

dition of “real world” sound, as Catharine Norman labels it, in electronic music, the listener is invited to hear specific associations and narratives. Lee seems to be inhabiting a kind of liminal territory between the abstract and programmatic, where the electronic element provides elusive references. I will be interested to see if her future work with electronics and field recordings move her more in one direction or the other.

Chanson de Fleurs: Eleanor of Aquitaine for oboe and soundscape was composed for the performer by Dana Reason and was created through a collaborative process. The oboe is in the foreground against an intermittent soundscape, which includes “manipulated field recordings, vocal samples and bird calls” (liner notes). Romantic piano fragments appear occasionally as do noisy scrapes. About two-thirds into the piece, the noise element becomes more turgid, and a pulsing heartbeat occurs several times. Distorted vocal harmonies also distinguish the climax area, while the oboe floats above, serenely. The program notes indicate that the piece presents an “oscillation of all the elements,” that it “traces the struggle between public and private life,” and that it is “the embodiment of being, sounding, thinking and becoming.”

Silkys, for oboe and field recordings, was created by Lee in collaboration with Juliana Lanning. The oboe hovers above a noise-based texture in the mid-to-low register. Lee explores various microtonal shadings and multiphonics that suggest percussion. The work begins softly and gradually, the fixed media element becomes louder and then subsides. Suddenly, a loud, slowly-recurring percussive blow is interjected. The oboe then plays a lengthy, delicate multiphonics passage accompanied by a slowly morphing noise that continuously underlays the high oboe tones. This element morphs into a higher, whirring sound. Its wide spectrum contrasts well with the focused high tones of the oboe. The liner notes state that the material is recorded from the bombyx silk moth “through its developmental stages and eventual metamorphosis into an adult silkworm.”

At times, the ambience of the oboe and the electronic sound is sonically very different—the oboe sounds rather dry and the electronic sounds “wet” and highly processed and reverberated. Some degree of reverb, applied to the oboe, might have made the two worlds sound more connected.

Anna Rubin is a composer of chamber and orchestral pieces and works that integrate acoustic instruments with electronic media. She recently retired from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Her works have been performed in Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall, Roulette, and BargeMusic in New York City, on college campuses, and at electroacoustic festivals and conferences. Recent commissions include those from Piano on the Rocks International Festival (Sedona, AZ).

Carol Ann Weaver (music) and Connie T. Braun (poetry):

Poland Parables

Mary-Catherine Pazzano, vocals; Carol Ann Weaver, piano, hand drums, soundscapes, Polish field recordings; Ben Bolt-Martin, cello; Michael Haas, recording engineer. LORAC Productions, LOR-028; SOCAN, Canadian Music Centre (2020)

STEFANIA DE KENESSEY

Song cycles are typically presented as musical creations, but *Poland Parables* emerges out of an unusually deep and thoughtful collaboration between composer Carol Ann Weaver and poet Connie T. Braun. The piece springs from the Canadian-born artists’ dedication to honoring their shared Mennonite heritage. Named after the 16th-century Dutch priest Menno Simons, the Mennonites were mercilessly persecuted for believing in adult baptism; forced to flee their homes in Germany and Switzerland, some relocated in Russia while others headed to North America, with a large contingent settling in Ontario. Like the Amish, from whom they separated in the late 17th century, the conservative branches of the Mennonite church require women to dress simply and to wear head coverings (making “escape to another culture...tempting,” in Weaver’s commentary). Unlike the Amish, however, Mennonites have not remained completely separatist; now numbering some 2.2 million worldwide, they are dedicated to pacifism and to good works.

In the artists’ own words, *Poland Parables* pays homage to their ancestors, to “Mennonite people and their neighbors through the eyes of children and families before, during and after WWII in Poland and Eastern Europe. In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the end of WW II in 1945, *Poland Parables* speaks for many others whose stories are, unfortunately, all too similar” (CD booklet). More specifically, the song cycle follows in the footsteps of Weaver, who traveled to Poland with her

daughter to explore family roots and to visit numerous historic sites, including Warsaw’s Polin Museum and the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The horrors of persecution, still visible in these locations, fostered a powerful remembrance of her own heritage. While the German Mennonite community in Poland was not interred by the Nazis, Weaver felt an overwhelming urge to serve as witness to universal human tragedy, both past and present: in her own words, “One would only wish that such a piece were not so timely” (CD booklet).

