

KYLE GANN

Consumer Guide

An awful lot of gnarled, dissonant music is dear to me, but if music has to be ugly to be authentically 20th-century, then I for one will wave goodbye to the 1900s with unmixed relief. So I am unapologetic about giving “Pick Hit” to the prettiest major work in many years, Lentz’s *Apologetica*, and it shares the stage with a joyously raucous percussion fest by coincidence, not as compensation. An interesting historical tendency is the return of choral music, apparent in Lentz, Leach, and Arvo Pärt’s *Kanon Pokajanen* on ECM—the last not reviewed below because it impressed me only with its numbing austerity. For passion and invention both, Lentz towers above the far better-known Pärt.

CHARLES AMIRKHANDIAN: *Walking Tune* (Starkland) The noises in Amirkhandian’s sound poems are raw and brittle, yet lovingly dwelt upon. In “Walking Tune,” a lonely violin enters over the gritty crunch of gravel underfoot, and even the melodies of the crickets seem to anticipate the gorgeous, wordless soprano voice that eventually floats in. That’s a portrait of weirdo composer Percy Grainger, and Amirkhandian is the master (sole practitioner?) of *representational* noise collage. “Vers Les Anges,” a portrait of Nicolas Slonimsky in L.A., melds cat meows and cuckoo clocks, while the Jungian “Gold and Spirit” looks back to Amirkhandian’s humorous text works with football chants made of famous artists’ names: “Go Van Gogh!” But every piece is complex and sinuous, harder to sum up than this blurb suggests. **A**

DENNIS BATHORY-KITSZ: *Detritus of Mating* (Malted Media) Those addicted to the new-music radio show and Web

reading and the myths of New Orleans voodoo, pounds primitively enough to dance to, yet the big drums frequently give way to subtle glockenspiels, chimes, sirens, and even rainsticks used in nimble rhythms and an amazing variety of textures. Still think the fortysomething generation hasn’t produced any universally lovable works? Try this. **A**

DIAMANDA GALAS: *Malediction and Prayer* (Asphodel) Stripped down to the conventional context of voice and piano—



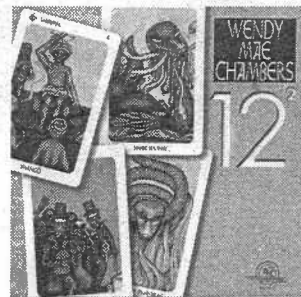
Pick Hit: Daniel Lentz

or rather, to her 40 different voices and expert fingers—

of them. Spiraling out of a sadly descending harmonic progression, the piece can dissolve into lethargy at times, but momentum isn’t the point; “Tunnel-Funnel” is thoughtfully caught between a Reichian concern for process and a Feldmanesque love of floating sonority. The gentle opening doesn’t brace you for the formal complexity that follows, and the work begs for repeated hearings as few postminimal works do, its rhythmic illusions challenging your perception. Completing the disc, “Fiddle Studies” is an engaging 1981 minimalist work. **A**

TOM HAMILTON: *Sebastian's Shadow* (Monroe Street) Hamilton’s hourlong synthesizer essay does not—repeat, does *not* sound like J. S. Bach on acid, but it does slow down the old master’s *Fantasia and Fugue BWV 542* to CD-length and diffract its harmonies through riffing postminimalist blips and beeps. As Hamilton is an installation composer, the disc is virtually ambient; the processes change, but the basic pleasant, kaleidoscopic effect remains the same from start to finish, a background reminder that, as Eliot quoted Emerson saying, “The lengthened shadow of a man/is history. . . .” **B**

ELODIE LAUTEN: *Inscapes from Exile* (New Tone) Quintessential New Yorker Lauten spent a year or two in godforsaken Albuquerque and survived by weaving its ancient Anasazi sites and UFO sightings into this collection



Pick Hit: Wendy Mae Chambers

her sometimes conventionally contrapuntal idiom, she wrings all the hair-raising dissonance she can muster from every half-step clash available. Gee, the music *seems* so well behaved, why is it ringing with acoustic beats? Cream of the crop are two a cappella works by the New York Treble Singers, but “Windjammer” is one of Leach’s finer instrumental pieces, and “Tricky Pan” a clever reworking of an early 14th-century chanson by the rhythmically tricky Solage. **A MINUS**

DANIEL LENTZ: *Apologetica* (New Albion) The gorgeous harmonies and gelatinously impressionist orchestrations of Lentz’s magnum opus will cause modernist sourpusses to write this off as New Age music. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Listen to the elision of words in the first movement, as “despair” in the men’s voices blends into “This pair of eyes see” in the women’s, and then “eyes see” merges with “My sea is red with our blood” in the men again. Add to that disarming text-setting approach Lentz’s unobtrusively odd meters like 7/4 and 5/4 and his use of MIDI keyboards

work, no matter how sensuous the results. As you listen, reality overwhelms you. The fact makes her a more important electronic pioneer than she’s yet been given credit for. Anderson’s *I Come Out of Your Sleep* is no horror-flick soundtrack, but a meditation piece of slowly whispered phonemes at the threshold of hearing. **A**

