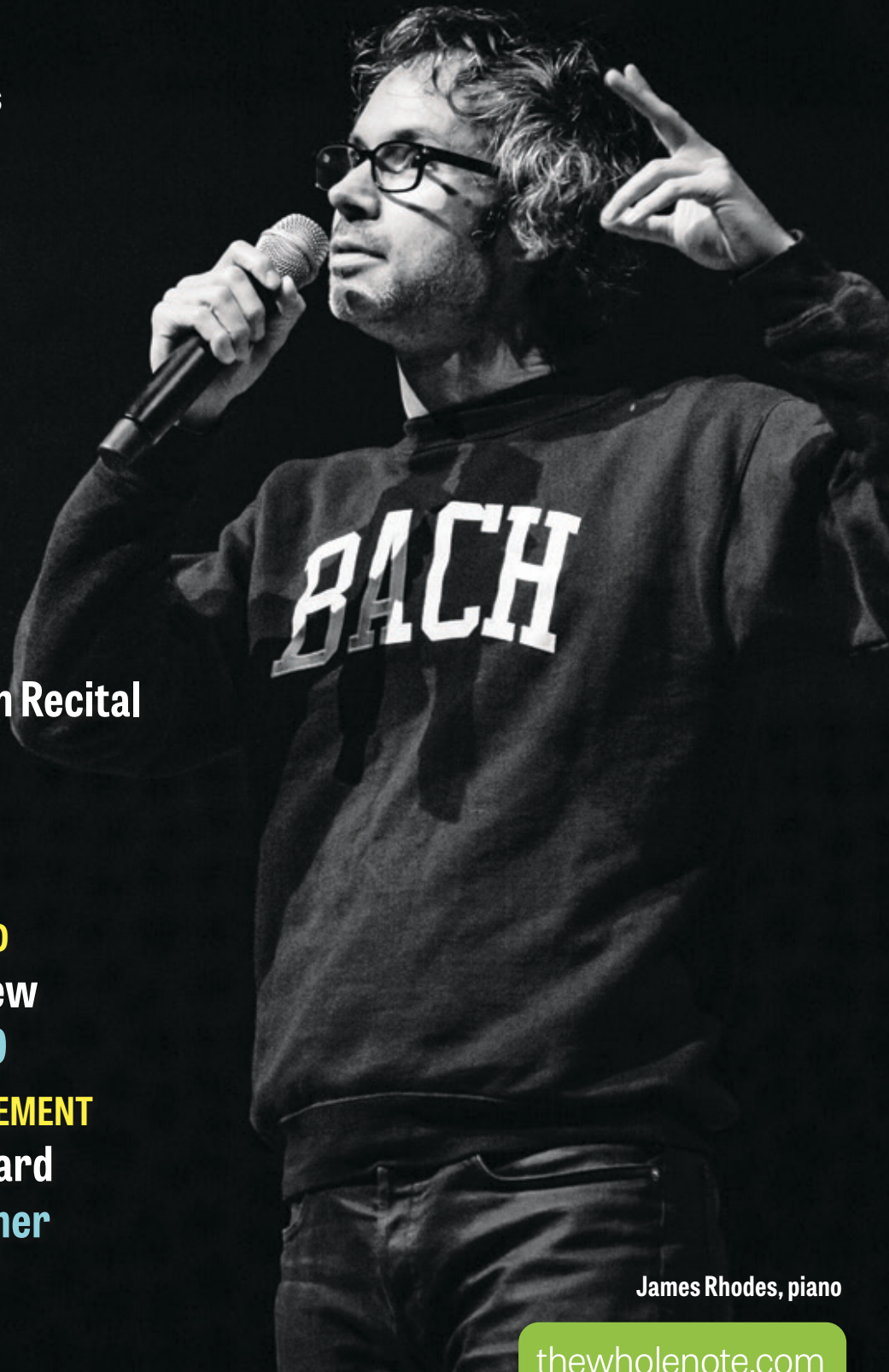


the
WholeNoteTM

25TH SEASON!

