The Music of Barbara Harbach – Composition Reviews and Performance Reviews 2007- present

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Barbara Harbach as Performer – Reviews
2007- present

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MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Orchestral and Chamber Music
Vol. I MSR 1252

"Barbara Harbach has distinguished herself as one of the preeminent American composers of any generation."
All Music Guide ~ December 2007

Barbara Harbach: Orchestral Music
Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra; Kirk Trevor, conductor
Frantisek Novotny, violin
Cynthia Green Libby, oboe

Veneration for Orchestra, Frontier Fancies for Violin & Orchestra, Arcadian Reverie for String Orchestra, Rhapsody Jardine for Oboe and String Orchestra, One of Ours – a Cather Symphony

Barbara Harbach is perhaps better known as a pianist and harpsichordist (and a champion of women composers), but this new release shows she's equally accomplished as a composer -- and not just as a composer for the keyboard.

Venerations for Orchestra, is, according to Harbach, is a three-movement symphony celebrating "love, beauty, attractiveness and desire" -- and the veneration of those themes. So it seems. Overall, this is a pleasant work, orchestrated with a soft focus that keeps it a little removed emotionally. Harbach has a gift for evocative melody, and there were some imaginative orchestral touches that made this an attractive work.

As the name suggests, *Frontier Fancies for Violin and Orchestra* has a vaguely American cast to it. But don't expect distilled Copland. Harbach has her own ideas about what Americana music sounds like. The violin and orchestra maneuver about each other like two protagonists -- or two lovers. Solo violinist Frantisek Novotny makes the most of the gorgeous material Harbach gives him -- especially in the slow movement, "Twilight Dream."

One of Ours - A Cather Symphony was inspired by Willa Cather's book of the same name. The work conjures up the sprawling plains of Nebraska in its opening movement with the orchestra's wide-open harmonies and soaring melodies. The second and third movements skip to the end of the novel, set on the battlefields of the First World War. But don't expect an overt depiction of war a la Shostakovitch's "Leningrad" symphony. Harbach, like Carther, is more concerned about the emotional effect of the conflict. The symphony ends, not triumphantly, but in an elegiac and life-affirming fashion.

The Rhapsody Jardine for Oboe and String Orchestra is the most adventurous score on the album. The oboist, Cynthia Green Libby, has worked with Harbach before, and is able to bring substantial insight to the score. The melody goes through several transformations, but Libby never lets us lose sight of the thread. Her performance really brings this work to life.

And it also highlights the one flaw with this recording. As good as the Slovak Radio symphony Orchestra is, their performance overall sounds flat, as if they were sight-reading. Using Eastern European orchestras to make a contemporary music recording is common practice these days -- without these relatively inexpensive and competent ensembles, a lot of deserving American music simply wouldn't get recorded. Conductor Kirk Trevor does what he can, but he can't fully compensate lack of adequate rehearsal. I'd love to hear these works done by an American orchestra after playing them in concert.

CCC. classical music
http://the-unmutual.blogspot.com/2014/05/barabara-harbach-orchestral-music.html
May 1, 2014 Off Topic'd A personal view of technology, the arts, and culture
Also, Orchestra I from WTJU Classical Comments, 91.1 FM, Charlottesville, Virginia by Ralph Graves http://wtjuclassical.blogspot.com/2014/04/barabara-harbach-orchestral-music.html

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BARBARA HARBACH: Orchestral Music = Veneration; Frontier Fancies for violin and orchestra; Arcadian Reverie for strings; Rhapsody Jardine for oboe and strings; One of Ours – A Cather Symphony – Frantisek Novotny, violin/Cynthia Green Libby, oboe/Slovak Radio Sym. Orch./Kirk Trevor – MSR Classics 1252, 56:05 [Distr. by Albany] ***:**

BARBARA HARBACH: Chamber Music I = American Solstice; Transformations for string quartet; Forces at Play; Carondelet Caprice; Fantasy and Fugue on Swing Low, Sweet Chariot for woodwind quintet; Separately Together – Synesthesia for Chamber Ens.; Rhapsody Ritmico for brass quintet – Ensemble Istropolis/Moyzes String Quartet/Woodwind Quintet/Brass Quintet/Kirk Trevor, dir. – MSR Classics 1253, 65:32 [Distr. by Albany] ***:**

I have several recordings on the Gasparo label of Barbara Harbach performing a variety of works on both harpsichord and organ, but had no idea she was also a noted composer with a large catalog of works in many different areas. She has also recorded for the Naxos, Albany, Kingdom and Northeastern labels, and has had many keyboard works written for and dedicated to her. She currently is a professor of music at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Harbach's compositional style is very diatonic and accessible but never corny or of what you would call the 'light music' area. On the strength of both of these CDs (and it looks there will be at least a second volume of the chamber works), her original works would be a very well-received part of many concert programs. *Venerations* seems to have a spiritual slant, with three movements marked *Blessings, Charity & Grace.* The three short *Frontier Fancies* have the proper Western feeling to them, but without copying Copland and others who have pioneered that area. The rhapsody for oboe is a lovely nearly ten-minute work. The closing short symphony was inspired by Willa Cather's novel *One of Ours*, concerning a WW I American war hero. Its center movement depicts an interlude in the war, a celebration in a small French town which has just been liberated from the Germans.

The Slovakian orchestra sounds well-rehearsed and comfortable with this very American symphonic music, and the sonics are first rate.
The chamber works by Harbach are even more varied and maintain interest switching between several different ensembles. The opening *American Solstice* is another work in the American frontier style – based on a fiddle tune. And the influence of folk Americana is also strong in the eight very short movements of *Transformations* for string quartet. My favorite work on this CD was *Forces At Play,* conceived as a modern ballet. Its combination of three woodwinds, three strings, piano and percussion making for a very pleasing orchestration. The instrumental line of each one weaves thru the work like a dancer thru a chorus line. *Separately Together* began as an accompaniment to a 1913 silent film *A House Divided*. Exploring the atmosphere and emotions of the film's images, its ensemble is about the same as *Forces At Play,* but without the percussion.

John Sunier, Audiophile Audition ~ March 2008

Robert Myers, Classical Voice of New England ~ June 2009

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"Barbara Harbach is... a remarkably prolific American composer... In the first chords of *Veneration*, Harbach presents her listeners with aural candy; delightful harmonies orchestrated by lush string textures effectively paint the evocative movement titles: I. Blessings: Gift of Blood, II. Charity-Caress, and III. Grace: Pleasure Heart. The 1st movement's gushing lyricism gives way to the imitative nature of the 2nd, whose original incarnation was a piece for cello and voice. The last movement effectively synthesizes the thematic elements of the piece within its own contrapuntal architecture. This delightfully rewarding piece belies her film score background, imbued with the characteristics of a storyteller of evocative imagery.

The following *Frontier Fancies* is equally intelligently crafted, successfully conveying frontier images with its driving rhythms and Copland-esque harmonies, led superbly by violinist František Novotný. It is a many-hued mosaic of themes inspired by America's heartland, simultaneously jubilant and pensive. The movements each have their own interactions between soloist and orchestra, as outlined by Harbach in the CD liner notes: "In 'Fiddleflirt,' the two are protagonists in a duel of speed and energy. 'Twilight Dream' is an evocative aria and lush respite before the wild tarantella of 'Dancedevil'."

The succeeding *Arcadian Reverie* is essentially a lush theme and variations on a pastoral theme that harkens very closely to "Simple Gifts," though not explicitly. The interplay of melodic motives as the piece draws towards its conclusion displays Harbach's compositional creative mastery.

In *Rhapsody Jardine*, renowned oboist Cynthia Green Libby makes full use of the oboe's expressive tessitura as she produces a rich sound comparable to a watercolor tapestry in its sheer beauty and scope of shading. Harbach often employs numerous themes which are then unified at the piece's conclusion, which she does here with a plaintive duet between oboe and cello followed by an orchestral unison statement of the fugual subject that characterized the latter half of the piece. Driven by Libby's superb musicianship, the piece is a remarkable tableau.

In her description of how *One of Ours – a Cather Symphony* came into being, Harbach betrays an immense respect for Willa Cather as well as a personal connection to the characters and events that make up the novel *One of Ours*. She spins the story of Cather's protagonist Claude Wheeler in different stages of his experience in World War I. "On Lovely Creek" is a bucolic portrayal of Claude in his homeland of Nebraska, happily naive and content in the world he knows. "Autumn in Beaufort" depicts a respite to the war, a minor celebration in a town recently liberated from the Germans. The notes of Harbach's composition become the characters that are enjoying the simple things in life recently denied in the period of suffering and war. The final "Honor at Boar's Head" is a memoriam of the thousands of lives lost to preserve the American freedom we hold so dear. The entire piece is uniquely evocative and features a more introspective expression from Harbach."

Robert Myers, Classical Voice of New England ~ June 2009

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"Anyone who read my previous review of Harbach's chamber music will know that I am a fan. All I need say is that this disk is well worth having for, if anything, it's even better and more interesting than the previous disk. So if you're with me, you can stop reading now and rush to your local record shop and buy an hour's–worth of the most glorious music you'll hear this year...[Harbach's] music is tuneful, grateful to play and a joy to listen to. I described the music on the earlier CD as "white note" music, implying a new simplicity, and it celebrates the great American outdoors. The works recorded here, as befits compositions for orchestra, use larger thoughts and gestures than the chamber works, but her country is never far from her feelings. The (Willa) Cather Symphony...is very special indeed and needs to be heard. The recording is bright and clear with a good perspective on the orchestra and the performances are obviously of the very highest standard. The notes are straight forward and lead one through the music but don't get technical, nor tell you too much – so, in general, the music is allowed to speak for itself. Harbach's music is in a class of its own and this is a CD which must not be missed at any cost."

Bob Briggs, Music Web International ~ September 2008

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"Harbach's music is on the whole remarkably gentle
and comfortable-sounding, even comforting - never fierce even when vigorous--and
there is very little music I would put in such a category."

R. James Tobin, Classical.com ~ July 2008

"[Harbach's music is] forthright, uncomplicated, honest, spiritually generous, rugged yet accessible, it dwells under a big sky and within wide open spaces. [Veneration] is proof that sincerity can be expressed in music... Kirk Trevor and the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra leave me confident that they have left none of the music's stones unturned; the engineering is similarly professional..."

R. James Tobin, Classical.com ~ July 2008

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"[Harbach] is a master organist and harpsichordist...She's a dead-on-heart-and-soul American romanticist in the Copland-Hanson-Harris mold... Harbach's music astonished me for its heavy reliance on the lyric and the beautifully (and cogently) framed melodic line. I could listen to her music for hours. This music is so uniquely characterized with its own sense of beauty that it makes me wonder where this woman has been all our lives. This is music that really needs to be heard. A great deal of credit for the success of the music on [this record] goes to the conductor and the sound engineers. They have done their best to present the composer, who should someday-if there is any justice in the universe-become a household name. You have *got* to hear this woman's music if you're a fan of mid-century American romanticism. She brings something entirely new to the table."

American Record Guide ~ March / April 2008

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"Fundamentally based on American folk and hymn-tune style, these attractive pieces occasionally suggest Copland in film-score mode and are often quiet, contemplative and peaceful in spirit. The melodies are lovely, the orchestration never thick or gaudy, emotion present but never heart-on-sleeve; in short, dignified and instantly approachable orchestral works."

Records International ~ December 2007

*****

"Extensively active as composer, performer, academician, musicologist, and publicist, Barbara Harbach's contributions to American music have been noteworthy."

All Music Guide ~ December 2007

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Barbara Harbach is widely known for her harpsichord performance as well as for the substantial amount of literature composed for the instrument in her honor. Currently professor of music at the University of Missouri – St. Louis, she is a remarkably prolific American composer whose output includes symphonies, works for chamber ensemble, film music, and modern ballet scores, among many other genres.

The works on this volume of her orchestral music are: *Veneration for orchestra*, *Frontier Fancies* for violin and orchestra, *Arcadian Reverie* for string orchestra, *Rhapsody Jardine* for oboe and string orchestra, and *One of Ours – a Cather Symphony*. In the first chords of *Veneration*, Harbach presents her listeners with aural candy; delightful harmonies orchestrated by lush string textures effectively paint the evocative movement titles: I. Blessings: Gift of Blood, II. Charity-Caress, and III. Grace: Pleasure Heart. The 1st movement's gushing lyricism gives way to the imitative nature of the 2nd, whose original incarnation was a piece for cello and voice. The last movement effectively synthesizes the thematic elements of the piece within its own contrapuntal architecture. This delightfully rewarding piece belies her film score background, imbued with the characteristics of a storyteller of evocative imagery.

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The CD liner notes contain descriptions of all the pieces in Harbach's own words as well as detailed biographies of the composer, conductor, and the two soloists.

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http://www.cvneweng.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=534:orchestral-music-of-barbara-harbach&catid=58:connecticut&Itemid=81

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Talk Classical.com – A community covering every aspect of classical music!

This week I have been working through a series of recordings of the works of American composer, harpsichordist and organist Barbara Harbach. I really enjoy listening to her compositions. Her music is distinctly American, i.e. Aaron Copeland etc. and yet she does have her own style of melody and texture. For a modern composer most of her music is very tonal and colorful. Much of her music has almost a sorrowful longing feeling to it and can be very moving. I also hear the use of American folk and even native American melodies and rhythms. For something different and quite relaxing without too much of a demand I recommend Harbach. She has a lot going for her!

- Kevin Pearson, Talk Classical http://www.talkclassical.com/37262-current-listening-vol-iii-481.html June 23, 2015

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Chamber Music I
Ensemble, String Quartet, Woodwind Quintet
Vol. II MSR 1253

American Solstice for Chamber Ensemble, Transformations for String Quartet, Forces at Play for Chamber Ensemble, Carondelet Caprice for Chamber Ensemble, Fantasy and Fugue on Swing Low, Sweet Chariot for Woodwind Quintet, Separately Together for Chamber Ensemble, Rhapsody Ritmico for Brass Quintet

"It's always good to find a new composer whose music speaks directly to you, using a language which is easy to understand and assimilate...and which has tunes. Say Hi to Barbara Harbach...the pieces here recorded are quite delightful. There is an open-air quality to these pieces, much in the manner of the Copland of the ballets and the folk inspired works of the 1940s. The scoring is transparent and the textures clear and bright. This is "white note" music, and is an excellent example of a "new simplicity" in composition. I am wondering if this music is the aural equivalent of the Americana of the work of Grandma Moses, but I must say that although both Harbach and Moses create works of Americana, there is nothing naïve about this music...when I have compared [Harbach's music] to Copland I don't mean that it sounds like Copland – certainly, this music doesn't sound like any composer I've ever heard, it is original in that respect. It is very well written and skillfully, and gratefully, scored for the various ensembles. The performances here are very assured and the recorded sound...is easy on the ear...I am very pleased to have made Ms. Harbach's acquaintance and want to hear more of her work. It's fine stuff, well deserving of a hearing."
Bob Briggs, MusicWeb International ~ July 2008

*****

"...American Solstice is wonderfully fresh, with sunny upbeat melody, making for far more than pleasant listening...Forces at Play begins with a gorgeous theme, beautifully developed...The recording is good and the authoritative notes very welcome.
I strongly recommend both releases."
R. James Tobin, Classical.com ~ July 2008

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"[Harbach's] style is unabashedly tonal and optimistic, attractive in uncomplicated fashion. Barbara Harbach's chamber music is melodic and well-crafted...this is attractive music and I

look forward to exploring more. No complaints about the performances under Kirk Trevor and various ensembles, all of which provide worthy advocacy..."
Gramophone ~ July 2008

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"The engineering is ideal. [Harbach's] music lives in the best of all possible worlds. There's a place in the universe for Harbach's music."
International Record Collector ~ June 2008

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"[Harbach] is a master organist and harpsichordist...She's a dead-on-heart-and-soul American romanticist in the Copland-Hanson-Harris mold... Harbach's music astonished me for its heavy reliance on the lyric and the beautifully (and cogently) framed melodic line. I could listen to her music for hours. This music is so uniquely characterized with its own sense of beauty that it makes me wonder where this woman has been all our lives. This is music that really needs to be heard. A great deal of credit for the success of the music on [this record] goes to the conductor and the sound engineers. They have done their best to present the composer, who should someday-if there is any justice in the universe-become a household name. You have *got* to hear this woman's music if you're a fan of mid-century American romanticism. She brings something entirely new to the table."
American Record Guide ~ March / April 2008

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"The disc opens with Harbach's best work here, *American Solstice*, a lovely piece, no matter how you look at it. It has all the beauty of the pentatonic without any of the stasis. The other piece that stands out is the Fantasy and Fugue on *Swing Low* for wind quintet – The fugue seems especially neat. The subject derives from the spiritual's I looked over Jordan, and what did I see." The performances, by Slovakian forces under the British conductor Kirk Trevor, are thoroughly professional.
Classical Net ~ October 2010

*****

"Barbara Harbach has distinguished herself as one of the preeminent American composers of any generation. Her music is distinctly American, with clever folk elements that hint at Copland but are all uniquely her own. [this disc is] a testament to Harbach's versatility in this environment; the works on this album are scored for an impressive assortment of instruments, from the traditional string quartet, brass and woodwind quintets, to larger ensembles featuring both strings, winds, and brass."
All Music Guide ~ December 2007

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"One nice thing about listening to classical music on XM Sirius satellite radio is that now and then, I hear a piece of music I never heard before. And if I switch from my GPS map view to the

satellite radio view on my Hyundai Santa Fe's viewscreen, I can find out who the heck the composer is, and what the piece is called.

That's how I found out about the piece "American Solstice" by composer Barbara Harbach.

I went on Amazon and looked for any CDs containing that piece. I found a series of six albums of the orchestral, vocal and chamber music by this remarkable composer, and I'm listening to them all.

She teaches at the University of Missouri-St. Louis; years before, she founded Vivace Press to publish music by "underrepresented composers."

The reason is obvious. Composition students who believe what their music professors teach come out writing music that nobody in their right mind wants to listen to, except to be able to tell their friends that they did.

Symphonic music has moved almost entirely to the realm of film scores, but the problem there is that film scores tend to be repetitive and irresolute. It serves the story, as edited; the music can't go where it needs to go for its own sake.

Barbara Harbach is somewhere in between. There's plenty of music in this CD collection that proves her credentials as a survivor of American university musical indoctrination. But even the most "experimental" is quite listenable.

Because somewhere along the way, Harbach apparently missed the memo about how all the beautiful, powerful music has already been written, so serious composers are all required to write music that is painful or annoying.

She actually writes beautiful music now and then. And clever, jesting music. And well-constructed, satisfying pieces. What a shock. A modern composer who thinks it's OK to create music that regular people might actually enjoy.

Look, if you already don't care about classical music, for heaven's sake don't start with Harbach. Start with Barber's Adagio for Strings. Start with Copland's Appalachian Spring.

Harbach's music is in the middle of the conversation; it only makes sense if you know what has come before, what she's answering with her music, what she's rebelling against.

But if you've been listening to classical music for a while now, and you can tell in a few measures whether a piece sounds like it comes from the Baroque, Classical or Romantic period, if you can tell Satie from Bach and like them both, then you'll be delighted with Harbach."

The Rhinoceros Times ~ Uncle Orson Reviews Everything
September 5, 2012

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MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Toccatas, Flourishes & Fugues
Vol. III MSR 1254

***Toccatas, Flourishes & Fugues,* A Celebration of Hymns**
Chester, In Babilone, Azmon, O Waly Waly, Chorale Fantasy on Ein feste Burg, Reverie on Vater unser, Finale on Ein feste Burg, Kingsfold, Sufferer, Land of Rest, Fantasy and Fugue on Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, Holy Manna, Gloria, Besançon, Antioch, Forest Green, Darwall's 148th, Llangloffan, Wade in the Water, Ar Hyd Y Nos, Hermas, The Morning Trumpet, Christ lag in Todesbanden, Erre Gyere

"Lovingly researched and expertly composed and arranged [this album is] a fitting representation of the remarkable dedication at the heart of Dr. Barbara Harbach's life work. Her performances successfully transfer the music with vibrancy and a joyful respect... [This release arrives] with informative notes including an account of the many achievements of Dr. Harbach and the historical background to the music she has chosen and performed... the well-chosen selection of hymns act as further endorsement of the level of respect which Barbara Harbach has for this particular genre. [This album] is distinctly individual, expertly performed, and contain[s] a high degree of educational value. Harbach's greatly admired authoritative position within the music world, and her abilities to perform the pieces with such command are all on display within these works.
They provide a highly satisfying addition to any classical music collection."
Jeff Perkins, BlogCritics, May 2009

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"The art of the organ hymn paraphrase is something that goes back to the seventeenth century, and this very well-filled MSR disc features a variety of hymn settings, ranging from Harbach's growling, slightly discordant setting of "Sufferer" to her bright and radiant rendering of "Antioch" (i.e., "Joy to the World"). Harbach brings together an interesting mix of the hardy counterpoint and fugues common to the German tradition and the harmonic preferences and flourishes of the French approach, though many of the tunes are American... the recording itself, made with an Aeolian-Skinner at Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis, MO, is splendid. MSR and Barbara Harbach's *Toccatas, Flourishes & Fugues* will provide some interesting and fresh pieces to the attention of organists everywhere and likewise will bring enjoyment to those who welcome a novel twist on familiar hymn tunes as played on the organ."
All Music Guide ~ April 2009

*****

"These small pieces are what many would consider to be typical organ music, but there's more to them than that for nothing this composer does is ordinary – there's always something unexpected in there. Somewhere... Harbach is probably better known both as an organist and harpsichordist than as a composer but it is to be hoped that this will change and the three issues, so far, of her music on CD should be going along way to introducing her special art to English audiences. This disk is a fine example of her taste and capabilities in creating music for what is, after all, a fairly limited medium and one which hasn't been visited too often by contemporary composers... The recorded sound is magnificent. Crisp and clear with a little reverberation but not so much that the music is lost in endless echo, for this full praise must go to engineer Roger Fredrickson for his perfectly placing the organ in the right aural setting... This is well worth investigating for, as always with Harbach, there's so much to enjoy in her music."

Bob Briggs of Music Web International, February 2009

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Harbach plays an Aeolian-Skinner organ at the Christ Church cathedral in St. Louis. The 24 selections are original or (mostly) arranged from old hymn tunes and traditional melodies. This is Volume 3 (the only organ recital) of a projected seven discs of Harbach's music for various ensembles, so the focus is on Harbach. She uses a few familiar techniques to handle the tunes, often ending with a fugue. A Finale obviously meant to conclude a service is a *tour de force* , she says, for double pedal with toccata in the manuals that is quite impressive for its brevity. Similarly, a Fantasy and Fugue on *Swing low, sweet chariot* , the only work dated before 2001, serves the same purpose at greater length. Some of the hymn tunes are treated meditatively. The 70-rank organ has that familiar Aeolian-Skinner sound that G. Donald Harrison created so brilliantly, though this was not one of his designs. This is a very enjoyable organ recital, the tunes just familiar enough and the treatment just novel enough to sustain interest throughout.

Splendid sound.

J. F. Weber**, Fanfare – Classical Reviews – Instrumental, June 2009**

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Barbara Harbach, who has composed for orchestra, chamber ensemble, choir, film, and musicals, as well as keyboard, here presents settings of 24 hymns and spirituals spanning most seasons of the liturgical year. Cast in a well-conceived and executed neoclassical style with a conservatively modern harmonic language, they are fresh, invigorating, and exuberant. Several are multisectional, a short fugue commencing in mid-section. Others are through-composed. A few feature multiple tunes in the same piece. For example, *Sufferer,* a Fantasy and Fugue based on "They crucified my Lord," uses "There is a balm in Gilead" as the fugue subject, with fragments of "Swing low, sweet chariot" (seemingly a favorite of Dr. Harbach's) to effectively amplify the primary text; it becomes a mini-sermon in music. Harbach's playing reflects the music itself: strong, vibrant, rhythmic, clear. The large Aeolian-Skinner suits the music well, providing plenty of color, brilliance, and clarity in a moderately dry acoustic. All of the settings recorded here are in print, available from either Vivace Press or Augsburg Fortress, as indicated in the program booklet. This recording will provide much pleasurable listening and be a welcome resource for those seeking appealing,

high-quality, hymn-based literature.
The American Organist, May 2011, page 65

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Toccatas, Flourishes & Fugues
A Celebration of Hymns: *Summary for the Busy Executive*: Harbach's Hymnal.

Someone once asked Vaughan Williams whether he regretted giving up so many years of original composition to work on the classic *English Hymnal*. Not a bit of it, he said. He got the opportunity to work with some of the best tunes in the world. That's one of the perks of church musicianship, at least if you work for people who don't insist on up-to-the-minute relevance. Harbach has given something back to the tunes she's worked with a lot of her life.

This CD presents Harbach's arrangements for organ of mostly well-known hymns, as well as, in one case, an original. I suspect that many of them came from her church improvisations, which she then polished. She selects material eclectically, with a special fondness for shape-note hymns and African-American spirituals, and she displays great variety in her treatments.

Harbach's approach to writing for the organ follows more the French school than the German. More than once, she put me in mind of Widor. She employs many different devices: flourish, trio *en taille*, and toccata, as well as the more contrapuntal canon and fugue. Her fugues tend to confine themselves to initial entries before they evaporate into something else, although she does have extended examples. She often, as in her take on William Billings's *Chester*, crams many of these devices into the same piece.

In Babilone begins as a prelude or fantasy and ends with an intriguing "asymmetrical" fugue, where the entries come not at regular intervals, but practically at will, on or off the beat. *O Waly Waly*, better known as "The Water is Wide," sings tenderly and simply. It's one of my favorites of the set. Among the British settings, *Kingsfold* ("Dives and Lazarus"), *Forest Green* (the British tune to "O Little Town of Bethlehem"), and *Ar Hyd Y Nos* ("All Through the Night") stood out. Most of them tend to trios, and the simplicity of texture enhances them.

Harbach excels in the shape-note hymns, possibly because her own idiom has much in common, as shown by her original *Gloria*, a lively gigue, which resembles but doesn't imitate "The Lord is to His Garden Come" from *The Southern Harmony*. Furthermore, her treatment of the 16th-century *Vater unser* plunks that tune down in the middle of the Cumberlands.

The African-American spirituals, however, seem to set Harbach's imagination free. She has favorites that turn up again and again, even in those settings supposedly featuring other hymns: "Wade in the Water," "Balm in Gilead," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Her treatment of the *echt*-British *Kingsfold*, for example, weaves in those three, plus "My Lord, What a Morning." It's as if the modal nature of British folk music and the Spiritual provides a substantive kinship, a musical Rosetta Stone. *Sufferer*, a dramatic meditation on Christ's Passion, begins (after a hint of "Jesu, meine Freude") with "Mumblin' Word." "Swing Low" and "Balm in Gilead" enter into the mix, and Harbach gives the latter fugal treatment. "Swing Low," an obvious Harbach fave, also shows up in a chamber setting, with a similar fugue on the phrase "I looked over Jordan, and

what did I see." Here, she gives it another full-on treatment: declamatory, then lyrical, the fugue, another lyrical episode, fugue again briefly, and finally toccata.

The organ, the Aeolian-Skinner at St. Louis's Christ Church Cathedral, is very well recorded indeed. I enjoyed this disc quite a bit, especially since I knew almost every melody, but I don't think that's a requirement. Spend some time with some of the best tunes in the world.
Steve Schwartz, Classical Net, October, 2011

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MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Chamber Music II
String Orchestra, Ensemble & Woodwind Quintet
Vol. IV MSR 1255

The Music of BARBARA HARBACH: Vol. 4 - The Soul of Ra and Transformations for String Orchestra, Echoes from Tomorrow for Chamber Ensemble, Freeing the Caged Bird and Lilia Polka for Wind Quintet

Unless the Americans have changed their ideas about what constitutes chamber music this disc is rather oddly named. Two of the pieces on offer here are for string orchestra. One is for chamber *ensemble* and two are for wind quintet. Does this really matter? No, it doesn't, except to those people who refuse to listen to chamber music - and there are some - because they will miss out on some good things.

This is Volume 4 of Barbara Harbach's music and most welcome it is. This is a different Harbach to the one presented on the previous discs. One of the most appealing things about Harbach's music is her very Americanness. Her music speaks of wide open places, the prairie, homespun Americana. If you haven't yet experienced the beautiful Harbach voice then I urge you to first listen to *One of Ours - A Cather Symphony* (2004) (MSR Classics MS 1252). This is a substantial work, very worthy of our attention and a work which should be heard by all. It is very American in tone and content.

What the two string orchestra works on this disc display is a more cosmopolitan voice. Indeed, *The Soul of Ra* (two movements, slow and fast) speaks in a kind of accent, American filtered through English. Imagine Tippett, but more transatlantic and you've got it. This piece is richly scored for strings, in the way we hear in Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*, or Tippett's *Concerto for Double String Orchestra,* but not in Ned Rorem's *Pilgrims* or Roy Harris's *Prelude and Fugue* (1936). But it's still very obviously American. There's real heart-felt lyricism here, of the kind seldom encountered in contemporary music. Kirk Trevor achieves a performance of great passion and tension. This is wonderful music. You'll agree with me. It would be impossible to disagree.

Transformations is an eight movement suite for string orchestra inspired by Alice Guy-Blaché's film *Making an American Citizen* (1912) - Guy-Blaché was the first female director in motion pictures and is considered to be one of the first directors of a fiction film. Having never seen the film I have no idea how this music fits with the film whose storyline is simplicity itself - Ivan Orloff and his wife go to America. Ivan treats his wife roughly, as a matter of course, and after

landing in America, he forces her to carry their baggage, while he repeatedly prods her with his cane. A passer-by castigates Ivan and forces him to carry the luggage. This is the first of several lessons that Ivan will learn in his adopted country.

When I reviewed the string quartet version of this piece (MSR Classics MS 1253) I wrote that "The music, although still of the Americana style, is slightly more angular with more movement and argument." Listening to this fuller scoring, and the amplified scoring really suits this music, the Americana is still there, how could it not be! After comparing the versions I find that it is the arrangement for string orchestra which has added this new, more cosmopolitan, dimension to the piece. What we have lost by having the angularity removed we have gained in beauty and stature.

Echoes from Tomorrow is a four movement piece, and it is more obviously American. The first movement has a bright and airy feel, the second has a gorgeous flute solo, which contains some "wrong" notes in the tune, thus spicing the music up a little. But it's all pastoral easiness and very lovely too. The third movement is a spritely dance and the finale is a sad piece, a kind of passacaglia which builds to a majestic climax. Splendid stuff.

The wind quintet is, together with the string trio, one of the most difficult combinations to write for. These ensembles are, to some extent, monochromatic. Thus it takes a keen ear to create something which has the necessary light and shade to make the composition acceptable to the ear and the intellect. Barbara Harbach is a true mistress of her trade and she knows exactly what will work and be very pleasing to the senses. *Freeing the Caged Bird* is a suite of four pieces inspired by four literary women - Maya Angelou (a delightful rhythmic dance), Sara Trevor Teasdale (a deeply felt slow movement of rich textures), Kate Chopin (a waltz, redolent of the social milieu of Chopin's early years) and Emily Hahn, who lived a colourful life, to say the least! This portrait is of a traveler and free spirit, it's easy-going tinged with nostalgia. This is a marvellous piece, endlessly entertaining and colourful.

The other piece for wind quintet is Harbach's arrangement of Kate Chopin's *Lilia Polka* which gives each member of the ensemble a chance to shine. It's a kind of *Young Person's Guide to the Wind Quintet.* A lovely way to end this exciting disc. This is essential listening.

Briggs of Music Web International, October 2009

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This is Volume 4 on MSR of the music of American composer Barbara Harbach. I commented quite positively on Volumes I & II (MSR1252 & *1253; MIA* 2008), noting that her heart and soul is thoroughly American and romantic in the tradition started in the 1930s by Roy Harris, Howard Hanson, and continued into the 1940s by Aaron Copland. Her strengths lie in her melodic ideas and how she lets them evolve. Her music lacks anything trendy or extravagant or especially academic. It's also not terribly complicated, but there's nothing wrong with pleasant, delightful music that never seems to outwear its welcome. (And it must be fun to play.)

The Soul of Ra (2006) is for string orchestra, *Freeing the Caged Bird* (2007) is for woodwind quintet, *Transformations* (2004) for string orchestra, *Echoes From Tomorrow* (2006) for chamber orchestra, and there's a small polka for woodwind quintet originally written by Kate Chopin for her daughter in 1899 called 'Lilia Polka' (2007). Like Harbach's fuller orchestral works (found on Volume I), the pieces here for string orchestra and chamber ensemble are the

strongest. I found the works for woodwind quintet *(Freeing the Caged Bird* and 'Lilia Polka') a bit limited in developmental possibilities. I love her strings; I love the way she allows her ideas to expand across a wide range of instruments. But this is just a personal preference. The dates above show that this is very recent music, but it'll remind you of what Americans have always been good at: strong melodies, sweeping gestures, and heartbreaking moments of sheer beauty. (Check out II in Echoes From Tomorrow, called 'Choices'. The violin is right out of Vaughan Williams's *Lark Ascending).* All performances are quite good, and the sound has considerable warmth to it. Don't let the music of this woman pass you by.

COOK ~ American Record Guide, November/December 2009

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Description: Harbach's music is always determinedly accessible, tonal and melodic, completely avoiding anything that might have been identified as a modernist trend at any point in the 20th century. A bracing strain of American mid-20th century romanticism, with nostalgic glances backward, characterizes these works, with their themes of life's struggles and lessons, basically positive outlook, and admiration for women of historical significance from the past. This last is most clearly spelled out in the four character portraits of the woodwind quintet. Transformations has an open-air, somewhat Coplandish quality, an American character-piece with folk allusions, while The Soul of Ra addresses more universal issues of loss and hope, death and the transcendence of the human spirit. Echoes tells a life story, inspired by an early 20th century silent film based on a 19th-century poem; gently nostalgic and purposeful in its narrative drive, with a vein of lyrical melancholy never far beneath the surface.
Ensemble Istropolis, Bratislava Woodwind Quintet, Bratislava Chamber Orchstra; Kirk Trevor. Records International specializes in bringing unusual repertoire to collectors of classical music.

Appealingly Straightforward **Music by Barbara Harbach – warmly recommended by Ron Bierman, Music&Vision**

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When I auditioned Barbara Harbach's felicitous recording of harpsichord works by Anna Bon last year, I didn't realize the performer was a prolific composer. Now I know not only that, but also that she is a very good one, assuming you're open to ear-hooking melodies in a setting of mild neo-romanticism. *The Soul of Ra* for String Orchestra has some of the most strikingly beautiful moments I've heard in a new piece in several years. Harbach here remembers loved ones lost.

The concluding second movement is a lively reaffirmation of 'human spirit that transcends loss'. The theme of the first movement returns in a soaringly optimistic closing.

Freeing the Caged Bird is a tribute to four exceptional woman authors. Possibly the least familiar of these is Kate Chopin. Winds intertwine and swirl as they state the theme which represents the 'social milieu that Kate grew
up in'.

Transformations is Harbach's clearest use of the American sound of composers such as Aaron Copland. The similarity is intentional. The piece, in eight movements, 'was inspired by pioneer director Alice Guy Blache's silent film *Making an American Citizen*'. It could easily be used in a movie soundtrack, as could a good bit of the other music on this disc. Make of that whatever your musical prejudices require.

Echoes From Tomorrow is for a small ensemble of strings, woodwinds and piano. It continues the composer's inclination to take inspiration from women's adventures and struggles, historical or fictional. In this case the heroine is a young girl in love, as described in a poem by József Kiss. The youth's innocent joy is expressed in the opening movement.

The program concludes with a bagatelle based on a polka written for her daughter by Kate Chopin. It is a whimsical delight.

Barbara Harbach's music is appealingly straightforward: themes are immediately attractive, forms clear, and textures and harmonies transparent. Conductor Kirk Trevor and the varied instrumental combinations serve the music well. This release is a worthwhile introduction to a valuable contemporary composer, and I look forward to hearing more of her work.
Warmly recommended. Daily Classical Music, March 2010

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Fanfare Magazine Interview
Barbara Harbach: An American Voice
MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Chamber Music II
Vol. 4 MSR 1255

Feature Article
Written by Robert Schulslaper
Music of Barbara Harbach, V.4: Chamber Music II - String Orchestra, Ensemble & Woodwind Quintet
MSR Classics

In an interview for *Missouri Life*, Barbara Harbach confided that she was "one of the fortunate (or unfortunate) people who knew what I wanted to do since I was five years old—I wanted to be a musician, in particular, a concert pianist." How could this be an unfortunate aspiration? "I guess because I was just laser focused onto being a musician and concert pianist. As I evolved through my early career, other keyboards began to fascinate me, and I enjoyed them very much. And then all of a sudden all I wanted to do was play in Carnegie Hall; at that time I was majoring in organ. I was pretty naive; Carnegie Hall didn't have an organ then. So, that dashed that hope for a little while. [Laughs.] But overall, it's been a wonderful ride. It's been a lot of fun; I never thought my career would be where it is today."

A composer, organist, and harpsichordist, Barbara no longer performs or records on the piano. What happened to redirect that "laser focus?" "I love the piano, I love hearing piano music, and I play it a lot in my various jobs. But I just felt a bigger and better affinity for an organ. Also, it's loud. [Laughs.] I played Strauss's *Also Sprach* —that was a thrill. I did it in Woolsey Hall at Yale University. And I'll tell you, that organ—there's nothing like drowning out an orchestra!"

The organ and the harpsichord are both keyboards, but in a sense they're distant cousins. Still, Baroque composers like Bach and Handel were virtuosos on both. "Yes. And while it's true that the respective techniques differ, they share one thing: no matter how hard you pound on those keys, it doesn't get any louder." Laughing, she adds, "of course you don't really pound, I'm just speaking metaphorically."

One of the fascinating things about organists is that they've preserved the art of improvising fugues, toccatas, and other pieces "whole." Does she ever try her hand at it? (The notes to "Toccatas, Flourishes and Fugues," MSR 1254, refer to the third part of *Land of Rest* as a free improvisation on *Amazing Grace* .)"I do a little bit, not in the same scope as Marie-Claire Alain, or somebody who at the end of a concert can make up an entire piece out of four notes. With *Land of Rest* , as I was thinking about it, ideas arose as my fingers were moving over the keys, so in some ways it was an improvisation that became a piece. And then I combined the two themes (the original hymn tune and *Amazing Grace*). I like doing that, but I don't really improvise in public. I may have a little bach in my name, but it's not *the* Bach." [Laughs.]

Barbara is primarily self-taught as a composer, although she did have some lessons with Samuel Adler. She's been playing for church services since she was nine, and has held positions as music director for religious institutions of all denominations, so many of her early

works were written with a practical purpose in mind."I think you start with what you know the best, so I wrote for choirs and organ and slowly started expanding. I did small ensembles, then a string orchestra piece, until finally I felt comfortable enough to tackle a full orchestra. Of course, I still keep the Kennan book, *The Technique of Orchestration* , right by my side. [Laughs.] And now the technology is incredible, you can do a range check with Finale." (Finale is a type of notation software often used by composers and arrangers.) Does she use Finale in other ways?" It depends on what I'm writing. I guess over the years we all get a way that we do our hieroglyphics. I usually do a melodic sketch on the piano with one-note harmony, and if I hear the countermelodies, maybe a little bit of that. And then, I just go to the computer and do it.

"I lived many years in small rural areas like Pullman, Washington, and Oshkosh and Stevens Point in Wisconsin, and continued to write music, knowing that there would be few performances, if any. I have been very fortunate in St. Louis with the many excellent musicians, and have found that there is a place for my music, and that audiences enjoy listening to it."

Speaking of technology, Barbara has done her bit to bridge the gap between science and art. "I was an associate professor in the Department of Mathematics and Computing at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. But what I was emphasizing was how to create art with the technology. I would teach the students how to make a video, or how to underlay a score, a little bit about film. We'd have certain assignments, for example, how to make an electronic holiday card. It was kind of a catchall, because I was teaching computer majors who basically never left their computers, trying to get a little of the arts into them."

Barbara has often found herself promoting culture in one form or another, and once hosted a TV program for a few years." It was called *Palouse Performance* , and it was when I was professor of music out at Washington State University, over in Pullman near the Idaho border. The time was right, and it was really a musical variety show. We'd do a lot from all over that part of southeastern and even up into central Washington. People would come and we'd tape them. We'd have a good time. These were local performers; we had bluegrass, jazz, and pop. One of the singers was so great—she wrote a song called *I'm gonna fax my baby some love*. I performed, as well. For one program, we went out of the studio so that I could give an organ concert, and I took three keyboards with me: my clavichord, my harpsichord, and my pump organ."

That would have been something to see, especially for the clavichord, which is so rarely played in public (or anywhere else, for that matter). Conventional halls are just too large for its tender voice. "It's very intimate, believe me. I once gave a concert where a thunderstorm came up. I had to stop because you couldn't hear me! But I'm not a purist, because I've been known to amplify. Even with the harpsichord, it's so hard for strings these days to play softly enough, so I'm all for a little gentle enhancement."

Barbara is very involved in educating the public about women's contributions to music. She founded Vivace Press after a publisher's plans for manuscripts she had unearthed didn't mesh with her own vision. She was excited about her finds, and wanted to have everything printed complete, but was told that only separate movements would appear and would have to be edited in a way that ran contrary to her ideals. Also, the publisher brought out an edition printed in pink, with a picture of a demure young woman seated at a piano on the cover.

Today, Barbara is no longer offended by such stereotyping, but at the time it convinced her to go her own way. “It was the 1980s; we [feminists] were struggling away. [Laughing.] I’m probably a bit more mellow about it now. But back then, just to have to edit this early music. You know, we edit Bach, but we really don’t, we use the *Urtext* if we’re really into it. So, that was kind of my thinking, leave the music the way the composer intended it.

“By the way, *Fanfare* readers might like to know that we also made our own CDs under the Hester Park label. The label takes its name from Maria Hester Park, an 18th-century London composer and one of my first reclaimed historical women composers. We put out seven at one point. One of them that I really liked was called “Classical Prodigies.” It focused on Mozart and a little girl by the name of Elizabeth Billington. They were about the same age and they wrote music around the same time. So half was Mozart and half was the little girl. She was very good and went on to become England’s supreme diva. She reputedly had a beautiful voice and a great sense of ornamentation, but as soon as she started concentrating on singing the creativity lapsed. Just a quick aside: she was very, very interesting. She was married to her teacher, and when he passed away, she married an Italian (she was English, from London). They separated—they had this kind of tumultuous back and forth affair—but he wanted to reconcile, so he took her to Italy and murdered her. It’s an opera waiting to happen. Really, what a wonderful story it could be with a high, great singer. [Barbara has written an opera and several musicals: more about them anon.] Anyway, I recorded her op. 1, written at the age of eight. Her second, her mature works, date from when she was 11. That was delightful. And the Mozart, of course was wonderful. But he had the extra-added dimension of Leopold correcting it. When the Billington family found out that I had published and recorded her music, they were thrilled. They actually called me and wanted to see the scores and hear the music.”

Vivace Press also published a quarterly, *Women of Note*. Was this perhaps available online so that readers could sample the contents? “No, it’s not. We’re just reviving it. Vivace Press has been taken under the wing of the University of Missouri as part of the Women in the Arts program I initiated. Women in the Arts is a natural outgrowth to all my passion of rediscovering, bringing to light neglected women composers. I’ve done a fair amount of men composers, too, who have written wonderful music and who sadly get tossed by the wayside and maybe not even looked at. And I so enjoy bringing that to the public and I let the public choose. Let the public decide the music’s merits and where it stacks up in the musical canon. I mean, there are some really sharp people in the listening audiences.

“And so, I had my Vivace Press and my *Women of Note Quarterly* , and then in the year 2005, I was in Saint Louis and I decided that I would like to do a Women in the Arts 2005, and see if we could get together a few concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, all those kind of wonderful things, sculptures, paintings. I was hoping I could get 100 events throughout the Saint Louis region. I got over 850, and I couldn’t even go to them all. The time was right for celebrating women creators. So that seemed to have been a good thing. And then Women in the Arts at the University took off and I became the director. And so, it’s going gorgeously!”

With seven CDs of her own coming out on MSR, Barbara has written enough to host her own mini-festival, but she only recently added an opera to the list. “I based it on Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* I’m drawn to strong women, and Willa Cather writes very strong women. *O Pioneers!* is this wonderful story of a woman who inherits the land; she makes it prosperous,

the best farm in the Nebraska region, much to her brothers' chagrin, who are always kind of biting on her. And yet she never found love. In mid-life, she found that she thought that friends make the best lovers. And the other side of the story is illicit love, where a young Bohemian woman married the wrong man but fell in love with the strong woman's brother. And so, our illicit lovers meet for the very last time, they're parting, they're saying goodbye, and her husband finds them and shoots them both. Writing an opera is very complex, but luckily I have a great artistic director and conductor who put it together. I don't think I could do it. I'm not the impresario type."

Before embarking on an opera, Barbara had written five musicals, each with more than 20 songs. Any favorites? "I'm very fond of *A Mate for Kate, Tom and Sally* (based on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings), and *Booth! A Mate for Kate* is Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* , so that was fun. And *Booth!* is based on the famous family of actors, the Booth family. It won a competition and then it had a short run on Broadway—off-off-off-Broadway, actually. The lyricist was very good, he's funny, the words worked well. I often find that even a few words can be so evocative. Sometimes, I have a melody in mind while I'm walking to the piano to start work, and at other times, the melody is there after looking at the words. Anyway, the musical focuses on Edwin Booth, who is the older brother, the most famous Shakespearean actor of his day. And it includes John Wilkes: of course, you have to touch base with him. John Wilkes was the most handsome man in America. He was a real lady's man. *Booth!* told the story of what happens to a family when one of its members does something heinous. Asia, Edwin and John's sister, was almost hanged by an incensed mob, even though she was innocent of any wrongdoing, but when they discovered she was pregnant they let her live. And when Edwin Booth could finally go back on stage, there were several assassination attempts while he was acting. It's a fascinating story."

Never one to pass up a dramatic opportunity, Barbara has written an orchestral score that was performed live as an accompaniment to a silent film. Today we picture a lone pianist or organist improvising the music on such occasions, but the reality is that complex arrangements for pit bands or even full orchestras were quite common. "That was a really strange film [*Simon Judit*]. It was a Hungarian Jewish film from 1916 about a young woman who falls in love. She is of the working lower class—her father is a tinker, selling things, always going and coming—and she falls in love with the son of the estate. She becomes pregnant and somehow has the baby without anyone finding out. She takes the baby and goes down to the rushing water—today the depiction would probably be more graphic—but you see her come back without the baby. She cuts off all her hair, which is a terrible thing for a Jewish woman to do, and goes to see her Rabbi, who puts a curse on her—that she may never kiss any of her children to come. And so it goes on from there; it's a real melodrama. She's eventually cast out by her husband and becomes a beggar, but not before she's borne a daughter. On the day of the daughter's wedding, the mother appears—the daughter recognizes her from a painting that hung in the family parlor—kisses her and falls dead; it was based on a ballad by Joseph Kiss, who was a Hungarian poet. Writing for film was fun, but was also really nerve wracking. You time it out just so, and it's put on CD. But then they bring in the film, and it stretches, the timings aren't quite the same, so sometimes it's a little faster and the conductor has to be very alert to keep everything synchronized."

Barbara's interest in strong women found another fortuitous opportunity for expression when she was commissioned by the Equinox Chamber Players to write a piece with a Saint Louis theme. She obliged by writing music inspired by four Saint Louis literary natives (F*reeing*

the Caged Bird , for woodwind quintet—see review below): Maya Angelou, Sara Teasdale, Emily Hahn, and Kate Chopin. Of the four, Emily Hahn led perhaps the most exotic life. "She must have been an amazing woman. She smoked opium, she was the concubine of a Chinese poet, and spent many years writing for the *New Yorker* —what a woman! I met her daughter in 2005. I had her come in for our Women in the Arts festival. Sara Teasdale was fascinating in another way. She was a poet; her poems are very dark, which I think expresses her feelings in life. Sadly, she committed suicide in 1933 (one of Teasdale's poems is printed in the booklet notes for "Chamber Music II," MSR 1255). Kate Chopin—Chopin was her real name, by the way—became famous for writing *The Awakening.* This was a book that just stood the literary world on its ear because it was a coming of age of sexuality in a woman. And that was *not* something one talked about at the end of the Victorian period. She wrote a delightful polka for her daughter, which I've arranged for woodwind quintet. Although she wasn't a musician, coming from the upper middle class as she did she would have studied piano, painting, embroidery, and all the other little accoutrements that went into the making of a nice young woman. The quintet's title, *Freeing the Caged Bird*, was a response to Maya Angelou's autobiographical novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* In addition to acquiring fame as the first African-American woman to have her screenplay adapted to film and to being the first black female director in Hollywood, she was also the first female cable-car conductor. She overcame an abused childhood to speak five languages, win a Pulitzer Prize, and march alongside Martin Luther King and Malcolm X—a marvelous story that I've tried to interpret in music."

Barbara is a prolific composer with a varied list of works in her portfolio. Is there any genre she prefers? "I keep coming back to organ music, writing organ pieces because they cleanse my palette between projects. Playing the organ in church has the same effect, as it's a different environment from the academic world. It's serene. It's peaceful. And I like playing traditional organ music. But getting back to composition, I like to write for different ensembles. Small chamber ensemble is one of my favorites; string orchestra is also, and of course, orchestra. And I love voice. I guess I like to write for all of them, to stretch myself and do things I haven't done."

Barbara Harbach identifies herself as "an American voice," and that capsule description holds true for most of the music here. Without access to a score, I won't try to explain how her melodic and harmonic tendencies could be construed as American except to refer to her appreciation of folk music and a superficial resemblance to Copland and others of similar bent. *Transformations* for string orchestra—inspired by *Making an American Citizen*, a silent film directed by Alice Guy Blanche in 1912—exemplifies her approach to our national idiom. The opening "Pastorale" is lyrical, perhaps emphasizing the gentler side of a bucolic early America. There's a transition to a rhythmically pronounced or dance-like theme before the movement subsides. "Towards Liberty" is more assertive, but optimistic strains are followed by "Restrain," in which dramatic intensity and darker harmony imply struggle, no doubt correlated to episodes in the film. "Commandment" combines the lyrical "Pastorale" element and the striving implicit in "Towards Liberty." All told, the eight movements continue in the same vein as these first four, encapsulating, in the composer's words, "moods . . . from nostalgia to agitation to resolution." It's not uncommon for composers of film scores to compile suites to allow their music to be heard in the concert hall—Harbach has done so herself in *Echoes from Tomorrow* for chamber orchestra, adapting material she wrote for another silent film, *Simon Judit* —so, reversing that procedure, I suspect Harbach's music

would provide a moving and meaningful accompaniment for *Making an American Citizen. Echoes* , compared to *Transformations* , shows the same hand at work, insofar as the melodies and harmonies sound familiar, but the instrumental color is more diverse, as it's scored for piano, winds, and solo strings (violin, viola, cello). There also seems to be more interplay among the instruments. The opening movement, intended to portray "the joy and exuberance of young love," pulses with buoyant "Anticipation." The spare violin and piano that begin "Changes" introduce a vaguely anxious motif that alternates with happier, dance-like episodes and a sweetly nostalgic violin solo—the fluctuating form is no doubt an attempt to convey the central character's confusion and sorrow in the midst of life-changing circumstances. While sometimes bittersweet, the music doesn't dwell on the film's tragedy. Harbach, as her notes reveal, is more interested in the central character's psychological evolution, and she finds hope even in a darkly oppressive story. "Transitions" alternates between major and minor and between themes implying struggle as well as cheerfulness, while "Remembrances" is reflective, sad perhaps but not somber—the price of hard-won wisdom? Harbach's wind quintet, *Freeing the Caged Bird,* opens with a jaunty theme that could be heard as an introductory fanfare. Each of the four movements is named for the literary woman who inspired it: "Maya Angelou," "Sara Teasdale," "Kate Chopin," and "Emily Hahn." Teasdale's adagio follows Angelou's allegro, with Chopin and Hahn's flowing allegrettos comprising the last two movements. Hahn is a trifle spicier than Chopin is, but also partakes of Harbach's considerable lyricism (I only use the Italian terms as a convenient reference for readers as such tempo indications aren't listed on the CD). The quintet's prevailing mood is sunny, even though the subjects' lives were hardly free from struggle, depression, or opprobrium. Although I fundamentally agree with Harbach that she's immediately recognizable as an American composer, oddly enough, I thought of Mahler when I heard *Soul of Ra* 's second subject; it's "a soaring melody of hope and heart's ease" that closely follows an elegy, "In Memoriam," intended to honor"all our lost love, loved ones and the many war dead." *Soul of Ra* 's energetic second movement, "Phoenix Rising," "personifies the indomitable human spirit that transcends loss and this world's suffering." The composer symbolically repeats themes from the first movement to stress that even "Amidst our joy there is always a reminder of 'In Memoriam' and the gentle ache of remembrances past." The final track, Harbach's delightful transcription for wind quintet of Kate Chopin's *Lilia Polka* for piano, provides a whiff of ragtime and 19th-century Americana to end the CD. Conductor Kirk Trevor, the Bratislava Woodwind Quintet, the Bratislava Chamber Orchestra, and the Ensemble Istropolis play Harbach's music in direct, communicative ways that never compromise the music's integrity with uncalled-for tempo alterations or interpretive distortion of any kind. This is a fine disc of appealing music by a talented composer.

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Local Connection WNED.org, August 20, 2010 with Marty Wimmer

This week's Local Connection features Barbara Harbach, a former music faculty member at SUNY at Buffalo and an internationally known concert organist and composer. The CD is titled Barbara Harbach, Volume 4 - Chamber Music 2. Composer: Barbara Harbach, Kate Chopin. Conductor: Kirk Trevor Orchestra/Ensemble:Bratislava Chamber Orchestra, Bratislava Woodwind Quintet and Ensemble Istropolis.

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Vocal Music
Soprano, Winds, Strings, Harp, Trumpet & Piano
Vol. V MSR 1256

Stella Markou, soprano

Abigail! for Soprano, Flute, Clarinet, and String Trio, Pleasure Flow, Tender Emily! for Soprano, E-Flat Trumpet and for Soprano and Piano, Cherish - Caress Pioneer Women: from Skagway to White Clarinet and Piano, Twenty-first Century Piano. Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, Harp Mist for Soprano and Piano, Piano, Light out of Darkness for Soprano and Cello, Mountain for Soprano, Pioneer for Soprano and

Description: As in the ensemble works on the accompanying disc this month, Harbach admiringly memorializes women of historical significance in these works for soprano and various instrumental combinations - Abigail, wife of President John Adams; Emily Dickinson, Helen Keller and four female American pioneers all appear here. The song medium allows Harbach's melodic gifts full rein, while her refined harmonic sensibilities in a resolutely tonal, attractively accessible idiom provide rich and memorable context for the eloquent projection of her carefully chosen, emotionally expressive texts. Texts included.
Stella Markou (soprano), Various artists, James Richards (conductor).
Records International specializes in bringing unusual repertoire to collectors of classical music.
Records International, 2010

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So far, in MSR's survey of the music of Barbara Harbach, vocal music has been conspicuously absent, an oddity, to say the least. After all, apart from the music recorded here, Harbach has written a musical, *Booth!* (concerning the brother of John Wilkes) which played in New York last summer, and an opera, *O Pioneers!*, based on the novel by Willa Cather, was given in St Louis last October. Unfortunately, although *O Pioneers!* was broadcast on KFUO St Louis - (which was available on the internet - if you missed it that was it.) It's a fine work, which needs repeated hearings to really get into the piece, so one can only hope for a national broadcast at some time, and thus a worldwide audience could hear the work.

Until then, here are seven vocal works, which show the range of Harbach's vision.

Abigail! - Harbach seems to favour the exclamation mark in the titles of her vocal works! - sets words from letters between Abigail Smith Adams and John Adams, the second President of the USA. Voice and harp make such a good combination, and here they are complemented by wind and strings – it's a beautiful piece of vocal chamber music, well laid out for a small ensemble, colourful and understated.

Pleasure Flow, Tender Mist sets words by Jonathan Yordy – who wrote the libretti for both her musical *Booth!* and her opera – and they are eminently singable words – not always the

case with contemporary verse. These are also very singable songs. Relaxed and tender, they would grace any recital.

Emily! sets words by Emily Dickinson and who would have thought that the combination of soprano, trumpet and piano would work so well together! Dickinson the mystic is here treated to music of ecstatic fervour which, due to the e trumpet, still has its feet on the ground, planted firmly in the real world. Harbach's seeming simplicity – like Copland's in his Dickinson settings – heightens the emotion and passion of the words. Perhaps the use of trumpet will militate against too many performances so we must be grateful for this recording.

Pioneer Women: From Skagway to White Mountain sets words from four women who "helped settle the wilds of Alaska". This is the longest work on the disk and it's more dramatic and visionary than the other pieces. But it's not without a sense of fun. With clarinet added to voice and piano, it is a major addition to the repertoire for this combination of instruments.

The final three short pieces are delightful make–weights. *Light Out of Darkness* sets words by Helen Keller; it's a simple, ecstatic chant. *Cherish – Caress* is a duet for voice and cello, setting more words by Yordy, which is a fine essay in how to write a really "singing" vocal line. The poem, however, is rather twee and somewhat cringe–making. Finally, *Twenty–First Century Pioneer*, is a blues, delivered in a lovely Southern style, with a down–home drawl. Great fun.

It says much for the strength of Harbach's work that she has created vocal music which builds on the two great American composers for the voice – Ned Rorem, who has probably done more for vocal music in the past sixty years than anyone, and Aaron Copland, whose *12 Poems of Emily Dickinson* might just be the greatest American composition for voice and piano – yet manages to find her own truly American sound. As I have said before, when I have had the great pleasure to report on the previous four CDs of her music, she has forged a voice which is all her own, yet speaks clearly in the American vernacular.

Don't miss this disk for it is something very, very special. The performances are excellent, committed and vibrant – Stella Markou knows how to use her voice to best effect, and although rather limited in her range of vocal colour, she makes up for it in insight into the music – in excellent sound and with good notes in the booklet.
This is something very special … **Bob Briggs MusicWeb International**

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Barbara Harbach's route to her current status as a highly respected American composer has been somewhat circuitous, and is well documented in a Fanfare 33:3 feature by Robert Schulslaper. Unlike her other discs, this one is wholly dedicated to vocal music, and shows a keen grasp for choosing texts that lend themselves to musical treatment and setting those texts with dramatic insight.

The text for Abigail! is culled from letters penned by John and Abigail Adams in 1762. Abigail was a true pioneer for equality for women, and though (or perhaps because) she received little formal education herself, she described the necessity for "learned women" if American society were to have "heroes, statesmen, and philosophers." Harbach's strength is her sensitive method of molding melodic contours and rhythms to fit her text, and soprano Stella Markou matches her syllable for syllable with diction so clear the reproduction of the words in the booklet is almost superfluous.

I reviewed another performance of Emily! in Fanfare 33:3 and enjoyed this performance every bit as much. The contrasting timbre of the trumpet is a perfect choice for Dickinson's poetry, while Markou and trumpeter Paul Hecht play off each other nicely. Pleasure Flow, Tender Mist uses texts of Jonathan Yordy, and Harbach is right at home setting words like "wind," "breeze," "cooling," "breath," "misting," and "calm."
Pentatonic scales play a large role in this set.

There is much to admire in this collection of vocal works, especially the choice of the text and her refusal to compromise the clarity of the messages behind the words. It is an approach that is well integrated and idiomatic for instruments and voice alike.

A couple of notable exceptions to this pattern come near the end of the disc, first with the cycle Pioneer Women, which ramps up the dramatic effects considerably for the first two songs, portraits of the fascinating Catherine Van Curler and Cordelia Nobel. The other change of pace comes in the disc finale, 21st Century Pioneer, a sassy blues number. Markou steps into these very different roles with nervy gusto.

Michael Cameron, Fanfare, Issue 34:2 Nov/Dec 2010

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Vocal Music | *Barbara Harbach* World Magazine

With a composer as diverse and prolific as Barbara Harbach, it's hard to know where to start. Vocal Music is only one of three Harbach albums to have come out recently (*Chamber Music II* and *Toccatas, Flourishes & Fugues* are the other two), and it would be oversimplifying to say that it's the "best" of the three. But by serving as an exhilaratingly lyrical vehicle for the exhilaratingly lyrical soprano Stella Markou, it presents a hitherto underexposed side of Harbach's prodigious compositional gifts in a most flattering light.

Arsenio Orteza, World Magazine August 14, 2010

*****

"Stella Markou...has a clear and compact voice that often reminds me of a young Dawn Upshaw... The musicians and performances are excellent. I especially appreciated trumpeter Paul Hecht's control and (yes) sweet tone in Emily!"

Kilpatrick, American Record Guide ~ November/December 2010

*****

"...this [CD] is wholly dedicated to vocal music, and shows a keen grasp for choosing texts that lend themselves to musical treatment and setting those texts with dramatic insight... Harbach's strength is her sensitive method of molding melodic contours and rhythms to fit her text, and soprano Stella Markou matches her syllable for syllable with diction so clear the reproduction of the words in the booklet is almost superfluous... There is much to admire in this collection of vocal works, especially the choice of the text and her refusal to compromise the clarity of the messages behind the words... well integrated and idiomatic for instruments and voice alike... Markou steps into these very different roles with nervy gusto... Recommended."

Michael Cameron, Fanfare ~ November/December 2010

*****

"...the songs run the gamut from concert Lieder to Broadway belt and blues... Light Out of Darkness is lyrical and sweet, well set, with the text nicely exegeted from Helen Keller's own words..."

David Wolman, Fanfare ~ November/December 2010

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MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Chamber Music III

Reeds, Brass, Strings, Harpsichord & Piano

Vol. VI MSR 1257

Frontier Fancies, for Violin and Piano, American Dialogues, for Flute and Piano, Four Dances for Two, for Oboe and Violin, Tres Danzas para Clavecin, Phantasy and Phugue, for Solo Piano, Spaindango - Caprice for Harpsichord, Rustic Dance for Viola and Piano, Perambulations for Trumpet and Piano, Daystream Dances for Oboe and Piano, Emanations from the Sacred Harp for Cello and Piano

Though far from a household name, Barbara Harbach has been writing music for a long time, and for a contemporary composer, a considerable amount of her work has appeared on CD. This is MSR Classics' sixth release of her music, and the third specifically of chamber music. Four of the previous five releases have been reviewed, warmly each time, on MusicWeb International: volume 1, volume 2, volume 3 and volume 5. This latest release is subtitled 'Chamber Music III: Reeds, Brass, Strings, Harpsichord and Piano'. MSR's website says these are world première recordings, without indicating which ones – which presumably means they all are.

Those unfamiliar with Harbach - she is probably better known as an organist and harpsichordist - need feel no trepidation. At about an hour in length, this is not an over-generously filled disc, but it is still one jam-packed with music which is both attractive and extremely accessible - melodic, tonal, structured, intelligent, varied.

Given the variety of instruments on offer, there will likely be something for everyone on the disc. *Rustic Scene for Viola and Piano* is as good a place to start as any for fans of American music - a lovely folk-like evocation of the wide spaces and huge skies of the American frontier. Some of the most memorable music is to be found in the three solo keyboard works - hardly surprising, given Harbach's proven abilities as a harpsichordist and organist. *Spaindango - Caprice for Harpsichord* is a short, humorous, riotous piece, featuring Harbach's own fingers flying up and down the keyboard, whereas *Tres Danzas para Clavecin* is Spanish flamenco guitar as played on a keyboard - by Harbach again - with a unique-sounding, jazzy Andante followed by another frenetic finger-chase aptly entitled 'Danza-Deliro'. The *Phantasy and Phugue for Piano*, with its Liszt-like opening, moves from brooding Romanticism into a hypnotic, almost minimalist section, and finally a bright fugue,

with beginning, middle and end announced with dramatic piano 'thunderclaps'.

Frontier Fancies for Violin and Piano is in three short movements, with a particularly evocative second, entitled 'Twilight Dream'. The version for orchestra was reviewed on MSR volume 2 mentioned above. *Perambulations for Trumpet and Piano* is another very attractive, very accessible work. The trumpet part requires a perfect breathing technique, and is seamlessly interwoven with the piano music. But where that trumpet is slightly wistful, the oboe in *Daystream Dances* is marvellously pastoral and sunny - at least until the cooler evening air of the second movement, 'Reeling Dusk', starts drawing in. Though nothing on this disc is particularly profound - the emphasis is often on fun or sun - there are no weak works or fillers either.

Unfortunately the CD booklet does not give any information on the soloists - suffice to say that there should be few complaints about their performances. The sound quality is high, without being perfect - there is some slightly distracting 'air' noise in *Four Dances for Two* and *Daystream Dances*, a minimal permanent hum 'underneath' all the music, and the flute is almost too close to the mike for comfort in *American Dialogues.* On the other hand, the balance between trumpet and piano in *Perambulations* is just right.

Harbach has worked tirelessly to promote the cause of women in the arts, for which work she has received a number of awards. It is to be hoped that soon her music too will start receiving greater recognition.