CHRIS NEWMAN: *Compassion* (content) Along with Kevin Volans, Englishman Newman can boast one of the most refreshingly unfettered imaginations in new music. If you’ve heard him only in his provocatively satiric mode (e.g., singing his rock song “Clair, Clair has pubic hair”), then you may be delighted yet somehow unsurprised by this equally audacious 63-minute, single-movement work for violin and piano. With tranquil relentlessness, the instruments take turns playing ascending scales, stop for an occasional melody, then hit the same old dissonant chord over and over, like two neurotic friends sharing their obsessions and finishing each other’s sentences without really paying attention. In the process, you’ll hear a conception of musical time perhaps unlike anything you’ve heard before. **A MINUS**

ELIANE RADIGUE: *Trilogie de la Mort* (XI) One of the 20th century’s great fanatics, Radigue spent eight years handcrafting this three-hour, three-disc, Tibetan-inspired, death-transcending elegy for her son, and if you’re not a deep listener, all you’ll hear is

logically simple as to be self-evident, and they can hardly help but fulfill their extraordinarily modest ambitions. Accordion meditations (he’s an accordionist) and oddities such as a gentle piano-woodblock duet achieve a self-effacing charm, while some of the songs just seem conventional. Call Skempton kind of a British Satie, yet with a wit even drier than Tom Johnson’s. **B**

JACK SMITH: *Les Evening Gowns Damnées* (Audio ArtGive) You listen to Tony Conrad, Jack Smith, and their friends sit around chirping in falsetto, tapping finger cymbals, and strumming guitars, more to say, “Wow, the ’60s were really like that” and “I wonder what they were on,” than to get a real aesthetic experience. But Conrad has preserved some intriguing ’60s documents here, including his screaming film score for Smith’s *Flaming Creatures* and Smith reading his own self-indulgently psychedelic texts, with ill-recorded accompaniments that hint vaguely at the world of La Monte Young. **C**

GEORGE TSONTAKIS: *Four Symphonic Quartets* (Koch) Lord knows I’m no Uptown orchestra fan, but Tsontakis’s heroic, nostalgia-free romanticism always torpedoes my attempts to dislike it. There’s something Beethovenian and impressionist at once about the way these *Symphonic Quartets* (based nonvocally on Eliot’s *Four Quartets*) pile motive upon motive in irresistibly slow climaxes.

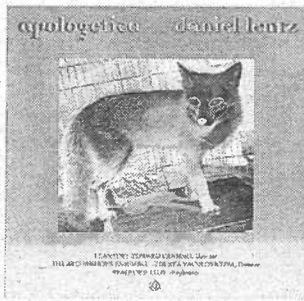
wordless soprano voice that eventually floats in. That's a portrait of weirdo composer Percy Grainger, and Amirkhanian is the master (sole practitioner?) of *representational* noise collage. "Vers Les Anges," a portrait of Nicolas Slonimsky in L.A., melds cat meows and cuckoo clocks, while the Jungian "Gold and Spirit" looks back to Amirkhanian's humorous text works with football chants made of famous artists' names: "Go Van Gogh!" But every piece is complex and sinuous, harder to sum up than this blurb suggests. **A**

DENNIS BATHORY-KITZS: *Detritus of Mating* (Malted Media) Those addicted to the new-music radio show and Web site Bathory-Kitsz cohorts (at <http://www.goddard.edu/wgdr/kalvos/cf2ulnone>—the most extensive on the Web) will find interest in his sound sculpture, a sample of which is caught here. Glistening tones ring in the air, bits of deconstructed voices float by, a dark bass pulse starts up that's more felt than heard, in large-scale periodic cycles that would replicate the opening if allowed to continue for some 27 years. You don't get a distinct idea of his creative personality from this first disc, but it's enjoyable how the exquisite rings continually modulate even when nothing seems to be happening. **B**

WENDY MAE CHAMBERS: *12²* (New World) Varese wrote *Ionisation*, John Becker wrote *The Abongo*, Steve Reich wrote *Drumming*, and now Chambers has written *12²*, which may surpass them all. Her hour-long percussion extravaganza, based on a tarot

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DIAMANDA GALAS: *Malediction and Prayer* (Asphodel) Stripped down to the conventional context of voice and piano—



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or rather, to her 40 different voices and expert fingers—Diamanda seems even more astounding. Recorded live on tour (though excellently), the first booming chords of "Iron Lady" remind you that her piano playing is capable of power, delicacy, bluesiness, and dexterity, even if its range is dwarfed by that of her voice. Singing chilling lyrics in Italian, French, Spanish, Greek, and English, she can sound like a gutsy-throated 400-pound woman on death row, a shrieking harpy, a jaded French dissolute, and anything in between, often switching in mid-phrase. Here's the perfect Diamanda disc for neophytes because the pieces are simple, but that doesn't mean her darkness is mitigated. **A MINUS**

