



Jeremy Huw Williams stars in Paul Frehner's *Horizon: Madog*, a post-apocalyptic chamber opera about a messianic leader intent on rebuilding society

(who also directed the first production), in Welsh, Quebec French and – common to both nations – English; as a sound recording, however, the use of three languages does not help the opera's assimilation. *Horizon: Madog* can also be heard as a set of loose variations on its opening melody – heard after an initial radio broadcast – that dominates the musical fabric. Williams's committed performance is crucial to landing Frehner and Murphy's environmental message but his use of vibrato is not wholly to my liking. It is a strong performance, nonetheless, matched by the vivid, coruscating accompaniment from five members of Ensemble Paramirabo, augmented by Frehner himself as conductor and electronic instrumentalist.

Un pont sanguin ('A blood bridge', 2024) was written for the ensemble and takes its title from a line in Murphy's libretto for *Horizon: Madog*. Composed a year or so after the opera was completed, it is a single-movement sextet lasting some 14 and a half minutes, scored for flutes (one player), bass clarinet, violin, cello, piano doubling synthesiser, and percussion. The role of the synthesiser is not unlike that of the ondes martenot in some of Messiaen's ensemble compositions (lending it a somewhat contemporary French atmosphere) while revisiting the chamber opera's sound world. An intriguing listen.

Guy Rickards

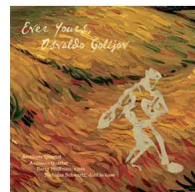
Golijov

Esperanza^a. Ever Yours^b. K'vakarat^c. Tintype^d

^aBarry Shiffman *va* ^bNicholas Schwartz *db*

^{ab}Animato Quartet; Arethusa Quartet

Phenotypic (PR-2601-CD • PR-2601-LP ● • 57')



The complexity of brotherly love is laid bare within the correspondence

between Vincent Van Gogh and his brother Theo, who financially and emotionally supported the struggling artist throughout his life. In the reams of published letters, Vincent signs his often-desperate musings with the same scrawl: 'Ever Yours'. It has become a sibling equivalent to Beethoven's Immortal Beloved dedication, and is the inspiration behind Osvaldo Golijov's imaginative four-movement piece for string octet, written in 2022 for violinist Geoff Nuttall, Golijov's 'brother in life and music'. In this newly revised version, the Arethusa Quartet and the Animato Quartet are joined by double bassist Nicholas Schwartz, who is put to work in the driving 'Papa' and propulsive sections of 'Sowing Fifths'. As that movement's title suggests, there is a structural focus on perfect intervals, but, unlike Glass's *Music in Fifths*, which takes a similar view, Golijov's employs less circular repetition. There is a minimalistic flavour to this and 'You Reap What You Sow', which

nice links to the earlier harmonic material, with quotations from Haydn's String Quartet in D minor, Op 76 No 2, Nuttall's favourite work and another piece built on fifths (giving it the nickname *Quinten*). Throughout *Ever Yours*, Golijov cleverly dissects, refracts and, of course, repeats Haydn's melodies. The shadow of *Recomposed by Max Richter: Vivaldi – The Four Seasons* looms.

The remaining shorter works include the sombre *K'vakarat* (1993), originally written for the Kronos Quartet and cantor Misha Alexandrovich, which features on the ensemble's cross-cultural 1994 album 'Night Prayers' (Nonesuch). In this adaptation, viola player Barry Shiffman takes on the vocal role, which is reworked to embed the liturgical lyricism, an idea further developed in *Tintype* (2024). Claire Jackson

'Island Prayers'

Balakrishnan Darkness Dreaming. Groove in the Louvre. Island Prayers Blanchard Turtle Trajectory Giddens Pompey Ran Away

Jl Tate Little Loksi'

Turtle Island Quartet

Azica (ACD71391 • 55')



Conceived during the pandemic, 'Island Prayers' finds the Turtle Island



Quartet returning to founder and artistic director David Balakrishnan's original vision: a string quartet in which his own music stands alongside works by jazz, roots and other American composers. The larger idea is of 'Turtle Island' itself – North America imagined as a cultural mosaic in which traditions merge most naturally through music. Hence the title: performances conceived as both meditative and celebratory, as acts of community, reflection and collective imagination.

