

# American Record Guide

september-october 2008

Jiri Hanousek, vc; Janacek Philharmonic, Moravian Philharmonic/ Theodore Kuchar, Joel Eric Suben  
Centaur 2898 77 minutes

It's always encouraging to know that under the radar of *academe* there are composers everywhere writing intelligent yet attractive music in the romantic tradition. Charles Roland Berry's music is a case in point. Berry studied under Paul Creston and even had his own talk-radio show in Portland, Oregon (classical station KBOO) where he managed to wrangle phone interviews with the likes of George Crumb, John Cage, Benjamin Lees, Karel Husa, Ned Rorem, George Rochberg, and William Schuman. His own music resembles none of them but seems to embrace the general geniality of all sorts of romantic music from both America and Europe.

The two major works here are the Cello Concerto and his Symphony 3. The Cello Concerto has a beautiful cadenza in I that is backed by a flute; it will remind you of Ralph Vaughn Williams without sounding at all like that composer. Berry wisely allows the cello (confidently played by Jiri Hanousek) to engage in dancelike cadences that give the work its energy and aplomb. The Symphony 3 (no date is given for any work here--I'm assuming that they are of this decade) is another melodic masterpiece and at 28 minutes could easily find its place in the standard repertory (decades from now, as these things tend to happen). This work is performed by the Janacek Philharmonic with Theodore Kuchar as conductor and sounds (but only *just*) as if it might have wandered out of the Bohemian mountains or some Hungarian valley---yet it is truly American. I like this work tremendously. It's understated yet confident in its heartbreaking melodies and soft delivery.

The smaller works here are the *Mariner's Fanfare*, a minute and a half brass showcase (trombones and trumpets mostly), *Veery Thrush with Cedars*, a five-minute work that recalls Kenneth Leighton and John Ireland, and *Quileute Overture* for cello and orchestra. This last is a very edgy ten-minute romp that is more of an eclectic mix of thematic elements (certainly more so than the Cello Concerto).

This record came as a complete surprise, but then Centaur has been doing this of late. Excellent sound, keen performances. The Third Symphony alone is worth the cost.

COOK