

CONSUMER GUIDE Kyle Gann

I'm a classical critic, but the classical music I love most is marginalized by that community. When it's recorded on CRI, it's under the rubric Emergency Music. When on New World, it's called CounterCurrents. When played at Lincoln Center—as it wasn't this summer—it's called "Serious Fun!" Music doesn't have to use violins and European forms to aim at an Important Statement, nor is *classical* a synonym for *stuffy*. Any weirdness below appears in a classical supplement without apology. The news is, Europe's postminimalists are sprinting ahead of the Americans.

Wendy Carlos: *Switched-On Bach 2000* (Telarc) Carlos is an innovative tuning theorist, so when I heard that she used a variety of Baroque tunings to revamp her colorized Bach synthesis, I had to give it a try. The mean-tone tunings do smooth the music's contours (listen especially to the slow E-Flat Major Prelude), and they show up more strikingly in the synthesizer's thick timbres than I've heard them on harpsichord. Carlos's glitzy pings on accented notes still make my skin crawl, but 25 years of techno-improvement, especially in note attacks, makes this more instrumental-sounding, less grating than the old *Switched-Ons*. Tuningwise, the disc makes its point. **C PLUS**

Charles Dodge: *Any Resemblance Is Purely Coincidental* (New Albion) How many new-music discs list Enrico Caruso as a performer? In the title piece, Dodge, a commanding computer-music pioneer, disembodies the tenor from a 1907 recording of *Pagliacci*, turns him into a one-man chorus and his laughter into

Any Resemblance is Purely Coincidental CHARLES DODGE



Enrico Caruso Baird Dodge Alan Feinberg Joan Le Barbara

PICK HIT: Charles Dodge

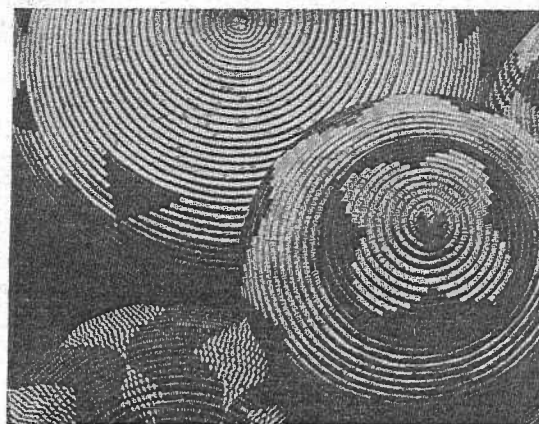
sche (Newport Classic) The philosopher wrote lovely songs (Fischer-Dieskau's collection of them is long gone), three of which turn up here in keyboard arrangements, but piano wasn't his forte. Schumann (never Wagner) is his model for the emotionally overloaded bagatelles, Liszt for the three larger tone poems. Moody *Nachklang einer Sylvesternacht*, an early version of the *Manfred Meditation* written to compete with Schumann, deserves better than the scorn Von Bülow leveled at it, though the inexperienced Nietzsche had idiom trouble: some of it pianistic, most cries out for orchestra. His life-affirming philosophy becomes audible in the noble *Hymn to Friendship*. Only superb panache would make these pieces soar, and pianists John Bell Young and Constance Keene don't do much special. Future installments in this complete works series hold more promise, though, unlike Cage, Nietzsche

capable. But what stands for soulfulness in this 12-inch version of the Barber *Adagio* in three slow movements is the fact that Górecki's plodding scales creep around the mind so inconspicuously that they never encounter an obstacle. I have a bet with history that within 10 years these contrapuntal platitudes will sound terribly dated. In the meantime, enjoy. **C**

Kronos Quartet: *Pieces of Africa* (Elektra Nonesuch) At last, the perfect New Music party disc. The Kronos's collection of African commissions is carried by the enthusiasm of its soloists: Hassan Hakmoun and Dumisani Maraire singing, Foday Musa Suso on kora, and the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir on Maraire's *Kutambarara*. The pieces are ostinato-based, cute, folksy, and ingenuous. Because the Kronos pretty much stays out of the way, the African ethos seems well pre-

KEVIN VOLANS
COVER HIM WITH GRASS

In memoriam Bruce Chatwin



PICK HIT: Kevin Volans

Can festivals is the brashest composer of his generation and occasionally the best. He also conducts his pickup orchestra impressively. The title work is more infectious postminimalism than John Adams has given us lately; over a proud bass melody, string patterns swell, evaporate, then ring forth again. The shorter, boppier, jazz-evocative works are too obvious in their pretend-to-go-somewhere m.o. *Principia* is a ragtime *Le Sacre*, while *Shoulder to Shoulder* assaults you with brass blasts until you want to grab Martland by the throat, but even at his most obnoxious, he accomplishes what that more popular colorist Michael Torke only aims at. **B PLUS**

