



WORTHINGTON:

Orchestral Pieces Czech Philharmonic/ Robert Ian Winstin; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky; Russian National Philharmonic/ Ovidiu Marinescu Navona 6025—53 minutes

Seven years ago I reviewed a set of dreamlike piano pieces by American composer Rain Worthington that grabbed my attention and wouldn't let go (North/South 1049, J/F 2010, p 270). Here was a composer who was able to write short pieces that stretched time mysteriously and seductively, who was not afraid of melody, and who used minimalism to maximum effect. Now an album devoted entirely to Worthington's orchestral music has arrived, and it too is beguiling.

Worthington has an instantly recognizable sound, an austere sensuality not quite like anyone else, though there is a Hovhanness-like Eastern quality to some of her intervals and a Satielike repose in her chordal loopings and repetitions. Her orchestral pieces (at least the ones here) share certain signatures such as trembling strings, spare but imaginative percussion, floating wind chorales, and a tendency to ascend toward a culminating minor-key chord that offers closure without real resolution. Worthington describes one of piano pieces, 'Always, Almost', as expressing yearnings that "remain unfulfilled, seemingly out of reach", and that describes these orchestral works as well.

Indeed, the seven pieces in this album (from 2001-13) have such a similar profile that they resemble seven sequences in a single, restless dream. In 'Of Time Remembered', chromatic strings drift downward and a lonely tuba growls under percussion tinkling in elegant patterns. In 'Yet Still Night: A Nocturne for Orchestra', insistent timpani sound a heartbeat under gently whirring strings. There is a deep interiority to this music, which seems directly in touch with a private dreamworld that the composer makes universal. 'Tracing a Dream', which flies into the listener's imagination like a dark bird, reminds me of the poet Theodore Roethke's 'Night Crow: "Over the gulfs of dream/Flew a tremendous bird/Further and further away/ Into a moonless black/ Deep in the brain, far back." Most of the pieces sustain a single, rapt mood, but 'Shredding Glass' is more varied, balancing sinister orchestral chords against a harp soliloquy of singular delicacy.

The performances here by three Eastern European orchestras all sound atmospheric and committed, but the Czech Philharmonic is a more refined ensemble than the Moravian Philharmonic or the Russian Philharmonic, and it shows in the all-important wind playing. Certainly the performances are good enough to introduce listeners to a composer of considerable imagination, emotional expressiveness, and poetic sensibility—one who needs to be heard more widely.

SULLIVAN