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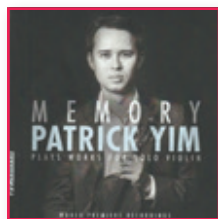
A Musical Summer

James Rhodes, piano

thewholenote.com

Memory – Patrick Yim plays works for solo violin

Patrick Yim
Navona Records nv6268
(navonarecords.com)



▶ Championing contemporary works for violin by living composers has become an integral part of Patrick Yim's performing career in recent years. This Honolulu-born

violinist displays both dazzling technique and passionate interpretations of solo violin works on his new release, *Memory*. Among five pieces, four are commissioned for this occasion and premiered on the album, and three are inspired by *Miles Upon Miles: World Heritage Along the Silk Road*, an exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of History.

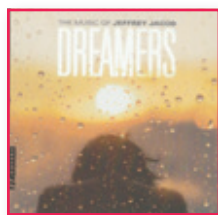
Memory features works by a talented array of composers – Chen Yi, Kai-Young Chan, Yao Chen, Austin Yip and Michael-Thomas Foumali. Their music is both an engaging showcase of inventive musical ideas and treatises on contemporary violin techniques. Through the exploration of cultural identity and the role of memory in preserving it, they bring out a delicate tapestry of ideas on the significance of sound in both past and present-day settings. Field recordings processed through granular synthesis in combination with amplified violin in *Miles Upon Miles* by Yip is a perfect example of accord between relics of the past and rich expressions of the modern language.

Yim is very attuned to each of these pieces. His skill in highlighting the minute nuances and details is fiercely supported by an understanding of the musical language and ideas of each composer. His sound is encompassing and penetrating at times, lyrical and poetic when needed, adding a special dimension to this album.

Ivana Popovic

Dreamers – The Music of Jeffrey Jacob

Various Artists
Navona Records nv6248
(navonarecords.com)



▶ The disc, *Dreamers*, is a collection of pieces written by composer/pianist Jeffrey Jacob. The pieces are all earnest expressions of melancholic feeling,

moving through discord towards reconciliation. He often pits the brightest register of the piano against sombre lower strings, and he uses short melodic motifs that sometimes recall a familiar strain of someone else's: the lilting adagio in 6/8 time of his *Sanctuary One*, almost quotes Mozart's *Piano Concerto*

No.23 in the solo piccolo; there's a gesture somewhat like Debussy's *Syrinx* in some of the woodwind lines in *The Persistence of Memory*; in the same work the piano and the cello give voice to Schumann-esque nostalgia (although in his notes the composer freely admits this last reference).

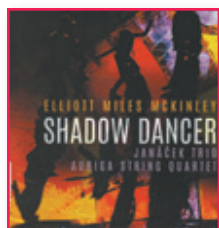
The writing is assured, and Jacob's performance skills are fine (he appears as piano soloist or ensemble member on most of the tracks). He also receives (takes?) oboe credit for the final track, somewhat puzzlingly, as it's a synthesizer, not the real thing.

The disc opens with the title work, a three-movement concerto dedicated to the cohort of American immigrants known as *Dreamers*. The first movement is subtitled *Rain, Lagrimas* (Tears). The piano solo provides the persistent drops of sound to generate this image, an evocative technique if somewhat heavily present in the mix, a comment that applies for much of the disc. The string orchestra provides the melancholy.

Jacob confines much of his syntax to the four-bar phrase. This is just a quibble, one from someone who gets easily bored of the repeated trope.

Max Christie

Elliott Miles McKinley – *Shadow Dancer*
Janáček Trio; Auriga String Quartet
Navona Records nv6264
(navonarecords.com)



▶ As I write this review on Valentine's Day (despite any personal reservations about this day) it seems fitting – and strangely serendipitous – that I am writing about

a collection of pieces centred around the common theme of remembered love. Elliott Miles McKinley's *Shadow Dancer* contains three chamber works from the well-known American composer: a quartet performed by the Auriga String Quartet, a duo for cello and piano, and the title work, a piano trio in six movements performed by the eminent Janáček Trio.

Sentimentality is a term thrown around in many negative contexts – and rightly so when a surplus of emotion is offered in excess of the object itself. That said, McKinley provides easily recognizable moods through varying angles that in turns assume flourishes of jarring dissonances, agonizing punctuation and repetitive thoughts that somehow create a welcomed atmosphere of sentimentality. These shifts in emotional temperament are most expertly woven in the *String Quartet* No.8 – a work that ignites a journey of doubt and eventual spontaneous resolution. The aforementioned duet, *A Letter to Say I Love You, and Goodbye*, is most fittingly titled in its obvious dramatic purpose and longing.

