

ablaze RECORDS



PIERROT ENSEMBLE SERIES VOL. 2 • Pavel Wallinger^{2, 3} (vn); Pavel Šabacky (vc); Petr Pomkla (fl); Lukáš Danhel^{1, 2}, Emil Drápela³ (cl); Jiří Hrubý, Marie Petříková¹ (pn) • ABLAZE 00041 (54:54)
C. S. CHOI ¹*Animus*. **J. MARQUEZ** ¹*Toward*. **K. M. CHOI** ¹*Tender Spirit I*. **FINBERG** ²*Kinah*. **BRIJALDO** ³*Anatomy of Sur*

The classic “Pierrot ensemble” is that of voice (Sprechstimme), flute/piccolo, clarinet/bass clarinet, piano, violin/viola, and cello. Groups such as the superb Manchester-based (UK) group Psappha, the Da Capo Chamber Players, and eighth blackbird are based on this line-up. A plethora of pieces have used the instrumentation of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, starting with Schoenberg’s pupils. One thinks immediately of Webern’s transcription of Schoenberg’s First Chamber Symphony for *Pierrot* quintet.

The five pieces here comprise Ablaze’s second volume based on this idea. The Korean composer Chang Seek Choi seeks to negate convention as regards harmony, melody, and rhythm in his *Animus*, writing athematically, and searching out harmonies that are neutral as opposed to directional. He uses mathematical devices as a way to generate the musical surface (Pascal’s Triangle, which itself includes the much more famous Fibonacci sequence), and as so often the result is actually the opposite of what one might expect. Instead of sounding highly organized, it sounds almost aleatoric. (The same thing happened when composers experimented with integral serialism: despite the high level of organization, it sounded random.) So, no wonder one of Chang Seek Choi’s movements is called “Chaos”; the movement called “Ordo” (order) is the only one with pretensions of comprehensibility in the traditional, organic sense, but registral displacement seems to subvert even this. The scoring is managed with a light touch; there is real beauty in the final “Aeternus” movement.

The young Filipino-American composer Joshua Marquez offers up a piece called *Toward*. Marquez’s music seeks to investigate liminal spaces in music, specifically between sound and noise (as a metaphor for cultural alienation). Like Choi’s piece, Marquez’s uses single word titles for each of its movements. In “Lilt” woodwind keenings twist and turn

against tappings, while “Devour” is more phantasmagoric, and “Scatter” indeed feels like notes quietly scattergunned across woodwind instruments. The final “Shift” is slow-moving yet unsettled.

Described as a “composer, organist, painter visual artist, and poet,” Kyong Mee Choi dedicated her *Tender Spirit I* to the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut (12/14/2012). Kyong Mee Choi teaches composition and electroacoustic music at Roosevelt University, Chicago; she clearly has utter mastery in her field, as the electronic component sounds so naturally part of the piece. The work is gentle, as its subject matter might dictate; but one also notices from her website that her poetry is similarly tender. There is a remarkable moment in *Tender Spirit I* when a clarinet seems to seek to acknowledge its jazz/blues roots.

The Hebrew word “kinah” means lamentation, and Avner Finberg’s piece of that name takes as its basis the tradition of sitting shiva for seven days after the death of a family member. When the instruments take a solo line, it is always in the spirit of an outpouring of individual grief, held within the collective. There seem to be aspects of heterophony to Finberg’s processes, as well as a lot of energy. It is quite a gear change, then, to move to the opening of Colombian composer Julián Brijaldo’s *Anatomy of Sur*, where notes seem to dip down unobtrusively, with tense momentum only slowly moving forwards. Inspired by the diversity of Latin America, the “Dreamy Dance” second movement is a slightly trippy ride before the third movement, “5 Feet,” portrays a dance that does seem to imply the dancers should have five legs. Its rhythms are infectious and joyous, the perfect way to close the disc.

Not all of this is easy music, by any stretch of the imagination, but it is all rewarding, and presented in fine performances. The sheer expertise of the Czech players is remarkable throughout.

Colin Clarke

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