

**CD Review by [William Zagorski](#)**

**ARTHUR LEVERING *Still Raining, Still Dreaming.***

In an attempt to describe these samples of the music of Arthur Levering (b. 1953) in any sort of meaningful manner, I at first chose the term "minimalism." What I hear fits all the more or less universally embraced characteristics of that genre—brief thematic kernels repeated incessantly over rising and falling pedal points; strong rhythmic impetus; vivid and kaleidoscopic instrumental colors, etc.; but I quickly realized that I could also be describing the music of Beethoven. The eloquent liner notes to this offering by *Fanfare* colleague Robert Carl make the point that if one takes the musicological term "classical," and thinks of it in the true sense of the word, which embodies the notions of, to quote Carl, "an archaic (and Arcadian) beauty and harmony. And deeper, a sense of *balance* of all the elements in a work supporting one another in pursuit of a perfection that bespeaks elegance, grace, a sort of dynamic serenity." To that I'd add economy of means. Carl then clinches his argument by rightfully claiming that these criteria can be applied to the music of such diverse composers as Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Fine, Shapero, and Harbison. Put another way, the notion of classicism transcends musical language. It can also be applied to

Levering's music without hesitation. *Still Raining, Still Dreaming* for six players (1996, revised in 2001) is Levering's homage to Toru Takemitsu. In the Composer's Notes section of the booklet he makes the point that Takemitsu composed many pieces utilizing the terms "rain," and/or "dreams" in their titles. He also notes that Jimmy Hendrix, a musician he admires, also used that same title for one of his pieces. From Takemitsu, he finds his sextet's otherworldly quality; from Hendrix, its unbridled energy.

*Echoi* for violin and piano (1999) opens with almost the identical downward thrusting motive as does *Still Raining, Still Dreaming*. I was particularly struck by its thematic development from movement to movement. As in so much of the music of Satie, the thematic variations at first sound so close to one another as to seem no real variations at all, but, upon closer inspection, their seemingly insignificant alterations bespeak the stuff of alternative universes.

The meaning of the title of *Sppooo* for piano and celeste (2001) is left largely up in the air by the composer. He cites two references to which I have no connection, and then states that he was being tongue in cheek and that the title implies "the childlike quality of the music." It does convey a sense of naive wonder, but communicated via the most sophisticated of means. In many ways, this is the most phantasmagorical

piece on this release.

The brief *Tesserae* for viola and piano (2002) and *Catena* for piano and chamber orchestra (2000) plunge us deeper into Levering's sound world. *Catena* once again recalls that same downward thrusting motive which opens *Still Raining, Still Dreaming*, serving to bring this offering full cycle. The bottom line: Levering is a composer who, like so many others of his generation, has created his own musical syntax. He writes for the instruments at hand with great virtuosity. And this New World release presents the most vivid sonic realization of the Boston-based Dinosaur Annex Musical Ensemble that has thus far come across my desk, and which is crucial to realizing Levering's music to the fullest. In case that you haven't noticed, this one is recommended without reservation. **William Zagorski**

**This article originally appeared in Issue 31:6 (July/Aug 2008) of *Fanfare Magazine*.**