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MARYANNE AMACHER - PETRA (CD by Blank Forms)

By Frans de Waard

Sometimes the reviewer is expected to be a know-it-all; a person of impeccable taste. I like to think I am not that person. There is massive blank space here when it comes to composers, genres, musicians and such like. I know lots of people think the world of the music of Maryanne Amacher (1938-2009), but I am afraid I am one of those people who still have to hear anything by her properly. Well, of course, I heard 'Petra' now, the CD in front of me, which I have to review. Based on my very limited knowledge I had expected some electronic piece, but 'Petra' is a work for two pianos and premiered in 1991. Amacher was back then one of the two players, and the other was Marianne Schroeder, who is also playing it here, in this 2017 recording, with Stefan Tcherepnin. The press text talks of this being in an "acoustic realm that alludes to the music of Giacinto Scelsi and Galina Ustvolskaya"; I heard the music of the first only, but not enough to say if I would agree with such a statement. The thirty-eight minutes of 'Petra' is throughout most solemn and quiet, and only on a few instances cluster the notes loudly together. I think it's a great work, but then I easily admit that reviewing modern classical music is not something for me (or I should think many of my co-reviewers); we lack the knowledge and lingo.

For perhaps a lot of the Vital Weekly readers the name Zbigniew Karkowski (1958-2013) is synonymous for noise music; loud, vicious noise music. But Karkowski was a trained modern classical composer, who scored all sorts of classical works. I don't think I heard any of these before. Here is a piece for electronics and a small choir, of eight voices, male and female. Karkowski provided the electronic material and the voices imitate the electronic sounds. There are four sections here, flowing into each other. The electronic sounds are quite rudimentary; drones, Shepard tone ("creates the auditory illusion of a tone that continually ascends or descends in pitch, yet which ultimately seems to get no higher or lower"), white noise and noise towards the end, combined with female voices. Male voices are in the opening drone part. While this piece is partly rooted in the world of noise, it is also very much a modern classical work (hence all these releases lumped together for a narrative), but brutal and dirty. It is, perhaps, the kind of modern classical music I understand, or even better, I like. It reminded me at times of Cardew's 'The Great Learning', with not as many voices but with the same creepiness. There are two versions of this piece on this CD, one with the electronic parts as realized by Wolfram and one by Constation Popp, which is the one I preferred of the two, but I couldn't say why. They were quite similar but Popp's version seemed to be edgier.

A composer of modern classical music that is a new name is Ernstalbrecht Stiebler, whose earliest compositions are from the early 60s and he still composes, until this very day. He's now 85 years old and on this record, we clearly hear his love for reductionist music, along the lines of

Cage, Feldman and Scelsi. Each side has one piece and was recorded in very different locations, configurations (although 'small orchestra' could fit all four performances) and times. The oldest recording is from 1999 and the most recent from 2018. Each piece is 'explained' on the insert and talks about intervals, octaves, semitones and microtonality. Each of the pieces has a very calm and slow development. I would think this is not music to play and do something. It's better to sit down and fully concentrate on the music itself. Only then it opens some of its beauty; otherwise, I can imagine this would work your nerves. The ultra minimal approach in these pieces is something I quite enjoyed; it reminded me of acoustic drone music, but of an even more careful nature. Otherwise, I found it hard to discuss this in terms of modern classical music.

Which brings me to the last in this small series of classical music releases; give or take. Surely I wrote these words many times before but there are tons of genres that nobody at Vital Weekly can discuss. Music that simply eludes us. Modern classical music is one that even when, as we just have seen, to various degrees these releases are interesting, appealing or great. Sometimes I just don't know, and I can only give some details. There is an ensemble by the name of Synaesthesia and they perform works by Lithuanian composers such as Ričardas Kabelis, Julius Aglinskas, Ramūnas Motiekaitis, Rytis Mažulis, Dominykas Digimas, Rita Mačiliūnaitė and Andrius Arutiunian. The ensemble has players for flutes, clarinet, horn, saxophone, trombone, percussion, piano, violin, viola, cello, double bass and electric guitar. The music they play sure sounds like modern classical music, and so we arrive at where we failed: that's all I can write about this. It sounds pretty good, actually. I am sure that's not what a review is about, but that's all I have to offer. I am pleased there is a Music Information Centre in Lithuania that is so active in the production of CDs. All they need is a somewhat more streamlined mailing for target reviews.

<http://www.vitalweekly.net/1179.html>