

among others). The works on this CD are as dramatic and somber as the Scottish landscapes they portray, and the Concerto especially a significant new highlight in our literature.

— Review by Rob Nairn

One On One

Ron Merhavi, double bass
merhavi@gmail.com 2009

Based out of the Jerusalem Music Centre in Israel, Dr. Ron Merhavi has recorded a CD of solo double bass works composed from 1986 through 2008. Several of the works were commissioned by Merhavi and represent an assortment of contemporary styles. Merhavi is a versatile double bassist, and he is well-suited to the task of tackling the variety of challenges that confront performers of new works for solo double bass. The CD opens with David Anderson's *Capriccio No. 2* (1997), a work whose pedal tones, use of idiomatic harmonies and double stops, and Progressive Arena Rock rhythms represent the composer's compositional predilections. Merhavi clearly understands the intent of the composer and communicates it with efficacy. *Mimes and Pantomimes* by André Hajdu is a group of six short miniatures commissioned by Merhavi. Each miniature elaborates a singular gesture. Merhavi intelligently interprets and performs the six disparate movements and delivers a cogent unification of the works.

Another work commissioned by Merhavi is Yehezkel Braun's *Primeval Images* (2007). Like the work by Hajdu, the work is a group of five short miniatures that elaborates on a singular gesture. Unlike the Hajdu commission, however, which relies on singular abstract gestures, Braun's *Primeval Images* is driven by programmatic motivations and musically depicts images and narratives from the Hebrew Scriptures. And unlike his approach in the Hajdu, Merhavi exercises his versatility and explores the wide

range of musical imagery by delineating a distinction among the different works. His ability to contrast the very divergent movements is especially evident in the wild abandon that he conveys in the movement titled *Cain* versus the solemn repose of *Methuselah*. *I Am Writing My Nocturne* by Oded Assaf, another Merhavi commission, is a lyrical, atmospheric work that relies heavily on abrupt changes in dynamics. Fortunately for the composer, Merhavi once again delivers with complete mastery of tone production in all registers and at all dynamics in order to elevate the work to a higher level that may not have been envisioned by the composer.

Composed in 1986, Reinhard Wolschina's *Waldszenen 1986*, can be regarded as a vehicle for Merhavi to summarize his technical and musical compass. The only work on the CD by an established composer is *Psy* (1989) by Luciano Berio. Clocking in at less than two minutes, it is a short, curious work for solo double bass whose materials were derived from an earlier work. John Elmquist's *Pockets* is both well-written for the bass and well-suited to Ron Merhavi's command of the instrument. The work distinguishes itself on this CD because not only was it composed by an accomplished double bassist, the pieces do not need to invoke vernacular styles or rely on a series of bass tricks to keep the listener's interest. Robert Rohe's *Serenade* is a tender and rustic work whose effect on the CD not only provides welcome contrast to the avant-garde works that dominate the CD, but also with carefully treated dissonances interspersed in the static arpeggios, provides a very satisfying linear experience for both Merhavi and the listener.

One of the charges of a bassist who promotes new music is to seek out, recognize, and perform the works of emerging compositional talent. He has done just that by enlisting composer/improviser/violinist Carmel Raz, a rising



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star in the New Music arena. Raz's *Merhavin (Landscapes)* (2008) demonstrates a maturity not often found among youthful composers. Between Raz's writing and Ron Merhavi's capabilities, *Merhavin (Landscapes)* develops logically and always has a sense of direction and form. As a result, *Merhavin (Landscapes)* accomplishes what is so hard to attain in solo double bass writing and other predominantly monophonic instrumental media, an apparent form and direction. **One On One** is a CD project inspired by a bass player's simple, universal need to affirm oneself as an artist. As Merhavi states himself, "My daily work keeps me immersed in the waters of classical music... Yet, at the same time, I am left with little time for direct performance. This endeavor has been my lifeline to that world." In doing so, the Merhavi commissions have added substantial repertoire to the solo double bass medium. In the glut of recordings that saturate the CD market and try to reveal life-affirming artistic truths, Merhavi's honest artistry on **One On One** might well be one of the most affirming of all.

— Review by Jeremy C. Baguios

Poetic Schumann at 39

Gary Karr, double bass
Harmon Lewis, piano
Han Han Cho, double bass
Amati Productions, GK 113

Gary Karr, a living legend on the double bass, shows no sign of slowing down in his semi-retirement from public performance. His contributions to the double bass community are unparalleled. His virtuosity, stage presence, affability, and zeal helped propel both himself and the double bass to the rank of solo artist and solo instrument. Karr, however, does not seem content to rest on his unequivocal legacy. In 2007, he recorded a self-released two-disc set, **Poetic Schumann at 39**, featuring Harmon Lewis on piano and double bassist Han Han Cho who also produced the recording.

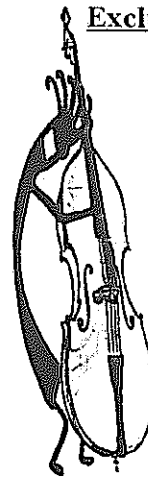
Karr selected the lyrical works of Robert Schumann (1810-1856), most of which were composed in the year 1849 when Schumann was 39 years old. The exceptions to the composition year of 1849 are *Nachtstücke* (1839), *Träumerei* (1838), and *Spring Song* (1848). Like many of the recordings in his discography, Karr has embraced transcriptions and selected works that adapt comfortably to the double bass and showcases both the lyrical qualities of the instrument and his playing style. Although it is difficult to determine what transcriptions Karr used, commercial transcriptions of *Fantasy Pieces* Op. 73 and *Five Pieces in Folk Style* Op. 102 are published by International Music Publishers and are available through Lemur.

Anyone familiar with Karr's recordings or live performances will immediately recognize his powerful, striking tone with its intensely expressive vibrato. Karr has never been afraid to slow down his bow speed and play with a bow placement closer to the bridge than most players would prefer. This technique has afforded him a beautifully clear and projecting tone that has helped allow him, throughout his career, to fill concert halls with rich sound and soar above an orchestra without aid of a microphone in a live performance. Yet, his sound is never strident. Han Han Cho's recording technique is masterful in that she has captured the essence of Karr's tone on this recording.

Originally composed for oboe and piano, *Three Romances*, Op. 94, is a perfect vehicle for Karr's aforementioned lyricism, intense expressive vibrato, and powerful tone, and it establishes the sound concept that predominates throughout the recording. In addition to Karr's default signature sound, *Three Romances* spans a wide breadth of expression in Karr's command of bow control as demonstrated with his ability to begin and finish phrases with both emotional panache and subtle tenderness. The highlight of the per-

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