

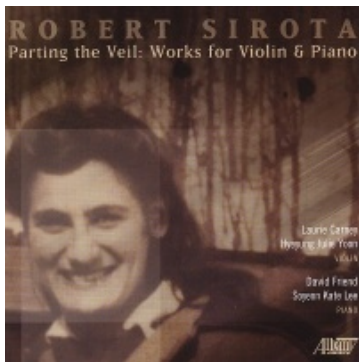


## Crocks Newsletter

By Bob McQuiston  
February 23, 2015

The albums below are "Classical Releases Of Current Key Significance," or "CROCKS", if you will. To purchase an album, simply click on one of the Web site retail outlets given in the "AVAILABILITY" table under the write-up.

Since the first of the year there have been an increased number of noteworthy discs with unusual repertoire. In order to cover more of these in the time available for each newsletter there's a little less detail than usual.



Sirota, R.: Vn & Pno Wks (Sons 1 "Pange Lingua" & 2 "Farewell",  
Summertime); Vrs Soloists [Albany]  
AUDIOPHILE (1 CD)

A native New Yorker, Robert Sirota's (b. 1949) extensive musical education has included studies at the Juilliard School of Music, Oberlin Conservatory, and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979; see 22 November 2010 ). He also earned a doctorate from Harvard University where one of his instructors was Leon Kirchner (1919-2009), who succeeded Walter Piston (1894-1978) there.

He'd go on to become director of the Boston University School of Music, then Johns Hopkins Peabody Institute, and from 2005 through 2012 president of the Manhattan School of Music. In addition to being a superb administrator, he's also a talented composer judging from this recent Albany Record's release featuring three of his pieces for violin and piano. These are the only recordings of them currently available on disc, and require repeated listening to be fully appreciated.

The program opens with his second sonata of 2013 written for the violinist who performs it here. Both of their mothers passed away while he was working on this, so it's accordingly subtitled "Farewell", and dedicated to their memory. Incidentally that's his mom on the album cover.

In four movements the opening one [T-1] is a chromatic rumination with a couple of frenetic spots. It brings Schoenberg's (1874-1951) more tonal moments to mind, and ends tranquilly. The following scherzo [T-2] begins deceptively with a searching glissando-distended violin soliloquy. The music then turns skittish sounding at times like Gunther Schuller's (b. 1925) The Twittering Machine in his Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee (1959; see 20 June 2013).

Thematic flakes of the foregoing fall in the hesitant "Night Snow" [T-3], which has a couple of flatline silences where you may think your CD player has died. But not to worry as the sonata resumes with a final "Farewell" [T-4], having an extended melody that's sorrowful and at the same time reassuring. It ends the work serenely.

The three-movement Summermusic (2000) was inspired by several trips the composer made to southern France in the second half of the 1990s. Named and modelled after a sixteenth century dance, the opening "Pavane" [T-5] begins with the violin playing a somber stately idea (SS).

The piano then joins in, and the two discuss it with references to the Dies Irae (DI) [beginning at 03:06], which is meant to signify the early Christian history of this area. An animated development follows, after which the movement ends sotto voce with recollections of SS and DI.

The eerie "Notturmo" [T-6] with its hints of frog and insect sounds brings to mind the "Night Music" so frequently found in Béla Bartók (1801-1945; see 13 January 2013). Then the work ends in a jaunty "Round Dance" [T-7] having more DI references [02:46]. Apparently meant to evoke Henri Matisse's (1869-1954) Dance paintings (1909-10), it brings the work to a busy balletic conclusion.

The other violinist on this disc commissioned Sirota's earlier sonata of 2012. In three movements and titled "Pange Lingua", it's based on the chant melody (PL) for St. Thomas Aquinas' (1225-1274) hymn of that name (c. 1260). The initial "Apologia" [T-8] could well describe a bumblebee in search of nectar, which it finally finds in the form of PL played sul ponticello [03:22].

In the rambling "Ballade" [T-9] the violin rhapsodizes to an occasional PL-related piano accompaniment. It relaxes the listener before the closing, vivacious virtuosic "Variations" [T-10], which gives both performers a chance to strut their stuff!

This begins with a fugato statement of PL [00:00], which is subjected to eight transformations. The first three are respectively jiglike [00:30], in a morose minor key [00:56], and whimsical [01:07]. After that there are chromatically flashy [01:49], tipsy [02:15], and Bartokian [02:42] variants.

Then the movement closes with a weeping seventh [03:41] and antic eighth [04:09] followed by a ringing finale [05:23]. It concludes the sonata and this CD dramatically.

Violinist Larie Carney, who is a founding member of the esteemed American String Quartet, is joined by pianist David Friend for the first two selections. They give captivating performances that are respectively reverential and bucolic.

A past artist-in-residence at Harvard University (2008-14), violinist Hyeyung Julie Yoon along with Korean-American pianist Soyeon Kate Lee give us the last work. One couldn't ask for a better interpretation of this Eucharistic sonata.

These recordings were made at the American Academy of Arts and Letters auditorium, New York City (NYC), which once again proves to be an ideal chamber venue (see 27 May 2013). They present a generous soundstage in an acoustic ideally suited to the music. Produced and engineered by audio maven Judith Sherman, the string tone is uniformly natural and piano beautifully captured.

All in all this is an audiophile disc. However, those playing it at high levels on systems that go down to rock bottom may hear occasional low rumblings probably engendered by NYC traffic and/or subways.

<http://www.clofo.com/Newsletters/C150223.htm>