Jam-packed with music which is both attractive and extremely accessible - melodic, tonal, structured, intelligent, varied.
***Byzantion*, MusicWeb International, March 2011**

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American Dialogues for Flute and Piano; Four Dances for Two for Oboe and Violin; Tres Danzas para Clavecin; Phantasy and Phugue for Solo Piano; Spaindango: Caprice for Harpsichord; Rustic Scene for Viola and Piano; Perambulations for Trumpet and Piano; Daystream Dances for Oboe and Piano; Emanations from the Sacred Harp for Cello and Piano – UM-St. Louis Chamber Soloists – MSR Classics MS 1257

Variety—it's the spice of life and the essence of contemporary American music, as evinced by these very different offerings from Barbara Harbach and Neil Rolnick

Here are two chamber music CDs by American composers whose work illustrates just how varied the current musical scene is in our country. Barbara Harbach, professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, is a noted organist and harpsichordist as well as composer; she's heard here in *Tres Danzas* and *Spaindango*, both for harpsichord solo. For me, these are two of the liveliest and most engaging pieces in the whole recital. The last of *Tres Danzas* is entitled *Danza-Delirio*, and true to its name, it involves a mad dash to the finish plus wild, zithery glissandi. Harbach tosses it all off with mad abandon. Equally Dionysiac is the tiny *Spaindango*, a fierce eminently undanceable version of a fandango. Harbach gives herself an opportunity to unwind only in the slow second *Danza* entitled *Andante para viheulo de penole*, which is like a jazz player's lament, colored by the soft sounds of the harpsichord's lute stop.

In fact, my favorite works on the program are for solo instrument, including *Phantasy and Phugue for piano*, which has jazzy elements, Impressionistic elements, neoclassical elements—everything but the Baroque elements the title might imply.

Perambulations, Daystream Dances, and Emanations from the Sacred Harp, the last based on Early American hymn tunes, including an arresting dissection of William Billing's Chester, made familiar by William Schuman in his *New England Triptych*. *Perambulations for Trumpet and Piano* has some of the urban-jungle melancholy of Persichetti's *The Hollow Men*, scored for trumpet and strings. *Daystream Dances* starts with a lively, almost throw-away movement called "Rolling Brightness," then settles down to "Reeling Dusk," whose 11/8 time signature "creates a slightly off-kilter sway," as well a general sense of unease. At least that's the impression I'm left with.

My favorite piece among the chamber works may be *Rustic Scene for Viola and Piano*, which the notes tell us "evokes the quintessentially American frontier character and spirit." While that may be true, somehow I hear the influence of the rustic, very Hungarian music of Bartók and Rosza behind this piece—maybe it's just the use of the viola, which figured so prominently in the compositions of the two Hungarians.

I will grant, however, that most of this music has a quintessentially American tunefulness and vigor that should make it a favorite of recitalists. It gets first-rate advocacy from the composer and her colleagues at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The recordings, made in a number of venues in Missouri and New York State, are all very good—big, bright, with good presence. It's a tribute to the MSR engineers that consistency is maintained throughout, regardless of venue.

Lee Passarella, Audiophile Auditions, March 2011

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Barbara Harbach's name and music were completely unfamiliar to me prior to hearing this release. *American Dialogues* immediately made me sit up and take notice. This was an interesting piece, combining folk-like themes with open fourths, close seconds, clashing sevenths, and "the devil's fourth" to add harmonic interest.

4 Dances for 2 is a series of four short pieces for oboe and violin, starting with a "Rococo Promenade" built on the French Baroque overture style before moving on to a calm lullaby interrupted by bursts of frenetic energy, an energetic reel, and a finale that teases the listener with a clockwork-precise piece featuring interpolated glissandi. Even better are the *Tres Danzas* for harpsichord, played by Harbach herself. She swears that it was influenced by flamenco guitar music, but the second-movement Andante, to my ears, is more heavily influenced by jazz.

The *Phantasy and Phugue* (I like her whimsical titles!), after a thunderous opening, moves into a mysterious atmosphere until the tolling of low octaves introduces a hypnotic middle section. The very excited and excitable fugue changes its course through augmentation, texture, and range. *Spaindango: Caprice for Harpsichord*, also played by Harbach, opens in 11/8 time with rapid, punctuating chords, producing sound clusters a half-step apart that evolve into a Spanish dance figure with rolling glissandos.

With *Rustic Scene,* the final pages were quite excellent. *Perambulations* is a trumpet-piano duet with a slight blues tinge, more in the piano part than the horn part. The trumpet's role is lyrical and relaxed, though technically challenging, covering the full range of the instrument even into the low range. The piano seems to lead both the creation of themes and their development, with the trumpet tagging along for the ride. Indeed, as the piece continues, it is the piano part that becomes busiest and densest as the trumpet is relegated to commentary followed by a relaxed cadenza in each section. The final melody reminds me of *Simple Gifts.*

With *Daystream Dances,* we again move into music with a unique lilt and swing. Yet perhaps because she is a keyboard player, Harbach gives the "swing" to the piano, though in all fairness it's exceedingly difficult to make an oboe swing (ref: Paul Lavalle's Woodwindy Ten, Charles Mingus, Gil Evans, or just about anyone else who has ever tried to write an oboe part into a jazz or jazz-classical composition). The second movement has a little less of a swing and a little more thematic and harmonic complexity—this piece sounds like something out of Les Six in the early 1920s. *Emanations from the Sacred Harp,* written for cellist Robert Haskins, who has a great interest in early American sacred music, is based on five hymns from the Revolutionary and Federalist periods (*How Firm a Foundation, The Morning Trumpet, Jordan, Morning Hymn* and *Chester*). Its brevity (the two movements take only a little more than eight minutes to play) helps Harbach compress her ideas into contrasting moments of quiet and busyness. The second movement, after an introductory fragment, completely states the theme of *Chester,* followed by a section where the piano counterpoint becomes a fugal subject that weaves the tune into its fabric. Hymns, another fugue, reels, and more hymns work their way in and out of the music before being brought together in a celebratory climax.

Stylistically, Harbach does try to create her own distinctive voice. Some works succeed in this respect better than others, but in all of this music, there is a tremendous sense of centeredness. Harbach balances her moments of harmonic or improvisatory exploration with moments of relaxation that give one a sensation of calm mixed with playfulness.

Lynn René Bayley Fanfare, May/June 2011

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"...these works are attractive and have instant melodic appeal... strong performances, including some from the composer herself..."

[* * *] BBC Music ~ March 2011

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'Morning Fantasy', from *Emanations from the Sacred Harp* (cello and piano) is really nice; there's appropriate drama, melodic interest, and it's played with excellent phrasing by the cellist. Paula Kasica has a delicious, full, slightly woody tone in 'American dialogues', which makes it easier to listen to.

'Danza-Deliro' sounds like a zither piece, a musette, a Czerny exercise, and Prokofieff's Scythian Suite all rolled into one. 'Spaindango' uses more of the same techniques [as 'Danza-Deliro'], but the opening chords sound like they could fill an arena – if Emerson, Lake, and

Palmer were still doing their prog-rock versions of classical pieces, they'd jump straight on this one. I've never heard a harpsichord sound more psychedelic, nor so full-bodied.

Harbach has a sense of lyricism and an appreciation for beauty and elegance that most modern composers don't.

Paul Cook's views in (Mar/Apr 2008 & Nov/Dec 2009) are worth reading: he appreciated her strengths: "It'll remind you of what Americans have always been good at: strong melodies, sweeping gestures, and heartbreaking moments of sheer beauty."

American Record Guide May/June 2011

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Chamber music by Barbara Harbach (MSR 1257) - enjoyed by RON BIERMAN

'... more humor than can be found in the entire oeuvre of many contemporary composers.' Barbara Harbach: Chamber Music III. UM-St Louis Chamber Soloists. © 2010 MSR Classics

This is the sixth in a series of MSR recordings of compositions by the contemporary composer Barbara Harbach, and the third devoted to her chamber music. I said in a review of the second disc of chamber pieces, 'her music is appealingly straightforward: themes are immediately attractive, forms clear, and textures and harmonies transparent.' All still true.

The works included are shorter and more diverse than those of previous releases in the series. Seven of the ten here are for two players, three for solo keyboard. The program begins with Frontier Fancies, a three-movement duet for violin and piano. At a little over eleven minutes it is nearly twice as long as the other selections. The outer movements have the energy of an American barn-dance. The middle movement is a romantically melodic respite, though the violinist's marvelously sweet tone wasn't the best choice for an already sugary melody.

The aptly named Four Dances for Two makes equal partners of violin and oboe. Who knew they could blend so well?

As she proves with a playful update of Scarlatti, Harbach is also a formidable harpsichordist. In this performance she savages the keyboard, at times making the instrument sound almost like an organ.

Perambulations makes effective use of the infrequently heard combination of trumpet and piano. Harbach has a gift for both merging and contrasting the sounds of two instruments, and most of the duos treat the instruments as equals. But Perambulations is more like a sonata for trumpet, even including a brief cadenza, played with gorgeous tone by Paul Hecht.

The first movement of Daystream Dances is in ABA form. The jaunty beginning is revisited after a lilting center section.

The concluding Emanations From the Sacred Harp is for cello and piano.

It is a loving arrangement of five simple American hymns, most from the late eighteenth century. Chester is the basis for much of the final second movement. Each instrument sounds the theme more than once, usually with the other providing an elaborate counterpoint. The development includes a fugue.

This release provides many pleasurable moments, a few surprises, interesting timbral combinations, and more humor than can be found in the entire oeuvre of many contemporary composers. The earlier second volume of chamber music is an even better introduction, but if you purchase any of the CDs in MSR's series, you may wind up wanting them all.
Ron Bierman, Music and Vision, June 2011

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MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ *Music for Strings*
Vol. VII MSR 1258

Sinfonietta, In Memoriam: Turn Round, O My Soul, Freedom Suite, Two Songs from the Sacred Harp, Demarest Suite, Nights in Timisoara, Lilia Polka

Beautifully crafted works for string orchestra by Barbara Harbach on a release from MSR Records

A disc that has recently come my way is of Music for Strings by Barbara Harbach featuring the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by David Angus from MSR Classics.

MSR Records have already issued a number of recordings of Harbach's music covering orchestral works, chamber works, organ music and vocal music. This current release is volume 7 in this series.

Barbara Harbach, professor of music at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, has a large catalogue of works, including symphonies, operas, works for string orchestra, musicals, works for chamber ensembles, film scores, modern ballets, pieces for organ, harpsichord and piano, choral anthems and many arrangements for brass and organ of various Baroque works. She is also involved in the research, editing, publication and recording of manuscripts of eighteenth-century keyboard composers, as well as historical and contemporary women composers.

In June, 2009, her musical, *Booth!* was premiered at the Skirball Center for the Performing Arts in New York City where it won a competition at the Tisch School of the Arts. *O Pioneers!* – An American Opera was premiered, in October, 2009, at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in the Touhill Performing Arts Center.

Harbach has toured extensively as both concert organist and harpsichordist throughout the United States and Canada, and overseas in Bosnia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Korea, Romania, Serbia and Russian Siberia.

Harbach holds academic degrees from Pennsylvania State University (B.A.), Yale University (M.M.A.), Musikhochschule (Konzertdiplom) in Frankfurt, Germany, and the Eastman School of

Music (D.M.A.). In 2002, she received an honorary doctorate in music, Honoris Causa, from Wilmington College, Ohio for her lifetime achievement as a composer, performer, editor and publisher.

Barbara Harbach initiated *Women in the Arts-St. Louis*, a celebration of the achievements of women creators for which she was the recipient of the Arts Education Award from the Missouri Arts Council, the Missouri Citizen for the Arts Award, the Yellow Rose Award from the Zonta International Club of St. Louis and the University of Missouri-St. Louis, College of Fine Arts and Communication, Faculty Excellence Award. In 2007 she was awarded the Hellenic Spirit Foundation Award and, in 2011, she was awarded the Grand Center Visionary Award for 'Successful Working Artist,' the Argus Foundation Award, and the YWCA Leader of Distinction Award
in the Arts.

The first work on this disc is Harbach's three movement **Sinfonietta (2010)**. The strings descend from heights in the opening of *Hommage,* a movement dedicated to all lost love and loved ones. This is a melody that has depth and sadness, with some rich sonorities in the basses as the music swirls forward with lovely string sounds. The music quietens to a hush before gently moving on to a rhythmic section pointed up by pizzicato violins before opening out in the flowing melody of the opening. Harbach certainly knows how to use strings to great effect.

Jeu Jeu takes a theme from Harbach's opera O Pioneers and is a lively, rhythmically buoyant movement that has a fine transparency with, again, the basses pointing up the music. Soon there is section that recalls the melancholy thoughtfulness of the opening movement before the music returns to the rhythmic nature of the opening. *Pastiche* opens with a fresh, joyous, syncopated theme that eventually bounces forward full of life.

This is a terrific piece that should take its place alongside some of the great works for string orchestra from the past.

In Memoriam: Turn Round, O My Soul (2010) is a eulogy and elegy for All Souls Day opening on the lower strings before the rest of the orchestra join in this lovely, flowing theme, full of deep feeling. Harbach keeps the music moving, as though not wishing to dwell too long on such painful memories. The music rises to a central passionate climax only to end gently.

Freedom Suite (2010) is inspired by the life of Harriet and Dred Scott, slaves who sued for their freedom in 1847. It is also in three movements with the first, *Harriet Scott – A Strong Woman* opening with rustic dance rhythms. Although this theme is based on a spiritual, the strings do hint at a repeated 'ho down' tune but with much subtlety in this attractive section. Another spiritual arrives in the slow section, a more nostalgic passage with a melody for the cellos. The dance rhythms return leading to the coda where the two themes are overlaid.

Eliza and Lizzie – Let My People Go has a magnificent opening high in the strings before a flowing melody, punctuated by a bass pulse arrives. This leads to another hushed section before another fine melody with individual instruments weaving throughout the string orchestra. Another hushed section appears before the main melody joins, bringing a strong sense of yearning.

The music rapidly rises up to open *Freedom – At Last* before a fugal section arrives with some terrific writing for strings where, underneath, the melody of another spiritual can be heard. A timeless sounding slower theme arrives but soon the theme of the opening returns for the coda.

This is another terrific piece so well crafted.

Two Songs from the Sacred Harp (2010) has two movements, *The Morning Trumpet* where the orchestra announces the theme before it is taken into a more flowing version decorated by a solo viola, then violin before being subjected to a fugue and *Chester* where swirling strings lead to a theme that enters low in the strings. The upper strings continue to swirl over the bass theme before the various sections of the string orchestra each enter, with the theme, in another fugue. The movement concludes with the return of the opening.

The three movement **Demarest Suite (2009/10)** was commissioned by the Northern Valley Regional High Scholl in Demarest, New Jersey. The suite opens with *Echoes of Our Youth* with a rhythmic pulse in the lower strings before the rest of the orchestra enter, flowing forward in a fine melody. Soon a less confident variation intrudes before returning to the opening theme, though still subjected to hesitant moments as well as confidence swirling sections before leading to a confident coda.

With *Remember the Ladies Tango* a moderately paced tango rhythm soon becomes more flowing, though with the rhythmic pulse remaining. There is often a slight Mediterranean flavour to this music.

Joyous Day places a string quintet within the double string orchestra. This movement sparkles right from the opening with a dance rhythm that allows the music to move forward.

An upward rising motif opens **Nights in Timisoara (2010)** with the orchestra soaring before settling to a quieter, slower moving melody, full of feeling. Soon a dance rhythm appears with pizzicato violins in a tango rhythm around which the orchestra moves. The music slowly builds before falling to allow another dance rhythm that is played in fugue. The opening rising motifs return to lead quickly to the conclusion on a pizzicato note.

Lilia Polka (2009) is great fun in this arrangement of a Polka by Kate Chopin (1850-1904) so deftly arranged by Barbara Harbach.

David Angus and the strings of the London Philharmonic Orchestra give terrific performances of these works. Barbara Harbach is revealed here as a fine composer whose beautifully crafted works will give endless enjoyment.

The recording, from the Henry Wood Hall, London is first rate and there are excellent booklet notes.

Bruce Reader, The Classical Reviewer, 2014

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Fanfare Magazine Interview with Barbara Harbach
& Reviews
MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Orchestral Music, Vol. 1 MSR 1252
MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Chamber Music I, Vol. 2 MSR 1253
MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Music for Strings, Vol. 7 MSR 1258

Meeting Barbara Harbach

At first, the title for this interview might seem amusing, perhaps even wrong, given the circumstances, for I have never met Barbara Harbach in the flesh; but after hearing her music, and reading her replies to my questions (set out below), I feel as if I have. Her music speaks with an open honesty that is rare in music today. I point out to her that her music is exquisitely crafted and also remarkably pleasant to listen to. More than once, it was her use of counterpoint that impressed (in *Venerations*, for example, or in the third movement of *One of Ours*). Where did this interest in counterpoint spring from and how was it developed, I wonder.

"I am largely self-taught (for better or worse!)," she replies, "and I did have some composition lessons with Samuel Adler at Eastman as well as Mel Powell at Yale University. I also studied organ with Helmut Walcha in Frankfurt. I had the privilege of observing, listening to, and learning from both Powell (jazz) and Walcha (Baroque) improvise superb compositions. Many of my compositions begin as improvised pieces, and then become enlarged and codified to paper. My interest in counterpoint stems from logging many hours on both the organ and harpsichord bench, and playing and performing a wide range of composers, which gave me a chance to assimilate their styles. Studying scores becomes a composer's passion."

And on her recordings, Harbach has been blessed with some tremendous soloists: František Novotny in *Frontier Fancies* and Cynthia Green Libby in the oboe *Rhapsody Jardine*. Her writing seems to me to be very gratefully written for the instruments. "I have been very fortunate with the soloists and performers on my recordings such as the ones you mentioned as well as trumpeters Barbara Butler and Charles Geyer at Northwestern University, William Preucil of the Cleveland Orchestra, the St. Louis Chamber Players, and the Arianna String Quartet at UMSL," she says. "If I have a question or a questionable lick, I check with the expert players to determine if it is playable. It is one of my priorities to make instruments sound the best that they can. I enjoy listening to solo literature for each instrument and hearing the nuances of the instrument."

In Harbach's own sound world, there is a pronounced pastoral element to some of the music, almost like an American equivalent to the English school of Vaughan Williams, Butterworth, and

the like. I ask if that is a parallel she will allow? Does this element come from a love of nature and environment? "Absolutely," she responds." I am delighted and humbled to be likened to the English composers such as Vaughan Williams and Butterworth. I am also thrilled to be considered an American romanticist in the Copland-Hanson-Harris mold. Love of nature has inspired several pieces: *Frontier Fancies* came out of the Palouse region in the state of Washington with its rich topsoil and rolling wheat-covered hills; *Nights in Timişoara* came from the vibrant, cosmopolitan city of Timişoara in the Romanian part of Transylvania." Another technique is to reuse previous material (for example, the 2010 Sinfonietta uses material from *O Pioneers!*, as indeed does the *Demarest Suite* in two of its movements)."Often when I write a melody, I try to write it in such a way that it can transcend any genre, but still work well within its original context. A vocal aria can be an instrumental tune and vice versa. Sometimes I find that after I have written a melody, I am not yet finished with it, and it might pop up in another form in another genre. I try to make a melody as appealing in its original form as well as in its newly morphed version."
In keeping with this spirit of adaptability, Harbach can also take music by other composers and arrange it: In the case of the discs under consideration, Kate Chopin's *Lilia Polka. "*I am often inspired by strong writers like Kate Chopin (*The Awakening*), Willa Cather (*O Pioneers!* and *One of Ours—A Cather Symphony*), and the strong women who settled Alaska in my *Pioneer Women: from Skagway to White Mountain*," she says. "I was commissioned to write a piece for the Equinox Chamber Players in St. Louis, and I wrote *Freeing the Caged Bird* for woodwind quintet. While working on the piece based on women from St. Louis, I discovered that Kate Chopin composed *Lilia Polka* as a piano piece for her daughter that was published by H. H. Rollman in St. Louis. Polkas were quite popular in the German and German-American communities in St. Louis in 1899. In my arrangement of *Lilia Polka,* I tried to showcase each instrument in the woodwind quintet, as well as in the string-orchestra version."

As an aside, I suggest that perhaps I'm biased, being U.K.-based, but the London Philharmonic makes a truly gorgeous sound on the disc *Music for Strings*, and that it particularly captures the pain of bereavement in *In Memoriam. "*I often am told that some of the absolute best string playing in the world is found in London, especially the London Philharmonic Orchestra," Harbach says. "David Angus and the LPO did a marvelous recording of my pieces. Their talent, outstanding technique, and musicianship were a thrill to experience. Their interpretations flowed easily from jaunty dance tunes in *Demarest Suite* to poignant reflection in 'Hommage' from the Sinfonietta."

Returning to the heart of Harbach's music, I am intrigued by the composer's description of *The Good Lord Is Comin' for Me* as a "new spiritual." In the next movement Harbach uses two very famous ones (*Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child* and *Go Down Moses*), while the chamber disc has a lovely set of variations on *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*. Again, in Two Songs from *The Sacred Harp,* she uses material by Benjamin Franklin White (1800–79), compiler of the hymn book *The Sacred Harp* (another tune from this collection appears in *American Solstice* on the chamber disc) and Billings's *Chester*. "I have always been fascinated with early American composers and their compositions from early psalm tunes to spirituals," she explains. "I grew up in the hills of Pennsylvania, and the rural singing community sharpened and shaped my appreciation of both spirituals and early American pieces. When I was writing my musical, *Booth!*, I searched and searched for a spiritual that would fit the spirit and mood of the lyrics. Finally, I gave up searching for a spiritual and wrote my own spiritual—newly composed, *The Good Lord is Comin' for Me*. I enjoy writing 'new spirituals' and always try to find innovative ways to develop and enrich the sound."

I'm also fascinated by the string quartet piece *Transformations*, inspired by a 1912 silent film. I love the idea of the film stretching across the decades and linking to a piece of chamber music. Also, it adds another dimension to the diversity of Harbach's music. Similarly, *Carondelet Caprice* references a 1913 silent film. "I became enchanted with the 1912 film *Making an American Citizen*, directed by Alice Guy Blaché, a French director who moved to the United States in the beginnings of narrative film. The plot centers on an Eastern European couple who come to the United States and through a series of incidents he learns to respect his wife. This captured my imagination. I scored the silent film for string quartet which became *Transformation*. It was a musical challenge to underscore the film with the appropriate emotional ambience for the eight segments. *Carondelet Caprice* (for chamber ensemble) began life as the score to the 1913 silent film *How Men Propose.* A young writer accepts marriage proposals from three different men and she compares their techniques! I enjoyed writing this short comedy piece. I also wrote the 45- minute score to *Judit Simon*, a 1915 Hungarian film, which later became my *Echoes from Tomorrow* for chamber ensemble."

And now, as they say, for something completely different: the impetus of the harpsichord disc Harbach recorded of Anna Bon de Venetia (the op. 2 of 1757). I knew Harbach is an active keyboardist, but why this music? "I had been performing the music of Anna Bon for several years after finding a copy of the manuscript and believed that the music of this young composer needed to be recorded. I have championed many historical and contemporary women composers, as well as men, including anonymous 18th-century women composers, Elizabeth Weichsell Billington, Elisabetta de Gambarini, Elizabeth Hardin, Vivian Fine, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, and Libby Larsen to name a few.

"Soon to be released is a disc of the six concertos of the English composer Thomas Haigh (1769–1808). These pieces can be played by one performer on the harpsichord or fortepiano. He wrote them at the time when the piano was just emerging, but there were still many harpsichords being played. Later this year or early next year, MSR Classics will be releasing a 12-CD set of the keyboard sonatas of Antonio Soler, which I have recorded on my Willard Martin harpsichord." This, surely, will be a remarkable achievement. As is, of course, the ongoing series of discs of Harbach's music on MSR. There are various questions this raises: not only how many more volumes are planned, but also given that Harbach is known as a prolific composer, just how much of her music remains to be recorded? "I am working on my *Chamber Music IV*," she says, "which will include *Harriet's Story* for soprano, violin, and piano, inspired by the life of Harriet Scott, who with her husband, Dred Scott, sued the United States government for their release from slavery. Their suit was unsuccessful but it helped to catapult the United States into our Civil War. Also on the CD will be *The Sounds of St. Louis* with a funky version of the St. Louis blues; also in the works will be another orchestra recording of my symphonies."

Plenty to look forward to, then. Harbach's music is refreshing in its sound world, yet stimulating in both its intellect and its sense of endless discovery.

Colin Clarke Fanfare Magazine, July/August 2012

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Fanfare Magazine Review, July/August 2012:
Barbara Harbach is a prolific composer, whose music achieves an immediate emotional connection to the listener. None of this cerebral "written for other composers" mentality for her! Yet a traversal of the three discs under review here has convinced me that she has her own voice, and has something significant to speak in musical terms to anyone willing to listen. She has made her mark as a touring organist and harpsichordist, the organ (especially) seeming to have lent something of its textures to her orchestral music. She teaches at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, having obtained degrees from Pennsylvania State University (B.A.), Yale University (M.M.A.), and the Eastman School of Music (D.M.A.). Her pedigree, to be sure, is impressive.

Mind you, her music is very tonal, and will not offend ears even slightly sensitive to dissonance. I am happy to say that Harbach proves that there is still something valid to say in a tonal musical language. This shouldn't be surprising in light of the fact that the Baroque era, after all, lasted a good 150 years. Why should neoromanticism be stifled more quickly than that? If you enjoy the music of such composers as Bohuslav Martinů, Walter Piston, Jean Sibelius, and John Ireland, Harbach will definitely be worth checking out.

Veneration opens the first CD, which contains several of Harbach's orchestral works. A short symphony that forms a paean to the goddess Venus, its three movements are exuberant throughout. *Frontier Fancies* is a work for violin and orchestra with the clever movement titles of "Fiddleflirt," "Twilight Dream," and "Dancedevil." Here the mood is a bit more subdued, albeit as optimistic in tone as her music in general. The violin charms and seduces through its lovely meandering romantic lines. The solo part is well performed by František Novotný, whose name used to appear quite frequently on various Czech and Slovak LPs that came through my hands.

Harbach's *Arcadian Rhapsody* is a lush work for string orchestra. If you enjoy the fantasias by Vaughan Williams, this work will resonate with you. The tempo picks up in the middle section, which features a rollicking tune in 6/8 meter. *Rhapsody Jardine*, scored for oboe and strings, through its harmonic richness evokes a musical landscape of resonant colors and aromatic counterpoint. Soloist Cynthia Green Libby is possessed of a piquant, sweet, and somewhat haunting tone—perfectly appropriate for the style of the work at hand.

One of Ours—A Cather Symphony is a work cast in three fairly brief movements. The symphony is based on the novel of the same name by Willa Cather, whose work deals with a hero of World War I. You'll find no sounds or effects of war in this work: Like the other pieces on this CD, its tone is unceasingly full of optimism and life. Its three movements, "On Lovely Creek," "Autumn in Beaufort," and "Honor at Boar's Head," all remind me of short tone poems rather than movements of a symphony, as there is little symphonic development contained in any of them. This is no slight on the music, which is unfailingly ingratiating and fun to listen to.

The second MSR CD under review, a disc devoted to Harbach's recent—all of the works on it were composed in 2009–10—string-orchestra music, begins with her Sinfonietta. Its opening movement, "Homage," invokes a gentle and lyrical mood, and exhibits more contrapuntal writing than some of her works. The homage gives tribute to all those who have lost love or loved ones. "Jeu Jeu," the second movement, is a much livelier exercise that plays with rests, slurs, and staccatos in a five-part form. "Jeu" is of course the French word for "play" or "game," but the notes do not explain why the word is used twice. "Pastiche," the concluding movement, combines

several melodies in an imitative and syncopated structure. The whole of the Sinfonietta invokes a nostalgic aura.

In Memoriam: Turn Round, O My Soul, through its sadness and beauty, is a moving tribute for All Souls' Day, on which departed friends and relatives are remembered. The harshness of grief is portrayed by a dissonant (or about as dissonant as Harbach gets in her music) chord toward the end of the middle section. Harbach's *Freedom Suite* celebrates the lives of Harriet and Dred Scott, and their two children. Scott, you will remember, sued as a slave for his freedom on the grounds of his having lived for a time in states where slavery was illegal. The infamous Dred Scott decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1857 denying Scott's petition still has reverberations more than 150 years later. Harbach's music seeks to portray the era and its inhabitants through the use of spirituals, Virginia reels, and the like. Thus, lively sections form a contrast with others containing sober and melancholic music. The third movement ends with an affirming quote of the spiritual *Many Thousands Gone.*

The composer's longstanding fascination with shape-note singing is reflected in her Two Songs from *The Sacred Harp.* The first of these, "The Morning Trumpet," contains several sections, alternating between unison and lush chordal writing. The second is based upon William Billings's well-known tune *Chester*, most famously used by William Schuman in his *New England Triptych*. Harbach's version of this tune is set in three sections, which draw upon such musical devices as syncopation and canonic/fugal treatment. The tune makes its appearance first in the celli and basses, and branches out to the other instruments from there.

The *Demarest Suite* is a cousin to Holst's *St. Paul's Suite,* not only in its instrumentation, but in having been written for a school orchestra. In Harbach's case, the school was the Northern Valley Regional High School in Demarest, N.J., conducted by Jonathan Harris, who commissioned and premiered the work. In this work, the composer has attempted—successfully, I think—to portray the youthful emotions of insecurity, joy, and nostalgia. Some of its material is loosely based on a duet from her opera *O Pioneers!*

Nights in Timişoara seeks to evoke the "essence of the Romanian people in the eastern city of Timisoara," according to the notes. Since Timişoara is in the very *western* part of Romania, *eastern* must refer to its being part of Eastern Europe. I'm not sure that *any* piece of music can truly make a serious claim to encompass the essence of a particular people. I've been to Romania several times (the closest I've gotten to Timişoara is Oradea, which boasted a good record store, about which I shall tell some good stories if I ever get around to writing a book on my years as a record dealer). Nothing in this work particularly reminds me of Romania and its people, but it's a tuneful, well-crafted piece of music, so never mind that.

The CD closes with the playful (and brief) *Lilia Polka.* The title is well chosen, and pretty much gives the idea of the piece in its 10 letters. Apparently, either the piece itself or the inspiration for it—the program notes are not clear on that point—is drawn from a piano work by Kate Chopin (1850–1904), who is completely unknown as a composer, and somewhat better-known as an American author. Harbach's original version of this work was scored for woodwind quintet.

The third of the three MSR CDs under review opens up for us another facet of Harbach's compositional focus, her chamber music. Most of the works are for rather large chamber forces, the smallest number of instruments in any of the pieces being the four strings in her string quartet.

These works, like the orchestra and string-orchestra works, are sunny in their disposition, and free of any but the mildest dissonances. The opening work, *American Solstice,* at 11-plus minutes, is the longest single movement of any work on the three discs, and also calls for the largest forces (two winds, string nonet, and piano). It is loosely based on an original fiddle tune, and seeks to capture something of the spirit of the American frontier. A short motive of two eighth notes followed by a quarter note a major second lower pervades the piece.

Transformations for string quartet drew its inspiration from Alice Guy Blache's 1912 film *Making an American Citizen.* Its eight brief movements span a gamut of emotions from nostalgia to agitation, and from pathos to tranquility. *Forces at Play* is another more substantial work, conceived by the composer as a modern ballet or "a landscaped musical journey conveyed through dance." Each instrument's distinctive voice weaves its way around all the others, sometimes colliding, sometimes dancing, but always interacting in aurally pleasing ways. Scored for eight instruments, the piece evokes something of the spirit of the original chamber version of *Appalachian Spring.* It is certainly American through and through, as indeed are most of the works on these CDs. Like *Transformations, Carondelet Caprice* was inspired by a film by an American woman director, in this case the 1913 film *How Men Propose* by Lois Weber, while *Separately Together: Synethesia* looks once again for its inspiration to a Blache film, specifically *A House Divided*. Its movement "Dancing Rhythms" is one of my favorite pieces in the collection, its catchy tunes and bouncy, tango-influenced rhythms combining to make a most memorable work. Both of these film-inspired works are scored for woodwinds, strings, and piano. With Fantasy and Fugue on *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,* we shift to the medium of the woodwind quintet. The piece juxtaposes a rather dramatic fantasia with a fugal treatment of the tune in its concluding section. Another quintet, this time for brass, closes the CD. *Rhapsody Ritmico* opens with a majestic fanfare-like movement, which yields to a gentler lilting lullaby over an ostinato figure in the lower instruments. A lively fugue is introduced by the horn, and the work—and the CD—concludes with a dramatic flourish.

Although I like some of the 19 pieces included on these three discs better than others, there is not a weak work in the lot. My journey through the ingratiating and amiable music of Barbara Harbach has been a pleasant one. Don't expect the profundity or angst of a Gustav Mahler or an Allan Pettersson here; rather, treat your ears to several hours of enjoyable and uplifting music by a sure craftswoman in the art of composition.

Recordings and performances all serve to present the music in a most favorable light.
Fanfare Magazine, David DeBoor Canfield, July/August 2012

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Unlike most modern composers, Barbara Harbach writes music that is unapologetically lyrical and melodic. She has an elegant approach to line, and it results in truly beautiful pieces. Often, she states her theme in a straightforward manner and then restates segments of it by having it played in various formations by different combinations of instruments. She maintains a conservative framework, however. Within it she writes joyful tunes and develops them enthusiastically.

Harbach's *Veneration* is a smoothly orchestrated work defined here as paying honor to the ancient goddess Venus, and has its own distinct qualities and leaves an indelible impression.

Although it is in no way derivative, it has recognizable American sonorities. While the first movement may remind us of rituals, the second is devoted to charity and love as expressed in a soft caress. Harbach is an expert at expressing emotion in her music and she finishes her piece with a rondo that braids various themes into a graceful, lyrical vision of pleasure. *Frontier Fancies* features violinist František Novotný, who plays Harbach's flirtatious music with romantic playfulness and Western pizzazz, despite his European identity. When not performing, he is an associate professor of violin at the Janáček Academy of Music and the Performing Arts in Brno. The "Twilight Dream" tells us of the sunset over high snow-capped mountains that brings an aura of peaceful reverie after a day of hard work. Its sequential passages flow smoothly like a calm river but after a bit of rest the enchantment of the "Dancedevil" draws us to our feet. Then we follow the melodies and the rhythms until we collapse from exhaustion.

From time immemorial, composers have been inspired by the lush beauty and stark power of nature. Both Harbach's soothing *Arcadian Reverie,* with its simple melodic starting point, and her more exotic *Rhapsody Jardine* with its plaintive oboe part follow that path. The emotional range of both these pieces is very impressive. Soloist Cynthia Green Libby's playing in the rhapsody is thoroughly enjoyable. She has excellent breath control and she phrases with silken, well-shaped tones. At home in the United States, Libby is professor of music at Missouri State University. The Willa Cather symphony, *One of Ours,* is the musical realization of the writer's 1922 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about a young man and his eventual heroism in World War I. The letters of Cather's cousin, killed in action in 1918, inspired her to write the book. Harbach's grandfather served in that war and she has a definite emotional attachment to the stories of those who came home and those who died in Europe. Harbach's solidly framed, straightforward music tells his story in melodic but contemporary lyrical language.

Her music is accessible to the novice and presents interesting textures and sonorities to the connoisseur. Here it is beautifully performed by veteran recording conductor Kirk Trevor and the Slovak Radio Symphony. Although the sound of the instruments is blended, it never loses its character and solos stand out the way they should.

Much of the music on the second compact disc relates to Harbach's 2009 opera *O Pioneers!,* which is based on Willa Cather's 1913 novel of the same name. Cather's story has all the elements that an opera needs: long-term loving relationships, sibling rivalry, and murder. Harbach has used the music that the novel inspired in other works as well. In the Sinfonietta, the first movement, "Hommage," is a version of Alexandra's aria in which she mourns the death of her brother, Emil. For the second movement, "Jeu Jeu," she gives us a new treatment of the "Moon Waltz" from the opera, which she weaves into a colorful tapestry. "Pastiche" contains a melodic mixture that includes an enchanting tango. In the first section of the *Demarest Suite, "*Echoes of Our Youth," she reprises music from the duet Marie and Emil sing at the beginning of the opera. The second movement is the charming "Remember the Ladies Tango," in which the beat is layered with string harmonies, but the dance is still there. For the final section, "Joyous Day," she uses a theme from the opera's wedding scene. It gives the suite a happy and rhythmic conclusion that is bound to win a thunderous round of applause in the concert hall.

In Memoriam is a mourning piece that might well be played at the funeral of a dignitary. The *Freedom Suite* is fascinating in its use of traditional spirituals and their harmonies. The

composer even combines one with her version of a Virginia reel in the first section of the work. Later, she uses themes from the spirituals in her own unique manner to tell the tribulations of Dred Scott's wife and daughters on their journey to freedom. Two Songs from *The Sacred Harp* give Harbach a chance to write her own colorful fugues and acquaint us with American music from the time of the Revolution. *Nights in Timişoara* is a rather multicultural piece that places a tango rhythm in Eastern Europe and is simply fun to listen to or even to dance to. The *Lilia Polka* is Harbach's arrangement of an 1899 composition by Kate Chopin that has the charm of the *fin de siècle* . It makes an amusing finale to this otherwise serious compact disc. David Angus leads the excellent London Philharmonic orchestra and brilliant soloists in sensitive and idiomatic performances.

American Solstice makes use of an old fiddle tune, the rhythms of which almost sound Native American. She uses strings in a clever manner, employing the Moyzes String Quartet in addition to the Istropolis Ensemble. The second theme breezes in with a light heart and gradually crescendos like a growing river that will eventually sweep across the listener's ears with floods of musical color.

Transformations describes the stages an immigrant goes through in order to become an American citizen. The pastorale that begins this piece describes the calm that results from having arrived safely at the destination. In the end, the immigrant will again attain this state of peace, but before that he will have to undergo the changes of attitude and behavior that are a part of the hard work of fitting into the fabric of American life. She tells us far more about these difficult adjustments with music than words ever could. *Forces At Play* is for chamber ensemble and it tells a different type of story, with broad lines that form a background for dance. *Carondelet Caprice*, also for chamber ensemble, has a lovely plaintive section that brings 19th-century rural Mid-America to mind. The Fantasy and Fugue on *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, as worked out for woodwind quintet, follows these works. *Separately Together—Synesthesia* is a set of pieces for chamber ensemble that provide a bit of contrast. The first section, "Lilting Lines and Careening Melodies," is rather jazzy. In the second, her "Spattering Notes" form melodic patterns despite the name. All of these pieces build up to the aptly named "Crescendo of Colors." The *Rhapsody Ritmico* for brass quintet fills out the disc with exquisite brass flourishes.

Maria Nockin Fanfare Magazine - August 2, 2012

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My late MusicWeb International colleague Bob Briggs was passionate about the music of Barbara Harbach (b. 1946). He is responsible for most of this site's previous discussions of her music: Volume 1, Volume 2, Volume 3, Volume 4, Volume 5; Byzantion covered Volume 6. This seventh CD in the Harbach anthology, dedicated to music for string orchestra, is my introduction to her music, and I'm going to join Bob and Byzantion in enthusiastic advocacy of her music.

For those who missed the first six reviews, Barbara Harbach is an American organist, harpsichordist, researcher and teacher (at University of Missouri, St Louis) who has edited new editions of Clara Schumann and earlier women composers, recorded for labels such as Albany and Naxos, and evidently found time to compose a lot of music too. Her works are

distinctive and immediately appealing. This is a tonal, in some ways old-fashioned American sound, with plaintive harmonies, hymn-like tunes, and a simple beauty throughout (think *Appalachian Spring* meets African spirituals). But I'm misusing the word simple, because Harbach's music is finely crafted at all times; this is a composer whose every stroke makes her ability clear.

It's hard to describe Harbach's style because she falls in that unfortunate no-man's-land of contemporary composition: music that's undeniably rewarding to listen to from the very start, and appealing to everybody, but not at all kitschy, pandering or simplistic. New should always mean different, and while Harbach has clear antecedents she's no imitation, but new shouldn't always mean taxing, and this CD is not. The tone is set immediately by the *Sinfonietta*, with its wistful opening movement, reminiscent of Barber and Copland in its melodic, clearly heartfelt searching for some kind of solace which is not found. The rest is more chromatic and 'modern' but with humor and an earnest spirit: Copland might again come to mind, but he was more acidic at times, and his tunes had a recognizable stamp where these blaze their own trails.

Many of the selections are based on African-American spirituals and other folk traditions; the *Freedom Suite* bears three portraits of members of the Scott family (Dred Scott was the slave who, in 1857, unsuccessfully brought a Supreme Court case suing for his freedom), and its movements quote or evoke spirituals from the heart of the American south. The Two Songs from *The Sacred Harp* are similarly affecting melodic gems, based on hymns from very early in American history (*The Sacred Harp* was an 1844 hymn-book), but with Harbach's own sensitive updating. The first song brings a second melody stated by a solo violist and then developed by solo violin and cello; the second contains a gentle fugue on a tune published in 1770.

As beautiful as those are, the standout for me is the *Demarest Suite*, written for a school orchestra in the town of Demarest, New Jersey. For this unlikely commission, Harbach has written a twelve-minute masterpiece: the opening sees expansive, open-ended sonorities (more reminiscent of string music by, say, Rautavaara) take shape over a jaunty bass line. According to the booklet, this first movement is meant to symbolize childhood and young love, but while I can hear a sense of 'new beginnings,' it seems to better capture the feeling of waking up with an out-of-nowhere conviction that today is going to be a good day.

The second movement is a tango, as we are told by the very standard bass line, over which is hung a slightly more melancholic mood. Then comes the finale, which feels like a jovial country dance spanning multiple hemispheres, since its main theme sounds a lot like the Russian folk-tune from Beethoven's Razumovsky quartets. (The Cold War symbolically ended?) It's all an absolute delight and, if this was played by a school orchestra, it can't be out of reach for many amateur string ensembles. They'll love playing it, too, assuming they love string music by, say, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, or Wirén, or the fantasia on *Greensleeves*.

The CD includes three shorter pieces, the moving elegy *In Memoriam*, a rather lively rhapsody called *Nights in Timisoara*, which doesn't sound as Romanian as Enescu but never mind, and an arrangement of a tiny, instantly likable polka by Kate Chopin - whom you may recall as the author of *The Awakening*.

At any rate, ignore the odd names and focus on the music: for those who admire polished string music in the tradition of Barber, Vaughan Williams, and Grieg, with a generous dollop of Americana, this album will be a treat. I'll be seeking out more of Harbach's music in time; the previous volumes in this series have been well-loved on this site too. Truly a voice worth hearing.

Musicweb International Brian Reinhart, 2012

Immediately attractive new music doesn't have to be simple; in other words, this is both very appealing and very good.

*****

Freedom Suite, from 2010, is a very strong piece; the first movement, '*Harriet Scott—a Strong Woman'*, is the best five minutes on the disc, with the most convincing scoring and moments of sublimity. Harbach's writing is shot through with Americana—folk songs, spirituals, Sacred Harp melodies, etc. I prefer the influences to be a little more subtle, but her writing doesn't come across as derivative or pandering, either. '*Remember the Ladies Tango*' (the phrase, minus the "tango", comes from Abigail Adams, writing to John in March, 1776, about treating women better than his forebears had) is a charmer, and the whole *Demarest Suite* is joyful and skillfully written.

ESTEP American Record Guide, September/October 2012

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MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Chamber Music IV
Music for Strings, Winds, Brass, Piano & Soprano
Vol. VIII MSR 1259

Incantata; Harriet's Story; Phantom of the Dreams' Origin; The Sounds of St. Louis

Harbach continues her series with MSR, well-received in many quarters including this one.
Audiophile Audition, 2014 ****

Three pieces on this disc are from 2011. The style is remarkably similar, especially in the chamber ensemble pieces, and they all remind me of Stravinsky in his more pastoral and calmer moments. *Incantata* is inspired by a Paul Muldoon poem of the same title, and the music seeks to reflect the emotions found therein in movements "Perplexities", "Nocturnes", Ireland Remembered", "Bitter-sweet", and "Coda". I enjoyed it a lot. When the last work on this disc, *Phantom of the Dreams' Origin* appears, based on Nikos Stabakis's translation of the Embirikos *Blast Furnace* (1935), I was expecting something far dreamier—as this is what the composer was looking for at the time—than what I got. Perhaps it's the percussive nature of this score, complete with glockenspiel, castanets, triangle, bell tree, crotales, timpani, and suspended cymbals that makes Harbach's notion of dreaminess different than mine—and that is certainly a valid comment—which throws me off. Anyway, it is still fascinating music, and again, one hardly wants to leave it while it is playing.

The Sounds of St. Louis incorporates a series of American folk songs with Harbach's own considerable skill in fugal writing for a low brass ensemble. The results are not as folksy as you would think, being dominated by the bluesy feel of W.C. Handy's own *St. Louis Blues*, with a pseudo-rock beat.

…the short song cycle *Harriet's Story* for soprano, piano, and violin, is quite the stunner, with soprano Marlissa Hudson delivering a splendid performance. The lyrics by the composer are put in the voice of Harriet Scott (of Dred Scott fame) while the third movement uses the genuine texts of Harriet Tubman, the former slave and African-American abolitionist, humanitarian, and Union spy during the American Civil War. The music is affecting and lyrical, passionate and versatile, making me wonder if Harbach shouldn't spend more time than she has in this genre—she certainly seems to have an innate talent for it.

Harbach is well worth hearing…I sincerely doubt if anyone will be disappointed with what they find on this disc, recorded with great consistency and presence.
Steven Ritter, Audiophile Audition, 2014

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For years Barbara Harbach (b. 1946) was best known as an intrepid harpsichordist and organist, specializing in contemporary music, especially that of women composers. Among the most important of these activities was an excellent series of albums for the now defunct Gasparo label devoted to contemporary harpsichord repertoire. (Two of the best pieces, by Daniel Pinkham and Arnold Rosner, were rereleased on MSR this past year.) Harbach's busy and vital musical life also included the founding of a publishing company (Vivace Press), a record label (Hester Park), and a journal on women and the arts (*Women of Note Quarterly*). After moving to St. Louis in 2004, Harbach began to focus a significantly greater portion of her efforts on composition. Though she had composed a variety of works previously, she credits the arts community of St. Louis with being much more interested in her music than had been the case in previous places she'd lived. The result of the last decade has thus been a large number of chamber and orchestral pieces, joining the keyboard and choral pieces that had comprised the bulk of her catalog prior to 2004. She has also written five musicals and an opera. Feature articles (and generally quite positive reviews) on her have appeared in this magazine in 33:3 and 35:6.

MSR Classics is releasing an ongoing series of CDs devoted to her works, of which this disc is both the eighth volume in the complete series and "Chamber Music, Vol. 4." This release contains four pieces from 2011–12: two works for large chamber ensemble, a song cycle about Harriet Scott (wife of Dred Scott) for soprano, violin, and piano, and a very bluesy suite about St. Louis for low brass ensemble with percussion. Harbach's musical style is firmly tonal and lyrical, with a distinctly American flavor and a lot of folk influence. The vast majority of her pieces are either programmatic or poetic in inspiration. Except for the times when it becomes more overtly pop (such as her musicals) or jazz influenced, her music is similar in style and concept to that of Rick Sowash, and the many fans of Sowash's popular recordings would likewise enjoy Harbach's work. Performances by many St. Louis-area musicians are all strong.
Carson Cooman Issue 37:4 (Mar/Apr 2014) of *Fanfare* Magazine

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Another in the continuing series of recordings of the Chamber Works of living composer Barbara Harbach. This set includes a 3 song cycle (lyrics for 2 parts by Harbach) in the voice of Harriett Scott (of the Dred-Scott renown), and the 3rd song's lyrics in the words of Harriett Tubman. Other works on this CD are "Incanta" for chamber ensemble, and a work for brass entitled "The Sounds of St. Louis." Harbach holds degrees from multiple instutions including The Eastman School of Music, Yale, and a conservatory in Frankfurt. She initiated "Women in the Arts" a celebration of women creators, and she has toured extensively as a concert organist and harpsichordist, as well as being involved in the research, editing and publication of music by keyboard composers of the 1700s.
Kara Dahl Russell, February 2015, DELMARVA WSCL RADIO

Facets 3 *– New American Music for Trumpet*
James Wintle: Distant Voices; Barbara Harbach: Perambulations, Emily!; Francine Trester: Four Thoreau Songs, Sonata; Joseph Klein: Die Königskünderin (The King-Proclaimer); Ulysses Kay: Tromba. John Holt (trumpet and flugelhorn), Nataliya Sukhina (piano), Sophia Grech (mezzo), Igor Borodin and Julia Bushkova (violins): Katrin Meidell (viola) and Johannes Kleinmann (cello) rec. 2007-2009, Crystal Records CD 768

Barbara Harbach contributes two works. *Perambulations* is a concise affair full of rich piano chording and a lyrically flowing trumpet line; expressive and appealing. The more recent *Emily!* takes four texts by Emily Dickinson, sung by Sophia Grech, with trumpet and piano. The first song is vibrant and uplifting, the second calming and pliant, and third is *Wild Nights! Wild Nights!* and duly opens with a strong trumpet fanfare theme. This excellent work, full of Dickinsonesque charge acts as a fine contrast to the more clement earlier work.
Jonathan Woolf, MusicWeb International, 2010

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Orchestral Music II
Symphonies and Soundings
Vol. IX MSR 1519

Fanfare Magazine – Interview & Review, September/October 2014

Fanning the Flames of Tonality: The Music of Barbara Harbach
BY DAVID DEBOOR CANFIELD

Fanfare readers have met Barbara Harbach in interviews by Robert Schulslaper in 33:3 and Colin Clarke in 35:6. In the latter issue, I also reviewed three CDs of her engagingly tonal music, expressing my considerable admiration for her compositional gifts. This is not, however, a one-sided woman, as she is also well-known as a keyboard player, most recently specializing in the organ. That she is still busy as a composer is evidenced by the CD on which I interviewed her in late May of 2014, attempting not to re-walk the paths explored by my two colleagues.

Q. Barbara, in the earlier interviews, you mention having worked with, and having been influenced by Samuel Adler and Mel Powell. Yet your music sounds nothing like theirs. Who or what formed your romantic musical aesthetic and language?
A. I was fortunate enough to take classes with Mel Powell at Yale University as well as a semester with Sam Adler at the Eastman School of Music. From Mel I learned to appreciate improvisatory ingenuity and from Sam rhythmic athleticism. Composers often write what they like to hear, and I adore listening to Howard Hanson, Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Mary Howe, Thea Musgrave, Gian Carlo Menotti, Adolphus Hailstork, and, of course, Ralph Vaughan Williams as well as many others. Many of the mid-twentieth century composers studied with one of my heroes Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) in Paris. She was an outstanding pedagogue, composer, organist and pianist. Some of my favorite pieces are Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's Overture (c. 1830), Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto and the operas of Ethel Smyth.

Q. Do you feel vindicated, now that tonal music has been embraced by most of the best-known current American composers? I sometimes joke to people that I was writing tonal music before it was fashionable. Is this your sentiment too?

A. I am delighted to hear the growing trend towards tonal music among contemporary composers! It has seemed that most awards and competition winners are given to more dissonant and atonal music, but the resurgence of tonality is refreshing. I believe that performers and audiences like lyrical and melodic sections that relieve the edginess and nervous tensions of other sections. I like your response that you were writing tonal music before it was fashionable, and I feel the same way. I have tried to write pieces that were closer to the "beep and squawk" style, but they never came to fruition. I guess it's difficult to write against your own type and style.

Q. You would seem to be a soul sister to your predecessor American composers, women such as Amy Beach, Peggy Stuart Coolidge and the English-born Rebecca Clarke. Have these women influenced you, and are there others?
A. Yes, they are all wonderful composers! I mentioned earlier Mary Howe, Thea Musgrave and Ethel Smyth. There are other terrific contemporary composers from the late 20th and early 21st centuries such as Emma Lou Diemer, Beth Anderson, Joan Tower, Libby Larsen, Cindy McTee, Judith Statin, Shulamit Ran, Melinda Wagner, Jennifer Hidgon and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, the first woman Pulitzer Prize winner in 1983. I am especially drawn to the works of Grace Williams and the string quartets of Elizabeth Maconchy, as well as the music of her daughter, Nicola Le Fanu. And who can forget the music of the French composer Germaine Tailleferre? These are just a few composers whose aesthetic ideals we all share, and there are many more women creators writing stunning and exciting music, and I wish I had space to list them all!

Q. In your interview with Robert Schulslaper, you state that you knew you wanted to be a musician from the age of five. How is it that you came to have such a conviction at such a tender age? Did you grow up in a musical family in which you had a lot of exposure to classical music?
A. Like Amy Beach, my mother was my first piano teacher. She and her two sisters had a vocal trio and sang at church services, weddings, and funerals. I grew up in rural Pennsylvania, and my paternal grandparents had an inn that was one of the north-south horse and buggy stops through central Pennsylvania. I would play the harmonium for church services in the inn's saloon (not an active saloon, because the county was dry) when it was too cold to go to the little church down the road. In the fall, the inn boarded hunters from all over the area, and I would play the pump organ for them. I played my first church service when I was nine years old. The nearest town and little grocery store was eight miles away. When I needed another piano teacher, my parents would drive an hour each way to take me to lessons every Saturday. I owe my parents so much for their support and love, and they never complained about the sacrifices they made for my musical education. Our family was always pleased and proud to claim Otto Harbach as one of our distant relatives.

Q. What gave you the idea for your Night Soundings*?*
A. As all nocturnal creatures, I have a tendency to wander about during the night, embracing and relishing in its mysteriousness, unexplained sounds, and thick aura of darkness. As a pianist I was drawn to compositions with the titles of *Nocturne* and *Notturno* – from Maria Szymanowska's *Nocturne in B-flat* to John Field and Frederic Chopin's *Nocturnes*, not to forget the nocturnes of Carl Czerny, Faure, Debussy, Satie and Poulenc. The night offers a myriad array of emotions from solace to absolute horror. I tried to infuse some of these terrifying thoughts, as well as solace that only night can bring into *Night Soundings*.

Q. The symphonic works I've encountered by you to this point have been smaller-scale works, at least in terms of length. Have you written larger-scale symphonic works?

A. I have written six symphonies, and as you noted, they are smaller-scale works. I seem to emit my themes, work them out, combine and intertwine them, and then come to a close. I usually feel that there are no superfluous extras, but probably most composers feel that way about their works. I have written large-scale pieces such as *O Pioneers! – an American Opera* and *Booth! – an American musical*. *Booth!* won a competition and was presented at Skirball Theatre in New York City for a short run Off-Broadway in 2009. *Booth!* is about a strong man, Edwin Booth, the brother of John Wilkes Booth. The story is about what happens to a family when one of the members commits a horrific deed. That same year in 2009, *O Pioneers!,* based on Willa Cather's novel of the same name, was premiered at the Touhill Performing Arts Center in St. Louis.

Q. How was it that the present CD came to be conducted by David Angus? Did you have a connection with him beforehand? He seems most sympathetic to your work.
A. David Angus is a consummate musician and conductor! I knew of his recordings and liked his style, and also was intrigued that he is the Music Director of the Boston Lyric Opera and has a true empathy for the voice. I knew he would do well interpreting my pieces since many of them are vocal and lyric in style. In 2011 I went to London to hear him record the London Philharmonic Orchestra in several of my string orchestra pieces. I was thrilled with his conducting and interpretations. Then when I had my latest four symphonies ready to go in 2014, he was the natural choice.

Q. The present CD features two works, A State Divided - A Missouri Symphony *and* Gateway Festival Symphony, *with connections with your adopted state. Given the symbolism of the St. Louis arch as gateway to the West, do you see these works in any similar light?*
A. For some reason I seem to absorb the landscape and cultures where I am planted. *A State Divided* was inspired by the 150th anniversary of Missouri's entry into the Civil War. *Gateway Festival Symphony* was for the 50th anniversary of the Gateway Festival Orchestra in St. Louis, and *Jubilee Symphony* was the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the University of Missouri- St. Louis. In Pullman, Washington, I loved the Palouse region, and its mesas and rugged terrain. I wrote *Frontier Fancies* for violin and orchestra with an Americana flavor in its three movements, "Fiddleflirt," "Twilight Dream," and "Dancedevil." *Pioneer Women: From Skagway to White Mountain* for soprano, clarinet, and piano was about four women who helped settle Alaska, and *Daystream Dances* for oboe and piano showcased the hot summer air. St. Louis has been an inspiration in many genres for me: the three symphonies that are mentioned above, *Freeing the Caged Bird* for woodwind quintet inspired by the lives of four St. Louis women (Maya Angelou, Sara Teasdale, Kate Chopin, and Emily Hahn), *Freedom Suite* for string orchestra inspired by Harriet and Dred Scott, *Lilia's Polka* for string orchestra based on a polka written by Kate Chopin, *Carondelet Caprice* for chamber ensemble, *Harriet's Story* for soprano, violin, and piano, *Sounds of St. Louis* for low brass, as well as many pieces not directly related to the St. Louis environs.

Q. Ironically, Maya Angelou passed on just about the time I received your answers. Your music sounds unambiguously optimistic to me. Are you, indeed, an optimist?
A. As all creative people, we have our optimistic side and a darker side. Yes, I would say that I am more optimistic than not. I have written some very lush pieces when I was at low ebb, and some highly energized pieces when carrying a great sadness. It seems that I am getting more optimistic as I get older – life is a lot of fun!

Q. In a previous interview, you stated that you admire "strong women." What in your judgment makes for such a woman?
A. In spite of all the cultural restrictions, in spite of marital or political difficulties, a strong woman continues to create and makes the world go round, such as Abigail Adams and Alexandra Bergson (in *O Pioneers!*), Harriet Scott, and Emily Dickinson all did. History is full of women creators in the arts, many of whom created under oppressive circumstances, including Kassia, Anne Boleyn, Fanny Mendelssohn, the contemporary Chen Yi, and
various Soviet and Ukrainian composers.

Q. At the risk of being provocative, may I ask if there is still any place in America for strong men?
A. Absolutely yes! Men have been in the forefront of music for centuries, and they have written glorious music, loved and appreciated by many. In some ways, men are still in the forefront. There is a lot of room for composers of all types of music by both men and women, nowadays. In some ways, it is difficult for contemporary composers to find an audience. Both men and women would love a culture that embraced and hungered for new music, as they did in the Classical period. I tell my students that they should just keep writing, write what pleases you, and don't worry about what people or critics may think about your music.

Q. That is certainly an approach I agree with. Now that so many women composers have achieved international renown, are we past the point of needing to identify or associate composers by gender? It seems to me that the days of discrimination against the music of gifted women are mercifully behind us.
A. Thankfully, it is getting better for women composers. We now have five women Pulitzer Prize winners in music since 1983: Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Shulamit Ran, Melinda Wagner, Jennifer Higdon, and Caroline Shaw. When Marin Alsop was asked what it felt like to conduct the Last Night of the Proms, she said, "I am exceedingly proud to be 'the first' but I am also a bit shocked that there can still be firsts for women in 2013!" Is there a gender gap in the music industry? It is true that there are more professional male music creators than female. For some reason, it's taking a lot longer in music than in literature and the visual arts to reach equilibrium. It was almost acceptable by the 19th century for female writers to be published, yet it's only in the last couple of decades, since about 1980, that historical female composers have really emerged. Just a few other statistics: as of 2014, the Metropolitan Opera in New York City has never performed a work by an American woman composer; only five percent of paintings hung in museums are by women artists; and about one percent of pieces played by orchestras in the US are by women, according to the League of American Orchestras. Yes, it is getting better, but we're still working on parity. Perhaps until that time, there is a need to focus on "women composers," competitions for women composers, and conferences that highlight the creativity of women. Or as Nadia Boulanger said, "I've been a woman for a little over 50 years and have gotten over my initial astonishment. As for conducting an orchestra, that's a job where I don't think sex plays much part." Nadia Boulanger was the first woman to conduct many major orchestras in America and Europe, including the BBC Symphony, Boston Symphony, Hallé Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra.
Q. What are your latest compositional projects?
A. Right now I seem to be in a vocal phase, and have just finished three Dorothy Parker poems for soprano, violin and piano. The poems reflect Dorothy's wry humor and keen observation of urban life. Now I am working on five songs of children's poetry from the Theresienstadt concentration

camp, the poetry of which is surprisingly uplifting and beautiful. By July I will begin another silent movie score and then some more
orchestral pieces.

Q. You clearly have your projects lined up well in advance! Is there any genre that you haven't yet written in that you hope to someday?
A. I would love to do another opera, but finding the right libretto will be the key. I have also written several musicals other than *Booth!*, and would love the opportunity to orchestrate them
for the stage.

Q. Now that your compositional career is flourishing, do you still have as much time to perform as you did earlier in your career?
A. The first part of my career was indeed as a performer and recording artist, and I am still keenly involved with both. While rummaging around in the British Library, I found many delightful and interesting compositions by 18th-century men and women composers. MSR Classics recently released Thomas Haigh's, Six Concertos for Harpsichord, Op. 1 which are
great fun to play.

Another 2-CD set by MSR contains Bach's: *Art of the Fugue* and Pachelbel's Canon, Chaconnes, and Chorale Preludes. Over my career I have logged many hours on the organ bench playing the works of great Baroque composers such as Bach and Pachelbel. It is a great tribute to their music that it still speaks eloquently to us. I am also looking forward to release later this year of the integral 120 harpsichord sonatas by Antonio Soler in the Rubio edition, a 14-CD set.

Review – Fanfare Magazine September/October 2014 David DeBoor Canfield
HARBACH ***Night Soundings. Gateway Festival Sym. A State Divided - A Missouri Sym. Jubilee Sym*** David Angus, cond; 1Nicholas Betts (tp); London PO MSR 1519 (61:03)
Having previously reviewed three full CDs of Barbara Harbach's music, I feel that I am getting a good handle on her style. The CD under review here continues to cement my opinion that here is a composer in full command of her compositional craft, and who, even though she speaks with an uncompromising conservative and tonal voice, has something worthwhile to say in each of her works. This is not music by a mere musical dilettante, but by someone who is both possessed of a vivid musical imagination, and the craft to set down what she conceives. Her orchestration is masterful, and always "works."

The four works heard on this CD, labeled as volume II of Harbach's orchestral music, are all relatively brief, none lasting more than 18 minutes, and each cast in a three-movement structure. Opening the disc is *Night Soundings,* which was commissioned by Thomas F. George, and is comprised of the movements "Cloak of Darkness," "Notturno," and "Midnight Tango." Nothing in the work sounds particularly ominous to me, but the work is evocative of the murmurings that characterize the dark hours. The last movement brings a departure from Harbach's usual Americana-infused style, and slips far south of the border in its sultry tango atmosphere.

Following comes the *Gateway Festival Symphony*; the opening movement, "Confluencity," contains some of the more subtly austere harmonies I've encountered in this composer's music. These sonorities are meant to suggest the merging of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. The second movement, "Sunset St. Louis," has a gentle tango rhythm underpinning its long flowing lyrical lines. "After Hours" begins with a trumpet call to arms which quickly yields to themes of

grandeur suggesting to my ears the wide open spaces of the West. The movement is a paean to the people of the State of Missouri, and looks back to the pivotal role that Missouri played in the Civil War. History buffs will recall that the state sent troops to both sides of that internecine conflict between the states, and saw more battles fought on its territory than any of the other states save Virginia and Tennessee. The movement (and symphony) ends on an optimistic note with plenty of brass flourishes, perhaps meant to suggest the composer's hope that such a conflagration will never again arise on American soil.

A State Divided - A Missouri Symphony is a companion work to the previous one, and is based upon similar themes drawn from the state's history and its divided interest in the Civil War. The opening movement, depicting the Missouri Compromise, is based upon a "folk tune" of Harbach's own composition, which spins forth the movement with harmonies that could be nothing other than American. The second movement, "Skirmish at Island Mound - African-American Regiment," opens with rather ominous harmonies, redolent of impending disaster, but instead of leading into overt battle music, transforms into a square dance-like section that also utilizes another new folk song, this one quite lively. Occasional trumpet calls remind the listener that the piece is indeed connected to war, especially given the return of the ominous sonorities from the opening of the movement. The piece celebrates the first Union engagement (and victory) by a regiment composed of African-Americans. "The Battle of Westport - the battle that saved Missouri" looks back to one of the largest engagements of the War west of the Mississippi. Persistent *ostinati* and dramatic figurations including runs in the strings suggest the conflict, and these are augmented by the use of the "military" percussion, including cymbals, bass drum, and xylophone.

Closing the proceedings is *Jubilee Symphony,* a work commissioned by the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Its opening movement features a highly syncopated and irregular rhythmic figure over which Harbach's signature flowing melodies rise. Shortly, a jig-like dance occurs, and indeed, the entire movement is permeated by a dance-like quality. The opening of the second movement provides a brief respite that evokes pastoral images, before returning to new dance rhythms.

Like the music on the previous CDs I reviewed, Harbach's music never strays very far from the optimistic spirit of the American "can-do" mindset. This is music that is easy to love and appreciate, but without the shallowness exhibited by much music that would carry those particular descriptors. David Angus and his colleagues in the London Philharmonic Orchestra bring off these works in splendid fashion. In short, the disc is warmly recommended to those who are convinced that new tonal music still has something to offer the listener. If you're not yet convinced by that premise, give these pieces a try, and see if you don't yield to their charms.

