

City of Shadows, it is delightfully rich in comic-book scurrying around and dusted with hints of Britten.

Wheeler adapts with impressive ease to the three works' different territories: *City of Shadows* is a chamber symphony dedicated to Kent Nagano, while *Crazy Weather* for two string orchestras and *Northern Lights* for a very large orchestra were both Koussevitzky Foundation commissions. The performances are more than authoritative. Wheeler's music has an off-kilter attitude which suits the orchestra's own cool jazz-influenced musical sensibilities; they react quickly to Wheeler's sometimes audacious shifts in mood and get to display their very outstanding chops.

Laurence Vittes

'Confetti Man'

Bacharach/David *Send Me No Flowers*
(arr McKay/Balakrishnan)

Balakrishnan *Alex in A major. Confetti Man*

Carisi *Israel* (arr Balakrishnan)

D'Rivera *La Jicotea* Mintzer *Windspan*

Powell *Bouncin' with Bud* (arr Smoczyński)

Shorter *Infant Eyes* (arr Gutzeit) **Summer**

Pattern Language: Julie-O Concert Etude #1

Turtle Island Quartet

Azica © ACD71296 (63' • DDD)



The Turtle Island Quartet have turned the genre of the string quartet on its ear in repertoire that eagerly circumvents the mainstream. On their new disc, 'Confetti Man', the musicians pour irresistible energy and dazzling skills into pieces with roots in everything from bluegrass and jazz to rock and beyond.

The disc's title comes from David Balakrishnan's two-movement explosion of rousing and haunting ideas that embrace all of the influences above as well as Indian music. Balakrishnan has tapped into the Turtle Island's ability to bring a sense of improvisatory surprise to whatever they touch. The composer's invigorating artistry can also be gleaned in his arrangement of John Carisi's *Israel* and in his own bluegrass feast, *Alex in A major*, which calls upon the Turtle Island musicians to go wild with country fiddling.

Latin influences rub shoulders with contemporary techniques in Paquito D'Rivera's infectious *La Jicotea* ('Little Turtle'), and the ensemble proves as cosy in the tender lines of Wayne Shorter's ballad *Infant Eyes* as it is playfully subversive teaming with vocalist Nellie McKay

in the Burt Bacharach-Hal David pop tune *Send Me No Flowers*.

Turtle Island cellist Mark Summer has a moment in the sun performing his solo *Pattern Language: Julie-O Concert Etude #1* with remarkable dexterity and flair. His colleagues rejoin him for the disc's finale, Bud Powell's bebop *Bouncin' with Bud*, in an arrangement by Turtle Island violinist Mateusz Smoczyński that brings out all of the coolest qualities in this singular group's artistic arsenal.

Donald Rosenberg

'Dances for Piano and Orchestra'

Cadman *Dark Dancers of the Mardi Gras*

Castro Herrera *Vals capricho, Op 1*

Chopin *Krakowiak, Op 14*

Gottschalk/Kay *Grand Tarantelle, Op 67*

Pièrné *Fantaisie-ballet, Op 6 Saint-Saëns*

Valse-caprice, 'Wedding Cake', Op 76

Weber/Liszt *Polonaise brillante, Op 72 S367*

Joel Fan *of*

Northwest Sinfonietta / Christophe Chagnard

Reference Recordings © RR134 (69' • DDD)



It might be interesting to know how many thousands of notes

Joel Fan plays on this new recording. Each of the seven works calls for an artist who has no fear of cascading passagework and acrobatic leaps. Fan sounds perfectly at home in these virtuoso novelties, which are probably known to few musicians other than intrepid pianists.

But there's a great deal of charm to be found in the repertoire, which explores all sorts of dance idioms as realised by 19th- and early-20th-century composers. Several of them are titans, in their distinctive national ways, such as Saint-Saëns, whose delicious *Valse-caprice* in A flat major has the apt subtitle *Wedding Cake*. Weber's *Polonaise brillante* goes through a blockbuster transformation in Liszt's arrangement, while Chopin is in prime, majestic form in his *Krakowiak* in F major.

Less well known but equally disarming are Gabriel Pièrné, whose *Fantaisie-ballet* is an exuberant ride, and Mexican composer Ricardo Castro Herrera, who paints all sorts of colours in his *Vals capricho*. Gottschalk's *Grand Tarantelle*, in a reconstruction by Hershy Kay, provides soloist and orchestra with a glittering showcase. The disc's real ear-opener is Charles Wakefield Cadman's *Dark Dancers of the Mardi Gras*, which exudes bountiful excitement and lyrical ardour.

The recorded sound is a bit distant, so turn up the volume to appreciate the fervour and dynamism Fan brings to his challenging duties. He immerses himself in a series of colourful collaborations with the Northwest Sinfonietta led by Christophe Chagnard.

Donald Rosenberg

'Dreams & Prayers'

Beethoven *String Quartet No 15, Op 132 -*

Heiliger Dankgesang (arr A Far Cry)

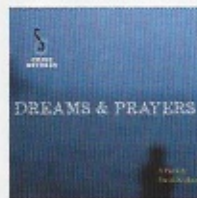
Golijov *The Dreams & Prayers of Isaac the Blind*

Hildegard of Bingen *O ignis spiritus paracliti*

(arr A Far Cry) **Sanlikol** *Vecd*

David Krakauer *of A Far Cry*

Crier Records © CR1401 (66' • DDD)



Here's how Miki-Sophia Cloud, a violinist in the Boston-based ensemble

A Far Cry, describes the programme she curated for the group's newest recording: 'This album explores music as a passageway between the physical and the divine as expressed over the mystical branches of three faith traditions and 1000 years of history. In each of these four works, something very simple – a breath, a word, a single note – is transformed into something transcendent, and even holy.'

Cloud doesn't exaggerate. The music and performances keep you transfixed, whether for spiritual or sonic reasons. Two selections are arrangements by members of the conductorless ensemble which put vital new spins on old music. The unison chants of Hildegard of Bingen's *O ignis spiritus paracliti* become communal celebrations as shaped by these superb musicians. Transcriptions of Beethoven string quartets for larger string forces aren't always persuasive but A Far Cry give such nuanced life to the third movement of Op 132 ('Heiliger Dankgesang') that the music's juxtaposition of the divine and the exhilarating is vividly achieved.

The two newer works also seize ears and soul. Mehmet Ali Sanlikol's *Vecd* – Arabic for 'ecstasy' – conjures up a Sufi ceremony by building rhythmic momentum on increasingly propulsive phrases. From Jewish tradition, Osvaldo Golijov's *The Dreams & Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, already a contemporary classic, explores a spectrum of moods, with the clarinet and strings engaged in activity both introspective and wailing. The Criers, as the musicians of A Far Cry call themselves, truly soar with their guest, the spectacular clarinetist David Krakauer.

Donald Rosenberg