

American Record Guide

best of that composer's work for both piano and orchestra. Sound and performances are excellent, but you'll hear tiny flubs by Mr Panizza (notes aren't struck firmly enough or flanking keys are nudged). Some occur in the frenetic opening flourishes of I, but then they crop up even in the slower transitional passages. They aren't *that* off-putting, but they do call attention to themselves.

Elements Concertos, based on the elements of air, earth, water, and fire, is (artistically) the better work of the two (it seems more original), and it's also better performed. Anna Rabinova is the soloist. I should say that the merit of both of these works lies in their heavy reliance on the soloists. These are true showpieces for the soloist, and both works have long passages that allow each artist to strut his stuff.

The notes say that David Winkler has composed over 200 works. I hope Naxos releases this man's symphonies. When he's not aping other composers (such as Rachmaninoff in the Piano Concerto), his creative vision is very original.

COOK

WOJCIK: *The Sketchbook; Vanishing Lands; Lord Sedley's Masque; Closer to Home; Sea Songs*

Arthur Wilson, narr; Douglas Wooten, t; Moravian Philharmonic, Rzeszow Philharmonic/ Ramond Wojcik

Albany 1046—61 minutes

Raymond Wojcik (b. 1957) is an American-born composer with extraordinary lyrical gifts. His music holds at its core the *song* or the melody or the cogent, well-defined lyric, placing him squarely in the heart of contemporary romanticism. I treasure music like this.

The Sketchbook (2006) is scored for narrator and octet and is about a boy who hears colors and sees sounds and is bullied at school until his teacher gives him a sketchbook where he can put down all that his mind sees. This isn't *Peter and the Wolf* and isn't intended to be, but the voice part (Arthur Wilson) is playful and engaging as the music offers a backdrop to the drama of the boy's adventures in gaining the respect of his classmates who used to bully him. The piece stands alone, but I imagine it would be a great performance piece with overhead slides, because the music was inspired by the art of several inner city children.

Vanishing Lands (2002) takes the form of a melancholy hymnal evoking the vanishing lands of the prairies. The violin here carries the basic melody, but never once does the piece devolve into sappy homage or mere nostalgia. It's got some spicy, atonal moods

that slip in quite comfortably among the strings, preventing a descent into banality.

Long Sedley's Masque Or The Revels of Love Revealed (1982) is a Renaissance masque, attributed to Charles Sedley, about the adventures of Corydon and Phillis, two amorous shepherds. Douglas Wooten is the tenor here and manages to sound quite, well, medieval. I found the music a delight but the miking on Mr Wooten is a bit recessed, giving him the aura of someone standing on a stage. There is no technical reason why he couldn't have been closer to the microphone. But this is a minor complaint.

Closer to Home (1999) is a nine-minute work taken from a film score—the film never got off the ground. *Closer to Home* is about a romance between an ex-merchant marine and his Filipino bride. It's the best piece here, full of hope, disappointment, and conflict (the woman's theme is in a major key, the man's is in the minor). Absolutely stunning.

Finally, *Sea Songs* (1981-1997) is a collection of short, atmospheric pieces reflecting aspects of the sea. It's filled with solemn moods and brush-strokes of color that paint a picture of glooms and fogs and perhaps a yearning for something that never was.

Wojcik's creative gifts for concrete melody and cogent lyrical lines are only emphasized by his sculpting abilities as a conductor. Performances are topnotch; sound is even-tempered. A keeper.

COOK

ZBINDEN: *Symphonies; Overture; Torneo Veneto; Elegy*

Italian Swiss Orchestra/ Matthias Aeschbacher, Basel Radio/ Jean-Marie Auberson; Lausanne Chamber Orchestra/ Armin Jordan, Lawrence Foster, Jesus Lopez-Cobos; Lausanne Sinfonietta/ Jean-Marie Auberson

Gallo 1229 [2CD] 138 minutes

Julien-Francois Zbinden is a Swiss composer born in 1917. Not much of his music has come out on recordings easily available in the US—a few things on imported Swiss LPs, a very occasional small item on CD. That omission is now rectified by this two-disc survey of Zbinden's orchestral works that includes all four of his symphonies along with three other pieces.

Zbinden's music draws on Rousset, Honegger, and mid-period Stravinsky, with family resemblances to many another middle-of-the-road mid-century composer. It's tonally anchored though with much use of polytonal harmonies, built from clear if sometimes spiky or sinuous themes, typically cast in classic formal patterns, and presents little difficult