*****

This is actually the ninth disc in an ongoing series devoted to Harbach's music, a major commitment for any contemporary composer; and certainly the skill with which Harbach handles the large-scale works here is attractive in many ways. Harbach, a fine organist as well as a composer, certainly uses an orchestra with skill and creates more-accessible pieces than many contemporary composers produce.

Mark J. Estren **INFODAD.COM** September 2014 **** (Four Stars)

*****

Barbara Harbach is again shown to be an impressive composer on a new release from MSR Classics featuring David Angus and the London Philharmonic Orchestra

MSR Classics has just released Volume 9 in its series of recordings of the music of Barbara Harbach.

This new release is the second volume of this composer's Orchestral Music entitled *Symphonies, Soundings and Celebrations.*

Barbara Harbach has a large catalogue of works, including symphonies, operas, works for string orchestra, musicals, works for chamber ensembles, film scores, modern ballets, pieces for organ, harpsichord and piano, choral anthems and many arrangements for brass and organ of various Baroque works.

She has been the recipient of the Arts Education Award from the Missouri Arts Council, the Missouri Citizen for the Arts Award, the Yellow Rose Award from the Zonta International Club of St. Louis and the University of Missouri-St. Louis, College of Fine Arts and Communication, Faculty Excellence Award. In 2007 she was awarded the Hellenic Spirit Foundation Award and, in 2011, she was awarded the Grand Center Visionary Award for 'Successful Working Artist,' the Argus Foundation Award, and the YWCA Leader of Distinction Award in the Arts.

Further biographical information on this composer can be found in my review of Volume 7 in this series, Music for Strings and, indeed, on the composer's own website.

The works on this new CD are all billed as World Premiere Recordings and are again performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by David Angus.

Night Soundings for Orchestra was commissioned by Thomas F. George and is in three movements. There is a dynamic opening to *Cloak of Darkness* but the music soon settles to an oboe led theme. The dynamic outburst re-occurs before the gentler theme is taken forward by various wind instruments. The dynamic outbursts continue to periodically interrupt the music, keeping the tense overtone of this movement.

Woodwinds dominate *Notturno*, weaving a mysterious tapestry of night sounds in this imaginatively orchestrated movement. Part way through, the strings bring a lighter, flowing nature before the woodwind return weaving some beautiful textures leading to the hushed coda.

As the title infers *Midnight Tango* has a tango rhythm led by a solo trumpet that appears out of the opening. Soon the music flows forward with just a gentle underlying pulse of the tango rhythm. Later a little ensemble of strings appears as the tango picks up with brass bringing a real Latin feel.

This is a most attractive piece idiomatically played by David Angus and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Gateway Festival Symphony was commissioned by St. Louis' Gateway Festival Orchestra for their 50th Jubilee in 2013.

Confluencity depicts the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and grows upwards from a small motif to provide a dynamic opening. The xylophone keeps a rhythm over which the orchestra rides, with woodwind arabesques. Soon a more flowing theme arrives with gentle brass overlaid as the two themes merge and overlay as the movement progresses. Eventually a faster rhythm develops as the music bubbles up to a climax before flowing forward and speeding to a decisive coda.

Sunset: St. Louis, inspired by a poem by the St. Louis poet Sara Teasdale, opens quietly, though pensively, before a rhythmic theme commences a tango. The theme is passed around the orchestra before a slowly rising and falling motif appears around which the tango then moves. This is an especially lovely movement, expertly orchestrated.

Solo trumpet announces the opening of *After Forever,* as the pensive nature becomes even more obvious. This movement is related to the struggle of Dred and Harriet Scott, slaves who unsuccessfully sued for their freedom, an event that deepened tensions between the northern and southern U.S. states. Soon the tension eases, as the music flows and builds in richness. Little surges of drama and passion alternate with the flowing music. Eventually a little rhythmic melody arrives, pointed up by quiet percussion. The trumpet returns to call a note of caution before the music leads to the more settled coda. This is another approachable and highly attractive work.

A State Divided – A Missouri Symphony also takes the theme of the divided politics of the northern and southern U.S. states with Missouri's involvement in the Civil War.

Missouri Compromise –a slave state has an expansive opening though with a hint of melancholy that eventually leads to a section with a folksy rhythmic snap. A side drum enters to reinforce the rhythmic elements of the music but the predominant feeling remains expansive and calm. A tune runs through this work that sounds very much like a traditional American song.

Skirmish at Island Mound – African-American regiment brings low strings and a flute to open this quietly pensive music which rises up with a lighter theme shared around the wind instruments. The music slowly builds, rhythmically, between wind instruments in surely another traditional tune. Eventually the music quietens, the flute returns, before the music moves forward with confidence to the coda.

A trumpet and side drum herald the opening of *The Battle of Westport – the battle that saved Missouri* before a swirling orchestral theme joins, thrusting the music ahead in a marching rhythm around the tune 'Mourning Glory'. Harbach's distinctive orchestration brings some terrific moments as this movement progresses. There is a slower central section with side drums before the music leads decisively to the coda.

Jubilee Symphony was commissioned by the University of Missouri-St. Louis for their 50thJubilee in 2013 and was premiered in October that year.

The first movement, *Bellerive* takes its title from the historic Bellerive Country Club that became the site of the new university. The music springs into life as an insistent motif appears for the trumpet. This theme is developed around the orchestra building and developing many variants on

the theme, becoming more light-hearted with something of a traditional jig before leading to a final fugal section.

Mirth Day Fiesta draws on a day of celebration unique to the university that showcases cultures and ethnicities. A xylophone opens the movement with low brass, soon joined by a flute and the rest of the orchestra as the music opens out into a lovely melody. Soon there is a change to a lively dance rhythm followed by varying rhythmic versions with pizzicato lower strings pointing up the music. The xylophone gently returns as the music quietens and flows forward with brass leading ahead before woodwind join for the rhythmic coda.

Tritons Ascending refers to the mythological mascot of the university. There is a gentle, hushed opening to which woodwind soon add little motifs before developing into a texture of woven sounds that flow forward, building in depth to the coda.

Barbara Harbach is an impressive composer who has a depth of expression underneath the surface attractions of her music.

There is fine playing from David Angus and the London Philharmonic Orchestra who receive an excellent recording engineered by Mike Hatch at the Henry Wood Hall, London, England. There are excellent booklet notes.

Bruce Reader, The Classical Reviewer, 2014

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Barbara Harbach: *Orchestral Music II*

London Philharmonic Orchestra; David Angus, conductor. MSR Classics, MS 1519 (2013)

The four symphonic works on Barbara Harbach's new disc, *Orchestral Music II*, are decidedly cinematic. Although none are meant to accompany a film, all are programmatic and unabashedly approachable. Harbach has publicly defended music accessibility on behalf of the Hester Park recording label that she co-founded and has long been successful in securing both commissions and audiences for her works.

The four works on the disc were written on commission within the last four years and have much in common. They are in three movements and feature an orchestra with woodwinds mostly in pairs, a healthy brass section, strings, and sparing use of percussion. Particularly noteworthy are the woodwind and brass sections, which are often prominent. The London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by David Angus delivers compelling and cogent performances.

The music sometimes draws on pre-existing material (the *Dies irae* quoted in "Cloak of Darkness") or familiar traditions (tangos appear in "Midnight Tango" and "Sunset: St. Louis"). Harbach's work is conservative for the most part, and can be quite melodious. "Cloak of Darkness," the first movement of *Night Soundings* (2013), has many of the characteristics found elsewhere in Harbach's music: tonal centers, pedal tones, economic use of thematic material, and often an arch or rondo-like form. The movement begins with vigorously played, well-disciplined scurrying in the strings over a low pedal tone, followed by a contrasting, quieter section over the same persistent pedal. The listener encounters a return of both the opening gesture and the

thematic material of the quieter section later in the movement. The second movement, "Notturno," begins quietly, with solo woodwinds over another pedal, and an undercurrent of strings reminiscent of the opening of Smetana's *The Moldau*. The opening material returns later at a new pitch level, and the movement ends with low-register open fifths in the strings. The finale, "Midnight Tango," starts with a fortissimo unison and sustained chord followed by soft strings and a beautifully played solo trumpet crooning the slinky tango tune featured throughout. The orchestral introduction returns as well as the tango theme, and the movement concludes with the solo trumpet in an effective and much more elaborately ornamented form of the tango theme. Key signatures, an unusual feature in contemporary music, appear in both "Notturno" and "Midnight Tango."

If Smetana came to mind in the slow movement of *Night Soundings*, he is even more present in "Confluencity," the opening movement of the *Gateway Festival Symphony* (2013). This movement is about rivers, and the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi is depicted with flowing string lines often accompanied (rather oddly) by marimba. The dramatic gesture of piling up instruments over a pedal tone is again featured here, and it builds, subsides, and builds again with imitative entries before concluding. The next movement, "Sunset: St. Louis," named after a poem by Sara Teasdale, presents another tango (for reasons less clear than in "Cloak of Darkness"), and is quietly lyrical. The final movement, "After Forever," opens with a dramatic trumpet flourish repeated over an ascending three-note, then two-note figure, the type of ostinatos that can be found quite often in Harbach's music. The movement reaffirms the cinematic quality of the music, intended, at least in part, to reflect the strength of the Missouri people.

A State Divided – A Missouri Symphony (2011) was commissioned by the music department at the University of Missouri-St. Louis for the 150th anniversary of Missouri's entry into the Civil War in 1862. Each movement is about some aspect of the state's involvement in that war, from "Missouri Compromise – a slave state (1820)" to "Skirmish at Island Mound," which celebrates an African-American regiment victory, and finally "The Battle at Westport," a turning point dubbed "The Gettysburg of the West." The composer describes the two themes in the first movement as newly-composed folk tunes and one in the second movement as a newly-composed spiritual. In addition to the backbone of strings, the brass and woodwinds are featured in all three movements, often with short solos. They showcase the composer's ease and proficiency in writing for these instruments as well as the virtuosity of the soloists of the Philharmonic.

The final piece of the disc, *Jubilee Symphony* (2012), was also commissioned by the University of Missouri-St. Louis, this time celebrating its 50th anniversary. While the first and third movements, "Bellerive" and "Tritons Ascending," have serious moments and both contain fugal or imitative passages, the second movement, "Mirth Day Fiesta," is mostly dance-like and light-hearted, celebrating the variety of cultures within the university with a section of mariachi music. The end of the symphony comes with full-throated brass (one of the strongest sections in the performance) and strings swelling to the finish.

Harbach's symphonic music as represented here is listenable, skillfully composed, well orchestrated, well performed, and beautifully recorded. The program notes are useful and the CD cover striking. Those who are usually not fans of contemporary classical music will probably be enchanted.

Readers interested in details of Harbach's wide-ranging career as performer, editor of *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, professor at the University of Missouri, co-founder of Vivace Press and the Hester Park recording label, and champion of women's music, are referred to Cynthia Green Libby's 2006 *Journal of the IAWM* article entitled "From Bach to Vivace Press: The Metamorphosis of Barbara Harbach." (http://www.umsl.edu/~harbachb/iawm.pdf)
Elizabeth Vercoe, *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* Volume 21, No. 1 • 2015

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Soundly Constructed: Orchestral music by Barbara Harbach - heard by HOWARD SMITH

'... the LPO is wholly admirable in this music ...'

This second MSR Classics recording of Barbara Harbach's orchestral music follows an earlier programme played by the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra with conductor Kirk Trevor (*MS 1252*).

The present release has three concise 3-movement symphonies and Harbach's atmospheric *Night Soundings for Orchestra* lasting fifteen-and-a-half minutes. The London Philharmonic Orchestra is directed by Boston Lyric Opera conductor David Angus, and illustrates Harbach's soundly constructed tonal style.

Composer, harpsichordist, organist and teacher, Harbach is Professor of Music at the University of Missouri-St Louis. She founded Women in the Arts-St Louis to highlight women's work and gain more performances for musicians and composers. In 1989 she founded the small Vivace Press, publishing music by underrepresented composers.

Night Soundings for Orchestra is largely programmatic, with its first movement, 'Cloak of Darkness', full of shadows and menace. In 'Notturno' the darkness is less immediately apparent with faint similarities to Bartók's extraordinary 'night music'. The final movement, 'Midnight Tango', brings to life the intrinsic Latin rhythm, popularized in the 1920s and given a revived lease of life by Ástor Piazzolla and Gidon Kremer.

The *Gateway Festival Symphony* begins with 'Confluencity', in which two great rivers — the Missouri and Mississippi — meet some eight miles north of the St Louis Arch. Harbach suggests the many moods and fusion at the conjunction: the site of Confluence Point State Park, home for a myriad waterfowl.

'Sunset: Saint Louis' is inspired by the poem of the city's ill-fated poet, Sara Teasdale (1884-1933). It begins:

Hushed in the smoky haze of summer sunset
When I came home again from far off places
How many times I saw my western city
Dream by her river

'After Forever' is bookended with a clarion call trumpet. Harbach was reminded of the dramatic story surrounding Dred and Harriet Scott, the St Louis slaves who sued for freedom only to be denied by the 1857 US Supreme Court. Missouri ranks third in Civil War battles and engagements. The tuneful central section is particularly effective.

The *Jubilee Symphony* was commissioned for the University of Missouri-St Louis fiftieth jubilee anniversary, 1963-2013. Its first movement, titled 'Bellerive', refers to Bellerive Country Club, a golf country club moved to its current site with a newly designed course, opened on Memorial Day 1960.

'Mirth Day Fiesta' is unique to the University where Mexican influences are much in evidence. Here cultures and ethnicities are showcased. The focus is on *Cinco de Mayo* (Spanish for 'fifth of May'), a celebration held on 5 May. Mexicans and Americans also often see the day as a source of pride: one way they can honor their ethnicity. Listen for hints of Mariachi music.

The symphony culminates with 'Triton's Ascending' in which Harbach's fugal writing is present almost throughout. This movement brings the programme to an impressive conclusion and though nothing here is especially profound, much remains to admire.

As one might reasonably expect, the LPO is wholly admirable in this music, and David Angus is clearly at ease in Harbach's accessible works. Angus spent his early years in Belfast. He was a boy chorister at King's College, Cambridge under Sir David Willcocks and finished his training with a fellowship in conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music, where he won several prizes for his opera conducting.

His professional career began as a repetiteur with Opera North (UK), before becoming Chorus Master and Staff Conductor for Glyndebourne Festival Opera with numerous engagements throughout Europe.

Howard Smith, Music & Vision, 2015

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A fresh composer/performer who deserves to be better known. [* * * *]

Composer Barbara Harbach passed me by somehow. The CD under review is volume 9 in a series of her compositions from MSR Classics. If this disc is a good indicator, I would probably really enjoy hearing more of her music.

Dr. Harbach is Professor of Music at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, with a large catalog of works, including; symphonies, operas, string orchestra, musicals, works for chamber ensembles, film scores, modern ballet, pieces for organ, harpsichord and piano; choral anthems; and many arrangements for brass and organ of various Baroque works. She also has recorded many CDs of both harpsichord and organ. This disc contains four orchestral works, some tied thematically to her residence in Missouri. Having grown up around St. Louis, I found that of more than passing interest.

The first work, Night Soundings, is a somewhat mystical work, describing the zone between light and darkness. The last movement is called Midnight Tango, and has a South American

motif. Next is the Gateway Festival Symphony, a work that premiered in 2013. I would describe it as a three movement tone poem describing scenes around Missouri, such as the meeting of the great rivers near St. Louis. It's followed by A State Divided- A Missouri Symphony, reflecting the tension that resulted from part of the state being allied with the north, and southern Missouri being part of the Confederacy during the Civil War. The CD closes with Jubilee Symphony, which pays tribute to the founding of the University of Missouri.

All these works are noteworthy, and well played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of David Angus. I like Harbach's musical style and inventiveness. She has a sound all her own, she's not doing a reduction of Copland or Ives.

Recording-wise, this stereo disc sounds just fine. It's very natural, separations are sharp, but not overblown. Strings are very smooth. A high resolution option would be nice, but the CD sounds excellent. It was recorded in Henry Wood Hall in London, an acoustic space I'm familiar with and I've heard multiple live performances there. The sound is well-captured.
I'll have to explore more of Ms. Harbach's compositions, and I'm always happy to discover a previously unheard talent.
Mel Martin, Audiophile Audition, 2015

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March 2017 eNewsletter

CD of the Month

new on MSR Classics

Symphonies by Barbara Harbach

There are four symphonies on this disc, recorded in the Henry Wood Hall, London, by the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by David Angus. Recent works, they show Barbara Harbach moving onto a larger musical canvas than in her previous more chamber style orchestral works. These symphonies are not numbered, but each has a title and explores a theme in three movements.

Night Soundings presents a conflict between wolves and demons, long nights and the colours of South America. The *Gateway Festival Symphony*, composed in 2013 depicts the meeting of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. *A State Divided - A Missouri Symphony*, dates from 2012. A slave state, it was also the site of the Battle of Westport in 1864, one of the largest during the American Civil War. Lastly in this selection of Barbara Harbach's symphonies is the *Jubilee Symphony*, composed in 2013, as a portrait of the University of Missouri-St. Louis as it celebrated its 50th Jubilee Anniversary.

The four Symphonies by Barbara Harbach are a wonderful example of New American Music. Superbly played - the London Philharmonic sounds as though they have known these works for years - and given a real Hi-Fi recording by engineer Mike Hatch.

Laurence Lewis, Czech Music Direct 2017

https://t.e2ma.net/message/yauoeb/mlmsgg

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MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ CHAMBER V
Soprano, Violin, Piano & Chamber Orchestra
Vol. X MSR 1544

HARBACH ***Terezin Children's Songs. Nocturne noir. Dorothy Parker Love Songs. The Birth, Life and Death of Christ*** • Stella Markou,Marlissa Hudson (sop); Julia Sakharova,John McGrosso (vn); Alla Voskoboynikova (pn);James Richards, cond; St. Louis CO • MSR 1544 (73:54)

Finding Beauty in Ephemera

For me, the two works on this collection of Barbara Harbach's chamber music I most enjoyed were the longest and the shortest. The longest was "The Birth, Life, and Death of Christ" for chamber orchestra. It was written as a musical accompaniment to Alice Guy's 1906 silent film of the same name.

The movie is a series of tableaux and the music follows the same structure, presenting a series of short, interrelated movements. This is quiet, understated music whose slow pacing (matching that of the film), invites contemplation.

Harbach is an accomplished pianist as well as a composer. Her "Nocturne Noir" packs a lot of technical challenges into a five-minute work. Her accessible, tonal-based style keeps the music from just being a jumble of notes, but rather provides an engaging listen.

Also included are two song cycles for soprano, violin, and piano. "Terezin Children's Songs" sets a selection of poems and letters of the youngest concentration camp victims. The music seems superficially simple with a dark undercurrent of sadness that gives the words their emotional power.

The second cycle is "Dorothy Parker Love Songs." Parker's acerbic wit drips from every line -- like this one: "My one dear love, he is all my heart -- and I wish somebody'd shoot him." Harbach successfully captures the mood of these writings. While the soprano sometimes sounds sentimental, the violin seems to be making mordant (if wordless) commentary throughout to remind us how Parker really feels about all this.

This is MSR Classics tenth volume of Barbara Harbach's music, and it holds up well in comparison to the others I've heard. This is honest music-making.

Finding Beauty in Ephemera – Views and reviews of over-looked and underappreciated culture and creativity
Ralph Graves, September 2016 http://the-unmutual.blogspot.com/

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"*This cycle, beautifully sung by soprano Stella Markou, worthily stands in the company of the great cycles by Samuel Barber and Ned Rorem. They're really that good, and this is my favorite work on the recital.*"

Composer and organist/harpsichordist Barbara Harbach is nothing if not prolific, as this is volume five of her chamber music, and I have also reviewed a disc of her orchestral music. Readers desiring more information about her may wish to refer to the interview that I did with her in 38:1. I really like her music a great deal, so I am always pleasantly surprised when I open the latest parcel from Fanfare Central to discover a new CD of her work. The present CD contains four chamber works for various groups of instruments (and in two works, they include the addition of a soprano to the ensemble).

The opening Terezin Children's Songs sets texts by the children who were confined to the Nazi "showcase" concentration camp, more often referred to by its German name, Theresienstadt. The "Potemkin Village" had an unusually high percentage of composers, writers, and other artistic prisoners who were allowed a degree of freedom to practice their art—until, of course, these unfortunate Jews were eventually shipped off to the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Among the prisoners of Theresienstadt who eventually lost their lives were some 15,000 children, some of whose art and poetry was smuggled out of the camp. The depictions of the brutal life of the camp as seen through the eyes of a child are moving in the extreme, and the beauty of these settings is striking from the very first notes of the opening song, "Birdsong." It features a lovely lyrical melody sung by the soprano, with a counter melody by the violin weaving around it in canonic fashion. These lines are accompanied in the piano by some of the most gorgeous harmonies imaginable.

Despite the circumstances attending the writing of this poem by the anonymous child, there is a spirit of optimism in the poem ("You'll know how wonderful it is to be alive") that Harbach set exquisitely in the music. The second song, "Forgotten," foregoes the use of the piano it its first stanza, giving a particularly wistful quality to the setting of this text about love and friendship. "On a Sunny Evening" seems a bit more reserved in its rhythmic structure and harmonies; here, the subject is nature, but it closes with the lines, "If in barbed wire, things can bloom, Why couldn't I? I will not die!" Unlike those of the first three songs, the authors of the final two are known. These include "The Butterfly" by Pavel Friedman and "Do not stand at my grave and weep" by Mary Elizabeth Frye. The shift in style in the final two or three songs from the lighter and more upbeat opening ones, both in the texts and Harbach's music, is quite noticeable. Nevertheless, their sadness yields a luminescent beauty that will deeply move the listener. This cycle, beautifully sung by soprano Stella Markou, worthily stands in the company of the great cycles by Samuel Barber and Ned Rorem. They're really that good, and this is my favorite work on the recital.

The Nocturne noir sets quite a different mood, full of drama and passion. From the title alone, I was expecting something, well, more nocturnal (i.e., peaceful and sleep-inducing). It turns out (I having finally read the booklet notes) that the piece was inspired by a dream, apparently one that included some moments of anxiety. Perhaps the most unexpected thing I heard was a fugue utilizing a jig-like motive. In any case, the piece produces a powerful impression.

The text of the Dorothy Parker Love Songs demonstrates the unerring eye of this American poet for the foibles of urban existence. The musical style of this cycle is similar to that of the Terezin Songs,although it is more up-tempo and more metrically regular throughout. Harbach especially well expresses in her music the conflicted feelings evident in the final poem of the triad, "Love Song," a whimsical text that begins, "My own dear love, he is strong and bold," and ends with "And I wish somebody'd shoot him," the latter line reinforced with a vocal swoop to the soprano's high C. Marlissa Hudson's soprano voice is several degrees weightier than that of Stella Markou, but seems perfectly suited to the tension in Parker's texts.

The major work on this disc is the closing one, The Birth, Life and Death of Christ. It is major both in terms of duration (more than a half hour in length), and the forces employed, a 13-member chamber orchestra. The title comes from the 1906 French film, La naissance, la vie et la mort du Christ, the most important work of the first woman filmmaker, Alice Guy, and one of the longest films that had been produced up until that time. The film is set in 25 scenes, and Harbach has written music to accompany each episode of this silent film. Her score was premiered in a showing of the film under the auspices of the St. Louis International Film Festival in 2014. Not surprisingly, there is a good bit of variety in the moods between one section and another to be found here. While this imaginative modal music is good enough to stand on its own, I would very much like to hear it in conjunction with the film for which it was written. I think its impact would be even greater in that context. Nevertheless, I can and do recommend this work and the others on this disc with considerable enthusiasm.

David DeBoor Canfield *Fanfare* Magazine Issue 40:2 Nov/Dec 2016
http://www.fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/40_2/4023120.az_HARBACH_Terezin_Children_Songs.html

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This fifth volume of Barbara Harbach's chamber music begins with a cycle from Terezín and ends with a silent film score on the life of Christ. These, a short but brilliant pianistic *tour de force* called Nocturne noir and a second cycle on bittersweet poems by Dorothy Parker constitute a rewarding survey of Harbach's recent work.

Harbach responds in her *Terezí Children's Songs* with her most involving music, sung exquisitely by Stella Markou. Four of the songs were written to children's poetry from the concentration camp, and a fifth to Mary Elizabeth Frye's 'Do not stand at my grave and weep', inspired in 1932 by the story of a young Jewish girl unable to visit her dying mother in Germany. Sung exquisitely by Markou, the music is closely, delicately aligned to the five very different poetic voices, particularly attuned to small, special moments like the flutter of doom in Pavel Friedman's 'The Butterfly'.

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Harbach's chamber orchestra score for *The Birth, Life and Death of Christ,* French film-maker Alice Guy-Blaché's 1906 classic (available for 'synching' on YouTube), has a meandering, *fin de siècle* feel about it, with imaginative touches throughout, such as the xylophone at the end of the 'Climbing Golgotha' sequence.

Laurence Vittes, GRAMOPHONE, November 2016

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Laurence Vittes, GRAMOPHONE, November 2016

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ ORCHESTRA III

Portraits in Sound

Vol. XI MSR 1614

HARBACH Symphonies Nos. 7–10 • David Angus, cond; London PO • MSR 1614 (62:54)

Apropos of nothing, but a thought inspired by the surname of the conductor of this CD, if you're ever interested in partaking of the best hamburger you've ever eaten in your life, seek out the Black Angus chain in Armenia the next time you're there. You won't be disappointed! (Virtually everything you'll eat in Armenia is organic, which may explain why the food in general tasted so good there.)

My, my! I digressed even before I got started on the review. Even though the present CD is the sixth devoted to the music of Barbara Harbach that is now happily residing in my record and CD library, it didn't sink in to my addled brain as to how prolific a composer she is until I saw that this disc contains her Symphonies Nos. 7 through 10. Having written 10 symphonies in addition to a host of other orchestral and chamber music is certainly nothing to sneeze at, and Harbach continues to impress with her fluent compositional craft in these works.

The opening Seventh Symphony is subtitled "O Pioneers," and is intended as a paean to the settlers of the American West. Like Hindemith's symphony *Mathis der Maler*, Harbach's work is an adaptation of her eponymous opera, based on the Willa Cather novel, the plot of which is summarized in the notes. Briefly, it deals with a Swedish immigrant family's trials and tribulations as they settle into the fictitious town of Hanover, Nebraska. Three scenes in the opera lend their titles to the three brief movements of this work (the entire symphony lasts only 15 minutes). Despite the conflict and anguish in the plot of the opera, I hear very little but sunny optimism in the music, along with the expected "open" sonorities that are often used by composers to depict the American West. The piece is pleasing and effective, and often quite dramatic, even if it is not particularly profound in its musical aesthetic, surely located at the antipodes of the world of Mahler.

Harbach's Eighth Symphony is subtitled "The Scarlet Letter," and is (as you'd expect) based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel—one of my favorites of those I was required to read in my 11th-grade English class about 50 years ago. The three movements are named after the three main characters of the novel: Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingsworth, and Arthur Dimmesdale. The opening of the symphony sets the tone of the novel dramatically, with a powerful five-note

timpani figure portraying Hester's indecision over the choices she faces over the progression of her life. Other themes describe her solace, the revenge of her husband (using menacing figures in bassoons and brass), and the struggles of the ordained minister Dimmesdale, for the conflict between his faith and his actions. This conflict is represented by the alternation of major and minor sonorities and tonal centers. In terms of tension and depth, this symphony forms a significant contrast with the preceding one, and I believe it to be the stronger work for those reasons. Indeed, this work is a major symphonic statement by a composer whom I would consider significant simply on the basis of this one work. My only wish is that the work could have been extended a bit. The fine ideas she employs could have been worked out and expanded such that the work could have easily been double the length than it is (a bit more than 14 minutes). Nevertheless, this is my favorite work among the four fine symphonic statements on this CD.

Symphony No. 9 bears the subtitle "Celestial Symphony," and is synthesized from the composer's silent film score *The Birth, Life and Death of Christ.* It opens with a flowing figuration above which soaring lines in the violins float to represent the Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary as she was informed that she was to give birth to the Messiah. "Celestial Vaults," the second movement describes Saint Veronica, who was said to be so moved with pity as she saw Jesus carrying his cross that she gave him her veil to wipe his face, his image being transferred to it as he used it. This event is not found in Scripture, but has come down through the centuries as part of the tradition of the Catholic Church. The movement is gently lyrical and full of pathos. The final movement, "Temptations," refers to the three temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness as he was about to begin his earthly ministry of preaching the gospel. A rhythmic figure in the cellos suggests the struggle and deprivation that Jesus faced in these temptations involving the physical (turning stones into bread to satisfy his hunger), the spiritual (casting himself down from a high place knowing that angels would rescue him), and the vocational (foregoing the agony of the cross by worshiping the devil). The angels who ministered to Jesus after he resisted these temptations are represented by flutes. There is a fair amount of dissonance in this movement, but tonality triumphs in the end, even as the Savior did.

The CD concludes with "Symphony for Ferguson," Harbach's 10th essay in the genre, and reflects the composer's attempt to deal with the social unrest in the aftermath of the 2014 death of a young African-American man at the hands of a policeman in Ferguson, Missouri. The first movement, "Heroes," celebrates the men and women who have come forward to help in times of crisis (not just this one), and draws on the spiritual *Wade in the Water*, and American patriotic songs, including *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* and *Chester* for its inspiration. Added to these well-known tunes is one that Harbach borrowed from her own music, "Johnny, You're No Hero" from her musical *Booth.* The opening of the work is powerful and tumultuous, with dramatic lines in trombones and brass surrounded by swirling figurations in the strings. At the conclusion of the movement, she cleverly combines these tunes into a rather intricate tapestry. "The Fallen" follows as the centerpiece of the Symphony, and is a somber movement dedicated to all of those who have lost their lives through war or injustice. The composer has sought herein to produce a *chiaroscuro* effect through the contrasts in this movement; she has done so successfully through shifts in texture, instrumentation, and counterpoint. The symphony closes with "Together in Harmony," an expression of Harbach's hope for peace among nations and individuals. Fanfare-like figuration in the brass and timpani opens the movement, which weaves together several

contrasting ideas (including a syncopated version of W. C. Handy's *St. Louis Blues*) in pleasing and convincing fashion.

David Angus and the London Philharmonic Orchestra do a splendid job in bringing these pieces to life. Pacing and accuracy of ensemble are especially noteworthy attributes of these premiere recordings. As much as I like these works, especially the Eighth Symphony, I should note that they would better called suites than symphonies, as there is not very much of what most auditors would consider symphonic form and development in them. This is not a criticism, but only an observation that might better suggest to *Fanfare* readers what these pieces are all about.

David Deboor Canfield, Fanfare Magazine. March/April 2017

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The symphony as a form continues to attract composers of all sorts, and Barbara Harbach (born 1946) seems especially interested in it, having composed 10 symphonies to date. The four most recent (2014-2015) are heard in world première recordings on a new MSR Classics CD featuring the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus, and all four are well-constructed and show considerable ability in handling large orchestral forces. Harbach appears frequently on this label – this is the 11th CD devoted to her music and the third focused on her orchestral works – and inevitably shows a sure sense of style, and comfort with modern compositional techniques without slavish devotion to them. The four symphonies here are four cases in point: each is in the traditional… three movements, each lasts 15 to 20 minutes, each is programmatic, and each sounds different from the others but recognizable as Harbach's for those familiar with her style. The title of No. 7 ("O Pioneers!") inevitably recalls Copland, but the music does not: the work includes material from Harbach's 2009 opera based on Willa Cather's novel, and manages to evoke an earlier time and place in America without sounding particularly derivative.

No. 8 ("The Scarlet Letter") is a three-movement portrait of characters in Hawthorne's novel… "Chillingworth" rendered with suitable emotional turmoil…

No. 9 ("Celestial Symphony") is drawn from Harbach's music for the silent film, *The Birth, Life, and Death of Christ,* and is the most interesting symphony here: dramatic and heartfelt as appropriate, with a strong sense of form that comes through even if a listener does not know the titles of the movements ("The Annunciation," "Celestial Vaults" and "Temptations").

No. 10 is a strictly political work ("Symphony for Ferguson"), commissioned after riots that occurred after a petty criminal was shot and killed, possibly without sufficient justification, by a police officer…

Overall, though, I enjoyed this release. Barbara Harbach is a composer who follows her own muse, and I continue to admire her originality.

INFODAD.com February, 2017

http://transcentury.blogspot.com/2017/02/handling-orchestra.html

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Four succinct, three-movement symphonies, unashamedly programmatic and neo-romantic in style. The 7th paints musical portraits of three characters from Harbach's opera 'O Pioneers!' based on Willa Cather's novel of immigrant families in 1910 Nebraska, with themes of romance, tragedy and transformation. The first movement is heroic and conflicted, the second pastoral, the last transcends tragedy through the power of love. The composer's idiom is tonal, with a bracing, open-air Coplandish turn of phrase. The 8th is similarly structured around the principal characters of Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. A dramatic introduction leads to a depiction of the dignified, conflicted Hester, the sinister Chillingworth - "old-fashioned" musical gestures and restless, shadowy music; and the tormented Dimmesdale. The Celestial Symphony is based on material from Harbach's score for a silent film about the life of Christ. Serenity, joy, mystery and the drama of the temptations of Christ are depicted in vivid musical imagery. The 10th commemorates the tragedy of the city of Ferguson, MO. Spirituals, the Battle Hymn of the Republic, blues, rock and New Orleans jazz are woven into music of unrest, heroism and the hope for 'togetherness in harmony'. London Philharmonic Orchestra; David Angus.

Records International, January 2017,
https://www.recordsinternational.com/cd.php?cd=01S008

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This volume brings listeners up to date with Barbara Harbach's symphonic output. It features symphonies No. 7-10, composed between 2014 and 2015.

Harbach is an economical symphonist -- the works are uniformly short, focused, and efficiently orchestrated. All four symphonies follow a straight-forward 3-movement fast-slow-fast structure. Yet with all these constraints, Harbach shows a great deal of imagination and variety.

Symphony No. 7, "O, Pioneer" uses music from her opera of the same name. Harbach manages to evoke the great expanse of the Nebraska prairie without for a moment sounding like Aaron Copland. No mean feat.

I have to admit I didn't enjoy Symphony No. 8 "The Scarlet Letter" as much as the others. The three movements are character studies of Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingworth, and Arthur Dimmesdale. To my ears, only the middle movement, Chillngsorth captured the emotional turmoil of the character. The outer movements, though pleasant, weren't as engaging.

Symphony No. 9, "Celestial Symphony" also repurposes music from another source. This time, Harbach's score to the silent film "The Birth Life, and Death of Christ" (which I reviewed in its original form). The movie is a series of tableaux, and the original score for 13 instruments had a static quality to it. Recast in symphonic form, Harbach explores and more thoroughly develops her material. I think it's a successful reworking. The music sounds more dynamic, and the

enhanced instrumental palette allows for more nuanced musical expression.

The final work, "Symphony for Ferguson" fell just short of the mark, I think. Though I would be hard-pressed to suggest a composer who might come closer. Harbach, a member of the University of Missouri-St. Louis faculty, was commissioned to write a symphony of healing in the wake of the Ferguson riots. The music needed to speak to all the citizens of the community. Harbach wove together tunes such as "Wade in the Water," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and 'Chester," to suggest that blending of cultures. While skillfully written, to my ears it just sounded like a medley rather than a work of great emotional appeal. Even the final movement, adopting the jazzy "St. Louis Blues," didn't quite gel for me.

Overall, though, I enjoyed this release. Barbara Harbach is a composer who follows her own muse, and I continue to admire her originality.

Ralph Graves, Finding Beauty in Ephermeral, January, 2017

http://the-unmutual.blogspot.com/2017/01/barbara-harbach-orchestral-music-iii.html

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In an interview with Barbara Harbach printed in Fanfare 35:6, I stated that her music “speaks with an open honesty that is rare in music today.” If there is a connecting thread between these four symphonies, then that is it, a refreshing sense of freedom to speak the composer’s own truth. This is the third volume of orchestral music by Harbach on MSR Classics, and the 11th volume of her music on that label. The consistent high standard of Harbach’s music, coupled with her consistency of expressive means, is massively impressive.

A review of Volume I of Harbach’s orchestral music formed part of my interview, “Meeting Barbara Harbach,” in Fanfare 35:6; David DeBoor Canfield tackled Volume II as part of another interview feature in Fanfare 38:1. Now we come to Symphonies 7 through 10. The first thing to note is the standard of performance throughout. The London Philharmonic is going through something of a heyday these days, with much of the credit due to its current principal conductor, Vladimir Jurowski. The orchestra plays immensely responsively here under David Angus; there is a lovely sense of flow and inevitability to the slower sections of these works.

First up, then, the Seventh Symphony (2014), subtitled “O Pioneers!,” as the music is adapted from Harbach’s opera of that name set in 1910 Nebraska. Certainly the first movement, “Conflict,” sets up the atmosphere, with its resolute opening. While the music is intimately related to the characters (trombones representing the anger of a specific character, horns playing the melodic lines of another, for example) and a specific place in the opera (act II, scene 3) the innocent ear enjoys highly charged music of great power and concision. Harbach’s orchestration is worth studying, too; her textures are thick sometimes but never congested (this trait beautifully honored by MSR’s recording). The central movement, (“Now I see what cannot be”) is taken from the Trio in act II, scene 1, rising to an incredibly energizing setting of the anthem “O Pioneers.” The finale dwells on loss, and the closure of that loss. The LPO’s brass is particularly impressive (representing one character consoling another) as it dialogues with the woodwind and strings (representing the grieving person). Finally, the two coincide, in a moment of resolution and newly found hope beautifully realized by Harbach. She structures and balances the movement perfectly.

The Symphony No. 8 of 2014–15 is based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel The Scarlet Letter, consisting of portraits of three major characters (Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingworth, and Arthur Dimmesdale). In the first movement, Harbach's sweet, very characteristically American lyricism offers huge solace to the conflicts faced by the character of Hester, graphically depicted in sound. A portrait of evil in the shape of the character Chillingsworth, the second movement finds Harbach expertly painting with a dark palette, while the finale considers the eternal story of an ordained minister struggling with his past sins. Depicting scenes of confession on the scaffold, the music yet has rays of light, beautifully rendered here by the LPO's strings.

Moving now to music for silent film, the Ninth Symphony (2014) reworks music for the 1906 film The Birth, Life and Death of Christ. If forced to choose an outstanding offering from the four symphonies here, this is the one that would come out top. There is a glorious delicacy to the first movement ("The Annunciation"); after such magical writing, short brass fanfares announce the arrival of the Magi. The sense of time suspended in "Celestial Vaults" is simply beautiful. This central panel represents the miracle of Saint Veronica, who offered her veil to Christ while he was carrying the cross; as a result, Christ's face was imprinted on the material. There is a palpable sense of the hallowed here. The finale presents the trio of temptations offered to Christ by Satan. Particularly delightful is the triangle-halo on a lightly scored sequence that, as the booklet notes point out, seems to refer to a French Noël. Fairly obviously, this portrays the angels. Harbach's Ninth Symphony is an engaging, winning work that will doubtless gain her many more followers.

Finally, there comes the Symphony No. 10, "Symphony for Ferguson" (2015). Ferguson is a place situated in Missouri and the scene of a tragedy in 2014, a shooting that sent waves around the world. Using traditional American tunes (The Battle Hymn of the Republic, the spiritual Wade in the Water, William Billings's Chester) plus a melody from her musical Booth! ("Johnny, you're my hero"), Harbach weaves a strong tapestry. Widening the net, "The Fallen" second movement speaks to all those who lost their lives through war or injustice; the sound world is best described as shadowy. Finally, "Together in Harmony" is a plea for hope and peace. The ringing fanfares remind us what a tremendous brass section the LPO boasts these days. Harbach works with W. C. Handy's St. Louis Blues (the Handy original is wonderful, but interested listeners might wish to expand their horizons by exploring versions by Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, and Ella Fitzgerald). Harbach's handling of the blues tune is full of joy; this is a glorious way to close the disc.

All these are world premiere recordings; it is difficult to imagine finer, fresher versions though. Fascinating to see how opera, literature, film, and American music in its various forms all inform Harbach's completely unique and immensely strong style. The recording team deserve credit also, for the sound is first-rate, but no mention seems to be made of its members (or the recording venue) either in the booklet or online. Anyway, head over to msrcd.com/catalog/cd/MS1614 for a free streaming sample (the "Dimmesdale" movement from Symphony No. 8). This is fantastic, stimulating music by a master craftswoman.

Colin Clarke, *Fanfare* Magazine, Issue 40:5, May/June 2017

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Barbara Harbach has nurtured a career as a harpsichordist, organist and teacher, but she's also a prolific composer whose large canon includes, as of 2016, 10 symphonies. In this third volume of her orchestral music, subtitled 'Portraits in Sound', Symphonies Nos 7-10 are performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus.

Each of the symphonies has a moniker that evokes the descriptive nature of Harbach's concise, three-movement essays. No 7 is called *O Pioneers!* after the Harbach opera from which the music drawn. The central characters of Hester, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* are depicted in Symphony No. 8, while Symphony No. 9 (*Celestial Symphony*) is derived from a Harbach silent-movie score and Symphony No 10 (*Symphony for Ferguson*) commemorates the 2014 killing and riots in Ferguson, Missouri.

Harbach's writing hearkens back to Romanticism, with sweeping lyricism, richly layered lines and harmonies unfolding in a confident tonal style.

These symphonies are akin to mini-tone poems, full of thematic material that provides dramatic focus and summons an array of atmospheres and emotional states. In Symphony No 10 Harbach is especially effective employing beloved spirituals and popular tunes (including WC Handy's 'St Louis Blues') to drive home messages of courage and tolerance.

The cinematic nature of the symphonies receives lavish treatment by Angus and the London Philharmonic, who illuminate every detail in these skilfully crafted scores.
Harbach's music could hardly be better served.
Donald Rosenberg, Gramophone, April 2017

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I remember reading an interview with Barbara Harbach in Fanfare magazine in 1996, wherein the interviewer spent most of the time focusing on her keyboard talents, on her work to promote the music of female and other often neglected composers, and on other musical activities of hers. Very little attention was paid to Harbach the composer. But at the time she was certainly better known as a keyboard player, particularly on the organ and harpsichord. While that may still be true, I'll guess she would rather be known as a composer first.

Born in 1946, Harbach has produced a large output that includes many orchestral and keyboard works, musicals, choral and chamber music, film scores, sacred music and various others pieces. Listening to the music on this disc, I would surmise that Ms. Harbach is an incurable optimist, a composer who sees life in a nearly always positive way, generally not brooding over tragedy or personal disappointment, or at least expressing them in a less negative way.

Even in the Symphony #8, subtitled "The Scarlet Letter", the music depicting Roger Chillingworth (second movement), which you would expect to be dark and sinister, comes across as conflicted and disturbing alright, but it also has a sense of hope and brightness, at least to my ears. I think I can say that I have heard few composers who can match her beaming joy and almost unrelenting optimism. But, you ask,
does the plentiful happiness translate into something good?

If I can judge from the music on this CD, Harbach is not a composer of just passing interest but appears to offer substantial rewards. The works here are mostly a joy to listen to and I believe many people unfamiliar with her vast output may well want to sample some of it. She could serve for many as the antidote to the dark music of so many 20th and 21st century musical nihilists. Her compositions, at least on this disc, are generally upbeat, devoid of grand design, mostly light in mood, and straightforward and accessible. There are no pretenses here, the music

mostly avoiding complexity and generally not reaching to the depths of profundity. Stylistically, her works here are related to that of early to mid-20th century American composers, and at certain moments may call to mind such composers as David Diamond and Roy Harris, though her music is ultimately quite individual. Wind instruments, particularly brass, often carry the main line, and while thematic material can come across at times as somewhat threadbare, the various movements and the works themselves compensate in their brevity.

The Symphony #7, subtitled "O Pioneers", is in three movements and lasts fifteen minutes, pretty close to the length of each of the works here. Its music was derived from Harbach's opera, *O Pioneers! An American Opera*, and depicts several of its scenes. The symphony contains fine music in its uplifting manner, having a muscular, rugged character much of the time, but also conveying a sense of triumph and joy. Symphony #9, subtitled "Celestial Symphony", is another joyous work, this time of religious inspiration as it was adapted from Harbach's score for the film *The Birth, Life and Death of Christ*. This is another fine effort, lighter though than you would expect for a work on such serious subject matter. "The Scarlet Letter" Symphony may be the strongest composition on the disc: it's quite probing in its depictions of Hawthorne's three main characters (Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingworth, and Arthur Dimmesdale) and has a weightier expressive language than the other works.

The first three symphonies on the disc are quite compelling works then, but I believe the longest work (nearly nineteen minutes), the Symphony #10, subtitled "Symphony for Ferguson"… is making a sincere attempt here to heal wounds opened by the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. She is also addressing issues relating to loss of life through war and injustice (second movement) and making a plea for peace and hope (third movement). Still, you have three rather fine works and in excellent performances by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the knowing baton of David Angus. The sound reproduction is vivid and powerful, and the album notes are very informative and highly detailed. If you're interested in very accessible contemporary orchestral music, this MSR Classics disc may be of strong interest to you.

Robert Cummings, CLASSICAL NET, May 2017

http://www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/m/msr01614a.php

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The cause of American composer Barbara Harbach was strongly promoted on this site by the late Bob Briggs. After his death, reviews became less common, though always positive. When this release appeared on the review list, I decided it was time that our readers were reminded of her name and music.

The Connecticut-based label, MSR Classics, has been a staunch supporter of Harbach: this is the label's eleventh release, and the third in the series of orchestral works (Volume 1); there is also one titled Music for Strings (review). Harbach is a prolific composer, educator, concert harpsichordist and organist, whose music is firmly tonal and in the tradition of Copland in Appalachian Spring mode, without sounding like the great man. Much of her work is programmatic, as illustrated by these four symphonies, all of which have a story to tell.

The sub-title for the release - Orchestral Portraits - is a more accurate depiction of these works than the term "symphony", which suggests something rather more formal in structure. One might

call these four pieces tone poems. Whatever they may be called, the pleasure in spending an hour in their presence is undeniable.

Symphonies 7 & 9 reuse previous Harbach compositions. The former uses three songs from her opera of the same name, based on a Willa Cather novel, using the music to paint portraits of some of the characters. The feel of the music is certainly broad and expansive, matching the Nebraska setting…exceptionally well-crafted and very enjoyable.

The ninth symphony is an arrangement of excerpts of music from a score written for a St Louis screening in 2014 of a 1906 silent movie, *The Birth, Life and Death of Christ*. The three movements portray episodes in the life of Jesus. While the music is again very enjoyable…Some of the brass and percussion elements reminded me of Alan Hovhaness, but that may have been a subconscious connection because of a similarly titled symphony of his.

Symphony 8 is based on the famous novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the three movements are portraits of three of the main characters Hester, Chillingworth & Dimmesdale. I haven't read the story, so I can only go by the comprehensive booklet notes, in terms of how the music matches the personalities. I can report that it certainly does, and is a darker work than the seventh and ninth.

Symphony 10 was inspired, if that is the correct word, by the terrible events in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Should you need reminding, they were the shooting of a black man by a police officer, and the subsequent days of riots. Again Harbach uses some previous material, but in this case, it is only a theme from her opera *Booth!*, about the shooting of Abraham Lincoln. There are also references to a spiritual "Wade in the water" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". The work is stirring, but not angry; apparently, it was Harbach's way of coming to terms with the events in her home state. Of the four works, it is my favourite.

MSR Classics have used the London Philharmonic for each of the three orchestral works' volumes, an interesting choice - but certainly one that guarantees excellent performances. As I have noted, the notes are very good; they are written in the third person, but with a detail that suggests substantial input from the composer.
Sound is equally good.

If you enjoy contemporary works with tunes, and do not require to be drawn into complex musical arguments, then you should investigate Barbara Harbach's well-crafted music.
***David Barker*, Music Web International**
http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2017/May/Harbach_orchestral_v3_MS1614.htm

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Barbara HARBACH: Orchestra Music III, Portraits in Sound – London Philharmonic Orchestra/ David Angus – MSR Classics MSR 1614, 62:54 [Distr. by Albany]

This recording of Symphonies 7, 8, 9, and 10 is the latest volume in a series devoted to the prolific American composer, Barbara Harbach. She is fortunate to have the London Philharmonic in this project; they play splendidly. This is unabashed neo-tonal music, full of good spirits and

straightforward melody. Even the darker music such as the Ferguson Symphony is relatively upbeat. These are short symphonies, with concise movements that present a central idea, briefly develop it, then move to a brisk conclusion. Everything is superbly orchestrated, and is aided by a transparent recording. If the music doesn't cut deep, it does supply an agreeable experience.

The Pioneers Symphony is spacious and lucid, like a film score, building to a jubilant coda. Hester in the Scarlet Letter Symphony is depicted as a sensual, radiant character, brought to life with bright percussion and lively timpani; Chillingworth is appropriately austere, painted mainly with lower brass; Dimmesdale is forceful and charismatic, invested with a driving rhythm and a dark undercurrent. The Celestial Symphony is what the title sounds like: heavenly music with swirling strings and soaring brass. The first movement has a shining fugue; an even brighter one soars through the finale, showing off the airy virtuosity of the strings. Ferguson is more urgent, with a striking quotation from Wade in the Water one more instance of a spiritual skillfully used in a symphony. The finale opens with a fanfare before developing an imaginative riff on St Louis Blues. The brass are wonderful here. A growling tuba introduces a New Orleans style brass section adding an additional drum set and electric guitar the splashiest music here.

American Record Guide May/June 2017
https://docplayer.net/63445808-American-record-guide.html

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Barbara HARBACH: Orchestra Music III, Portraits in Sound – London Philharmonic Orchestra/ David Angus – MSR Classics MSR 1614, 62:54 [Distr. by Albany] **:**

Volume 11 in this impressive series proves a winner

This is the eleventh volume of MSR's extraordinary commitment to Barbara Harbach, polyglot extraordinaire, by the looks of her resume one of the busiest musicians on the planet, wonderful keyboardist (organ and harpsichord), and a very fine composer. In fact, her prolific output defies all normal ideas of time management, and she must spill out music like Mozart with a never-ending sense of inspiration.

I am happy to report that most the works on this symphonies disc fall into the "excellent" category, and are quite moving and enthralling. Her style doesn't vary too much—I can't see her music existing without other of the "American" school like Harris and Thomson—but her ideas, in many instances, bolster the exceptional construction and immersion into a truly tonal idiom that is her hallmark.

"O Pioneers", her *Seventh Symphony*, is taken from her opera of the same name. The three movements are based on three songs portraying the four main characters of Willa Cather's novel. "The Scarlett Letter" is her *Eighth Symphony*, an original work based also on the main characters of Hawthorne's masterpiece. Both symphonies share a similar tone, with the *Eighth* a magnificent example of character-based tone painting, evocative orchestration, and moving melodic ideas.

Harbach penned a film score *The Celestial Symphony* based on a 1906 silent movie, "The Birth, Life, and Death of Christ". The three movements "Annunciation", "Celestial Vaults" (reflecting on St. Veronica) and "Temptations" (three temptations that Satan offered Christ before his crucifixion) are drawn from the inner depths Harbach undoubtedly feels from all her years involved with sacred music. Having not seen the film I cannot comment on the efficacy of the visual/ aural experience, but the music as it stands is most attractive and evocative.

Her *10th Symphony*, "Ferguson", is titled after the 2014 Ferguson, Missouri mess that received worldwide attention. Not living in St. Louis—and working there, as Harbach does—the immediacy of emotion and response no doubt eludes me, and I can see why an artist in that sort of highly-charged environment might feel the need to comment on current events. And to her credit she does not take sides or enter the purely political aspects of the event…
for this is a very fine disc with some wonderful music that should assuage any concerns about Harbach's muse—a very active, intelligent, and moving one. The London Phil plays with passion and energy in a wonderfully resonant recording.
Steven Ritter, Audiophile Audition ~ 2017

Barbara Harbach as Performer 2007- present

ANNA BON DI VENEZIA
Six Sonatas for Harpsichord, Opus 2
MSR 1241

Anna Bon di Venezia
Six Sonatas for Harpsichord, Op. 2
Barbara Harbach, harpsichord

Sonata I in G Minor, Sonata II in B-Flat Minor, Sonata III in F Major, Sonata IV in C Major, Sonata V in B Minor, Sonata VI in C Major

Anna Bon di Venezia is a somewhat mysterious figure -- very little is known about her, save that she, along with her parents (a stage manager and an opera singer) were hired by Count Esterhazy, where (presumably) they worked under his Kappellmeister, Franz Joseph Haydn.

Anna Bon published a set of flute sonatas, a set of keyboard sonatas, a set of trio sonatas before marrying and apparently retired from music.

The harpsichord sonatas, published in 1757, are fascinating. To my ears, they sound similar in style to the ones Haydn wrote around the same time. These are short, straight-forward works that are charming in their simplicity. Barbara Harbach performs them with delicacy and authority, bringing out the beauty and elegance of Bon's carefully crafted melodies.

These works, I think, compare favorably to contemporaneous sonatas by more famous composers. Recommended to anyone interested in early classical music.
WTJU Classical Comments Ralph Graves, 2014

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Anna Bon di Venezia, for some reason, is the accepted form of the name of a female Italian composer known in the eighteenth-century as Anna Bon. Daughter to itinerant actors, Bon entered the Ospedale Della Pietà in Venice as student at the tender age of four. Antonio Vivaldi, who from 1705 had led the Ospedale to its greatest glories, had just died in disgrace in Vienna. It is a pity he wasn't able to stick around long enough to witness the developing talents of Miss Bon; in terms of sheer precociousness, she must have been among the most amazing prodigies in history - up there with Mozart and Arriaga. Bon's Six Sonatas for Harpsichord Opus 2, printed when she was between the ages of 17 and 19, clearly attests to her talents, which register to the ear not as the products of an eager, bright and enthusiastic teenager but that of an experienced, seasoned and accomplished musician with a unique voice.

Bon's six harpsichord sonatas have been recorded before, both individually as part of collections and, once, as a complete set in 1995 for the Belgian Pavane label by Paule van Parys. It would be unfair to deride Parys' effort, as it was pioneering and has its own virtues; however, it is difficult to overlook the moments of hesitance and cautiousness in her interpretation that suggests lack of complete familiarity with the material. This is not an issue for harpsichordist Barbara Harbach, as she has edited these works for Vivace Press and knows every twist and turn in these scores. Harbach utilizes a beautiful sounding Willard Martin instrument fashioned after a French double manual harpsichord built by François Blanchet; it suits the music perfectly, and Harbach intelligently works with the Martin's various registrations to keep the program overall varied in sound. Harbach also provides a booklet note that makes an exegesis of some of the many unusual features in Bon's harpsichord music; it is tempting to discuss them here, but not wise to do so in the course of a short review. Suffice it is to say that she was familiar with the work of Domenico Scarlatti, whose harpsichord sonatas began to appear in print right around the time she was born. She adopts some aspects of his binary form within movements, but tricks it out in a way that's intriguing; the recapitulation seldom comes around as hard in Bon as it can in Scarlatti, and there is no one method that Bon employs to make the repeat less conspicuous,
but her strategies always work.

Releases like MSR's Anna Bon di Venezia: Six Sonatas for Harpsichord, Opus 2 may lead some old school grumblers to say, "We are only reviving such fourth tier composers because they are women." Let them grumble away; were Bon male, those grumbling would have no trouble accepting her as a significant and substantive transitional figure from the Baroque-to-Classical era, comparable to Johann Schobert. Those who enjoy and appreciate eighteenth-century keyboard music will certainly not fail to treasure this MSR release.
All Music Guide Review, May 2008

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After she married an Italian tenor, the composer evidently gave up music.
You hear little about women composers in the 19th century, and this one only lived to be 27. Her parents were also musicians and they all worked for a time at the court of Prince Esterhazy. Her Op. 2 Six Sonatas for Harpsichord was published in l757 and mix the German style of music with Italian rhythms and attitude. They seem to bridge the distance between Baroque music and the Classical period. After she married an Italian tenor, the composer evidently gave up music, so

these sonatas and a work for flute is all we have from her.

All the sonatas have three movements, with slow center movements full of interesting harmonies. The opening Allegro of the Sixth Sonata is a bouncy treat, and its final *Minuet and Variations* movement is at 6:15 the longest movement in any of the six sonatas.

We just marveled at the wonderful compositions of Barbara Harbach and here she is back on the performer's bench with a unique program of harpsichord sonatas. She has long advocated women composers, both historic and new, so this CD is very understandable. Her instrument was built in l989 and is a copy of an 18th century French double-manual harpsichord. Its sound is perfect for the sonatas and well recorded too.

John Sunier, Audiophile Audition, 2008

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Forgotten Baroque composer *Rediscovered!*
MSR Classics MS-1241

Anna Bon di Venezia (ca.1740-?), as her name implies, was a native of Venice, the daughter of an opera singer and a stage designer. She moved with her parents to the court of Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy (who was later Haydn's patron). In 1757 she published her **Opus 2, Six Sonatas for Harpsichord**, dedicated to a Princess Ernestina of Sachsen-Weimar. Her last known date is 1767, the year of her marriage to an Italian tenor. After that she disappears from recorded history. Presumably, raising children and managing a household was her full-time occupation. Without a career to promote, there was no further need to write or publish music. Since no one in the 18th century wrote music without an eye to its market value that was the last the world heard of Anna Bon di Venezia, *virtuosa di cembalo*.

Until just recently, that is. American harpsichordist Barbara Harbach, a modern day *virtuosa* in her own right, published Anna Bon's Opus 2 in a Vivace Press Edition. She makes a further argument for these neglected works with sparkling performances on the present MSR release. As befitted a published work with a princely dedicatee, Bon's sonatas were learned enough to win the acclaim of connoisseurs and sufficiently varied and charming to please every music lover. Fetching new ideas greet the listener at every turn in elegant, refined music that was on the leading edge of the transition between the Baroque and Classical eras.

All six sonatas are in three movements, in the Italian style with some considerable variety in treatment. Sonata V in B Minor, for instance, begins with a stately, dramatic French overture. Her slow movements, typically marked *Andante* or *Andantino*, are somewhat livelier than usual, though the expressive *Adagio* in III and the solemn *Largo* in IV with its melody based on four-voice chords contrasted with octave passages, are notable exceptions. The Minuet of Sonata III in F Major has a trio in the parallel minor, rather avant-garde for its day. Through the Opus 2 set, Bon makes striking use of all the techniques at her disposal, including arpeggios, trills, suspensions, grace notes, tremolos, and diminished chords.

In Barbara Harbach's hands, these delightful works spring to new life. Her performances sparkle with fresh appeal, which is particularly noticeable in such moments as the *Allegro* of Sonata V that concludes in exciting fashion with perpetual 16th notes and rising arpeggios.

New Classik Reviews , Atlanta Audio Society, 2008

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Even among the ranks of obscure women composers, Anna Bon – who listed herself in her folios as Anna Bon di Venezia – is one of its greatest Mysteries. Her parents were, apparently, successful theater people, her mother as an opera singer and her father as a stage designer. All three were employed by Prince Nikolaus von Esterhazy, who probably promoted the publication of her three folios of music. These six sonatas, her op. 2, is the middle set of these. The album's notes, apparently written by Harbach, give her date of death as 1767 only because that's the last year anything was known of her, but she was only 27 years old at the time and the"last thing known about her" was her marriage to an Italian tenor.

I tend to cut women composers of any ear before the end of the 19th century some slack for several reasons. With few exceptions (Fanny Mendelssohn probably being the most famous), they seldom had access to the same first-rate musical education accorded to men. Their music was expected, by nature of their being women, to be more elegant, more decorous, less cutting-edge than their male counterparts. And, of course, they seldom had access to music publishers unless they were truly exceptional figures of their age (such as Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre) or, in Anna Bon's case, a powerful and high-ranking mentor.

What strikes the ear of the listener in these works is not much in the way of innovation or brilliance so much as a liveliness of spirit and a certain playfulness that I found charming. The left-hand accompaniments are particularly varied, ranging from single-note ostinatos to fully developed countermelodies in the style of Purcell or Handel. There are many unexpected flurries of 16ths and triplets in the right hand that are sometimes unexpected. Occasionally Bon ends her movements in the low range of the keyboard, introduces false recapitulations, or uses diminished chords or deceptive cadences. The problem, as I heard it, is that there is a great deal of repetition in these short works, but who knows how she might have developed? It's important to remember that when she published these sonatas, she was only 17 years old! Aside from a transcendent genius like Mozart or Mendelssohn, how many 17-year-old composers do you know who could write pieces this good, even with their conventionalities?

The first one, the Sonata in G Minor, is in many ways the weakest and most repetitive, but the others all have interesting moments. More important, Barbara Harbach is a splendid musician whose commitment to excellence as a performer informs all of this music with not only Bon's evident spirit of fun but also her contrasting moods of reflection and energy. In other words, she has taken fairly ordinary music with a few extraordinary moments and made it all sound rather excellent by virtue of her interpretive brilliance and total identification with the material. Just listen to the way she plays the closing Allegro of Sonata No. 2, for instance, or the unusual dragging sound she imparts to the Adagio of sonata No. 3 (played with the damper on the strings of her instrument). This is extraordinary harpsichord playing by any measure. I would buy this recording just to hear this woman play, almost regardless of musical quality, because she

elevates every note and phrase into a realm beyond the written score. The recorded sound, close to the instrument but not unduly magnified, gives you the aural pleasure of being in her kitchen, so to speak.

This album is a triumph for Harbach and a vindication of her decision to record these works. I'm usually a sucker for good harpsichord-playing anyway, so for me to hear an artist of this high a caliber overcomes any reticence I may have towards the material.

~ Lynn René Bayley, FANFARE, September/October 2008

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Women composers of the past and present have no better friend than Barbara Harbach. She discovers, edits and publishes their music on Vivace Press Editions. Some she records, as a pianist, organist and harpsichordist. Finally, she contributes to their number by being an active composer herself. She has a nose for unearthing female composers of the utmost present obscurity. Though reasonably familiar with music of the eighteenth century, I recognize scarcely any of the names on the list of composers Harbach has published, including Anna Bon di Venezia. Harbach tells us what little can be discovered about her. She was born c.1740 and married an Italian tenor in 1767, after which there is no further trace of her. Harbach reminds us that women composers of the time customarily abandoned their vocation after marriage. Anna came from a musical/theatrical family, presumably originating in Venice. Her mother was an opera singer and her father a stage designer. At one point she and her parents were all hired by Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy. The dedication of the sonatas on this recording also refers to her being a chamber musician of the Margrave of Brandenburg.

At the age of 16 she published some flute sonatas, of which Harbach speaks highly. The present recording features her second publication: a set of six harpsichord sonatas from 1757 dedicated to Ernestina Augusta Sophia Principessa di Sachsen Weimar. The sonatas are characteristic works of the transition period between the late Baroque and Classical periods. Stylistically, they seem half-way between the sonatas of Marcello and those of Galuppi (if that helps anyone). The emphasis is generally on grace and charm. Although there are movements of some nobility, such as the French overture-style opening movement to the Fifth Sonata, these have more than a hint of furrow-browed earnestness. For all her sparkle and energy, Anna Bon seems not to have a gift for melodic invention. The only memorable tune in the series is the concluding *Allegro assia* to the Fourth Sonata and this, although Harbach makes no mention of it, is clearly based on the aria 'Sempre in contrasti' from Pergolesi's *La serva padronna*.

Harbach plays with considerable skill, wit and obvious affection for young Anna's music. The instrument, which seems very closely miked, is a modern copy of an eighteenth-century double manual designed by Blanchet. The disc contains no information on the pitch or tuning system adopted. This is a shame, because it is one of the strangest-sounding harpsichord recordings I have heard in a long time. It has a tangy vibrancy, which while not unpleasant is not always easy on the ear. The whole recital reminded me somewhat of a good-quality lemon sorbet –

deliciously frothy, at once sweet and tart, but not exactly nourishing.
Andrew O'Connor, International Record Review, 2008

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I first heard the music of Anna Bon some ten years ago when, in a music shop in Arezzo, I stumbled across a CD (Mondo Musica MM96006) of her Opus 1, *VI Sonata da camera, per il Flauto Traversiere e Violoncello o Cembalo,* played by Claudio Ferrarini (flute), Andrea Corsi (bassoon) and Francesco Tasini (harpsichord). That collection was published in 1756, when Bon was only sixteen. All of the sonatas are in three movements, full of florid melodic lines above a slowly changing harmonic bass. While hardly revolutionary or profound, the Opus 1 sonatas are striking evidence of considerable musical precocity. The six harpsichord sonatas which constitute Bon's Opus 2 are more impressive still and, stylistically speaking, more forward looking – and, remember, their composer was probably only seventeen at the time.

