

GRAMOPHONE

ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Beck

Requiem

Coro Volante; Cincinnati String Ensemble /

Brett Scott

Acis (APL54131 • 58' • T/D)



Composers grapple with the subject of death in myriad ways, most directly through

settings of the Requiem Mass or variations thereof. These ruminations come in all shapes and sizes, from the operatic (Verdi) and monumental (Berlioz) to the humanist (Brahms, Britten), celestial (Fauré), and beyond. American composer Jeremy Beck puts an individual stamp on the genre in his Requiem, a piece of tranquil and urgent beauty for chorus and string orchestra that has received an exquisite first recording.

Beck finished the work in 2019, before the pandemic, which means we must hear the music without imposing personal layers of grief on the listening experience. There is ample layering of eloquent lines, in any case, built into this Requiem, which eschews many of the expressive conventions suggested by the Latin texts. Throughout the 11 movements, Beck often goes against the grain, finding fresh means to convey the weighty or hopeful messages, and turning to lyricism rather than overt drama to evoke the verses' spiritual implications.

Themes recur at key points, as when the luminous lines of 'Ingemisco' emerge later in 'Agnus Dei', though the texts are far apart in meaning. Elsewhere, Beck binds the strands by juxtaposing staggered choral entrances with warm or rhythmic string statements. Among the moments of striking contrast are the women's quiet pleading of 'Cum vix justus sit securus' interrupted by the men's fierce outbursts of 'Rex tremendae majestatis'. String entreaties in 'Sanctus' mingle with hushed choral lines that bloom with exhilarating force upon the declarations of 'Osanna in excelsis'.

Employing two dozen voices and a small complement of strings, Beck achieves an intimate portrait of mourning at once

comforting and fervent. Coro Volante, the vocal ensemble devoted to music of living composers, led by Brett Scott bring fine focus and nuance to the score's varied demands in collaboration with the vivid Cincinnati String Ensemble.


Donald Rosenberg

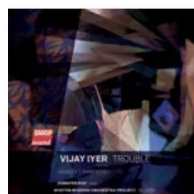
Iyer

Asunder. Crisis Modes. Trouble^a

^aJennifer Koh *vn*

Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

BMOP/sound (1099  • 72')



Having released upwards of 20 albums over a period of nearly 30 years,

primarily for his own jazz quartet and trio formations, pianist and composer Vijay Iyer's foray into orchestral territory forms part of a tradition that goes back to Third Stream jazz in the 1950s, with recent 'crossover' examples including Uri Caine's *The Passion of Octavius Catto* (Winter & Winter, 2020), Brad Mehldau's *Variations on a Melancholy Theme* (Nonesuch, 2021), and Floating Points, Pharoah Sanders and the LSO's *Promises* (Luaka Bop, 2021). In fact, the three compositions featured on this portrait album were written between 2017 and 2019, when Iyer felt compelled to channel his anger and frustration at the deepening political crisis surrounding the US during that time through this medium.

Trouble, for violin and chamber orchestra, engages with these issues in very direct, immediate and sometimes profound ways. A brief first movement, containing vulnerable, desolate-sounding melodies on flute supported by sinister low-moving bass notes on piano and eerie harmonics on solo violin, sets the scene. The more substantial second opens with two-note ostinato figures swapped between violin and orchestra. These become more urgent with every successive repetition, and the movement ends with descending patterns the draw on the so-called Phrygian dominant scale.

The centrepiece of the concerto is an eloquent elegy to Chinese American Vincent Chin, who was beaten to death in Detroit in 1982 in a racially motivated attack. After a dancelike fourth and chorale-like fifth, *Trouble* concludes with an all-encompassing, episodic final movement whose cumulative contrapuntal lines gradually dissipate before building up once more: an appropriate metaphor for the political injustices represented in *Trouble's* subject matter. The concerto benefits enormously from a finely balanced and nuanced interpretation by violinist Jennifer Koh, who manages to capture the range of emotions expressed throughout.

Crisis Modes, for percussion and strings, comes closer to Iyer's distinctive jazz language in its use of fluctuating time signatures, complex overlapping rhythmic cycles and the cell-like development of short musical figures and motifs to generate longer lines, especially during high-energy moments in the first and last movements. The other work on the album, *Asunder*, perhaps suffers at times from a rather unbalanced orchestration (such as the opening section), but there is nevertheless plenty to appreciate on this impressive album that showcases Iyer's distinctive compositional voice and creative presence.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Wollschleger

Anyway, where threads go, it all goes well^a.

Between Breath^b. Secret Machine No 7^c. Violain^d

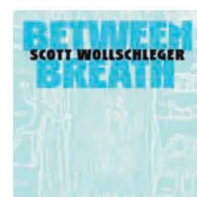
^aLucy Dhegrae *sop* ^bWilliam Lang *tbn*

^cMiranda Cuckson *vn* ^dNathaniel LaNasa,

^bAnne Rainwater *pf* ^dandPlay (Maya Bennardo *vn*

Hannah Levinson *va*)

New Focus (FCR408 • 53')



'Between Breath', the New Focus label's fourth release devoted to music by Scott

Wollschleger, contains four premieres written over a period of seven years, and, according to the composer, 'woven together here as a complete work'.

Wollschleger describes the project as