

Celebrating Canadian Women!
Laurel Swinden; Stephanie Mara
Independent LBSCD2017 (musiccentre.ca)

▶ Flutist and University of Guelph flute professor Laurel Swinden and pianist Stephanie Mara have teamed up to record this new CD of music by Canadian women, introducing composers and music new to many of us. Swinden's playing is consistently first-class – great sound with flawless intonation and articulation. Mara is her equal all the way, playing like a soloist when that is required – and there are at times some devilishly difficult solos for the pianist – and stepping back when needed.



The program includes two sonatas, one by Quebec composer and organist extraordinaire Rachel Laurin, the other by composer and pianist Heather Schmidt. Both sonatas, oddly enough, have cadenzas which are, in my opinion, some of the best writing in these pieces, and which Swinden plays with great confidence and verve.

I had the same response when hearing the opening of the Schmidt *Sonata* and the opening phrases of Alice Ho's *Suite for Flute and Piano*: "What a composer!" Both bristle with excitement and virtuosity, demanding that the performer go to a stratospheric energy level. I was struck by how idiomatic Schmidt's writing was for the flute. The second movement's kaleidoscopic changes of mood are virtuosic feats of composition. While Swinden excels in this exciting and treacherously difficult music, she also shines in the more lyrical, like Jean Coulthard's *Music on a Quiet Song*, which she plays with great artistry.

This CD brings together artistry and artistic leadership. Well done!

Allan Pulker

Christopher Butterfield – Trip
Quatuor Bozzini
Editions QB CQB 1719 (actuellecd.com)

▶ For its 23rd CD, Quatuor Bozzini has produced a monograph recording with an almost-chronological retrospective of music by Christopher Butterfield. Spanning more than 20 years, it contains three pieces for solo strings and two string quartets. *Clinamen* (the Latin name Lucretius gave to the unpredictable swerve of atoms), for solo violin (1999), is made up of 80 cards, each containing a short musical phrase, combined according to the free will of the performer. Intentionally inchoate, the piece is bound together most prominently by



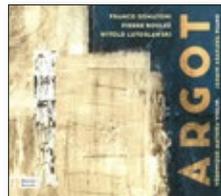
the honey tone of Clemens Merkel's playing, and yet, there are whispers of its compositional technique, as though related materials were sketched, bent through historical filters from classical music to modern, and then played by means of William S. Burroughs' cut-up technique.

Fall (2013), written for the full quartet, is the perfect vehicle for the Bozzinis' signature non-vibrato playing. At times haunting and tense, their sound is also unadorned, unaffected and exquisite. Engaged in material processes of rotation and accumulation, the ensuing tone of the piece is plaintive and distantly evocative of Cage's *String Quartet in Four Parts*. The eponymous *Trip* (meaning possibly all of: excursion, to dance or run lightly, to stumble or fall, to release and raise an anchor, and to hallucinate) is an outlandish journey from a short *Scorrevole* movement augmented by a random talk radio broadcast, through a moto perpetuo, to a swaying, recapitulatory *Scherzo*. The last movement, marked *Adagio molto*, is longer than the preceding movements combined, and sounds not simply slow but like a time-stretched recording, where the smallest, usually ordinary timbral deviation is magnified and burnished, while notes, lines and harmonies are expanded into tranquilizing beauty.

Paul Steenhuisen

Argot
Véronique Mathieu; Jasmin Arakawa
Navona Records NV6105
(navonarecords.com)

▶ Canadian violinist Véronique Mathieu has positive mojo in spades: chops to burn, rock solid musicianship, solo and concerto gigs around the world and



a doctorate in music. Not taking the typical path, Mathieu has chosen to play, commission and record primarily contemporary music, mostly by American and Canadian composers.

In *Argot* Mathieu – and Jasmin Arakawa, her pianist in the Lutoslawski repertoire – has chosen a demanding program of late-20th-century classical music. She tackles substantial scores of three European heavyweights, Franco Donatoni (1927-2000), Pierre Boulez (1925-2016) and Witold Lutoslawski (1913-1994).

The two-movement *Argot* by Donatoni definitely makes a virtuoso, dramatic statement. Brimming with a huge variety of keening timbral shifts, swift overtone-rich melodic fragments and expressive bowing and fingering, it's an impressive work and performance. Composed for Yehudi Menuhin in 1992, Boulez's *Anthèmes* employs extended techniques and virtuoso passagework galore. To these ears, Mathieu nails this 8'56" solo.

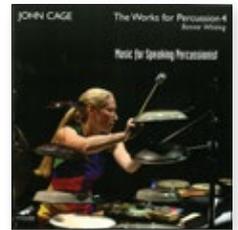
The album is capped by the three works by Lutoslawski for violin and piano. *Recitativo e Arioso* (1951) is early Lutoslawski, imbued sometimes with an almost folk-like lyricism. *Subito* (1992), on the other hand, is among the composer's last works, though in no way is it resigned. Rather, it is full of melodic playfulness with perhaps a musical tip of the hat to the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók.

Mathieu's recital closes satisfyingly with the largest work here, Lutoslawski's five-movement *Partita* (1984). I understand it's the work on the album most often included in contemporary violin recitals. In the virtuoso hands of Mathieu and Arakawa you can clearly hear why.

Andrew Timar

John Cage – The Works for Percussion 4:
Works for Speaking Percussion
Bonnie Whiting
mode records mode 296 (CD and Blu-ray disc; moderecords.com)

▶ American new music and improvising percussionist Bonnie Whiting is carving out a career as a "speaking percussionist." And what better repertoire to collect on her new album than the iconoclastic, prolific and influential American composer John Cage's groundbreaking scores that require speaking or singing and percussion?



The main program falls into three Cagean periods. Two early career songs bookend a combination of two mid-1950s works for speaker and percussionist. *Music for Two (By One)*, and a realization of Cage's late period *Music for _____* (1984-1987) for solo voice and percussion, follows. The album closes with a 2011 Allen Otte composition which incorporates several Cage works.

On the face of it, the two songs – *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* (1942) and *A Flower* (1950) – seem the most conventional fare here: melody with piano accompaniment. While they are usually performed by a separate singer and pianist, Whiting performs the two parts together with ease and grace. It's a performance ethos she traces to Cage's openness to having some of his works combined and performed simultaneously. The songs, however, are more non-conformist than they first appear. The instrumental parts are tapped and struck with fingers and hands on a closed piano. The voice is also severely restricted. While Cage's 1930s composition teacher Arnold Schoenberg famously employed all 12 conventional semitones as a structural feature of his later compositions, Cage, on the other hand in *The Wonderful Widow*, uses three tones. *A Flower's* vocal melody is constructed of four pitches with a fifth added only near the end. Were these songs at least partly a result of Cage rejecting