

**FISCHER Suite for Cello and String Orchestra**<sup>1</sup>. *Time Piece. Bachludes I and II* • Clare Fischer, cond; <sup>1</sup>Cecilia Tsan (vc); Studio O • CLARE FISCHER 12201 (60:20)

This disc, given the title *After the Rain*, is a much earlier effort than the other Clare Fischer disc reviewed in this issue (see above). It was released in 2001, when Clare Fischer was 72 and still alive, and in fact he conducts all the works here. The Suite for Cello and Strings, like several of Fischer's more interesting works, was composed over a period of time, in this case from his earliest years as a composer. The second movement of this suite, bearing the title "The Early Years," was written in 1947 when he was 18 years old. Having some time left over after a 1999 recording session, he asked cellist Tsan to record this piece with the studio string orchestra; liking the way it came out, he then wrote the other two movements ("After the Rain" and "Finale") to give the work more depth and substance. This is very much a piece in Fischer's post-Romantic, Bartók-influenced style, but like so much of his music its outwardly simple-sounding structure belies its underlying complexity. Listen, for instance, to the manner in which "After the Rain" develops from its simple, tune-like beginnings to its more complex final section and you'll understand why Fischer is such an underrated composer. As it turns out, "The Early Years" sounds so much like his mature style that it's difficult to believe that 52 years separates it from the other movements. Here, the solo cello leads the voicings of the orchestra, which follow its music by entering a beat or two after the soloist's lead note every few bars, shifting both rhythm and tonality. As in some of his later work, this middle movement also evolves into what sounds like a pop music melody but is actually a fairly complex piece with a continually moving and evolving undertow played by the strings. "Finale" begins with a jolly, jaunty rhythm, syncopated in a ragtime sort of feel quite different from Fischer's usual style, though the later sections, reflective and pensive, are typical of his mature music. When he returns to the jaunty melody, the rhythm is more complex and the harmonic-thematic development more complex. A dead stop in the music is followed by another lyrical passage, but this time bitonal and more complex, which is the coda of the piece.

*Time Piece* was also written in stages several decades apart. The composer is quoted in the booklet as saying that the first half of the opening movement, "Homage," was "conceived and scored in 1953. The original idea for the second half of the movement was conceived in 1953 but the actual writing of the music took place in 1987." (Brent Fischer has told me that his father did not go back to earlier compositions periodically, but simply had to restart in later years due to "life issues" such as making money getting in the way.) In the second movement, "Elegy and Blues," Fischer combined the "Elegy" in 1987 while the "Blues" was composed in the early 1950s. "Fugue and Finale" comes completely from 1987. This is, like *Pensamientos* and *Realización* on the other disc, a major work, diverse in its sections and developing its themes even as it changes them. One of the most fascinating aspects of Fischer's work is the way in which his music sounds completely organic, i.e. as if it has sprung from his mind full-blown, which in a way is true because he came back to these works rather than composing them over a period of time. Here, too, his personal and sometimes witty sense of orchestral color comes into play, adding piquant interest to the music in sheer sound. The introduction of a quirky waltz rhythm also brings in fascinating subsidiary themes, which are then developed in 4/4. Taken even singly, on its own terms, "Homage" is a major piece. Brief horn and oboe statements open "Elegy and Blues," underscored by what sounds like a bass clarinet (again, interesting orchestral colors), then moving to the upper strings for the pensive theme statement. Once again, the harmonies fall through a chromatic trap door as the music evolves. The "Blues" section, played by solo piano with light string accompaniment, sounds quite a bit like a cross between Bartók and Ellington. At first, this material sounds relatively simple compared to the opening "Elegy," but eventually the orchestra takes it over and morphs it a bit as the movement comes to a close. "Fugue and Finale," as Fischer put it, uses jazz orchestration—plunger mutes in the brass instruments—within a classical structure. This is a rather happy, nonchalant fugue, and not only the plunger mutes but also the use of jaunty clarinet figures put me in mind of Ellington or perhaps his alter ego, Billy Strayhorn. This is music that recalls, in mood at least, such Ellington pieces as *Harlem* and *Night Creature*, although as the music develops it becomes much darker, almost sinister, compared to Ellington or Strayhorn.

The *Bachludes*, written and recorded in the late 1970s, pay homage to the famed Leipzig composer but also to Heitor Villa-Lobos, particularly the *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 5. Indeed, as the first of these two pieces starts up, one may be forgiven for thinking it is one of the Villa-Lobos pieces, but after a short while the music develops in a rather different manner and style. The second of them is entirely in Fischer's own mature style, changing after the opening statement to a double-time (but still slow and stately) development of the theme. Not too surprisingly, Fischer retains his strong emotional feeling in this piece, presenting an elegiac quality even as the music morphs away from a purely Bachian style to something more modern.

This is a brilliant album of original and moving works that, like its latter-day counterpart, is highly recommended to all serious music lovers. **Lynn René Bayley**