

*Rear Vision*

Melbourne Composers' League.

*Rear Vision* is a double CD that brings together the music of members of the Melbourne Composers' League to look back over a decade of music by Victorian composers. Such compilations rely on much good will, including the contribution of recordings from diverse sources. Some of these are excellent recordings, of brilliant clarity, others are fraught with the problems of live recordings. The diversity of sound quality is matched by that of compositional ability and one can not help but admire the egalitarian nature of this collective.

Those works which capture the excitement of live performance, and which document significant concerts, are a welcome and valuable addition to recordings Australian music.

There are two works which stand above all others: Brendan Colbert's *Agité III* and Peter Myers' *Incantation*. The former is performed by Michael Keiran Harvey, and is a fond reminder of the extraordinary energy that characterized Melbourne's compositional scene in the 1980s. This is music that is unforgiving, obsessive, saturated, as well as carefully controlled, precise and ambitious. The latter attribute marks it apart from most of the works on these discs, which tend towards the conservative, ploughing predictable furrows that are largely unrewarding. Harvey's performance captures the essence of the *Agité* series; his precise rhythmic shaping reveals the continually transforming cells that comprise the trajectories of the work. Around these structures, Harvey launches streams of grace-notes. His ability to control this layering allows the work's singularly directional form to function. Harvey's sensitivity to the dynamic markings is also remarkable, especially since the composition occupies the instrument's upper range of volume.

Peter Myers' *Incantation* is very different in style. It balances precisely approachability with obfuscation to generate its depth of materials. It sounds as though one has heard it before. Its success in this collection of works is also due to the performance by Natasha Anderson and Mark Knoop. This is stunning playing, with the two instruments in close accord. Myers distributes his music materials to make the most of the differences between the instruments. To put it conversely, the instruments retain their individual characters, the combination of which reveals a totality of the music. This effect is only possible with expert performers, and Knoop and Anderson are musicians of the highest order. The issues in recording quality are of little regard here, for the performance is thoroughly engaging.

Least successful are those works which allow the listener's mind to wander towards the surface of the sound. McKeller's *Twelve Hours*, for solo piano performed by Robert Chamberlain, is exemplary. Lasting exactly one minute, the piece has little to offer, and whilst I am all in favour of children attending concerts, I am not sure that I find their voices an intrinsic part of the music. It also sounds as though it has been through lossy compression. More disappointing are works by well known composers such as Ros Bandt, whose *Tragoudia*, for tarhu and tape, is ill-conceived in its faux-naïvité. Similarly, each of Thomas Reiner's *Three Sketches* for solo cello (Rachel Atkinson) does not wander far from its first notes.

If one is seeking carefully programmed CDs of uniformly engaging music then *Rear Vision* will be a disappointment. If one places high value on excellent performances of significant works then there is more than enough here to exceed the asking price.