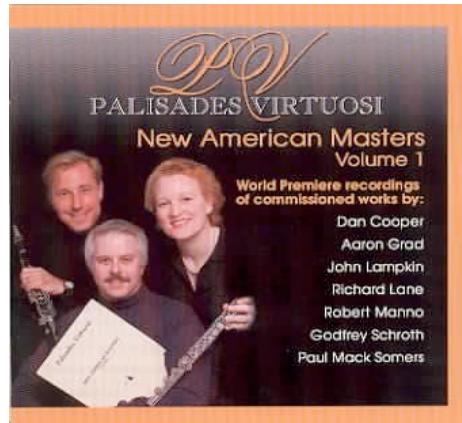


PALISADES VIRTUOSI: NEW AMERICAN MASTERS, VOLUME 1

Margaret Swinchoski (fl); Donald Mokrynski (cl); Ron Levy (pn)

• ALBANY TROY 826 (69:47)

GRAD Lep·i·dop·ter·ol·o·gy. **MANNO** Three Scenes from the Mountains. **COOPER** Trio. **LANE** Trio No. 2. **SOMERS** An Arch of Miniatures. **SCHROTH** Variations on an Appalachian Carol. **LAMPKIN** George Washington Slept Here!



Palisades Virtuosi/New American Masters 1

You always have to wonder if, when presented with 70 minutes of flute, clarinet, and piano music—new music at that—the experience is going to even remotely border on the tolerable. Over the years I have heard much of this kind of music, and the pleasurable moments can probably be counted on one hand. It's not that the musicians fail me, though that certainly occurs every so often, but that the music is just not the quality one would hope for. Too often, when considering this type of rather unique or unusual ensemble, the tendency can be to "lighten up" on the critical aspects of the compositions themselves; after all, for such an instrumental makeup, you hardly expect Mozartian expertise, and you really do want to give the musicians a break. There is not that much music for this rather exclusive chamber setup, so let's assume from the beginning that the music will be second-rate, and then comment only on the performance itself.

Wrong.

I gave up that approach many years ago. My philosophy, for what it is worth, is that any music, no matter for whom or for what it is composed, has got to be good. Especially in magazines like this, which serve as a filter for you, the Serious and sometimes-scammed Record Collector, it is all important to act as consumer advocate first and artist supporter second. It is your money that buys these albums, and we need to make sure that you at least have a fighting chance before breaking your nails trying to tear the plastic wrap off of any CD. So if it's not good, it's gone—we owe you that much. Now for some really good news—this one is a pure winner! Even the hesitancy that I approached this with gradually wore away, and feelings of relief and delight flooded my soul as each new piece proved its mettle. Writing for this combination of instruments is no easy task, and each composer here has solved the problem in different ways. Just listen to the first piece, *Lep i dop ter ol o gy*, (named, obviously, for the study of butterflies) by 27-year-old composer Aaron Grad. The marvelous, infectious manner that he weaves his arpeggiated flutters among the three instruments, sometimes grouping them in twos yet still maintaining a constantly devoted sense of thematic unity, is a wonder to hear. Robert Manno's *Three Scenes from the Mountains* is perhaps my favorite piece on this recital. Its uncannily accurate depiction of the three movements, "The Wind on the Water," "The Meadow at Dawn," and "The Forest at Night" dispels any surly attempts at graphic tone-painting, and instead launches us into a beautifully contrived reverie of remembrances.

The other works here are equally affecting, and the measure of success can be directly correlated to the ability to forget that this ensemble is only two woodwinds and a piano. The sound is terrific and the performances couldn't be better. The Palisades Virtuosi is a new group, and plans to offer a similar release every two years. Let's hope it can fulfill that promise. **Steven Ritter**