



Music@Menlo, Live: Maps and Legends
 Various artists. (musicatmenlo.org)

Impressive Lineup Brings Life To a Rich and Varied Program

The theme of Music@Menlo's 2010 program proves elusive, but the high caliber of the string playing should enthrall listeners

By Greg Cahill

The cellist David Finckel and his wife, the concert pianist Wu Han, serve as co-directors of the Northern California summer music festival known as Music@Menlo, which features a stellar chamber-music institute and world-class concerts. For eight years, following the festival, Finckel and Wu Han's boutique label, ArtistLed, has released a multi-disc chronicle of the festival's highlights. The high-quality concert recordings—supervised by the acclaimed record producer and recording engineer Da-Hong Seeto—are a great way to show the astounding level of the talent involved in this event and present some of the finest performances of classical recordings found anywhere. The themed programming at the 2010 festival proved adventurous: Vol. 1 of this eight-CD set of pairs Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* with George Crumb's "Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III)."

Throughout these volumes, 20th century works by Barber, Bolcom, Britten, Schoenberg, Shostakovich, Copland, among others, are interspersed among warhorses by Haydn, Beethoven, and Brahms.

At times, the programs, dominated by chamber music, settle in into period or place—Britten's art song masterwork *A Charm of Lullabies*, Op. 41, is teamed with fellow Brits William Walton (Piano Quartet) and

Edward Elgar (Piano Quintet in A minor, Op. 84), all wonderfully executed and richly interpreted. There are programs that define a nation's identity and others that address the trauma of war. Vol. 5 transports listeners to Paris of the 1920s through the creative surge that characterized the period after World War I. It includes works by Milhaud, Antheil, Poulenc, Ravel, Gershwin and others.

But a cohesive theme overall proves a bit elusive, though it does range far and wide as the tracks span the centuries.

Still, you won't need a map to navigate these legends or the stellar performance by a long and impressive roster of featured string players, which includes violinists Arnaud Sussmann, Jorja Fleezanis, Ana Kavafian, Ian Swensen, and Philip Setzer (who performs with Finckel in the Emerson Quartet); violists John Largess and Molly Carr; cellists Joshua Gindele and Gabriel Cabezas; and bassist Scott Pingel, as well as members of the Jupiter and Miró Quartets.