The work arrives simultaneously as a CD, with performances by soprano Mary-Catherine Pazzano, cellist Ben Bolt-Martin, and the composer as pianist and percussionist—together with a 50-page booklet, featuring an initial preface by Braun (“On Creating *Poland Parables*”), a second essay by Weaver (“On Composing *Poland Parables*”), followed by the printed versions of the nine poems that comprise the song cycle; these combine previously published poems with new material written specifically for this project. I should add that the booklet is beautifully produced, punctuated by striking, mostly black-and-white images taken by both Weaver and Braun, who also supplied the color photographs used on the cover.

One surprising—and highly unusual—aspect of *Poland Parables* is that the poems, as printed, do not correspond precisely to the texts, as sung. In her preface, Braun mentions that “some of Carol Ann’s text arrangements contain only fragments of poems,” and the table of contents for “*Poland Parables—the Music*” (p. 22) contains the following warning, presumably from the composer: “Note. While all vocal songs are based on poetry by Braun (as listed), the texts in each song are ‘versed’ and at times slightly rearranged by the composer in order to match the shaping, rhythm, and scope of the music.” This means that trying to read the poems while listening to the music—as one might read the libretto of an opera—will not work, since textual phrases are omitted, repeated, and often substantially rewritten. The exception is song No. 9, “Shadows of the Moon,” which prints Braun’s poem (p. 43) immediately followed by Weaver’s “versed” version of the same poem (p. 44), but even this revised version is not completely accurate, as it is missing the phrase “over the earth,” sung in the third couplet. Although perhaps prohib-

itively expensive, it would be informative to provide the reader with a side-by-side overview of Weaver's renderings of all of Braun's poems.

The structure of *Poland Parables* is idiosyncratic and an artful combination of tradition and innovation. There are nine lyrical songs for voice and piano, but the fourth piece is simply a soundscape of found sounds, recorded and compiled by Weaver. The composer plays hand drums in the third song, overdubbed on her own piano part; a cello appears from the fifth song onwards; the voice doubles itself in several songs, weaving beautiful duets. In short, *Poland Parables* is a studio creation, which is perhaps unsurprising, given the pandemic. One can only hope that additional resources will be made available for live performances in the future.

The musical style of *Poland Parables* is a refreshing mixture of varied sources

and influences. While situated generally in the camp of "art song," it is yet reminiscent of 1960's folk music, tinged with echoes of Joni Mitchell and kindred singer-songwriters. Weaver's melodies are invariably lyrical and grateful for the voice (singers: please take note); her text setting is sensitive both to meaning and to verbal rhythm, evincing an excellent sense of prosody; her harmonies tend to be triadic and clear, sometimes sweetly tart from added sevenths and flattened thirds. More importantly, she manages to capture the heartache and tragedy of her subject matter through music that is nonetheless a pleasure to hear—no small feat, as she acknowledges in her preface: "The task of composing song after song of sadness, loss, and trauma was indeed daunting.... This could not be a piece with false hope, shallow happiness, or facile joy."

A few words about the all-Canadian team behind this impressive CD: Carol

Ann Weaver is an accomplished, versatile composer; a Professor Emerita at the University of Waterloo, she is listed as having taught "composition, piano performance, African music, women's music, jazz and groove music, contemporary music, Mennonite music and arts, music and the environment," a testament to her astonishingly wide array of interests and abilities. Connie T. Braun is a poet, memoirist, speaker, and instructor whose areas of interest and expertise include Mennonite Studies and Creative Writing, focusing on themes of "family history, ethnicity, immigration/emigration, loss, (dis)placement and (dis)location."