Wolfgang: *Martland Plays Mozart* (Factory Classical) I'm not making this up. Martland, hereby

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crowd, only Nono brought music's existentialist movement to fruition. **B PLUS**

Wolfgang Rihm: *Music for Three Strings* (CPO) If you cling to the idea, as many do, that great music of the future is hereafter required to satisfy the histrionic demands of Beethovenian drama, you'll be glad to find Rihm's music braving the Atlantic. This 62-minute String Trio is the Darmstadt neoexpressionist star's most listenable piece. Its patches of classical tradition register as not-quite-recognized quotation, sewn together with looser thread than usual. You can cut with a knife the tension created by sonorities whose layers struggle against each other, like early Schoenberg played *slomo fortissimo*. Though I guess this kind of soap opera still grabs at European heartstrings, it inspires an irony I wish it acknowledged. The third movement's never-consummated Beethoven coda is a riot, but Rihm sounds deadly serious. **B**

Lois V. Vierk: *Simoom* (XI) The "boinnng!" of Vierk's overdubbed guitars (actually plucked by David Seidel) is a '90s sound, but her focus on gradual process picks up a '60s thread. Her textures, all for overdubbed multiples of the same instrument, aren't minimalist-clean, but wild and woolly, and what you think you hear isn't what you're going to get. *Go Guitars* turns from a delicate plucking piece into a threshing machine of snarling glissandos; *Cirrus* (Gary Trosclair, trumpets) modulates from a dull drone to clouds of scales; and the title work (Theodore Mook, cellos) turns from swelling tremolos into a melody straining to emerge from a hailstorm of falling lines.

Charles Dodge: Any Resemblance Is Purely Coincidental (New Albion) How many new-music discs list Enrico Caruso as a performer? In the title piece, Dodge, a commanding computer-music pioneer, disembodies the tenor from a 1907 recording of *Pagliacci*, turns him into a one-man chorus and his laughter into 12-tone rows, the whole smiling in a charming, computer-generated chuckle. Dodge's *Speech Songs* sound so timid in this post-sampler era, you'll have to remember they were state of the art in 1972. Most moving is a *Viola Elegy* for Morton Feldman, in which Baird Dodge's solo draws a sweeping line of darkness across an Aurora Borealis of warmly synthesized tones. The disc sums up the best of 20 years of university-sponsored ("big machine") computer synthesis. **A MINUS**

Music by Marcel Duchamp (Edition Block) If you want to hear how much more subtle a great composer's randomness is than a musical amateur's compare these spare chance pieces Duchamp made in 1913 with post-1952 Cage. That isn't to disparage them; Duchamp was millenia ahead of his time as usual, drawing notes from a hat, dropping numbered balls through a funnel. He gave no thought to rhythm, though, and nothing swings. Four pleasant realizations (one using pianola, another layered music boxes) of his three extant works by Petr Kotik and the S.E.M. Ensemble have a dry, elegant precision that Duchamp would have smiled at. The sketchy, original scores are reprinted, and a mesostic for Duchamp read (in French) by the late Cage's lulling voice adds sentimental value. **B**

Piano Music of Friedrich Nietz-

some of it pianistic, most cries out for orchestra. His life-affirming philosophy becomes audible in the noble *Hymn to Friendship*. Only superb panache would make these pieces soar, and pianists John Bell Young and Constance Keene don't do much special. Future installments in this complete works series hold more promise, though, unlike Cage, Nietzsche really was better as a philosopher. **B MINUS**

Peter Garland: Border Music (What Next?) We're overdue for this seminal West Coast postminimalist on easily available disc. Sadly, his late work isn't much represented; four of the six pieces date from 1972-73, the years of Garland's "noise minimalism." *The Three Strange Angels* and *Obstacles of Sleep* were incredible for their time: mammoth piano clusters, warbling sirens, whirring thundersticks, assembled with a sculptural austerity Varèse would have admired. Since then, Garland's moved in gorgeous new directions, represented by a string quartet and piano works not included here. *Cantares de la Frontera* for harp and *Old Men of the Fiesta* for violin, harp, and rattles are reflective, modal, Lou Harrison-like, and lovably unpretentious. It's a must-have disc for partly historic reasons, but Garland's next compilation will be the stunner. **A MINUS**