Shadow Dancer attempts to create a sense of purpose through love and understanding – wordless poems that are expertly performed by the highly accomplished musicians.

Adam Scime

Playing on the Edge
Sirius Quartet
Navona Records nv6249
(navonarecords.com)



▶ The brightest star in the visible night sky has been given the name Sirius – a word of Greek etymology meaning “glowing” or “scorching.”

The Sirius Quartet certainly lives up to such a depiction in their masterful performances on this release, comprised of five genre-bending composers, each providing a confident array of compelling sonic landscapes. Jennifer Castellano, Ian Erickson, Brian Field, Marga Richter and Mari Tamaki all bring a level of creative excellence that elevates this disc to a compulsory level along with the brilliant performances by the musicians.

The need to push boundaries and push limits is an ever-present theme in contemporary genres; however, as one listens throughout, such pushing is seemingly met with no force as it feels natural and pure as the music is refreshingly contemporary while avoiding any tired clichés. We do get the standard contemporary tricks as are heard in many pieces of recent times, but unexpected innovation takes over if any doubt arises concerning overused performance techniques. For those who ask if there are still new sounds and new contexts to be accomplished in contemporary classical music – this release is a must-listen.

Adam Scime

Found Objects – New Music for Reed Trio
PEN Trio
Summit Records DCD 754
(summitrecords.com)



▶ I'm seeking synonyms for “whole-some.” I do so because I so enjoy what seems to me the very salubrious effect of listening to the timbre of three distinct reed voices.

I am ready to accept that this is not everybody's cup of tonic, but it seems to cure what ails me to listen to the very excellent PEN Trio. The tuning between the instruments is uniformly excellent, whether in consonant or dissonant voicings. Whether they're swatting staccato flies or swinging languorous legato lines, they match character to one another. They play their respective windpipes with

vigour, elan and grace. All three are fine practitioners, although I am personally less partial to Nora Lewis' oboe sound. Phillip Paglialonga, clarinet, and Eric Van der Veer Varner, bassoon, form a more sympathetic blend. It might be a question of the close mic being less kind to the oboe, although it allows one to hear the players inhale, very inspiring and invigorating.

The disc is named for one of the pieces presented: *Found Objects*, by Jenni Brandon, turns out to be pleasant tuneful tonal evocations of flotsam on Long Beach CA. No plastic included in the collection – artistic licence I guess. Two colours of sea glass are the only semi-synthetic items, which I think is in keeping with my overall impression of the disc being salutary. The opening work 5-4-3 (except after C) by relative old-timer William Bradbury (he's now 64 – the other composers are all 40-something), is similarly pleasant, if a bit more lively.

As much as the happily tonal first two works are like gentle massages for the ears, the final two are good stiff workouts designed to keep one's ears in proper shape for hearing new sounds. *Oblique Strategies* by Aleksander Sternfeld-Dunn and *In Threes* by M. Shawn Hundley round out this terrific collection.

Max Chrisite

Atomic Legacies Xenia Pestova Bennett Diatrib Records (shop.diatribie.ie)



► Before sitting down and listening to this new release by UK-based, Canadian artist Xenia Pestova Bennett, one is immediately struck by the vibrant,

compelling images on the cover design. This is one of those exceptional instances where the sonic expression found therein sounds just as its extramusical inspirational sources look: stunning chemical elements that glow and pulsate. From Pestova Bennett's liner notes: "Radium is an element which glows pale blue, Plutonium glows deep red, Tritium is green and the gas Radon is yellow at its freezing point, and orange-red below. I added the fifth, obsessively-repetitive loop... this element is silvery-white, glowing blue."

Glowing Radioactive Elements, the five tracks that correspond to the colours depicted, unfold in a well-curated and scintillating arc. The beauty of sound that emerges from Pestova Bennett recording this music on a piano with magnetic resonator – designed and trademarked by Andrew McPherson – enhances the sound world and draws the listener in, through dips and heights of pianistic gesture. The effect is akin to watching slow-moving landscapes in isolated, unfamiliar parts of our globe. The range of expression and musical material here is impressive: spontaneous at times and focused, personal and singularly

driven at others.

This disc rolls on to its significant final track, featuring the Ligeti Quartet in a companion work to the first, *Atomic Legacies*. Pestova Bennett directs the action in a florid series of closely connected gestures, deconstructing Haydn's music and her own.

