

# RECORDING REVIEWS

by Carlos María Solare

*American Weavings.* Music by Daniel Pinkham, Augusta Read Thomas, John Weaver, Christopher Gable, and Craig Philips. Carol Rodland, viola, Catherine Rodland, organ. Crystal Records CD839.

A family affair in every sense, this enchanting CD features for the most part music either commissioned by—or, in one case, unsolicitedly given to—the sisters Carol and Catherine Rodland. Two pieces by John Weaver book-end the recital and give it its punning title. *Concert Piece* makes for an impressive opening with its passacaglia-like beginning, and it should be hard to find a more rousing ending than *Foundation*, last of the *Three Chorale Preludes* with which the CD finishes. Carol Rodland writes movingly of finding in her mailbox at the New England Conservatory a copy of the *Sonata da Chiesa* by Daniel Pinkham, a composer whose music she had admired since childhood. Pinkham's piece, loosely based on Baroque patterns, uses effectively the organ's registrations and varies the viola's sound with *con sordino* effects and the use of harmonics. Augusta Read Thomas's *Incantation* and *Pulsar* are originally for unaccompanied violin, but—as does most music for that instrument—they sound warmer, more attractive, and just plain better on the viola! Both are freely-shaped ruminations that come across as if improvised, although their rhythmic and structural complexity becomes apparent on closer scrutiny. I found Christopher Gable's *Teshuvah* less immediately accessible, but nevertheless worth the effort. As the composer observes in his liner notes, the piece's "'formless' form makes much more sense in hindsight." The performances by the Rodland sisters are beyond praise. Carol's round, powerful viola tone is infinitely variegated and more than holds its own against the organ, while Catherine, always considerate of her partner, nevertheless

holds nothing back when the music requires it, and her use of registrations is consistently imaginative. The recording is ideally clear, with none of the churchy resonance that can afflict recordings of organ music.

*Add Viola and Stir.* Katrina Wreede, viola, *et al.* Vlazville Records VV-1001.

My acquaintance with Katrina Wreede goes back to a long-ago viola congress, when she came as near as anybody ever has to making me improvise on the viola and actually enjoy it. She was at that time a member of the Turtle Island String Quartet, which she has long left behind to pursue an amazing range of musical styles, of which this all-too-short CD gives a nice conspectus. Wreede defines her composing style(s) as "California Eclectic," and I can't do any better than that. The CD starts with a trio of bar-lounge compositions for viola, piano, and double bass—*Still Tuesday*, *Sierra Waltz*, and *Pleasant*—that had me reaching for that Martini (stirred, of course) within two bars. Later on come *Scenes*, an extended concert piece with harp of a more "abstract" hue, and the hypnotic *Invocation #3*, accompanied by assorted chimes. In between there are several pieces that originated in the collective composing project "60 x 60" and are accordingly around 60 seconds long. They include electronics (*56 Seconds of Creep*), multiple-tracking (*A Slough of Violas*), and other effects that I wouldn't like to spoil for the prospective listener. All this adds up to a most enjoyable recording for the curious at heart. Good news is that the sheet music is available through the artist's website. I have namely not gotten any better at improvising.

*Sprezzatura: Music by Paul Chihara, Paul Siskind, Benjamin Britten, and Paul Hindemith.* Shelly Tramposh, viola; Cullan Bryant, piano. Ravello Records RR 7818.