A record – or six – of an extraordinary event

‘Music@Menlo Live 2007’

‘Bridging the Ages’
Adolphé String Quartet No 4, ‘Whispers of Mortality’ Bach Cantata No 82, ‘Ich habe genug’
Beethoven Scottish Songs, Op 108 – No 1, ‘Music, Love and Wine’, No 3, ‘Oh! Sweet were the hours’
No 11, ‘Oh! Thou art the lad’, No 24, ‘Again my lyre;’
No 25, ‘Sally in our alley’ Boccherini Guitar Quintet, G448 Bottesini Gran du o concertante Brahms Piano
Quartet No 1, Op 23 Copland Variations Handel
Organ Concerto No 15, HWV412 Korngold Suite, Op 23 Mendelssohn String Quartet No 2, Op 13
Neirug Pueblo Children’s Songs Rachmaninov
Trio élegiaque Ravel Le tombeau de Couperin
Violon Sonata Saint-Saëns Le carnaval des animaux
Schnittke Moz-Art Schubert String Quartet No 14, ‘Death and the Maiden’, D810 Tchaikovsky Piano
Trio, Op 50

Heidi Grant Murphy pp Christopher Nomura
hsy Carole Wincenc fbr William Bennett dbr
Carey Bell dbr William Vorruden hn Dennis
Godburn hn brnc Erin Keefe, ahp Philip Setzer, ftr
Jan Swensen, ahp Joseph Swensen tnm Roberto
Diaz, masao Kawasaki, ahp Paul Neubauer vnm
Colin Carr, Andréa Dicz, ahp David Finckel,
ralph Kirshbaum tnm daxun Zhang db Jason
Vieuxu gtr jn Kenneth Cooper bdp Inon Barnatan,
Gary Graffman, ahp Wu Han, ahp Gilbert Kalish,
kevin Murphy gtr, dbr Florian Concerti, Christopher
Froh pm, dbr Escher String Quartet (Adam Barnett-
Hart, Wu Jie tnm Pierre Lapointe tnm Andrew Janss tnm)
‘Miami String Quartet’ (ivan Chan, Cathy Meng
Robinson tnm Yu Jie tnm Keith Robinson tnm)
Music@Menlo Live @ (6h 35’ • DDD)

on each programme. Deft programmatic
combinations abound, such as Schubert’s
death and the Maiden Quartet and Bruce
Adolphe’s String Quartet No 4, ‘Whispers
of Mortality’.

It can sometimes be difficult for participants
in a chamber music festival to establish a high
level of communication with unfamiliar partners.
But these performers either have previous
connections with each other or were able to gain
near-instant rapport in the festival’s atmosphere.

The highlight disc? A toss-up between two
two excellent ones: Heidi Grant Murphy’s verstile
singing of Beethoven’s arrangements of jaunty
Scottish songs and Marc Neirug’s poignant
Pueblo Children’s Songs, smartly joined by
Korngold’s Suite for two violins, cello and piano
left-hand. It’s always fascinating to hear this
more commercial side of Beethoven, while
pianist Kevin Murphy accentuates Murphy’s
tenderness in the Neirug and the Korngold is a
tour de force performed by Gary Graffman
(piano), Philip Setzer and Erin Keefe (violins)
and Andrea Diaz (cello).

The other gem would have to be a
programme of Schnittke’s whimsical Moz-Art,
(ian and Joseph Swensen), Ravel’s bluesy Violin
Sonata (Jan Swensen and Gilbert Kalish) and
Brahms’s elegiac Piano Quartet No 1 in G
minor (Kalish, Ian Swensen, Paul Neubauer,
Colin Carr). The performers map out the large-
scale contours of the Brahms with precision and
then drive the piece with uncommon verve.
Producer and engineer Da-Hong Seetoo again
impresses with superb balance and warmth to
the sound.

One of the only mis-steps happens,
interestingly enough, with co-founder
Wu Han. Her reading of Rachmaninov’s
Trio élegiaque with Setzer and Carr could
be better called a trio funèbre in light of its

A superfluity of, well, super performances
characterises this collection of live recordings
taken from Music@Menlo’s 2007 season, but
with a budget feel to the packaging, one wonders
how high the sales will ever climb.

Perhaps the primary consumers will be those
who attended one or all of the concerts on the
San Francisco Peninsula. The urge to have
a permanent record of an outstanding night
of music-making can be strong, probably stronger
than an average classical music consumer’s
desire to purchase such a wide-ranging
assortment of music. For the enterprising
husband-and-wife team who lead the festival,
cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han,
showing off the extraordinary quality of
musician ship they have attracted to the West
Coast is reason enough to produce this six-disc
set. That’s a sentiment buoyed by the applause –
and at times even cheering – by the appreciative
audience. But with no main book of liner-notes
and only scant treatment in the individual disc
cases, one misses the scholarly aspect of the
festival: with “symposia featuring the nation’s
leading musicologists”.

Menlo’s menu usually overflows with
substantive fare served with sophistication
and depth. This season is again dominated
by the standard repertoire, but with plenty
of lesser-known works that pique curiosity

“Showing off the extraordinary
quality of musicianship
attracted to the West Coast
is reason enough for this set”

slow and almost ponderous approach. The
inclusion of Copland’s lesser-known Vitebsk
is a masterpiece, but Han, Keefe and Finckel
play it with a harsh timbre. Then, as if to
make up for the Rachmaninov, Han, Joseph
Swensen and cellist Ralph Kirshbaum take
Tchaikovsky’s Piano Trio in A minor a little
fast, sapping some of its drama. Oh well,
you can’t expect every disc in such a large
and largely excellent set to please everyone.