Balakrishnan's *Island Prayers* supplies the emotional arc. Dialogue starts off with Bartókian simplicity, its argument animated

but still capable of listening; in the concluding 'Redemption', energised by the first of a series of astonishing cello solos throughout the album as virtuosic and pivotal as anything allotted to the first violin, the interplay acquires an Ivesian sense of conversation before veering into a brilliant Grappelli-without-Django riff.

A series of guest works widens the album's American mosaic. Rhiannon Giddens's *Pompey Ran Away* follows an enslaved fiddler through the Southern landscape with a deeply moving sequence of fiddle tunes and dances, superbly written for the violin. Jerod Impichchachaaha's Tate's *Little Loksi*, based on a Chickasaw

children's story of communal rescue, opens with a tune in harmonics and again gives the cello a starring role. Terence Blanchard's *Turtle Trajectory*, written for the quartet after years of collaboration, breaks after a minute into a rambling tune with Slavic overtones and intimate violin cadenzas.

Balakrishnan returns with *Darkness Dreaming* and *Groove in the Louvre*: the former starts with the hair-raising melodrama of a gypsy fantasy and ends up domesticated and close to the heart; the latter launches its ingenious ending with hair-raising, teeth-on-edge effects.

Laurence Vittes

Apollo's Fire

Our monthly guide to North American ensembles

Founded 1992

Home Multiple venues

One of the most admired early music ensembles in the United States counts not one but two major American cities as its home base. Founded in Cleveland in 1992, Apollo's Fire established an ambitious, annual Chicago-area season in 2021, often selling out those performances.

It's easy to see why Apollo's Fire has attracted large crowds in both Midwestern metropolises, as well as with stand-alone concerts across the US and in Europe: this ensemble approaches early music with a decidedly more dramatic presentation manner than many of its counterparts.

Though founder and Artistic Director Jeannette Sorrell pays meticulous attention to period style, instrumentation, voicing and performance practice, she also encourages her musicians to underscore the emotional currents of the repertoire at hand. This can involve hand gestures, facial expressions, body movement and other manifestations of a musical message, whether comic or tragic, agitated or serene.

'I grew up doing a lot of theatre and drama, and I also think that drama and rhetoric are essential in Baroque music,' explains Sorrell. 'Baroque composers were trying to re-create the power that the ancient Greeks had mastered, to use the arts to move the emotional moods of the listeners.'

Composers across the ages have sought to do the same, of course, but musical theorists of the 17th and 18th centuries wrote of the *Affekt*, or the specific emotional character, of a musical composition. The performers' job, they argued, was to stir the same emotions in the listener.

The rather extrovert performance manner of Apollo's Fire contrasts with more buttoned-down approaches, but it works because of the very nature of the programmes that Sorrell designs. For each Apollo's Fire concert doesn't just present scores – it also explicitly tells a story or evokes a time and place. 'O Jerusalem! Crossroads of Three Faiths', for instance, conjures Jerusalem from about 1200 to 1650, an epoch when Jews, Christians and Muslims co-existed rather more amicably than today. 'Fencing Match' spotlights double concertos –



and, yes, a period-style fencing match takes place during the intermission.

'Providing a thematic context – whether it's about the society at the time, or the composer's life, or the pageantry of a sumptuous space – this can help give new listeners a window into the music,' says Sorrell. 'It gives them something to latch on to, and then they can go more deeply into the music.'

The ever-expanding schedule of Apollo's Fire – which in April included a St Martin-in-the-Fields London residency featuring several programmes – suggests that audiences have embraced the ensemble's animated approach. Its extensive discography, which includes the Grammy Award-winning 'Songs of Orpheus' (Avie, 8/18), attests to its range of repertoire, from 'Handel: *Israel in Egypt*' to 'Heavenly Bach', from 'Vivaldi: *The Four Seasons*' to 'Sephardic Journey'.

Perhaps the ensemble's most remarkable feat is that it came into existence in the first place. Sorrell had been asked by Cleveland Orchestra administrator Roger Wright to meet with then-Music Director Christoph von Dohnányi, who was looking for an assistant conductor. 'I had a nice chat with Dohnányi,' remembers Sorrell, 'but at the end he told me he would not waste the orchestra's time by having me audition, since "the audience in Cleveland would never accept a woman conductor".'

Sorrell replied that she was much more interested in working with period instruments, anyway, and Wright later promised to help her start a baroque orchestra in Cleveland. 'So it would never have happened without Roger.'

Nor without Sorrell. **Howard Reich**