometimes can't tell anymore what's commercially available and what's being sold only out of the composer's basement over the Internet. So the letters come in: "I can't find that great disc you recommended. . . ." I try to give preference to stuff you can find, and I will proactively provide e-mail addresses where possible. Good luck.

MARYANNE AMACHER: *Sound Characters* (Tzadik) Since she's famous for building-sized three-dimensional sound sculptures, I was resigned to never hearing Amacher on disc, but this sampling of installations and mind-altering textures captures her better than I thought possible. Thunder booms in 22 different colors to drive your neighbors crazy, 800-foot balalaikas strum endlessly, and one explosive track, which began when I had gone into the kitchen, made me think my son was having some terrible accident in the garage because it sounded like amplified garbage cans plummeting down an infinitely long metal laundry chute. Several ear-splitting textures intend to elicit "otoacoustic emissions," sounds inside your ears and not in the music; they dance right at your eardrums and wheel through your head. All previous sonic spectacular discs are hereby rendered obsolete. **A**

first wave of enthusiasm for the group and only emerge in recent years as the Feldman of Italy? Don't know, but along the way his Webernesque pointillism—evident in one piece included from 1956—melted into a totally original and distinctive sense of texture: lightly sprung dance rhythms heard through a veil of Seurat-like dots of timbre. Aside from the one oldie, the Ives Ensemble of Holland plays nine recent works varied in speed and strategy (some of them delightfully canonic), but absolutely alike in their fragile poetry. Sort of like fast Feldman, but with a hint of a waltz in the background. **B PLUS**

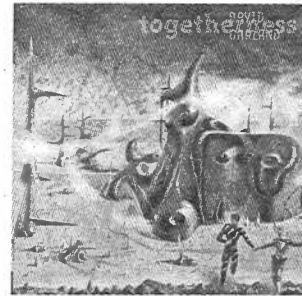


Maryanne Amacher
SOUND CHARACTERS

performer. This one-man-duo album—he sings and plays cello, both superbly and at the same time—finds him in a gently sad, introverted mode. Some songs, like the final "Il Mio Pomodoro" in Italian, are remarkably traditional and beautifully done. Elsewhere he uses Tibetan overtone singing, minimalist word repetition, and smooth jazz cello pizzicato, invariably to charming effect. **B PLUS**

DAVID GARLAND: *Togetherness* (Ergodisc) His songs are as richly detailed and elegantly produced as Mikel Rouse's, but while Rouse hides behind his glib wordplay and vibrant rhythmic structures, Garland constantly reveals himself even though he pretends to an ironic persona. There's a love song here Sinatra would lust after, a song that's gotta be the first ever written about blandishments (they should be banished, not brandished), and a science-fiction song that interrupts the line "With the girls of Planet X/I could have some wonderful" with a whirling electronic noise. Underlying it all, though, is a deep compassion for the daily sadness of being human, couched in a comforting voice that can sustain a low B-flat below the clef like it's no big deal. **A**

ANNIE GOSFIELD: *Burnt Ivory and Loose Wires* (Tzadik) Only two or three people use the sampler distinctively enough to be instantly recognizable, and Gosfield may be chief in that respect. Her jumpy ostinatos and



Pick Hit: David Garland

(mousetraps and pencil sharpeners as instruments, whacked-out totalist rhythms) distracted from his main point—so he erased what was fake? There's still the same slapdash sense of melody, some peculiar meters, but there's a lot more quiet here, moments where you're led to wonder whether the music has ended and it hasn't. Also some gentle dance tunes, including a very sincere *Cheap Suit Tango* for violin and tuba. Despite its introversion the music remains highly physical, making me suspect it's better suited for concert hall than recording. It confirms, though, that Jarvinen, bless him, is still an aesthetic loose cannon. **B**

PHIL KLINE: *Glow in the Dark* (CRI) Not since Stockhausen's *Gesang der Juenglinge* has a child's voice in an electronic whirlwind sounded so otherworldly as in Kline's "Chant." Low-tech though it may be, I'm still mystified as to how he gets these sweeping glissandos to culminate in huge roars from playing 10 to 25 boomboxes into each other

astonishing technique of playing in between each other's notes to create an impression of double-human speed. Even when they're evoking Satie, playing xylophones, or providing minimalism with a welcome sense of humor, their bullets-through-the-propeller-blades synchronization creates calmly frenetic textures unlike anything you've ever heard. It's the fastest new music since Nancarrow, and I bet he'd have liked it. **A MINUS**

