

# REVIEWS

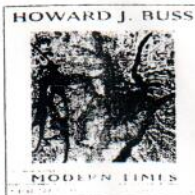
The best new recordings from North America

## Buss

'Modern Times'  
Modern Times<sup>a</sup>, Overture for Percussion<sup>b</sup>,  
Currents<sup>c</sup>, Scenes from the Holy Land<sup>d</sup>  
<sup>a</sup>Jerald Reynolds *narr* <sup>ad</sup>Kim S  
McCormick *fl* <sup>abc</sup>percussion ensemble /  
<sup>a</sup>Robert McCormack *cd* <sup>perc</sup>

Capstone Records © CP58735 (67' • DDD)

Good flute and percussion ensembles  
jostle with narrator interference



Composer Howard J Buss (b1951) has won a number of awards, and this varied survey offers a worthy overview of his music. After an opening flourish, the Overture for Percussion segues

into some cheerful marimba passages and more syncopated sections. The marimba and cymbals provide rhythmic bite among the array of percussion, and though mildly amiable more than blindly virtuosic, the music proves entertaining enough over its short haul.

More intriguing is Buss's *Scenes from the Holy Land*, scored for flute and percussion in five movements. The opening section, 'Masada' presents angular solos against percussion accents, with extended ascending legato passages for flute. The music turns more florid and Middle-Eastern in style before a peaceful coda. 'Storm on Mount Sinai' offers sharply rhythmic music accented with tambourine and a more febrile bazaar-like flute writing. 'The Flock on the Sea of Galilee' contains an oddly memorable five-note percussion motif under a lovely bucolic flute theme, conveying pastoral tranquility. 'The Road to Jerusalem' makes a haunting finale with elaborate flute passages against pulsing percussion, which leads to a burst of exotic virtuosity in the finale. *Scenes from the Holy Land* is an effective and colorful work with deftly varied music and tackled by the musicians with the skill and understated virtuosity Buss's intimate style requires.

The most outré work on the disc is *Currents*, for four percussionists. In this quasi-theater piece, the fourth player initially serves as a conductor. Halfway through the work, after utilizing a handsaw as a baton, he strikes the blade with a mallet, cuts through a sawhorse, etc. Minus the visual and theatrical elements, the relatively soft hues and unvaried colors seem to pall well before the 15 minutes are up. The longest work, at 30 minutes, is

*Modern Times*, which adds a narrator to the flute and percussion ensemble. The whimsical texts are the composer's own creation. These include 'Info Glut', a not-too-angry Dylan-esque wordplay. 'Night Tide' follows with a nocturnal flute solo, and poetic evocation. There's also a protest against doctors and bankers and much cryptic silliness. Someday composers are going to realize that, after a few centuries, there has yet to be written a single truly great musical work for narrator. Nonetheless, *Scenes from the Holy Land* makes its effects with point and economy and would be a boon to flute and percussion duos searching for program material.

Lawrence A Johnson

## Beethoven

String Quartets, Volume 3  
String Quartets – No 11 in F minor,  
'Serioso', Op 95; No 12 in E flat, Op 127;  
No 15 in A minor, Op 132  
Aurn Quartet (Matthias Lingenfelder,  
Jens Oppermann *vs* Stewart Eaton *va*  
Andreas Arndt *vc*)  
Tacet © 2 126 (102' • DDD)

## Beethoven

String Quartets, Volume 4  
String Quartets – No 13 in B flat, Op 130;  
No 14 in C sharp minor, Op 131; No 16  
in F, Op 135. Grosse Fuge, Op 133  
Aurn Quartet (Matthias Lingenfelder,  
Jens Oppermann *vs* Stewart Eaton *va*  
Andreas Arndt *vc*)  
Tacet © 2 127 (124' • DDD)

New interpretations of late  
Beethoven that set a new standard



In these concluding installments of their complete Beethoven cycle, the Aurn Quartet, who take their name from the amulet that grants intuition in Michael Ende's fantasy, *The*

*Neverending Story*, have put forth a breathtakingly new and illuminating proposition. Instead of presenting the music as late Beethoven, riddled with awkward enharmonic changes and thorny technical obstacles, they play them as mainstream classical music of great confidence and power. In so doing, they have rethought numerous commonly accepted interpretive solutions.

A few examples will have to suffice. The way the Aurn embrace the composer's



idiosyncratic use of clockwork elements, like the triplets in bar 48 of the first movement of Op 132, transforms notions of what drives the Beethoven machine. And the overwhelming

positive attitude with which they play the *Meno mosso e moderato* in the *Grosse Fuge* proves that a quartet can master this super-human movement. There are also deeply profound individual touches, as when Matthias Lingenfelder's tone breaks before the 'Beklemmt' section of the Cavatina in Op 130.

Beyond these moments of epiphany, the Aurns possess a sense of latent power that creates a superb kind of musical tension, a rare ability to phrase with a kind of radiant Italianate grace and in hypnotic big pictures arches, and to do so as with one voice. Unlike the Takács, whose late quartets set has just been released on Decca, there is no sense that this is a first violinist and 'the others', or that the music is a series of (occasionally dysfunctional) fragments, however brilliantly or inimitably played. At times, the Aurn performances seem so close to what one sees unfolding on the printed score that it is possible to believe you are hearing directly what Beethoven had in mind. Perhaps only the Busch Quartet had this kind of liberating vision.

Working in the Cologne studio of DeutschlandRadio with two Neumann M49 microphones, Andreas Spreer has captured the Aurn in what sounds like one of those science fiction continuums where space stretches to fit time, the sound rich and detailed without being analytical, the lower strings of the viola and cello having a wonderful grainy quality to them.

There is no shortage of great and famous Beethoven cycles, but there are no performances such as these. For me, this is now the set to beat. Laurence Vittes

## García

fragmentos del pasado<sup>a</sup>. #3 From Three Pieces for Double Bass and Tape<sup>b</sup>. separación<sup>c</sup>. timbres artificiales<sup>d</sup>.

Vedute sonore da Bellagio<sup>e</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Robert Black *db* <sup>c</sup>Daniel Kientz *sax*  
<sup>ad</sup>Jamie Marquez *gtr* <sup>c</sup>Reina Portuondo  
*sound* <sup>d</sup>Cuarteto Latinoamericano (Saul Bitran, Aron Bitran *vs* Javier Montiel *va* Alvaro Bitran *vc*) <sup>e</sup>Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar / Alfredo Rugeles  
New Albion © NA124 (72' • DDD)