Henry Górecki: Symphony No. 3 (Elektra Nonesuch) "Daah, dah-dah, dah, dee" rise the scales, Dawn Upshaw sings wonderously when they finally peak, and Górecki's cult following gets goose bumps. Every generation or so since Tchaikovsky, the American public elevates some Slav to greatness for the sake of his melancholy, a depth of spirit of which our own artists are presumed in-

commissions is carried by the enthusiasm of its soloists: Hassan Hakmoun and Dumisani Maraire singing, Foday Musa Suso on kora, and the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir on Maraire's *Kutambarara*. The pieces are ostinato-based, cute, folksy, and ingenuous. Because the Kronos pretty much stays out of the way, the African ethos seems well preserved, and I don't feel as p.i. enjoying it as Christgau did in his April review. The disc is dominated, though, by Kevin Volans's *White Man Sleeps* (see Volans, below, for a better performance) and mellow, glissandoing *Escalay* by the famous Nubian *oud* virtuoso Hamza El Din. **A MINUS**

David Lang: Are You Experienced? (CRI) "I know you were looking forward to hearing this piece," says the composer as the title piece begins, "but something terrible has just happened." *Are You Experienced?* then bonks you on the head and creates an alternate, brass-chord-bouncing reality. It's a cute theatrical conceit off of a Hendrix title, but Lang's better pieces turn inward. He's a nervous postminimalist, whose sonorities echo, flash back, and jump like the hero in a detective novel, eliciting virtuoso performances. In *Orpheus Over and Under*, the Double Edge piano duo shimmers mysteriously in minor-scale tremolos, and *Illumination Rounds* turns Rolf Schulte's violin and Ursula Oppens's piano into 32nd-note machine guns. My favorite is *Spud*, in which a twitchy melody darts around a chamber orchestra before exploding and beating a distraught pizzicato retreat. **B**

Steve Martland: Crossing the Border (Factory Classical) This snake-tattooed, spiky-haired, Brit-with-an-attitude hero of Bang on a

bandwagon, accomplishes what that more popular colorist Michael Torke only aims at.

B PLUS

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hands-down winner of the 1992 Chutzpah Award, has assembled the Steve Martland Band to perform Wolfie's *Serenades K375* and *K388*, along with a suite of six opera arias in Martland's own instrumental arrangements. The interpretations—rough-edged, dubiously tuned, lively, sincere, and joyous—represent an overdue alternative to the white-linen professionalism in which the master's music habitually suffocates. May other renegades follow Martland's example, and rescue Mozart from his devotees. **B**

Luigi Nono: la lontananza nostalgica utopica futura (Disques montaigne) In his last decade, Nono abandoned serialism for music, the way Picasso left Cubism for painting. *The Nostalgic Longing for a Future Utopia* for violin and eight-channel tape dates from '88-89 (postdating and building on his *Fragmente—Stille, An Diotima*, the most profound string quartet Europe's given us lately). The sound is eerie, mostly soft, and entirely ungraspable, tones fading into harmonics and harmonics sliding into glissandi, live violin and Memorex rarely distinguishable. We seem to be hearing the edge of a music being played in another world. Perhaps, of all the Darmstadt

and woolly, and what you think you hear isn't what you're going to get. *Go Guitars* turns from a delicate plucking piece into a thrashing machine of snarling glissandos; *Cirrus* (Gary Trosclair, trumpets) modulates from a dull drone to clouds of scales; and the title work (Theodore Mook, cellos) turns from swelling tremolos into a melody straining to emerge from a hailstorm of falling lines. Less linear than they seem, the processes follow some intricate formal sectioning revealed by playing on fast forward. Vierk has since moved on to more symphonic forms, but this early work is notable for a completely original sense of texture. **B PLUS**

Kevin Volans: Cover Him With Grass (Landor) South African Volans has been the Kronos Quartet's best discovery. His claim that his music is anticonceptualist, anti-European-abstraction, isn't just a posture. Volans brings European polish to an African aesthetic without maiming the latter. It's hard to convey how invigorating this music is, because its methods are subtler than its surface seems. From mbira playing he steals a shifted downbeat technique that keeps your focus constantly shifting in uncountable rhythmic cycles. Most incredible is *Mbira* (1980) for two harpsichords and rattle: an African-inspired pattern piece in an arresting tuning of seven equal steps to the octave. *White Man Sleeps* appears in two very different versions, the familiar one for string quartet and as a lively set of dances for harpsichords, viola da gamba, and percussion. If you want to realize how *flabby* the Kronos Quartet can sound, compare the Smith Quartet's rich, crisp reading of *Sleeps* here with that on the Kronos disc above. No comparison. **A**