

## CD Review - Society News Magazine

*New York Chamber Players: Works of Franci,*

**Koenig, Quilling, and Schlenck**

CRS CD 1395

The main theme statement of Franci's *Three Variations on a Theme of Michael Levy* is almost deliberately reminiscent of a movie score by Philip Glass or Michael Nyman; the simplicity of the theme (an arpeggiated minor triad) at first calls for such a stable texture. This texture begins to fall apart in small dissonant ways, still returning to the arpeggiated minor triad; but the center cannot hold, and soon the dissonant interjections begin to take over.

The first variation still plays with Nymanesque textures, coming apart again through frequent polytonal interjections from winds and strings. The mood has been sufficiently altered by the middle of the variation that the piano has trouble finding the minor triadic material it started out with, and highly dissonant material is now consistently laced throughout the rest of the variation.

The second variation maintains the instability introduced in the first, the minor triad dissolving in a cascade of unsteady scales and textures. By the middle of the movement the mood has ranged far and wide, and finally pauses on a nightmarish cluster chord in the orchestra, augmented by quasi-improvisational dissonance in the piano.

The final variation, especially Nymanesque at beginning, is yet unstable for all its simplicity. Textures and moods have become consistently sharp and disjunct; and this mood is consistent to the end.

A work of drama through harmony and texture; a chiaroscuro transformation from light to dark. As a musician involved in classical improvisation, I especially appreciate the aforementioned introduction of quasi-improvisational materials.

Koenig's Adagio, a student work, is essentially a Baroque-style movement with few references to music written after 1850. However, it is a skilled study in earlier styles of music.

The Koenig Concertino looks to the late-Romantic period after 1850. Again, the language is conservative. The cellist Kalin Ivanov plays very much in the spirit of the work, realizing well the cafe textures of the second movement Andante, and the Brahmsian third movement Allegro (which itself is a nice tribute to Brahms).

Howard Quilling attended--as did I--UC Santa Barbara, where he studied with my teachers Emma Lou Diemer and Peter Racine Fricker. The first movement of the Woodwind Quintet might be a combination of the styles of those two composers—the lyricism of Diemer, and the post-war

Hindemithian eccentricities of Fricker.

The second movement is perhaps more recognizably American, evoking Piston and Persichetti, and is a wistful postcard to that time in American composition between the wars, when lovely neo-classical slow movements were often framed by overly-busy fast movements.

This movement alternates between both tempi, and to its advantage truncates the fast motion before it becomes overlong, bringing back the wistful moments in a tribute overall kind to its source material, and more successful than much of that music by virtue of such truncations.

The opening fanfare of John Schlenk's Fanfare and Variations starts out in a promisingly vague state, then satisfyingly solidifies its disparate elements before the start of the variations. Throughout the variations there are elements of passacaglia, monody, and (increasingly) jazz until about the midway point, when the brass becomes more pronounced, and elements of Ingolf Dahl and Norman Dello Joio's adept brass and wind writing come to the fore. A study in many contrasts even more than simply a variation set, it forms a satisfying conclusion to the CD.

**Gregory Hall**