

American Record Guide

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

Festivals: Tanglewood | Gateways | IKIF

Minnesota Orchestra Summerfest

Naumburg's Summer Concerts

Bard SummerScape

Seattle Chamber Music Society

BBC Proms

Opera: Glyndebourne | Santa Fe

Glimmerglass | Cincinnati | Saratoga

Queen Sonja Vocal Competition

US \$7.99

November/December 2019



PICKER: *Fantastic Mr Fox*

John Brancy (Mr Fox), Krista River (Mrs Fox), Andrew Craig Brown (Boggis), Edwin Vega (Bunce), Gabriel Preisser (Bean), Elizabeth Futral (Miss Hedgehog), Andrey Nemzer (Agnes the Digger); Boston Children's Chorus & Modern Opera Project/ Gil Rose

BMOP 1065 [2CD] 84 minutes

Elsewhere in this issue I reviewed David Stanhope's opera of *Dracula*, lamenting in essence that it was bland, given its subject matter. I also think it has something to do with being able to compose an opera. Tobias Picker knows how to compose an opera and has written a number of excellent works for the stage. *Fantastic Mr Fox* (adapted from the Roald Dahl stories) is delightful from beginning to end. The music is hummable, expertly crafted, and a joy to listen to. There are arias, duets, trios, and even more complicated ensembles. The libretto by Donald Sturrock creates characters who are recognizable archetypes, ones we all can understand and relate to. The three villainous farmers join in some raucous ensembles. Mr and Mrs Fox have some lovely arias, and Miss Hedgehog is given a lyrical scene where she expresses her loneliness. There are also a Digger and a Tractor played by a countertenor and a

soprano. Everything is expressed in music filled with life and love.

The cast for this recording is wonderful. John Brancy has one of the most beautiful lyric baritones I've heard in a while. He and Krista River as his wife blend and play off each other most convincingly. The villains are sung by three well-contrasted voices. Edwin Vega's high, edgy tenor, Andrew Craig Brown's seemingly bottomless bass, and Gabriel Preisser's handsome baritone are enjoyable individually and collectively. I especially have to commend Brown for enunciating the words so clearly at the the lower end of the bass scale. Elizabeth Futral reminds us what a lovely soprano voice she has. It's no longer quite as pure as it once was, but that suits Miss Hedgehog very well. Andrey Nemzer is laugh-out-loud funny as the Digger. He sputters indignantly using his colorful countertenor and sings a harmonious duet with Gail Novak Mosites. Nemzer has been heard at the Met in their latest production of *Fledermaus*; I hope we hear more of him there and elsewhere.

Gil Rose leads his forces with ebullience and flair. Both orchestra and children's chorus are first rate. I love Picker's writing for the children, used primarily as choral interludes. They supply a loving contrast to all the musical hullabaloo around them. Excellent sound.

Picker proves that there are modern composers who can write operas. I've heard his *Emmeline*, *Therese Raquin*, and *An American Tragedy*. Now I'd like to hear *Dolores Claibourne*.

Notes and texts included.

REYNOLDS