SCHWENDINGER

**Esprimere** for Cello and Orchestra.  
**Chiaroscuro Azzurro** for Violin and Chamber Orchestra.  
**Walking Dream** for Flute and Chamber Orchestra

Nicole Paiement, cond;  
James Smith, cond;  
Matt Haimovitz (vc);  
Curtis Macomber (vn);  
Christina Jennings (fl);  
Madison Snf;  
University of Wisconsin CO

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This disc presents three works by Laura Elise Schwendinger (b. 1962), whose music has won the American Academy of the Berlin Prize Fellowship. The opening work, titled *Esprimere*, is a dark, stark piece in which the solo cellist (Haimovitz) seems to be continually struggling against cold, forbidding tone clusters played by the orchestra. Psychologically speaking, it struck me as the cry of an individual against an unfeeling and even hostile outer world, a sense of personal searching; yet the solo cello part is also rather abrasive at times, while the orchestra seems to soften (particularly in the gentle ambience created a couple of minutes into the second movement, titled “Teneramente”) just enough to entice the solo voice into
Luisa Guembes-Buchanan: Beethoven in D, E. T. A. Hoffman Sonatas / Robert Schumann Kreisleriana, Late Beethoven

Open Goldberg: Open Goldberg Variations

Sharon Ruchman: Remembrance, Chamber Music, Arrival of Spring

Tod Machover: Resurrection, Hyperstring Trilogy, Vinyl Cello, ...but not simpler...

Ursula Bagdasarjanz: Glazunov & Nardini

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Michael Antonello

a feeling of acceptance, or at least some complacence. Schwendinger describes the third movement, titled “Giocoso Novico,” as “a jazzy scherzando-like texture,” but although the music here is somewhat “scherzando” in nature (it’s certainly playful, lighter in texture, with a solo cello within the orchestra playing pizzicato lines around and beneath the principal soloist), its relationship to jazz is tenuous at best, at least insofar as how the performance comes off. The last movement, Con Fuoco, resembles most closely a nightmare scene from Metropolis or The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, with dark, furtive figures suddenly emerging from the shadows to alarm and then frighten the soloist and listener. It is most certainly not pretty music but it is dramatically effective, particularly the climax in which the musical line climbs through the orchestra, from the lowest basses to the highest piccolo.

Despite an equally angst-ridden opening solo cadenza for the violin, I found Schwendinger’s “pocket concerto” Chiaroscuro Azzurro equally energetic but more positive in tone. This particular piece was written for Jennifer Koh and the International Contemporary Ensemble and premiered by them in March 2008. It has in common with Esprimere tremendous excitement, but its mood seems to me energetic and upbeat; indeed, at certain moments I found it particularly humorous, as in the way she interjects solo tuba lines to underpin the violin. She also achieves some nice coloration in the combination of high strings with high percussion instruments (triangle and what sounds to me like a glockenspiel). There is also some nice counterpoint provided, once again, by pizzicato cellos and basses in the middle section of the work. The second movement, Molto espressivo, is a particularly lovely piece, rhapsodic and lyrical, while the last movement (Emphatically) is one of those pieces that sound a bit like chaos even though the musical patterns are all well worked out in advance. There is an exquisite slow section in the middle of the movement before it ends, emphatically, with guillotine-like chopped chords in the orchestra, that force the work towards its conclusion.

The CD concludes with Walking Dream for flute and chamber orchestra, played here by the work’s dedicatee, Christina Jennings. Probably due to the much gentler nature of the solo instrument, the elements of darkness
in Schwendinger’s writing here are more subdued, sometimes a bit in the background—a gong here, a low trumpet-trombone mix there—although the soloist herself is called upon to play quite low in the instrument’s range much of the time. Moreover, Schwendinger manages to sustain the drama even in the quietest passages, even when the orchestra drops to a near-whisper. It is tremendously effective writing. I found this to be a fascinating disc, and I commend it to you for a listen! Lynn René Bayley

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