Details of Bon's life are somewhat sketchy. On the title pages of both the flute sonatas and the harpsichord sonatas (published as *Sei Sonate per il cembalo)* she is described as "*Anna Bon di Venezia".* She was probably the daughter of Girolamo Bon, a Venetian architect, painter and theatre designer and his wife, Rosa Ruvinetti, an opera singer originally from Bologna. Girolamo Bon worked in Germany (by turns in Berlin, Dresden, Potsdam, Frankfurt and Bayreuth) between 1746 and 1761. Anna Bon's first two publications appeared from a press in Nuremberg. She appears to have married an Italian tenor called Mongeri and, in 1767, to have been resident with him in Hildburghausen in Thuringia, central Germany. After the harpsichord sonatas she published only *VI Divertimento per due flauti e cembalo*, 1759. The present CD gives 1767 as the date of her death, but on what evidence is not clear. She disappears from the records around then, but she may well have continued to live beyond that date, without contributing to the world of music. Or, just possibly, there is work yet to be discovered in manuscript.

The six harpsichord sonatas - some of them would work quite well, I suspect, on the fortepiano - are all in three movements. Barbara Harbach puts the matter rather well in her booklet note, when she writes that "the pieces are a mixture of the German musical style and Italian rhythm and temperament". Several of the slow movements – such as the andantino in Sonata I – have considerable elegance about them; the adagio of Sonata III is emotionally expressive in a way that reaches well beyond the Opus 1 Flute sonatas. The gallant is infused with anticipations of later developments. Bon's music here seems to claim for her a place amongst the musicians of what one might, at the cost of some simplification, describe as the gradual shift from the musical paradigms of the baroque to those of early classicism.

Bon's formal invention is considerable and various. There are movements in simple binary form, there are movements built around variations; some movements are ternary in structure, some are through composed. Barbara Harbach's playing complements such variety in the well judged use which she makes of a wide range of registrations. The instrument she plays is a copy, made in 1989 by Willard Martin, of a two manual harpsichord made, in eighteenth century Paris, by François Blanchet – and what a nice range of thoroughly musical sounds it makes! Player and instrument bring out the dramatic dimensions of some of Bon's music – as in the allegro moderato which opens Sonata V, full of unexpected and expressive pauses, rich chords and

dotted rhythms. Like much else on the CD it persuades one that a good deal was lost when – presumably – Bon swapped the life of composition for life as a married woman.

Clearly and brightly recorded - but not overly so - this makes a very persuasive case for the precocious musical virtues of the young Anna Bon and will surely interest and give pleasure to all lovers of the harpsichord tradition. The 'feminist' reclaiming of lost writers, composers, painters etc. has sometimes involved some over-generous aesthetic judgments. Bon needs no special allowances – this is fine music.

Music Web International, Glyn Pursglove, 2008

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Description: A few of this set of sonatas have appeared on anthology discs or mixed with the composer's flute trio sonatas but this is the only available complete set. Their outer fast movements sparkle with Baroque technical display while the slow movements' interesting harmonies and pathos prefigure the early Classical style. Barbara Harbach (harpsichord). Records International specializes in bringing unusual repertoire to collectors of classical music.

Records International, 2008

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Anna Bon Di Venezia: Six Sonatas for Harpsichord, Opus 2 | *Barbara Harbach*

STYLE: "These inventive, charming [18th-century] sonatas for harpsichord give a glimpse of . . . the transition period from the Baroque to the Classical" (liner notes).

WORLDVIEW: That neither the age of a composer (Bon composed these sonatas in her teens) nor her obscurity (she vanishes from history in 1767) matter where music of genuine timelessness is concerned.

OVERALL QUALITY: Arresting. One needn't be a "feminist" in the contemporary sense to join Harbach in celebrating the women composers whose music she has made it her mission to rediscover.

Arsenio Orteza, World Magazine, 2008, Vol. 23, No. 14

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Precocious and Talented - Music by Anna Bon di Venezia - heard by RON BIERMAN

'... nuanced and cleanly articulated ...'

Many people (invariably male) point out that no female classical composer has ever reached top-ten status. Perhaps women, on average, don't have as much inherent ability to create memorable classical music as men do. Gasp! What did *he* say!? That old canard in our politically correct world?

Larry Summers, while President of Harvard University, speculated that women may not have as much aptitude for mathematics (often identified with music) as men do. He lost his job largely because of that controversial suggestion.

Don't fire me yet.

The admirable harpsichord pieces composed by the teenaged Anna Bon Di Venezia (1740-1767?) won't change the mind of a misogynist, but they do add weight to the argument that women, rather than lacking a talent for composition (or math), have been held back by insufficient training and opportunity in male-dominated professions. Would this have languished, unplayed for two hundred and fifty years, if it were Scarlatti's?

And what if this lovely piece could be attributed to one of Bach's sons?

Not that I'm claiming top-ten status for the very short list of compositions by Bon. The sonatas are often clever and delightfully melodic, but they are the work of a composer not yet fully developed. She overuses rhythmic and melodic repetition, and is sometimes harmonically predictable. That, not surprisingly, is most evident in the earliest sonata.

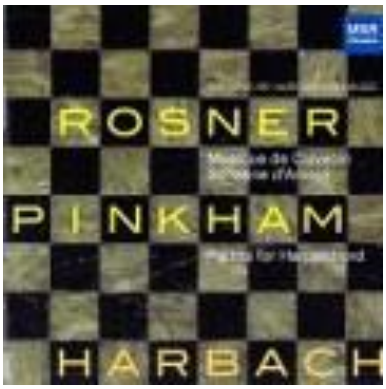
Harbach is a fine performer and a marvelous advocate for Bon (and other female composers). Her playing is nuanced and cleanly articulated with colorful use of different registrations. I don't care for a few of the choices. (Other reviewers have been uniformly complimentary.) One registration, in the mid and higher octaves, in spite of the clear quality of the instrument, sometimes reminds me of a toy piano.

Proponents of the male conspiracy theory (no doubt reinforced by my last comment) will note that the precocious and talented Bon disappeared from musical (and any other) history when she married in her late twenties. Today's female musicians are faring better. They are most clearly closing the gap in careers as soloists and members of symphony orchestras. While women continue to lag far behind as conductors and composers, chauvinists must be a bit less sure of their beliefs because of the likes of Tower, Higdon, Gubaidulina and Zwilich. Still not top ten, but among today's composers who is, or will be? And most people, male or female, will be surprised to learn that over two hundred female classical composers are represented on CD recordings. (See the Kapralova Society web site.)

Kudos to Barbara Harbach for bringing us this music. Think how much more has been lost, forgotten or never written because of the prejudices of ours and past societies.

Ron Bierman, Daily Classical Music, 2010

ROSNER/PINKHAM
Rosner ~ Musique de Clavecin & Sonatatine d'amour
Pinkham ~ Partita for Harpsichord
MSR 1443



ROSNER *Musique de Clavecin. Sonatine d'amour.* PINKHAM Partita for Harpsichord • Barbara Harbach (hpd)

This disc is the reissue of a 1990 CD that originally came out on the Gasparo label (I found only one link that dated Gasparo as far forward as 2005, but could not find conclusive evidence that the label is now defunct). Both are works by modern American composers for the harpsichord: one written essentially for the composer's own satisfaction to portray certain women he knew through his chess club correspondence or friends' wives, the other commissioned as background music for a public television show in Boston that never aired. Moreover, the styles of the two composers could not be more different. Rosner's music is eclectic but essentially tonal (in this case, however, most of it sounds very Eastern, like Turkish or Arabic music) while Pinkham's is decidedly atonal or at least multi-tonal. Also, Rosner's music is much more mood-oriented while Pinkham's is more complex in construction.

One of the more fascinating aspects of this CD is the manner in which Harbach, who is herself a composer, manages to elicit a tremendous range of moods from the harpsichord. Since the dynamic range of her instrument is rather circumscribed by comparison with a piano, she manages to do this by means of registration changes and inserting pauses in the musical line. I found her touch and style endlessly fascinating to listen to even though, as noted earlier, some of these passages were recorded a little too close to the mike for my taste. This is *not* easy listening music for your next Sunday brunch or "party with a purpose"; the music is often too complex, demanding of the listener, and even somewhat dark in mood to serve that purpose. All for the better, because this is one of the most fascinating discs ever to come my way for review.

Lynn René Bayley ***Fanfare* Magazine** **Mar/Apr 2013**

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Barbara Harbach plays music of Arnold Rosner (b. 1945) and Daniel Pinkham (1923-2006) on a large two-manual harpsichord by Eric Herz, after an instrument by 18th century builder Hass. Rosner's *Musique de Clavecin,* Op. 61 (1974) is a series of character pieces in baroque forms. The pieces are musical portraits of Rosner's female friends from the chess-playing community. His harpsichord writing shows a deep knowledge of the harpsichord literature. I enjoyed the textures he creates in the 'Noel' movement. The block chords and rhapsodic melody reminded me of Giovanni Picchi's keyboard dances from 16th Century Italy. Rosner's Sonatine D'Amour (1987) is lovely. The first movement, 'Le Troubadour', opens with harplike arpeggios. These serve as a prelude to a haunting modal melody that is, presumably, the voice of the troubadour. The imitations in the left hand are like the troubadour imitating his own vocal melodies with his harp.

Pinkham's Partita for Harpsichord (1964) is conceived on a grand scale. It is half an hour long and in six movements. Pinkham was fond of counterpoint, and several movements offer his take on classic polyphonic techniques like canon and fugue. Other movements are lyrical. The Andante, with its syncopations and melancholy minor seconds, is almost bluesy.

The second-to-last movement, a Scherzo and Trio, shows the harpsichord at its most sparkly. Pinkham wrote excellently for the harpsichord—which he played. Harbach plays with great conviction. People interested in 20th century harpsichord music will be overjoyed to hear this superb release.

Benjamin Katz, American Record Guide, May/June 2013

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Barbara Harbach has toured internationally as both a harpsichordist and organist. A body of work has been written for her and she has composed prolifically herself, including not only keyboard works but symphonies, operas and ballets. Living composer Arnold Rosner has written over 120 musical works during a 50-year period. Most are conservative and tonal, with *minimalism* used for decorative effects. He has a strangely idiosyncratic style, with such elements as the *harmonically roaming* polychoral influence of Henrich Schutz and the influence of Indian music. His Musique de Clavecin has five movements in a *Baroque* pattern, each inspired by a different woman he has known, including one titled "Les Suzannes" because several of his friends had married women named Susan.

Boston-based Daniel Pinkham, who died in 2006, studied with Walter Piston, Aaron Copland, Arthur Honegger and Samuel Barber. He studied harpsichord with Wanda Landowska and was a prolific composer, writing four symphonies, concertos, cantatas, oratorios, chamber operas, chamber music and 20 film scores. He had been Director of Music at Boston's King's Chapel. He wrote the *Partita for Harpsichord* while I was working at WBGH in Boston. It was supposed to be music for three half-hour films on modern art, which were never distributed. However, Pinkham also created the *Partita,* similar to those of J.S. Bach, with a series of ten movements of contrasting moods and technical devices. Barbara Harbach plays a large two-manual harpsichord

patterned after a German Baroque instrument, in which the 16 ft. stop is used frequently in the Rosner piece.

John Sunier, Audiophile Audition, 2014

THOMAS HAIGH ~Six Concertos for Harpsichord, Opus 12
MSR 1441

***Thomas Haigh, Six Concertos for Harpsichord, Opus 1*, MSR Classics 1441, 2012**
Concertos in D Major, B-Flat Major, A Minor, G Major, C Major, E-Flat Major

Czech Music Direct, London, England eNewsletter, 2013

Thomas Haigh - Six Concertos for Harpsichord

The chances are that Thomas Haigh (c.1769-1808) will not be very high on your musical radar? He studied with Haydn, during his first visit to London in 1791. By then Haigh would already be a published composer. His Six Concertos for Harpsichord, dedicated to the Countess of Mexborough, were published by Longman and Broderick in 1783. Most of these concertos are in a three movement, fast-slow-fast format. Barbara Harbach has chosen to play these delightful concertos without a backing from violin and cello. Her copy of an 18th century two-manual French double harpsichord by Francois Blanchet sounding great on these World Premiere recordings from American label MSR Classics.

More from Barbara Harbach
On a copy of a late Baroque era harpsichord designed by Hieronymus Albrecht Hass (1689-1752), Barbara Harbach creates a totally different sound-world.

Rosner's Musique de Clavecin's five movements are dedicated to friends; Pinkham's Partita for Harpsichord originated as the soundtrack for a TV documentary on the history of modern art. These are amazing pieces, with Barbara Harbach eliciting the most extraordinary sounds from a harpsichord that we have ever heard!

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Thomas Haigh (1769-c.1808) was an accomplished and well-regarded musician and composer in his day. When Haydn made his first trip to London in 1791, Haigh studied with him for a year.

He composed and published music in the popular forms of his day: chamber music, arrangements of Italian arias, and English songs. His six concertos are designed to be performed as keyboard solos or with the accompaniment of two violins and cello. Harbach performs them as solos. I did not miss the strings on account of the beautiful Willard Martin harpsichord she plays. It is a copy of an 18th Century French double manual harpsichord designed by Francois Blanchet. Well-recorded on this release, it has an incisive attack and a sweet, full decay.

Haigh's music is optimistic and lighthearted. He has a gentle sense of humor that shows itself in movements like the Allegro of Concerto No.3, where, in the opening, the usual eight-bar phrase is truncated into seven. Mozart uses the same device in his *Musical Joke*. But Mozart is much more of a Momus, delighting in pointed, intentional mockery. In the case of Haigh, I was sometimes not sure whether he intended to be funny. His music also shows some traces of his British ancestry.

The rondos of Concertos 2 and 6 sound like they could be English folk songs.
Barbara Harbach plays with gracious enthusiasm. Lovers of Haydn's music may be curious to hear how his gifted pupil put to use what must have been extraordinary lessons.
Benjamim Katz, American Record Guide, July/August 2013

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Here's the deal, in a nutshell—if your classical period collection is weak, meaning that it's loaded down with Haydn and Mozart with few, if any, recordings of the music of Gluck, Clementi, CPE Bach, Cherubini, Hummel, you get the idea—then you really needn't bother with the music of one Thomas Haigh (1769-1808)—a pianist, violinist, and composer who studied with Haydn during his first London sojourn, until you rectify the holes in your catalog. His main efforts were directed at music with keyboard of some sort, and these 1783"concertos" were published with the idea that two violins and cello could provide accompaniment if desired, though to be honest I really can't imagine, aside from sonority, what the additional instruments would add. This is basically non-developmental music with a lot of repetition and a heavy reliance upon melodic ideas, of which Haigh seems proficient. The keyboard is demanding with a lot of technical wizardry required, and four of the six are in three movements, the other two with two only. Haigh is a fine composer—and these are premiere recordings as well—but is not in the top rank by any means. Nonetheless, classical period aficionados will find much interest here.

Barbara Harbach sits atop these opuses with much authority and evident pleasure that comes across in these recordings. The sound of her Willard Martin 1989 harpsichord is rather bright and forceful, yet of a crystalline clarity. She projects Haigh's intention with panache and an effortless sense of style. There won't be a lot of these to come your way, so if the interest is there by all means go for it.
Steven Ritter, Audiophile Audition, 2013

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Czech Music Direct, London, England, February 2013 eNewsletter

Thomas Haigh - Six Concertos for Harpsichord

The chances are that Thomas Haigh (c.1769-1808) will not be very high on your musical radar? He studied with Haydn, during his first visit to London in 1791. By then Haigh would already be a published composer. His Six Concertos for Harpsichord, dedicated to the Countess of Mexborough, were published by Longman and Broderick in 1783. Most of these concertos are in a three movement, fast-slow-fast format. Barbara Harbach has chosen to play these delightful concertos without a backing from violin and cello. Her copy of an 18th century two-manual French double harpsichord by Francois Blanchet sounding great on these World Premiere recordings from American label **MSR Classics**.

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Among the plethora of musical genres during the 18th century, surely one of the least recorded today was that type of work meant solely to be performed in the salons of the well-to-do. Amateur music-making was certainly omnipresent, and publishers rushed to provide this stable and even growing market with works ranging from original chamber music to arrangements and parodies of larger compositions, such as operas or symphonies. Thousands of these were printed, and a number of composers easily made a nice tidy bit of change publishing for these consumers. Thomas Arne, for instance, wrote a number of keyboard concertos with ad libitum instrumental accompaniment. If you got 'em, use 'em; if not, no problem, since the pieces sound just as well with or without. Indeed, even major figures like Joseph Haydn were persuaded to get into the act, as seen by his arrangements of Scottish songs.

This brings us to one of these unknown figures and a pupil of Haydn, Thomas Haigh. Born in 1769 in London, he was probably trained as a violinist by local musicians. As a performer, he was generally present in the various orchestras around town and in the city of Manchester. While in the capital he came into contact with Haydn, to whom he dedicated six keyboard sonatas in 1796. Thereafter he became a popular publisher of light music, much of it based upon various songs and airs of the period. He died in April of 1808 in London, possibly while visiting his publishers. Harpsichordist Barbara Harbach, who herself is a well-known composer, has revived his earliest published works, a set of six concertos for this instrument from 1783, consituting Haigh's op. 1. It is dedicated to Elizabeth, Countess of Mexborough, whose portrait Joshua Reynolds painted a few years earlier. She had just been married, so perhaps this was a means of honoring that event by a young composer seeking some status in his field.

The set of six works originally was accompanied by a pair of violins and a bass line (read: violoncello), and while one might consider that any well-endowed household in London of the period could have scrounged up at least these forces, Haigh left nothing to chance by going the traditional route of making the accompaniment optional. This is the way that Harbach has chosen to perform them, but given their particular style, one doesn't miss much with the omission of the stringed instruments. (Of course, this also leaves an opening for some enterprising group to do them with.)

If there is an expectation that these six concertos will appear profound because of the ingenuity and depth of musical content, this ought to be discarded right now. These are meant only for entertainment, and they reflect this purpose exactly. There is no drama, no progressive technical advancements in form, structure, or harmony, no attempt at uniqueness. They are exactly what they purport to be: competent pieces with pleasant themes using some of the more recognizable

stylistic traits (say, from Mannheim or from resident composers in London like Johann Christian Bach), energetic rhythmic structures that tend to be either ostinatos or Alberti bass, and requiring a modest technical proficiency. They are also meant to be heard in genteel society. In other words, the concertos are pure entertainment music with no strings attached, which in turn makes them delightful and familiar. They are the comfort food of the 18th century.

With two exceptions, each follows the three-movement format, and only one, the A-Minor Concerto, begins with a rather solemn, if conventional dotted French overture slow movement. One finds embedded within every other opening movement some nice, predictable themes, devices such as unison rises or falls along the triad, a sort of maniacal ostinato in what are obviously ritornello sections, and little dynamic change or elaborate ornamentation. In the B♭- and E♭-Concertos, both the first and second movements begin with roughly the same musical material, providing a sort of mnemonic continuity. Where Haigh really shines, however, is in the rondos, each of which seems to be based upon popular song material. He has a positive knack for making these sprightly tunes earworms, with numerous internal variations that are remarkable for both variety and lack of pretense to something greater.

Harbach's playing is delightful, relentless, and in strict tempo when the music demands, backing off when her "solo" parts come in with their only slightly varied lines. She performs each of the fast movements energetically, and the slow movements with considerable grace. My only preference is that Harbach should have made more use of the dual keyboard and stops for the sake of contrast, but since one might not have expected the various original performers to have done this, it is not something worth more than a passing mention.

If you are looking for the power and depth of a Mozart, let this disc go. For anyone else who is, especially in the 18th-century sense, looking for sheer joyous entertainment, you should obtain this excellent disc.

Bertil van Boer, Fanfare Magazine, May/June 2013

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Thomas Haigh is not exactly a household name. The first time I heard about him was when I reviewed the disc "Haydn à l'anglaise" by Café Mozart. He arranged many compositions by Haydn, not only orchestral works including a selection of the symphonies, but also songs. When Haydn was in London, in 1791/92, Haigh was his student. He lived for some time in Manchester, then in London again, and also frequently performed in Ireland. The year of his death is not exactly known. The assumption that it was 1808 is probably incorrect as a considerable number of compositions from his pen were published in the next decade.

Haigh was a violinist and keyboard player; in most of his compositions the keyboard plays the main role. This disc includes the six concertos which were printed as his op. 1 around 1783. The title page says "Six Concertos for the Harpsichord or Piano Forte with Accompaniments for Two Violins, and Violoncello". Barbara Harbach has opted for a performance without string accompaniment. It is argued in the booklet that this was quite common at the time; the "Six Favourite Concertos" by Thomas Augustine Arne are mentioned, among others, as an example. I don't know whether composers themselves gave any indications that the instrumental parts could be omitted. According to *New Grove* only the first of Arne's concertos exists in a version without instrumental accompaniment. As I have no access to the scores of Haigh's concertos I

can't tell what exactly the two violins and cello add to the keyboard parts.

There is a notable difference in the keyboard part between those passages where it is joined by the strings and where it is on its own. In the *tutti* its range is limited, and there are many repeated figures and drum basses. In the *soli* the whole range of the keyboard is used. As is the case in so much keyboard music of the second half of the 18th century the right hand has most of the work to do. The left hand is often confined to the role of accompaniment. In *New Grove* the author of the article on Haigh refers to a musicologist who states that Haigh's music is comparable with that of Arne instead of Haydn. That is a fair comment: this is music in the galant idiom and has much in common with keyboard repertoire which was written some decades earlier.

This could also justify the use of a harpsichord rather than a fortepiano. Barbara Harbach has chosen a copy of a French harpsichord of the 18th century by François Blanchet. It has a penetrating sound which makes me wonder whether this was the best choice. The score includes indications in regard to dynamics, and that suggests that an English harpsichord from the late 18th century may be preferable. Several of these instruments have pedals which allow a change in dynamics during play.

There are plenty of nice ideas in these six concertos. Even so, I am not sure that it is a good idea to listen to them at a stretch, especially because there is quite a lot of repetition of figuration and chords. I wonder whether they would be less of a problem in a performance with string accompaniment. The strings could also provide the dynamic shading largely missing here, except the contrasts which are the result of the alternation between the two manuals.

The booklet omits any information regarding the time and venue of the recording. An internet search suggests this is a recent recording, but the tray mentions 1990 as the first year of production and refers to a "digital re-mastering". So this is a bit of a mystery. Anyway, it is certainly good to have these concertos on disc, and when consumed in limited quantity they will give much pleasure.

***Johan van Veen*, MusicWeb International, June 2013**

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Bach ~ *Art of the Fugue* and Pachelbel ~ *Canon, Chaconnes & Chorale Preludes*, 2-CD set, MSR 1442

Art of Fugue on the organ—always the best bet, and Harbach brings it home.

BACH: Art of Fugue, BWV 1080; PACHELBEL: Canon in D; Chaconne in F; 13 Chorale Preludes;
Chaconne in D – Barbara Harbach, organ****

Barbara Harbach, Professor of Music at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, has toured extensively as both concert organist and harpsichordist throughout the United States and Canada, and overseas in Belgium, Bosnia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Korea, Romania, Serbia and Russian Siberia. For this recording of the Bach she has chosen the Fisk Organ at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York, and for the Pachelbel the Fisk Organ at Slee Hall at the State University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.

The arguments over Bach's *Art of Fugue* will never end; what was it for, what instrument should it be played on, should it be completed, on and on it goes. As far as I am concerned, and despite the supposedly "didactic" nature of the work—which one could really claim about *all* of Bach's work to a certain extent, I think this was meant to be played. Bach's entire life testifies against any idea of time spent on a theoretical piece—especially of this size—simply as an academic exercise or a meditation on "pure" *fugal composition* for the sake of intellectual pondering. It would be the first time he ever did this if it proves to be the case. No; he meant the thing to be performed, for music was a palpable and resonating art form that demanded performance in Bach's view.

So which instrument? It seems to me obvious that the most practical and comprehensive instrument to be found for such an undertaking is right here on this recording. Only an organ can loftily cover all the demands of this piece, and it greatly expands the idea of *color* and *registration* within the confines of one person's imagination. I have heard many worthy

contenders on other instruments and for other combinations,
but the organ remains the most convincing.

What about the ending? This has perplexed artists for years, especially as the original manuscript version *does* have an ending, fully in place ten years before the published version. But evidence shows that Bach was not content with the work, revising it, and finally dying before the last *quadruple fugue* was completed. I have never found the newly-composed completions of this work to be satisfactory and the ending of a *chorale prelude* sounds out of place in a piece like this. The sudden cutoff, so profoundly a reminder of genius stopped, adds a pathetic dimension of great emotion and drama, and I am happy that Harbach does that here. This is an excellent reading of this work done with thoughtfulness and a lot of passion.

The Pachelbel works might seem a little superfluous in such a setting, but they actually serve as a nice come-down from the fugal complexities and utter perfection of the Bach. The famous *Canon* is nicely presented, not in the same contrapuntal web as the original scoring, and it proves very enjoyable even if it hardly replaces the original. The two *Chaconnes* are fine works, very involved and dramatic, the D-minor of an exquisite fiery sensibility that Pachelbel nonetheless keeps under control. He is best known for his *chorale preludes*, and these thirteen selections show why; an ever-inventive nature that is able to wed seasonal requirements to music that is fully descriptive and yet brilliantly independent make for enthralling listening on a number of levels. The tonal characteristics of the Fisk organ at Slee Hall offer lots of opportunities for experimentation and a truly crisp presentation of these works.

The engineers have captured both venues very well, and Harbach is to be
congratulated on a fine offering.
Steven Ritter, Audiophile Audition, 2014

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Barbara Harbach's organ performance (which includes 'Komm Süsser Tod', S 478 and a number of Pachelbel works) originally appeared on two separate Gasparo releases. (The Bach was reviewed in Mar/Apr 1991; I don't believe the original Pachelbel disc was reviewed.) Tempos are good; articulation is noticeable but not so ostentatious as to cause offense to listeners unconvinced by performance practice principles.

As for the Pachelbel, I should immediately mention that I wrote the program notes for the original release (one of my Eastman mentors, Alfred Mann, wrote the beautiful notes for the Bach). Harbach's selection includes an arrangement of the famous Chaconne in D, organ chaconnes in D minor and F minor, and 13 chorale preludes—this group includes two on 'Von Himmel Hoch', 'Nun Lob, mein Seel', 'Ach Herr, mich Armen Süder', 'Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland', 'Jesus Christus, under Heiland, der von Uns', 'Wenn wir in Höchsten Noten Sein', 'An Wasserfluüssen Babylon', 'Ich Ruf zu Dir', 'Ein Feste Burg', 'Wie Schön Leuchtet der Morgenstern', and 'Nun Freut Euch'. It's worth listing them because the ones here don't seem to duplicate any of the repertory on two of the most recent releases we've reviewed—Madsen on Raven (Sept/Oct 2011) and Payne (July/Aug 2000). I'd guess these works count among Pachelbel's best known, but I'm not familiar enough with his organ music to guarantee it. The

performances are fine, unobtrusive interpretively, minimally (and not dogmatically) articulated. She has no trouble at all with virtuoso challenges (as in 'Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr'); her registrations are agreeable, never strange. Our reviewers lament the unevenness of Pachelbel's output, suggesting to me that his music needs a strong advocate—her thorough professionalism makes the performances worth hearing.

Rob Haskins, American Record Guide, January/February 2015

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Barbara Harbach has many recordings in the **MSR Classics** catalogue, as composer, harpsichordist and organist. To add Bach and Pachelbel to these further enhances her standing as one of the leading American musicians of our time.

Czech Music Direct, Laurence Lewis November 2014 eNewsletter

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When it comes to Bach's The Art of Fugue, the trend over the past 20 years or so has favored performances either in arrangements for various combinations of instruments or for solo harpsichord; and while performances on organ are not exactly an endangered species—I reviewed one by Joan Lippincott in 36:1—the fact of the matter is that the work is not playable in its entirety, as written, by a single player on any keyboard instrument, whether harpsichord, piano, or organ. For in two of the work's numbers, specifically the "mirror" fugues, Nos. XII and XIII, Bach notates "a 2 Clav."—as distinct from a single harpsichord with two manuals—indicating he assumed the presence of a second player. That said, our likes and dislikes, preferences and prejudices, are very often conditioned by first exposures, and my first exposure to The Art of Fugue came through Helmut Walcha's 1956 Arkiv Produktion recording on organ. Since then, it's only the organ that seems able to convey to me the sense of grandiosity and high moral purpose I associate with the work.

And so here we have, not quite a new recording of the The Art of Fugue, but one made in 1989 by Barbara Harbach playing the Fisk organ (op. 83) in Rochester, New York's Downtown United Presbyterian Church. The organ, completed in 1982, has three manuals plus pedal, 39 stops, 56 ranks, and 2,625 pipes. According to the Eastman School of Music's web page describing the organ's specifications, the design and stop list of this particular Fisk opus "are eclectic, making the organ capable of playing music from all eras, as well as accompanying choral music and supporting congregational singing." This then is not an organ specifically built with Bach in mind. Nonetheless, the sound of the instrument, complemented by its acoustic environment, and most of all Harbach's intelligent and musically appropriate choice of stops and couplings, result in exceptionally clear voicing and detailed delineation of Bach's counterpoint. Where I criticized Lippincott for her stultifying choice of stops and registrations, comparing the colorations of mixes she drew from the instrument's pipes to the tonal characteristics of an electric organ in a funeral parlor, and her dutiful, devotional approach to the effect of shadows cast by flickering votive candles, Harbach's readings are just the opposite—brightly lit, responsive, and devoid of the vox humana vibrato that smells of undertakers and embalming fluid. In fact, as I listen to Harbach's The Art of Fugue, I find it not that much different from my

cherished Walcha version, high praise indeed for Harbach, a composer, harpsichordist, organist, and professor music at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Without getting bogged down in a lengthy discussion of the various versions of The Art of Fugue and the sequencing arrangement of its numbers, I'll just say that Harbach, like most players, follows the order of the later printed edition of four simple fugues (I–IV), three counter fugues (V–VII), four double and triple fugues (VIII–XI), two mirror fugues (XII–XIII), four canons (XIV–XVII), and the uncompleted triple fugue (XVIII). If the 18 Roman numerals don't jibe with Harbach's 20 tracks, it's because the third and fourth canons (XVI and XVII) are each given in rectus and inversus form on separate tracks, but each pair is counted as only one Roman numeral. The concluding, unfinished fugue is, of course, the one in which Bach uses the notes of his name B-A-C-H (=B♭-A-C-B♮) as the third subject. There is strong evidence to suggest that Bach had intended to add yet a fourth subject, making this a quadruple fugue, and latter-day musicologists and composers, Michael Ferguson, for one, have had the "audacity" (Ferguson's own word) to offer their own speculative completions. Ferguson poses the question, "not can it be completed, but should it be completed?" Harbach, like Walcha, apparently believes the answer to that question is "no," for she, too, leaves off exactly where the final fugue ends. This is, quite simply, a magnificent performance of Bach's The Art of Fugue, one completely worthy of the magnificent organ on which it's played. Harbach's version will occupy a place on my shelf right next to my prized Walcha.

It used to be said that an intellectual was one who could hear Rossini's William Tell Overture and not think of the Lone Ranger. It might be time to update that with a more recent definition of an intellectual—that being one who can think of Pachelbel and not think of his Canon, which, for a time, eclipsed Wagner's Wedding March from Lohengrin as the music of choice for ushering brides down the aisle. I believe the piece even made it onto the Top 10 Pop Charts, as it was aired repeatedly in various arrangements and souped-up versions.

Here's the lowdown on it. It's believed to have been written circa 1694, possibly for the wedding of Johann Christoph Bach. With greater certainty, it's known to have been originally scored for three violins and continuo, and that the canon was paired with a gigue which followed it. Perhaps not fully appreciated is that the canon, which observes strict canonic imitation at the unison, simultaneously employs chaconne or passacaglia-like procedures in that the canonic entries are constructed over a repeating eight-note ground. Pachelbel and the Bach clan were well acquainted, and there's every reason to believe that Johann Sebastian Bach studied and was familiar with the elder Pachelbel's work. The canons in Bach's Goldberg Variations display a similar technique of imitative points of entry over a ground that informs the entire work.

Pachelbel, like Bach after him, was a highly skilled organist, and much of Pachelbel's known output consists of works for organ, with special emphasis on chorale preludes. After spilling over onto disc two for two tracks, Harbach's The Art of Fugue is followed by Bach's aria, Komm süsser Tod, BWV 478, then Pachelbel's Canon, sans its gigue, and a Chaconne in F. Harbach then treats us to 13 of Pachelbel's chorale preludes, many based on the same chorale tunes Bach would draw upon for his chorale preludes, such as Nun komm der Heiden Heiland and Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr. Pachelbel's settings are quite affecting in their devotional sincerity, but they don't "muddy the waters," so to speak, with the chromaticism and contrapuntal complexities that Bach would apply to his chorale prelude settings, which led the Leipzig church rectors to complain and reprimand Bach for confusing the congregation.

Harbach concludes the second disc with another Pachelbel Chaconne, this one in D. All of the Pachelbel items were recorded in August 1990, on a different organ than the Bach works were two years earlier. For the Pachelbel, Harbach takes us to the Fisk organ (op. 95), completed in 1990, in Slee Hall at the State University of Buffalo, New York. "The specifications of Opus 95 are based upon classic and romantic French and German antecedents, but combined in a unique American way that allows for authoritative performance of four centuries of organ music, while inspiring new music as well." The organ has three manuals plus pedal, with 45 stops, 59 ranks, and 2,778 pipes.

Let me conclude with one very minor quibble that has nothing to do with Harbach. Disc one of this set times out at exactly 70 minutes, with the spillover of The Art of Fugue on disc two taking another 11:12. That adds up to 81:12, meaning the entire Art of Fugue could have been accommodated on a single disc, and the Pachelbel disc could have been released separately for those who wanted it. I'm not saying the Pachelbel pieces aren't nice to have, but tethering them to The Art of Fugue seems arbitrary and not particularly pertinent.

Other than that, these are wonderful, commanding performances by Harbach on truly grand-sounding organs and imposing-sounding recordings. Strongly recommended.
Jerry Dubins Fanfare Magazine December 2014

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As a composer, organist, and scholar, Barbara Harbach is of course quite well known and needs no introduction to either the scholarly world or public at large. She has championed women composers for many years, and she is perhaps solely responsible for an interesting and progressive repertory. Moreover, her journal is well respected and her recordings run a considerable gamut, from the Baroque to contemporary composers. It is therefore somewhat surprising to receive this disc of Bach's iconic *Art of Fugue*. Surely, there is no lack of recordings of this venerable collection, first published in 1751, and counterpoint students for at least a century and a half have diligently studied them. Perhaps it is the use of the Fisk organs in Rochester and Buffalo, New York that ought to be the real focus of this two-disc set, and when one listens, the voicing is indeed rather clear and resonant, though I find them lighter in tone than, say, the larger cathedral organs of Europe upon which many of the current recordings available are performed.

That alone might be an incentive, but what I find more attractive is that the second disc is devoted largely to the music of Johann Pachelbel, whose infamous canon (here also performed) has become arguably the earworm of the century. Harbach at least makes her adaptation a sort of gigantic crescendo that seems particularly apt for the organ, but it still doesn't help the overexposure of the piece. More interesting, however, are the other works, such as the two chaconnes, which like the canon, are based upon ostinato basses. No earworms here, for one can find a solid, even sensitive set of works. The F-Minor Chaconne begins with a soft palette of sounds, wherein the bass line is virtually imperceptible. As the texture begins to build the registrations outline each variation with definition. By the time one gets to the two penultimate variations, the sound has become a surging wave, which then vanishes seemingly into the mist, with a sudden thinning of the texture, to disappear as quietly as it came in the beginning. The D-Major Chaconne has some rather gnarly opening harmonies above the ostinato, which swells

until it too attains a massive sound wave, only here it does not vanish but rather concludes triumphantly. The chorale preludes all have a nice sense of contrapuntal line that is often marked by suspensions and chromatic variation. These are every bit as worthy of performance as those by Bach, demonstrating that Pachelbel was no slouch when it came to serious Lutheran church music.

I am quite taken with Harbach's choice of registration, and, as noted, the Fiske organs have a nice transparent sound which in turn allows for the individual lines to become audible. Perhaps such would be (and sometimes are) lost in some of the great cathedral organs, but intimacy replaces grandeur. One has so many versions of *The Art of Fugue* from which to choose, and so this portion of the set might be more of a matter of personal choice, but I would get it solely for the Pachelbel, which, apart from the exorable canon, is something of an eye-opener.

Bertil van Boer Fanfare Magazine September 2014

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(++++) LOOKING BACK, AND AHEAD

Barbara Harbach's recordings of Bach and Pachelbel date back even farther than the Rewind offerings, having been made between 1983 and 1990 on two C.B. Fisk organs in New York state, one in Rochester and the other in Buffalo. The MSR Classics release is a new digital remastering of Gasparo Records material, and it is quite well done both technically and musically. Harbach has a fine sense of the shaping of Bach's *The Art of Fugue,* choosing registrations carefully and allowing the music to move from the delicate to the sinewy and back. She plays with sureness, understanding and a strong sense of Bach's style, using well-chosen tempos and allowing the various fugal lines to emerge, blend and subside with what feels like inevitability. Organ performances of *The Art of Fugue* can sometimes feel overwhelming because of an instrument's sheer sonority, but Harbach's do not: she manages to provide both intimacy and grandeur, and at the same time to make it clear that *The Art of Fugue* is far from an academic exercise in musical form. And the other, less-familiar material in this two-CD set is equally well played and equally intriguing, albeit in different ways. There is a veritable plethora of Pachelbel here, and it is very, very welcome indeed, since for most listeners Pachelbel has been reduced to a single super-well-known canon (often called *the* Pachelbel canon, as if he wrote no others). It is inevitable that Harbach plays this work (in an arrangement by S. Drummond Wolff), but it is scarcely as interesting to hear her reading (although it is a very fine one) as it is to hear two chaconnes and no fewer than 13 chorale preludes by Pachelbel. The preludes have fascinations aplenty, from the two separate ones on *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her* to those from the Psalms, on *Nun lob, mein Seel den Herren* (Psalm 103), *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* (Psalm 137) and *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (Psalm 46). Pachelbel comes from the generation before Bach, and it is fascinating to compare his chorale preludes and other music with works in similar forms that Bach wrote some years later. But an academic comparison is scarcely the point of Harbach's performance and scarcely necessary to enjoy it. The music here, from the familiar to the very unfamiliar indeed, is wonderful in its own right, played with high skill and considerable understanding, and a notable

addition to the collection of any listener interested in the highest reaches of the high Baroque.
INFODAD.COM: Family-Focused Reviews July 10, 2014

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Barbara Harbach org MSR Classics [F] [2] MS1442 048' * DDD) Played on the Fisk organs of Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY; (b) Slee Hall at the State University of Buffalo, NY From Gasparo GSCD282/3

For many listeners besides scholars and (in this case) organists, the challenge with Bach's The Art of Fugue is to hear good music. The challenge for performers is simply to make good music. Scored for no instrument in particular, the music is long, the textures increasingly complicated and the tune which is fugued is not a happy one, though it may be uniquely amenable to Bach's inversions and other contrapuntal designs and devices. Barbara Harbach responded to the challenge in her 1989 recording for Gasparo by putting Bach's iconically simple yet complex voices and lines into motion, tempered by a certain amount of gravitational pull, interpretatively speaking, and letting the sound and authority of her Fisk tracker organ--Op 83 at the United Presbyterian Church in downtown Rochester--take over. A year later, on Fisk Op 95 at Lippes Concert Hall at the State University of Buffalo, Harbach recorded a Johann Pachelbel set.

At the place in the score where Bach's uncompleted last fugue breaks off, Harbach stopped and let 16 heart-stopping seconds elapse on the track itself before moving on to the consoling strains of Komm., susser Tod, these segued into a spiritually radiant (with audiophile low bass) reading of Pachelbel's famous Canon in the standard arrangement by S Drummond Wolff, and gripping performances of two big chaconnes, each one its own tour de force stretching harmonic and melodic orthodoxies with astounding virtuosity; to these Harbach responded with her most brilliant playing.
Gramophone. Volume: 92. Issue: 1116 Publication date: November 2014.

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Rich and Colourful
Organ music by J S Bach and Pachelbel - recommended by Gerald Fenech

'... Barbara Harbach gives a towering performance ...'

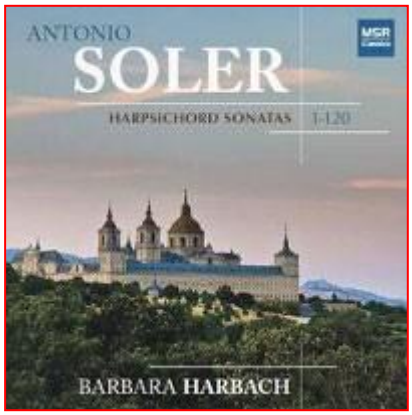
This double CD set focuses on, maybe, the greatest composer of all time, and one of the greatest to precede him. J S Bach (1685-1750) was mainly interested in the sacred and organ genres, but his instrumental and orchestral pieces were among the most inventive works of the baroque period, and their daring language paved the way for future composers to elaborate and bring out the potential sound of the orchestra. The *Art of Fugue* is the composer's swansong, and remains to this day both a compositional and historical enigma. It remained unfinished (or did it?) due to Bach's death in 1750, and is considered as one of the cornerstones of the organ repertoire.

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) has a direct connection with Johann Sebastian, as he was the teacher of his elder brother Johann Christoph, who in turn instructed the younger Bach

when he became the boy‘s guardian. Pachelbel‘s largest contributions to the organ genre are his chorale settings in which he demonstrates his familiarity with both old and contemporary styles, but his output also includes choral and instrumental pieces that reveal his consummate skill in handling both the small and large forces at his disposal.

American composer, organist, teacher and musicologist Barbara Harbach gives a towering performance of Bach’s pieces, while her Pachelbel has a rich and colourful palette that gives these works their unique and distinct timbre.

A wonderful double album in sumptuous sound quality, with a couple of quite exhilarating essays by Alfred Mann and Rob Haskins that make for some enthralling reading.
Highly recommended.
Gerald Fenech, Music&Vision, 2016



SOLER Harpsichord Sonatas Nos. 1–120 • Barbara Harbach (hpd) • MSR 1300 (14 CDs: 1,041:09)

This massive 14-CD set of 120 sonatas ostensibly written by Antonio Soler was a labor of love for harpsichordist Harbach. As she points out in the extensive liner notes, there are multiple problems identifying how many sonatas Soler actually wrote as well as their dating because none of these works exist in his own hand. They were all written down by copyists, and the scores are rife with errors: missing or wrong notes, missing pages of music, and missing or added bars of music. Both Padre Samuel Rubio, whose edition is used here (originally published in 1957 by the Spanish Music Union), and Frederick Marvin did their own independent cataloguing of Soler's music in the 20th century; later there were Robert Gerhard and Macario Santiago. Harbach doesn't say why she chose this edition over the others, but admits that there are duplications of movements within it: "Sonata No. 41 also exists as No. 96, Movement II; No. 42 as No. 96, Movement IV; No. 45 as No. 94, Movement III; No. 60, Movement I as No. 99, Movement I; No. 60, Movement II as No. 99, Movement III; and No. 54 (transposed from C major to D major) as No. 92, Movement I."

I suppose Harbach chose to stick to these duplications and idiosyncrasies not only to present Padre Rubio's work intact, but also because, as one reads into accounts of Soler's life and personality, he may actually have done these things himself. He entered the Escolania of the Monastery of Montserrat at age seven to study music and took holy orders at age 23, where he spent the rest of his life, and apparently had zero ego and didn't really care if his music was published and admired or not. He never assigned numbers of any sort (neither opus nor catalog numbers) to his works, nor did he date them, so when he died in 1783 everything was in a state of disarray. Some handwritten copies of his sonatas are dated 1786, which meant that he apparently wrote them posthumously.

But as careless as Soler was in the business end of music, he was just that meticulous on the musical side. Harbach mentions that in one of his rare surviving treatises, *Llave de la Modulación* from 1762, he mentions Domenico Scarlatti, so he certainly knew and admired the Italian's equally brief sonatas and possibly even studied with him. And there is something more, as Harbach notes: "The later sonatas were written for a wide range, such as F1 to G6 (or as high as C7 as in the fourth movement of Sonata No. 61)—well out of the range of the harpsichord and early pianoforte." So there go the best-laid academic theories of the historically informed crowd, right out the window. If Soler's music was composed for a harpsichord, but neither the

standard harpsichords nor the early pianofortes of his time had this range … *what did he play them on?* Harbach commissioned harpsichord maker Willard Martin of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to build a two-manual instrument for her that could reach G6, "a copy of an 18th century two-manual French double designed by François Blanchet." The amusing part of this story is that Martin delivered the new harpsichord to Harbach at her home in St. Louis in a long black hearse, prompting many of her neighbors to drop by "over the next few days to offer their condolences!" But here we go again: How did an 18th-century Spanish monk, who obviously took a vow of poverty, end up with a fancy, state-of-the-art French harpsichord to compose his sonatas on? Maybe he won it on *Let's Make a Deal?*

As for the performances, they are bright, lively, and beautifully articulated, recorded very well so as to capture the full range of the instrument with just enough natural room ambience. Harbach, who also plays quite a bit of modern music (I previously reviewed her CD of music by Arnold Rosner and Daniel Pinkham on MSR 1443), takes a very modern approach to phrasing, which is to play everything in a straightforward tempo with no modifications of rallentando or rubato. Certainly the music can take this approach; after all, Soler is not Domenico Scarlatti or Diedrich Buxtehude, whose music cries out for such modification of the line. We must remember that Soler was Spanish, that a great deal of his music was based on Spanish dance rhythms, and thus a lack of tempo modification would be appropriate, particularly in the fast movements. That being said, a little gypsy swagger now and then would have been welcome. As in the case of Scarlatti's sonatas, extended listening to this set, as I had to do in order to review it in time, is not recommended. Listen to a sonata, hit pause or stop, and let it sink in before moving on to the next one. This will give you a chance to absorb the multiple beauties and the sparkle of Soler's music. Despite the brevity of most of these works, Soler uses a surprising amount of repeats of themes, so within their four-to-five-minute length one hears quite a bit of music that sounds alike.

Harbach made a list in the booklet of the sonatas she particularly liked, and by and large I agreed with her. Like many composers who wrote a lot of music—even J. S. Bach—not all of Soler's sonatas are of equal value. Some were probably written for his royal pupil, the Infante Don Gabriel, who was the son of King Carlos III (and who may also have been one of the principal scribes who jotted some of these sonatas down), and thus would be fun to play without being especially challenging. Think of this massive collection as being a combination of imaginative works written for Soler himself to play and simpler études composed for his royal student … and possibly other students we don't know much about as well. Too often people seem to think that composers have some sort of divine channel to the deity who inspires them to write Music For The Ages. In the real world, it just doesn't work like that. Some of these sonatas may even have been dinner music.

To my mind, there is a lot more of the Baroque in Soler's music than the Classical, but this probably stemmed from his admiration of Scarlatti and his cloistered life. I don't know if he ever heard or knew of the more modern music written in the 1770s and early 1780s by Haydn, Mozart, or C. P. E. Bach. Although his later, multi-movement sonatas are a bit more Classical, they still rely on such traditional Baroque devices as repetition an octave lower or higher, canons, and fugues. Some musical prodigies grow and develop and others stay within their comfort zone. Little of his music is harmonically adventurous, not only for his time but also by

comparison with Scarlatti or Bach. Yet Soler was apparently a happy person, because most of his music sounds happy.

As I said earlier, listening to all these CDs sequentially over a period of several hours is not a recommended way of savoring this set, but I had to do it. Among the more interesting sonatas is No. 3 with its quirky use of arpeggios and appoggiaturas, the wide musical leaps and odd key changes in No. 5, the rising scale passages in thirds and descending scales in the right hand of No. 11, and the "strumming accompaniment and Bolero rhythms" of No. 12. Although Harbach makes it clear that the harpsichord is not able to make many dynamics changes, I detected occasional louder passages here and there in these performances, which were welcome in order to break up the repetitions of themes. (Harbach explains this: On a two-manual harpsichord, one can play soft passages on the upper manual to achieve an echo effect.) In Sonata No. 41, I also heard a few *Luftpausen* as well as an interesting metallic or chime-like sound (I'm not sure how she produced that), and in the second movement of Sonata 98 she uses the damper pedal to make the harpsichord sound almost like a Spanish guitar. As I said, even when I didn't know exactly which sonata was coming up next, I found myself agreeing with Harbach on the quality of various works. For instance, she describes Sonata No. 15 as "Spanish sounding with great Soler artistry," but what I liked about it was the way he continually "bounced" his themes around from hand to hand and used syncopation to propel the music. I also heard syncopation in Sonata 18 that, if played with a little more looseness, could have approached a jazz beat. Sonata 20 also has an interesting, loping beat, and Sonata 21 has a lot of swagger with its rollicking triplets and asymmetric rhythmic feel. Other sonatas I liked, for various reasons, were Nos. 24, 26, 30, 35, 38, 40 (which almost sounds like a little symphony), 44, 48, 52, the last movement of 61, 69, 72, 73, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 88, 90, 92, 93, 98, 100–101, 104–106, 108, 110, 113–114, 116–118, and 120. Several of the others start off with good musical ideas, but then suffer from too many repetitions and/or not enough interest or development (e.g., Sonata No. 85). Incidentally, I should mention that several of his sonatas are, unusually for that time, written in the Dorian mode: Nos. 15, 18, 19, 25, 32, 36, 39, 47–49, 57, 100, 102–104, 114–115, 117, and 120.

Pieter-Jan Belder, in his complete set on Brilliant Classics, divides the sonatas between harpsichord and fortepiano. He plays with enthusiasm but has a tendency to "mow 'em down," driving the rhythm so hard that it resembles a semi on the interstate with a load of potatoes to get to market by midnight. Gilbert Rowland, in his set of the sonatas for Naxos, has a peculiar sound, both very dry *and* overly resonant (whether due to the instrument or the mike placement I'm not sure), and plays them in a style similar to Harbach except that he "rounds off" the ends of choruses with decelerandos whereas Harbach does not. Sometimes these sound good, at other times affected. But there are other differences: Rowland apparently goes up to Sonata No. 130 and his slow tempos are generally (but not always) slower than Harbach's and his fast tempos faster (Sonata No. 81 almost twice as fast!). Rowland's set is also (at the time of writing) only available as 14 single CDs in thick jewel boxes, each selling for $8.99 on Amazon, and the sonatas were released all out of order (Vol. 7, for instance, including Sonatas Nos. 3, 10, 39, 81, 108, 113, 11, 80, 82, 97, and 112), whereas Harbach's set is fully integral and comes in an attractive box with each disc in a cardboard sleeve. Each CD presents the sonatas in Rubio's original order, running sequentially from Sonata 1 to Sonata 120, and sells on Amazon for $96.42 which breaks down to $6.88 per disc, so it is the better value. Whether you are a Soler fanatic who wants it all or a performer or scholar who wants a handy reference to this music,

this set is a valuable resource.
Lynn René Bayley, Fanfare Magazine September/October 2015

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Meet Barbara Harbach Written by Lynn René Bayley
Fanfare Magazine, Saturday, June 2015
SOLER Harpsichord Sonatas Nos. 1–120

Pennsylvania native Barbara Harbach, who studied organ and harpsichord at Penn State, received a master's degree at Yale, and then a doctoral degree in organ and composition from the Eastman School of Music, has been one of the busiest performers in America. Her Wikipedia page tells us that following graduation she also studied organ at the Frankfurt Musikhochschule with the legendary Helmut Walcha. Interestingly, he told her that "he did not believe that women belonged on the organ bench." That statement has been more than refuted by her being ranked in 1992 by *Keyboard* magazine as second to Keith Jarrett as "Top Keyboard Artist" in classical music, as well as her numerous organ and harpsichord recitals in North America, Asia, Europe, and Siberia. As also indicated on Wikipedia, she presented a weekly television series, *Palouse Performance*, broadcast in the northwest U.S.

Her many compositions in various genres and forms, from solo works to orchestral and choral pieces, have received awards. *The Music of Barbara Harbach, Vol. 1* was named "record of the year 2008" by MusicWeb International and received a Critics' Choice award from *American Record Guide.* Her works have also been praised in the pages of this journal by David DeBoor Canfield, and I was very impressed with her previous recording of works by Arnold Rosner and Daniel Pinkham. She is a staunch champion of women composers: in 1993 she co-founded the *Women of Note Quarterly* and is now editor of *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*, despite her busy duties as Curators' Professor of Music at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where she teaches performance, composition, and related classes.

I was fortunate enough to be able to catch up with Harbach via e-mail for this interview.

Q: Barbara, I hardly know where to begin with this interview! You wear so many hats and have accomplished so much. Perhaps I should start by asking you which of your accomplishments you are personally most proud of: performing, composing, teaching, or proselytizing for other women composers?

A: I love them all! Whatever I am doing at the moment is the one that captures my imagination and energy. I do have to admit that teaching, composing, and editing is a bit easier than sitting at the organ or harpsichord for seven straight hours, but I do love to do it anyway! I have found my career changing over the years. At first, I thought I wanted to be a performing and recording artist, and played many recitals and performances beginning in the 1970s. In the 1980s I went to the British Library and ordered and received reels of historical women and men keyboard composers, and thus was born Vivace Press. (This was before the era of pdfs and e-mail.) My vision was to recover, record, and publish the music of these talented women composers. What really charged my ambition to do this was an incident at an eastern university. I was asked to give an organ recital, and at the reception after the performance, I mentioned to a musicologist

that I was interested in recovering the music of historical women composers. He said to me, "If there were any women composers, they wouldn't be very good." That was the gauntlet! In addition, the review headline of that night's recital read, "Tight Slacks, Organist in Good Form."

Q: I can't imagine that a double major in harpsichord and organ is as common as that of harpsichord and piano. What drew you to the organ as your other instrument, rather than the more similar piano?

A: I played for my first church service when I was nine years old. I was sufficiently tall to be able to reach the pedals. The first hymn I played was *Bringing in the Sheaves*, and to this day I can play it in any key. The church service was held in my grandparent's "saloon," where there was an old harmonium that you had to pump with your feet, and I certainly developed great calf muscles! The "saloon" was in the hotel that my grandparents owned in central Pennsylvania, and since the county became dry, it was a saloon in name only. I graduated to a Hammond organ a few years later when we went to another church, and then in high school came one of the loves of my life, the pipe organ. The sound of the pipe organ still gives me a thrill, whether soft strings or drowning out the orchestra as in Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra.*

I should mention that I took piano lessons beginning when I was four. My mother was my first teacher, and it was a wonderful way to bond with her. She was a terrific supporter of my musical career. I knew I wanted to be in music since I began lessons, and I enjoy the various facets that my career has led me.

I think I was drawn to the harpsichord because of the similarity of touch between the harpsichord and the tracker organ. When you press a key on the harpsichord, the pluck of the string gives a slight resistance similar to the feel of depressing a key on a tracker organ. Also, harpsichordists and organists use much less wrist and body motion than pianists, and we do not need the upper body muscles required by pianists.

Q: I suppose the next question should be who were the organists and/or harpsichordists who influenced you—the ones who inspired you to take up these instruments?

A: For 20th century harpsichordists, I particularly admire and respect Wanda Landowska, as well as Gustav Leonhardt, Raymond Leppard, Ralph Kirkpatrick, Igor Kipnis, Ton Koopman, Sylvia Marlowe, Daniel Pinkham, Colin Tilney, Rosalyn Tureck, Fernando Valenti, Elisabeth Chojnacka, and many others.

For organists, I came of age with Helmut Walcha, Virgil Fox, E. Power Biggs, Marie-Claire Alain, and Gillian Weir; and now there is a whole crop of extremely talented contemporary organists. I still marvel that pipe organs, both large and small, are being built and installed in many churches in this rather cynical and perhaps non-church age.

Q: If I may, I would like to ask a couple of questions regarding Helmut Walcha, since he is such an icon to so many of our critics and readers. I know that you had difficulties with him, but was there anything positive that you were able to get from the experience?

A: Oh, absolutely! He was a gifted organist, improviser, and composer! He would play Evensong every week at his church for free, the Dreikönigskirche in Frankfurt, where the audience would

consist of only six or so of us students. When he would give a public recital that had a hefty ticket price, the church was packed. Go figure! At Yale, I studied with Charles Krigbaum, who had studied with Walcha, and I admired the articulations and interpretations of Krigbaum, which fueled my desire to study with Walcha. I was fortunate to be awarded a Deutscher Akademischner Austausdienst to study with Walcha. Interestingly, Russell Saunders, with whom I studied at Eastman, was Walcha's first American student, and I was his last. While at the Frankfurt Musikhochschule, I was fortunate to receive the Konzert Diplom under Walcha. For my qualifying concert, Walcha would not coach Widor or any American compositions. In his defense, his forte was Germanic composers, and his forte was really a fortissimo!

Q: And now, a different question, same topic: did Walcha really have no respect even for those women organists who had become famous? I doubt that he would have heard of such organists as Mary Cherubim Schafer, but as a European-based organist he might have heard of Anne Maddocks, who worked at the famed Chichester Cathedral from 1942 to 1949, and he had to have known of Marie-Claire Alain (who, incidentally, was one of my personal heroes when growing up).

A: These are all wonderful women organists! And Marie-Claire Alain is one of my icons, also. Perhaps Walcha responded to the culture of his time, by not believing that women could be outstanding organists, so why teach them? Women would only get married and not use their training, so why waste a spot in the academy for them? The culture of suppressing women composers and performers goes centuries back in Germany and other countries. Just think of Fanny Mendelssohn and the struggles she and many other women had to endure to get their music recognized. How many women's compositions were left to languish in attics, only to be thrown out by future generations! So much has been lost over the centuries.

Q: On a different topic, I was very happy to learn of your support for women composers. Nancy Van de Vate once told me that the unwritten rule in most American symphony orchestras is that perhaps one major composition per year by a woman composer is programmed; otherwise, it's back to the men. A friend of mine who considers himself enlightened once told me that he thinks this is only fair because "men write so much more music"!!!

I would guess that you disagree with this as much as I do?

A: Absolutely; just check out the International Alliance for Women in Music, New York Women Composers, Society of Composers Inc., Donne in Musica, and American Composers Forum, just to name a few, and there are many, many women composers. According to the League of American Orchestras, only 1–2% of pieces played by orchestras in the United States are composed by women—what a shame! We write exciting, visceral, and beautiful music but cannot get it programmed. In the introduction to my book, *Women in the Arts: Eccentric Essays II* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015), I tried to address the issue of why there is a need for books about women in the arts, exhibitions of women painters, readings of women's poetry, concerts of music by women composers, and conferences highlighting women in the arts. It is an ongoing struggle for equity.

Q: I guess I really should ask where you come down on the recent revelation that Anna Magdalena Bach may have composed some of her husband's music—an article in The

Telegraph by Ivan Hewitt suggests the Cello Suites. I can't imagine that living with and even playing her husband's music on a daily basis wouldn't have rubbed off on her, as it did on his sons?

A: I think this is a fascinating thesis! Anna studied with the best, and I believe that Bach's creativity ignited hers! Or consider some other 18th century women composers such as Elizabeth Billington, Anna Bon, and Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre, who wrote music as teenagers and then went on to have other careers or dropped out of composition or got married and tended to a large estate. Elizabeth Billington, (1765/1768–1818) wrote her Opus 1 at the tender age of eight years old, and her mature Opus 2 at age eleven. Her sonatas compare favorably to Mozart's at the same age. Elizabeth went on to become one of England's most outstanding operatic sopranos. The CD I recorded, half Billington and half Mozart, is still available as Classical Prodigies: Elizabeth Weichsell Billington/Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Hester Park, CD 7703, Vivace Press (www.vivacepress.com) I enjoyed working with Elizabeth's music, and her second marriage was tumultuous. She and her husband would separate and then reconcile, until in the last reconciliation he took her to Italy and then murdered her. I talked with one of her descendants in England and asked if the story were true, and she told me that it was true. Elizabeth's story and career, from child prodigy composer to famous soprano, a jealous husband, and a murder, is a made-for-TV movie waiting to happen!

Q: If I may ask about Palouse Performance, *which I've never seen: what kind of show is it? Performances by you, or a music discussion show with musical guests like the once-famous radio show* St. Paul Sunday*?*

A: As the host of the show, *Palouse Performance* was a wonderful opportunity for me in the Palouse in the 1990s when I was professor of music at Washington State University, which is a region located in eastern Washington surrounding Pullman. It is a large wheat-growing area, and each day the rolling fields of wheat seemed to change in color and depth. *Palouse Performance* showcased talent from Washington as well as performers passing through the region. We did everything from classical to blues, jazz, rock, and I also did performances on clavichord, harpsichord and organ. One of my favorite shows was a woman composer/performer who wrote her country-western song, *I'm Gonna Fax My Baby Some Love* (faxing was still new in the 1990s). The fertile Palouse region inspired my *Frontier Fancies* for Violin and Orchestra.

Q: To briefly discuss your CD of music by Rosner and Pinkham, I was really wowed by the fact that such interesting modern music was composed for the harpsichord. Do you also work for more pieces like this? A body of modern works for harpsichord in addition to the 18th-century repertoire?

A: Yes, I am totally supportive of contemporary harpsichord composers and music. I recorded four CDs of contemporary harpsichord music featuring the music of Van Appledorn, Borroff, Zwilich, Diemer, Starer, Stern, Read, Rose, Martinu, Thomson, Albright, Adler, Sowash, Templeton, Fine, Near, Jones and Locklair. I think Rosner's *Musique de Clavecin* is an incredible piece and not for the faint-of-heart technically! His portraits of women are fascinating and intriguing.

I have also recorded contemporary organ composers such as Adler, Locklair, Bitgood, Marga Richter, Zwilich, Julia Smith, Ethel Smyth, Violet Archer, Gardner Read, Gwyneth Walker and Jeanne Demessieux.

Q: How would you characterize your style on the harpsichord, as compared to other well-known harpsichordists currently active?

A: It seems to me I incorporate a lot of articulations and performance practices, and I pay close attention to melodic contours and harmonic foundations, which probably stems from my organ technique. I like to hear the harpsichord played with a fluid technique, and let the music speak for itself, without imposing the performer's personality on it.

Q: In your new set of the keyboard sonatas of Antonio Soler, how did you go about sorting through the manuscripts and deciding the correct performance style?

A: It was a long process. For some reason, I bought the entire works of Soler some time before I even thought of recording the sonatas. I used the Samuel Rubio edition of his 120 sonatas for the recording. I am glad I got them when I did, since you can no longer get the Rubio editions. First, I analyzed all the movements for form and melodic repetitions. Then I listened to many recordings of Soler by various artists, and all had some fine interpretations, but when I sat down to record, I knew how I was going to interpret them – somewhere between Baroque and early Classical. I enjoyed the journey of researching and recording them, and it took two decades to get them all done. At one point, I didn't know if I would ever complete them, but various serendipitous events allowed me to continue. I am happy I persevered, and I thank Rob LaPorta and Richard Price of MSR Classics and Candlewood Digital, respectively, who did a superb job on the final mastering and packaging, and I thank Roy Christensen of Gasparo Records, who started and believed in the recording project.

Q: I'm particularly curious about the various repeated movements that you enumerated in your liner notes to the Soler set: Sonata 96 duplicating Sonata 41, and movements in Sonatas 42, 45, 54, and 60 being recycled in later sonatas. Do you suspect, as I did, that Soler himself might have actually done this? And if not, why include the duplications?

A: I wrestled and struggled with whether or not to include the duplicates, and decided that whether Soler put the duplicates together, and/or Rubio did, it seems to make the sonatas more complete when they contain the duplicates. On the lighter side, perhaps Soler or Rubio had so many sonatas and movements to contend with that they forgot they had included them earlier!

Q: I'm wondering how on earth you balance all your activities in the course of a year. I can't imagine that it's particularly easy to be teacher, researcher, performer, editor, and composer. Somewhere along the line, there has to be less time for one of these activities. How do you manage it?

A: A good question! Luckily, I am a morning person and start work, whether composing, rehearsing, preparing syllabi/tests, or proofing an article or manuscript, early in the morning before the flood of e-mails, phone calls and disturbances (usually by my four cats!). Summer is a good time for academics to recharge and do all the creative endeavors that had to be put off during the academic year. I like to do projects that I can become passionate about—women in

the arts and mentoring students. Like all of us, if we enjoy what we are doing, it's not work, and we might even get paid for it!

Q: Do you have any immediate plans, as performer or in the recording studio, that you would like to share with our readers?

A: I have some excellent 18th-century manuscripts tucked away of women and men composers that seem to be insisting I should introduce them to the listening public, so I will begin the editing, publishing and recording process with them.

Thank you for your stimulating questions and letting me recall the gentle past, which none of us does in these aggressive and motivating times.

Lynn René Bayley, Fanfare Magazine, June 2015 MSR 1300 (14 CDs: 1,041:09)

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There is no doubt that Padre Antonio Soler was one of the foremost composers in Spain during the 18th century. Born in Catalonia in 1729, he was schooled as a youth in the monastery of Montserrat at the age of five, and by 1744 had embarked upon a career at a young age at the cathedral in Seo de Urgel, finally becoming a monk in 1752, moving to Madrid to become active in the Hieronymite order. His association with the Royal Court meant access to the Royal Family, while his duties at El Escorial as maestro di capilla relieved him of the necessity to become involved in the various musical intrigues on the outside. As a result, he was able to hone his skill, achieving a formidable reputation for his theoretical knowledge (including a treatise on modulation written in 1762), and moreover corresponded with some of the musical pedagogues of his time, such as Padre Martini in Bologna.

