

# GRAMMOPHONE

THE CLASSICAL MUSIC MAGAZINE

THE MUSIC LOVER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST DISCS

## ORCHESTRAL

Birtwistle at 70 • Messiaen from Rattle • Wuorinen old and new

### WUORINEN

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Fast Fantasy<sup>ac</sup>, Grand Union<sup>bc</sup>,  
Cello Variations<sup>c</sup>, Cello Variations II<sup>c</sup>,  
Cello Variations III<sup>c</sup>, Andante Espresso<sup>ac</sup>,  
An Orbicle of Jasp<sup>ac</sup>  
<sup>a</sup>Charles Wuorinen *pf* <sup>b</sup>Thomas Kolor *perc*  
<sup>c</sup>Fred Sherry *vc*  
Albany © TROY658 (78 minutes: DDD)  
Recorded 1993-2002

### WUORINEN

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Genesis<sup>a</sup>, Mass for the restoration of St Luke  
in the Fields<sup>b</sup>, Ave Christe<sup>c</sup>, A Solis Ortus<sup>d</sup>  
<sup>b</sup>Curtis Macomber *vm* <sup>b</sup>James E Pugh,  
<sup>b</sup>Joseph Alessi, <sup>b</sup>David Taylor *tbns*  
<sup>b</sup>Harold Chaney *org* <sup>bd</sup>New York Virtuoso  
Singers / Charles Wuorinen *cpf*; <sup>a</sup>Minnesota  
Chorale and Orchestra / Edo de Waart  
Albany © TROY678 (74 minutes: DDD)  
Texts and translations included  
From Koch International Classics 3-7336-2 (7/96)

### WUORINEN

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The Haroun Songbook  
Elizabeth Farnum *sop* James Schaffner *ten*  
Michael Chioldi *bbar* Emily Golden *mez*  
Philip Bush *pf*  
Albany © TROY664 (54 minutes: DDD)  
Text included

Ear-catching songs give us the most  
accessible work from a die-hard modernist

Charles Wuorinen, now in his sixties, carried the torch for American modernism regardless of the onslaught from minimalism and market-forces culture in the last decades of the 20th century. He has taught in universities, which has enabled him to preserve his independence, and belongs to a noble tradition which stems from Schoenberg's serial techniques filtered through the late works of Stravinsky. While studying at Columbia University, New York, Wuorinen garnered many prizes (including the 1970 Pulitzer Prize for *Time's Encomium*) and co-founded the Group for Contemporary Music.

Initially his fragmented, post-Weberian idiom, often displaying an expressionist intensity, showed little to differentiate it from others operating in



that sometimes arid field. (But see 9/96 for Alan Feinberg's compelling account of piano works.) However Wuorinen's rhythmic continuity gives some of his scores a drive that is distinctly American. *Fast Fantasy* (1977) – and it certainly is – on the cello music CD is an example; the *Andante Espresso* (2001) shows some mellowing, if less than its title seems to offer; and *Grand Union*, for cello and drums, adds a flavour from Indian classical music. There are no booklet-notes for the actual pieces on this CD, which is a tribute to the prodigious Fred Sherry.

Much more impressive is the reissued Koch CD with two major works for chorus and orchestra. *Genesis* (1989) is a version of the creation story arising from the composer's biblical scholarship and interest in plainsong. It follows on from Stravinsky's late religious works such as *Tbreni* and *The Flood*. The performance under Edo De Waart is stunning, with confident attacks from the Minnesota Chorale and exhilarating orchestral interludes. The *Mass for the Resurrection of St Luke's Church* (1982), which was burnt down, is almost as impressive. The instrumental group seems weird but Wuorinen has explained its symbolism: A single violin is the individual soul; three trombones are voices of angels; the organ is the natural world; the chorus is the congregation and the whole work an act of worship. These distinctions – and some judicious balancing – help one come to terms with the Wuorinen of 25 years ago.

*The Haroun Songbook*, derived from the opera *Haroun and the Seas of Stories*, is surely the most accessible Wuorinen of all, entering a public arena with a story for children. This version was premiered in New York in 2002 and immediately recorded: the full-scale opera has its premiere this month at New York City Opera. The libretto is by James Fenton, based on a children's story by Salman Rushdie. A first impression of the *Songbook* is that there's a great deal of text to be put across, which makes everything frantically hyperactive, especially the demands on the pianist; Philip Bush meets them brilliantly. Wuorinen's vocal lines are mostly simple *parlando* verging on patter: this and Fenton's rhymes make for intelligibility. There are moments of repose in Part II, such as when Butt and Iff tells Haroun he is suffering from Heart Shadow, and Princess Batcheat comes close to a blues as she expresses her love for Prince Bolo and waits to be rescued in a happy ending. The singers are consistently admirable, the recording adequate; but the CD booklet unhelpfully omits a list of characters. **Peter Dickinson**