Adam Sherkin

JAZZ AND IMPROVISED

Solo Sessions Volume 1 Brenda Earle Stokes Independent ASNM 007 (brendaearle.com)



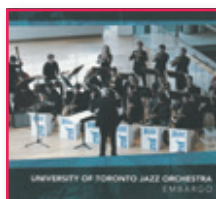
► Smooth and rather sultry-voiced, vocalist Brenda Earle Stokes has released a truly enjoyable collection of well-known pop and jazz songs that she has put her own twist

on. Featuring her own compositions among pieces by significant musicians in the general music universe including Dave Brubeck, Huey Lewis and Michael McDonald, this album is a versatile and captivating journey. The title refers to the fact that it's just her and the piano on this record, which creates such a charming sense of intimacy; the listener truly feels as if they are seated right by the piano, watching and hearing Stokes play.

If You Never Come to Me opens up the album with a sensual punch, showcasing Stokes' very apparent vocal talent. *Standing* is an original, a unique and modern piece that features interesting chord and melodic progressions which easily catch anyone's attention. Throughout the album, not only is the listener taken through various genres from traditional jazz to the blues, but Stokes' talent as a pianist is very well showcased. Her voice and melodies blend in seamlessly for a satisfying whole. A favourite is undoubtedly the cover of Lewis' *Power of Love*, in which the original song is still fully recognizable but has been jazzed up just enough to be refreshing. Anyone looking for a treat to the ears and something a little different from the norm will enjoy this album.

Kati Kiilaspea

Embargo University of Toronto Jazz Orchestra U of T Jazz n/a (uoftjazz.ca)



► It is no easy feat to construct an eclectically programmed album that maintains its flow from start to finish, but this is exactly what the University of

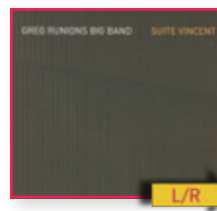
Toronto Jazz Orchestra, under the direction

of Gordon Foote, has done with their most recent release, *Embargo*. The student compositions on the album all demonstrate intricacy and wisdom, ranging from swing numbers to more contemporary pieces, and everything in between. It is a testament to both the quality of these arrangements and the stylistic programming of the album, that they sound right at home next to legendary trombonist and arranger Rob McConnell's version of *Take the A Train*. McConnell's treatment of the Ellington/Strayhorn classic is a demanding one to execute, but the ensemble does a fine job, as do the four soloists featured. Hearing the music of the Boss Brass live on through a younger generation of Toronto musicians is a unique treat. It is apropos that this should happen at the University of Toronto, which inherited McConnell's scores and library following his death in 2010.

From contemporary ballads like Jesse Marshall's *Summer's Over*, and the energetically uplifting title track, *Embargo*, which features solos from its composer Vonne Aguda and guitarist Julian Bradley-Combs, to Hannah Barstow's Count Basie-esque *Medium Blue*, a wide scope of large ensemble jazz writing is present on this release. Full of arrangers, composers and soloists who are wise beyond their years, depth and maturity are the true themes of this album.

Sam Dickinson

Suite Vincent Greg Runions Big Band Independent Grind 2019 (gregrunions.net)



► With the release of this superbly conceived, performed and recorded big band project, vibraphonist/composer/arranger Greg

Runions has fashioned a magnificent musical celebration of the iconic, late Canadian trumpeter/composer/arranger Kenny Wheeler. To realize his concept, Runions built upon his longstanding septet, and also created a "live-off-the-floor experience" by recording in the recording of the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts. Wheeler was an unassuming, ego-less, gentle genius, who would no doubt be incredibly honoured by this inspired six-movement musical tribute.

The skilled A-list cast includes Andrew Rathbun, Tara Davidson and Bob Leonard on reeds/saxophones; John MacLeod, Brian O'Kane and Jason Logue on flugelhorn and trumpet; William Carn on trombone; Brian Dickinson on piano; Mike Cassells on drums; Dave Barton on guitar; Artie Roth on bass and the lithe vocals of Yoon Sun Choi, channeling Wheeler's longtime collaborator, Norma Winstone – particularly on the vocal feature *The Long Way* (which also displays Dickinson's moving, emotionally vulnerable