As a composer, Soler has been most known in our day for his keyboard sonatas, of which at least 120 survive and possibly many more have been lost. Although well-known as the doyen of Catalan music during the period, his international reputation has largely been linked with a fellow resident in Madrid, Domenico Scarlatti, whose own collections of keyboard sonatas marked a seminal development in the rise of that genre (not to mention formal and stylistic developments as the Classical period emerged). In this, Soler has often been considered sort of as Scarlatti's lesser colleague, and although there is some slight evidence that Soler might have studied (or at least interacted) with Scarlatti, his music shows not only a penchant for native melodies and rhythms throughout, but also a sequential formal development from single-movement works (such as Scarlatti generally wrote) to full-fledged two and three-movement sonatas in a mature Classical style.

There are a number of issues surrounding Soler's sonatas that have made their dissemination as a group difficult. First, his music was circulated readily throughout Europe, and while the sources are widespread, they are not always consistent in terms of authenticity, given that no Soler autograph appears to have survived. This means that the bulk were disseminated in loose manuscript copies, sometimes with awkward attributions. Musicologist Padre Samuel Rubio has created a seven-volume edition of works, which are used for this recording as they are

probably based upon the best musicological research. In terms of which instrument Soler intended, it should be noted that many of the copies only require an "*instrumento de tecla*," or generic keyboard. This is the same sort of conundrum that one finds with Scarlatti's sonatas, but at least several of the later works dating stylistically from towards the end of the composer's life (he died in 1783) would be better played on a fortepiano rather than a harpsichord or clavichord; I am not certain after hearing them that the suggestion that perhaps an organ might also have been a possibility is particularly convincing. Barbara Harbach has chosen to do this entire set on the harpsichord, which given the uncertainty is probably as close to a ubiquitous keyboard in Europe as one might find during the period. A final ambiguity concerns the title "sonata" itself, given the variety of these works in terms of structure, form, and content. Because this term is so generic to the age, however, it might be a fruitless exercise to try and differentiate the works generically, and thus I find this issue rather moot.

Although Soler's sonatas have been recorded often before, no one has attempted a complete set of the 120 works, and therefore Harbach's project has taken on monumental proportions. Pieter-Jan Belder has started a set with Brilliant Classics in 2008 but I can find only four volumes that have been released. The same exists with Gilbert Rowland's set for Naxos, which has a parallel project recording them for modern piano by Denis Zhdanov. As these plod along, Harbach has done the world an immense service by releasing the entire bunch as follows:

Disc 1: Sonatas 1-13 (78:24)
Disc 2: Sonatas 14-23 (76:03)
Disc 3: Sonatas 24-35 (77:54)
Disc 4: Sonatas 36-49 (73:04)
Disc 5: Sonatas 50-60 (66:48)
Disc 6: Sonatas 61-63 (75:44)
Disc 7: Sonatas 64-66 (62:51)
Disc 8: Sonatas 67-73 (76:27)
Disc 9: Sonatas 74-83 (74:32)
Disc 10: Sonatas 84-92 (first two movements; 79:45)
Disc 11: Sonatas 92 (last two movements)-94 (74:15)
Disc 12: Sonatas 95-97 (72:59)
Disc 13: Sonatas 98-106 (76:26)
Disc 14: Sonatas 107-120 (75:57)

In case one is keeping track of the total time, it is over a thousand minutes or 17 hours of music. Clearly, this is a reference set, to be savored over a larger amount of time (unless one is inured to marathons by *Der Ring*). To produce this is a labor of love and dedication, and the results are extremely fine. In the extensive booklet notes, Harbach, herself both a musicologist and composer as well as performer, has even given minute descriptions of 36 of her favorites, each of which she outlines in a brief sentence or two as to stylistic and technical contents. But there is more, much more hidden in all of the sonatas. For example Sonata 117 has a nicely imitative line that seems to echo Sonata 114, both in Dorian mode, save that the latter twists in rather flexible directions (and makes one wonder if Sonatas 114, 115, and 117 ought not to belong together, as

they have a musical congruity that is quite apparent, to this author anyway). The three-movement sonatas, probably composed somewhat later in his career, are all mature works with good thematic contrasts. For instance, the Sonata 67 in D major opens with a bell-like theme in which one can imagine the bells of El Escorial, and a lyrical secondary theme that Mozart might have written. This is followed by a lively rondo with cascading triplets that are distinctly gigue-like. The finale is a fugue based upon a theme that wanders, and here Soler makes something that would be hard to imagine as counterpoint into flowing, easy-going tapestry. In the single-movement Sonata 37, subtitled "Pastoril," the mischievous opening trills devolving into a sprightly triple-meter dance practically evokes bucolic pleasures and gamboling sheep. I even detect a slight Spanish tone to the work, as if one is now out on the altiplano. As each of these works is unique and individual, one might reiterate that Harbach has her favorites (all amply and accurately described) but the remainder are all equally as brilliant and interesting in and of themselves.

In terms of the performance, Harbach's playing is precise and crystalline, with each phrase, each turn of harmony, and each ornament clearly and cleanly defined. Even without the monumental aspect of this entire set, her performance is some of the best harpsichord playing I've encountered, for it is articulate and passionate, energetic and careful to bring out all of the hidden subtleties in Soler's music. This set is a must have, and there is no higher recommendation that I can give. One does not have to absorb all 14 discs all at once, but one can be rest assured the temptation with such excellent playing will be to hold a Soler marathon. Get it. Period.

Bertil van Boer, Fanfare Magazine, 2015

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Gapplegate Classical-Modern Music Review

Antonio Soler, Harpsichord Sonatas, Barbara Harbach, Box Set

Antonio Soler (1729-1783) may not be as well-known these days as someone like CPE Bach, but his music has a vitality that sounds right to us today. He was born in Catalan and had a successful career in Spain, ultimately as chapel master for the Royal Court in El Escorial. He was an ordained priest.

We look to his masterful *Harpsichord Sonatas* (MSR 1300 14-CDs), some 120 in all, for his early classical inventiveness. Barbara Harbach gives us an exhaustive, but certainly not exhausting rendition of the 120 in the recent limited edition box set.

They are a remarkable body of music, rhythmically lively, filled with clarity of form and singing melodic charm. They sound most certainly related to Domenico Scarlatti's sonatas, so much so that there has been speculation that Soler studied with him when he was tenured in Spain, but we do not know for sure.

They both have that infectiously lively approach that fills the ears and heart with great good cheer. Both sets of sonatas are at times very Spanish in their dance-like vivacity. And both grab you with their gallant quality and straightforward musical perfection.

Barbara Harbach sounds entirely ravishing in her performances throughout. She seems just right on Willard Martin's 1989 copy of an 18th century two-manual French harpsichord. And the recording has a pristine clarity of sound that goes far in making the music come alive.

If you love Scarlatti's sonatas you will find the Soler entrancing as well. Do you really need all 14 volumes? They come at a very good price, so why not treat yourself? It's music played with great verve and there is no time or mood where the music does not fit in, in my experience. It is something to cheer you in the new year ahead!

Classical Modern Music, December 31, 2015 by Grego Applegate Edwards

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Barbara Harbach's Soler Cycle

For her "complete" Soler cycle, Barbara Harbach presents Padre Samuel Rubio's edition of 120 sonatas in numerical order on 14 CDs, in contrast to Naxos' Gilbert Rowland, who opts for varied ordering and the inclusion of sonatas not published in the Rubio collection. While Rowland's discs convey the resonance of a small concert hall, Harbach's harpsichord, modeled after an 18th-century two-manual French instrument, is reproduced in a close-up, slightly dry yet vividly clear recording. The sonics suit Harbach's centered, straightforward, and technically meticulous interpretations.

She shapes ornaments with pointed consistency, and illuminates striking harmonic ideas (No. 30's chromatic felicities, No. 21's ear-catching suspensions, and No. 110's chordal movement) without belaboring them. Harbach's finely honed distinctions between sustained and detached articulations pay particular expressive dividends in slower movements.

Harbach's booklet notes reflect her enthusiasm and devotion, her perspective and painstaking scholarship, and a genuine desire for this repertoire to reach a wider audience…the purity and integrity of Harbach's best performances compel in their own way.

Classics Today, Jed Distler, 2015

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(++++) KNOWING THE UNKNOWN

Soler: Harpsichord Sonatas Nos. 1-120 (Padre Samuel Rubio edition). **Barbara Harbach, harpsichord. MSR Classics. $149.95 (14 CDs).**

No one knows what Padre Antonio Francisco Javier José Soler Ramos (1729-1783) looked like: he lived in religious seclusion essentially throughout his life, and no portraits of him are known to exist. No one knows how many compositions he wrote: there appear to have been around 500, but there are so many missing manuscripts, conflicting notations and repetitions among his works, or those attributed to him, that there is no consensus. No one knows how many keyboard

sonatas he produced: there were probably about 130, but again, there is simply no way to sort through all the uncertainties and inconsistencies and find out. No one knows what instrument or instruments he wrote his keyboard sonatas for: certainly the harpsichord makes sense for most of them, but some movements' designs seem to point to the fortepiano or even the organ. No one knows whether he studied with Domenico Scarlatti, to whom he makes reference in a treatise and whose work Soler's sometimes, but by no means always, seems to resemble. No one even knows whether to deem Soler a composer of the late Baroque or early Classical period, because his sonatas straddle the eras in so many ways that it is impossible to assign him to just one time – assuming the sonatas attributed to him are in fact by him.

With so much unknown, it is a relief to point out some things that *are* known, of which the primary one is that Soler's keyboard sonatas are absolutely wonderful pieces of music. By turns balanced and poised, short and long, with developed themes or straightforwardly repeated ones, with unusual or typical modulations, in single movements or multiple ones, written simply or requiring considerable virtuosity, these are gems of music of their time – to whatever time they are considered to belong. Individual ones are occasionally heard in recital, and groups are recorded once in a while, but the chance to listen to a more-or-less-complete set of the sonatas is a rare one and, when the works are as well-played as they are by Barbara Harbach, is not to be missed.

This MSR Classics release is a joy from start to finish. There are several editions of Soler's sonatas and several ways to present them. Harbach, who is a composer of some finesse as well as a performer of considerable skill, chooses the edition of Padre Samuel Rubio and presents the 120 sonatas in that edition in numerical order. This is as good an approach as any: some sonatas are surely left out, some of the included ones repeat within others, and the organization of Rubio's edition is not immediately apparent, since none of Soler's sonatas can be dated precisely, but Harbach's cycle gives a pleasant orderliness to the Soler sonatas that they do not otherwise possess.

Indeed, because the sonatas in the Rubio edition (and other editions) are arranged in somewhat helter-skelter fashion, the decision to present them in numerical order gives listeners a chance to hear just how wide a variety of sounds and techniques Soler's sonatas offer. For instance, a graceful and decidedly old-fashioned three-and-a-half-minute sonata such as No. 37, which sounds as if may be the earliest or at any rate one of the earliest of all (as Haydn's Symphony No. 37 may be *his* earliest, despite the number), is followed within a few minutes by No. 40 in G, a seven-minute piece whose sound and structure appear to come much more clearly from the Classical time period. Elsewhere, sonatas may be presented as pairs, providing back-to-back examples of differing forms of Soler's creativity – as, for instance, in the two E-flat sonatas Nos. 41 and 42. In other cases, a single-movement binary-form sonata (these Scarlatti-like constructions are the most common in Soler's work), such as No. 45 in G, presents a pleasant surprise and a different way of looking at and listening to the same material when it reappears later as part of a multi-movement work – in this case, as a portion of the third movement of No. 94.

Harbach performs the Soler sonatas on a modern harpsichord modeled after an 18th-century French one, and the instrument suits her admirably careful attention to detail and extreme care in phrasing very well indeed. Once in a while, it would be nice to hear her cut loose a bit more, but Harbach's primary concerns are careful pacing and close attention to ornamentation (including

its use during repeated sections, as is appropriate for the time period); and it has to be said that she makes some of the sonatas exceptionally exciting (the flamenco-style No. 48, for example, is splendid, and the second movement of No. 67 is downright perky). The harpsichord sound is big and close – the instrument seems to fill the whole sonic environment – and while this makes the individual works highly effective and very involving, it also makes them difficult to listen to in long stretches. Indeed, trying to consume this entire set in just a few listening sessions would be a mistake on multiple levels, not the least of which would be a kind of aural exhaustion: the sonatas run a total of nearly 17½ hours. A full appreciation of Soler, and of Harbach's exceptionally perceptive approach to his music, really requires listening to only a bit of this music at any one time. This will also help with yet another unknown, that being what Soler meant by the word "sonata." There is little in these pieces resembling a sonata as we now understand the term; they are certainly not in what we know as "sonata form." Many, perhaps most, were written for instructional purposes: one thing we do know about Soler is that he was harpsichord tutor of the Infante Don Gabriel. But like everything else in these works, this information helps in understanding some elements (such as some of the sonatas' technical requirements) without clarifying others (such as their expressive elements).

The reality is that much will remain unknown about Soler and his music: sources of extensive information on someone who lived virtually his entire life in monastic seclusion simply do not exist. In a way, though, this lack of information is liberating, since it requires performers and listeners alike to deal with Soler's works without the distraction of biography, without considering in any way the sense in which they may have reflected his life or his everyday secular concerns. One of the best things in Harbach's Soler cycle – among many – is the ease with which her meticulous playing makes it possible to immerse oneself in Soler's music, to absorb it and be absorbed into it, to hear its flow and accept its beauties at face value, and thus to be all the more impressed when the composer throws in something unexpected, such as minuets in contrasting tempos or "intento" movements that are something like free-form fugues (theoretically a contradiction in terms, but not so here). This is an unusual and most welcome set, packed with pieces that directly reflect Spain (such as Nos. 15 and 32), ones in unusual keys (Nos. 22, 23, 88 and 110 in D-flat), ones requiring impressive cross-hand playing (Nos. 10 and 108), and ones packed with grace and beauty and delightful style – whatever style one chooses to call it. Harbach is a wonderful advocate for this music, and the music itself is wonderful on so many levels and in so many ways that this Soler collection is flat-out treasurable. It is safe to predict that it will amply repay many listenings over many years.

The Infodad Team, October 15, 2015

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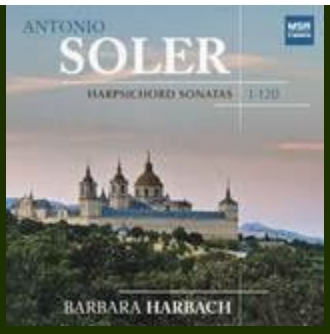
Each reviewer chooses the top 5 CDs that they reviewed in 2015. Harbach's Soler Harpsichord Sonatas was chosen by Bertil van Boer to be on his *Want List* for 2015 – a real honor.

Want List for Bertil van Boer [Fanfare Magazine 2015] Issue 39:2 Nov/Dec 2015

Padre Antonio Soler was one of those seminal figures in this period whose keyboard works were considered to be the epitome of taste and variety. In this 14-disc set (a monumental undertaking to be sure), harpsichordist Barbara Harbach has recorded the complete sonatas, which have an extreme range from single-movement pieces that reflect modes and counterpoint to fully mature three-movement Classical forms. Here, she has chosen wisely to limit herself to a single

instrument, the harpsichord, noting in the excellent booklet that other keyboards, from clavichord to organ, were probably equally as valid. Soler's music is always inventive, even when he is at his pedagogical best, and these works are replete with unusual harmony, Spanish-flavored paraphrases, and some gorgeous
lyrical melodies.

Barbara Harbach's Soler Sonatas makes Fanfare's 2015 *Want List*



Barbara Harbach's epic 20-year project traversing all of Padre Antonio Soler's 120 harpsichord sonatas has been named to Fanfare Magazine's 2015 *Want List* by critic Bertil von Boer, who calls the 14-disc set "a monumental traversal." The much-acclaimed set is released on MSR Classics.

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American harpsichordist, Barbara Harbach, has taken twenty years to record the complete Sonatas by Antonio Soler. No less than 120, some no more than a couple of minutes, some lasting up to half an hour.

Soler (1729-1783) may have spent most of his life in an enclosed religious community, but he seems to have been a musical progressive. His Sonatas reveal a questing mind, as these works are not composed to a strict formula. There are surprises as Soler's imagination runs riot through these ever fascinating pieces.

It helps that Barbara Harbach has recorded all the Sonatas in the same acoustic space and on the same instrument, given a beautiful recording by **MSR Classics**.

Soler's Sonatas come on fourteen discs housed in a clam shell type box. There is also a booklet with notes by Barbara Harbach in which she points out a few of her favourites in the collection.

Go from 1 to 120, or just dip in, whatever way you choose, you will be rewarded with decades of listening pleasure in Soler's amazing creations and Barbara's wonderful realisations.

Czech Music Direct, March 2016, Baroque eNewsletter

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This amazing recording on 14 **MSR Classics** discs comprises the complete Harpsichord Sonatas - 120 in total - by Antonio Soler (1729 -1783). It is the outcome of 20 years of recording by Barbara Harbach. Throughout she used the same recording venue and instrument, which gives the set a very integrated feel. The discs are housed in cardboard sleeves, which accompany a detailed book of programme notes and historical background material. Barbara Harbach even lets you into knowing which are her favourite Sonatas.

Soler lived most of his life in a religious institution, yet his Sonatas cover a wide range of emotions and colours. Some, in the manner of Scarlatti, are just a single movement lasting a few minutes. Others are multi-movement, lasting up to thirty minutes.

To make navigation easy the Sonatas are laid out over the discs in numerical order, and it is fascinating following their course, changes of key and tempi (some of these are not specified). Barbara's Harpsichord dates from 1989 and is a copy by Willard Martin of an 18th century two-manual French Double Harpsichord designed by Francois Blanchet.

This unique set is quite a musical journey, and Barbara Harbach is a wonderful guide.

Czech Music Direct, June 2016, Baroque eNewsletter

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ANTONIO SOLER: Harpsichord Sonatas (Complete Rubio Edition) – Barbara Harbach, harpsichord – MSR Classics MS1300 (14 CDs), 14+ hours [Distr. by Albany]

These are tremendous recordings and an important addition to the catalog!

Though Antonio Soler (1729-83) achieved quite a bit of fame in Europe for his harpsichord and organ works, it was his keyboard sonatas that really cemented his reputation, and they are the reason for our interest today. Often compared to Domenico Scarlatti, his pieces composed in a variety of styles featuring early one movement formats to later multi-sectional pieces do exercise some of the same methods as the Italian master. But Soler was not Scarlatti, though this should not deter us today any more than listening to Mozart's music means we ignore the rest of the Classical period. The endless variety and sparkling sonorities that he produces lend themselves to hours of relaxed and sometimes enthralling listening, an especial remedy for those looking for something new along the byways of late Baroque/ early Classical keyboard music.

We don't know much about his life because he entered the Escolania of the Monastery of Montserrat in 1736 as a young boy to study music, and stayed in relative monastic seclusion. He was born in Olot de Porrera in Catalonia, Spain in 1729 and became organist and sub-deacon at the Cathedral of La Seu d'Urgell in 1744, taking holy orders at age 23 and remaining in Madrid for the rest of his life. He never reaches for the stars in his music, being more contemplative in nature, though there is an unerring consistency and perfection in his art that is always seeking just the right note at the right time.

In this nicely-priced set (a hundred bucks for 14 discs) Barbara Harbach opts for the edition of Padre Samuel Rubio, who sets the canonical listing at 120 sonatas, and they are recorded in numerical order, which is nice if you wish to concentrate on a certain period or trace the composer's development over time. We really can't call the set "complete" as there are other

sonatas not included in Rubio's edition (and which have been recorded on Naxos by Gilbert Rowland and given in a varied ordering), but Rubio's inclusions cannot be dismissed so easily either. [There is a total of over 550 Scarlatti sonatas and more are constantly being discovered…Ed.] Rowland's set is in a more natural acoustic, and is perhaps more demonstrative in nature. Harbach by contrast goes for a very close recording with little ambiance around the instrument. However, this is not a bad thing as these sonatas lend themselves to this sort of aural examination, and one is energized upon hearing the delightful articulation and sprightly sense of bounciness and dance that she brings to the instrument, while the close up sound allows for the degree of intimacy we would most likely find in a drawing room during Soler's time.

Steven Ritter, Audiophile Audition ~ 2015

Bach ~ Johann Sebastian BACH Organ Music
MSR 1444

JS BACH: ORGAN MUSIC - *Prelude and "St. Anne's" Fugue, BWV 552; Toccata and Fugue in F, BWV 540; An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV 653; Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 546; Choral Prelude "O Mensch Bewein dein Sünde Groß," BWV 622; Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542; Prelude and Fugue in E Minor ("Wedge"), BWV 548.*

Barbara Harbach is well known as a composer, editor, researcher, and educator, and her numerous recordings of harpsichord and organ repertoire have established her as a major interpreter of 18th century keyboard music. These recordings of some of the most celebrated organ works of Johann Sebastian Bach were originally released on Gasparo Records, though this 2015 reissue on MSR Classics is a digitally remastered CD that offers enhanced sound for Harbach's exquisite performances. The Prelude and Fugue in E flat major, "St. Anne," BWV 552, the Toccata and Fugue in F major, BWV 540, and the chorale prelude An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV 653, were performed on the Fisk organ in the Downtown Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York, while the Prelude and Fugue in C minor, BWV 546, the chorale prelude O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß, BWV 622, the Fantasy and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542, and the Prelude and Fugue in E minor, "Wedge," BWV 548, were recorded at First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lyons, New York, with Harbach performing on the Schlicker organ. Yet the sound of the album overall is even and quite clear, and the change of venue makes little difference in the audio quality, except for a slightly brighter sound of the Schlicker. Harbach's execution is meticulous and rhythmically alert, so the freshness of her interpretations is matched by her impeccable presentation, making this a superb Bach album by any standard.
Blair Sanderson, All Music, February, 2016

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The disc at hand offers a collection of Bach organ "favorites," avoiding some of the most commonly encountered works, such as the dictionary definition of a Bach organ work, the D-Minor Toccata and Fugue, BWV 565, which according to some sources may not even be by Bach. What a shock that would be! It would be like finding out that God didn't write the Ten Commandments. The popular, so-called "St. Anne" Prelude and Fugue isn't exactly a joined pair, or at least Bach didn't originally intend them to be heard as such. The majestic Prelude, one of Bach's longest, served as the "overture," if you will, to the Clavier-Übung, Part III, aka

German Organ Mass; while the Fugue, some hours later, concluded the service. The "St. Anne," along with the Toccata and Fugue in F Major, BWV 540, the Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 546, and the chorale prelude An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV 653, are heard on the Schlicker organ in Lyons, New York, an instrument of fairly modest size—only two manuals plus pedal and 24 stops—which, nonetheless, makes a very robust sound in its acoustic space as captured by the recording. Harbach, of course, has a lot to do with that. Hers is a big, bold, colorful style of playing that makes maximum use of the resources at her disposal. This is playing of a manner that harks back to the approach of E. Power Biggs, and, as an antidote to some "historically informed" performances, I find it personally quite thrilling.

Beginning with the chorale prelude O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß, BWV 622, and continuing with the Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542, and the Prelude and Fugue in E Minor, BWV 548, nicknamed "The Wedge," we find ourselves at the Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York, listening to the Fisk organ, the specifications for which were given earlier. This is a very different sound—sharper, drier, not as given to spread, and very tightly focused. As organs go, it's quite a new instrument (1983) and it reflects what I think is a modern sound well suited to contemporary music. It is also excellent, as is Harbach, at delineating Bach's contrapuntal voices. You can almost visualize the lines in Harbach's realization of the G-Minor Fugue.

All of these works have, of course, been played to death by organists of every persuasion on organs of every period and design. But Barbara Harbach brings her own special artistry to this music, and on a couple of outstanding organs that are very exhilarating to hear—one of them, a Fisk by an all-American company established in Gloucester, Massachusetts only in 1961; and the other, a Schlicker, also an American company, but founded in 1930 by a third-generation builder who had studied organ building in Germany, France, and Denmark, and who combined in his instruments the characteristic properties of the great European organ building traditions.

Harbach is a wonderful player—which I already knew from her The Art of Fugue—and this disc is easily recommended to anyone who loves Bach's organ music performed with all the stops pulled out.

Jerry Dubins Fanfare Magazine, March/April 2016

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"Johann Sebastian Bach: Organ Music." The bare words don't begin to describe the riches in this CD. In a marvelous example of scholarship allied with style and technique, Barbara Harbach gives us one of the most deeply satisfying Bach recitals I've heard in some time.

There are actually two recitals here. Tracks 1-5 were recorded on the Fisk organ of the Downtown Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY, Tracks 6-11 on the Schlicker organ of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lyons, NY. The former has, to my ears, a slightly warmer sound, and the latter a marginally more incisive one. First-rate balance engineering gives the impression of a single, cohesive program.

First up is the Prelude and Fugue in E-flat, BWV 552. The prelude is a synthesis of French ouverture, Italian concerto, and German fugue, with vividly contrasting passages. The Fugue

proper is known as the "St. Anne," after the accidental resemblance of its first subject to the tune of the English hymn "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." As Albert Schweitzer pointed out in Jean-Sebastien Bach, le musician- poête (1905), the triple fugue is a symbol of the Holy Trinity, ending in "rushing semiquavers as if the Pentacostal wind were coming roaring from heaven."

The most remarkable feature of Toccata and Fugue in F, BWV 540, is the jaunty, zestful upswing in the second subject of the toccata, as if the music were sweeping us toward the Kingdom of Heaven on the backs of fiery steeds. Adventurous harmonies, startling modulations, and dramatic chord insertions add to the excitement.

"An Wasserflüssen Babylon" (By the waters of Babylon), BWV 653, is an ornamental chorale in the style of a Sarabande. The Psalmist's lament in the first section is followed by calm, uplifting hope in the next. The other chorale prelude on the program, "O Mensch, bewein deine Sünde gross" (O man bemoan thy grievous sin) contrasts Passion-like gravity with a rising bass line in the part of the chorale concerning Christ's sacrifice.

BWV 546 in C minor consists of a stentorian 7-part Prelude and an amazingly supple 5-voice Fugue. BWV 542, the "Great" Fantasy and Fugue in G minor, is prized by Harbach as much for its "harmonic boldness, chromatic shifts, and enharmonic perplexity" as for the countersubjects and added motifs that propel the mighty fugue to its final conclusion.

Finally, we have the Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 548 as a fitting conclusion to a satisfying program. As Harbach explains in her highly readable notes, this work is called the "Wedge" because the opening fugal subject starts with one note, followed by two notes on either side, forming a minor triad, and then gradually widens into an octave (another evocation of the Trinity).
The concluding Fugue is bold, free, and utterly brilliant.
Phil Muse, Audio Club of Atlanta, 2015

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Still, the contrast between Biret's piano-Bach and Barbara Harbach's organ-Bach shows the inherent superiority of performing this music on the right type of instrument. Much like Biret, Harbach is a thoughtful performer as well as an energetic one, and she too gives the impression that she has thought through all the elements of every work she plays long before she sits down for a performance. The two organs that Harbach plays on a new MSR Classics CD are scarcely comparable to those of Bach's time: one, in Rochester, New York, dates to 1983, while the other, in Lyons, New York, dates to 1970. But Harbach evokes the Baroque feeling of this music through her skillful choice of stops, her adept blending of voices, and her very clear understanding of Bach's style and the extent to which an interpreter must – and must not – vary from the printed notes. The program given by Harbach is clearly a highly personal one – there is little inherent connection among the works – but these pieces, one and all, give Harbach a chance to show the great variety of sounds and styles that Bach brought to his compositions and that the organ can put on display. The gradual addition of voices to *An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV 653,* for example, contrasts strongly and appealingly with the striking immediacy of the opening of the *Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 546,* which immediately follows on the

disc. The stepwise, highly chromatic opening of the *Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542* (usually called "Fantasia" rather than "Fantasy") makes a wonderful contrast with the much more declamatory start of the next work, *Prelude and Fugue in E Minor ("Wedge"), BWV 548.* Harbach handles all the fugues with care, precision and enough feeling to make them sound like something well beyond dry exercises. Indeed, the contrast between her improvisation-like approach to the first of the paired movements (whether Prelude, Toccata or Fantasy) and her much more even, almost-staid handling of the fugues is one of this disc's particular pleasures. Harbach, herself a composer, quite clearly understands the structural elements of this music, and her sensitive readings show that she knows just when to draw attention to the works' foundations and when to let listeners hear just how imposing an edifice Bach built upon those bases.

Keyboard Excursions, February 25, 2016

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For those relative few who may not be familiar with her career, Barbara Harbach is a highly acclaimed organist, harpsichordist and composer, clearly one of the most respected composer-performers before the public today. She is also a teacher (professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis) and founder of a music publishing company, Vivace Press. As a composer Harbach has been quite versatile, turning out symphonies, operas, musicals, ballets, film scores, chamber and choral works and various keyboard pieces. As a performer she has championed works by female composers but without abandoning mainstream repertory, as the disc under review underscores.

These performances were originally issued on Gasparo Records and have now been expertly remastered here by the MSR engineers, the results having state-of-the-art sound quality. The first three works were recorded on the Fisk Organ at the Downtown Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY, and the remainder on the Schlicker Organ at the First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lyons, NY. I slightly favor the latter instrument, though both certainly have superb sound.

Harbach is a fine Bach player: every work on this CD comes across with spirit and a deft sense for the plentiful contrapuntal writing. She plays Bach with judicious tempos throughout, and never seems to inject a wayward personal touch or eccentricity into the music. Her interpretations are fairly straightforward, always sounding vital and intelligent, never calculated or cautious.

In the Prelude half of the Prelude and "St. Anne" Fugue, Harbach nicely conveys the stately character of the music with a full but never fulsome sound and her fugue builds to such a magnificent and all-conquering triumph that it becomes hard to imagine a more convincing account of this great piece. The ensuing works are played with the same kind of intelligence and spirit. Listen to the subtlety in her opening of Bach's Chorale Prelude from the Orgelbüchlein, O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross ("O Man, thy grievous sin bemoan"), and notice how she points up the sense of regret and pain with a slightly understated approach that also highlights a curious serenity and mystery in the music. And take note of the drive and epic character of the fugue in the G minor Fantasy and Fugue. Here you notice a clarity and crispness in the playing that give the music both energy and a lean muscularity, yielding a convincing and utterly vital performance. The vigor and bright character that Harbach brings out in the Prelude half of the

"Wedge" Prelude and Fugue is balanced perfectly by her brawny and epic account of the fugal portion. The breathless running passages are brilliantly played here.
A stunning performance to conclude this splendid disc.

CLASSICAL NET March 2016 http://www.classical.net/music/recs/reviews/m/msr01444a.php
Robert Cummings

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Harbach's Bach breathes the breath of openness and refined imagery. ****

The Fisk organ of the Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester NY, and the Schlicker organ of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lyons NY are the settings for this third Bach disc of Barbara Harbach for MSR Classics. Harbach is quite the wunderkind; Curators' Professor of Music at the University of Missouri St. Louis, she is a prolific performer, researcher, composer, educator, and historical music specialist. I get tired just looking at all of her accomplishments, and maybe this is why I find her Bach so relaxed, genial, and devotional. If that sounds like code for "boring" to you, the truth is anything but. In fact, after all the Bach organ recordings that seem to have been as stretched, twisted, and pulled apart as Bach's music in general, I find the more meditative aspects of even his more vigorous pieces, like the*Toccata and Fugue in F major*, taken with a wonderful lilting feel, to be preferable to the enervated and pumped-up recordings that so often appear these days. Harbach in fact reminds me of one of my favorites, E Power Biggs, a man much maligned in his days as being too middle of the road, but who in fact had a unique and formidably powerful vision of Bach's music and how it was performed. Harbach seems to share this spirit.
The sound, as on so many MSR recordings, is warm and vibrant, analog-like, not always the most spacious but equally rich in tonal luster and true to the instrument. An easy recommendation.
Steven Ritter – Audiophile Audition, June 2016

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JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH: ORGAN MUSIC
Barbara Harbach, organ

Barbara Harbach has performed extensively as an organist and harpsichordist worldwide. As a result of her highly acclaimed performances, many new works by American composers have been written and dedicated to her. Additionally Ms. Harbach is involved in the research, editing, publishing and recording of 18th century keyboard composers as well as works by women composers. She has a number of publications and recordings to her credit, and also serves as editor of WomenArts Quarterly Journal. She holds degrees from Pennsylvania State University, Yale University, the Musikhochschule (Frankfurt), and the Eastman School of Music (D.M.A.). She is currently the Curators' Professor of Music at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. Both

organs used for this recording are by American organ builders. The Fisk Organ in the Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester, NY is used in tracks 1-5 and the Schlicker organ at First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lyons, NY is used in tracks 6-12. Both are outstanding instruments, and the differences between venues and instruments does not affect the superb quality of the performances or record engineering. Some listeners may have a preference between the two, with the Schlicker organ being more vivid and brilliant. The recording is a well done, digitally remastered version of an earlier recording. Throughout there is a fine quality of sound which is warm and reverberant, but without losing definition or clarity in articulation. These works are well-known to every organist and to those who love Bach's organ works, and Barbara Harbach presents them here with great technical precision and inspiring musicality. Her runs are performed brilliantly with crisp, clear articulation, and her use of the full range of colors available on these two outstanding instruments is impressive. Harbach is one of the most well-known and respected performers today, and this recording is sure to please.

Attractive liner notes are provided by Ms. Harbach.

Kim McCormick, Fall 2016 PAN PIPES, page 33. Sai-national.org

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This is a digitally remastered reissue of two recordings that first appeared on the Gasparo label. The program includes some of the best known of JS Bach's larger-scale free organ works. There are also two chorale preludes. 'An Wasserflüssen Babylon' (S 653) is the version in five parts with double pedal. 'O Mensch Bewein' is from Orgelbüchlein. In her performances Barbara Harbach tends to favor brisk tempos, particularly in the Toccata in F and the Wedge.

…Harbach's formidable technique or the boldness of her interpretations. Indeed, hers is one of the most fluent performances I have heard of 'An Wasserflüssen Babylon'. It is exceptionally difficult for the double pedal writing to come across smoothly with good phrase connection.

The first part of the program is played on the three-manual Fisk organ (1980) at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York. The tone combines clarity with warmth and refinement—hallmarks of Fisk's best work. Judging from the decay of final chords, the room is far from dry, but without sumptuous reverberation. The rest of the program is played on a smaller two-manual Schlicker organ (1970) at First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lyons, New York.

Barbara Harbach is on the faculty of the University of Missouri in St Louis. In addition to her reputation as an organist and harpsichordist, she is a prolific composer and a devoted champion of music by women, both early and modern.

Gatens - AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE, July/August 2016

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…Still, the contrast between Biret's piano-Bach and Barbara Harbach's organ-Bach shows the inherent superiority of performing this music on the right type of instrument. Much like Biret, Harbach is a thoughtful performer as well as an energetic one, and she too gives the impression that she has thought through all the elements of every work she plays long before she sits down for a performance. The two organs that Harbach plays on a new MSR Classics CD are scarcely comparable to those of Bach's time: one, in Rochester, New York, dates to 1983, while the other, in Lyons, New York, dates to 1970. But Harbach evokes the Baroque feeling of this music through her skillful choice of stops, her adept blending of voices, and her very clear understanding of Bach's style and the extent to which an interpreter must – and must not – vary from the printed notes. The program given by Harbach is clearly a highly personal one – there is little inherent connection among the works – but these pieces, one and all, give Harbach a chance to show the great variety of sounds and styles that Bach brought to his compositions and that the organ can put on display. The gradual addition of voices to *An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV 653,* for example, contrasts strongly and appealingly with the striking immediacy of the opening of the *Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 546,* which immediately follows on the disc. The stepwise, highly chromatic opening of the *Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542* (usually called "Fantasia" rather than "Fantasy") makes a wonderful contrast with the much more declamatory start of the next work, *Prelude and Fugue in E Minor ("Wedge"), BWV 548.* Harbach handles all the fugues with care, precision and enough feeling to make them sound like something well beyond dry exercises. Indeed, the contrast between her improvisation-like approach to the first of the paired movements (whether Prelude, Toccata or Fantasy) and her much more even, almost-staid handling of the fugues is one of this disc's particular pleasures. Harbach, herself a composer, quite clearly understands the structural elements of this music, and her sensitive readings show that she knows just when to draw attention to the works' foundations and when to let listeners hear just how imposing an edifice Bach built upon those bases.

INFODAD
Keyboard Excursions, February 25, 2016
http://transcentury.blogspot.com/2016/02/keyboard-excursions.html

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Barbara Harbach puts forth this program with authority, subtlety, and in a great variety of voicings which few organists can conceive, let alone manifest at the console. She plays the Fisk Organ (1983) in Rochester, NY and the Schlicker Organ (1970) in Lyons, NY.

Organ Historical Society, January 2017 http://www.ohscatalog.org/josebaorwo.html

BACH: Prelude and St. Anne Fugue in E-flat major, BWV 552; Toccata and Fugue in F major, BWV 540; An Wasserflussen Babylon, BWV 653; Prelude and Fugue in C minor, BWV 546; Choral Prelude: O Mensch Bewein Dein Sunde Gross, BWV 622; Fantasy and Fugue in G minor, BWV 542; Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 548 "Wedge" – Barbara Harbach, organ – MSR Classics MS 1444, 74:40 [Distr. by Albany]

The Fisk organ of the Downtown Presbyterian Church in Rochester NY, and the Schlicker organ of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lyons NY are the settings for this third Bach disc of Barbara Harbach for MSR Classics. Harbach is quite the wunderkind; Curators' Professor of Music at the University of Missouri St. Louis, she is a prolific performer, researcher, composer, educator, and historical music specialist. I get tired just looking at all of her accomplishments, and maybe this is why I find her Bach so relaxed, genial, and devotional. If that sounds like code for "boring" to you, the truth is anything but. In fact, after all the Bach organ recordings that seem to have been as stretched, twisted, and pulled apart as Bach's music in general, I find the more meditative aspects of even his more vigorous pieces, like the *Toccata and Fugue in F major*, taken with a wonderful lilting feel, to be preferable to the enervated and pumped-up recordings that so often appear these days. Harbach in fact reminds me of one of my favorites, E Power Biggs, a man much maligned in his days as being too middle of the road, but who in fact had a unique and formidably powerful vision of Bach's music and how it was performed. Harbach seems to share this spirit.

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Steven Ritter, Audiophile Audition ~ 2016

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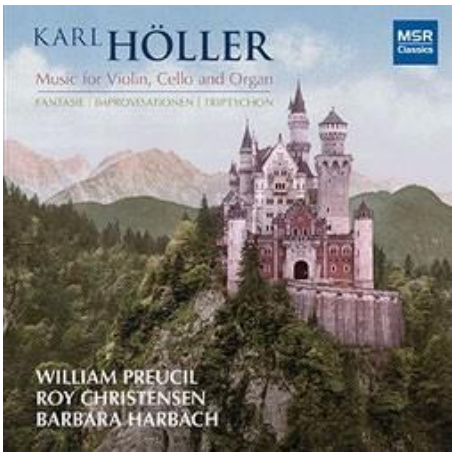
Karl Höller
Music for Violin, Cello and Organ
MSR 1445



KARL HOELLER: Music for Violin, Cello and Organ = Fantasie for Violin and Organ, Op. 49; Triptychon for Organ solo, Op. 64; Improvisationen for Cello and Organ, Op. 55 – William Preucil, v./ Roy Christensen, cello/ Barbara Harbach, organ – MSR Classics MS 1445, 70:55 (9/29/16) [****]

The music of Karl Hoeller proves devotional and ecstatic in a highly individual but dark style.

During a phone interview with pianist Veronika Jochum, daughter of eminent conductor Eugen Jochum, the name of composer Karl Hoeller arose, in the course of a radio tribute to Eugen Jochum which featured one of Hoeller's orchestral compositions. Given Hoeller's penchant for polyphony, tonal colors, and classical procedures, a comparison to Paul Hindemith seemed inevitable; but Ms. Jochum and I agree that Hoeller's style feels distinctly less "academic" than that of Hindemith. The three works presented here derive from the years 1949-1963. Violinist William Preucil served as concertmaster in Atlanta and in Cleveland, before assuming the first violin position with the Cleveland Quartet. The *Fantasie* opens with a solo cadenza before the organ joins him in some "symphonic" harmonization. The writing for both instruments, whether in concert or individually can become quite rhapsodic. The muted organ episodes introduce an aura of mystery and pietism into the work, not far from the somber chorales of Franck and their idiosyncratic chromaticism. If the organ harmonies prove modal and askew, the violin often maintains a piercing lyricism whose ardent and passionate arioso remands me of Frank Martin. Mid-way, the organ breaks off into a toccata riff quite indebted to Bach, with the violin's assuming a more angular melodic line. A plaintive series of riffs absorbs the violin over a weaving bass line in the organ; then the organ picks up the violin tune and adds long-held chords that crescendo as Harbach applies the swell manual. What then follows seems a kind of moody, resigned epilogue that eventually fades away in haunted tones.

Victimae paschali laudes (1570) is a sequence prescribed for the Roman Catholic Mass and liturgical Protestant Eucharists of Easter Sunday. Hoeller made his three-part *Trypticon* for solo organ around 1962-1963. Given Hoeller's long experience with the instrument – particularly in Frankfurt and Bamberg – the writing proves virtuosic and effective, often in agitated and convulsive gestures. The opening "Improvisation: Amen" exploits the full diapason of the M.P. Moeller Organ of the First Church of Christ Scientist in Buffalo, New York. Mid-way, a heavy

bass tone moves under a piccolo choir. The harmonies blur, and the effect reminds me of the background score for the Ian McKellen/Judy Dench version of *Macbeth*. A high-pipe flourish concludes the "Amen." The setting for the middle movement, "Die nobis, Maria," is an expansive ricercare at first set in contrary motion. Soon, the music expresses a highly chromatic sense of exaltation, befitting the tone of the sacred motet. We wonder how much of the influence of Max Reger permeates this approach, especially in the grand crescendos. The music becomes distinctly fugal in texture, but Hoeller's score does not dance. Rather, it frets and grumbles in increasing histrionics, insistent. In what appears an extended coda, the music achieves a sense of intimate quietude, still dark, but resigned to piety. The last movement Hoeller marks "Postludium 'Amen, Alleluja.'" Huge block chords and scalar patterns invoke a severe sense of the transcendent, the rhythmic motion close to Poulenc but without the feeling of liberation. Organist Harbach herself enjoys a career that embraces composition, editing, performing, and publishing.

The five *Improvisations (1950) for Cello and Organ* are each marked in German, much in the manner of late Beethoven and Hindemith. They each refer to the spiritual folksong, "Schoenster Herr Jesus," sometimes noted apocryphally as the Crusaders' Hymn, but its first real appearance occurs in Liszt's *Legend of Saint Elizabeth*. The first movement sings in a way the prior pieces only managed sporadically. Cellist Christensen has an *ostinato* pizzicato for the second movement, in which the organ realizes a pseudo-jazzy rhythm. The third movement, *Gesangvoll fliessend,* soars, and the organ contributes its own meditative song. The fourth movement, relatively brief, suggests a scherzo, and employs pungent entries from Christensen's instrument. The fifth movement, the longest, reverts to the highly chromatic lines Hoeller favors his meditative organ works, gloomy and somber. The cello part, however, seems a combination of Schumann fused with aspects of Debussy, Faure, Reger, and late Romanticism generally. As fits the designation, *In ruhiger,* the music achieves a grudging peace of mind nd spirit. No credit identifies Christensen's instrument, but it sports a lovely, burnished tone, as some may recall when he served as principal cellist both in Atlanta and Cincinnati.

Gary Lemco, Audiophile Audition, January 2017

https://www.audaud.com/hoeller-fantasie-for-violin-and-organ-triptychon-for-organ-solo-improvisationen-for-cello-organ-william-preucil-v-roy-christensen-c-barbara-harbach-organ-msr-classics/

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Description: You will find no notes on the music in this reissue of a 28-year-old Gasparo release but the Fantasie of 1949, Improvisations (1950) and the Triptychon (early 1960s) all show Höller's main characteristics: late Romantic tonal language with elements of the mature Hindemith's neo-classicism and an interest in baroque forms and structures. The recording quality handles the combination of string instrument and organ with such balance and clarity that it makes you wonder why more composers don't try this interesting genre. William Preusil (violin), Roy Christensen (cello), Barbara Harbach (organ of First Church of Christ Scientist, Buffalo). Original 1989 Gasparo release.

Records International, January 2017

https://www.recordsinternational.com/cd.php?cd=01S006

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Recently, I attended a concert by the Cleveland Orchestra, which had come down to Bloomington for its bi-annual residency at Indiana University. The orchestra's concertmaster is William Preucil, and his extended solo in the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 2 (brilliantly performed by the orchestra and Yefim Bronfman) reminded me of the fact that I dearly wished that more of Preucil's artistry was available on CD. Well, here I am three days later reviewing a disc that features him and his colleagues, cellist Roy Christiansen and organist Barbara Harbach, both of whose artistry I also admire, in a program of music by the German composer-organist-conductor Karl Höller. I'm not saying, however, that this is a newly recorded CD, since it actually is a reissue of the original Gasparo disc, issued back in 1991, and reviewed in that year by Fanfare's Scott Wheeler in 14:6. Wheeler didn't much care for Höller's music, but given that I'd heard other works of his over the years that I'd liked, I was determined to approach it with an open mind.

His Fantasie for Violin and Organ begins with an extended violin solo, effectively showcasing Preucil's incomparable artistry (his student performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, given as one of his required recitals for his degree at Indiana University, I thought was the best performance I'd ever heard of the work, as I sat listening to it, as a graduate student). After a minute, the organ enters, and the tempo of the piece picks up. Like most works with such a title, this 19-minute fantasie has a number of contrasting sections and moods. The style of the writing is quite tonal, albeit with not infrequent excursions into abstruse sonorities derived from near-clusters of pitches in the organ. Fortunately, Höller knew enough to restrain the organ from overpowering the violin, although I suspect that in some of its louder passages, the engineers had a hand in insuring the violin part would be heard. Contrary to Wheeler, I do like this music. If the composer has any weakness, it might be his rather constant shifting of styles—sometimes you're hearing figuration and chords reminiscent of Hindemith, and at others, Messiaen-like sonorities, and at still others, Bach with updated harmonies—but I do believe that there is an organic consistency and flow to the piece despite this fact, and I don't actually hear this stylistic shifting as a flaw. Of course, the superlative artistry of Preucil and Harbach could make the phone book sound like a masterpiece, were it somehow transcribed to musical pitches.

Höller's Tryptichon for solo organ forms the centerpiece of this recital. Here, Harbach is allowed to pull out all the stops, and the opening almost knocks the listener out of his chair. The M. P. Moller organ found in the First Church of Christ Scientist in Buffalo, NY, is an impressive, even if not particularly large (it has but 42 ranks) instrument. The works opening movement is improvisatory in nature, and indeed is entitled "Improvisation 'Amen.'" Since the notes don't favor us with even one word about the pieces themselves (I did find the essay on the composer illuminating: He came from a long line of organists and composers, for instance), I can give but my aural impressions of each of these works. The second movement is entitled "Ricercar 'Dic nobis, Maria,'" and is a quiet and meditative essay with a dramatic high point that comes at mid-point, while the Tryptichon's concluding "Postludium 'Amen, Alleluja'" forms an exuberant and exciting conclusion to this work which amounts to a symphony in its scope and style. The style of this fascinating work is more consistently within the mid-20th-century ambit of the German music of composers such as Hindemith, Boris Blacher, and Günther Bialas, with healthy doses of contemporary chromatic counterpoint at certain points. I would say, however, that some of the rapid figuration in the final movement sounds a bit more French to my ears than German.

The survey of Höller's organ and organ-accompanied works concludes with his Improvisations for cello and organ. This five-movement suite is based on the spiritual folksong Schönster Herr

Jesus and is by turns elegiac, powerful, and lively. Since I didn't recognize the tune in this setting, it is difficult for me to pinpoint exactly how the composer uses it here, but I found the piece very satisfying. The second movement features an unusual device, for instance—a walking pizzicato line in the lower range of the cello, over which complex chords are played in the organ's upper register. Not many composers have written for the combination of cello and organ (I recall only offhand a piece by Louis Vierne), but the combination works exceedingly well, and Roy Christiansen's consummate artistry is on full display throughout the 23-minute suite.

I don't have the original Gasparo issue of this disc with which to compare this reissue, but I find no fault in any aspect of its production, other than the omission of any discussion of the works heard herein. I consider Höller's music elegant and profound, and the performances it receives here simply cannot be surpassed.

David DeBoor Canfield, *Fanfare* Magazine Issue 40:5, May/June 2017

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The three Karl Höller works on a new MSR Classics release focus neither on violin nor on cello, although both are present. The dominant sound here is that of the organ, which is scarcely an instrument usually associated with chamber music. Barbara Harbach, a very fine organist as well as a skilled composer in her own right, clearly finds the music of Höller (1907-1987) congenial. The tonal language here is primarily that of the late Romantic era, but it is blended, generally rather seamlessly, with the neoclassicism of Paul Hindemith and some of the approaches to organ music favored by Max Reger. Indeed, two of the works on this disc have neo-Baroque sensibilities despite their more-modern harmonic structure. *Triptychon* is a three-movement solo organ work "on the Easter sequence 'Victimae paschali laudes,'" and *Improvisation* is a five-movement piece "on the spiritual folksong 'Schönster Herr Jesus.'" The religious underpinning of both these works ties to the traditional centrality of the church in organ music, yet Höller's use of a folksong as the basis for *Improvisation* pulls the instrument our of a strictly ecclesiastical setting and into the wider world. Unlike Martinů, Höller does not seem to take the folk elements of his underlying material deeply to heart, at least in this work, but he writes just as effectively for cello and organ as Martinů does for cello and piano – and in fact Höller's integration of the stringed and wind instruments is so well done that listeners may wonder why the combination is so rare. As for *Triptychon,* it is a more conventional piece in its sacred theme and in Höller's handling of the material, and at nearly half an hour it is somewhat overly expansive, without the tight integration of form that, for example, Widor and Vierne brought to their organ symphonies. Harbach certainly plays the piece very well, though. As for the somewhat slighter *Fantasie,* here the balance of violin and organ is attractive – and in some ways more immediately appealing than that of the lower, more-resonant cello with the organ in *Improvisation.* Again, though, the single-movement *Fantasie* uses the two instruments in such interesting ways that listeners may wish for further examples of this type of strings-and-organ combination, which in skilled hands like Höller's offers a very intriguing mixture of sounds.

Mark J. Estren, INFODAD.COM, April 2017

http://transcentury.blogspot.com/2017/04/small-scale-with-much-to-say.html

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ ORCHESTRA IV
Symphonic Storytelling
Vol. XII MSR 1646

HARBACH Symphonic Storytelling • David Angus, cond; London PO • MSR 1646 (77:37)

Interview with Ken Meltzer

A new recording on MSR Classics is the fourth volume in the label's series of the orchestral music of American composer Barbara Harbach. Subtitled "Symphonic Storytelling," the recording features two orchestral works inspired by narratives created in the second decade of the 20th century.

Your Symphony No. 11, "Retourner" (2017), is based upon Willa Cather's 1913 novel, O Pioneers! *What were the circumstances that led to the creation of this symphony, and why did you choose* O Pioneers! *as its basis? How does your music reflect and illuminate Cather's narrative?*

I have been intrigued with the writings of Willa Cather since I read *My Ántonia,* followed by *The Song of the Lark,* and then *O Pioneers!* Perhaps my affinity to Willa and her novels comes from my own background—I grew up in rural Pennsylvania with the nearest town six miles away, and there were wide-open spaces similar to Nebraska. The only surrounding houses were those of my father's two sisters, and my grandparents who ran a traveler's inn until the 1960s. I was enchanted with *O Pioneers!* and thought it would make a great opera. Years later, after rereading *O Pioneers!* I felt that the time was right to write, and the opera was premiered in 2009 at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Sometimes a writer or a composer is not finished with a particular subject or scene or even a theme or melody. In 2016, some themes from my opera were swirling through my imagination, some enlarged and transformed, some merely changed, as well as new ideas emerging for the same scene.

Each of the symphony's three movements refers to a particular scene in *O Pioneers!* The first movement of Symphony No. 11, "Retourner," is adapted from a scene of Willa Cather's 1913 lyrical novel of tragedy and transformation. Nebraska is making the transition from frontier to

prosperous rural heartland. The first movement, "Return-Debate," takes place in the early 20th century. Emil Bergson has just returned home to Nebraska from Mexico and with much eagerness goes to an orchard, where he plans to meet his childhood sweetheart, who awaits him. She is now Marie Shabata, married to an ill-tempered man. The bond between them is rekindled, and escalates into a clandestine passion. The movement is a compilation of themes and motives, and they are always changing and morphing into new versions of themselves—all related but different, depicting a conversation, sometimes coherent, other times incomprehensible as only intimate conversations can be. As conversations between lovers often unfold, they may be a debate, or else seductive, strident, or joyous with anticipation and reconciliation. The themes leap from instrument to instrument, intertwine, mingle, and frolic.

"Our Sweet and Carefree Youth," the second movement of "Retourner," is also inspired from a scene from *O Pioneers!* It is a moment when the soon-to-be lovers, Alexandra Bergstrum and Carl Linstrum, look back on their youth, and remember the tender scenes of their childhood—milking cows and going to the General Store—a sweet and carefree youth. To set the stage Alexandra, who runs a successful farm in spite of her brothers, is in her office, working with her ledgers and a Burroughs adding machine. The opening theme, begun with the trumpet and upper woodwinds, represents her adding machine in its methodical and steady beat. Looking out her window over the land, she imagines a stately anthem to Nebraska. The scene dissolves as Alexandra returns to the reality of bookkeeping, but soon the mood changes and Alexandra feels alone, yearning for love. Superimposed over Alexandra's sad song, the adding machine theme begins to dominate. Reality returns once again, but this time ending with a happy ode to the adding machine.

The third movement, "The Art of Tarot," takes place at the fair in a nearby French church where everyone dresses in the Mexican fashion. Marie, who dresses as an old Bohemian fortune teller, is the Queen of Hearts who "will all your fortunes tell." Marie is happy to see her lover, and during the evening her lover steals a kiss from her. In the confusion that follows, he tells her that he will leave her alone if she admits that she loves him, and she does. The scene opens with a short string introduction, followed by the trumpet ushering in the lilting melody. As with doomed lovers, the next section starts with a sense of foreboding of impending tragedy. The festive aura keeps trying to return, and is successful for short while. In a capricious and flirtatious scene, the piccolo takes a short cadenza, leading into a new theme. However, an ominous atmosphere prevails, harmonically restless, with attempts at striving for a happier message. While the triumphant ending should be celebratory, impending tragedy masks the tone, anticipating the deaths of Emil and Marie.

The second work on "Symphonic Storytelling" is Hypocrisy *(2016), an orchestral suite written for the 1915 silent film* Hypocrites. *Tell us about this remarkable movie, and its brilliant creator. When did you first become familiar with* Hypocrites*, and when did you decide to compose a new score to accompany the film?*

I am inspired by strong women creators and have composed music on the texts, poems, or novels of these creators such as Willa Cather, or women who helped pioneer Alaska, plus Maya Angelou, Dorothy Parker, and Harriet Scott, to name a few. I am also a fan of silent films, and have become fascinated with women directors, who in spite of almost overwhelming odds have produced outstanding and thought-provoking films, often with a social message. Over the years I have written scores to six silent films, including the well-known directors Alice Guy Blaché and Lois Weber.

1) *Hypocrites* (1915) for orchestra and 49-minute silent film with director Lois Weber. (Released on MSR Classics 1646, *Harbach Orchestra IV*.)

2) *The Birth, Life and Death of Christ* (1906) for chamber ensemble and 33-minute silent film with director Alice Guy Blaché, premiered at the St. Louis International Film Festival in November 2014. (Released on MSR Classics 1544, *Harbach Chamber Music V*.)

3) *Judith Simon* (1915) for chamber ensemble and 39-minute silent film with director Adolf Merai. A Hungarian-Jewish silent film called *Simon Judit*, it premiered at the Touhill Performing Arts Center, University of Missouri-St. Louis in November 2006. (Renamed *Echoes from Tomorrow for Chamber Ensemble* and released on MSR Classics 1255, *Harbach Chamber Music II*.)

4) *A House Divided* (1913) for chamber ensemble and 13-minute silent film with director Alice Guy Blaché, premiered at Webster University in November 2005. (Renamed *Separately Together for Chamber Ensemble* and released MSR Classics 1253, *Harbach Chamber Music I*.)

5) *How Men Propose* (1913) for Chamber Ensemble and 6-minute silent film with director Lois Weber, premiered at Webster University in November 2005. (Renamed *Carondelet Caprice for Chamber Ensemble* and released on MSR Classics 1253, *Harbach Chamber Music I*.)

6) *Making an American Citizen* (1912) for chamber ensemble and 16-minute silent film with director Alice Guy Blaché, premiered at the St. Louis International Film Festival, Tivoli Theatre, November 2004. (Renamed *Transformations for String Quartet* and released on MSR Classics 1253, *Harbach Chamber Music I*; also released as *Transformations for String Orchestra* on MSR 1255, *Harbach Chamber Music II*.)

Hypocrites is a significant silent film by the American film director, Lois Weber (1888–1939), and is noted for its use of religious imagery and innovative special effects. My aim was to write an original, contemporary film score for this 1915 silent film. Broadly, the film dramatizes the fascinating, frustrating, and moralizing indictment of hypocrisy, particularly in reference to religion, business, politics, as well as love and family—timeless subjects of literature and film. I feel that there are two reasons to add contemporary music to silent film: 1) to show how contemporary music enhances the picture, and 2) to expose the silent film to newer, younger audiences and attract new and appreciative audiences to the genre.

The film follows the two parallel stories of an early Christian monk and a modern minister. The medieval monk devotes himself to completing a statue of "Truth." When his work turns out to be an image of a naked woman, he is murdered by a mob. The contemporary minister is the pastor of a large wealthy urban congregation for whom religion is a matter of appearances and not beliefs. A series of vignettes follows in which the *Naked Truth*, a nude, reveals the hypocrisy of the congregation members and exposes their appetites for money, sex, and power. In the film, the nudity is barely visible due to the film technique of double exposure, producing a ghostly appearance. This technique was revolutionary for its time, as was Weber's intricate editing. The film proved to be quite controversial. Although there were calls for censorship, the film was generally hailed as an artistic and cultural milestone. The *New York Evening Journal* described the film as "the most startlingly satisfying and vividly wonderful creation of the screen age." A print of the film is kept in the Library of Congress and is now available on DVD by Kino.

Lois Weber was the leading female director-screenwriter in early Hollywood. She began her career alongside her husband, Phillips Smalley. Her films were well-scripted and acted, popular, and financially successful. They addressed topics that contained controversial social issues such as abortion, birth control, capital punishment, religious hypocrisy, a living wage, child labor, prostitution, and white slavery. Lois Weber's name was regularly mentioned as one of the top talents in Hollywood, and she was the first and only woman elected to the Motion Picture Directors Association in 1916, an honor she held for decades.

Have there been screenings of the movie Hypocrites *with your film score? If so, I'm curious as to the audience reaction, both to the movie, and to your music.*

Unfortunately, we have not yet had a screening, but we are planning a premiere.

Did you conceive Hypocrisy *as an orchestral work that can also be performed independent of the film?*

One of my goals in writing the film score is the hope that it will add musical punctuation and feeling to the drama, stretch the emotional range, and guide the audience into the receptive frame of mind to comprehend, with empathy, the subtleties of the narrative. An effective musical score provides an emotional bridge into an historical film genre that may otherwise prove to be inaccessible to present-day audiences, such as the relevant topic of religious bigotry that resonates today. Contemporary music set to silent film is a growing genre that consistently enthralls audiences, making this an area of growing artistic significance.

The overall goal was to write music that not only serves the film as a musical video, but stands on its own musical merits, so I renamed it *Hypocrisy—Orchestral Suite*.

Symphonic Storytellers *reunites you with artists with whom you have previously collaborated; the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and conductor David Angus. Describe your ongoing creative relationship with Angus and the LPO.*

There are so many moving parts in putting together all the personnel involved in taping an orchestral CD that it literally took people from two continents to put this one together, and I don't know how I am so fortunate to work with so many talented and gifted people!

Maestro David Angus and I have worked together on several CDs since 2008:

Orchestra Music IV, Volume XII, MSR Classics 1646 (2018);

Orchestra Music III, Portraits in Sound, Volume XI, MSR Classics 1614 (2016);

Orchestra Music II, Symphonies and Soundings, Volume IX, MSR Classics 1519 (2014);

Music for Strings with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Volume VII, MSR Classics 1258 (2011).

Last August, in 2018, we recorded four new orchestral pieces for another release this year on the MSR Classics label. I have gotten to know members of the LPO players who have been on several of my recordings, and I delight in seeing them when I go to London.

As a conductor, David has an incredible ear and can finely tune a large orchestra (pun intended!). The LPO members have great respect for him, and give him their best musical efforts, for which

I am very grateful. He is also Musical Director of the Boston Lyric Opera since 2010, as well as being in demand as an orchestral conductor here and in Europe. Since I tend to write melodically, David has an intuitive feel for my music, and I am fortunate to be able to work with someone of his caliber and artistry. I always learn more about my music as well as orchestration in general from talking with him and watching him conduct rehearsals. The musicians of the LPO are some of the best! Strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion are all incredible and inspiring. I often write with the sound of the various performers of the LPO in my mind's ear, and know that they can do anything I write for them.

The recorded sound on this disc, made at London's Blackheath Halls, is mightily impressive. Tell us about the production team involved in creating your recordings.

There are many others who have greatly helped me so much over the years with the taping and production of CDs: Mike Hatch (sound engineer and director at Floating Earth in London), Richard Price (produced, edited, and mastered at Candlewood Digital), Rob LaPorta (product management at MSR Classics), Patrick Garvey (project management), and Tim Schwartz (package design).

The first time I went to record with the LPO was my *Music for Strings with the London Philharmonic Orchestra*. I was in the recording booth with headphones listening to the rehearsal, when a question came up in the viola section: Is it F♯ or F♮? David and the violists discussed each of the possibilities, and were still unsure. Since the LPO usually records deceased composers, it was startling to hear someone ask, "Isn't the composer here?" That was me! I had to find the measure quickly and feign an intelligent response with "I think it's as written."

Your career encompasses composing, performing, and teaching. What new projects are on the horizon?

I am intrigued by the writings of Native American women and have created a song cycle for soprano, violin, and piano that will be premiered this spring. I am also working on another 40-minute silent film that was directed by Alice Guy Blaché. This summer I plan to return to London for another taping with the fantastic recording team, LPO, and Maestro Angus.

Review by Ken Meltzer

The music of Barbara Harbach has impressed me on a number of occasions, not least a disc of her Symphonies Nos. 7–10, also on MSR and also performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus. That was the third volume on this label of her orchestral music; here we meet the fourth volume (and the 12th volume of Harbach's music). Again, there is a symphony, here coupled with a symphonic suite; the whole disc is subtitled "symphonic storytelling." And indeed Harbach is a wonderful storyteller in sound.

The Symphony No. 11 is subtitled "The Retourner" and is cast in three movements, each with its own title. The first movement depicts a scene from Willa Cather's 1913 novel *O Pioneers!*, thus taking taking the "place" to early 20th-century Nebraska. The music certainly has a lovely tinge of nostalgic Americana to it. The novel sounds charming, as indeed does Harbach's music and the performance. Conductor David Angus finds amazing detail, not least in the many delicious solo woodwind contributions; the solo trumpeter also warrants commendation. It is Harbach who really takes the laurels, however, for providing such a supremely well crafted, pleasurable movement. Entitled "Return, Debate," it speaks of the return of a man to claim his beloved, who

is by now married to an ill-tempered man. The music opens out magically for the central "Our Sweet and Carefree Youth," again with its ideas taken from Cather's novel. Here the lovers look back and reminisce; the music includes an imagined musical anthem to Nebraska. Harbach's musical narrative follows some of the scenes in the book, but the music has a flow and an inevitability all of its own. The solo trumpet, Jason Evans, is magnificently lyrical here, too, with Nicholas Mooney's horn echoing the lines well.

The finale is set in a country fair in a French church and is entitled "The Art of Tarot" (though the last time I looked, church and tarot didn't particularly mix). The character Maria is the "Queen of Hearts" who tells fortunes (the Queen of Hearts being the equivalent to the Queen of Cups in the tarot, of course). Harbach creates a little miracle here, capturing the spirit of the time of the novel with an impeccably light touch, and sculpts a gorgeous work—perfect, if I may say so, for Sunday afternoon listening—linking her music to the novel but at the same time constructing a perfectly formed, freestanding symphonic work. In some senses it is more of a sinfonietta than a symphony, but really that's just semantics. This is fabulously refreshing; written as recently as 2017, the ink is almost still wet, and it sounds like it.

