

More From Less - CD Review

There are unusual aspects to this recording with which many listeners may not be familiar: 1) the composer, even though he is quite well-known and greatly appreciated by many; 2) the flute choir, of which there are many throughout the world; and 3) the bayan and the two bayan artists heard on this CD. This recording undoubtedly will form a new appreciation for all.

Yehuda Yannay (b. 26 May 1937, Romania) is an American-Israeli composer, conductor, film maker and performance artist. He has lived in the USA permanently since 1968. He retired from his position as Professor of Composition at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2004, where he was founder of the Music From Almost Yesterday concert series, now celebrating over 39 years of new music performances. Yannay has been a winner of many international and national composition awards. It is fortuitous that he and Stas Venglevski met in Milwaukee and became aware of the individual gifts they each had: Yannay as composer and Venglevski as interpreter, thereby resulting in new and excitingly new repertoire wherein the bayan would be heard.

The first composition on the recording "Bayanette For Two" features pianist Dana McCormick and bayanist Stas Venglevski. The work is described as "a lively conversation between the bayan and piano" where "The score alternates between sections of coloristic textures and rhythmic, dancey measures." Both performers show great musical skill in bringing out the intrinsic nuances of their instruments.

The repertoire for flute choirs is growing from the many transcriptions first made for it to an increasingly large list of original compositions. Founded and directed by the great French flutist, Pierre-Yves Artaud, The French Flute Orchestra, heard on this recording, is one of the world's foremost flute organizations. Yehuda Yannay was asked by Artaud to write a second new work for this unique ensemble of 24 flutes, which included bass and octobass flutes. Luckily for all, and because of his admiration for Stas Venglevski, the bayan was included in this new composition, Plus Avec Moins (More From Less), a three-movement work including: "Coming Up For Air," "...I Felt As If I'd Been Singing It A Long Long Time!" (Humoresque), and "Flirting With Spring. For this listener it is difficult to separate the sounds of the flutes from that of the bayan. The composer writes, "The seemingly simple, transparent musical constructions use only limited melodic and rhythmic materials: hence, the title of piece." And quoting further, "For the composer and the listener, this orchestra is like an out sized lung: you can hear the breathing of 24 musicians in the recording. The idea of including a bayan soloist with its "breathing" bellows naturally came to me." The work is dedicated to Stas Venglevski, who is heard prominently throughout as well as being featured in various short sections, particularly in the [second] movement. The descriptions by the composer will help the listener in developing his appreciation for this composition, one which deserves repeated hearings.

The well-known bayanist, Stas Venglevski, a native of Moldova now living in Milwaukee, has recorded other Yannay compositions in the past. Professor Friedrich Lips, the world-renowned bayanist of the Russian Academy of Music in Moscow, is the former teacher of and now a mentor to Stas. During one of his several concert tours to Milwaukee, they performed together the final piece heard on this CD, Bayannayab (choral), which was dedicated to them. It is indeed a "meditative piece." The very clever title "is a combination of the word "bayan" and "yannay" that can be read from the left and right." One may marvel at the extreme depths of sound shown by the bayans as well as the attention necessary to balance the contrasting highs in various measures. Rarely do we hear such long sustained phrasing performed with such artistry as heard by these two artists.

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