

# KEYNOTE

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Two Dollars

Ansermet at 10  
Verdi's Spanish Operas

## Records

**WUORINEN:** *Arabia Felix*. **SOLLBERGER:** *Angel and Stone*. **ROUSSAKIS:** *Voyage*. Group for Contemporary Music; Charles Wuorinen, cond. (*Arabia Felix*). Harvey Sollberger, flute; Aleck Karis, piano (*Angel and Stone*). The Manhattan Chorus; Daniel Paget, cond. (*Voyage*). Composers Recordings, Inc. SD-463. \$8.95.

The Group for Contemporary Music was formed by composers and performers at Columbia University in 1962 to perform the exceedingly complicated serial music written in what was then known as the Princeton-Columbia style and is now sometimes called uptown music. Most practitioners of that style have gone on to simpler and more direct things, and the ensemble has moved to Manhattan School of Music; but two of its three founders—Charles Wuorinen and Harvey Sollberger—are still artistic directors, while Nicolas Roussakis has been its executive director since 1971. This album of their recent works is billed as the Group's 20th-anniversary celebration, although it demonstrates that the three composers no longer have much in common.

Curiously, only one work uses the ensemble, and it wasn't even written for it. Still, Wuorinen's *Arabia Felix*—a dazzling display piece which pits the metallic glitter of guitar, piano, and vibraphone against the sustained-note luster of flute, bassoon, and violin—gets the kind of flattering performance that made the Group famous. In the 11-minute work, Wuorinen seems as fascinated as ever by hard-to-hear intellectual processes, but also willing to write music of

attractive surface. When sinuous, complex threads gradually merge into Arabian dance rhythms at the end, they do so with unmistakable glee.

Sollberger's *Angel and Stone* for flute and piano, on the other hand, looks back to the Group's earliest aesthetic, and the music's glaringly disjointed phrases do not logically connect in the ear of a listener unfamiliar with the composer's technical procedures. But Sollberger is a tremendous virtuoso of his instrument, and he shows it constantly throughout the score's wandering 20-minute course.

In complete contrast to the other two pieces and, it seems, to everything the Group has ever stood for, Roussakis' *Voyage* is flabbergastingly elementary, the result of a composer who has chucked complexity for the flashy simplicity of today's popular minimalism. *Voyage's* five movements—titled *Ordre*, *Beauté*, *Luxe*, *Calme*, and *Volupté*—are taken from Baudelaire, as are the few syllables that make up the text of this a capella choral work. Musically, the movements consist of sweet chords or common scales put together almost like warm-up exercises, though executed with beguiling charm.

CRI offers the above in its usual fine sound and decent pressings, but the otherwise conscientious company has unnecessarily split Sollberger's single movement over two sides instead of dividing the multi-movement *Voyage*. The disc, it should also be noted, is dedicated to the late Robert Miller, the Group's pianist and an important specialist in contemporary American piano music, whose last performance was the recording session of *Arabia Felix*. M.S.