

Flexible Music:
undaunted by
formidable repertoire



Captivating
contemporary music
that is vigorous, varied
and vital

Flexible Music

L Andriessen Hout **Link** Around the Bend
Muhly Flexible Music **Shende** Throw Down
or Shut Up **Streber** Closing Time
O Webb Sustenance Variations
Flexible Music (Haruka Fujii *perc* Daniel Lippel *gtrs*
Eric Huebner *pf* Tim Ruedeman *sax*)
New Focus Recordings © ② **FCR105 (59' • DDD)**

The quartet known as Flexible Music derives its name from the title of the Nico Muhly piece that the group plays on its new disc. Like that score, the programme's other works by Louis Andriessen, John Link, Ryan Streber, Orianna Webb and Vineet Shende take percussion, piano, saxophones and guitars through fascinating textural, rhythmic and colouristic terrain. The results are varied and vital, a feast of intimate musical possibilities.

The disc's springboard is Andriessen's beguiling *Hout*, which has been recorded by several other ensembles. Dutch for "wood", the piece is a canon that finds the instruments chasing each other at pell-mell speed, occasionally stopping in their tracks amid the hypnotic activity, sensual gestures and group exclamation points. Muhly's

Flexible Music is exactly that. Inspired by video games, its energy is relentless, with swirling, punching ideas momentarily relaxed with lyrical lines. In Link's *Around the Bend*, something surprising is always lurking, from exotic tambourine sighs to quickly shared fragments, dreamy piano lines and sudden outbursts.

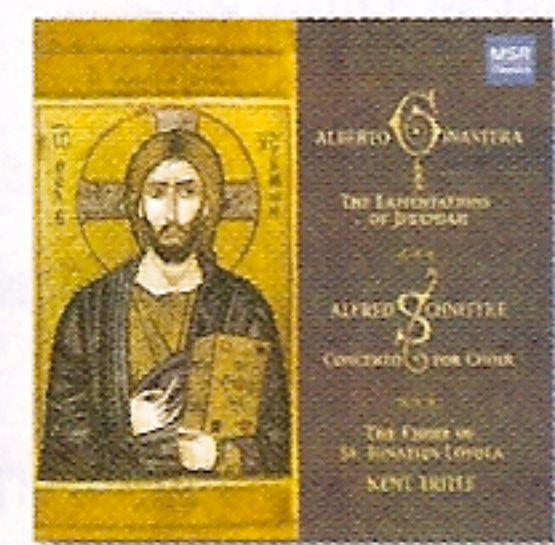
An electric guitar broods in Streber's *Closing Time*, which is animated through saxophone flights and feisty interaction. Titbits emerge from hushed moments, and the saxophone and guitar have extended solos before the music fades away.

The aura veers from the frisky to the still in Webb's *Sustenance Variations*, whose punchy chords and confrontational episodes find a keen balance amid lines of haunting poetry. Shende pays homage to James Brown in *Throw Down or Shut Up*, whose vigorous activity includes vocal grunts, riffs, shifting rhythms and textures and a sassy finish.

The members of Flexible Music are undaunted by the repertoire's formidable demands. Haruka Fujii (percussion), Eric Huebner (piano), Timothy Ruedeman (saxophones) and Daniel Lippel (guitars) appear to relish the sense of discovery that these composers have invested in their captivating creations. **Donald Rosenberg**

Ginastera • Schnittke

Ginastera The Lamentations of Jeremiah
Schnittke Concerto for Choir
Choir of St Ignatius Loyola / Kent
MSR Classics © **MS1251 (49' • DDD)**
Recorded live at the Church of St Ignatius
New York City, on February 13, 2008
Virtuosity and versatility le
readings of these two com



Alberto Ginastera
Lamentations
(1946) and
Schnittke
Choir (1970)
appear to be
bedfellows

the fierce cries and dance-like, syncopated rhythms that begin the Ginastera score, it is immediately evident that the Schnittke score, to the Russian Orthodox choral tradition, despite the marked difference in cultural ancestry, these works are really complementary. Both are richly textured, overwhelmingly lyrical, emotional and (as the title of the Schnittke work suggests) demand considerable virtuosity.

The Choir of St Ignatius Loyola performs admirably with the numerous challenges the sopranos struggle somewhat with the high notes in the Schnittke, but it's conceivable that the compos-

**'The choir sustain a
breathtaking atmosphere
of ethereal melancholy**

for those passages to sound effortful (and out of place). There is an edginess to the choir's voices in the opening of the Ginastera, but this actually suits the music's ferocity. Indeed, conductor Kurt Tritle has the choir's sound quite adaptable. The Schnittke with a darker, more restrained tone than the Ginastera, for example; it's not as profoundly inky sonority one would expect from a Russian ensemble, but it's stylistically appropriate.

Still, the most striking aspect of these interpretations (recorded live in the Church of St Ignatius, New York City, on February 13, 2008) is the warmth and depth of feeling. The Ginastera's breathtaking atmosphere of ethereal melancholy in the middle movement of the *Lamentations* (*vir videns*), and the Schnittke's

MSR Classics' engineering captures the immediacy within the reverberant acoustic, though in loud passages the sound becomes muddled and slightly obscured. Certainly this small caveat should not prevent anyone from hearing these superb recordings.

Andrew Farach-Colton