

Review 'Hohler Fels'

I have become more enthusiastic about this release as I have lived with it. Flutist Karin de Fleyt, a Belgian musician working in Great Britain, is a renowned advocate for experimental music for her instrument. She is particularly known for an extended collaboration with Karlheinz Stockhausen, but has worked with many avant-garde composers and is a member of several ensembles specializing in new music. The Composers whose music she performs on this release are well regarded in contemporary music circles, as well. Rolf Gehlhaar is German-born American, but has worked primarily in Europe, including for a time as assistant to Stockhausen, and though retired still teaches experimental music at Coventry University in the UK. Oboist/composer Paul Goodey is on the faculty of the Royal Northern College of Music, now as vice principal for performance. He has made a name for himself as a performer of new music, as well as a composer. Christopher Fox, professor of music at London's Brunel University is probably the most progressive of the three composers, with his previous decade-long association with the Darmstadt School of his objectivist approach to composition involving abstract concepts, mathematical/computer mediated compositional algorithms, and an emphasis on process.

There is no question of the skill of these artists, or of the other performers who participate in this recording, including the students of the Royal Northern College of Music Wind Ensemble. They all deal with the often significant performance complexities with admirable virtuosity. The recording quality itself, and the presentation, including extensive notes and biographies of all participants, are exemplary.

How the listener responds to this recording will, I suspect, depend on how he or she deals with the scale of the works. All make rather large demands on the patience of the listener to deal with some stretches of near stasis, harmonic and/or rhythmic. It is not an issue of tonality; while that would not be an issue for me in any case, none of the three works is essentially atonal. Goody's three-movement concerto is the most conventionally structured, and its

37-minute duration offers rewards for patience with unusual and often impressive ideas and stylistic juxtapositions, along with a third-movement climax that is invigorating if over-extended. In fact, all three works grab the attention with thought-provoking textures and timbres, interesting turns of phrase, and novel ideas. They sometimes seem long in coming, or occasionally get stretched far too long for my --possibly deficient—span of concentration. Fox's almost 11 minutes of whisper tones and key clicks in jazzy rhythms on a limited number of pitches probably have a structure and trajectory I am missing. Gehlhaar's 16 minutes of repeated notes on similarly limited pitches, with occasional flights by one or another soloist, and an unexpectedly Coplandesque ending, no doubt add up to more than I am perceiving. Multiple listening, in different frames of mind, have increased my appreciation for these works. In truth, though, it was my respect for the performers who present them that convinced me to stay with it.

Ronald E. Grames (Fanfare)

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