



concertos by Edward MacDowell and Clara Schumann for this disc without coming near an orchestra. Both performances are the result of encounters with

modern technology – the first with a Music Minus One recording; the second with a so-called “midi orchestra” of sampled sounds.

No need to cringe just yet. Moyer has pondered the economic challenges of making recordings in the 21st century, as well as the moral issue of not hiring living, breathing musicians as collaborators. While he doesn't condone using alternative orchestral sources, he makes it clear he's open to all sorts of performance possibilities.

At least, it's difficult to argue with the pianistic achievements on this recording. Moyer is a superb artist who plays with equal degrees of dramatic zeal and poetic subtlety. MacDowell's Piano Concerto No 2 receives an absorbing account that emphasises the work's sweeping Romanticism. Moyer has the finesse and intensity to bring the concerto's lyrical aspects into vibrant focus, and he manages the virtuoso aspects as if no obstacles exist. Even though the pianist is performing to a Music Minus One recording featuring the Plovdiv Philharmonic Orchestra, a Bulgarian ensemble, under Nayden Todorov, the sonic relationship between soloist and ensemble has a natural ambience.

The Clara Schumann Concerto is less persuasive, and not only because husband Robert later wrote one of the iconic works in the form (and in the same key, A minor). While attractive on its own terms, Clara's piece has a personality tied to conventions of the day. It is too formulaic to be truly distinctive.

On this recording, the concerto also has the disadvantage of an electronically concocted orchestra. There are moments when you're fooled and you forget that Moyer, again in sterling form, is the lone human in the recording studio. But the steely strings, cottony woodwinds and toothless brasses of the sampled ensemble often suggest a third-level orchestra minus inspired maestro. Let's hope Moyer is right: perhaps such experiments will send listeners to the real thing. **Donald Rosenberg**

Jennifer Larmore

'Royal Mezzo'

Barber Andromache's Farewell, Op 39

Berlioz La mort de Cléopâtre

Britten Phaedra, Op 93 **Ravel** Shéhérazade

Jennifer Larmore *mez.*

Grant Park Orchestra / Carlos Kalmar

Cedille © CDR90000 104 (67' • DDD)

Too bold in Larmore, perhaps, but elsewhere Larmore is in regal form

One heartening aspect to classical labels divesting themselves of major artists is that ▶



Lansing McLoskey:
going one step
beyond Fux



Smart, compelling music that gives strong hints of a punk-band past

McLoskey

'sixthspecies'

Wild Bells^a. OK-OK^b. Solsange (Sunsongs)^c.

Tinted^d. Glaze^e

^aJoanna Kurlewicz *vn* ^bLeticia Oaks-Strong *va*

^cAndrew Talle *vc* ^dTimothy Durkovic, ^eNina

Ferrigno *pts* ^fLiber unUsualis (Melanie Germond *sop*

Carolann Buff *contr* William Hudson *ten*); ^gFrost

Saxophone Quartet (Jason Rush, Michael Thomas,

Taiki Azuma, Stephen Molfetta *saxs*); ^hAtlantic Brass

Quintet (Jeff Luke, Hirofumi Naguchi *pts* Seth Orgel *bn*

John Faieta *trbn* John Manning *tuba* Robert Schulz *drum*)

Albany © TROY1044 (76' • DDD)

Not for Lansing McLoskey, the safe, time-honoured route from high school to university setting and respectable career as teaching composer. Rather the 44-year-old professor at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music came to classical music via youthful immersion in 1980s San Francisco punk bands where his three Bs as guitarist-songwriter were "Beatles, Bauhaus and Black Flag".

That unvarnished street-music experience is palpable in McLoskey's chamber works on this Albany disc, which takes its ironic title from Fux's contention that there are five species of counterpoint. All the works were composed between 1998 and 2006 and provide a bracing conspectus of the former punker's smart, compelling and fascinating music. The title of

Wild Bells for viola and piano is taken from the hymn tune "Ring Out Wild Bells", and other hymn texts are given as subtitles for the work's three movements. In the opening *Allegro*, the viola is initially most prominent, lyric phrases alternating with more agitated passages. The music builds up a considerable head of steam with broken chords and jagged writing for viola and piano that become increasingly turbulent before a kind of uneasy solace on held viola notes at the coda.

Despite the hymn subtitles there is no overt spiritual connection save for the middle section, "fiery trials", wherein the hymn tune "How firm a foundation" emerges to calm the preceding angular, aggressive fragments. At nearly 15 minutes the chaconne-like finale is longer than the first two movements combined. Broadly spaced piano chords lead to the viola's solemn, almost vocal solo lines, the inward, ruminative music bestowing a consolatory solace.

OK-OK is a palindromic retooling of Charlie Parker's *Ko-Ko*. It takes Parker's lengthy solo and removes the rhythmic component, creating, in McLoskey's words, "a tone-row of 1,058 pitches". Parker flew through his solo in 1'50" but McLoskey's retooling for saxophone quartet runs just over nine minutes. The artful revamp has a wry, sinuous quality with the jazz counterpoint sounding free and spontaneous despite the rigorously worked-out structure.

Solsange ("Sunsongs") are three vocal settings written to the composer's own Danish poems, penned while McLoskey was living in Copenhagen. The canonic first setting manages to suggest medieval music yet possesses a subtle 21st-century harmonic edge and the increasingly dense polyphony shines with the extraordinary bell-like soprano of Melanie Germond. The central, more chant-like setting is striking in maintaining a communicative simplicity despite the chromatic complexity, while the concluding "Hymne" offers elaborate solo lines in "a sort of organum in 21st-century St Martial style". This is difficult music but quite beautiful in its melding of old and new, and the most compelling work on the disc.

McLoskey's rock influences are most palpable in *Tinted* for piano trio and *Glaze* for brass quintet and drums, two thirds of a triptych reflecting visual art inspirations. Both works offer a sequence of short, contrasting "aural snapshots", freely mixing melancholy lyricism with flashy, brilliant passages for the instrumentalists. *Glaze* in particular offers a chaotic collision of exuberant populist style with a bluesy edge and infectious punch.

All of the music is given first-class advocacy by the various ensembles, and "sixthspecies" offers a bracing sampler from an engaging, greatly gifted composer I hope to hear more from.

Lawrence A Johnson