



levelled and unstatic 'Voiles'. While the slightly dry recording renders left-hand figurations in 'Le vent dans la plaine' more like etchings than wispy murmurs, the presence of a solid dance-like pulse reveals 'Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir' in refreshingly firm light. Sheppard gauges the cakewalk rhythms of 'Minstrels' and "'General Lavine' – Excentric' to perfection and with a palpable sense of air between the notes, although he launches into 'La puerta del vino' too fast for the work's lilting habanera character to take hold.

By contrast, Sheppard's superb balances and subtle *rubatos* liberate 'Brouillards' from its often mushy performance history. The pianist especially shines when unabashed virtuosity is called for, as in 'Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest' and 'Feux d'artifice', while he builds 'La cathédrale engloutie' to a powerful central climax, observing the accelerations that Debussy made in his piano-roll recording but not in the actual score. For an encore, Sheppard graces his justifiably enthusiastic audience with a beautiful rendition of the composer's final piano work, *Les soirs illuminés par l'ardeur du charbon*. While one wouldn't want to be without the musical and sonic advantages distinguishing my preferred modern-day studio versions – Steven Osborne, Paul Jacobs, Jean-Yves Thibaudet – I can guarantee that Craig Sheppard's robust artistry will linger in your ear.

Jed Distler

Selected comparisons:

Jacobs (1/79) (NONE) 7559 79474-2

Thibaudet (8/96) (DECC) 452 022-2DH2

Osborne (10/06) (HYPE) CDA67530

Decker

'Decker Plays Decker, Vol 3 – Suite Dreams and Fantasies'

On this day, earth shall ring. El tigre. La pantera. Liturgical Suite. Ave maris stella. Jesu, dulcis memoria. Golden Gates

Pamela Decker *org*

Loft Recordings © LRCD1130 (67) • DDD

Played on the DA Flentrop organ of

St Mark's Cathedral, Seattle



Seattle's mighty Flentrop for Pamela Decker's own music

Aside from the regal Flentrop organ at St Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, the star of Tucson-based Pamela Decker's new recital of her own music (her third for the Loft label) is the nine-minute *La pantera*, composed in 2009 for the composer's husband, Ken Yuki, also an organist and composer. With a quirky narrative path that lands the listener in unexpected places like the best new Bach fugue you've heard in a long time, a sense of abandon unusual even for non-organists and Roger Sherman's full-range



'Unabashed virtuosity': Craig Sheppard plays Debussy's *Préludes*

recording, *La pantera* makes a perfect audiophile demonstration piece.

Also of note is Decker's *Golden Gates*, a *tour de force* that pays homage to the city of San Francisco through the arresting development and relationship of a series of themes representing, mostly at subtle levels, the diversity of ethnic influences that characterise the West Coast. Before devolving into a routine gathering of forces for the conclusion, there is real originality here.

While Decker's two suites of liturgical music are more conventional fare, two pieces written for Douglas Cleveland provide genuine musical excitement: *Ave maris stella* turns out to be an ear-bending adventure of considerable emotional complexity, and *Jesu, dulcis memoria* features a compelling stride to its massive final climaxes.

In addition to being authoritative, Decker's performances are marvels of liquid flow amid the Flentrop's vast reservoirs of sound, recorded by Sherman as naturally as any organ can be. After you get the hang of Decker's somewhat oblique booklet-notes, you realise how closely they describe the musical events you are listening to. **Laurence Vittes**

'Anniversaries & Messages'

Victoria Missa Alma redemptoris mater

Theofanidis Messages to Myself JS Bach Der

Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf, BWV226

Liszt Ave Maria D Lang again (after Ecclesiastes)

Yale Schola Cantorum / Simon Carrington

Delos © DE3436 (52) • DDD • T/t

Recorded live at Christ Church Episcopal, New Haven,

CT, December 9, 2011



Yale's choir honours local talent and composer birthdays

The Yale Schola Cantorum pays homage to four composers on its captivating new disc, 'Anniversaries & Messages', marking the 400th anniversary of the birth of Victoria, the bicentennial of Liszt's birth and the gifts of two Yale faculty members, David Lang and Christopher Theofanidis. Also included is a motet by Bach, who never needs milestones or university affiliations to be celebrated.

The programme's appeal stems in part from the variety of texture and style achieved by interspersing Bach, Lang and Liszt amid sections of Victoria's *Missa Alma redemptoris mater* and Theofanidis's *Messages to Myself*. By the time the ensemble returns to the diverse worlds of Victoria or Theofanidis, our ears have been drawn into other realms of unaccompanied choral enchantment.

Victoria's Mass abounds in interweaving lines for two four-voice choirs that convey reverence and ecstasy in equal measure. Four poets (Walt Whitman, Rumi, Amy Beth Kirsten and WB Yeats) are the inspiration for Theofanidis's cycle, which unfolds in a series of soaring phrases and velvety dissonances.

Lang's *again* achieves mesmerising beauty through slowly descending motifs and layered lines wedded to the composer's text (after Ecclesiastes). A similar ruminative quality, with added rapture, pervades Liszt's setting of *Ave Maria*, while Bach's motet, *Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf*, is an occasion for lilting and penetrating urgency.

Each score contains richly expressive material that tests the concentration and cohesion of its interpreters. As led with meticulous attention to words, balances and harmonic implications by Simon Carrington, the choir's former director, the performances are fresh, articulate and poised.

Donald Rosenberg