

Sirocco. Sylvie Proulx, guitar. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Centaur Records, 2010. CRC 3053. 1 compact disc (59:30). Contents: *Sirocco* / Andrew York (8:10) – *Triaela* / Roland Dyens (16:10) – *Variations on McGillicuddy's rant* / Clark Ross (15:52) – *Koyunbaba* / Carlo Domeniconi (16:12) – *An idea* / Leo Brouwer (3:04). \$16.00

Centaur Records' substantial catalogue of primarily instrumental solo and chamber music recordings includes fifty CDs featuring solo guitar or duos with guitar. The latest solo album is performed by Canadian guitarist Sylvie Proulx in an attractive program of five solo works by living composers all of whom are also guitarists. Consequently, the writing is idiomatic throughout, often virtuosic, and at times displays novel approaches to effects, no doubt tried and found workable under the composers' own hands.

Montreal native Sylvie Proulx, who holds Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Université d'Ottawa and the University of Toronto, is now a busy recitalist, and recognized as one of Canada's foremost guitarists. Her previous CD recording featured the music of Astor Piazzolla, in a solo capacity, in duos with flautist Robert Aitken, and in the Concerto for guitar and bandoneon with members of Symphony Nova Scotia. She acknowledges the support of the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council for the production of this CD recorded in July 2007 at the School of Music at Memorial University, where she is professor of guitar.

The program opens with *Sirocco* by American Andrew York, a long-time member of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet for whom he has made many arrangements. I am more impressed with the clean performance than with this light-weight composition which features some stock-in-trade guitar techniques, like open-string bass repetition, tremolo, and rasgueado.

Guitar pieces by well-established composers Roland Dyens and Carlo Domeniconi are among the most popular of the current generation of performing guitarists. One supplier, HB Direct [<http://www.hbdirect.com/>] boasts no fewer than sixteen different CD performances currently available of Domeniconi's *Koyunbaba*. One of my favourite renderings of *Koyunbaba* is not included there; it is on the 1992 recording entitled *Progression*, performed by another Canadian guitarist, Philip Candelaria. Domeniconi's opus 19 of 1985 may be considered an early composition in a list of works which now exceeds 156 opus numbers. *Koyunbaba* evokes the music of Turkey, where he visited and developed a regional folk compositional style, and the title refers to the southwest region of Turkey, and to the family name of Domeniconi's ancestors, descendants of whom still live in the region. It also carries the meaning of shepherd (literally, sheep-father) and could denote a thirteenth-century mystic.¹ *Koyunbaba* is a wonderfully resonant composition which conjures up the sound of the Turkish saz (bağlama) in part effected through scordatura tuning of the guitar: the five lower strings are tuned to C# or

¹ *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Carlo Domeniconi," last modified February 27, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Domeniconi.

G# while the top string remains at its normal pitch of E, thus supplying the third of the chord of C# minor.²

The four-movement suite in slow-fast-slow-fast form is notated without meter. In the first movement rhythmic interest is created with measures and phrases of varying and uneven length. Movements two (*mosso*) and three (*cantabile*) both display exotic-sounding melodies over a wash of evenly-flowing accompanying figures. Their fascination is enhanced by displacing accented notes from strong beats and irregular lengths of phrases in a rich sound fabric. The final movement *presto* is composed of motivic fragments repeated in a hypnotic fashion. The effect of quick arpeggio patterns of continuously flowing triplet sixteenth-notes, using the open-string resonance, is stirring and virtuosic. Proulx, like most performers, chooses to omit a repeated section in the first movement, thereby shortening it by about one minute. However, most performances of the fourth movement *presto* clock in at around four minutes, whereas Proulx's performance is significantly, almost three-and-one-half minutes, longer. This is in part due to her more deliberate tempo (Candelaria's tempo is about ten metronome points higher for the 12/16 measure than Proulx's), but also to her generous rendering of the composer's (perhaps) ambiguous indications with regard to repeated sections. Both of these factors contribute to a lack of urgency in Proulx's interpretation.

Roland Dyens' *Triaela* was composed in 2002 for Greek guitarist Elena Papandreou, who includes it on her 2005 CD with six other works, all composed by Dyens. Dyens is himself renowned for his improvisatory abilities and virtuosic performances. Sylvie Proulx captures the virtuosic quality of *Triaela* whose Brazilian-inspired movements with referential titles are: "Light motif (Takemitsu au Brésil)," "Black horn (When Spain meets jazz)," and "Clown down (Gismonti au cirque)." The first and third movements are tributes to the highly regarded Japanese and Brazilian composers and portray elements of their compositional styles evident in the important works they composed for guitar. *Triaela* requires the guitar's sixth string to be tuned a full perfect fifth lower than its normal pitch. While this produces some attractive colours and surprising effects, expertly handled, the tone of this re-tuned string is sometimes flabby-sounding, leaving one wondering if the employment of a fatter-gauged bass string might produce a crisper, more consistent tone.

The only Canadian work included is the *Variations on McGillicuddy's Rant* by Clark Ross, who is a professor of composition and Proulx's colleague at Memorial University. Though the piece is the only one on the CD not published, it is accessible, not from the Canadian Music Centre, as one would expect of compositions of an Associate composer of the Centre, but from Ross's own web site [<http://www.clarkross.ca/>]. There one learns that the *Variations* had a lengthy gestation period of twenty-three years, the theme having been composed as early as 1980. The piece was performed many times during the 2007-08 concert tour and subsequently recorded by another Canadian guitarist, Daniel Bolshoy.

² Don Michael Randel, "Saz," *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003): 757.

McGillicuddy's Rant apparently has no more significance than being a catchy title; nevertheless, the theme could perhaps pass as an obscure Newfoundland folk song. Its initial statement is followed by nine short character pieces, where it is never hidden and the work then closes with a modified reprise of the theme. The variations flow effortlessly from one to the next, but I wondered why the order of the first variation, a jig, and the ninth variation, a prelude, was not exchanged, as befits their more usual placement and character when included in multi-movement suites. The jig, I think, makes a more appropriate penultimate piece following the chorale and preceding the reprise. At the opening theme, which is marked "nostalgic" by the composer, I might have preferred a warmer tone from Proulx's guitar. In the second variation she makes the melody sing over the steady figuration, and in the bluesy fourth variation I especially enjoyed the glissandi chords and the 3 + 3 + 2 rhythmic figure. The gentle arabesque sounds appropriately like a lullaby, the repeated pattern arpeggio of the folk dance is clearly articulated, and the quality of the chords most attractive in the chorale.

How rich the contemporary guitar repertoire has become because of the works of the Cuban composer, Leo Brouwer, and because of his impact on other composers. A fitting close to the program, *An Idea: Passacaglia for Eli* was composed in 1999 to mark the seventy-fifth birthday of the influential teacher, Eli Kassner. Beautifully shaped by Proulx, who was one of Kassner's students, this short tribute of just twenty-six measures includes renaissance-like cadences and Chopinesque flourishes within its quasi-baroque style. Sylvie Proulx's whole CD is a most attractive *idea* at that!

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