DANIEL GOODE: *Tunnel-Funnel* (Tzadik) Goode's continuous, 34-minute orchestral labyrinth tempts you to think of '80s postminimalism as a historical genre with its own classics, for it is certainly one

slow down the old master's *Fantasia and Fugue BWV 542* to CD-length and diffract its harmonies through riffing postminimalist blips and beeps. As Hamilton is an installation composer, the disc is virtually ambient; the processes change, but the basic pleasant, kaleidoscopic effect remains the same from start to finish, a background reminder that, as Eliot quoted Emerson saying, "The lengthened shadow of a man/is history. . . ." **B**

ELODIE LAUTEN: *Inscapes from Exile* (New Tone) Quintessential New Yorker Lauten spent a year or two in godforsaken Albuquerque and survived by weaving its ancient Anasazi sites and UFO sightings into this collection of well-titled works ("Gusty Winds May Exist," for example, and "Barbie's Fugue State"). If her earlier *Tronik Involutions* on O.O. was mellow and smoothly postminimalist, this disc is screwed up to a higher energy level, sometimes bubbling over into contrapuntal randomness in an overflow of passion—or pain? "Changing Gravity" lifts you with its burbling crescendos, "Ordinary Spatial Distance" offers Lauten's familiar intent piano style, and in "At the Sundown" she sings with a huskiness as invitingly warm as any vocalist around. **A**

MARY JANE LEACH: *Ariadne's Lament* (New World) Here's a nice contrast in postminimalism with the Lentz below, both major examples of the new choral style. Leach's works stay closer to minimalism; they are flatter in form and don't stray from the opening tonality. However, within

14th-century chanson by the rhythmically tricky Solage. **A MINUS**

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ANNEA LOCKWOOD, RUTH ANDERSON: *Sinopah* (XI) The roar of a Hawaiian volcano, the prolonged boom of an under-ocean earthquake, the quick blips of a pulsar in the Vela Supernova—these are the more exotic sounds Lockwood has woven into her tapestry "World Rhythms." What separates her work from *musique concrète* is that the attention is drawn, not to the sound construction she's made, but to the universe outside our perceptual frame-

tranquil relentlessness, the instruments take turns playing ascending scales, stop for an occasional melody, then hit the same old dissonant chord over and over, like two neurotic friends sharing their obsessions and finishing each other's sentences without really paying attention. In the process, you'll hear a conception of musical time perhaps unlike anything you've heard before. **A MINUS**

ELIANE RADIGUE: *Trilogie de la Mort* (XI) One of the 20th century's great fanatics, Radigue spent eight years handcrafting this three-hour, three-disc, Tibetan-inspired, death-transcending elegy for her son, and if you're not a deep listener, all you'll hear is a hum. Overtones of gently pulsing drones are Radigue's themes, but her sweep is symphonic. Booming bass tones test the limits of your loudspeakers, and within them string orchestras and bagpipes seem to play dirges—but everything is analogue electronics. When the music goes from sweet to sad, or from roaring climax to pure quiet in the final half-hour, the change is so imperceptibly gradual that it sweeps you along all the more. You have to slow your day way down just to begin appreciating this, and that's not a bad idea. **B PLUS**

HOWARD SKEMPTON: *Surface Tension* (Mode) I was intrigued by this extreme British minimalist back when Michael Nyman wrote about him in the '70s, and it's taken a quarter century for us to get to hear his music. Worth the wait? Sorta; these 24 brief solo and chamber pieces are so

intriguing '60s documents here, including his screaming film score for Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and Smith reading his own self-indulgently psychedelic texts, with ill-recorded accompaniments that hint vaguely at the world of La Monte Young. **C**

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ADDRESSES

Asphodel, P.O. Box 51, Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10113; **Audio ArtKive**, c/o Table of the Elements, P.O. Box 5524, Atlanta, GA 31107; **content**, Glasfered, S-516 95 Malsryd, Sweden; **Malted Media**, RD 2 Box 2770, Cox Brook Road, Northfield, VT 05663; **Mode**, P.O. Box 1026, New York, NY 10116; **Monroe Street**, 666 Fifth Avenue, No. 232, New York, NY 10103; **New Tone**, c/o Robi Drolit, Strada Roncaglia 16, 15040 San Germano (AL), Italy; **Starkland**, P.O. Box 2190, Boulder, CO 80306; **Tzadik**, 61 East 8th Street, Suite 126, New York, NY 10003; **XI**, Experimental Intermedia Foundation, 224 Centre Street, New York, NY 10013. **V**