HARRY PARTCH: *Enclosure 5* (Innova) Volume 5 may scrape the bottom of Partch's barrel, but what a barrel! Apart from some politely trulent radio statements, the real prize of these three discs is the CD premiere of *King Oedipus*, the work with which Partch paid homage to Yeats and tied his early output to ancient Greek drama. It sounds every bit as weird and mannered as the original Greek drama probably would if accurately reconstructed, yet the story imprints itself powerfully, with some occasional thrilling climaxes on Partch's homemade instruments. Partch and Ben Johnston perform a well-tuned Baroque minuet, and there are a few dreary vocal works demonstrating Partch's early concept of corporeality, plus the old Gate 5 recording of *Revelation in the Courthouse Park* and Kenneth Gaburo's fabulous production of *The Bewitched*. For Innova's project as a whole, A plus is too weak a grade. **B PLUS**

many years, it's great to have the "Concord's" reissued, in sterling performances by the quartet they're named for. **B PLUS**

JUDITH SAINTE-CROIX: *Visions of Light and Mystery* (Sonic Muse) If Anthony Phillip Heinrich was "the Beethoven of Kentucky," I'm tempted to call Sainte-Croix "the Messiaen of Minnesota." She's too original for that, with an exotic and personal sound-world, but the emphasis on ecstatic harmonies and birdsong-derived flute gestures reminds you that she and Messiaen have parallel approaches to the mysticism of nature. In her case, also American Indians, the ambient evocations of whose music come off better on disc than I expected. "Visions I & II" for large chamber groups etch her sturdy melodies, and she sparkles playing her ambitious "Tukwinong" for piano, but the "Bright Leaf Trios," for instrumentalists required to speak text while playing, suffer on disc for the text being too soft and out of context. Despite occasional clichés, a strong compositional voice always comes through. **B**

GIOVANNI SOLLIMA: *Aquilarco* (Point) Finally a young European has taken postminimalism, polished it up with some nice Euro-harmonies and a tastefully feverish romanticism, and brought it back to us in an earnest disc. **B PLUS**

balalaikas strum endlessly, and one explosive track, which began when I had gone into the kitchen, made me think my son was having some terrible accident in the garage because it sounded like amplified garbage cans plummeting down an infinitely long metal laundry chute. Several ear-splitting textures intend to elicit "otoacoustic emissions," sounds inside your ears and not in the music; they dance right at your eardrums and wheel through your head. All previous sonic spectacular discs are hereby rendered obsolete. **A**

THURMAN BARKER: *The Way I Hear It* (Uptee Productions) Possibly the AACM's hottest drummer teams up with pianist Marilyn Crispell, baritone Thomas Buckner, and others for a half jazz, half new-music compendium. At one extreme is the boppy, heavily African "Zimbabwe"; at the other, "Forbidden Places" calls to mind Muhai Richard Abrams's mystical *Levels and Degrees of Light* album, with Buckner crooning wordlessly above shimmering cymbals and Barker's meticulously agile mallet percussion. What isn't mellow jazz is evocative impressionism (including one delicate piece by Crispell), and, though the disc is unevenly recorded, Barker's elegantly intuitive precision shines through every cut. **A MINUS**

ALDO CLEMENTI: *Madrigale* (hat ART) How did this Darmstadt-era serialist completely miss out on the

one oldie, the Ives Ensemble of Holland plays nine recent works varied in speed and strategy (some of them delightfully canonic), but absolutely alike in their fragile poetry. Sort of like fast Feldman, but with a hint of a waltz in the background. **B PLUS**



Pick Hit: Maryanne Amacher

DAVID B. DOTY: *Uncommon Practice* (Syntonic) The timbral flatness of Doty's DX-7 realizations suggests how far just-intonation composers have to compromise to get their music heard. Too, "Fake Irish Music" is a typical title, and he's not shy about generically evoking ancient and Oriental cultures. But Doty is one of our major tuning theorists, and for tuning-sensitive ears, the pure and subtly shifting intonations are well worth it, showing you in a simple, engaging, crystalline context what's possible with enough well-tuned pitches per octave. **B MINUS**

ROBERT EEN: *Your Life Is Not Your Own* (Buzzbox 1111) Like Toby Twining's, Glen Velez's, and Meredith Monk's (which last he's worked with closely), Een's music lives on the exquisite sweetness of his communicative skills as a

statements (they should be banished, not brandished), and a science-fiction song that interrupts the line "With the girls of Planet X/I could have some wonderful" with a whirling electronic noise. Underlying it all, though, is a deep compassion for the daily sadness of being human, couched in a comforting voice that can sustain a low B-flat below the clef like it's no big deal. **A**