The orchestral suite *Hypocrisy* is recent, too, written in 2016. The starting point here was Harbach's original score for a 1915 silent film, *Hypocrites*, directed by Lois Weber (the first and only woman ever to be elected to the Motion Picture Directors Association). The concept of hypocrisy is examined, as applied to religion, business, politics, love, and family alike. The excellent MSR booklet includes a detailed description of each movement; the second movement, for example, finds Harbach fetchingly using a three-part canon to depict its title, "Conversations." It is so simple and yet so effective. The film itself is freely available online and worth watching, not only in relation to Harbach's music but also for the remarkable, absolutely innovative, ghostly special effects. The same skill with use of the orchestra heard in the symphony is in evidence here, but the music is necessarily more episodic as it portrays the various scenes. There is a pronounced tenderness to of some of the writing (for example, in the movement entitled "Curiosity," or "Dancing Children," with its enchanting bassoon solos so beautifully phrased by Jonathan Davies). There is a Stravinskian sense of artifice, of distance, in the wind-dominated chords and writing of "Shock and Death"; woodwind imitation is perfectly managed by the LPO players. Harbach's lachrymose imitation in "Robe of Mourning" is massively affecting, the contrast to the jauntier "Vignette of Love" that follows marked. Orchestra leader Vesselin Gellev's solo violin shines in the final "Sermon of Hypocrisy."

This is a well-filled disc of highly enjoyable music, brilliantly performed by one of London's top orchestras (the Vladimir Jurowski years have really worked wonders on this band) and heard in magnificent sound from Blackheath Concert Halls. The sonic standard is hardly surprising, given that the sound engineer is the renowned Mike Hatch of Floating Earth. Excellent from all angles.

Colin Clarke, Fanfare Magazine 2019
http://fanfarearchive.com/ntbm/articles/harbach-int-clarke.html

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HARBACH **Symphony No. 11. *Hypocracy*** David Angus, Cond. London P O
MSR CLASSICS 1646 (77:37)

Barbara Harbach is an American organist, harpsichordist and composer. The opening work on this recording, *Retourner*, is her Symphony No. 11, so readers know she is prolific. Because she is fond of Willa Cather's writing, each movement of the symphony describes a scene from O Pioneers! In the first section, Emil Bergson returns from a time in Mexico to find Marie Shabata, who was his first love, married to an abusive husband. Harbach paints the picture with wind harmony broken by percussion embodied in a cross theme. Ever changing bits of melody form the strands of musical color that become a pattern. The second movement shows us two older lovers, Alexandra Bergstrum and Carl Linstrum. They look back on the time of their youth with a bright brass theme. As Carl and Alexandra converse, a mechanical rhythm denoting her adding machine punctuates the melodic tapestry with a reminder that the lady runs a ranch and has serious responsibilities. She is, however, looking for love and the French horn plays Carl's theme over music representing Alexandra and her adding machine. In the final movement, we again see Emil and Marie at a fair where she is telling fortunes. Harbach's music describes their flirtation but with a sense of impending tragedy. The lovers embrace under a mulberry tree where Marie's husband kills them both.

Hypocrisy is an orchestral suite in 13 parts inspired by Lois Weber's 1915 silent film *Hypocrites*. At the time the film was shown her work was thought to be on a level with that of D. W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille. Wikipedia identifies Weber as the most important female director the American film industry has ever known. In *Hypocrisy* Part I, "The Gates of Truth," Members of a church congregation disagree with a sermon on hypocrisy. Their nodding and sneering is evident from the orchestra's rhythm and downward scales even though the movement ends with the nobility of a harmonic blessing. Part II, "Conversations" deals with talk of replacing the minister. The trumpet and trombone play a melody but the woodwinds intrude with other textures. The scene ends with a delightful four-part canon. In Part III, "Deceptions" the minister morphs into a Medieval monk named Gabriel. People are following Gabriel as he drags a bag of gold up a hill. Melodic tones describe the pastoral scene until a fanfare announces the opening of the bag. For Part IV "Elusive Truths" a woman continues to follow the monk up the hill as brass and woodwind themes predominate the musical scene.

In Part V "Gabriel the Ascetic," the monk talks to a naked woman, actually the personification of truth, hiding behind a tree. Her theme is a distinctive plaintive melody played b y the strings. For Part VI, "Curiosity" other monks laugh and carouse to unresolved orchestral motifs. For Part VII, called "Fated Féte Day," the trumpet plays a greeting for the arriving crowd and the cellos play a tango as Gabriel completes his statue of Truth. In VII, Dancing Children continue the festivities accompanied by bassoon and clarinet. Two charming themes combine to add to the fun. Tragedy invades the merrymaking in Part IX "Shock and Death." The people are shocked by when Gabriel reveals his naked statue and a man stabs him. Part X, "Robe of Mourning" is a free harmonization of J. S. Bach's chorale, *Komm süsser Tod* with the horn

playing the melody. In Part XI, "Vignette of Love." Truth holds a mirror up to Politics, sometimes in the present day, and at other times in the remembered past. The orchestra plays nostalgic dances including a foxtrot and a two-step. Instruments of the London Phil interact playfully in Part XII, "Mixed Signals." For Part XIII, the final "Sermon of Hypocrisy," solo violins play with pizzicato bass while a Medieval family tends to a sick child. A trumpet plays their despair. A shift to modern times shows a dead minister and after a short fugue the main theme returns. In the finale to her piece, Harbach ties all the strands of her orchestral tapestry together with brilliant orchestration that produces a musical cloth-of-gold.

Although Harbach plays organ and harpsichord, she seems to have a love for trumpet and trombone, which are very prominent in the two works on this disc. The sound on this recording is clear and clean. Each solo instrument is will balanced with the rest of the orchestra. Conductor David Angus gives listeners a wide range of tempi and dynamics and he brings out the many musical colors in Harbach's writing. I enjoyed listening to both *Retourner* and *Hypocrisy* and think listeners will want to own this disc.

Maria Nockin, Fanfare Magazine 2019
http://fanfarearchive.com/articles/atop/42_5/4250260.aa_HARBACH_Symphony_11.html

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HARBACH **Symphony No. 11** "Retourner." ***Hypocrisy:*** Orchestral Suite • David Angus, cond; London PO • MSR 1646 (77:37)

Barbara Harbach, a prolific American composer, organist, and harpsichordist born in Pennsylvania in 1946, has received a number of positive reviews for her music in *Fanfare* but was new to me. I should perhaps start paying more attention to positive reviews, because I really enjoyed this disc. Others have commented on the American sound of her music, and indeed there are many passages that might have come from the pen of Aaron Copland, particularly in his conservative (even folksy) mood.

The 11th Symphony is loosely based on a scene from Willa Cather's novel *O Pioneers!,* written in 1913 and set in early 20th century Nebraska. Its three movements are titled "Return, Debate" "Our Sweet and Carefree Youth," and "Tarot." I don't know the novel and did not feel I needed to in order to enjoy the score. It is tonal and melodic, with some contrasting edgy energy in the "Debate" section. The second movement is sweet and tender, rich with tunes that stick in the memory, while the third movement recalls a country fair.

Harbach wrote *Hypocrisy* as a score for the 1915 silent film *Hypocrites*, directed by Lois Weber. The film was daring and far ahead of its time, featuring nudity and dealing with troubling social issues that are not yet resolved (abortion, wage disparity, child labor, prostitution, etc.). According to the composer's helpful notes, "the film points out the intriguing, aggravating and moralizing indictment of hypocrisy, especially applied to religion, business, politics, love and family." The only issue that I might raise with the score is that the music seems almost too attractive to accompany a film that Harbach herself calls "shocking and controversial." But

listened to merely as a picturesque orchestral suite in 13 sections, lasting more than 50 minutes, *Hypocrisy* is very engaging. There is enough variety to sustain our interest, and some movements ("Shock and Death" is one, the final "Sermon of Hypocrisy" is another) don't shy away from tension.

David Angus and the London Philharmonic have recorded two previous CDs of Harbach's orchestral music—to date MSR has released 12 volumes in their series devoted to her—and they certainly sound "inside" the music. The recorded sound is clean, and perhaps just a touch on the dry side, but not objectionably so. For those who enjoy the more conservative strands of contemporary American music, this disc is definitely worth getting to know. Harbach brings a fresh, vivid, warm voice to both works on the program.

Henry Fogel, Fanfare Magazine 2019

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HARBACH Symphony No. 11, "Retourner". *Hypocrisy* • David Angus, cond; London PO • MSR 1646 (77:37)

Barbara Harbach continues to produce symphonies and other orchestral works at an impressive rate and, further, to get them recorded by a superb conductor and orchestra in order to present them to a wide public. I've previously positively reviewed a number of CDs of her music, including a disc devoted to her Symphonies 7 through 10, liking in particular No. 8, even though I noted that her symphonies would better be considered suites due to their eschewing traditional symphonic breadth and development. Her eleventh foray into the genre maintains this impression and is subtitled "Retourner" in tribute to Willa Cather's 1913 novel, *O Pioneers!* The gentle opening horn solo is soon followed by some figuration that sounds as though it wandered over from Gershwin's *An American in Paris,* but the very lyrical opening movement falls most graciously upon the ear.

The Symphony's second movement is stylistically similar to the first, but is a bit more up-tempo, and again features solo lines tossed around among the various instruments of the orchestra. Harbach has a skillful way of incorporating the brass into the texture, giving the members of this section plenty of their own solos rather than reserving them for block-style chorales or sectional writing. Some of the melodic lines are even given to the xylophone, which Harbach keeps from sticking out like the proverbial sore thumb. The venue depicted in the final movement shifts from Nebraska to a church in France in which a country fair is taking place. This movement juxtaposes 2/4 and 6/8 meters throughout, frequently giving the melodic line again to a brass instrument—this time the solo trumpet. I find this tune to be one of the more memorable ones in the Symphony, which despite being well orchestrated does not have many melodies that linger in the memory. I also found the ending of the work to be too abrupt, but that is not a deal breaker by any means.

The CD is filled out with a twelve-movement suite entitled *Hypocrisy,* written as music to accompany the 1915 silent flick *Hypocrites.* The film, directed by Lois Weber, a leading female director of her era, addressed topics that were at least as controversial a hundred years ago as they are today including such issues as abortion, birth control, capital punishment, child labor, and a number of others. The film was considered quite innovative in its special effects, not to mention its reference to these controversial topics. Harbach's music, on the other hand, is very traditional, and no doubt complements the visual action of the movie well. David Angus and the

London Symphony Orchestra make a good case for the works on this disc, and I have no doubt that many *Fanfare* readers will enjoy the concert…
David DeBoor Canfield, Fanfare Magazine 2019

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HARBACH: Symphony 11; Hypocrisy Suite London Philharmonic/ David Angus
MSR 1646—63 minutes

Barbara Harbach is a music professor at the University of Minnesota and a prolific composer of tuneful Americana, some of it program music based on American literature. Her last CD, which I reviewed (May/June 2017), had everything from a musical musing on The Scarlet Letter to an evocation of New Orleans. This one opens with Symphony 11, a tuneful work which, like her Symphony 7, depicts scenes from Willa Cather's O Pioneers!. It has open American sounds and luscious solos for horn, trumpet, oboe, and percussion. The London Philharmonic under David Angus seems to be having a good time with this straightforward, colorful, resolutely simple music. The Hypocrisy Suite is a setting of the silent film, "Hypocrities", directed by Lois Weber. The music is more varied, but Harbach's tunefulness and spare polyphony are ever-present. This piece actually sounds very much like film music, in the best sense. The finale has a plaintive, mournful quality and an affirmative close. …it is colorful and well made.
Sullivan, American Record Guide May/June 2019

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Barbara Harbach: Orchestral Music IV, London Philharmonic Orchestra; David Angus
Symphonic Storytelling

The week's new release is really interesting - it's from American composer Barbara Harbach, who is based at the University of Missouri - St Louis. Harbach has written an orchestral suite as the film score for a 1915 silent film with an interesting history: "Hypocrites" was directed by Lois Weber, the leading female director-screenwriter in early Hollywood and deals with religious hypocrisy. The film was shockingly controversial at the time and was banned in a number of places.
Stephanie Elkins, Wisconsin Public Radio April 26, 2019

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Music Of Barbara Harbach • Volume 12 • Orchestral Music IV – Symphonic Story Telling • London Philharmonic Orchestra • David Angus • MS1646

Barbara Harbach's "Orchestral Music IV" recording on MSR Classics will provide a more than ample introduction to her prodigious body of symphonic storytelling or a further indulgence in her musical art for anyone who knows it well. Taking an overview, the two compositions on this CD are a rare treat for the ears across the full audible spectrum – Symphony No.11 "Retourner" inspired by poignant scenes in Willa Cather's 1913 novel *O Pioneers*" and *Hypocrisy* –

Orchestral Suite reflecting scenes from *Hypocrites*, the 1915 landmark silent film directed by Lois Weber. In both pieces, Harbach has woven a wide variety of sounds from stringed, wind and percussion instruments played by members of the London Symphony Orchestra. Under the baton of David Angus, they are transformed into highly enjoyable and listenable montages, which are also superb examples of current day recording. Unlike a high percentage of contemporary music fraught with conflict, discordance and angst, Harbach's symphony and the suite are harmonious and beautiful listening experiences more like the music of the Classical or Romanic era but also imaginative and innovative in Harbach's own creative style. This music may be enjoyed alone or with studious reference to the stories that inspired it. As a writer, I am compelled as Cather was to use words to communicate my impressions of reality as a journalist, as a music commentator, on in my fiction writing in an imaginative context. Instead of words, Harbach in Symphony No.11 uses musical instruments as means of telling three tales from "O Pioneers!" with sounds as her vocabulary. Turning to *Hypocrisy*, my grandfather played piano in theaters to accompany the silent films. He would have had to improvise at the keyboard or at best have a "cue" sheet to guide him on what to play as the scenes evolved on the screen. While he might not have personally encountered the challenge of playing for *Hypocrites* film showings, Harbach's suite intrigues me in terms of what might have been done to enhance its viewing experience at the time. That begs the question: Will we be able to see Weber's film accompanied by Harbach's suite? Curiously, despite the evolution of pornographic films and their internet renditions in the past few several decades, nudity in mainstream filmmaking is still greatly challenging and controversial in the United States, just as it was more than a century ago when Weber's film debuted and caused riots in New York City and censorship in Boston. In the film, two stories run parallel in vignettes, one involving a medieval monk who is killed by a mob after it is discovered he has sculpted a naked likeness of a woman he called "Truth," and the other concerning the hypocrisy of life in a contemporary, urban church congregation in which a woman posing as "The Naked Truth" reveals lust for sex, wealth and power among the "righteous" parishioners. As an outgrowth of her long history of composing and use of musical vocabulary to tell stories, Harbach's "film score" for *Hypocrites* might well be considered one of her masterpieces. However, to fully appreciate what she has accomplished, we must quest to see Weber's film in synchronization with Harbach's score for which MSR has provided a world premiere recording.

Joel C. Thompson, Cherry Grove Music Review, May 2019

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Barbara HARBACH (b. 1946)
Symphony No. 11 "Retourner" (2017) [23:00]
Hypocrisy – Orchestral Suite in 13 parts (2016) [54:29]
London Philharmonic Orchestra/David Angus
rec. 2017, Blackheath Concert Hall, London
MSR CLASSICS MS1646 [77:37]

Barbara Harbach is an American harpsichordist, organist, composer and teacher, and holds multiple academic music degrees. She is a Professor of Music and Director of Fine and Performing Arts at Missouri University. Whilst she has had many works written for her as a performer, she is also a prolific composer across all Classical genres, and this is the twelfth CD on MSR Classics devoted to her compositions along with 5 others where she performs harpsichord and organ works.

This CD contains her 11th Symphony, entitled *"Retourner"* and an orchestral suite entitled *"Hypocrisy".* The latter was composed as an inspiration from the 1915 silent film *"Hypocrites*", which became notorious for its sex and nudity, and was banned in several American States – given its date, that is hardly surprising. It is easily viewable on Youtube, where the primitive technical quality of the images is all too apparent, and its naked content wouldn't cause even an eyebrow to be raised these days.

Harbach has split the film into 16 scenes for which she has composed music – the shortest at 2:18 and the longest at 5:50. Naturally, the music is written to be descriptive of its scene, and with titles ranging from The Gates of Truth, Deceptions, Curiosity, Shock and Death and more; it is good that the CD booklet contains very detailed descriptions of the action in the film of each scene. I first listened to the music without reading the booklet, and my initial reaction was that the music occupied a fairly level strata of restrained dynamic throughout. It reminded me of gentle Debussy and occasionally Alan Hovhaness, whose fondness for trumpets is mirrored here… As with much descriptive music, one would be unable to guess the scene it describes, but the detailed notes allow the listener to relate the composer's inspiration to the film's scenes. Her orchestration is imaginative and varied, and whilst melodically there is nothing that had me humming with a remembered tune, it is very pleasant nonetheless. Had I the time, it might find it instructive to actually listen to the music whilst watching the film.

Two of three movements of the symphony are based on a novel written in 1913, which is set in the Nebraska countryside. Harbach loves to use her instruments to illustrate action, as is evident in the *Hypocrisy* music, and she frequently does the same in the symphony – for example, in the second movement, two people are remembering their youth, and in a scene in a farm office, the composer uses a 'mechanical' rhythm to represent the sound of a mechanical adding machine – trumpet and low woodwinds supplemented by a xylophone. There are other examples as well, but she is also careful to use the orchestra to represent an overall mood, rather than just a specific action.

The London Philharmonic play the music in a thoroughly professional manner, as I would have expected from one of Britain's top orchestras, and the recording is fine and natural. The booklet is very detailed and worthy of praise in its own right.

Jim Westhead, Music Web International, June 2019

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[* * * *] EXPRESSIVE VOCALS

Barbara Harbach: Orchestral Music IV—Symphony No. 11, "Retourner"; Hypocrisy—Orchestral Suite, London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by David Angus, MS1646

It is not necessary to use voices at all in order to tell stories in and with music. That is the lesson of a (++++) MSR Classics CD offering yet more of the music of Barbara Harbach (born 1946). A great deal of her large output is available on this label: this is the 12th CD and the fourth devoted to orchestral music. It is also one of the best and most interesting of the series. Both the works here are world première recordings, and both use strictly orchestral means to communicate a series of emotions every bit as clearly as could be done by setting words. Symphony No. 11, "Retourner," is a three-movement work based on the 1913 Willa Cather novel, *O Pioneers!* Not often read today, the book, set in Nebraska in the early 20th century, is about a young woman's attempt to succeed with the farm she has inherited from her father even though many other immigrant families in Nebraska have given up. It has the sorts of family squabbles and traumas common in novels of its time – those of Theodore Dreiser come to mind – and climaxes with a husband killing his wife and her lover. There is a sense of pervasive nostalgia for a time that never was in the book (which is the first of a trilogy), and it is this characteristic that Harbach brings out effectively in her symphony. She is essentially a tonal composer, and that stands her in good stead in representing this period piece: only a section of the first movement called "Debate" has any real edge to it. The symphony gives no hint of the melodramatic/tragic portions of the book, focusing on its rather over-sweet romantic elements and, in the last movement, on a happy day at a country fair. Even more interesting is the other work on this disc, *Hypocrisy*, a 13-section suite written as the score for a notorious 1915 silent film called *Hypocrites* that was widely condemned and even banned because of its use of full nudity and its attack on traditional moral values as exemplified by organized religion. The film was made by Lois Weber, the most famous female director of her time, and was full of condemnations of the hypocritical elements of business, family life, politics, and social structures in general. As in the symphony, Harbach somewhat downplays the more-intense and more-compelling elements of *Hypocrites*, although movements called "Shock and Death" and "Sermon of Hypocrisy" (the latter concluding the suite) offer a certain degree of tension. By and large, the suite contains varied elements that call up all sorts of emotions, even if the specific ones will not always be clear to listeners who are unfamiliar with Weber's film, which will be the case for almost the whole audience. The film, for example, contrasts a medieval monk named Gabriel, who is murdered after he makes a statue of Truth that turns out to be a naked woman, with a modern-day Gabriel who is pastor of a large, wealthy, hypocritical urban church. The suite's section called "Gabriel the Ascetic" works better if one knows this element of the plot than if one does not. And so matters go throughout Harbach's work. Nevertheless, the 55-minute suite sustains very well, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus plays both the suite and the symphony with dedication and obvious respect for what Harbach is trying to communicate. Both these pieces could be somewhat edgier and, if they were, would better reflect their source material; but as is, they both do a very fine job of using purely instrumental means to put across some, if not all, of the emotional concerns and impact of the works on which they are based.

Mark J. Estren, INFODAD.com,

http://transcentury.blogspot.com/2019/05/expressive-vocals.html 30 MAY 2019

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ ORCHESTRA V

Expressions for Orchestra

Vol. XIII MSR 1672

Barbara Harbach: Orchestral Music V
MSR

Barbara Harbach's music continues to impress; her voice is original, her fertility seemingly unending.

Conductor David Angus and the London Philharmonic Orchestra are no strangers to the music of Barbara Harbach. Two discs of her symphonies Nos. 7–11 (plus the orchestral suite *Hypocrisy*) performed by that combination stand out in particular, so it is good to encounter Angus and his Londoners again, recorded at Cadogan Hall, one of London's newer halls, just off Sloane Square, and a superb recording venue. All four works heard here were composed in 2017.

Inspiration for Harbach can come from a wide variety of sources. For the first piece we hear, it is Martin Luther that provides the backbone for the five-movement *Suite Luther*. It uses the chorale melody *A mighty fortress is our God* (*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*) by Luther himself in three of the movements, and the hymns *In peace and joy I now depart* (*Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin*) and *From deepest need I cry to Thee* (*Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir*). The opening movement, "Motet," introduces the chorale in a blaze of joy, and Harbach references techniques by composers such as Buxtehude, Bach, and Pachelbel in using counterpoint to preceded each phrase. There is a sense of calm to the second movement, and some lovely woodwind playing in this section from the LPO as well; the approach to the final glowing consonance is nicely managed. It's difficult to miss the famous chorale *Ein feste Burg* in the third movement, which is itself entitled "Chorale Fantasy," in this context fresh, being supported by markedly open harmonies. "Introspection" (aka the slow movement) comes with *Aus tiefer Not*, perhaps unsurprisingly given the chorale title. The scoring here is pellucid; only strings, flute, horn, trumpet, and trombone are used. The contrast of the lightly tripping counterpoints to the chorale of the finale (*Ein feste Burg again*) offers both a sense of arrival and of hope. Harbach uses playful counterpoint to maximal effect, with the whole building to a final tutti statement of the

theme in traditional harmonic garb.

Arabic and Moorish decoration inspires *Arabesque Noir*. Melodic curlicues dominate the first movement, "Looking for an Angel," which has a second theme the composer calls "She's a Woman, Simply Woman." The woodwind excels in this first movement, while the central "Evening Love" exudes fragrant crepuscular satiation. The melodic flow is easy and approachable, and the final "In the still I will wait" describes secret trysts of lovers; at times it seems viscerally to be seeking to project the clandestine thrill associated with such meetings.

Described in the booklet notes as "four snapshots that look back to the turbulence, Revolution, slavery, Civil War and social unrest of the 18th- and 19th-Centuries," *Early American Scandals* returns to a period in history that has inspired Harbach on a number of occasions. The first movement, "Love—Revenge" begins with a reminiscence of a waltz, one which soon takes on sinister undertones. The "revenge" part of the title could refer to that between slave and master, or equally within a relationship. The second part, "River Styx," touches on the Orpheus legend in the pining to see a lover one more time, but it also meditates on decisions we make in life, whether good or bad. The ear is led through the process by generally appropriate spotlighting (the clarinet is perhaps a touch forward in the sound image). The third part, "The Vulture Hours," refers both to insomnia (those hours of the night when one is eaten up by repetitive thoughts) and to the assassin John Wilkes Booth and the horror he brought on his family, the darkest part of the piece. In contrast, two fiddle tunes find their way into "Virginia's Real Reel," with the slide trombone of Lyndon Meredith providing a real feel of a hoedown. This is a more considered party than one might find in, say, Copland; thematic superimpositions, too, when they occur, veer more towards Ives.
Finally, *Recitative and Aria* is inspired by the work of the actor Edwin Booth (the older brother of John Wilkes above). The free-flow recitative section leads to the instrumental aria in which Wilkes dreams of a world wherein things could have been different, one in which he is free from alcohol addiction and does not lose his wife after just three years of marriage. This final section (separately tracked and entitled "Our love forever now") is a glowing beacon of hope, beautifully and unhurriedly performed here, a the perfect close to the disc.

Barbara Harbach's music continues to impress; her voice is original,
her fertility seemingly unending.
Colin Clarke, Fanfare Magazine, March/April 2020

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HARBACH ***Suite Luther. Arabesque noir. Early American Scandals. Recitative and Aria*** • David Angus, cond; London PO • MSR 1672 (59:02)

Four stars: A talented composer keeps a strain of Americana alive for today

There's a strain of Americana that many *Fanfare* readers can identify with. It doesn't necessarily use folksongs but has a populist ethos that puts Copland in his *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring* mode and most of Morton Gould's compositions at odds with cultural snobbery. The heyday of the populist aesthetic was the 1930s when the Great Depression made comrades of the workingman, left-wing idealists, and WPA artist and composer in a way not to be repeated. But

some composers of considerable technical skill who could swim in the post-Schoenberg mainstream, which remains elitist even though strict atonality and dogmatic 12-tone systems have had their day, choose instead to reach the broader audience that Copland and Bernstein won over.

I don't mean to read Barbara Harbach's mind or to impose an idiom on her orchestral music, which in the latest volume ventures beyond American culture. But as the booklet points out, she has an abiding interest in early American history. As a noted organist and harpsichord player, it is natural for her to align herself with the eighteenth century onward, and there are elements of counterpoint in her writing that stem from Bach. She goes even further back historically when mining the hymns of Martin Luther, but *Suite Luther*, which begins the program, doesn't use "Ein feste Burg is unser Gott," which features in three of the work's five movements, as Mendelssohn did for solemnity in the "Reformation" Symphony but closer in spirit to Copland's use of "Simple Gifts" in *Appalachian Spring*. She proves that a Lutheran hymn can dance. There's an unalloyed streak of optimism in Harbach's musical imagination that is irrepressible.

For six decades, from the songs of Charles Ives through the ballets of Copland and the Broadway musicals of Bernstein, optimism seemed like an enduring aspect of American music, but I think Harbach is one of its last heirs. The best piece here is *Recitative and Aria*, which is based on the actor Edwin Booth reflecting on the sorrow and tragedy brought upon his name, which was illustrious in American theater circles in the mid-nineteenth century until his brother, John Wilkes Booth, brought unforgivable shame to it. The piece employs a solo French horn to speak for Edwin, and the accumulation of expression is powerful. I wouldn't say, however, that the music achieves tragic impact. In compensation, Harbach delivers arching melody and swelling emotion that is satisfying in its own right.

Her most exploratory piece is *Arabesque noir*, where the night in the title is sensually amorous. Orientalism in Western music has had a seductive erotic overtone even if this had to be decorously hidden. Harbach is interested in the master-slave relationship (one could as easily call it the sultan-harem relationship) in which secret assignations are buried. To delve into these ambiguities she doesn't imitate the melisma of Arabic music but adapts her own idiom to create "motifs that are sinuous, spiraling, and undulating," to quote the program notes, which are very helpful in their detail and completeness. The notes also speak of extensive ornamentation, but I don't hear that so much as a style personal to Harbach of embedding melody in shifting texture, glittering color, and contrapuntal figures. *Arabesque noir* is her equivalent in music to a Persian carpet. (In *Suite Luther* the way she sets the hymn tunes like a chorale against a constantly moving accompaniment can't help but sound like Bach cantatas.)

Early American Scandals is a provocative title, but the music is at times no more scandalous than a waltz. The mood is nostalgic, reaching back to Stephen Foster and Louis Moreau Gottschalk as I hear it. This is the vein of Americana I grew up with in light classical recordings that Morton Gould specialized in. Gould lamented that he wasn't nearly as famous for his serious pieces, and clearly Harbach doesn't write in a folksy vein. She is continuing the neo-Romantic strain that occupied American composers who rebelled against atonality. It was a hard sell in the Fifties and Sixties, and when Minimalism made tonality once again chic, the aesthetic was not Romanticized but quasi-mechanistic.

What Harbach and her predecessors have as a great advantage is that audiences love melody and are won over by Romanticism. I don't know if this has aided Harbach's acceptance in the concert hall, but her artist bio describes a burgeoning career not just as a prolific composer but as a keyboard performer, editor, and publisher. She is especially active in the area of women composers and has done great work advancing the cause of American women composers in particular. Her energy is seemingly inexhaustible, and I am glad to report that her musical imagination sustains a high level of exuberance, invention, melodic attractiveness, and curiosity about new themes and musical languages. This enjoyable disc is evidence of all those things, and the performances under David Angus leading a somewhat reduced London Philharmonic are everything they should be—warmly recommended.

Huntley Dent, Fanfare Magazine, March/April 2020

Four stars: A talented composer keeps a strain of Americana alive for today

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INTERVIEW WITH COMPOSER BARBARA HARBACH, UNAPOLOGETIC ROMANTICIST ***In listening to some of your prior CDs and your new one (the fifth volume of orchestral music of yours issued on MSR Classics), I am struck by your unabashed musical conservatism. I say that with admiration; although tonality has been making a comeback in recent years, I still think it takes courage today to write tuneful music with warmly Romantic harmonies. Have you felt any sense of resistance from the musical establishment?***

A composer who writes either avant-garde music or neo-Romantic will have advocates and detractors. Over the years, I have gotten interesting comments on writing tonal music. In the following, I have paraphrased the comments to protect the innocent. One reviewer wrote, "Harbach writes nice music; too bad she was born 100 years too late." Or how about, "Harbach writes white music (no chromaticism with sharps and flats), although it's nice." Or "Harbach needs to write 'edgier' music." Or, as an editor of historical women composers, I received a letter from a pianist, who is moving towards playing the organ. Here's what she wrote: "You arranged one of her [Elizabeth Sterling] pieces, and I happened to look at your dates and bio, and wow—you are still alive!" Hmm, that comment 'kinda' puts it all into perspective…. I have tried to write 'edgier' music at times over the years and failed. The music came out sounding like a rerun of a theory exercise in a 20th-century harmony class, or just plain incomprehensible. A lot of my inspiration comes from poems and writings by women creators such as Emily

Dickinson, Dorothy Parker, Alaskan women pioneers; art; and history (especially the tragedies of the Civil War era, the Holocaust, and Native American women writers).

Your connection with tradition is particularly strong in this fifth volume. Suite Luther was composed in 2017, 500 years after Martin Luther purportedly nailed 95 theses to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, which led to the birth of Protestantism. You use Luther's chorale A Mighty Fortress is Our God as one of the bases of this suite. Could you speak about how you used it and how you treated it—how you kept such a sense of freshness in a tune that is so well-known by all listeners?

As an organist I have logged many hours on the organ bench, playing my first church service when I was nine years old (I was fortunate to be tall, so I could reach the pedals). I have held posts in many different Protestant and Catholic denominations, and the Lutheran Church may be one of my favorites with its long tradition of hymnody and liturgy. For Suite Luther I wanted to use only chorales composed by Martin Luther. It is remarkable that after 500 years his music and theology are still resonating. As an organist who played many compositions from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, I wanted to invigorate traditional melodies with contemporary harmonization, rhythm, and orchestral colors. In 2017 I wrote this five-part suite and used A Mighty Fortress is Our God in three of the movements (I, III, V). Luther wrote the hymn sometime between 1517 and 1519, and it became known as the "Battle Hymn of the Reformation," since it increased support for the Reformation movement. The Luther hymn of the second movement, In Peace and Joy I Now Depart (Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin), is a paraphrase in German of the Nunc dimittis, the canticle of Simeon; it was written in 1524 and is often used for funerals. The third Luther hymn, heard in Movement IV, is From Deepest Depths I Cry to Thee (Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir). Written in 1524, it is a paraphrase of Psalm 130.

I. "Motet – A Fortress Strong" is an exuberant arrangement of the original rhythmic melody of Ein' feste Burg. I follow the form of the hymn, AABA1 (A1 indicating a variation of A), featuring counterpoint preceding each presentation of the phrases with "pre-imitation" as did Buxtehude, Pachelbel, and J. S. Bach. Opening with a five-note timpani fanfare with cymbals, the trumpet and trombone announce the first phrase of the hymn, seemingly in double time. The woodwinds follow with new material, and then close the introduction with the ending phrase of the "A" section. A short imitative section precedes Luther's original rhythmic notation, with the flute regally playing the melody and soaring above the orchestra. The lively middle "B" section has transitional material featuring the brass instruments in close harmony and a more subdued presence for the words "And armed with cruel hate." This is followed with cascading flourishes in the strings before the echoes of the familiar opening phrases herald the end of the movement.

II. "In Peace and Joy I Now Depart" is a six-phrase hymn by Luther. I was inspired to write a two-part piece with the form of ABA1B1. The "A" parts are newly composed, with the ethos underscoring a feeling of Peace, while the "B" portions evoke the feeling of Joy. The "A" section begins with a decorated flute melody, with the oboe taking over the melody along with comments from the lower woodwinds and horn. The Joy section is reminiscent of a Renaissance dance, with the trumpet presenting the chorale melody with decorations, and then being joined by the horn with string accompaniment. The flute melody heard at the beginning of the piece returns, but with the decorated melody in a major tonality. "A1" returns with a fuller and richer harmonization, while the xylophone and timpani enhance the musical fabric in "B1."

III. "Chorale Fantasy – Ein' feste Burg," or "Christ, the New Contender," is a powerful and lively setting of the second verse of Ein' feste Burg, which announces Christ as the triumphant advocate. The melodies of the imitative introduction are derived from the first two phrases of the famous hymn melody, with conversations between the woodwinds and strings. The woodwinds state the "A" section, followed by more introductory material. The brass section and flute lead the next "A" section, while the winds and brass alternate in the "B" portion with strings, busily commenting on the introductory material. The entire orchestra joins in the noble final phrase.

IV. "From Deepest Depths I Cry to Thee" (Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir) is a newly harmonized rendition of the four-part chorale in AAB form. The movement creates a mood of introspection with recurrent plaintive petitions, using an orchestra here of only flute, horn, trumpet, trombone, and strings. The pre-imitation is original material, and also utilizes some motives derived from the original melody. The horn and trombone play the melody in unison, with the counterpoint weaving around them. The rising motives reflect the pathos or word painting of trying to climb out of the depths to a holier place.

V. "Ein' Feste Finale" marks the return of Luther's famous hymn Ein' feste Burg, but this time with the more familiar rhythmic notation. The hymn tune pulsates with many different simultaneous rhythms and key changes, with trombone and tuba in unison and in canon, and sections with three-part canons. The triumphant ending is rendered by full orchestra in traditional harmony for the final iteration.

Writing Luther Suite made me even more appreciative of the composers that came before us, and grateful for Martin Luther and his creative hymn writing.

Early American Scandals is a piece that addresses some of the less pleasant parts of our country's history, particularly the era of slavery and the Civil War. It ends, though, in a rather upbeat manner with an old-fashioned romping Virginia reel. Speak about the progression of emotions of this suite.

Early American Scandals, written in 2017, are four snapshots that look back to the turbulence, Revolution, slavery, Civil War, and social unrest of the 18th and 19th centuries. I have always been intrigued by this time period, and have written several compositions exploring the moods and pathos of that time, including Booth! an American Musical; Two Songs from the Sacred Harp for string orchestra; Frontier Fancies for violin and orchestra; Freedom Suite for string orchestra; Symphony No. 3, "A State Divided"; Symphony No. 8, "The Scarlet Letter"; Pioneer Women for soprano, clarinet, and piano; Harriet's Story for soprano, violin, and piano; and Emanations of the Sacred Harp for cello and piano. Early American Scandals won the TUTTI orchestral composition prize and was premiered March 7, 2019 at Denison University in Granville, Ohio.

I. "Love – Revenge," the first movement, uneasily evokes a happier time, with hints of conflict and revenge, as when "the master" makes unwanted advances toward a slave or when the love object chooses another. The movement has two themes. One is a subtly menacing waltz with descending half steps, often accompanied with flourishes in the upper strings; the other, a rising and descending melody that contains repeated notes, is first enunciated by the bassoon, and later more forcefully by trumpet and trombone.

II. “River Styx” focuses around the choices people make—some are abhorrent and some fulfilling. The first of four themes is gently nostalgic, full of longing for a lost love or for one who has died. The desire to be reunited is strong, accompanied by a willingness to brave the River Styx to pass into hell to see the beloved one more time. Shortly after the introduction of the gentle opening motive, the River Styx theme provides a jolt of reality, with short dotted rhythms and powerful strident horn and brass iterations. A little later, the flute and clarinet introduce the third theme, “Looking for an Angel.” Imitation abounds in transitions as well as within all three themes. Emotions become more complex when the Angel theme, with flute and oboe in canon at the octave, combine with the River Styx on the clarinet. The last theme, introduced by trombone and imitated by trumpet, may represent a call before the Divine. In the final section, the three themes intermingle and intertwine, and conclude with the River Styx theme, reminding us that one doesn’t always get what one wants!

III. “The Vulture Hours” occur in the night when sleep does not come, and one’s mind is tortured with thoughts of things done and not done. The past rears up like a winged phantom; cruel memory rips into the darkness with a terrifying shriek. Each dream becomes a nightmare when the vulture hours descend. “The Vulture Hours” was inspired by the horror John Wilkes Booth brought upon his family, never to be forgotten. The clarinet is heard in a short Vorimitation before the bassoon introduces the first theme of ambiguous tonality and melancholy, and an ever-so-slight hint of tango. The clarinet joins the bassoon with another statement of the melody, while the flute and oboe join with a canon at the octave. The trombone adds darkness as the texture grows to fortissimo, then returning to the sadness of melancholy. One last crescendo is heard before the music dissolves into the darkness.

IV. “Virginia’s Real Reel” is a romping, early American period dance piece that originates from the Revolutionary and Civil War eras. It is based on three fiddle tunes: Five Miles out of Town; Johnny, Bring the Jug Around the Hill; and Jack Danielson’s Reel. The tunes are stated individually, with each featuring a section of the orchestra—strings, woodwinds, and brass—before bringing in the entire orchestra for a show-down, hoe-down finish. The trombone acts as the caller for dancing a reel, which abounds with imitation, mode changes, string glissandos, and flourishes.

When I listen to music for the first time, I do so without reading explanatory notes so that I can hear the music unbiased by any commentary. Then I try to learn about the music and what lies behind it. The first time I heard Arabesque Noir I definitely heard the Eastern influences in it; when I read the notes accompanying the disc, I understood that you were attempting to capture the complicated relationships between slaves and masters, giving the Thomas Jefferson-Sally Hemings relationship as an example. This did deepen my appreciation of some of the elements of tension and release I heard in the music. Can you expand on this for our readers?

Arabesque Noir (2017) was inspired by the ornamental designs found in Arabic and Moorish decoration. The music reflects the florid ornamentation with flowing melodies and motifs that are sinuous, spiraling and undulating. It seeks to capture the complicated relationships between slaves and their masters; the subtle, hidden and forbidden interactions that can occur, such as the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings.

I. In the first movement, “Looking for an Angel” opens with a sweeping melody for solo flute that spans more than two octaves. Upon the second statement of the theme, the flute melody is

imitated by the oboe, accompanied by the strings. The two instruments cross parts and intertwine until the bassoon, clarinet, and trumpet joining the imitative texture. The oboe states a second theme, similar to one heard in Early American Scandals, "Looking for an Angel," found in the second movement of that work, "River Styx." One can interpret the second theme as representing the seeking out of an angel to bring happiness to a life without hope. After a short transition, the horn takes up the theme with the trumpet, oboe, and clarinet joining the imitation. The sweeping first theme returns, with the melody now in the first violins. The mood changes as the horn states a new theme, "She's a Woman, Simply Woman," which depicts the enchantment between lovers and features an expansive range with strings interjecting "comments," as would a Greek chorus. The trombone takes over, while the "Looking for an Angel" theme returns in a three-part canon in the woodwinds. As the "She's a Woman" theme finishes, the woodwinds begin a three-part canon in diminution, having half rhythmic values. The conversation is ended when the timpani begins an insistent five-note motive. The violins and oboe play the opening theme in imitation, being joined by the flute, horn and viola. The movement ends quietly with only a fragment of "Looking for an Angel."

II. "Evening Love" depicts lovers wrapped in the arms of the night, with arabesque melodies descending in a tetrachord in the bass; viola gently repeat this motive while the second violins enter on a single pitch. The first violins follow with a slow, gently moving theme. Pizzicatos in the viola, cellos, and bass provide accompaniment under the flute and violin duet. A second theme emerges in the trumpet, echoed by the oboe. Their interplay continues until the flute starts a descending and then ascending motive that is imitated by the first violins. All themes begin to vie for attention until the horn introduces the melody, "A Slave to Love," with its double meaning of being a slave, but also being in love - "Now I'm a slave to love, and so enslaved by love remain." All themes return and compete for dominance, interacting and intertwining, sinuous and seductive.

III. "In the Still I Will Wait" continues exploring clandestine trysts of lovers, and even if parted by death, "I will wait for you, my heart." The movement opens with a descending cadenza-like figure in the solo first violin, accompanied by the flute. A gentle and beguiling ascending waltz melody opens with the clarinet in canon with the flute—an octave higher—and strings, with 3/4 passages being interrupted by passages in 2/4. A new ascending theme emerges in the trumpet, imitated by the oboe in canon at the unison, followed by a return of the first theme as a horn and trumpet duet, imitated by flute, oboe, and clarinet. The trombone introduces a new theme, with numerous comments from the woodwinds, which is repeated with a canon among the trumpet, horn, and clarinet that leads to a climax using material from the introductory cadenza. The first theme returns, but this time in the first violins. Imitation in the strings and woodwinds is heard, leading to a section of several themes weaving in and out, with instruments vying to project their lines. "In the Still I will Wait" closes with gestures of the opening cadenza motif, fading away like the memories of long ago.

You seem to enjoy exploring duality in your music. For example, Recitative and Aria is a two-movement work inspired by the life of the great actor Edwin Booth. On the one hand, he was an extraordinarily successful actor famed throughout the world. On the other hand, his life was shadowed by tragedy—his brother being the assassin of Abraham Lincoln, and his own wife dying after three years of marriage, further complicated by his inability because of his drinking habits to read some telegrams that tried to inform him of her illness. I find that same duality in

much of your other music too, and indeed the complexity of music makes it an ideal art form for exploring these contrasts. Is that something you consciously strive for?

In many of my movements, I try to write strong and diverse themes that lead to duality of tempo, melodies, orchestration, shifting and changing meters and rhythms. As humans, we share many emotions, and I try to portray this commonality, as well as juxtapose different melodic moods, or pathos to depict how we interact, intertwine, and react with one another.

Opera is a great medium to display duality in music. In the same scene, the characters may have differing strong emotions, even in the same recitative or aria. Feelings and emotions may flow in a parallel field or be 180 degrees apart.
In addition to composing, you are an organist, harpsichordist, and pianist. How do you balance your performing and composing careers?

As I completed the 14-CD set of Antonio Soler's 120 sonatas, there existed only Soler for several months, 6–8 hours a day. As a composer, writing an opera is an all-consuming passion, where it becomes advantageous to go into a zone where you work with recitatives, arias, duets, ensembles, etc., and are unaware of the passing of time, only to look up and see that it is almost dusk. In the last decade or so, I have turned more to composition, as it fulfills my passion for creativity.

In what ways have your skills and experiences as a performer influenced the music you compose?

After years of playing the great composers for organ, harpsichord, and piano, I absorbed many contrapuntal techniques such as imitation, canons, and fugues that are now part of my compositional technique, and I try to decorate them with my harmonic and melodic language, striving for continuity and cohesion. As an organist playing "The King of Instruments," one becomes an orchestrator on the organ with many strings, flutes, principals, woodwinds, brass, and even percussion sounds at one's finger tips to give magnificent color to compositions, from French and German Baroque composers to French and German Romantic, and to 20th- and 21st-century composers.

Attempting to characterize a composer's music with words is always tricky. After all, if one could do that accurately one wouldn't need the music. Nonetheless, if I were to try to describe to a listener what your music is like, I would probably choose words like "harmonious," "tuneful," "colorful," and "joyous." Are those fair descriptors? Would you expand on them?

I believe that the adjectives are an apt description of some of my music. I also try to juxtapose dark emotions among the more optimistic melodies for variety or duality in color, tone, and ambience such as in Recitative and Aria or Early American Scandals.
Henry Fogel, Fanfare Magazine, May/June 2020

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HARBACH Suite Luther. Arabesque Noir. Early American Scandals. Recitative and Aria
David Angus, cond; London PO
MSR 1672 (59:02)

Barbara Harbach is an American composer, organist, pianist, and harpsichordist, born in 1946. Her compositional style is conservative and very audience-friendly. She exhibits a very strong lyrical impulse with a gift for composing melodic lines that stay in the memory. This new release is Volume 5 in MSR's series of Harbach's orchestral works.

Suite Luther is a five-movement built around three hymns by Martin Luther. His most famous, A Mighty Fortress is Our God (Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott) is the basis of the first, third, and fifth movements. In Peace and Joy I Now Depart and From Deepest Depths I Cry to Thee serve the same role in the second and fourth movements, respectively. Harbach applies modern harmonizations and orchestral colors to the hymns, but never in such a way as to disguise the basic melodies. Harbach was a Minister of Music at an Evangelical Lutheran Church in Missouri and was inspired to compose this work at that time. This is music that reflects the feelings of peace and joy.

There is an exotic color to Arabesque noir, a three-movement work inspired by the designs of Arabic and Moorish decoration. Harbach writes that "the music reflects the florid ornamentation with flowing melodies and motifs that are sinuous, spiraling, and undulating." She also says that her music seeks to capture the "subtle, hidden and forbidden interactions that can occur" between slaves and their masters, giving Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings as an example. This piece is very beautiful, focusing on the erotic and sensuous aspects of those relationships.

There is a greater degree of tension in Early American Scandals. About the second movement, "River Styx," Harbach tells us that "the music focuses around the choices we make—some are abhorrent and some fulfilling." There is an element of the unfulfilled, or the unresolved, in this music, and real melancholy underlying "The Vulture Hours." The final "Virginia's Real Reel" is a wild, rollicking Copland-like dance that would make a wonderful encore for an American orchestra to take on tour.

The final work is in a way the most moving, even though it is the shortest. Recitative and Aria takes its inspiration from the life of Edwin Booth. An historically acknowledged great actor famed for his portrayal of Hamlet, but shadowed by the threefold tragedy of his brother (John Wilkes Booth, assassin of Lincoln), the death of his wife, and his own alcoholism. The music is at once yearning, Romantic, and terribly poignant.

The performances seem committed and are certainly well played, and the recorded sound is natural and clean. The composer's notes are helpful and informative. This is a disc of refreshingly enjoyable new orchestral music.
Henry Fogel, Fanfare Magazine, May/June 2020

A FINE COMPOSER: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC BY AMERICAN COMPOSER BARBARA HARBACH.

'... the London Philharmonic Orchestra is very fine and conductor David Angus obviously provides great insight into how this music should be performed.'

A prolific performer and composer, Barbara Harbach commands much respect. This disc is volume thirteen of her music released by MSR Classics. The works presented here were all composed in 2017. The first work, *Suite Luther*, is in five movements, three of which use 'Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott'. The opening motet is exuberant and opens with quite a fanfare of timpani and cymbals and uses the popular chorale named above. It is quite uplifting, but to be honest I like the quieter woodwind passages when they occur. However, on saying that, this opening is perfectly suitable to introduce the work. The second movement, 'In peace and joy I now depart', utilises two different sections, one conveying peace and the other joy. The music is effectively evocative of the two emotional states, and it conjures up a feeling of the Renaissance. Based on a six-phrase hymn by Luther, it is, to me at least, one of this disc's finest tracks. The next movement is a chorale fantasy based on the second verse of 'Ein feste burg' - 'Christ, the new contender'. it starts quietly and there is interplay between woodwind and strings. This builds more triumphantly once the brass enter, and they provide a majesty and triumphant sonority to end the movement. The next movement, 'From Deepest Depths I cry to you', is reflective and plaintive and again, very effective music that reflects motion from the depths to a more exulted place. Finally, 'Ein Fest Burg' returns to end the suite in a triumphant fashion. For myself, I think I would have preferred the treatment of five different chorales for this suite, and found the quieter reflective movements reached me than the more exuberant ones.

The next work, *Arabesque Noir* in three movements, was inspired by designs found within Arabic and Moorish decoration.
The beginning of 'Looking for an Angel' reveals some truly lovely writing for flute, oboe and strings, and the solos are ravishingly played. The horn, trumpet, oboe and clarinet take up the tune. The horn introduces a new, more playful theme, and eventually the first section returns. The composer cleverly uses canon and other devices into the music, but it does not sound at all pretentious. 'Evening Love' reflects just that - an evocation of the lovers entwined in the embrace of darkness. It is mostly tender and rises in passionate tension before somewhat resolving in a soaring horn tune that depicts being a slave to love. All the themes intertwine and seductively vie for dominance before finally subsiding into the final chord. The last movement, 'In the still, I will wait', explores the trysts of lovers, even if death intervenes. At times tender and at others triumphant, the movement ends quietly as if what remains are the memories of yesteryear.

Early American Scandals looks at four events in the eighteenth and nineteenth century United States. It looks back at periods that the composer is intrigued by, with themes of revolution, slavery, civil war and the accompanying social unrest that is present in all of them. The first movement, 'Love - Revenge', depicts unwanted advances between master and slave, or when the love object chooses another. There are two main themes that reflect this. This is very easy to listen to, and like everything else on this disc, is very well-realised and performed. There is nothing sinister about the work, but at times one cans sense an uneasiness. The next movement, 'River Styx', has four themes which revolve around the choices we make in life: some good and some bad, and hints at the fact that we will all eventually face judgement, and that we very often do not get what we want. 'The Vulture Hours' depicts those times when sleep does not come

easily and thoughts are troubled by what one has done in the past, but also what has not been done. This movement was inspired by the effects of John Wilkes Booth's actions upon his family. The final movement, 'Virginia's Real Reel', is based on three fiddle tunes dating from the Revolutionary war and Civil war periods. This colourful piece is a very enjoyable way to round off this little suite.

The final work, *Recitative and Aria*, carries on this period theme, as it was inspired by the life of Edwin Booth, one of the greatest American actors of the period, but whose life is largely remembered by the deeds of his younger brother, John Wilkes Booth. The opening Recitative varies somewhat in mood, reflecting the turmoil that must have gone through Edwin Booth's mind at various times. The final track is the 'Aria' reflecting the other tragedy in Ewin Booth's life - the loss of his wife after three years of marriage. This is a wistful yet tender and at times hopeful movement, evoking memories of his wife and dreams of when they will be reunited.

This is the second disc of Barbara Harbach's music I have reviewed. I could not relate to the previous one, in spite of numerous hearings, but this disc is an entirely different matter. Here is a fine composer with her own unique voice. She has a gift for melody, is a fine orchestrator and is obviously skilled at counterpoint and harmony. Added to this, the London Philharmonic Orchestra is very fine and conductor David Angus obviously provides great insight into how this music should be performed. I look forward to hearing more of her work.

Geoff Pearce, Classical Music Daily, September 2020

https://www.classicalmusicdaily.com/2020/09/harbach.htm

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HARBACH Suite Luther. Arabesque Noir. Early American Scandals. Recitative and Aria
David Angus, cond; London PO

MSR 1672

In the May/June 2019 issue of Fanfare (42:5), I had the pleasure of interviewing Barbara Harbach, and reviewing Symphonic Storytelling, Volume 4 in MSR Classics' series of the American composer's orchestral music. That disc comprised her Symphony No. 11, "Retourner," and the orchestral suite Hypocrisy. Volume 5 features a quartet of multi-movement works, inspired by a variety of subjects. Harbach composed Suite Luther (2017) in observance of the 500th celebration of Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 theses to the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg. Movements 1, 3, and 5 involve settings of the Luther hymn Ein' feste Burg (A Mighty Fortress). They alternate with, respectively, settings of two other Luther hymns: In Peace and Joy I Now Depart and From Deepest Depths I Cry to Thee.

Arabesque Noir (2017) embraces "ornamental designs found in Arabic and Moorish decoration" as the starting point for music that "reflects the florid ornamentation with flowing melodies and motifs that are sinuous, spiraling and undulating." This sound world, in turn, is the basis for an exploration of "the complicated relationships between slaves and their masters." Early American Scandals (2017) "are four snapshots that look back to the turbulence, Revolution, slavery, Civil War and social unrest of the 18th and 19th centuries." Recitative and Aria (2017) was inspired by the great American actor Edwin Booth, older brother of Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth.

In my review of Volume 4 of Harbach's orchestral music, I wrote the following: "Both the Symphony No. 11 and Hypocrisy are the work of a composer of inspired ideas, and the ability to

communicate them in the context of a masterful, attractive, and compelling orchestral palette. Harbach favors a lean, bright, and keenly transparent orchestral sonority, in which the various instrumental families are always heard with the utmost clarity. The transparent and 'open' sonic landscape of both compositions evoked for me the impression created by many of Aaron Copland's works, even if the respective composers' melodic profiles are quite different. But like Copland, Barbara Harbach composes in an attractive tonal idiom, and possesses the gift of being able to craft melodies that linger in the memory long after the music has ended. The brightness of the orchestral sonority complements the general mood of the music. I think that another composer exploring the same source material might have invoked a darker mode of expression. But of course, that choice remains with the individual composer, and Harbach communicates her thoughts in a masterful and convincing way."

The current disc under review inspired like impressions. I was especially taken by Harbach's ingenious manipulation of the hymns in the Suite Luther, but all of the works contain engaging material, ingeniously developed, and beautifully scored. With regard to my previous "darker mode of expression" comment, I did not, for example, hear in the Recitative portion of Recitative and Aria the suggestion of "a mad soliloquy where one repeats and contradicts in a stream-of-consciousness rant." That music struck me as quite structured and attractive. But I suggest that as an observation, not a criticism. As in Volume 4, conductor David Angus and the London Symphony Orchestra offer performances that are admirable in quality of execution and tonal beauty. The recorded sound is first-rate, conveying the brightness of Harbach's sound world without a hint of glare or stridency. Fine program notes (by the composer?) round out this admirable project. If you enjoy Barbara Harbach's music, you don't need my recommendation of this disc.
If you are unfamiliar with Harbach's work and are interested in contemporary orchestral music couched in an individual, communicative, and lovely idiom,
I am sure you will find much to enjoy. Recommended.
Ken Meltzer, Fanfare Magazine, July/August 2020

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HARBACH Suite Luther. Arabesque Noir. Early American Scandals. Recitative and Aria
David Angus, cond; London PO • MSR 1672 (59:02)

Since American composer Barbara Harbach is a Minister of Music at an Evangelical Lutheran Church in Missouri, she chose to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing his theses to the door of the Church in Wittenberg with a new suite. She uses the reformer's motet, Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott (A Mighty Fortress is our God), for the movements one, three, and five, and two of his lesser-known hymns for the remainder. The piece opens with a fanfare and a stately rendition of Luther's original theme. Once it was thought the theme was originally a tavern song, but that has been disproven. Harbach varies its presentation with soaring flute and string textures and brass harmony. Part II is based on Luther's 1524 hymn Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin (In Peace and Joy I Now Depart). Harbach's dense orchestration expresses the former sinner's peaceful state of mind and brings it to a happy conclusion. Flute motifs along with harmony from the oboe and French horn express the joy of invincible faith. The third part is a fascinating orchestral "choral fantasy" related to Ein' feste Burg and Christ's victory over sin. Part IV Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir (From Deepest Depths I Cry to Thee) is based on the Lutheran version of Psalm 130. Beginning in a dark mood, Harbach's music eventually reminds

us that Christian souls count on the promise of salvation. For Part V, Harbach returns to Luther's indomitable tune, using it as a canon and as the basis for a grand finale by the full orchestra.

The inspirations for Arabesque Noir were the intricate designs of Arabic decoration. The soaring melody of Looking for an Angel draws the listener's mind up into the beauty of the heavens. Intertwining lines of flute and strings lead us on as stronger melodic textures intervene and return the listener to the search. With strings and flute sounds, the seductive sound of Evening Love tells of those who must express their affection in the dark. Is she actually a slave or has she merely enslaved him with her charms? Many melodic fragments intertwine, suggesting the listener to choose an accompanying story. Like the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, would the living lover build a monument to his dead partner? Would it be a waltz, a canon, a horn and trumpet duet? Harbach's In the Still I Will Wait gives us all of that and more in the resplendent ending to this piece.

Harbach's Early American Scandals is in a lighter but still serious vein that provides a thoughtful mood for an orchestra concert. In 2019, the unusual piece won Denison University's TUTTI Orchestral Composition Prize. In a nod to the "#MeToo" movement, Harbach gives us a musical description of an unequal relationship. Is she afraid not to respond? Does she really want revenge on him for his lack of respect for her wishes? The composer describes all these sentiments in "Love-Revenge." In a completely different mode, River Styx examines love for a dead partner. Would the listener, like Orfeo, brave the Styx to see the lover once more? The clarinet combines lyrically with flute and oboe, but brass tones warn of danger as themes interweave to form the translucent textures of this part of the piece. "Vulture Hours" bring no sleep, as the music builds to a fortissimo before it dissolves into darkness. The ebullient piece ends with the vigorous "Virginia's Real Reel" based on three fiddle tunes: Five Miles Out of Town, Johnny Bring the Jug around the Hill, and Jack Danielson's Reel. The first is from Kentucky, the second from Missouri, and the last was often heard in both Missouri and Nebraska.

Harbach's Recitative and Aria refers to the life of actor Edwin Booth (1833–1893), the brother of John Wilkes Booth, the man who killed Abraham Lincoln. With her music, Harbach reminds us that the actor lived much of his life under the stigma of his relationship to the assassin, one of the results of which was alcoholism. In the nostalgic music of the Aria, Edwin Booth's dream reunites him with the young wife who died while he was under the influence of drink. MSR Classics gives the listener good fidelity on this new collection of Harbach's work, but once in a while the sound of the full orchestra becomes a bit dense. I particularly loved the strong Luther Suite and the amusing part of the Scandals. I think this disc or download belongs in everyone's collection of American music.

Maria Nockin, Fanfare Magazine, May/June 2020

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BARBARA HARBACH: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC V, EXPRESSIONS FOR ORCHESTRA LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, DAVID ANGUS

The prolific Barbara Harbach has a good number of releases of her music on MSR Records, among other labels. Her latest, *Orchestral Music V, Expressions for Orchestra* (MSR Classics MS-1672), has caught my ear in good ways and so I report in on it for you.

The first thing you might notice on hearing the program is how the music comes alive thanks to

the very fine performances of the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus. So of course, one does not have to imagine what the music would sound like in a proper rendering because that is very much the case in this recording.

All four works have substance and girth, each with multiple movements and around 10 to 20 minutes play time. None outstays its welcome but has its say and says it well. Ms. Harbach orchestrates with a flair and a nice sense of the totality in a more or less classicist way. She has a distinctive use of the xylophone on parts of "Suite Luther" and "Early American Scandal," employing it colorfully to state some primary melodic parts. And then too winds and brass nicely balance strings throughout. She has a subtle way. She clearly knows what she is after and gets it.

"Suite Luther" grounds itself on the iconic Luther hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," weaving it into the musical proceedings throughout the five varied movements, creating various contexts for its restating, re-harmonizations, rhythmic extensions, and weaving counter motifs and variations with skill and expressive logic. Like all four works this one is firmly tonal but decidedly Contemporary, more Neo-Classical than Post-Romantic, though not in the more obvious ways, happily. The musical syntax flows readily and communicatively.

At times her use of folksy and otherwise recognizable stylistic thematic materials makes her in my mind a kind of present-day Aaron Copland-like figure. Listen especially to her "Early American Scandals" in this light and I think you'll happily see this. And it all sounds straightforwardly fresh and non-derivatively original

"Arabesque Noir" gives us an ornate and nicely lyrical presence with a contrapuntal movement that is a pleasure to hear. "Early American Scandal" has vibrant contrapuntal life as well and a clear-cut lyrical freshness on top of the pronouncedly old-rural folksiness.

The "Recitative and Aria" has a just-so quality and sends us off with well-turned brevity. It pays tribute to actor Edwin Booth (1833-1893), one of the most admired Hamlets of his era.

This is not deliberately "advanced garde" music so much as it is an unassuming and open expression that seems to flow naturally and assuredly flows copiously from Barbara Harbach's fertile musical mind. What matters in the end of course centers around the works themselves. They hold much interest even after hearing a good number of times as I have done this past week.

Barbara Harbach shows off some genuine talent here. This is one good showing and I do not hesitate to recommend it to you if you are someone who wants to be abreast of what is happening right now, or simply wants to hear good music.

Grego Applegate Edwards, Gapplegate Classical-Modern Music Review, February 2020

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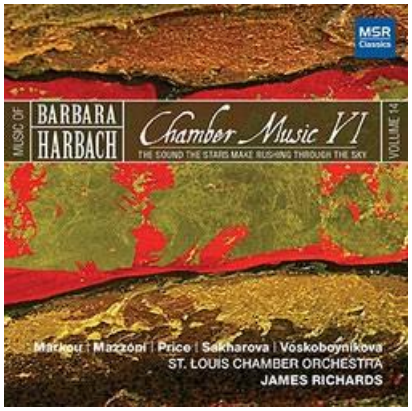
THINKING EXPRESSIVELY

Barbara Harbach: Orchestral Music V—Suite Luther; Arabesque Noir; Early American Scandals; Recitative and Aria. London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by David Angus. MSR Classics.

Barbara Harbach has long since established her own way of using the orchestra for expressive purposes. And the four world première recordings on a new MSR Classics CD seem, on the surface, to have something in common with the works of Richard Strauss, all being illustrative explorations of specific topics (although in the form of suites rather than in that of tone poems). *Suite Luther* is the most interesting of the pieces here, building its five movements on three of Martin Luther's hymns: *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*, notably used by Mendelssohn in his "Reformation" symphony and a favorite of other composers as well; *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* ("In peace and joy I now depart"); and *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* ("From deepest depths I cry to thee"). The comparative familiarity of *Ein' feste Burg* helps make *Suite Luther* approachable and intelligible – this hymn appears in three of the five movements – and Harbach finds some interesting ways to develop her material, whether in the outgoing opening *Motet* movement, the introspective fourth movement based on *Aus tiefer Not*, or the concluding celebratory reappearance of *Ein' feste Burg* in the finale. A very general understanding of the historical and religious sources of Harbach's *Luther Suite* suffices to make the work understandable and emotionally satisfying, and its mixture of contemporary rhythms and harmonies with those of earlier times produces a sense both of updating and of continuity with the past. The three other suites on this disc – which is very well-played throughout by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus – are also all well-thought-out… *Arabesque Noir* tries to use melodies inspired by Arabic decorations to explore master/slave relationships in early United States history... Harbach certainly knows how to create flowing, lyrical material, and does so to fine effect in this three-movement suite… The four-movement *Early American Scandals*… The third, *The Vulture Hours,* has some especially well-handled woodwind writing (clarinet, bassoon, flute and oboe) as it explores middle-of-the-night torments of memory. The finale, a generally straightforward dance movement called *Virginia's Real Reel,* is attractive in its comparative simplicity after all the fraught material that has come before. The last work on this disc is called *Recitative and Aria* and was inspired by Harbach's thoughts about famed actor Edwin Booth, elder brother of assassin John Wilkes Booth. The Booth family also inspired *The Vulture Hours* in *Early American Scandals…* The music has some effective moments – Harbach does wistfulness particularly well… Harbach is a skilled orchestrator who explores certain topics on a recurring basis, notably that of the history of the United States.

Mark J. Estren, InfoDad, March 2020

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ CHAMBER Music VI
The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky
Vol. XIV MSR 1695



Chamber Music VI Civil Civility1. Visions of Hildegar2. Cuatro Danzas3. The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky4 • James Richards, cond; Stella Markou (sop); 1Julia Sakharova, Jane Price (vn); Jennifer Mazzoni (fl); Alla Voskoboynikova (pn); St Louis CO • MSR 1695

A Chat with prolific composer Barbara Harbach

Barbara Harbach has an enormous catalogue of works including symphonies, operas, chamber works, choral music, and film scores. She has also arranged numerous Baroque pieces for modern instruments, and she is a keyboard performer of spectacular virtuosity. For her current recording, she has set some of her thoughts on civil rights, women's rights and their achievements, as well as the treatment of Native Americans in musical terms.

How did you stay busy and sane during the pandemic? Did you compose much? Did you do things you had never done before? What new ideas have jelled in your mind since the beginning of the pandemic?

That reminds me of being asked, "What did you do on your summer vacation?" Only this time the passing of the months was longer, darker, with no finish like the excitement of returning to school with new supplies.

