

## Un Vélo, une Auto, un Boulevard et de la Neige

Louis-Philippe Bonin

ATMA ACD2 4041 (atmaclassique.com)



► This digitally released album of saxophone and piano music combines classic saxophone repertoire with a few surprises. The performances by both Louis-Philippe

Bonin (alto saxophone) and Catherine Leroux (piano) achieve an excellent balance of clean technique and precise emotion. Bonin's tone is lean yet full and he makes many technically difficult passages seem effortless. Leroux's playing is articulated and balanced while lending a spark when required.

The album contains five works, two of them more traditional saxophone sonatas, one by William Albright (1984) and the other by Fernande Decruck (1943). Florent Schmitt was a contemporary of Debussy and Ravel and the beautiful *Légende, Op.66* (1918) is reminiscent of those composers' tonality. One of the surprises, Kristin Kuster's *Jellyfish* (2004) is a three-movement piece capturing the movements of different types of jellyfish; the various swirls and bursts of sound paint a perfect sonic portrait of these creatures.

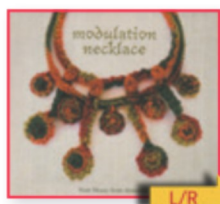
The title composition, *Un Vélo, une Auto, un Boulevard et la Neige*, by Félix-Antoine Coutu (2018) was commissioned by Bonin and brings classical saxophone music into the social media arena. In a December 2017 Facebook post, a blogger called a cyclist a "jerk" for riding on the street in the newly fallen snow and "zigzagging" in front of the writer's car. The post caused quite an outcry on social media and Coutu's piece is based on five of the more than 500 Facebook responses and the "variety of rhetorical devices" people used to express their opinions. The work effectively presents these five rhetorical "movements" and Bonin's playing artfully mimics and embraces this social media conflict.

Ted Parkinson

## Modulation Necklace – New Music from Armenia

Various Artists

New Focus Recordings FCR244 (newfocusrecordings.com)



► The Armenian diaspora retains strong ties to their ancient homeland. Six pieces from the last 20 years by five Armenian composers invite attention for

their lucidity and mastery. Tonalities from Armenian folklore pervade the superbly performed and recorded song settings and tone poems for string and piano ensembles, duo, and piano solo. The album was crafted at the Armenian Music Program of UCLA, with help from the Lark Musical Society and the Dilijan Chamber Music Series, which commissioned four of the works.

*Tekeyan Triptych* (2018), by Artashes Kartalyan (b.1961), sets three poems for mezzo-soprano and string quartet by Vahan Tekeyan (1878-1945), the most important poet of the Armenian diaspora. *Novelette* (2010), by Ashot Zohrabyan (b.1945), for piano quartet, is a searching dialogue for piano and strings. Michel Petrossian's (b.1973) *A Fiery Flame, a Flaming Fire* (2017), a masterful movement for piano trio, refers to Moses' biblical burning bush in honour of violinist and director Movses Pogossian, with references to an Armenian folksong. The lively *Suite for Saxophone and Percussion* (2015) is by Ashot Kartalyan (b.1985), the youngest of the composers. Artur Avanesov (b.1980) composed *Quasi Harena Maris* (2016), a compelling fantasy for piano quintet inspired by the Book of Job, and *Feux Follets*, a collection of short pieces. Avanesov is the admirable pianist for the entire program.

Austin Clarkson

## Jin Yin

Civitas Ensemble (includes Canadian Winston Choi)

Cedille CDR 90000 193 (cedillerecords.org)



► Chicago's Civitas Ensemble is an unusual quartet: violinist/ leader Yuan-Qing Yu, cellist Kenneth Olsen, clarinet/bass clarinetist J. Lawrie

Bloom, all eminent members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, are joined by Canadian pianist Winston Choi, Roosevelt University's piano-program head.

On *Jin Yin* (Golden Tone) they present five recent instrumental works by composers of Chinese heritage, offering world premiere recordings of works by Vivian Fung, Yao Chen, Lu Pei plus new arrangements of works by Chen Yi and Zhou Long.

Long's *Five Elements* (2014) is the album's longest work, its tonal richness bolstered by the addition of Yihan Chen (pipa), Cynthia Yeh (percussion) and Emma Gerstein (flute, piccolo). The Five Elements – metal, wood, water, fire, earth – were considered by ancient Chinese sources to be the building blocks of the physical universe. In his *Five Elements*, the composer represents each in turn. His programmatic music employs both modernist sonic gestures and percussive allusions to Chinese antique ritual music in the "metal" movement for example, employing effective

tone-painting throughout the rest of the opus.

Canadian composer Vivian Fung's *Bird Song* (2012) for violin and piano showcases the virtuosity of both instruments, characterized by runs, intense rhythmic passages and exploration of improvisational moments. The title refers to the birdcalls of the opening and closing passages, to the sprightly tonal arpeggios in the central section and to the overall rhapsodic spirit of the violin writing. The ending is a haunting contrast to the rest of the work, marked by a sort of soft nostalgia.

The other three works on *Jin Yin* have much to recommend them as well, altogether providing a full and fascinating 77 minutes of listening.

Andrew Timar

## Music from the APNM (Assoc. for the Promotion of New Music) Vol.1 & 2 (electronic)

Various artists

New Focus Recordings n/a (newfocusrecordings.com)



► The Association for the Promotion of New Music (APNM) was founded in 1975, and is celebrating its long commitment to composers with this double release of acoustic,

electroacoustic and electronic works by member composers

*Volume 1: Chamber Music* is mostly acoustic music performed by a variety of excellent musicians and ensembles. The opening work *Wind Chimes*, performed by composer/guitarist Stephen Dydo with Chen Yu on pipa, is a continuous colourful sound mix of the two instruments in 12 continuous sections each based on an early Chinese music mode. Thomas James describes his *Odd Numbers* as utilizing odd numbers to create "aggregate" rhythms, with piano soloist Sheila Simpson especially spectacular in the delicate sections. Love Joseph Hudson's piano/electronics work *Starry Night*. The composer memorably orchestrates his own interpretation of the night sky with florid piano lines against held, calming, electronic sounds, weather changes with louder rhythms and forceful ticking, and clouds drifting by in the closing slow piano/electronics section. Other works are composed by Laurie San Martin, Elaine Barkin and Sheree Clement.

*Volume 2: Computer + Electronic Music* consists of eight contrasting compositions. Explosions, rapid-fire lines open Arthur V. Kreiger's *For Diane*, with a plethora of interesting electronic sounds created on fixed audio media, while Adam Vidiksis' *Ouroboros* features more current-day electronic sounds like plops and repeated rhythmic figures. Almost theatre/movie music, *Stereo Fantasy* by Maurice Wright is fully notated and