well-deserved rave reviews on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. This writer agrees and hopes the recording will help bring Foote's piano music the attention it deserves.

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Derek Bermel, *Canzonas Americanas*. Cantaloupe CD CA21088, 2012.

Derek Bermel's third solo compositional album, *Canzonas Americanas*, includes the title work along with *Three Rivers*, *At the End of the World*, *Hot Zone*, *Continental Divide*, and *Natural Selection*, all recent compositions performed brilliantly by Alarm Will Sound under the direction of Alan Pierson. These works share a titular connection to nature and situate the listener in a dizzying montage of the world's musics. In his liner note, Pierson explains that "this album draws together all of Derek's works for ... the one-on-a-part chamber orchestra that Derek calls 'the orchestra of the 20th century.'" For his part, Bermel has said that the standard orchestra "continues to hold a great attraction for me because it is an unusual example of collective humanity in our digital era; it is, after all, the largest musical community."[1] Bermel's chamber orchestra in these works is clearly a community he also knows and loves, one in which he revels, jokes, and parties.

Now in his mid-forties, Bermel is a highly honored composer and clarinetist based in New York City. He is commonly branded an "eclectic" for drawing inspiration from, for example, Bulgaria, Ghana, Brazil, and sundry jazz styles. To my ears, his classical music antecedents include George Gershwin, William Grant Still, Leonard Bernstein, William Bolcom, and John Adams.

Stylistic eclecticism has sometimes been justified as a form of realism: American culture is pluralistic and its music thus requires pluralistic styles.[2] Bermel's adoption of wide-ranging influences, however, springs from four musical sources. First, his native New York exposed him at a young age to a multicultural world in which folk music, twentieth-century classical, pop, bop, and hip hop all fascinated him. Second, his studies with William Bolcom speak loudly in his music, as do traces of his work with Henri Dutilleux, Louis Andriessen, and masters of vernacular traditions such as Nikola Iliev (Bulgaria) and Julio Góes (Brazil). Third, Bermel has singled out Olivier Messiaen:

> Messiaen was a composer who joyfully followed his own instincts and inspirations; he twisted and mashed them together, molding utterly original shapes. However eclectic both the basic components and the resultant forms may have seemed to others, to him they

[1] Derek Bermel, liner note to *Voices*, BMOP/sound 1008 (CD), 2009, 6. For Bermel's program notes, see www.derekbermel.com/music.

[2] Kyle Gann attributes this perspective to John Corigliano; see Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 221.

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> complemented each other harmoniously. Perhaps from Messiaen we can learn that there is value and vitality in embracing all the worlds to which we are inextricably drawn.[3]

Finally, in the spirit of orienting rather than pigeonholing, I suggest that Bermel can be heard as a "totalist," a term Kyle Gann defines as a branch of postminimalism that arose in 1990s New York and whose music balances the "sensuous and visceral" with "complexity and intricate musical devices."[4] Gann adds that the totalist uses "all of the musical resources available, so that Indian raga-like melodies may fit together with jazz harmonies within classical structuring devices." That this album appears on Cantaloupe—a label founded by the Bang on a Can collective, with which Bermel shares an insouciance, a regular pulse, and a fondness for complexity—further aligns Bermel's music with this New York-based, fellow Yale-educated group. Where such postminimalists often make rock a stylistic touchstone, however, Bermel turns to various jazz styles and folk traditions.

The works on *Canzonas Americanas* reflect Bermel's characteristic eclecticism and exemplary compositional technique. Despite the music's layered complexity, his harmonies remain resonant, his textures clean, his orchestration radiant. Bermel possesses an uncommonly discerning ear in an American music scene that too often prizes trends over technique. Gustavo Dudamel commissioned *Canzonas Americanas* (2010) for the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Green Umbrella series, with the express request that the work "consider the interconnectedness of North and South American musical traditions."[5] The first movement begins with a strange Appalachian funk; the effect is like salsa bleeding onto a hotcake or cilantro seasoning corn pone. Bermel calls the second movement "a simple Brazilian *chôros*—with a slight Bulgarian inflection." Incongruous at times, but also beautiful and captivating, the third movement, "Montuno Blue," seems to place Humphrey Bogart and Ludwig van Beethoven in a San Juan nightclub. The Beethoven paraphrase likely nods to Dudamel, the dedicatee. Bermel's program note calls it an "atonal salsa that recalls the spirit of two great pianist/composers: the Puerto Rican Eddie Palmieri and the American Thelonious Monk." The final movement, "Itaparica," delicately colors a bossa nova with silvery non-chord tones. The voice enters here for the first time with a mellow, surfside lyric by the composer.

The title of *Three Rivers* (2001) refers to three planes of music: low and slow; high and fast; and a line in the middle. The title also recalls Gunther Schuller's Third Stream fusion of jazz and classical music, an allusion strengthened by the performance indications referring to funk, swing, and bop, and by its near-quotations of Henry Mancini's "Pink Panther," Leonard Bernstein's "Cool," and similar punchy big band sounds. Twice during the piece, the score calls for the players to improvise for around two-and-a-half minutes. On this recording, however, the improvisations last less than one minute and sound more indeterminate than is suggested by the clear parameters written in the score.

[3] Bermel, "All the Things We Are: Learning from Messiaen," *Inspirations* (blog), 19 November 2011. http://www.derekbermel.blogspot.com/2011_11_01_archive.html.

[4] Gann, *American Music*, 326.

[5] Bermel, program note to *Canzonas Americanas*. www.derekbermel/canzonasnotes-2.

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*Continental Divide* (1996), Bermel explains, "was inspired by the chapter 'The Origin and Fate of the Universe,' in Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*. Hawking describes a 'chaotic inflationary model' for the universe, in which expansion is not constant, but rather progresses in smaller bursts, each of which defines a new phase transition."[6] Like many other pieces on this recording, it plays tattoo rhythms, sings tunes of parallel chords, fragments its frenetic ideas, layers voices of different tempos, and expresses a quirky, puckish humor. Finally, *Natural Selection* (2000) sets four songs on animals (flies, spiders, dogs, and humans) in a wry, macabre cabaret. The lyrics are by Nami Shihab Nye and Bermel's frequent collaborator, Wendy S. Walters.

Though unusually tuneful without being cloying and accessible without being clichéd, Bermel's music can also be challenging. He either asks listeners to uncouple his musical sounds from their stylistic and geographical sources—an unhearing I find unmusicological—or, more likely, he asks the listener to join him on a light-speed journey from one locale to the next, where a melody that evokes the Cotton Club cadences uncomfortably in a Galway pub. I find such style jumping to be disorienting, perplexing, and at times unnerving. Despite these reservations, I would like to hear Bermel apply his remarkable technique and creativity to more ambitious projects. Bermel's longest works are *The Good Life* (a thirty-minute cantata), *Thracian Echoes* (a twenty-minute orchestral work), and *Voices* (a clarinet concerto of under twenty minutes). Given the pop-song duration of most of the pieces on this disc, however, I wonder why Bermel so often applies his abundant gifts and research efforts to such light music, marking a heightened sense of the global village without saying much more than what fun it all is. Greater use of extended forms, contemplative moods, and serious subjects would enable Bermel to fully express the importance of his fresh and blithely democratic music.

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[6] Bermel, program note to *Continental Divide*. http://www.derekbermel.com/continentalprogramnotes.

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