What I did begin during the required hibernation was digitize the dozens of microfilm facsimiles of 18th century women and men's compositions that I accumulated over several decades. I had ordered most of them from the British Library or Bibliothèque Nationale de France and a few were given by colleagues. Some of the copies were in good shape, some were readable, and some required an imagination to fill in the notes or decipher the film-deteriorated manuscript. I am digitizing these manuscripts not to publish, but to share with interested colleagues who may find them useful for research. Learning several new software techniques was a challenge, but then challenges are supposed to be good for our brains! During the digitization, I came across some interesting tidbits.

Elizabeth Weichsell Billington (1765/68–1818) was one of the greatest singers England ever produced. She was known for her natural voice, perfect technical control, wide range, head register, accurate intonation, and brilliant and original ornaments. She was born into a musical family. Her father, Carl Weichsell, was a transplanted German oboist and clarinet player, and her mother was a well-known singer. At an early age she accompanied her violinist brother on the keyboard. She studied singing with J.C. Bach and keyboard with J. S. Schroeter. After the death of Bach, she studied voice with James Billington, a singing teacher as well as a double bass player. She married him in 1783.

Haydn called her *"ein grosses Genie,"* a great genius, and she had triumphant tours of England and Italy. After the death of her husband, she married her second husband, a Frenchman, M. Felissent. Apparently, he mistreated her, for she soon left him. Unfortunately, he reappeared in her life, and she went to Italy with him where he allegedly murdered her in 1818. Her story could be an opera in the making!

Weichsell wrote two sets of keyboard music, both before she was twelve. The first, *Three Lessons for the Harpsichord or the Pianoforte,* c. 1775, Op. 1. The title page adds, *"A Child of eight Years of Age."* The title page of her second set states: *Six Progressive Lessons for the Harpsichord or Piano Forte* composed by Mrs. Billington, Late Miss E. Weichsell, Op. 2. Op. 2 was written when Weichsell was eleven. The title page calls these pieces *Lessons*, but the title of each individual piece in the body of the work lists them as *Sonatas.* These compositions, Op. 1, are amazing for an eight-year old or even for an eleven-year-old. Weichsell apparently understood the intricacies of the two-voice texture and two-part form of the times, the complexity of rhythmic variety, and virtuosic technique. Even at this young age, no movements are alike in form; she did not write to a formula. Each of the sonatas of Op. 1 is in two movements. Weichsell surprises the listener with unexpected shifts to sixteenth note passages creating a momentary turbulence. She often creates other surprises by not going to the expected note or chords of resolution but instead going to the higher or lower octave displacement.

Another interesting manuscript I rediscovered as I was digitizing the manuscripts was by "A Lady" with no other identifying information. She flourished in the 18th century, and likely fits the social profile of other women composers of the time. For some reason, though, she chose to remain anonymous, perhaps because her family considered composition an inappropriate occupation for a lady. At this time, women musicians usually came from the aristocracy, the convent, or from a family of musicians and instrument builders. No biographical information or details regarding this publication exist, but her Six Lessons for Harpsichord attest to her talent and intelligence.

All the facsimiles that I work with are a fascinating and intriguing addition in the study of English women keyboard composers of the eighteenth century such as Elisabetta de Gambarini, Elizabeth Turner, Elizabeth Hardin, and Jane Freer. All available from HMP (Harbach Music Publishing). Many of these women were also child prodigies on the keyboard or singers who became acclaimed during their lifetimes. Unfortunately, these women were forgotten and overlooked in the succeeding years by music historians. Every woman composer that is recovered and every new edition that is published provides another link in the history of eighteenth-century women composers.

During the past months of seclusion from the world, I started recording excerpts of my 18th century women composers to eventually post them on my website so others may get a chance to hear some of these intriguing and unknown compositions and judge for themselves the quality of the music. Consequently, I learned so much about self-recording, that I now know why I leave

recording in the hands of professionals such as Richard Price of Candlewood Digital who has recorded and edited most of my later CDs.

Your CD contains a piece called Civil-Civility. How would you define it?

Civil-Civility depicts the acts and writings of courageous women who I felt defied all odds to help women and humanity. Women have historically struggled to achieve their rights in patriarchal societies since the time of 9th-century composer Kassia. She was born to a wealthy family in Constantinople and refused to accept the dictums for feminine behavior. Therefore, she founded a convent. The chamber orchestra piece, *Civil/Civility*, continues the resistance by highlighting six women who made a difference in their lifetimes despite prejudice, ignorance, arrogance, and chauvinism. All were quintessential role models.

Written in six movements, the various ensembles capture the spirits of these intrepid women and create musical portraits. *Sentiments:* Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) was an American suffragist, social activist, abolitionist, and leading figure of the early women's rights movement. The melody passes from one instrument to another in equality to ensure that "*We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal."* Perhaps fighting for equal rights produces unexpected allies and unusual sentiments among the participating instruments in the string orchestra.

Gift of Mystery: Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962) is revered as a political figure, diplomat, and activist. She was the longest serving First Lady of the United States, and even campaigned and gave speeches for her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt. *Gift of Mystery* is a wordless vocalise for soprano, violin, and piano. Often when a woman speaks, her words go unheeded. Perhaps a wordless movement gives more prescience than if words are used and sung. Certainly, in the case of Eleanor Roosevelt, her words did not go unheard.

Memories of Our Lives: Rosa Parks (1913–2005) is known nationally as the "mother of the modern-day civil rights movement" in America. In *Memories of Our Lives*, there are twelve complete variations of the eight-measure passacaglia theme, with the thirteenth only a partial statement of the theme.

Committed: Margaret Mead (1901–1978) was an American anthropologist, author, and speaker in the 1960s and 1970s. In *Committed* I was inspired to write a two-part piece for string orchestra with flute and piano. The first part is newly composed and projects the feeling of peace, while the second portion is based on the German chorale *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* (In Peace and Joy I Now Depart). This joyous chorale was written by Martin Luther (1483–1546).

Light of Truth: Ida Wells-Barnett (1862–1931) was a former slave who became a journalist and launched a virtual one-woman crusade against the vicious practice of lynching. *Light of Truth* is a set of variations for string orchestra, and perhaps the variations could be interpreted as searching for truth. The slight tango feel that begins in variation five is usually expressed by the viola. All instruments enjoy tossing the melodies back and forth.

Ain't I a Woman?: Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) She was born into slavery and became an African-American abolitionist and women's rights activist. In 1828, she went to court to regain custody of her son, and she became the first black woman to win such a case against a white man. Written for soprano, piano, and chamber string orchestra, the short introduction opens with a dramatic and declamatory statement "And ain't I a Woman?" At the end of the piece, she contemplates the celestial, and begins to assert her strength and independence, "I'm not going to die, I'm going home like a shooting star." This is a musical tribute to the strength and courage of Sojourner Truth and all the women, who each in their own way, exhibit boundless courage and fortitude against sometimes unseemly odds.

How would you describe Hildegard's music for modern listeners?

I have admired Hildegard of Bingen for years! Her music with the soaring melodic lines is almost spiritual and unworldly in its beauty. My *Visions of Hildegard* was inspired by Hildegard (1098-1179) and her writings and music. Amazingly, she founded the monasteries of Rupertsberg in 1150 and Eibingen in 1165. Known as Saint Hildegard, or Sibyl of the Rhine, she was known as an abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, mystic, and visionary. Many consider her to be the founder of natural history in Germany. She was a composer of sacred monophony and is the most recorded Medieval composer in modern history. It was an interesting and mysterious journey to be inspired by the words that Hildegard used and then create melodies and harmonies that would enhance the texts, all the while conscious of the fact that Hildegard was inspired by these same words.

The first movement, *O vis eternitatis* (O power within eternity) is a Responsory for the Creator and Redeemer. *O nobilissima viriditas* (O noblest green viridity), the second movement, is a responsory for virgins. The last movement, *O ignee Spiritus* (O fiery Spirit) is a Hymn to the Holy Spirit. The movements have varying meters; sections that reflect the words from a gentle lullaby to rhythmic and exciting, energetic, and propelling tempos, all using the vivid colors of the violin and piano.

How did you come to use aspects of Spanish Flamenco and Argentine Tango in Cuatro Danzas?

Cuatro Danzas para Flute y Piano is a four-movement piece with a Spanish flavor and frenzied outer movements. The music anticipated my move to the Southwest with its Spanish influences. *Danza Flamenco* begins with a whirling waltz made of toccata-like sixteenth notes in the high register of the piano, and then rapidly descends to the lower range. Beginning with a trill, the flute joins with the melody while the piano again whirls down the keyboard but only halfway. Odd juxtapositions of intervals, swiftly changing modes, sequences, clashes of seconds, interjections of 4/4 time, phrase repetitions but with different accompaniments in the piano, until a descending section with trills in the flute and tremolos in the piano introduce the Tango section. The Tango in 2/4 is introduced by the piano with dotted rhythms typical of the tango. The right hand has clusters of chords with seconds and sevenths. Glissandi and trills abound leading to the last section which combines the two styles Flamenco and Tango. The opening material of whirling sixteenth notes returns, and then the piece ends abruptly with a staccato note in both parts.

La Mente (*Only in the Mind*) is a three-part ABA form. A plaintive, soaring, improvisatory, and decorated solo flute opens the movement and is repeated for seven times often starting on a different beat in the measure. A flourish in the piano introduces the B section with several variations that have rhythms reminiscent of tango rhythms. In the final section, the tango rhythm continues while the flute and right hand play melodic adaptations of the first section.

Andante para vihuelo de penole begins with the left hand of the piano resembling the sound of a plectrum-plucked Spanish Renaissance guitar. The first part has a slow-moving lyrical melody in the flute over a walking bass in the left hand. The next section is faster with a swing, a wider range, with the right hand and flute in duets at the octave, thirds, and canons until a fortissimo dynamic is reached along with demanding chords in the piano and trills in the flute.

Danza-Delirio is a two-part movement with a coda. Each part has its own ostinato bass part, rapid scales, three octave glissandi, fast arpeggios, and dramatic left-hand clusters. The coda deceptively sounds like a recapitulation, but it is whimsically truncated. I have often written

pieces incorporating tango rhythms as in *Midnight Tango* from the symphony, Night Soundings for Orchestra which can be heard on my CD, Orchestral Music II.

How did you get interested in Jane Johnson Schoolcraft? Did you once live near the Ojibwe Reservation? What is her name in Ojibwe and what does it signify?

I wrote *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky,* a cycle of four pieces for soprano, violin, and piano, inspired by Jane Johnston Schoolcraft's Ojibwe name. Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (1800–1842) was an extraordinary Native American princess in the Ojibwe tribe of the North Shore of Lake Huron and both shores of Lake Superior. The Sault Ste. Marie tribe of Ojibwe Indians lived in this region of the Great Lakes for more than 500 years. Jane's Indian name was Bame-wa-wa-ge-zhik-a-quay, which translates as "Woman of the Sound that Stars Make Rushing through the Sky." She was the granddaughter of the famous Ojibwe Chief Waub Ojeeg, and her mother, Susan, or Shau-gush-co-da-way-Quay was the daughter of the chief. Jane's father, John Johnston, was a white fur trader. Jane was educated, which was unusual for a young Ojibwe girl at that time. She gained a great deal of education from her Anglo-American father teaching her English, reading, writing, the *Bible*, and his love of history and poetry. Her father even took her to study in Ireland and then to England. She married Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, a white man, as did her mother. Since Jane spoke both English and Ojibwe, she provided access to the Ojibwe community for her husband. He learned its oral history and traditions and he published the stories.

Jane Johnston Schoolcraft was the first known Native American poet and the first known Native American woman writer. Her husband published her poems and stories. Her writings and poems in English paralleled those of Anglo-American and British writers such as William Wordsworth and Lydia Sigourney.

And Musing Awhile, the first movement of the song cycle, is an excerpt taken from her poem, "Pensive Hours." The last line of the poem is "So pensively joyful, so humbly sublime."

The author of the second movement, *Ojibwa Prayer*, is unknown. The language of the *Ojibwa Prayer* is also known in Chippewa, Saulteaux, Southern Ojibwa, and Mississippi Ojibwa. The prayer was taken from Bishop Frederick Baraga's Catechism written in the middle 1800's. The setting portrays in music the wind of the Great Spirit, the weakness of the many children, the beauty of the sunsets and the many things that the Spirit has made. The prayer asks for wisdom from the lessons that come from earthly beauty, so when life fades, their beauty comes to you.

Inspired to write the lyrics and music for the third movement, *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky*, I comingled virtuosity and lyricism to musically portray the many diverse facets of Schoolcraft's short life. The following is an excerpt from the movement:

The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky
A woman –
Ojibwe and French-Canadian,
American, Irish, and English.
Eloquent, lyrical, emotion stirring.
Born in Sault Ste. Marie,
Upper peninsula, Michigan.
Of mixed bloods, a métis,
She was red and white at once.
Her mother, Susan, daughter of a famous war chief.
Her father, John, was Scotch-Irish.

Jane was raised to be an Ojibwe elite,
And a member of white, high society.

For the last movement, *Trail of Tears,* I was moved to write the lyrics of the Cherokee's tragic journey. Evicted from their Southeastern homelands by the federal government in the 1830s, Native Americans were forced to march to eastern Oklahoma. The long walk became known as the Trail of Tears, an ordeal of disease, starvation, and death. The Cherokee Nation was one of the largest native groups in America, and their removal took the longest. The Cherokee were forced to leave their homes and march more than 1200 miles inland to present-day Oklahoma. Beginning in the summer of 1838 and continuing into the winter, approximately 15,000 Cherokee were relocated, and more than 4000 died from disease, exhaustion, or exposure. In the Cherokee language, this event is referred to as "the trail where they cried," giving rise to the English *Trail of Tears*. The entire story is told through a child's eyes. The following is an excerpt from the movement:

The banging was so loud!
They broke through the door.
The soldiers hit my father.
They pushed my mother at sword point.
My little sister cried and whimpered.
"Shut up," they said, "Shut up."
O Great Spirit we had hope.

When did you first learn of the Trail of Tears? Was it in your schoolbooks? Do you hope to teach people about it with your concert piece?

I have known the *Ojibwa Prayer* for many years and knew that I wanted to write a piece on the moving and mystical lyrics for soprano, violin, and piano. During my research I became intrigued with the story of Jane Schoolcraft, and the Trail of Tears became the song cycle's culmination in telling a small part of the story of our First Generation's triumphs and tragedies.

I understand you have retired from full time teaching. Do you still have some students? Are you mentoring young women composers?

We moved to New Mexico right before the pandemic became the world-wide crisis, and I am looking forward to making new contacts within the musical communities. I would love to mentor young women composers as well as young male composers. It is difficult for women composers to receive the acknowledgement that their music deserves – a centuries-long struggle. According to a report from Donne (donne-uk.org), *Equality and Diversity in Concert Halls*, their in-depth analysis of composers' works scheduled for the 2020-2021 season in 100 orchestras from 27 countries, show that only 11.45% of the scheduled concerts worldwide included compositions by women. That is a small improvement over the last few years. 88.55% of the music played was written by men. I should also mention that contemporary male composers have difficulty getting their orchestral works programed since many orchestras tend to do pieces in the historical orchestral canon.

I look forward to reaching out to the local musical community, and this fall I will present a video lecture to the American Guild of Organists, "Women Composers for the Organ" featuring historical and contemporary composers and their works.

Where did you come from?

Both my husband, Thomas George, and I are from Pennsylvania, but we met at Yale. Tom is a chemist/physicist/administrator, and pianist, who just released a jazz trio CD with MSR Classics, *Stardust*, based on the tunes of Hoagy Carmichael. This follows two CDs of his, also on MSR Classics, that featured women jazz composers. We are what I would call "academic gypsies," having been in academic communities all our careers from Connecticut, Massachusetts, California, New York, Washington State, Missouri, and now New Mexico. I even did a year at the Frankfurt Musikhochschule studying classical pipe organ with the renown-pedagogue Helmut Walcha.

Did you find your musical outlook changed with the climate?

While here in New Mexico, I was commissioned by the Missouri American Wild Ensemble's septet for flute, clarinet, horn, violin, viola, cello, and percussion, and the piece will be performed in celebration of the Missouri Bicentennial this year 2021. The title of the composition is *Following the Sacred Sun – Suite for Chamber Ensemble* and is a four-movement suite that follows the adventures of Sacred Sun or Mi-Ho'n-Ga, (1809?–1836?), an eighteen-year-old young woman who left her Osage fur-trapping family and friends in Saline County, central Missouri, to travel to France. She was a beautiful woman, and the French embraced her and her fellow Osage travelers. Lauded and treated royally, she stayed in luxury hotels, ate rich and exotic foods and attended French operas arriving in fancy carriages. As the French tastes turned to other exoticisms, the Osage people along with their manager became destitute. Sacred Sun had twin daughters that were born in Belgium, and she gave one away to a wealthy Belgium woman. The Osage spent the next few years traveling in Europe. Fortunately, when the Marquis de Lafayette, French hero of the American Revolutionary War, heard about Sacred Sun and her Osage companions, he sent them back to America. When she returned to St. Louis in 1830, her tribe had moved to the Oklahoma territory near Fort Gibson. This piece continues my interest in First Generation's stories, *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky*, and now *Following the Sacred Sun*. Hopefully, I plan to write another orchestral CD for the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and I look forward to seeing if New Mexican culture and cuisine attracts my muse.

What do you find is the current direction of new classical music?

To quote Cole Porter, "Anything Goes!" From tonality, to atonality, jazz with classical, rap with classical, etc. It is an exciting time for music in all its forms. Each composer has his/her niche, and I believe that we write what we want to hear. I feel that some interesting and exciting music is written for video games, film, and TV music.

What do you do for amusement in this COVID world?

I have friends and colleagues who have told me that they have never been as busy as after retirement. And I agree! I put off many projects until their time 'had come,' like digitizing manuscripts, taping excerpts for historical editions, and creating a new website. I have discovered that I love to cook especially with hot peppers. One reason we moved to New Mexico was that it is the Chile Capital of the World! My usual starters for stir-fry include Chile peppers or habaneros, garlic, and onions—it almost doesn't matter what else is in the mix! Hot Italian sausage and pasta is great with that.

Maria Nockin, Fanfare Magazine, Nov/Dec 2021

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Barbara Harbach is well known for composing music for orchestra, chamber ensemble, voice, and keyboard. She is also active in researching and promoting the music of women composers from the past when their work was rarely published and generally unrecognized. Harbach holds a masters degree from Yale, a concert diploma from the Frankfurt Conservatory, and a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music. Currently an award-winning professor emerita from the University of Missouri at St. Louis, she was recently named One of the Thirty Most Innovative Professors Alive Today.

Harbach opens her compact disc performance of *Civil-Civility* for String Orchestra with Soprano, Flute, Violin, and Piano. The work is divided into six movements, each devoted to a female rights activist. Elizabeth Cady Stanton is described in Sentiments, Eleanor Roosevelt in Gift of Mystery, Rosa Parks in Memories of Our Lives, Margaret Meade in Committed, Ida Wells-Barnett in Light of Truth, and Sojourner Truth in Ain't I a Woman. We should not forget that Harbach, herself, suffered discrimination because of her gender in the twentieth century. Each movement of *Civil-Civility* is a cogent meditation on its subject. Her tonal, melodic music retains the power of her drive for equality as do the performances of the soloists and orchestra. Soprano Stella Markou, flutist Jennifer Mazzoni, violinist Julia Sakharova, and pianist Alla Voskoboynikova contribute mightily to the glory of this rendition.

Abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was an exception to the usual rules for women of her time because as nun and the founder of convents, she was not bound by obedience to a superior or a husband. *Visions of Hildegard* for Violin and Piano is composed in three movements. The first, O Vis Eternitatis, is a responsory for the creator and redeemer. The second, O Noblissima Viriditas, is a responsory for virgins, and the final movement, O Ignee Spiritus, is a memorable hymn to the Holy Spirit. Each movement combines the spirituality and simplicity of Hildegard with the intense musicality of Harbach's setting for violin and piano. Cuatro Danzas for Flute and Piano, played by Mazzini and Voskoboynikova, is a rhythmic secular piece that invites listeners to tap their feet. It is most refreshing after the serious civil rights work and the mystical religious work.

Some starry night take an old country road to the top of a mountain. Stop far above the city lights, beyond the traffic and listen. Can you not hear *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing through the Sky?* Then pop Harbach's disc in the player and enjoy her musical version of the phenomenon. The Sound the Stars Make Rushing through the Sky for Soprano, Violin, and Piano lets you see the starry sky and hear its magical sounds even when you are in the middle of a busy town. Harbach's music encompasses peace and tranquility along with the picture of the lovely, Indigenous Jane Schoolcraft who tells us a poignant tale of her vanished world. The passionate rendition by soprano Stella Markou, violinist Jane Price, and pianist Alla Voskoboynikova is a revelation for those of us who have forgotten the treatment of Native Americans in the past.

The sound is pristine on this disc and soloists sound the way they would if the listener were sitting in an intimate hall dedicated to chamber music. This CD is not to be missed with its pieces on civil rights, women's rights, and Native American History.

Five Stars. Grab this one off the online shelf!

Maria Nockin, Fanfare Magazine, November/December 2021

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It is welcome to encounter new music that is tonal, melodic, emotionally communicative, and yet still sounds fresh. Such is the case with Barbara Harbach's output. The first word that comes to mind as one listens is "beautiful." This is music for any listener who enjoys, for instance, Vaughan Williams's warmth and rich melodic style. Harbach is an American composer, harpsichordist, and organist, born in 1946 and serving since 2004 as a professor of music at the University of Missouri at St. Louis. She began as a performer, and her composing followed naturally from that.

Civil Civility is a six-movement work scored for chamber orchestra with soprano, flute, violin, and piano. It pays tribute to six women who played important roles in the movement for women's and human rights: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Margaret Mead, Ida Wells-Barnett, and Sojourner Truth. Much of the music is gently lyrical, though the final movement, referencing Sojourner Truth, is more dramatic. The soprano's angular lines are punctuated by percussive chords from the piano, and the work ends dramatically with "I am not going to die, I'm going home like a shooting star." At almost a half hour, *Civil Civility* is the major work on the disc.

Visions of Hildegard is scored for violin and piano and was inspired by the medieval composer Hildegard of Bingen. Harbach's melodic gift is particularly evident in the hymn-like first two movements. The third and final movement, "O Fiery Spirit," is more driven, though it alternates rhythmic passages with more gentle ones.

Cuatro Danzas is scored for flute and piano. All four movements are influenced by Spanish dances, and once again Harbach alternates mellow lyrical passages with spikier rhythmic sections. The third movement, *Andante para vihuelo de penole*, is seductive at first but slowly builds to an energetic climax. On the way it combines jazz influences with the Spanish flavor. The finale, "Danza Delirio," sounds exactly like what its title leads you to expect, although once again Harbach holds your attention by briefly changing the mood in the middle before a quite amusing finish.

The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky is a song cycle for soprano, violin, and piano inspired by the life of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (1800–1842), a Native American princess of the Ojibwe tribe. The first movement sets a text written by Schoolcraft, the second is a traditional Ojibwe prayer, and the final two movements feature texts by Harbach herself. This is the most outwardly emotive piece here, but it is still clearly the work of the same composer. In some ways *The Sound the Stars Make* is also the most Modernist of the works on the program.

The performers are all from the St. Louis area and presumably include colleagues of Harbach's. All of the performances are committed and well executed. The recorded sound is warm and well balanced. It is fortunate that MSR provides texts, as the words are not always easily comprehensible from just listening. In the 1950s and 1960s it would have been difficult for a composer like Harbach to find performances, because of the rigidity of the musical establishment's resistance to tonal and melodic music. Fortunately, we are beyond that now, and this gifted composer's work is performed and recorded with some frequency.

Henry Fogel, Fanfare Magazine, November/December 2021

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The music of Barbara Harbach always seems to be a joy to review. The sense of open-air freshness to her music is irresistible, and it always seems to be so carefully constricted. Not a note wasted; Harbach knows what she wants to say and exactly how to say it.

The six movements of *Civil-Civility* for string orchestra with soprano, flute, violin and piano (2016) celebrates the acts of courage and the writings of women who have struggled to maintain a voice within patriarchal societies: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Margaret Mead, Ida Wells-Bennett and Sojourner Truth. Each musical portrait is strongly characterised, and the addition of soprano, violin, and piano to the second, "Gift of Mystery" is highly effective. Stella Markou is a fine soprano. There is something about Harbach's writing that cuts straight to the heart, and one can certainly feel that in the third movement, "Memories of our lives," inspired by Rosa Park. The overarching inspiration though is the ninth-century Kassia of Constantinople. Refusing to accept societal norms, she instead founded a convent.

The third movement is powerful: a passacaglia founded on the hymn tune *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*, it has a rigor hitherto not found in the work. The St Louis Chamber Orchestra is particularly convincing in this movement. It is the flute of Jennifer Mazzoni that shines through in the fourth movement, "Committed," inspired by the American anthropologist and author Margaret Mead. Again, religious music forms part of the fabric, here as, in the movement's second half, Martin Luther's *Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin* (In peace and joy I now depart) makes itself known. The next movement, "Light of Truth," celebrates the slave Ida Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), who became a journalist set against the barbarism of lynching. There is a peace to Harbach's setting, and the composer reflects the search for truth by working with a finely-crafted set of variations. The final track is vocal: Stella Markou in fine voice for "Ain't I a Woman," a celebration of Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), who became the first black woman to win a custody case for her son. Within the space of a mere five minutes the music moves from the intensely personal (that initial cry of "Ain't I A Woman") through to something far more transcendent and celestial. Harbach's music mirrors the beauty and the truth of these musing on the eternal.

It is difficult to imagine a finer performance than this one conducted by James Richards. I wonder if the recording is just a touch dry, though.

Scored for violin and piano, *Visions of Hildegard* celebrates another great woman: Hildegard of Bingen, a true polymath and genius whose own music is indeed celestially guided. Harbach takes three titles by Hildegard and locates their essence in her own time and expression while somehow maintaining the profound spirituality. The three movements are "O vis eternitatis" (O Power Within Eternity), "O nobilissima viriditas" (O Noblest Green Viridity) a d "O Ignee Spiritus" (O fiery Spirit). The occasional dance steps of "O nobilissima viriditas" sound impeccably American, as does the gentle repose of the easily gliding violin melody, so beautifully played by Jane Price. Anna Voskoboynikova is a fine partner here (the two instruments are very much equals); plus, the recording seems finer, less airless.

There is a definite feeling of the divertimento about the *Cuatro Danzas* for flute and piano (2018). The pronounced Spanish flavor reflects Harbach's move to the American Southwest. Jennifer Mazzoni is a fine flautist, her sound absolutely stunning, particularly in the flute's lower registers. The rather sultry third movement is of particular fascination, as it accelerates slowly but inevitably with the piano's walking bass adding a laid-back feel. And although "Danza delirio" implies some sort of crazy dance, the reality is more controlled, the excitement coming instead from the tightness of ensemble from the two players.

Inspired by Jane Johnston Schoolcroft (a princess of the Native American Ojibwe tribe), *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky* (2017) is a suite of four movements boasts two with texts by Harbach herself (the final two). The luxuriant first movement, "And Musing Awhile," is a text by Schoolcroft (from *Pemsive Hours*); the second is a traditional Ojibwe Prayer, beautifully and touchingly set by Harbach and gloriously sung by Markou; Jane Price's violin is a vibrant obbligato. The generosity of expression in the third song (which takes its title from the overall title of the collection) is positively Romantic in gesture, particularly perhaps the final, flung-out high note for voice. The title of the final movement, "Trial of Tears" refers to the forced marches in eastern Oklahoma; it was coined by the Cherokee. The story is told here through the eyes of a child; Harbach's setting is potent and uncompromising; a remarkable way to close the disc.

**** I have yet to be disappointed by anything Harbach has written. This disc acts as yet another affirmation of Harbach's stature in American music today.

Colin Clarke, Fanfare Magazine, November/December 2021

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A new CD from MSR Classics is Volume VI in a survey of the Chamber Music of the American composer, keyboard artist, and educator, Barbara Harbach. I always welcome the opportunity to hear and review Harbach's music. Her compositions are notable for their melodic inspiration, lovely and transparent scoring, and keen sense of involvement with her subject matter. I also admire the optimistic, life-affirming atmosphere that pervades her work. This is not to say that Harbach's music is unremittingly cheerful, even in moments that call for a darker mode of expression. But like Aaron Copland, whose spirit, I think may be found to some degree in her music, Harbach maintains faith in the human experience, and the possibility of hope. In previous reviews of Harbach's orchestral music, I've praised her "lean, bright, and keenly transparent orchestral sonority, in which the various instrumental families are always heard with the utmost clarity." In the context of chamber music, concerns regarding textural clarity are not so pressing. Still, Harbach's sensitive and delicate blending of instrumental voices in these chamber works is once again notable and impressive. It is music of substance that falls graciously on the ear.

Civil-Civility, scored string orchestra, soprano, flute, violin, and piano, is in six movements. The movements are musical portraits of "courageous women who defied all

odds to help the women of the world, and all humanity"; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Margaret Mead, Ida Wells-Barnett, and Sojourner Truth. The soprano soloist appears in the movements devoted to Eleanor Roosevelt and Sojourner Truth. The former is a soaring coloratura vocalise, while the latter is an impassioned setting of Sojourner Truth's speech, "And ain't I a Woman?" *Visions of Hildegard*, for violin and piano, is inspired by the music of Hildegard of Bingen. The work is in three movements; *O vis eternitatis* (*O Power Within Eternity*), *O noblissima viriditas* (*O Noblest Green Viridity*), and *O ignee Spiritus* (*O Fiery Spirit*). *Cuatro Danzas*, for flute and piano, is in four movements: *Danza Flamenco, La Mente, Andante para vihuelo de penole*, and *Danza Delirio*. *Quatro Danzas*, "with a Spanish flavor and frenzied outer movements", "reflects (the composer's) move to the American Southwest." The final work, *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky*, is "a cycle of four pieces for soprano, violin and piano." The work is inspired by the life and writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, a princess of the Native American Ojibwe tribe. Schoolcraft is one of the earliest known Native American writers. The four movements are *And Musing Awhile* (a setting of poetry by Schoolcraft), *Ojibwe Prayer*, *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky*, and *Trail of Tears*. Harbach wrote the text for the final two movements; the former a celebration of Schoolcraft's life, the latter a child's eyewitness account of the brutal forced relocation of Native Americans. The performances are all excellent; beautifully played and recorded. In *Civil-Civility* and *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky*, Harbach challenges the soprano soloist with music that requires by turns flexibility, ease in the upper register, vocal beauty, power, and expressiveness. Stella Markou distinguishes herself with accomplished, compelling performances. But all of the featured artists perform with the highest skill and commitment. The booklet includes extensive and informative program notes (author uncredited), sung texts, and artist bios. A release of considerable merit, and highly recommended.

4 Stars: Accomplished and moving chamber works by American composer Barbara Harbach

Ken Meltzer, Fanfare magazine, September/October 2021

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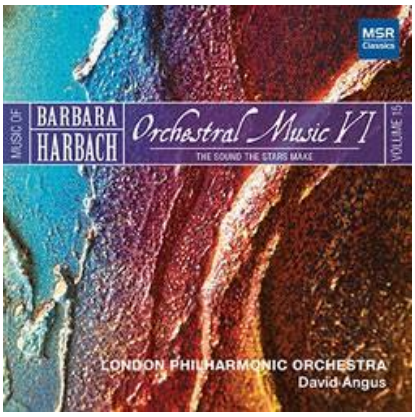
The reason for having another MSR Classics CD is clear enough for a certain group of enthusiasts: to add to one's growing library of music by Barbara Harbach. This sixth volume of her chamber music and 14th release in an ever-lengthening series of recordings of her creations consists, like a number of earlier releases, entirely of world première recordings. There are four multi-movement works here, for varying complements of performers – with the unity of the material stemming from Harbach's compositional style. *Civil Civility* is the longest and most elaborate of the pieces, requiring chamber orchestra plus soprano, flute, violin and piano. Its six movements focus on women whose names and causes are mostly familiar: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Margaret Mead, Ida Wells-Barnett, and Sojourner Truth. Because the sentiments are unsurprising, it is left to the music (which includes some

vocalise as well as song) to distinguish the material. By and large, Harbach (born 1946) works in a tonal medium, with instrumental highlights that are effective even when they are a touch obvious (such as the flute solo in the Margaret Mead movement). This is, in essence, "cause" music, skillfully created to make points that have often been made before. *Visions of Hildegard* for violin and piano is a tribute piece of a different sort, focusing on Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), whose own music has become famous in recent years (especially since she was canonized in 2012). The work's title is interestingly evocative: Hildegard did have visions, to which the music pays tribute; but in addition, these mostly quiet, elegant movements constitute Harbach's visions *of* Hildegard. The music is a touch too placid to sustain well for its full 15 minutes, but it is often thoughtful and moving. *Cuatro Danzas* for flute and piano is far more on the secular side of things, its four movements by turns jovial, quiescent, dreamlike and hectic (the last of them is called *Danza Delirio*). The final work on this disc has one of those overdone titles to which some contemporary composers gravitate, although Harbach usually does not. *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky* is a four-movement work for soprano, violin and piano, and is another "cause" piece, this one focusing on Native American history, Ojibwe in particular. The work's overall title is also the title of the third movement; all four movements are intended to reflect supposedly purer and better lives in the past, to which the evil response was along the lines of "shut up, shut up" (words that actually appear in the fourth movement). Although heartfelt and, like all Harbach's music, well-made, the piece is on the obvious side, as so much "cause" music tends to be. Listeners already familiar with Harbach's work will enjoy having this disc to add to a series that shows no sign of ending anytime soon: Harbach is nothing if not prolific. The music is unlikely to draw a new audience to the composer, but it will likely solidify the enjoyment of those who already gravitate to her compositions.

Mark J. Estren, InfoDad, September 2021

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ ORCHESTRAL Music VI
The Sound the Stars Make
Vol. XV MSR 1714



Five stars: Lovely new orchestral music performed with devotion

Composer Barbara Harbach (b. 1946), who has been on the faculty of the University of Missouri-St. Louis since 2004, is fortunate in having much of her music recorded, the majority on MSR. This disc is titled *Orchestral Music: VI.* David Angus and the London Philharmonic Orchestra have made many of the recordings, which is also fortunate, because both conductor and orchestra are familiar with her idiom and perform Harbach's music with real commitment.

Her compositional style is tonal and often quite lyrical, rather gentle in nature, and displaying a strong melodic gift. This is a style that would probably not appeal to those who believe that contemporary music must be challenging, difficult to absorb, and in some way filled with conflict. However, the word that keeps coming to my mind as I listen is "beautiful."

All the works here was composed in 2017 and 2018. *Visions of Hildegard* was inspired by the medieval woman composer Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). Harbach is a skilled organist and harpsichordist, so it is not surprising that she has an affinity for early music. The work is in three movements and is an orchestration of an earlier work for violin and piano. It gains from the additional colors provided by the orchestra. Harbach's considerable skill at orchestration is evident from the outset. In the third movement, "O ignee Spiritus" (O fiery Spirit), the instrumentation recalls the sound of an organ, in part through the use of sonorous lower brass. There is a real sense of grandeur to *Visions of Hildegard*, and at 15 minutes the work is the right length to find a spot on orchestra concerts if conductors had sufficient curiosity to discover it.

Mischances of Life is an orchestral suite based on Harbach's critically praised opera, *O Pioneers!*, which is described in the notes as a work involving horrendous tragedy. I must admit that I would never have surmised this from the suite. Only in the final movement is the unsettling nature of the libretto, adapted from Willa Cather's 1913 novel of the same name, apparent—the music changes meter frequently, revealing darker colors and harmonic tension. Otherwise, I find the suite an attractive 25-minute work but without the gravitas I hear in the rest of the program.

The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky is a three-movement orchestral suite that takes its title from Bamewawagezhikaquay, the Native American name of the early nineteenth-century writer Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, who was part Ojibwa. The name translates as "Woman of the Sound that Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky." The first movement is introspective, reflective of Schoolcraft's poem *Pensive Hours*. The second movement, "Luna and Stella" (Moon and Stars), is colorful and joyous. The last movement, "Trail of Tears," dramatically recalls the forced relocation marches that the U.S. government sent Native Americans on after evicting them from their homeland. Harbach has written a poem to accompany this movement, which is printed in the booklet. The music is very moving, making for a stark contrast to the preceding movements.

Eclipsis lunae is an exciting dramatic tone poem that can stand on its own, but which benefits from reading the composer's notes (despite the work's title, she describes a solar eclipse rather than a lunar one). "When the people saw that the moon was beginning to cover the sun, they became deeply distressed and anxious. To drive out the evil spirit that was covering the sun, they thought that music might dispel the darkness." The music describes an arc of emotion from mounting fear to triumph as their prayers are answered and the ritual succeeds. "As the sun began to reappear and get larger, the people rejoiced in 'how high the moon,' joyously playing the song that Ella Fitzgerald made famous."

The brief (five minute) *Spaindango - a Tango Caprice* was originally written for solo harpsichord or piano. To quote the composer, the music "features antique flourishes in vivid dialogue with 20th-century madness. Varying meters and quickly changing orchestration keep the listener off balance." The music demonstrates another of Harbach's qualities that I have always appreciated: humor. In contrast to the earnest seriousness of so much contemporary music she is not afraid to wink or smile occasionally.

MSR's recorded sound is excellent; the performances are all that a composer might hope for, and the booklet is a great help for the listener new to Harbach. I don't know if these recordings are leading to orchestral performances in America, but they should. Warmly recommended.
Henry Fogel, Fanfare Magazine May/June 2022

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If the contents of some of this disc (*Music of Barbara Harbach, Vol. 15 – Orchestral Music VI*) seem familiar, that's not entirely surprising: MSR 1695 (reviewed by myself and several other critics in *Fanfare* 45:2) presents chamber versions of *Visions of Hildegard* and *The Sound The Stars Make Rushing Through The Sky*. We do have several other different pieces, though; instead of *Cuatro Danzas* and *Civil Civility*, the disc is filled with *Mischances of Life*, *Eclipsis Lunae*, and *Spaindango*.

Hearing *Visions of Hildegard* in full orchestral garb is another experience again from the violin and piano version; the music seems to explode in depth and color. David Argus gets fine, tender performances from the London Philharmonic; we hear dance echoes here in both the opening "O vis eternitatis," as well as in the central "O nobilissima viriditas." It is wonderful that the original texts are reproduced in the booklet, even though this is a purely orchestral work; reading Hildegard's words really helps one tap into the creative processes at work here. It's interesting, too, that Harbach can retain her natural mode of expression while remaining true to the ancient messages and feel of Hildegard's output. Perhaps the biggest surprise in hearing the orchestral version is the third and final movement, "O ignee Spiritus," which sounds positively filmic in its dimensions, a huge vista of sound augmented by expansive woodwind melodies. While the violin and piano version

makes for an emphatic opening, it is a world away from this; and yet the scoring is so expert, and so beautiful, it seems impossible to imagine the orchestral version any other way. Mike Hatch's recording is brilliant: Detail is perfectly captured, and yet one feels the space of London's Henry Wood Hall as well.

The orchestral piece *Mischances of Life*, like *Visions of Hildegard*, dates from 2018. This is effectively a beautiful orchestral suite extracted from Harbach's opera *O Pioneers!* (which I, for one, would love to see). Again, quotations from the text illuminate the movements beyond their titles: "In the Cold, In the Deep, In the Dark"; "Away, Away, O Monstrous Choice"; and so on. The gracefulness of the playing from the solo woodwind and brass instruments in the third movement, "Misfortune's Folly," is most impressive and appealing; the flighty scoring of "Dreams through the Trees" sets up a positively magical, fantastical atmosphere. Harbach is something of a conjurer herself, creating the perfect atmosphere every time.

An orchestral suite in three movements, also written in 2018, *The Sound The Stars Make Rushing Through The Sky* is inspired by a princess of the Ojibwe people, whose name translates as the work's title (the version on the previous disc dates from the previous year). On that earlier disc, there were vocals; here, the orchestra is left to "sing," and indeed one can often imagine the melodies sung. There is a real power to this version, though: Although Harbach's scoring is elective, one is ever aware that a tutti is only a few strokes of the pen away. Although identifiably Harbach, this is another sound world, somehow deeper and more contemplative, even when the music moves along quite nicely. The LPO is magnificent in the tricky second movement, "Luna and Stella," with its overlapping phrases and tripping-along rhythms, creating a beautifully outdoorsy feel. The mood shifts significantly for "Trail of Tears" (referring to the enforced relocation of the Cherokee Nation; in Cherokee, the event is referred to as "The Trail Where They Cried," hence the title), more oppressive, carrying the weight of history.

Even darker is *Eclipsis Lunae* (2017), a piece about the superstitions surrounding lunar eclipses, and the peoples' attempts to prevent the loss of light so that the sun might reappear. Harbach cleverly includes a reference to the song *How High the Moon* (made famous by the likes of Charlie Parker and Ella Fitzgerald), unmissable here via the inclusion of a drum kit) as, for the final section, rejoicing reigns for the return of the light; there is some terrific brass playing in this section, also. Finally, there comes a "Tango Caprice," *Spaindango* (2018), a piece originally for harpsichord and which, in the composer's own words, "featured antique flourishes in dialogue with 20th-century madness." It is clever, witty, and delightful, and the references to early music come to the fore at one point most effectively. Instead of alternating two sections that could be labelled "A" and "B," Harbach alternates "A" (and its variants) with "Tango" through a sequence of five variations. The piece scuds its way through a variety of moods, none intended to pull us in any way downwards; this is a terrific end to a terrific disc. It sounds like the LPO had fun aplenty, too.

This is a fascinating, varied disc, with the London Philharmonic in top form and caught in a fabulous recording. This is volume six of Harbach's orchestral music series on MSR; I'm sure there will be more, and for that we should be ever grateful.

Colin Clarke, Fanfare September/October 2022

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"Keep the Music Playing and Let Your Spirit Soar!"
A Conversation with Barbara Harbach

I first spoke with Barbara Harbach in 2010 (*Fanfare* 33:3) but I've kept up with her musical adventures in the intervening years thanks to the ongoing series of *Fanfare* interviews that

followed. For those who don't know her, she's a harpsichordist/organist whose numerous CDs reflect her passion for both older and contemporary music; a tireless researcher and promoter of the works of overlooked composers, often women, but not exclusively so; a publisher of scores and journals; a festival organizer; a former host of a radio program; the Curator's Distinguished Professor Emerita of Music at the University of Missouri-St. Louis; and a composer whose extensive catalog includes numerous symphonies—11 thus far—and other orchestral works, chamber music, musicals, operas, silent film scores, and more. It was a pleasure to reconnect with her to discuss her latest release, Volume VI of her orchestral music as performed by conductor David Angus and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Looking at the track listing for Volume VI before listening to the CD, I wondered why Visions of Hildegard *and* The Sound The Stars Make Rushing Through The Sky, *originally heard on Volume V, were being repeated. However, I soon realized that these are orchestral scores, as* Hildegard *was originally composed for piano and violin and* The Stars *for soprano, violin, and piano. What prompted the orchestral versions?*

Yes, *Visions of Hildegard* began life as a piece for violin and piano, and *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky* was originally for soprano, violin, and piano. These chamber pieces appeared on my *Chamber Music V*, MSR Classics 1695 and were beautifully recorded by Stella Markou (soprano), Jane Price (violin), and Alla Voskoboynikova (piano), my colleagues at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. I was fortunate to have world-class artists to collaborate with at the university, and they were halcyon days for composition and music making.

Sometimes a composer may feel that she has more to say about a particular theme or even complete works such as *Visions* and *The Sound the Stars Make*, and then they may morph into a larger form with an expanded palette. Such is the case with these two pieces, which went from chamber music to orchestral. I have always been drawn to strong women who did not follow society's dictums—Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (1800–1842), pioneer women who helped settle Alaska, Dorothy Parker, and Harriet Scott (Dred Scott's wife). There are also the women highlighted in *Civil-Civility* for chamber orchestra—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Margaret Mead, Ida Wells-Barnett, Sojourner Truth—and in *Freeing the Caged Bird* for woodwind quintet—Maya Angelou, Sara Teasdale, Kate Chopin, Emily Hahn, Abigail Adams. Add to these *Light Out of Darkness* (Helen Keller), and the poems of Emily Dickinson. I am also inspired to write music for silent films by ground-breaking women film directors—Alice Guy Blaché's *Making an American Citizen* (1912) and *The Birth, Life and Death of Christ*, and Lois Weber's *Hypocrites* (1915), among others.

No matter how many times I read Hildegard's biography, I am still in awe of her accomplishments in the 12th century: She belonged to the Order of Saint Benedict and became known as Saint Hildegard and Sibyl of the Rhine, but she was also an abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, mystic, and visionary. Many consider her to be the founder of natural history in Germany. She is well known as a composer of sacred monophony and is the most recorded medieval composer in modern history. In all three movements of *Visions of Hildegard*, melodies flow from instrument to instrument, weaving a musical tapestry, so each instrument has a magical moment.

The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky, an orchestral suite in three movements, takes its title from Jane Johnston Schoolcraft's Native American name, Bame-wa-wa-ge-zhik-a-quay, which in English is "Woman of the Sound that Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky." Schoolcraft was an extraordinary princess of the Ojibwe people who settled along the shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior, a region they called home for more than 500 years. She is the first known Native

American poet and female writer, her work paralleling famous Anglo-American and British writers, including William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Lydia Sigourney (1770–1850). Schoolcraft was the granddaughter of the famous Ojibwe chief, Waub Ojeeg, and her mother, Susan (or "Shau-gush-co-da-way-quay"), was the daughter of the chief. Her father, John Johnston, was a highly educated white fur trader, who taught her English, plus the Bible, history, and poetry. Like her mother, Jane married a white man, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and used her knowledge of English and Ojibwe to help him learn of Ojibwe oral history and traditions, and ultimately to publish its stories.
The first movement, "And Musing Awhile," is an excerpt from Jane Schoolcraft's poem, "Pensive Hours." The last line of the poem, "So pensively joyful, so humbly sublime," captures its essence with searching and yearning motives, taken up variously by strings, woodwinds, and brass that circle round with percussive, chordal punctuations. Orchestral colors portray the musings and whispers, the glistening stream, and the murmurings of kind voices. The second movement, "Luna and Stella (Moon and Star)" is in irregular 7/8 meter and loose ABACAB rondo form. As instruments join in, the tempo becomes faster and more frantic until arriving at an electrifying 6/8 section with rhythmic themes that boldly alternate between 6/8 and 3/4. All instruments join in the fray and drive impulsively to a concluding musical thunderclap.

The last movement, "Trail of Tears" (with my text), tells a tragic story. In the 1830s, Native Americans were sent on forced relocation marches by the federal government, evicted from their homelands in the southeast. The Cherokee Nation, one of the largest native groups in America, took the longest time to move. In brutal excursions marked by disease, starvation, and death, they were forced to march more than 1,200 miles inland to present-day Oklahoma. Beginning in the summer of 1838 and continuing into the winter, approximately 15,000 men, women, and children were relocated; more than 4,000 died from disease, exhaustion, or exposure. In the Cherokee language, this event is referred to as "the trail where they cried," giving rise to the English title Trail of Tears. In the music, numerous changes in rhythm, meter, and dynamics, along with colorful orchestration, tell the story as seen through a child's eyes.

Volume VI also includes Mischances of Life, Eclipsis Lunae, *and* Spaindango—A Tango Caprice. *The booklet explains that some of the material for* Mischances *"has its origins" in your opera* O Pioneers!*, which in turn was inspired by Willa Cather's novel. Of course, that doesn't mean you didn't vary or expand it for the new piece.*

Composers sometimes use themes and movements of their operas to forge an enlarged and more developed orchestral work, such as the *Carmen* suites by Bizet or Tchaikovsky's tribute to Mozart on the 100th anniversary of *Don Giovanni*. I was not yet finished with some of the themes and story lines from my opera *O Pioneers!*, so the four movements of *Mischances of Life* became a piece that portrayed the tragedy as well as the innocence of childhood.

The first movement, entitled "In the Cold, In the Deep, In the Dark," is the dark place where one retreats after a horrendous tragedy occurs. Alexandra, one of the characters from the book, *O Pioneers*, contemplates her feelings about the murder of her brother and his lover, Maria. Sadness and melancholy are portrayed by sweet, mournful brass and comforting woodwinds.

In the cold in the deep in the dark
In the silence of the grave
In the cold of my deep unknowing
I must find the cold strength to be brave.

The second movement, "Away, Away, O Monstrous Choice," is another vignette taken from *O Pioneers!* When the lovers Emil and Maria try to resist their dangerous attraction to each other, they

agree, sadly, to part. Agitation in the strings sets the mood of indecision, as solo woodwinds and brass try to find a resolution regarding the fate of the lovers. Foreboding becomes clear with a reference to the Latin sequence *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath). Theme and motives are tossed from instrument to instrument in a weighty conversation that has no answers.

Away, away. Unhappy day.
A monstrous path. O bitter way.
I must choose the path that leads away.

In the third movement, "Misfortune's Folly," playful repartee and bantering transpires between Emil and Marie, the language lovers often use with one another. They meet at a church fair where the crowds and activities hide their assignation. Emil's voice is portrayed by the trombone and Marie's voice by sweet woodwinds and a beguiling trumpet. Their love duet is richly resonant in this orchestration. A subtle hint of Mexican flavor in the music reminiscent of Emil's return from Mexico is heard just before the love duet blossoms, engaging the full orchestra.

Your gypsy card reveal to me,
That you are truly Miss-fortune
I see it now but can only laugh—Miss-Fortune

In "Dreams Among the Trees," the fourth movement, Alexandra, Emil, and Marie's thoughts return to a more innocent time in their lives, depicted by playful motives intertwining and chasing one another. Subsequently, Marie's Moon Waltz begins and transport the trio to "Dreams Among the Trees," and all are entranced by the rapturous moment.

And sometimes though it is no one's fault,
I dream the moon and I are waltzing
Waltzing, lovely light as air.

And then, a sinister reminder that love can be a double-edged sword:
Turn back, O dreamers, from these paths. Control yourselves, forget the past, and we will leave our dreams among the trees.

The last movement, "Fly Low, Stay Out of Sight," foreshadows the tragedy that is about to befall the lovers Emil and Marie. Frequent meter changes and ominous orchestral themes and colors amplify the tension.

Fly low, stay out of sight. Once put wrong, the world is hard to right.

What can you tell me about Eclipsis Lunae and Spaindango?

When the University of St. Louis asked me to write a piece commemorating the eclipse in 2019, I became fascinated with the idea of what earlier peoples might have thought about such a phenomenon, and gradually a program took shape:

"When the peoples of earlier times witnessed the moon covering the sun, they became deeply distressed and anxious. To drive out an evil spirit they believed to be the culprit, they sought music to dispel the darkness. First, they offered a prayer by having instruments play while sneaking in on one another. As the sky grew darker, the timpani introduces a tranquil melody that rises toward the sky in worship of the sun. Facing little result, they decided the music needed to be louder, so they combined the music of the opening with snare drum and other percussion instruments, creating a powerful Dies Irae. Still, the sun was disappearing, so the trumpets began playing a fanfare, which was still not strong enough to stop the moon's encroachment. In a panic, they paid homage to the sun in a solemn dirge, *In Memoriam*, but it, too, was ineffective. Unrelenting, they tried a snare drum and timpani solo with slow-moving chords. The sun was almost gone, so the last effort was to invoke a jazz-style piece alternating with some of the previous melodies. As the sun finally began to

reappear and get larger, the people rejoiced in 'how high the moon,' joyously playing the song that Charlie Parker and Ella Fitzgerald helped make famous."

Spaindango—a Tango Caprice for Orchestra began as a piece for harpsichord … a "fetching piece, full of antique flourishes mixed with 20th-century rage and madness, a cauldron of churning notes," as *CD Review* described the work. All these elements were transcribed and intensified in the orchestral version. The orchestral version (as well as the harpsichord version) has two theme areas, an A Theme and Tango Theme that alternate with each other for five variations each. The A Theme has an asymmetrical and off-kilter time signature of 5/8 with emphasis on beats one and four. The Tango Theme is in 4/4 time and has glissandi in the upper strings with the tango rhythm in the bassoon and cello, with the trumpet presenting the melody, imitated by unison oboe and clarinet, and finally the xylophone, all with ear-catching glissandi. The last Tango Theme has blistering glissandi, heavily accented tango rhythms and a rising chromatic line that abruptly ends with all instruments proclaiming the final tango rhythm!

How are you getting on with your digitizing of forgotten manuscripts? Are you still recording fragments for your website, and have you thought about recording complete versions of this overlooked music?

I have thoroughly enjoyed the project of digitizing over 100 of my historical keyboard facsimiles. I always appreciated playing from facsimiles; I felt that I was closer to the composer and her/his musical intentions. The following are a few of the historical composers I have done so far: Anna Bon, Maria Hester Park, Caroline Orger, Jane Savage, Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Elizabeth Stirling, Elizabeth Weichsell Billington, George Berg, John Camidge, among others. I have made 13 piano excerpts so far and will put them on my website barbaraharbach.com. I hope to record several more this year.

I also have released complete historical keyboard versions of the following pieces on CD (the Gasparo and Hester Park CDs are out of print but available via streaming):

Johann Sebastian Bach: Organ Music, MSR Classics 1444 Prelude and "St. Anne's" Fugue in E♭ Major, BWV 552. Toccata and Fugue in F Major, BWV 540. An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV653. Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 546. Choral Prelude "O Mensch bewein dein Sünde gross," BWV 622. Fantasy and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542. Prelude and Fugue in E Minor, BWV 548, "Wedge"

Organ Music for the Synagogue (Album 13 of Volume 4: *Cycle of Life in Synagogue and Home*), Milken Archives, 2015

Antonio Soler: Harpsichord Sonatas 1–120 (Padre Samuel Rubio Edition) MRS Classics 1300, 14-CD Box Set 2015

Bach: Art of the Fugue, and Johann Pachelbel: Canon, Chaconnes & Chorale Preludes, 2-CD set, MSR Classics 1442, 2014 Bach: *The Art of Fugue*, BWV 1080. *Komm süsser Tod*. Pachelbel: Canon in D. Chaconne in F. Chorale Preludes: *Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her; Allein Gott in der Hoh sei Her; Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren; Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder; Nun komm der Heiden Heiland; Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, der von uns; Wenn wir in höchsten Noten sein; An Wasserflüssen Babylon; Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christi; Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott; Wie schön leuchet der Morgenstern; Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein.* Chaconne in D

Thomas Haigh: Six Concertos for Harpsichord, Opus 1, MSR Classics 1441, 2013

Anna Bon de Venezia: Six Sonatas for Harpsichord, op. 2, MSR Classics 1241 2007. Three-movement sonatas in G Minor. B-flat Major. F Major. C Major. B Minor. C Major

Bach: Goldberg Variations for Harpsichord, Gasparo Records (Gallante), GG 1018, 2002

Pachelbel: Canons, Gasparo Records, GSS-2001, 1999. (Reissued as MSR Classics 1442)

Summershimmer: Women Organ Composers, Hester Park, CD 7704, 1996 Works by Elizabeth Stirling, Barbara Harbach, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Christina Harmon, Maddalena Lombardini Sirmen, Jeanne Demessieux, Julia Smith, Ethel Smyth, Libby Larsen, Clara Schumann, Mary Jeanne van Appledorn

Classical Prodigies: Elizabeth Weichsell Billington / Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Hester Park, CD 7703, 1995 (harpsichord) Billington: Sonatas I–III, op. 1. Sonatas I–VI, op. 2. Mozart: Allegro in C Major. Andante in F Major. Menuett 1 in C Major. Allegro in B♭ Major. Menuett & Trio in G Major. Klavierstück in C Major. Eight Variations in G, KV 24. Untitled in F Major, KV 15. Seven Variations in D Major, KV 25

Eighteenth-Century Women Composers: Music for Solo Harpsichord, Vol. I, Gasparo Records, GSCD-272, 1995 (Also released on Kingdom Records, UK, KCLCD 2010, 1989) Cecilia Barthélémon: Sonata in E Major. Marianne Martinez: Sonata in E Major and Sonata in A Major. Marianna d'Auenbrugg: Sonata in E♭: Rondo. Elisabetta de Gambarini: Pieces for the Harpsichord. Maria Hester Park: Sonata in F Major

Eighteenth-Century Women Composers: Music for Solo Harpsichord, Vol. II, Gasparo Records, GSCD-281, 1990 A Lady: Lesson VI in D Major. Cecilia Barthélémon: Sonata in G Major. Maria Hester Park: Concerto in E♭ Major and Sonata in C Major. Elizabeth Turner: Lesson I in G Minor and Lesson II in G Major. Sonatas by Elisabetta de Gambarini, Elizabeth Hardin, Hester Park

Sonatas by Elizabeth: Eliszbetta de Ganbarini/Elizabeth Hardin, Hester Park CD 7702, 1995, Harpsichord; de Gambarini: Sonatas I-VI. Hardin: Lessons I-VI

Women Composers for Organ: Music Spanning Five Centuries, Gasparo Records, GSCD-294, 1993 Works by Roberta Bitgood, Amy Beach, Elizabeth Stirling, Edith Borroff, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Marga Richter, Violet Archer, Clara Schumann, Gwyneth Walker, Miss Steemson, Gracia Baptista, Mary Jeanne van Appledorn, Barbara Harbach, Grete von Zieritz

Contemporary Organ: Samuel Adler/Dan Locklair, Gasparo Records, GSCD-277, 1990 Dan Locklair: Rubrics. Agonies & Ecstasies. Samuel Adler: Toccata, Recitation & Postlude. Two Meditations. Reflection. Wind Songs

JS Bach: Art of the Fugue, Gasparo Records, 1990 American Hymn Preludes, Gasparo Records, GSCD-258, 1990 Samuel Adler: *Hymnset. When Jesus Wept.* Garner Read: *Preludes on Old Southern Hymns*, op. 90. *Six Preludes on Old Southern Hymns*, op. 112

While browsing your website I came across a disc devoted to modern-day composers Arnold Rosner and Daneil Pinkham. Is that the only CD you've recorded of contemporary harpsichord music? Are there other similar compositions you'd like to record? Concertos, perhaps?

Earlier in my career, I concentrated on commissioning, publishing, and recording 20th-century harpsichord composers and their pieces, such as the following:

Rosner/Pinkham, 20th Century Harpsichord Music, MSR Classics 1443, 2013 Arnold Rosner: *Musique de Clavecin*, op. 61; *Sonatina d'Amour*, op. 83. Daniel Pinkham: Partita for Harpsichord

Harpsichord Music, Vol. I, Gasparo Records GSCD-251, 1994 Bohuslav Martinů. *Deux pieces pour clavecin, Sonate pour clavecin, Deux impromptus pour clavecin*. Virgil Thomson: *Four Portraits*. Vincent Persichetti: Harpsichord Sonata No. 7, op. 156. William Albright: *Four Fancies for Harpsichord*. Samuel Adler: Sonata for Harpsichord. Rick Sowash: *The Unicorn and Theme with Six Variations*. Alec Templeton: *Bach Goes to Town* (Originally released on *Twentieth-Century Harpsichord Music*, Kingdom Records, London, UK, 1988)

20th Century Harpsichord Music, Vol. II, Gasparo Records GSCD-266, 1990 Arnold Rosner: *Musique de clavecin*. Dan Locklair: *The Breakers Pound*. Vivian Fine: *Toccatas and Arias*. Barbara Harbach: *Spaindango – Caprice for Harpsichord*

20th Century Harpsichord Music, Vol. III, Gasparo Records GSCD-280, 1990 Dan

Locklair: *Fantasy Brings the Day*. Samuel Jones: Two Movements for Harpsichord. Arnold Rosner: *Sonatine d'Amour*. Daniel Pinkham: Partita. Samuel Adler: *Bridges to Span Adversity* **20th Century Harpsichord Music, Vol. IV**, Gasparo Records GSCD-290, 1999 Emma Lou Diemer: Toccata. Michael Alec Rose: *B'rachah (Benediction)*. Gardner Read: Fantasy – Toccata. Edith Borroff: *Hyperboles*. Mary Jean Van Appledorn: Parquet Musique. Barbara Harbach: *Tres*

Danzas para Clavecin. Vincent Persichetti: Serenade No. 15, op. 161. Robert Stern: *Fantasia (ancora?)*. Ellen Taaffe Zwilich: Fantasy. Robert Starer: *The Seven Faces of Fernando*
Recording and performing contemporary compositions has been a great passion of mine and I would be delighted to record some contemporary concertos and other works. However, I have been spending most of my artistic time writing music, recording the pieces, and loving the whole process and journey.

*Towards the end of your conversation with Maria Nockin (*Fanfare *45:2) you mentioned plans for "another orchestral CD for the London Philharmonic Orchestra." How is that going?*
I am hoping to go to London mid-summer (pandemic willing) to do my seventh orchestral CD with the London Philharmonic Orchestra with David Angus, conductor. The pieces include *Spiritualis* for orchestra featuring six African American spirituals, *Following the Sacred Sun* for orchestra, and *Choices and Remembrances* for orchestra.

How did the London Philharmonic Orchestra become your orchestra of choice?
It was extremely good luck! Through Richard Price of Candlewood Digital (he produced, edited, and mastered my CDs), I was introduced to Patrick Garvey (London project manager) who introduced me to David Angus (conductor), as well as Mike Hatch with Floating Earth (London sound engineer). Then on this side of the Atlantic, there was Robert LaPorta of MSR Classics (product management) and Tim Schwartz of Onion Productions (package design). As you know, the creation of the music is just a part of the total package in making a CD.

Is there any other music you're working on or have plans to write that wasn't mentioned in your previous interview?
I am very fortunate to work with a talented and creative librettist, Linda Rimel. We have done a musical together, *The News from Tierra Nueva*, and an opera, *Look to Love*, based on a story by Alexander Pushkin, *The Blizzard*. We have just started another opera, *Pushkin in Baltimore*, which has all the opera criteria of great characters who are at times funny, witty, tragic, and poignant, embroiled in a plot centered on a love interest, revenge, murder, and betrayal! I'm also shaping two stories for orchestral storytelling on a successful Chinese woman pirate leader (late 18th century), and a woman who dressed as a man to lead people through the Underground Railroad during the Civil War (19th century).

Has your interest in Native Americans, both outstanding individuals and their experiences as a people, inspired you to write more music since Following the Sacred Sun*?*
I am researching some interesting topics of the Navajo Nation in northwestern New Mexico, and the Mescalero Apaches in southern New Mexico where I live. Now all I need is some time to explore the stories of the peoples in New Mexico. Often melodies occur to me as I am reading about a character or situation, and the music springs to life through the storytelling.

Have you ever wondered why you compose?
I sometimes wonder how and why my life took the paths that it did. I started out wanting to be a concert pianist, then along came organ and harpsichord; they became my passion. I took theory and

analysis throughout my education, but composition was not in the top tier. Then after I got my DMA in performance, I began to write, first for what I knew best, which were choral and organ pieces. Through the years I branched out to sonatas for solo instruments and keyboard, quartets and quintets, string orchestra, musicals, operas, and finally double-wind orchestral pieces that have two players for each instrument in the wind section. Along the way I became very interested in recovering historical women (and underrepresented men) composers who have been neglected and relegated to the back rooms of libraries and collections, overlooked for way too long. So, I recorded their music, published editions of the music, and performed the pieces as often as possible, along with the usual traditional repertoire.

I've spoken with you about your Vivace Press previously, and currently, your website has a section devoted to Harbach Music Publications. Are the two connected?

Vivace Press was my company from the early 1990s, and when I moved to New Mexico I changed the name to HMP, Harbach Music Publishing, as I revamped and enlarged the inventory, which is always evolving with new pieces and editions being added.

Another of your journalistic activities involves Women of Note Quarterly*, for which you've contributed numerous articles.*

The *Quarterly* is focused on historical and contemporary composers and musicians, and while I was at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, it became *Women Arts Quarterly Journal*. I would use articles in the *Journal* in my radio show that I did for the university station, and it was fun to interview women and talk about their processes of creativity. Both journals gently retired when I came to New Mexico.

You told Maria that the Women in the Arts program you initiated at the University of Missouri is "going gorgeously!" As a complement to that, I've just discovered that you wrote Women in the Arts: Eccentric Essays *in 2015. Would you like to say anything about it?*

There were two volumes of *Women in the Arts: Eccentric Essays*. For the first volume I had a co-author, the well-known Medieval musicologist Dr. Diane Touliatos-Miles. She taught me so much about editing a book, and I am grateful. When Cambridge Scholars Publishing were interested in a sequel, I decided to go for it; thus was born *Women in the Arts—Eccentric Essays in Music, Visual Arts and Literature* Vol. II. Little did I know how much work was involved when doing the editing yourself! The excellent chapters of the book came from the participants at a conference I hosted at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Women in the Arts.

Have you written more silent film scores since we last spoke?

