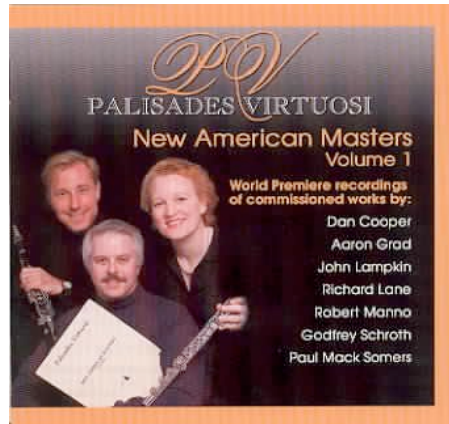


## PALISADES VIRTUOSI – NEW AMERICAN MASTERS – VOLUME 1



GRAD: Lepidopterology; MANNO: 3 Scenes; COOPER: Trio; LANE: Trio 2; SOMERS: Miniatures;  
SCHROTH: Variations; LAMPKIN: Washington Slept Here  
Albany 826—70 minutes

Seven quite recent (all from 2003 and 2004) trios commissioned for the Palisades Virtuosi explore variants of what might be called contemporary impressionism, an idiom well suited to the group's unusual combination of flute, clarinet, and piano. All of these pieces concede or at least play off of the primacy of triadic harmony and traditional procedures. Allegros are

bright and dance-like, sometimes whimsical; andantes are mellifluous and wistful, with the pastel harmonic shadings and *al fresco* spaciousness of calm reverie rather than the astringencies and discords of troubled unease.

Aaron Grad's *Lepidopterology* (the study of butterflies) is *al fresco* indeed. It's active yet dreamy and evanescent, using imaginative (but never "avant-garde") timbral interweavings to portray those flitting, delicate, colorful creatures who share our everyday world yet seem somehow messengers from another, more magical place. Paul Mack Somers's *Arch of Miniatures* also uses textural variety to cunning effect. After reaching an imposing climax in II, a solemn *largo*, the next three movements explore different ways of configuring dialogs among the three participants.

The prize for inventive interplay, however, goes to Dan Cooper's 8-minute trio. Drawing on vernacular styles, including bebop and Jamaican pop, in its three movements, Cooper comes up with a sequence of vibrant showpieces for the players (whose range is here extended by the use of piccolo and bass clarinet). II, a capricious tinkertoy of a scherzo, is especially fascinating, somehow at once birdlike and abstract.

Richard Lane's *Second Trio* hews closer to tradition. It's graceful and warmly romantic, rather like Poulenc at his tamest. Lane, who studied at Eastman, may be familiar to flute aficionados for his similar 1967 *Flute Sonata* recorded by Jennifer Stinton on Collins 1385 (Sept/Oct 1994, p 232).

The three remaining works use American folk tunes as points of departure. Robert Manno's *3 Scenes from the Mountains* is evocative and rhapsodic, serene and expansive whether rippling merrily along or quietly meditating. Godfrey Schroth's *Variations on an Appalachian Carol* is based on the unforgettably beautiful "I Wonder as I Wander"—ostensibly a traditional song but in fact written by the Kentucky folk singer John Jacob Niles. Nothing can match the exquisite setting for soprano and chamber ensemble by Luciano Berio in his set of *Folk Songs*, but instead of trying to do this, Schroth cunningly rings instrumental changes on the tune, exhibiting the latent possibilities and moods hidden in its melodic shapes and harmonic turns. John Lampkin's divertimento-like take-offs on the boisterous traditional fiddle-tune "Soldier's Joy" called "George Washington Slept Here!" include an infectious ragtime and a couple of nifty fugatos. The result is joyous, celebratory, and slightly inebriated. It's impossible not to smile listening to this gloom-dispersing music—a perfect finale to this splendid program of recorded firsts.

Performances by the Palisades Virtuosi are alert, lively, and infused with the pleasure of discovery. Sonics are clear but somewhat dry; a more realistic and inviting acoustic—with more ambience—would give a fairer picture of the group's tonal luster. Interested listeners might want to know that a recital by flutist Margaret Swinchoski on Albany 371 (July/Aug 2000, p 226), praised by ARG, offers another collection of easily-accessible American music, including several premieres.

– LEHMAN