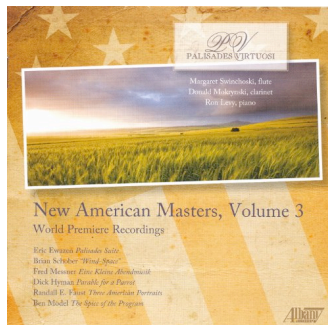


FEATURE REVIEW by [Michael Cameron](#)

NEW AMERICAN MASTERS, VOLUME 3 • Palisades Virtuosi • ALBANY TROY 1195 (71:22)

EWAZEN *Palisades Suite*. **SCHOBER** *Wind Space*. **MESSNER** *Eine Kleine Abendmusik*. **HYMAN** *Parable for a Parrot*. **FAUST** *3 American Portraits*. **MODEL** *The Spice of the Program*



[New American Masters, Volume 3](#)

The first volume of Palisades Virtuosi's *New American Masters* series received raves from *Fanfare*, and fans of this effort will no doubt be just as pleased with this third installment of commissioned works. The three performers are as fine as their moniker suggests, and their admirable mission is to build a sizable repertoire for their instrumentation. Perhaps I should describe their accomplishment as “weaving out of whole cloth” rather than merely supplementation, since the list of pre-existing works for this combination is surprisingly thin.

While there is nothing in their presentation to suggest any desire to provoke, the label for the series and the styles represented by the many composers they have commissioned suggest a particular aesthetic. *New American Masters* is an audacious description for a group of composers somewhat below the most prominent rank (with a couple of notable exceptions), and the trio has limited most of their choices to composers who employ a predominantly tonal idiom, and use their instruments just as composers did in the 19th century, with occasional nods to 20th-century developments (again, there are notable exceptions, with more to come). Few have positions with major music schools and conservatories or receive commissions from leading establishments, facts that will lead those of varying camps to tailor their conspiracy theories accordingly; either there is an institutional bias against composers of music that communicates easily, or it is impossible for a composer to have an original voice if the language employed is so well mined. Of course, the avant-garde feels even more disillusioned and disregarded by the Establishment. Listeners to this and the other discs will come to a simpler and more rational conclusion: Good music comes from where you find it, and artists pick repertoire that speaks to them most deeply and directly.

Brian Schober's *Wind Space*, commissioned as a 9/11 commemorative work, is the most powerful and evocative on the disc, although the composer states that he is not out to portray a specific event. The thin textures and glacial pacing of the opening are mesmerizing, and the emotional haze comes as quite a shock after the square-jawed certitude of Eric Ewazen's opening *Palisades Suite*. Some composers seem determined to wring out every possible degree of density from chamber groups, but Schober is after something else here. A long, lonely alto flute solo begins the work, spinning an atmosphere of isolation. His use of color is more far-flung than most works in the Palisades Virtuosi's repertoire, with extremes of register, flutter tongues in the flute, and plucks inside the piano.

Fred Messner's *Eine Kleine Abendmusik* is a charming short waltz, and legendary Dick Hyman's brief *Parable for a Parrot* was composed in response to a commission by Palisades Virtuosi; Hyman recalled an earlier piano improvisation that he expanded to create this work. Both of these bonbons have a cinematic flair, a characteristic that emerges even more starkly in Ben Model's jaunty *The Spice of the Program*, not surprising since Model serves as a silent-film accompanist at the Museum of Modern Art. The trio contains many of the sharp corners one expects in music of this type, with a seemingly endless supply of catchy tunes. Randall E. Faust's *Three American Portraits* presents slices of Americana in vivid terms, some bustling, some contemplative. The third movement unfolds with shades of Copland, in the guise of an all-American march.

There is not a single detail of execution or recorded sound to quibble with here, and fans of all three instruments will find much to admire and emulate. Sustaining a repertoire is a noble cause, but creating one is a feat few dare to attempt with such sustained effort. Kudos to Palisades Virtuosi for their noble mission. **Michael Cameron**

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