ANNIE GOSFIELD: *Burnt Ivory and Loose Wires* (Tzadik) Only two or three people use the sampler distinctively enough to be instantly recognizable, and Gosfield may be chief in that respect. Her jumpy ostinatos and rhythmic intercutting bring no one more recent than that crazy modernist George Antheil to mind, while her brash sampled piano tones, precisely mistuned to sound like the very image of desuetude, are wholly original. Three of the six pieces here combine her raucous noises with various Downtown-regular soloists. Another makes hay from sampled acoustic synthesizer blips and bleeps, which must be a first, and the last is a taut essay for the ROVA Sax Quartet that devolves from microtonal almost-unisons into increasing improvisation. An impressive debut disc. **A**

ART JARVINEN: *Erase the Fake* (O.O.) At this point I can't get as excited about Jarvinen's second disc as I did his first, *Edible Black Ink*, but I'm still intrigued. It's as though he decided the gimmicks I fell in love with

for violin and tuba. Despite its introversion the music remains highly physical, making me suspect it's better suited for concert hall than recording. It confirms, though, that Jarvinen, bless him, is still an aesthetic loose cannon. **B**

PHIL KLINE: *Glow in the Dark* (CRI) Not since Stockhausen's *Gesang der Juenglinge* has a child's voice in an electronic whirlwind sounded so otherworldly as in Kline's "Chant." Low-tech though it may be, I'm still mystified as to how he gets these sweeping glissandos to culminate in huge roars from playing 10 to 25 boomboxes into each other, but they give him the kind of swarming tone-clouds that Penderecki used to seek, deployed in a more gradual, more fluid, more convincing form than Penderecki ever arrived at. Kline's classic "Bachman's Warbler" for harmonica and boomboxes is here, plus "96 Tears," a restful chorale for e-bowed guitars whose expert counterpoint draws a poignant sadness. Downtown Kline may be, but his sensibility is symphonic. **A**

MICRO-RITMIA: *Lejos del Paraiso* It was only a matter of time before Conlon Nancarrow's pinball-quick player piano studies began to influence live performance, and since he switched his citizenship to Mexico, it's gratifying that two Mexican composers are the first to carry on his adventures in speed. Micro-Ritmia is the piano duo of Ernesto Martínez and Eduardo Gonzalez, who have developed a rather

output to ancient Greek drama. It sounds every bit as weird and mannered as the original Greek drama probably would if accurately reconstructed, yet the story imprints itself powerfully, with some occasional thrilling climaxes on Partch's homemade instruments. Partch and Ben Johnston perform a well-tuned Baroque minuet, and there are a few dreary vocal works demonstrating Partch's early concept of corporeality, plus the old Gate 5 recording of *Revelation in the Courthouse Park* and Kenneth Gaburo's fabulous production of *The Bewitched*. For Innova's project as a whole, A plus is too weak a grade. **B PLUS**

GEORGE ROCHBERG: *String Quartets Nos. 3-6* (New World) Intellectually bankrupt perhaps, certainly not a trail younger composers could follow, but I've always found Rochberg's return to writing in historical styles (Beethoven, Mahler) one of the bravest and most peculiar gestures in American music. Older than the serialist generation, he revolted against his youngers, and outdid them by going backward because he was a better composer to begin with. His so-called "Concord" Quartets from the 1970s also provided a vivid, if not terribly fertile, first draft for a postmodern aesthetic: mediating smoothly between tonal and atonal, suddenly sounding exactly like Beethoven's Op. 59 and then measures later like no one at all, in a mercurial stream of consciousness. And since they've been out of print for

groups etch her sturdy melodies, and she sparkles playing her ambitious "Tukwinong" for piano, but the "Bright Leaf Trios," for instrumentalists required to speak text while playing, suffer on disc for the text being too soft and out of context. Despite occasional clichés, a strong compositional voice always comes through. **B**

GIOVANNI SOLLIMA: *Aquilarco* (Point) Finally a young European has taken postminimalism, polished it up with some nice Euro-harmonies and a taste-fully feverish romanticism, and brought it back to us in an easy-to-digest form that I bet the Uptown critics find much more palatable than the American variety. And it's on whose label? Philip Glass's? Oh, yeah. **B**

ADDRESSES:
Buzzbox, 520 East 12th Street, New York, NY 10009;
Ergodisc Records, P.O. Box 3553, Portland, OR 97208;
Grabaciones Lejos del Paraiso, S.A. de C.V. Concepcion Beistegui 622-3 03100 Mexico D.F. (mcrytmia@ciateq.mx);
Innova, 332 Minnesota Street, E-145, Saint Paul, MN 55101; **O.O. Discs**, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3452 (www.hear.com/o.o.);
Sonic Muse, P.O. Box 955, New York, NY 10185;
Syntonic Records, 1039-L164 El Monte Avenue, Mountain View, CA 94040 (www.syntonic-rec.com); **Tzadik**, 61 East 8th Street, Suite 126, New York, NY 10003; **Uptee Productions**, Box 8420, Route 52, Jeffersonville, NY 12748. **V**