While regrettably little information is provided about the wonderful performers, they are equally accomplished. Soprano Mary-Catherine Pazzano sings both art songs and jazz standards, and her performances on this disc are exemplary, with a lovely, clear, bell-like sound. Moreover, her diction could not be more superb: each and every syllable, each and every word is clearly articulated. An impressive achievement. She is sensitively supported by Ben Bolt-Martin, principal cello with the Stratford Shakespearean Festival of Canada, a member of the Festival Quartet of Stratford, and the director of Instrumental Chamber Ensembles at University of Waterloo.

Poland Parables is a deeply engaging, emotionally compelling, musically satisfying, beautifully produced work. It is highly recommended.

Stefania de Kenessey is a composer working in a wide variety genres and venues. Her radical operatic reimagining of Tom Wolfe's classic novel The Bonfire of the Vanities (www.bonfiretheopera.com) updated the story of greed and corruption to the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange. She is Professor of Music at the New School and has served as the Dean of Eugene Lang College, undergraduate division, and Chair of the MA in Liberal Studies at the graduate level. She is the founding president of the IAWM. www.stefaniadekenessey.com

Danaë Xanthe Vlasse:

Mythologies

Seven songs for two soprano soloists and instrumental ensemble. Cezanne (August 2021)

MARY DAWOOD CATLIN

In times of darkness and unrest, people turn to the arts to escape the harshness of reality. It is in these moments that musicians such as Danaë Xanthe Vlasse provide dreams of hope and beauty as in her

Recent Compact Disc and Digital Recording Releases

Bold Beauty: Songs of Juliana Hall

Molly Fillmore, soprano, and Elvia Puccinelli, piano. The disc includes *Letters from Edna* (eight songs on letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay), *Syllables of Velvet*, *Sentences of Plush* (seven songs on letters of Emily Dickinson), *Theme in Yellow* (six songs on poems by Amy Lowell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Carl Sandburg), and *Cameos* (six songs on poems by Molly Fillmore). Blue Griffin Records, BGR559 (September 2021)

Beneath the Sky

Zoe Allen, soprano, Christopher Allen, piano, with Levi Hernandez, baritone. The recording offers songs about childhood, motherhood, family, and hope for the future by Juliana Hall, Missy Mazzoli, and Florence Price, as well as Charles Ives, Nico Muhly, Samuel Barber, Steven Lutvak, Maury Yeston, Eric Whitacre, Morten Lauridsen, Aaron Copland, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Georgia Stitt. Shokat Projects, IDBLM344545 (September 2021)

Dúa de Pel: Madéra de pájaro

The CD *Madéra de pájaro* (Mother of the Bird) features songs arranged, created, and performed by the Madrid-based duo Dúa de Pel: the composer Sonia Megías and the poet Eva Guillamón. The music is inspired by Spanish folklore and incorporates influences from classical, popular, folk, and world music. (<https://duadepel.com/escucha/>) Odradek Records (2021)

Natalia Rojcovscaia-Tumaha: Sympho-Suite "The Master and Margarita"

The *Sympho-Suite* "Master and Margarita" is a programmatic work for two solo violins, piano, youth choir, orchestra, and actors based on the homonymous novel by Mikhail Bulgakov. Its composer, Natalia Rojcovscaia-Tumaha, finished the manuscript in 2019. Parts I and II of the three movements that comprise the work were recently released on digital format. Part I: https://soundcloud.com/natalia_rojcovscaiatumaha/master-and-margarita-part-1. Part II: https://soundcloud.com/natalia_rojcovscaiatumaha/master-and-margarita-part-2.

Ania Vu

Two of Vu's works were selected by the Petrichor Records' Call for Recordings for their series titled "New Music by Living Composers" (2021). *Against Time* is featured on the Solo Piano CD, Volume 1, and *Tik-Tak* is on the Chamber Ensemble Works CD, Volume 3. For more information, please visit <https://www.petrichor-records.com/catalogue>.