



 **American
Record Guide**
November/December 2010
New American Masters 3
Palisades Virtuosi
Albany 1195-71 minutes

Since the beginning of their project, the Palisades Virtuosi have recorded and commissioned more than 40 new works for the flute, clarinet, and piano combination, this album presents works by six composers.

Palisades Suite by a native of Cleveland, Eric Ewazen, is a neo-romantic work that displays the trio in a very tuneful and sonorous light. In four movements it traverses four sentiments: 'beauty', 'sadness', 'anguish', and 'hope'.

Wind Space is an 18-minute commemorative work for the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. Composers have become increasingly comfortable with the idea of writing works either depicting or memorializing those victims, or attempting to express the emotions felt by observers, families, or friends who died. Brian Schober, a native of New Jersey, wrote this piece not necessarily as a programmatic work or for any particular person lost, but to depict the expanse of the emptiness left behind. Flutist Margaret Swinchoski plays alto flute here, and clarinetist Donald Mokrynski plays the bass clarinet. The alto flute is supposed to evoke the traditional Japanese bamboo flute, the *shakuhachi*. In tone and execution Swinchoski does a wonderful job, too. Her flutter-tonguing and stylized performance maintain the breathiness and hollowness of the Japanese counterpart. Even the clarinetist employs a similar flutter-tongue, and the pianist, not to be left out, uses a few prepared piano tricks to add greater tonal variety to the piece. The composer notes that the instruments rarely play at the same time except for a few moments to accentuate the drama. For all the sentimentality that one might expect to come out of a work reflecting a great tragedy, this one steers away from that and toward the mystery.

The short work in the style of a lilting waltz may be thought sentimental or nostalgic, but this kind of music that brings back fond memories for me, growing up in a musical family, concerts, recitals, and private musical gatherings were fondly anticipated. Music like *Eine Kleine Abendmusik (A Little Evening Music)* by Fred Messner is the perfect accompaniment to an intimate program of chamber music.

Parable for a Parrot by Dick Hyman, former music director of New York's Jazz in July series and composer of film scores for Woody Allen, began as a piano improvisation and has been adapted for the Palisades Virtuosi as a set of variations.

Each movement of *Three American Portraits* by Randall Faust presents a different character that the musicians adapt to and perform well. They are nice expositions on basic musical character and style. Ben Model's *Spice of the Program* is one of my favorites here. He is a pianist and theater organist in New York and has been accompanying silent movies for nearly 30 years. The motifs used in this piece will come as no surprise to fans of this genre-busy music, trouble-brewing music, and other standard *incidental* music.

This is a delightful program. I think most listeners will find the works rewarding, and the Palisades Virtuosi perform them with grace and command. **SCHWARTZ**