



January/February 2020

PICKER *Fantastic Mr. Fox* • Gil Rose, cond; Krista River (mez); John Brancy, Edwin Vega (tn); Andrew Craig Brown (bbar); Odyssey Op; Boston Modern O Project • BMOP/SOUND 1065 (2 CDs: 82:41)

It's sometimes easy to forget that opera has a playful side, given its preponderance for serious and downright dark subject matter. Indulging that lighter side comes in handy for introducing young people to it in a manner that is both accessible and, dare I say, "fun" (in other words, maybe not Wagner or Britten). Tobias Picker's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, based on the Roald Dahl story, is a worthy candidate for such an endeavor. Although it's designed to introduce children to opera with its playful music and tale of anthropomorphic animals, Picker and librettist Donald Sturrock conceived this not as a "children's opera," but as a "family opera." It's a task they evidently undertook with great care, recognizing to their credit that children should not be talked down to, and that they can enjoy the whimsy as much as their parents might be able to appreciate the darker allegorical meanings at the heart of the story. That said, a Roald Dahl story seems a logical choice for such an opera. Ranging from playful and funny to outrageous and grotesque, there's something for every age group in this opera to enjoy.

Although scored for a full orchestra, much of the scoring is chamber-like, making it light and fun, appropriate for a family opera. And the BMOP/Odyssey Opera has a great time with it, embracing all of the absurdity and wackiness with supreme clarity and precision. **Andrew Desiderio**