Not yet! I have several silent films that I would like to do including *Oceans Waif* (1916, approx. 43 minutes), directed by Alice Guy Blaché. Here are some of the silent film scores that I have composed:

Hypocrisy Suite for orchestra 1915 and *Hypocrites*, for chamber orchestra silent film (Total time 54:29) Director: Lois Weber, and released MSR Classics Orchestra IV 2018

The Birth, Life and Death of Christ 1906 for CHAMBER ENSEMBLE and silent film of the same name. (Total time 36:23) Director: Alice Guy Blaché. Premiered at the St. Louis International Film Festival, St. Louis Art Museum, 2014, and released on MSR Classics 1544 Harbach Chamber Music V

Judith Simon 1915 for chamber ensemble and Hungarian-Jewish silent film, *Simon Judit* (Total time 26:16) Director: Adolf Merai Premiered at the Touhill Performing Arts Center, UM-St. Louis, November 2006 Renamed *Echoes from Tomorrow* for chamber ensemble, and released on MSR Classics 1255, Chamber Music II

A House Divided 1913 for chamber ensemble and silent film (Total time 13:47) Director: Alice Guy

Blaché Premiered at Webster University, November 2005 Renamed *Separately Together* for chamber ensemble, and released MSR Classics 1253 Chamber Music I (David Shepard, film preservationist, used my *A House Divided* music for a TCM [Turner Classic Movies] release, 2015) *How Men Propose* 1913 for chamber ensemble and silent film (Total time 4:54) Director: Lois Weber Premiered at Webster University, November 2005 Renamed *Caronelet Caprice* for chamber ensemble, and released on MSR Classics 1253, Chamber Music I
Making an American Citizen 1912 for chamber ensemble and silent film (Total time 15:37) Director: Alice Guy Blaché Premiered at the St. Louis International Film Festival, Tivoli Theatre, November 2004 Renamed *Transformations* for string quartet, and released on MSR Classics 1253 Chamber Music I Also released as *Transformations* for string orchestra MSR 1255 Chamber Music II.

Do you still play the organ for religious services?
My organ shoes decided to retire when we moved to New Mexico, alas.
Since relocating, have you been involved in organizing any festivals or concert series, as you've done elsewhere?
We moved to New Mexico right before the pandemic hit, so I have not been able to make much contact with the artistic community. I did a video lecture for the local American Guild of Organists, "Women Composers for the Organ," and I am looking forward to getting out-and-about, interacting, and collaborating with the musical community and meeting all kinds of creators.
Robert Schuslaper, Fanfare Magazine September/October 2022

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Five stars: Beautiful performances of orchestral music by American composer Barbara Harbach

MSR Classics presents Volume 15 in its survey of the music of American composer Barbara Harbach. This, in turn, is the label's sixth release of her orchestral works. All of the compositions, receiving world premiere recordings, were completed in 2018, save *Eclipsis Lunae*, which dates from the preceding year. I have had the pleasure of reviewing for *Fanfare* three previous MSR recordings of Barbara Harbach's music (as well as interviewing the composer). And to some degree, the music on Volume 15 reprises some of the works on those earlier discs. Volume 15 opens with *Visions of Hildegard*, a three-movement composition inspired by the music by Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). In the Nov/Dec 2021 issue of *Fanfare* (45:2), I reviewed an MSR disc of Harbach's chamber music that included a version of the same work, there scored for violin and piano. *Mischances of Life* is a 5-movement orchestral suite of music derived from Harbach's 2009 opera, *O Pioneers!*, in turn based upon Willa Cather's 1913 novel. Harbach's Symphony No. 11, "Retourner", is also based on the *O Pioneers!* opera. I reviewed the MSR recording of that Symphony in the May/June 2019 issue (42:5). *The Sound of the Stars Rushing Through the Sky* is inspired by the life and writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, a princess of the Native American Ojibwe tribe. Schoolcraft is one of the earliest known Native American writers. The MSR chamber music disc I've referenced includes a four-movement version of *The Stars Rushing Through the Sky*, scored for soprano, violin, and piano. In its orchestral guise, the work comprises three movements; *And Musing Awhile* (inspired by Schoolcroft's poem, *Pensive Hours*), *Luna and Stella* ("a playful addition to the work"), and *Trail of Tears* (in its chamber version, a setting of a text by Harbach). *Eclipsis Lunae* is a programmatic work that depicts "peoples of earlier times" resorting to music in an attempt to drive away the evil spirit embodied by a lunar eclipse. A variety of musical approaches and styles ensues, culminating in a delightful and uplifting invocation of the jazz standard, "How High the Moon." The disc concludes with the brief *Spaindango—A*

Tango Caprice, a brilliant work originally composed for harpsichord.

The qualities I've praised in my prior reviews of Harbach's music once again shine through in this release. Harbach is a composer whose works embody an arresting gift for melody, couched in unfailingly rich, shimmering, and transparent scoring. Harbach strikes me as a composer with a decidedly life-affirming, optimistic approach. There is a beauty and uplifting energy that pervade her musical creations. Even in those moments in which Harbach is depicting tragedy and pain, her music never becomes maudlin or bogged down by its own weight. Some may prefer a darker voice in such moments. But as I've written in the past about Harbach's music, that is the composer's choice to make. And I find that listening to Harbach's music is a consistently engaging and fulfilling experience. The beautiful performances by the London PO under the direction of David Angus are captured in a rich and clear concert acoustic. The booklet includes detailed and informative liner notes (author uncredited). Recommended.

Ken Meltzer Fanfare Magazine September/October 2022

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Composer Barbara Harbach's newest album, "Orchestral Music VI: The Sound the Stars Make," recorded for MSR Classics, contains some of today's most beautiful contemporary music. Performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus, it stands as a tribute to Harbach's genius as a "neo-classic" composer. Beauty is very hard to find in our time, but it is celebrated here in ambulance by the players in the orchestra. This album provides feel good music at its best. Instead of producing compositions from a musical theme or tune, Harbach's is inspired by compelling stories and narrative context. This album opens with a tribute to Hildegard, a medieval abbess, writer, composer and visionary. It continues with "Mischances of Life," a development out of Harbach's opera "O Pioneers." The album's title stems from the composition that follows, "The Sound the Stars Make Rushing through the Sky." It was inspired by the tribal name and life of the first known Native American poet and female writer Jane Johnson Schoolcraft. To appreciate Harbach's music and its origins, it is very helpful to read the booklets that accompany her CDs, which fully explain her compositions. This album is one of 14 of her symphonic, chamber and instrumental works offered by MSR.

Joel C. Thompson, Cherry Grove Music Review, June 2022

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There is…no shortage of recordings of the music of Barbara Harbach, thanks to an extensive and still-growing set of CDs, released by MSR Classics, in which Harbach's works, both orchestral and chamber, are thoroughly explored. The latest disc of her orchestral music is the sixth, and it is Volume 15 in the entire set of Harbach releases on this label. All five pieces on the CD are world première recordings, but a couple of them will seem more than a trifle familiar to listeners who already own other releases in the series. The three-movement *Visions of Hildegard* (2018) on this disc is an orchestral version of a chamber work of the same title released on the sixth MSR Classics CD of Harbach's chamber music. In that form (for violin and piano) or this one (for larger ensemble), the piece is a tribute to Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), whose own music has become rather well-known in recent years. The piece's title represents not only Harbach's visions of Hildegard but also Hildegard's own visions… Another reworking of chamber music on this CD is *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky* (2018), a four-movement piece for soprano, violin and piano in its chamber form (available on the same prior release that contains the violin-and-piano Hildegard tribute). The work's title is the title of the third movement in the chamber work, but the orchestral piece contains only three movements, and the titular one is absent. The first

and third movements of the orchestral version bear the same titles as the chamber one: *And Musing Awhile* and *Trail of Tears.* But instead of two additional movements, the orchestral work has one, called *Luna and Stella.* The piece is intended as a "cause" work about Ojibwe history and Native American history in general, and seems designed mainly for people already familiar with, perhaps even immersed in, the topic on which it focuses. The longest work on the orchestral CD is the five-movement *Mischances of Life* (2018), which percolates along rather lightheartedly for a piece with this title (although the title does not, after all, say "tragedies"). Harbach, always a skilled orchestrator, is particularly adept here in handling the balance within individual orchestral sections and between one full section and the next – and the London Philharmonic Orchestra under David Angus, in this work and throughout the CD, plays with refinement and a sure sense of style, pacing, and understanding of Harbach's esthetic. Two shorter, single-movement pieces fill out the CD. *Eclipsis Lunae* (2017) suitably blends nocturnal and dramatic feelings, while *Spaindango—A Tango Caprice* (2018) is light and bouncy, surface-level in a good way, and a genuinely enjoyable conclusion to the disc. The Harbach series seems mainly designed for listeners with a penchant for completeness – and it may be quite a while for this set of releases to be complete. For now, each of the CDs shows something different in Harbach's compositional style, and each gives interested listeners a chance to hear some previously unrecorded material by a talented contemporary composer.

Mark J. Estren, InfoDad June 2022

MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ ORCHESTRAL Music VII

Spiritualis for Orchestra

Vol. XVI MSR 1742

Music of the Spirit: An Interview with Barbara Harbach

I was new to the music of Barbara Harbach, and I'm very glad to have had the chance to get to know her work and interview her. Below is a transcript of my exchanges with her via email, in which she elaborated extensively about the musical portraits she paints in the latest album from MSR featuring her work, exquisitely performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

First, I'd love to know what inspired you to compose the set of pieces on this album, the seventh installment of the London Philharmonic Orchestra's recordings of your orchestral works. Why did you want to tell the story of Sacred Sun, an 18-year-old Osage woman who, in 1827, joined 11 other people from her tribe on a perilous journey to Europe? Why is it important to give new life to African American spirituals? And how does Choices and Remembrances – Suite in One Movement *tie it all together?*

I lived in Missouri for 16 years from 2003 to 2016, and came to love the landscape, and also the Indigenous peoples and their histories, both the triumphs and the tragedies. When I came across the story of Sacred Sun, I knew I had to tell her story through music.
Sacred Sun or Mi-Ho'n-Ga, (1809?–1836?), was an 18-year-old young woman who left her Osage fur-trapping family and friends in Saline County, central Missouri, to travel to France. She was a beautiful woman, and the French embraced her and her fellow Osage travelers. Lauded and treated royally, she stayed in luxury hotels, ate rich and exotic foods, and attended French operas, arriving in fancy carriages. As the French tastes turned to other exoticisms, the Osage people, along with their manager, became destitute. Sacred Sun had twin daughters that were born in Belgium, and she gave one away to a wealthy Belgian woman. The Osage spent the next few years traveling in Europe. Fortunately, when the Marquis de Lafayette, French hero of the American Revolutionary War, heard about Sacred Sun and her Osage companions, he sent them back to America. When she returned to St. Louis in 1830, her tribe had moved to the Oklahoma territory near Fort Gibson.

Following the Sacred Sun celebrates the individual voice and unique culture of Sacred Sun and the

Osage people through a narrative musical composition, telling her story and trying to correct possible misunderstandings and commodification of native cultures. Her story is told through a mosaic of music, recognizing her contributions as unique as well as acknowledging her own tribal customs. With this music we hope to raise awareness of the rich cultural contributions of American Indian women to Missouri's history and culture. The purpose of the music is not to speak for a native culture or tradition, but through music to celebrate the undervalued achievements of native voices.

The music is inspired by the life of Sacred Sun, a unique and daring woman who had experiences and opportunities in Europe beyond her wildest dreams, and then returned to her Osage tribe that were forcibly displaced from Missouri and exiled to Oklahoma. The goal is to recognize Sacred Sun as seen through the empathetic eyes and heart of a composer who lives over 200 years later and admires Sacred Sun's strength and courage to embark on a journey, which today would be analogous to traveling to a nearby moon or planet.

The first movement, *Anticipation—Traveling to St. Louis*, expresses the excitement of these courageous men and women on a journey to St. Louis and then on to France; the tragedy of losing the furs that would pay for their trip when their boat capsized; and the determination to restock their furs and continue with their travel plans.

Arrival in France portrays the glitter of Paris, seeing new and wondrous things and places, and experiencing new music such as a waltz and exhilarating dance rhythms.
The third movement, *Lullaby for a Lost Child*, conveys the deep grief of leaving one of her twins in a strange land and handing her baby over to an unknown fate, by use of restless harmonies and searing melodies.

Looking for a Homeland, the last movement, follows the Osage, one of the first nations forced to travel to Oklahoma. It depicts their conflicting emotions of anger, agitation, and sadness at being forced to leave their homes, grief at leaving the dead and dying along the way, the anxiousness and uncertainty of a new place, the sense of resignation that life as they knew it is gone, and the faint hope of survival as they neared their new home.

While I was inspired to write a piece for orchestra based on another displaced people, African American spirituals, I came up with the word *spiritualis*, and later found that it has Latin roots, *spīrituālis* (of breathing, of the spirit), *spīritus* (breath, breathing), and *-ális* (meaning "ending"). *Spiritualis* could also mean a kind of wind instrument, of breathing, spiritual, of the spirit, or wind or air. All these words also fit the meaning of African American spirituals. Another inspiration was the memory of my mother singing spirituals to me as a little girl, and I treasure those memories, as the memories of singing William L. Dawson's spirituals. During 1899–1900 Dawson worked at the Tuskegee Institute and is well known for his rich textures and the lushness of his sonorities.

Fantasy and Fugue on "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" begins with a dramatic fantasy section that also includes a lyrical rendition of the melody. Solo woodwinds introduce the various sections, and the lively fugue subject is based on this beloved tune. All the instruments participate with countermelodies, imitation, augmentation, and then all join in *fortissimo* rising to Heaven.

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is an African-American spiritual and one of the best-known Christian hymns. Since the spiritual probably came from the oral tradition as a call-and-response style, the date it was written is unknown. The pentatonic melody and the structure allow for improvisation

and encourage the performers to lead the audience to a state of ecstasy with powerful imagery, rhetoric, and possibly coded lyrics. The song uses the theme of death to remind us of the glories that await in Heaven after leaving this world of suffering and tragedy. The text refers to the Old Testament account (2 Kings 2) of the Prophet Elijah's ascent into Heaven by chariot. The performances in the late 19th century by the Hampton Singers and the Fisk Jubilee Singers of Fisk University brought the song to larger audiences. J. B. T. Marsh includes an early version of text and tune in his 1876 publication *The Story of the Jubilee Singers, with their Songs*. The earliest known recording of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" was made in 1909 by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. In 2002, the U.S. Library of Congress chose "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" as one of 50 recordings to be added to the National Recording Registry. The spiritual was also included in *Songs of the Century* by the Recording Industry Association of America and the National Endowment for the Arts.

"Give Me Jesus" is also known as "And I Heard the Mourner Say," a traditional African American spiritual. The text references Matthew 16:26 and other passages in the Book of Matthew regarding the Judgment Day. In 1845 Reverend Jacob Knapp, a Baptist minister from New York, published the earliest known version of "Give Me Jesus," followed by publications by the Methodists. The song was popular in the mid-19th century through hymnals and camp meetings. The Fisk Jubilee singers in 1873 published a version that is still popular today. Nineteenth-century songwriters such as Fanny Crosby published versions of the song, "Take the World, but Give Me Jesus." The song is still being recorded in the 21st century, with singers Vince Gill and Fernando Ortega as well as others. This lyrical setting introduces the melody with horn and woodwinds. A recurring melody between verses reinforces the text, "Give me Jesus." The interludes use either pizzicato strings or staccato xylophone. Amid key changes, duets occur between horn and trombone, and later bassoon and clarinet. In the last two verses there are ecstatic trumpet flourishes, capturing the improvisatory feel of spirituals.

The lyrics to "Wade in the Water" were first co-published in 1901 in *New Jubilee Songs as Sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers* by Frederick J. Work and his brother, John Wesley Work Jr. The Sunset Four Jubilee Singers made the first commercial recording of "Wade in the Water" in 1925. The spiritual is associated with songs of the Underground Railroad. For example, Harriet Tubman used the song "Wade in the Water" to tell slaves who were trying to escape to get off the trail and go into the water; that way the dogs and slavecatchers could not sniff out and follow their trail. Walking through water would not leave a scent that dogs could follow. "Wade in the Water" begins with a pulsing bass and cello, with the upper strings carrying the melody with a slight swing. Following stanzas use the woodwinds with imitation, then brass and winds and strings, followed by a walking bass right before an orchestral outburst. A softer section with muted trumpet carrying the melody precedes a fugue that begins with the strings. The full orchestral joins in for an affirmative:

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel well –
Then why not every man?

"Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" or "Motherless Child" is an African-American spiritual dating back to the era of slavery in the United States. The song is an expression of pain and despair depicting the hopelessness of a child torn or sold from his or her parents. The Fisk Jubilee singers gave an early performance in the 1870s, and it was heard frequently during the Civil Rights Movement. It has many versions and has been recorded by many artists such as Paul Robeson and Mahalia Jackson. "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" begins with the basses and celli playing a descending chromatic line, and then the clarinet and horn join them with the melody. Short dissonant interludes separate the stanzas. Key changes between verses use various instrumentations with counter melodies, imitation, and instrumental comments similar to the call-

and-response style. The piece ends quietly almost as if in mourning, "A long, long way from home."

Fantasy and Fugue on "They Crucified My Lord" is also known as "He Never Said a Mumblin' Word," "They Hung Him on a Cross," "Mumblin' Word," "Crucifixion," and "Easter," and the hymn name is known as *Sufferer*. The song recounts the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, telling how he was nailed to the cross, pierced in the side by a spear, hung his head and died, all the while keeping a noble and dignified silence. Like much traditional folk music, the lyrics may vary from version to version, but still convey the same story.

Fantasy and Fugue on "They Crucified My Lord" is an intertwining and intersecting of three spirituals: "They Crucified My Lord;" "There is a Balm in Gilead;" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." The Fantasy begins slowly, heavily, mournfully, with the full orchestra loudly mourning the crucifixion with chords of angry disbelief. Then the brass takes up the melody with imitation, leading into "There is a Balm in Gilead" with countermelodies, followed by a fugue based on the hymn's melody. "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is superimposed on "There is a Balm in Gilead." The fugue is interrupted by another statement of "There is a Balm in Gilead," and as the fugue continues it leads into the more tension-filled material of the Fantasy, portraying a loud outburst of grief.

"When I Cross That River" is one of my newly composed spirituals, with several sections. It begins with mournful, earthly existence melodies, followed by a lively and joyful rousing section of going to Heaven with full chords, texture, key and meter changes, all with vibrant orchestration. "When I cross that river, what a day that will be!" highlights strings, brass, and woodwind solos, plus full ensembles, all with full lush chords. "When I Cross That River" began life as a chorus from my musical *Tom and Sally*, based on the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings.

We all have many feelings and emotions, the cry of heartbreak, enduring love, humor, pathos, giddiness, allusions to music, literature, art, liquor, and food. *Choices and Remembrances—Suite in One Movement* is looking back on the choices we made and remembering that some were agonizing choices, and remembering them brings back bitter memories, while other memories trace back to the innocence of childhood, and those choices were often filled with delight and love.

The piece is multi-sectional with eight sections, almost like a musical stream of consciousness:

1. The first section is desolate and solemn, with the strings introducing the mournful melody and later developing countermelodies.
2. The waltz brings a change of mood, featuring two themes with various solos that are then interrupted by the brass.
3. The beginning melody returns briefly and now features the trumpet, piccolo, flute, and horn before juxtaposing playful, happy childhood memories that are now long past. In 6/8 time, melodies and countermelodies careen together, reminiscent of the skipping music enjoyed by children.
4. Then comes a choice we made that brings a horrific and dark memory, melancholic and tinged with regret. The slow, contemplative music begins with an ostinato melody for solo violin, then follows imitation, canons, more ostinatos, and ending with tension building in the double bass.
5. Relief comes momentarily with a memory of nostalgia, with alternating 2/4 and 4/4 led by the trumpet, horn, and bassoon, *crescendoing* to a quick climax that disappears and dissolves into the shadows.
6. The haunting melody of dark memories returns with much imitation, leading to dissonant chords of regret that breaks the movement's momentum.
7. The waltz returns with a new counterpoint, ending quietly.
8. A noble theme of hope is superimposed over a bouncing and rhythmic fugue lined out by the cellos touting various key changes. Although dark memories intrude in the fugue, this last section

combines and interweaves all the themes, leading to a parade of melodies that remind us of the immortal lyrics of Paul Anka, sung by Frank Sinatra, "I Did It My Way":
Regrets, I've had a few,
But then again, too few to mention….

As a clarinetist, I couldn't help but notice the many exposed clarinet moments throughout all three pieces. For instance, I love the opening statement by the clarinet in the second movement of Following the Sacred Sun*. What is the clarinet "saying" here, if it can even be put to words?*

The clarinet is a very versatile instrument. It can portray many different moods from great sadness and melancholy to a warm, sensuous sound to a perky dance band and jazz style. It is also capable of playing softly or loudly braying and is quite athletic in its ability to play arpeggios and fast sections that viscerally excite the listener. In the second movement of *Following the Sacred Sun*, the clarinet sets the tone for the array of dances that are to follow.

Your music makes for extremely pleasant listening, even in its more painful, heart-wrenching moments. One example is the third movement of Following the Sacred Sun*. I've always been drawn to this type of achingly gorgeous music. What compositional techniques do you employ when working with grief or struggle as subject matter? I think it's possible that some might mistake you as being an exclusively "optimistic" composer—but I suspect that the most-life affirming music often arises from an awareness of despair, too.*

Yes, I sometimes write the most cheerful, optimistic music when I am in a dark place, and the reverse is also true, I write melancholy music while I am at one with the universe. It was a bit different writing the third movement of "Following the Sacred Sun." I kept imagining how a mother might feel if she had to give away a baby that she carried and gave birth to. Her agony and heart break are felt with the wisps of melodies, and reduced orchestration to only one player on violin I, violin II, viola, cello and double bass with the woodwinds accompanied by the triangle. Perhaps the saying is true that you can't appreciate the highs if you never experience the lows.

Can you tell me about your process of reimagining the spirituals invoked in Spiritualis—Suite for Orchestra*? How do you breathe new ideas into them and retain their essence at the same time?*

Spirituals are an amazing genre in music! They come out of the deepest and darkest part of the soul, but there is also a joyousness and hope that overcomes the bleak. I truly enjoy adding fugues, counterpoint, imitation, combining various melodies at the same time into one whole, and then letting the instruments interact, interweave, and complement each other. One only has to sing or hear William L. Dawson's arrangements of spirituals to know the range of emotion and passion that spirituals contain.

On a practical note, how do you decide which instruments should carry the melody in a given composition?

Often, it is the ethos of the piece that determines if the melody should go to the oboe, viola, or trumpet—soulful, triumphant, mournful, or bitter. And sometimes, it's *oops*, the bassoon hasn't done anything yet, got to get some action here.

I'm interested in your use of counterpoint to create beauty in your work. Why do you think counterpoint is so aesthetically appealing? Do you invent melodies with their contrapuntal potential in mind, or do you devise a tune first and then decide whether you can go that route with them?

I love canon, imitation, fugues, augmentation, and diminution. I usually write a melody and it turns into a fugue without much alteration. All these types of contrapuntal composition keep the melody in the listener's ear, but always a bit differently, so the listener can follow the themes weaving in and out. When I start a piece, I can almost hear Bach say, "When in doubt, write a fugue!"

Choices and Remembrances *deals primarily with abstract emotional concepts as opposed to storylines or characters. But I suspect you're still trying to create a sense of direction, yes? Perhaps the listener becomes the main character in a piece like this?*

Choices and Remembrances is a musical stream of consciousness. As we look back on our lives, the memories do not return in a linear fashion from childhood until now, some memories have just occurred, some were in childhood, some were horrendous, and some delightful. You are absolutely correct, "Perhaps the listener becomes the main character in the piece." Music often invokes a memory, and as the music changes, so does the memory.

Allison Eck, Fanfare Magazine Issue 47:2 (Nov/Dec 2023)

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Barbara Harbach has been interviewed and reviewed many times in *Fanfare* history, and for good reason—she is a solidly excellent composer who has helped keep tonal music alive in a way that feels fresh and invigorating. Ken Meltzer called her work "music of substance that falls graciously on the ear" (*Fanfare* 45:2); Colin Clarke referred to her as a "storyteller in sound" (*Fanfare* 43:5); and Maria Nockin noted that her music is "accessible to the novice and presents interesting textures and sonorities to the connoisseur" (*Fanfare* 35:6).

I won't go into detail on the subject matter of the orchestral works on this 16th volume of MSR's Harbach recordings, since she herself does so in the interview above—but I will just say that it's very clear that Harbach engages deeply with the stories she seeks to tell. Her research is exhaustive, and she is cinematic in her sonic depiction of people, places, and events.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra honors the spirit of Harbach's work throughout the album. In *Following the Sacred Sun*, the ensemble introduces the story of Sacred Sun with both gusto and majesty. The second movement is thoughtful and determined; the third, anguished and lovely (that movement was my favorite of the whole album, probably because I am naturally pulled in the direction of the bittersweet). In the last movement, the trumpet sits atop the rest of the orchestra for much of the time, and the balance is just right. The spirituals strewn throughout *Spiritualis* are inventively orchestrated, and the musicians play them with depth and richness. Choices and Remembrances, the last piece on the album, has a complex emotional texture that is conveyed well by the orchestra.

Overall, this is a very enjoyable new release. I came back to listening to it a few weeks after first consuming it, and the sensation was like that of settling in for a conversation with an old friend.

Allison Eck, Fanfare Magazine, Issue 47:2 2023

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I have lost count of the number of releases of music by Barara Harbach I have reviewed. All,though, have revealed music of depth, tonal and fresh; all have revealed a supreme orchestrator.

This disc is no exception.

The London Philharmonic is one of the English capital's finest ensembles, and it excels here. Its sound is impeccably caught by the experienced engineer (Mike Hatch of Floating Earth, and trained in the world-famous *Tonmeister* course at the University of Surrey, Guildford). The recording took place in St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, North London; there is a nice bloom around the orchestra, but zero blurring.

This is Volume Seven of Harbach's orchestral music on MSR Classics, and it concentrates on three suites (two multi-movement, while *Choices and Remembrances* is actually subtitled "Suite in One Movement"). The first we hear is *Following the Sacred Sun*, a homage to the life of Missouri-born "Sacred Sun," also known as "Mi-Ho'n-Ga" (1809–1836). Leaving a family of fur trappers, she headed over to France, where for a time she was held in the lap of luxury because of the sheer novelty of her presence. Sadly, tastes faded, and she and the Osage people she travelled with ended up destitute for several years. At one-point, Sacred Sun bore two children and was forced because of economic reasons to give one away. Her return to the States came about because of the beneficence of the Marquis of Lafayette; on her return, she discovered that her tribe had been displaced to Oklahoma.

The composer herself has said that she hopes "to raise awareness of the rich cultural contributions of American Indian women to the history and culture of the state of Missouri. The purpose of the music is not to speak for a particular native culture or tradition, but to celebrate the undervalued achievements of all native voices." At the heart of this piece is the "Lullaby for a Lost Child," the third movement. This is an intense song of mourning for strings and woodwinds, with particularly expressive flute lines; the harmonies refuse to settle. Elsewhere in the suite one can enjoy Harbach's ability to paint pictures in music: The first movement, bright and breezily optimistic, speaks of the journey to St. Louis and thence to France ("Anticipation—Traveling to St. Louis"). There is drama (when furs, meant to pay for their travel, are lost) and determined optimism (towards the end of the movement). All of this is brilliantly transferred to orchestra: Note how Harbach never crowds her textures but can still project powerful *fortes* and above. A habanera rhythm suffuses "Arrival in Paris," almost Gershwinesque in its breeziness before moving to Latin American dance. Sorrow infuses the final "Looking for a Homeland," undercut with nervousness and, occasionally, tinged with hope.

The set of six spirituals comprising *Spiritualis* is a major achievement. Taking well-known melodies, Harbach weaves them into a suite of ambition and some complexity. Two movements are entitled "Fantasy and Fugue on …," firstly "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and, later as the fifth movement, "They Crucified My Lord." The joy of "Give Me Jesus," the second movement, surely lies in the trumpet obbligato's decorative line. Harbach's restrained, melodic use of brass in this movement is particularly impressive, as is the lower string onward tread and the registral chasm between that and the high melody in "Wade in the Water." This last seems to carry a lot of weight on its shoulders. "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child" is one of the most famous of all spirituals, illuminated here by a sort of instrumental "call and response." *Fantasy on They Crucified My Lord* in fact uses three spirituals: that of the movement title, "There is a Balm in Gilead," and "Swing, Low, Sweet Chariot." Complex, masterfully constructed and orchestrated, this is surely the highlight of the disc; and how slickly the London Philharmonic delivers the fugue. The final "When I Cross the River" uses a newly composed spiritual that began life in Harbach's musical *Tom and Sally*. The movement seems more expansive, a seeking and eventual finding of a slightly uneasy peace.

Finally, *Choices and Remembrances* is a suite in one movement that invites the listener to reflect on choices made. Memories portrayed come from childhood, but also from the darker times in one's

life. A solo violin sings, full of melancholy. This is touching music as much as it is carefully wrought music. Harmonic shadings are carefully considered, and effective. There is more than a touch of the crepuscular about this piece, making it the perfect closing work.
Barbara Harbach's music continues to move the listener in a multitude of ways. There is so much to admire here, and so much to enjoy. Recommended.
Colin Clarke, Fanfare Magazine, Issue 47:2 2023

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These three suites for orchestra by American composer Barbara Harbach continue in her tradition of writing music that is tonal and broadly appealing, but which also manages not to sound dated. Her work, and I have come to know and admire quite a bit of it, demonstrates that it is still possible to say something fresh in traditional tonal language. Harbach has the gift of melodic invention, her orchestration is colorful (perhaps influenced by her career as an organist), and she always displays rhythmic vitality.

Following the Sacred Sun is a four-movement suite celebrating the culture of the Osage native people in general, and specifically a woman named Sacred Sun (1809–1836), also known as Mi-Ha'n-Ga, who at eighteen left her family of fur trappers in Missouri and traveled to France. She was part of a group of Osage misled by a man who told them that they were going to Washington, D.C. Half the group returned to Missouri, but Sacred Sun and others arrived in France in 1827, where they were treated like royalty by King Charles X.

But they were unwittingly duped into becoming part of a Wild West show. As its novelty wore off, the Osage turned to begging in the streets. Sacred Sun had become pregnant on the trip to France and gave birth to twin daughters. She allowed one to be adopted in Belgium but kept the other. Eventually, with the aid of the Marquis de Lafayette, the remaining Osage, including Sacred Sun and her daughter, were sent back home.

Harbach's suite effectively paints the many moods of this melancholy tale. The third movement, for instance, is a lovely, sparingly scored lullaby depicting the grief of Sacred Sun in having to leave one child in a strange country because she could not take care of two. The finale, "Looking for a Homeland," describes the return to the United States, the Osages' grief at the deaths that took place along the way, and a combination of resignation and hope with which their journey ends.

Spiritualis is a six-movement orchestral setting of traditional spirituals, each treated imaginatively and expansively, not simply orchestrated. For example, the first movement is "Fantasy and Fugue on Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." The fugal treatment of the tune is energetic and colorful, coming together in a triumphant conclusion. Each of the six spirituals is treated freely while never losing contact with the original, and once again Harbach's skill as an orchestrator is impressive.

In a way, although it is the shortest work on the program, *Choices and Remembrances* is the most extended work because it is an eleven-minute one movement suite. The music, according to Harbach, "looks back at the choices one has made, and remember of all that came as a result." The result is a lovely suite that varies in mood, sometimes quickly, as a lifetime of memories pile onto each other. Harbach's ability to connect all of these threads so that the piece hangs together is particularly impressive.

David Angus regularly conducts Harbach's music—he obviously knows it well and loves it, and he gets excellent playing from the London Philharmonic. The recorded sound is clear and warm, and the composer's notes are informative. This is Volume 7 in MSR's series of Harbach's orchestral works, out of a total of 16 releases devoted to her. Any composer would be fortunate to have such loyal support from a record company, and we listeners are also the beneficiaries of that support.
Henry Fogel, Fanfare Magazine, Issue 47:2 2023

Five stars: Another excellent recording of beautiful music by Barbara Harbach

HARBACH *Following the Sacred Sun*-Suite for Orchestra. *Spirituals*-Suite for Orchestra. *Choices and Remembrances*-Suite in One Movement • David Angus, cond; London PO • MSR 1742 (69:30)

A new release from MSR offers world premiere recordings of orchestral works by the American composer, keyboard artist, and educator, Barbara Harbach. The release is Volume 16 in MSR's series, *Music of Barbara Harbach*, and the seventh comprising her orchestral music. I have had the pleasure of reviewing several of the MSR releases. This new recording is another worthy showcase of a gifted, accomplished, and prolific composer. Volume 16 opens with Harbach's orchestral suite *Following the Sacred Sun* (2021). The work concerns the life of the Osage woman, Sacred Sun (Mohongo) (1809-ca. 1836). Sacred Sun, along with other members of the Osage tribe, were taken to France by an American promoter. The Osage were initially welcomed by the French. But as interest waned, the Osage became destitute. With the aid of the Marquis de Lafayette, Sacred Sun was able to return to America. *Anticipation*, the opening movement of *Following the Sacred Sun*, portrays the Osage's journey from their home to France. *Arrival in France* depicts the Osage's excitement over "the glitter of Paris" (all quoted descriptions of the works on Volume 16 are from the composer's excellent program notes, included in the CD booklet). The Osage hear "new music such as waltzes" and learn "of new dances of exhilarating rhythms." The latter is depicted, in part, by a reference to the 1962 Chubby Checker hit, "Limbo Rock"! *Lullaby for a Lost Child* portrays Sacred Sun's despair at giving up one of her twin daughters for adoption in France. *Looking for a Homeland* concerns the tragedy of the Osage's forced relocation from their home in Missouri to Oklahoma. The six-movement suite, *Spirituals* (2022), explores various orchestral treatments of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", "Give Me Jesus", "Wade in the Water", "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child", "They Crucified My Lord", and "When I Cross That River". The one-movement suite, *Choice and Remembrances* (2022) "looks back at the choices one has made, and the remembering of all that came as a result." The eight sections, played without pause, proceed "like a stream of musical consciousness", encompassing choices that "were agonizing, and remembering them brings back bitter memories, while others trace back to the innocence of childhood, resulting in recollections of happiness and delight."

The works on Volume 16 of MSR's Harbach Edition showcase the composer's many admirable qualities I've noted in previous reviews. I continue to hear an affinity between Harbach's music and that of her predecessor, Aaron Copland. Both composers express their love for American history, subjects, and life, with music that is lyrical, brimming with energy and optimism, and scored with a keen ear for transparency and varied instrumental colors. I'm not suggesting that one composer sounds like the other. But the kinship exists, much to my gratification. While the works on this recording at times deal with episodes of tragedy and resulting despair, Harbach expresses them in a subtle manner, avoiding even a hint of excess or bombast. Her music is always, at its core, life-affirming. The works are expertly performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of David Angus, and beautifully recorded. **Highly recommended.**

Ken Meltzer, Fanfare Magazine, Issue 47:2 2023

Five stars: Barbara Harbach's lovely and expertly crafted orchestral music

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Barbara Harbach has been interviewed and reviewed many times in *Fanfare* history, and for good reason—she is a solidly excellent composer who has helped keep tonal music alive in a way that feels fresh and invigorating. Ken Meltzer called her work "music of substance that falls graciously on the ear" (*Fanfare* 45:2); Colin Clarke referred to her as a "storyteller in sound" (*Fanfare* 43:5); and Maria Nockin noted that her music is "accessible to the novice and presents interesting textures and sonorities to the connoisseur" (*Fanfare* 35:6).

I won't go into detail on the subject matter of the orchestral works on this 16th volume of MSR's Harbach recordings, since she herself does so in the interview above—but I will just say that it's very clear that Harbach engages deeply with the stories she seeks to tell. Her research is exhaustive, and she is cinematic in her sonic depiction of people, places, and events.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra honors the spirit of Harbach's work throughout the album. In *Following the Sacred Sun*, the ensemble introduces the story of Sacred Sun with both gusto and majesty. The second movement is thoughtful and determined; the third, anguished and lovely (that movement was my favorite of the whole album, probably because I am naturally pulled in the direction of the bittersweet). In the last movement, the trumpet sits atop the rest of the orchestra for much of the time, and the balance is just right. The spirituals strewn throughout *Spiritualis* are inventively orchestrated, and the musicians play them with depth and richness. Choices and Remembrances, the last piece on the album, has a complex emotional texture that is conveyed well by the orchestra.

Overall, this is a very enjoyable new release. I came back to listening to it a few weeks after first consuming it, and the sensation was like that of settling in for a conversation with an old friend.

Fanfare Magazine, Issue 47:2 2023
Allison Eck

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Music can transport listeners both to outward destinations (figuratively) and to inner ones (literally). Composers who seek to connect effectively with audiences may draw inspiration directly from geographic locations or may be inspired at second hand, by basing their works on others' experiences of specific places. Barbara Harbach (born 1946) is surely aware that virtually no potential listeners will be well-acquainted with the story on which *Following the Sacred Sun* (2021) is based – and she accordingly creates a four-movement suite that distinctly refers to a specific life and travel but can also stand on its own musically (albeit less effectively). The work's title refers to an Osage woman known as Sacred Sun or, in the Osage language, Mi-H'on-Ga, who lived fewer than 30 years – from about 1809 to about 1836 – and was one of several Native Americans brought to France for a "Wild West Show" that eventually failed financially, and who thereafter traveled throughout Europe before none other than the Marquis de LaFayette arranged for her passage back to the United States. Harbach seeks to bridge the knowledge gap regarding Sacred Sun by creating four movements that acknowledge the physical journey but focus on the personal one – especially in the final two, *Lullaby for a Lost Child* (Sacred Sun gave birth to twins in Belgium and left one to be adopted by a French woman) and *Looking for a Homeland.* The music is made with Harbach's

usual skill, but it is rather gestural and superficial, its emotional underpinnings being effective in a general way but not having any significant direct attachment to the underlying story. In contrast, the journey is an inward one in *Spiritualis* (2022), a set of six arrangements and contemplations of mostly familiar spirituals: *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot; Give Me Jesus; Wade in the Water; Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child; They Crucified My Lord;* and *When I Cross the River*. The contemplative material comes across particularly well here; and, again, Harbach's compositional skill and the clarity of her orchestration are evident. The underlying similarity of the spirituals' emotions, however, makes this suite sound somewhat monochromatic despite the composer's care in arranging its component parts. The CD concludes with *Choices and Remembrances* (2022), a single-movement work that, like the others on the disc, is a world première recording. This is a somewhat tauter and more effectively organized piece than the two longer, multi-movement ones, with Harbach nicely managing the contrasting sections and producing a work that carries listeners on an emotional journey that is understandable if not specific. This is MSR Classics' seventh release of Harbach's orchestral music and 16th of her works in all forms – an impressive subset within the firm's overall catalogue. The disc further establishes the quality of Harbach's compositions and their ability to explore multiple topics in accessible and sometimes captivating ways.

Mark J. Estren, INFODAD.COM August 2023

https://transcentury.blogspot.com/2023/08/journeys.html

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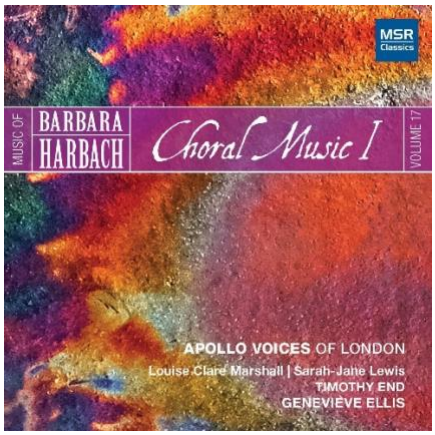
MUSIC OF BARBARA HARBACH ~ Choral Music I

Vol. XVII MSR 1794



Sing, Alleluia

An Interview with Barbara Harbach: Ken Meltzer

Volume 17 of MSR Classics' ongoing series, Music of Barbara Harbach, *is the first to explore the American composer's choral music. I spoke with Barbara Harbach about the pieces on* Choral Music I, *and her work in the genre of vocal compositions.*

This is our second interview, and the sixth MSR Classics recording devoted to your music that I've reviewed. It's also the first MSR release to explore your choral works. Tell us about your involvement in choral music. Has it been an integral part of your work as a composer?

I grew up in the beautiful Appalachian Mountains in a little town that no longer exists called Livonia, PA. The nearest town was eight miles away. The town basically consisted of the homes of my grandfather and my father's two sisters. My paternal grandparents had an inn that was called Livonia Hotel, which was famous for its Sunday chicken dinners, and people came from far and near for the outstanding cuisine. In late fall, many hunters would also come and stay at the hotel.

My church playing for church services began in the saloon that was part of the hotel called the Barroom when I was nine years old. I played on a harmonium in the saloon attended by family members and hunters. I then went on to my first paid position at a United Church of Christ that was eight miles away, and since I was tall, I could reach the pedals of the Hammond B3. Over the years I had may positions as organist or organist/choir director in Roman Catholic Churches, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, as well as a Synagogue.

As most composers, I began writing for what I knew best, organ and choral music. I enjoyed writing for my adult choirs and junior or youth choirs. I really became passionate about

choral writing after I graduated from Yale University and took an Episcopalian position as organist and choir director in Rochester, NY. I wrote a few anthems for my choirs, both adult and youth, and the choir members were gracious and kind and encouraged my efforts. They encouraged me to send away an anthem I wrote for the choir, *Praise Him with the Trumpet* (which is the first piece on the CD), and I sent it off to a publisher. I didn't hear anything, and a month or two later I received a packet from the publisher, and I thought, "Oh well, they didn't like the anthem so they sent me copies of anthems on how to write good choral music." When I opened the packet, in it was a contract and the galley proofs for the piece. I was overwhelmed! The first year the royalties surprised my husband and me, and we ate at a French restaurant with all the trimmings. The second year we ate at McDonald's with the royalties, and the third year, I received all the copies that they did not sell and several postage stamps as royalties. With the publication of *Praise Him* I thought, "Oh, this is easy, I will write and publish choral anthems. However… I did not publish any other choral anthems for years after that.

As time passed, I kept writing choral music and branching out into song cycles, solos, and after gaining confidence in instrumental writing, I had the courage to write musicals and operas. In 2009 *Booth! – An American Musical* was performed off-Broadway at Skirball Theatre, NYC, and my opera *O Pioneers! – An American Opera* was premiered at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. I am now writing an opera with the outstanding and gifted librettist, Linda Rimel, called *Pushkin in Baltimore*. We have written musicals and operas together and are always on the lookout for a performance venue.

Are there specific challenges in composing choral works that might not be as pressing or apparent in chamber and orchestral instrumental works?

I have worked mostly with volunteer church choirs or community choral organizations and have learned the capabilities of writing for those voices. Having had choirs in New York, California, Washington, and Missouri, regional accents can be a challenge as well as teaching a piece that is in Latin or a foreign language. I have always enjoyed striving to have my choirs rise to a level beyond what they think they can do. It is a joy to hear a choir sing a Schubert Mass or Vivaldi's *Gloria* to the best of their ability, *Gott sei Dank.*

Your choral music disc is divided into five sections: Sacred Music, Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, Spirituals, and Secular Music. I note that the compositions dates range from 1990-2021. If we could cover the Sacred Music (encompassing the Christmas and Easter works as well), tell us about the circumstances that led to these works' creations.

The choirs I have worked with over the years welcomed new music as well as held an appreciation for traditional choral literature. Sacred music or general music does not include Advent-Christmas or Lent-Easter. There are a lot of Sundays to provide music on general topics as Bach did with his Cantatas. Yes, there is a span on the CD from 1990-2021. I have written a lot of choral music, and the choices were difficult. Some of the pieces I wrote in the late 70s, and when I revised them, used the later date.

Sacred Music

Praise Him with the Trumpet (1990) is from Psalm 150 with vocal trumpet calls, rollicking bass lines, tightly knit harmonies and vocal glissandi.

Sing, Alleluia (2018) begins with a meditative mantra and uses only the two words "Sing, Alleluia."

The strong middle section still uses these two words but transforms them into a glorious section praising God.

The Hills Shout Glad Hosannas (2007) is a rousing anthem with an exuberant piano part, "The earth itself awakens to greet the Prince of Peace and sings of restoration of energy released."

Sing, Jubilation (2018) is a celebratory response to Psalm 116: 15, 16. *Dextera Domini* is the right hand, the dexterous hand, of the Lord, and *jubilatio* is jubilation, wild shouting, and whooping. The soaring melodies and jubilant spirit are especially appropriate for the celebration of the Easter Vigil where it was first sung.

Advent and Christmas

This Night in Bethlehem (2990) is a serene, *a cappella* setting telling the story of the mysterious night of Christ's birth.

Sing! Christ is Born (2990) is an exuberant Christmas choral setting, "Sing with loud and joyful voices. Sound the trumpet! Sound the horn! Earth is glad, and heaven rejoices. Christ is Born"

Audible Light (1991) is a joyous song featuring synesthesia, "Radiate singing! Reverberate light! Brightness and music together this night."

Lent and Easter

Bathe My Soul I (1991) is a SATB *a cappella* motet featuring bleakness and with hope at the end:
"As in a desert, desolate, I wander…Bathe my soul in gentle rain… And let a stream of soothing words refresh me as the morning dew."

Of Christ's Dark Cup (1991 is a dramatic Holy Week anthem,
"Of Christ's dark cup of sorrow, drink,
And of his crucifixion think…"
The litany pleads, "Grant us, Lord, your mercy."

Turn Round, O My Soul, To Your Rest (2018) is a eulogy and elegy for All Souls Day, remembering the friends and loves that have passed through our lives. The melodies and harmonies evoke the feelings that words cannot express – sadness, beauty, mournfulness, grief, sorrow, and nobleness. The harshness of grief is portrayed by the dissonance near the end of the middle section with loud, tension, and grief-stricken chords. *Convertere, anima mea, in requiem tuam, requiem.*

Mary's Joyful Shout (1990) for SATB with piano is an ecstatic Easter cry, "Awake! Awake! Come see what God has done. Come see! Come See! The resurrected Son!"

In Peace and Joy I Now Depart (2016) is a six-phrase hymn by Martin Luther. I was inspired to write a two-part piece with the form of ABAB. The A parts are newly composed with the ethos underscoring a feeling of Peace, while the B portions evoke the feeling of Joy. The A section begins with a decorated flute melody with comments by the altos, tenors, and basses. The Joy section is reminiscent of a Renaissance dance with the flute melody soaring above with ecstatic fervor. The flute melody from the beginning of the piece (A) now returns and is joined in the dialogue by the piano, followed by the dancelike B section. The piece ends on a joyous note for the final words "That death is but a slumber."

One of the qualities of your music I've noted in my various reviews is the sense of life-affirming optimism. I find this even in moments depicting pain and despair. I wonder if you agree with my assessment. Does that inform your approach to the various sacred choral works on this recording, and perhaps to the choral works in general?

Sometimes when life is its most challenging or frustrating or melancholic, the music comes out joyously, perhaps my way of coping with difficult issues. Other times, soulful melodies emerge from happiness. *In Peace and Joy I Now Depart* is a Lent-Easter piece, and *should* be desolate or repentant, but adding a Renaissance dance-bounce to the B section brings the piece to life. The two words of *Sing, Alleluia should* perhaps portray an upbeat piece, but my setting of turned out melodic and haunting. Yes, I agree with you that my music is life-affirming – I strive to be a "glass half full."

The section devoted to Spirituals opens with your 2021 arrangement of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." The vocalist on the MSR recording is Louise Clare Marshall. Tell us a bit about this remarkable artist.

Louise Clare Marshall was recommended to me by the Apollo Voices of London, and when I heard her recordings, I knew that she would be the definitive voice to sing "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." She is an outstanding and exceptional artist. Her skills span across genres from Jazz, Pop, R&B, Electronic, Classical to Gospel music. Louise has worked with Beverley Knight, David Gilmour, Michael Ball, Robbie Williams, Bryan Ferry, Ronnie Wood, Van Morrison, Sheila Ferguson, Sam Brown, Steve Winwood, Paul Young, Don Blackman, Solomon Burke, Karl Jenkins, and John Rutter. She has performed in London's West End in *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Lyceum Theatre), *Whistle Down the Wind* (Aldwych Theatre), *The Genius of Ray* (Haymarket) and with *Soul Train* on their first UK tour.

Did you create this arrangement for Marshall?

Marshall would be a great inspiration to any composer! When I had an Evangelical Lutheran Church position in St. Louis as organist and choir director, a member of the choir asked if I would write a piece for her, and I happily agreed. Since I love spirituals, I played through many, and when I came to "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," I knew it was the one I wanted or needed to arrange. My mother was a gifted soprano, and I remember her singing spirituals to me as a child.

*As you describe: "*Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child *has an improvisatory feel over a walking bass line with key changes and a wide range for the soloist and pianist." It's quite the showcase for Marshall, including many striking embellishments of the basic vocal line. Are those embellishments written into your arrangement?*

Some of the embellishments were written, but I gave Marshall free rein to interpret the spiritual as it moved and resonated within her. And what an interpretation!

"When I Cross That River" is a new Spiritual by you. What do you see as the role of a 21st century composer in the creation of Spirituals? Are there any Spirituals and/or performers who influenced your approach to this work?

I would hope that 21st century composers appreciate the genres that have come before us and investigate the genres from past generations. Along with spirituals, I am interested in 18th century music such as William Billings and the great hymn writers of that era. I have made many arrangements of 18th and 19th century hymns for solo organ and other ensembles.

Toccatas and Fugues on American Hymns
Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine – Phoebe Palmer Knapp
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy – Lizzie Tourjee
Nearer, Still Nearer – Lena Naylor Morris
Toccatas and Fugues on Hymns from the Sacred Harp
Chester – William Billings
Hebrew Children – David Walker
The Morning Trumpet – B B.F. White
Toccatas and Fugues on Hymns by European Women Composers
Give of Your Best – Charlotte Barnard
Ye Boundless Realms of Joy – Frances Chattock
Who is on the Lord's Side – C. Luise Reichardt

I am a fan of gospel music, and The Edwin Hawkins Singers ("O Happy Day" which I performed with my choirs) are an influence, as well the incomparable improv style of Ray Charles.

Your Spiritual "Many Thousands Gone", a setting of a text by Jonathan Yordy, "was inspired by the empathy Harbach felt for Harriet and Dred Scott while standing on the steps of the St. Louis Courthouse…" Tell us a bit more about that inspiration, and what you express in this Spiritual.

Standing on the steps of the St. Louis Courthouse where many had stood before, I was engulfed and overcome with the sadness and despair for all those who were gone. I had written several pieces about Harriet and Dred Scott, a three-movement *Freedom Suite for String Orchestra* (I. *Harriet Scott – A Strong Woman*, II. *Eliza and Lizzie – Let My People Go!*, and III. *Freedom – At Last*). "Many Thousands Gone" expresses my feeling of injustice and cruelty, then incorporated the song into my musical, *Tom and Sally – A Slave to Love* (Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings). In the musical, the piece is sung by four anonymous slaves as they await their turn on the steps.

I also felt compelled to arrange spirituals for orchestra, *Spiritualis for Orchestra*, and included the spirituals *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* and *Give Me Jesus, Wade in the Water, Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,* and *They Crucified My Lord.*

The concluding section of the MSR recording, Secular Music, includes excerpts from two musicals composed by you. First is Hester, An American Musical, *based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's* The Scarlet Letter.

Based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *Hester – An American Musical* contains portraits of the three main characters: Hester Prynne, Roger Chillingworth, and Arthur Dimmesdale. The church elders, Hester's daughter Pearl, and the witch create an unforgettable story.

"Here I Stand" is a solo for Hester Prynne. Tell us about this piece of music, and its

dramatic significance in your musical.

In *Hester*, the song "Here I Stand" highlights the conflicts that Hester faced in her life: guilt and

confession, sin and purity, sex, and abstinence, making her a lasting heroine in American literature. The music reflects these turbulent and conflicting qualities in dissonance versus lyricism, both rhythmically and melodically. Hester faces indecision and anguish over her life choices, longing and searching for redemption and solace.

Chillingworth, Hester's husband, is obsessed with exacting revenge on Hester and Dimmesdale for their illegitimate child, Pearl. He is portrayed as a symbol of evil who does the devil's bidding. His music is restless and dark, portraying his obsession, conniving, and manipulation. The slower tempos indicate his evil ability to use the aura of sacred music to further his nefarious desires.

Dimmesdale, the ordained Puritan minister, struggles with the status of his soul: he ably carries out his pastoral duties but knows he has sinned and will be eternally doomed. Themes are reminders of his fragility and guilt, and his confession on the scaffold. Dimmesdale's torture is depicted by the alternation of major and minor intervals and keys.

Another of your musicals, is Tom and Sally – A Slave to Love.

Tom & Sally: A Slave to Love is a fictional account of the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings.

In Tom and Sally – A Slave to Love, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings had a clandestine, illicit, and loving relationship; and Thomas allegedly fathered six of Sally's children. Sally Hemings' mother, Betty, was biracial, and Betty's father, Captain John Hemings, was white. Sally's father was John Wayles, who was the father of Jefferson's wife, Martha. Sally Hemings was half-sister to Jefferson's wife and three quarters white.

When Jefferson served as United States Minister to France, Sally Hemings joined Jefferson in France to care for his daughter along with Sally's elder brother, James. At the age of 16, Sally became pregnant. Sally was about 16 years old, and Jefferson 44. Although Sally and her brother James were free in France (which had abolished slavery), Sally agreed to return to Monticello with the understanding that Jefferson promised to free her children when they became of age at 21.

"America, the Promised Land" is a patriotic anthem from Tom and Sally. *What characters perform that music in the show?*

This rousing and moving patriotic tribute to America has verses for men's chorus, women's chorus, and an interlude for the instruments. Sung by the entire cast, it is the belief that the slave owners believed, and it is what the slaves were told when taken, that America is the Promised Land. It is a sentiment that still rings true today.

We'll see our sons and daughters rise
To take their rightful place,
As full and equal citizens,

Regardless of race.
America, the chosen place

For those of ev'ry race,
America, the chosen place,

A land of hope and grace.

We'll know it's right when we can look
Beyond a person's skin,
And build a place where all join in
As proud Americans.
America, where all join in
As equal citizens.
America, the chosen place,
A land of hope and grace.

The foundation for the works on Choral Music I *are SATB Chorus and Piano. But on occasion, you also incorporate solos and other instruments. Tell us about some such moments in the featured compositions.*

In "America, the Promised Land" I used SATB, and augmented the voices with three trumpets, snares and piano for a patriotic feel. In the middle of the piece is a short fiddle tune which would be appropriate to the period. "Many Thousands Gone" is for SSAATTBB, and the flute, cello, and piano add poignancy to the lyrics. The flute in "Sing, Alleluia" adds countermelodies that provide a soaring haunting aspect to the piece.

We've talked about vocalist Louise Clare Marshall and her performance of your arrangement of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." But all the performers on Choral Music I *are impressive. Tell us about those artists, and your collaborations with them.*

I feel extraordinarily fortunate to have the Apollo Voices of London perform my Choral Music I. The singers were outstanding, artistic, professional, and supportive of an American composer. Genevieve Ellis, conductor, and Timothy End, pianist, inspired all of us! I was thrilled when Ellis asked if I wanted the English to be London, American or Mid-Atlantic, and we went with Mid-Atlantic!

May we expect more Harbach choral releases from MSR?

Yes, the repertoire for Choral Music II is chosen, and I have too many pieces for a CD, so maybe there will be Choral Music III!

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Choral Music I is Vol. 17 in MSR's ongoing survey of the works of American composer Barbara Harbach. The CD comprises four sections; Sacred Music, Advent and Christmas, Spirituals, and Secular Music. The bulk of the works are scored for chorus and piano. But there are also settings that include vocal soloists and/or instruments, a cappella pieces, and works for solo voice and piano. In my interview with Barbara Harbach (above), she describes in detail the various pieces on *Choral Music I*. I have reviewed several of MSR's issues of Harbach's instrumental music. In them I found music that is tonal, beautiful, transparent and balanced in texture, and radiating an optimistic, life-affirming expression. The same holds true for the music on *Choral Music I*. As Harbach notes in her interview, she composed many of these works for amateur

choruses. Polyphony, when employed, is not complex, and the music's tessitura graciously resides within the comfort zones of the choral singers. The music is no less affecting for that. And the performances by all concerned present these works in their best light. I think the disc would be worth purchasing just for the performance by alto Louise Clare Marshall and pianist Timothy End of Harbach's arrangement of the spiritual, "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." Harbach's spare piano part, reminiscent of Copland's *Old American Songs*, is the foundation for Marshall's searing performance. She sings with a breathtaking directness of expression; embellishments are employed for expressive, rather than pyrotechnical ends. And the depth and beauty of Marshall's voice, and her clarity of declamation, are exemplary. But the artistic quality on this recording is admirable throughout. The Apollo Voices of London, under the direction of conductor Genevieve Ellis, are a fine ensemble, singing Harbach's music with tonal beauty, lovely diction, and keen involvement. The recorded sound is lovely. Complete texts are included, as are the composer's commentary on the works. Recommended. **Ken Meltzer**

Four stars: Choral music by American composer Barbara Harbach
Ken Meltzer, Fanfare Magazine, Issue 47:4 (Mar/Apr 2024)

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It is good to hear the choral output of Barbara Harbach. Her symphonic output has impressed on multiple occasions in the past, and she brings her experienced hand to the world of the choir with outstanding results.

The recording venue is well chosen: St John's, Smith Square in London, a church converted into a concert venue located near the Houses of Parliament and a stone's throw from the River Thames. I know from personal experience of performing there how resonant the acoustic can feel. It needs careful handling from the recording engineers but can sound amazing (try Robert Levin's long-awaited completion of his Mozart Piano Concerto cycle with the Academy of Ancient Music for a good, recent example). Here, the engineer is the hyper-experienced Mike Hatch, with Richard Price as producer (who also edited and mastered the recording).

The disc is divided into five sections: Scared Music, Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, Spirituals, and Secular Music.

The first of the sacred music offerings is *Praise Him with the Trumpet* (ironically, not an item with a trumpet in it). The dotted rhythm, single note setting of the opening line does have a fanfare aspect to it, though, and the central section, beginning with a ruminative piano solo beautifully played by Timothy Bell, offers respite surrounding affirmations. The text is from the Psalms (No. 150). Apollo Voices of London is clearly a fine ensemble (not to be confused with the similarly UK-based vocal ensemble Apollo 5).

There is something very poignant about restrained settings of the word "Alleluia." One need only think of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. Harbach offers an extended example, for choir and piano with a solo flute adding a sinewy extra line, performed by the excellent Margaret Campbell. It certainly contrasts with the religious zeal and exaltation of *The Hills Shout Glad Hosannahs*. The choir sounds magnificent throughout, perhaps especially in the telling quieter moments when everything is exposed. Chord balancing is exemplary, and there is never any strain to the upper voices no matter what Harbach throws at them.

Moving to Advent and Christmas (as we are doing, inexorably, as I write this), warmer harmonies inevitably infiltrate. There is only seven minutes in this entire section, a shame as Harbach's setting of Jonathan Yordy's text for *This Night in Bethlehem*, is simply scrumptious.

Soprano Mimi Doulton's little solo is lovely. From music redolent of oven-warmed mince pies, we move to a jazzy number, *Sing! Christ is Born!*, with piano offering brass fanfare imitations ("Sound the trumpet, sound the horn," go the words). There is a lovely sense of hope to the words "Spread the word to ev'ry nation"; text is again by Yordy, whose poetic play on synaesthesia in *Audible Light* is most engrossing. Harbach's setting of *Audible Light* has a quiet swing to it, as if gently rocking a baby. The suddenly active piano part at the end aids both the feeling of celebration and, indeed, plain old fun.

Lent is traditionally a whole lot less fun than Christmas, and the tenor of *Bathe My Soul* reflects this. "As in a desert ... as in a wasteland," go Yordy's words. Harbach's setting is imaginative, relishing dissonance within a generally tonal ambience. There is almost a bluesy aspect to *Of Christ's Dark Cup* (it is a cup of sorrow), with a particularly pernickety piano phrase nagging away over a left hand whose tramping rhythm never varies, as if to remind us of Jesus' suffering. This is a highly effective Holy Week offering. This track offers a particularly fine example of how Apollo Voices of London maintain perfect balance at *fortissimo*, and how well the sopranos can control the line.

Pitting the Latin of the *Nova Vulgata Sacrorum Editio* with Yordy's English translation (the two languages alternate), *Turn Round, O My Soul* seems to plumb deeper depths, underpinned by Harbach's innate lyricism. Only *Mary's Joyful Shout* lacks a touch of what is obviously intended to be absolute joy (and surprise, one imagines) at Jesus' awakening from his previous state of death. The setting is decidedly jolly; the performance sounds just a touch studio-bound (this piece would surely make a great encore at a concert). A flute enters to usher in the final piece in this cluster: *In Peace and Joy I Now Depart*. I agree absolutely with the booklet notes that there is more than a touch of Renaissance dance to the piece's "B" section, enhanced by Campbell's fluid flute. Active though the flute might be, the choir is less so, ushering in a somewhat ritualistic feel.

Certainly, there is a gear change as the program moves into spirituals territory. Harbach's setting of *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child* is perfectly pitched for this repertoire. Louise Clare Marshall is the fine soloist here, every word beautifully enunciated, melismas as smooth as Swiss drinking chocolate. *Give Me Jesus* is clearly heartfelt both by composer and choir; Harbach's piano part is highly effective, with strong soprano solos from Mimi Doulton and Joanna Forbes L'Estrange. It is mezzo Marshall and bass Rodney Earl Clarke (no relation) who solo in the extended *When I Cross that River*. Harbach's newly composed spiritual should be in the repertoire of every choir that specializes in this music. Expansive, it reaches a rousing climax that implies it is heading towards the filmic, although it never does. Another spiritual of near-Biblical intent is *Many Thousands Gone*, which includes parts not only for solo flute, but also an elegiac solo cello (performed by Pedro Silva).

Finally, in the secular music section, Harbach's song *Here I Stand* beautifully conveys the resolute nature of its protagonist (mezzo Sarah-Jane Lewis, who has a stunning upper register). There is something very cuddly about the harmonies Harbach uses for *Intoxicated by the Wine of Love*, a setting of Persian Sufi poet Farid al-Din 'Attar, while the famous poet Sara Teasdale furnishes the words for *Sunset: St. Louis*, which includes a rather slinky dance-like section featuring Persian-inflected vocal lines.

The premise of *Women Composers* is simple and proves a point, Harbach lists famous women composers as part of her text. It's light and frothy. The presence of trumpets and snare drum adds much to *America, the Promised Land.* It is certainly patriotic and includes an instrumental insert from Harbach's own *Tom and Sally—A Slave to Love*. The three trumpeters judge their

contribution perfectly, bright but not brash, strong but not overwhelming, complementing and enhancing the text and its sung sentiments.

The segregation of the disc into various fields works very well. Performances are faultless to my ears, and Harbach's music certainly does not disappoint. Texts and translations (where appropriate) are included, along with annotations. A fine disc.

Colin Clarke, Fanfare Magazine, Issue 47:4 (Mar/Apr 2024)
Five stars: Performances are faultless to my ears, and Harbach's music certainly does not disappoint.

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A gorgeous, multi-faceted recording of vocal compositions by Barbara Harbach entitled "Choral Music I" offers superb entertainment and a new appreciation of her musical prowess. If you have sung in choirs or choruses, as I have, I believe you will love this recording and keep it in a special place in your music collection. Harbach is a prodigious thought-provoking composer as well as a keyboard musician, whose work has been rewarded with a wide audience. "Choral Music I" is surely one of the very best of her many recordings. For it, Harbach brought together several components, including the Apollo Voices of London, pianist Timothy End as accompanist and lyricist Jonathan Yordy. The 75-minute recording is divided in sections: sacred music including new hymns to celebrate Christmas and Easter and praise God; African American spirituals and songs inspired by them; and secular music. Harbach has included 21 compositions, each of which stands on its own as a mini-masterpiece. The wondrous performances of the Apollo Voice of London are all superb and beautiful, if not heart rending by turns. Taking an overview, one might choose any of them for a musical program or a personal electronic file per topic. While I enjoyed the whole CD, I came away from it with many favorites as I believe you will too.

Joel C. Thompson, Cherry Grove Music, 2024

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One modern composer who does want to reach out widely is Barbara Harbach (born 1946), whose works continue to appear in a very extended series of releases from MSR Classics. The 17th volume in the series is the first featuring Harbach's choral works – and all of those on the CD are world première recordings… and all are given forthright and carefully considered performances by Apollo Voices of London under Genevieve Ellis – with solid piano support from Timothy End. Clarity of presentation, a hallmark of Harbach's instrumental music, is clearly present in her choral works as well: there is nothing confusing, unclear or experimental in her use of voices, with the words of all these pieces being paramount. This does not mean that Harbach's harmonies are old-fashioned: the dissonances that open *Praise Him with the Trumpet,* one of the four works brought together as *Sacred Music,* are one example among many of her knowledgeable handling of sound – while the very next work in the same group, *Sing, Alleluia,* shows just how sweetly Harbach can handle harmony when she so chooses. There are three works listed under *Advent and Christmas,* with *This Night in Bethlehem* – with its soaring soprano line – being especially affecting. Among the five *Lent and Easter* works, *Of Christ's Dark Cup* is noteworthy for its moody piano, while *Mary's Joyful Shout* has something of the revival about it.

Mark J. Estren, Infodad.com February 2024