

## CD Review by Colin Clarke

**TRAVELING WEST** • Max Lifchitz, cond; Helen Lin (pn); <sup>1</sup> Lisa Hansen (fl, <sup>3</sup> pic); <sup>2</sup> Margaret O'Connell (mez); <sup>4</sup> North/South Consonance Ens <sup>1, 2, 4</sup>  
• NORTH/SOUTH 1038 (54:23)

**ZIFFRIN Piano Concertino.** <sup>1</sup> **MAYER Messages.** <sup>2</sup> **BULOW Syntax I.** <sup>3</sup>  
**KOYKKAR Out Front.** **SNYDER Traveling West** <sup>4</sup>

This collection of widely but pleasantly divergent chamber works coheres due to what the conductor, Max Lifchitz, refers to as a “post-modern thread.” There is no denying a certain life-affirming element to Marilyn J. Ziffrin’s Piano Concertino of 1999. This is attractive, eminently approachable music—it’s difficult to believe on this showing that Ziffrin has written a biography of Carl Ruggles. The present performers gave the world premiere in 2000. It is scored for piano, flute, bassoon, two violins, viola, and cello. The spiky, jazzy first movement features harmonies based on the intervals of the fourth and the fifth, while the second ( *semplice with feeling* ) begins with piano chords and a disjunct bassoon line. There is almost a feeling of cartoon-like creeping about here before the driving, energy-laden finale—again strongly jazz-influenced, with a reflective central section—rounds this exhilarating work off. A very strong way to start the disc. Helen Lin (a student of Peter Serkin) plays with crystal clarity and real rhythmic verve.

William Mayer (b. 1925) has studied with Roger Sessions. *Messages* , from 1972, is scored for solo flute (doubling piccolo) with violin, viola, cello, and percussion. Each of the four movements has a title: “Wind,” “Touch,” “Wood,” “Light Years (Ravel remembered).” The recording here is quite close, which seems to emphasize the fun side of Meyer’s writing, particularly in the first movement. Spookiness reigns for “Touch,” while the shadow of the shakuhachi dominates “Wood” before a haunting homage to Ravel rounds off a work of real imaginative scope. Slivers of humor light up this piece.

Harry Bulow studied with the unusual combination of Copland and Henry Mancini. His *Syntax I* is highly evocative, essentially lonely music—superbly played. Joseph Koykkar’s *Out Front* is immediately more unbuttoned. An ensemble piece, it is very concise; one is aware not a single note is wasted.

Minimalism is a discernible influence—not mentioned in the booklet notes—and I have to report a certain similarity of utterance between the second and third movements.

Randall Snyder is a successful saxophonist who has also made an in-depth study of Korean traditional music. In *Traveling West* (the piece from which the disc derives its name), Snyder sets poetry by four female Nebraskan poets: Susan Strayer Deal, Marjorie Saiser, Hilda Raz, and Kathleene West. Snyder's compositional hand is secure. He does not over-use effects, so that when there is spoken recitation, it makes a real effect. More, there is real sensitivity to the texts themselves. Margaret O'Connell is the superb mezzo, who handles the frequent difficulties with seeming ease.

A fascinating exploration of five contrasted composers that is well worth investigating. **Colin Clarke**

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