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CD Review by Colin Clarke

MOBILI • Georgina Isabel Rossi (va); Silvie Cheng¹ (pn)
• NEW FOCUS 268 (69:02)

R. DÍAZ ¿Habr^á alguien que en sus manos sostenga este caer?. ¹*Al fondo de mi lejanía se asoma tu casa.* **BOTTO-VALLARINO** ¹Fantasia, op. 15. **HEINLEIN** ¹*Duo*, “Do not go gentle”. **CORTÉS** (arr. Farias) ¹*Tololo.* **ORREGO-SALAS** ¹*Mobili*, op. 63. **GUASTAVINO** (arr. Kashkashian/Levin) ¹*El Sampedrino*

Fairly specialist fare, this: “Music for Viola and Piano from Chile” goes the album subtitle. The disc is dedicated to the memory of Juan Orrego-Salas, composer of the piece that gives the disc its title, and who passed away aged 100 in 2019.

But first, there comes Rafael Díaz (b. 1962) and his ¿Habr^á alguien que en sus manos sostenga este caer? (2009) for amplified solo viola. “Will there be someone whose hands can sustain this falling?” asks the title. Creating a rarefied sound world, Díaz writes melodies of pathos and yearning. It is worthwhile noting that this is not the Rafael Díaz whose *Concierto andaluz* Barry Brenesal so disliked in *Fanfare* 30:3—that Rafael Díaz was born in 1943. The present piece is influenced by the prayer-songs of the Pewenche people of the central and southern Andes, a group of people that see deity/deities and Nature as one and the same. Some of the indigenous music of this people is included in Díaz’s material. The idea of the amplification is to simulate a “lone voice in mountainous terrain,” to quote the excellent booklet notes; the piece is shaped from an opening gestural cry towards a place of meditation. It needs a soloist shot through with eloquence, and one need look no further than Chilean-American violist Georgina Isabel Rossi, born in Santiago and currently a member of the Hartford Symphony. She offers playing of strong character, integrity, and clearly possesses 360-degree technical command.

What is compositionally impressive is how Díaz uses compositional techniques as metaphor, here heterophony as a metaphor for wind. For the second piece by Díaz, *Al fondo de mi lejanía se asoma tu casa* (In the depths of my distance your house emerges, 2013), Rossi is joined by the Chinese-Canadian pianist Silvie Chang in this evocation of the Chilean landscape, specifically the composer’s walk to school every morning as a child. The piece uses a tune Díaz whistled as a child to keep the wild animals at bay on that walk. There is a sense of distancing, and of an atmosphere that is now more than a dream (the piano’s imitations of animal noises are subtly done here by Cheng).

Written in 1962, Carlos Botto-Vallarino’s *Fantasia* includes passages that the booklet notes rightly describe as “fidgety”; they are balanced by the languid, heat-haze lyricism of the rest of the piece. (Carlos Botto-Vallarino is also known simply as

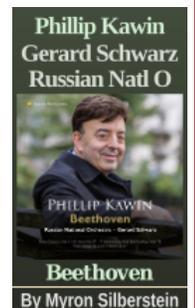
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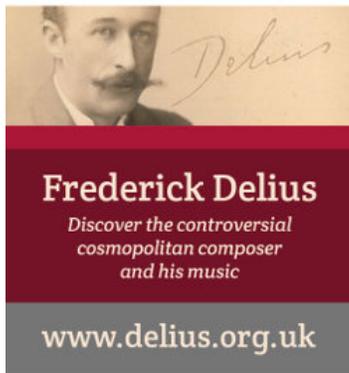
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Carlos Botto.) Of German roots, Federico Heinlein (1912–1999) was the son of an émigré who settled in Venezuela in the 1880s before moving to Argentina. Heinlein was raised in Buenos Aires, although he was actually born in Berlin; he became an assistant to Fritz Busch and Erich Kleiber at the Teatro Colón. The 1980 *Duo*, “Do not go gentle” (1985), with its titular Dylan Thomas reference, is Heinlein’s only work for solo viola (it was later arranged for clarinet and piano). The harmonic language is difficult to pin down: unique, somewhat piquantly fragranced, and very movingly conveyed here.

Named after Mount Tololo, home of the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory, David Cortés’s *Tololo* (2011) acts as an homage to the Coquimbo Region, a place that looms large in the composer’s family history. Cortés attempts to simulate the idea of a telescope zooming in on a planet as he “zooms in” on his musical fabric, transforming, and fragmenting it in a process of revealing multiple perspectives on his baseline material. Originally for viola and string orchestra, this is a strongly dramatic piece; there are only a handful of works by this composer reviewed on the *Fanfare* Archive, so it is good to introduce one more. Rossi’s ability to convey a sense of timelessness shows the piece in the very best light.

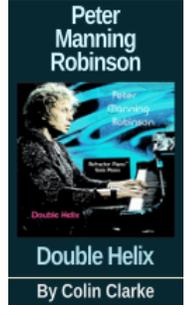
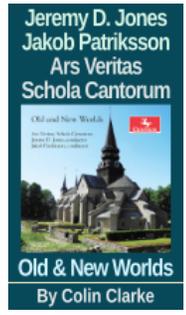
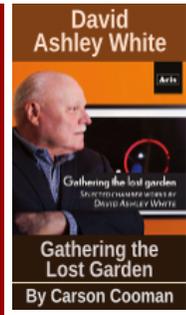
The piece by Juan Orrego-Salas that gives this disc its name, *Mobili* (1967) reflects the composer’s dual career of musician and architect (it sounds nothing like Xenakis, before you ask). Born in Chile, Orrego-Salas went on to become director of the Latin American Music Center at Indiana University. While *Mobili* might be structurally brilliant, it is also sonically attractive. It is Orrego-Salas’s only work for viola and piano and appears, in its whispered confidences, to be (mostly) at the other end of the scale to his *Missa* “in tempore discordine” reviewed by Benjamin Pernick in *Fanfare* 6:1 (that’s 1982). Personally, I had only come across his *Rústica* for piano before (*Fanfare* 36:2; the pianist was Paulina Zamora). *Mobili* is a fascinating work in four movements whose titles give clues as to the character of the music itself: “flessibile,” “discontinuo,” “riccorente” (recurring), and “perpetuo.” The longest movement, the third, is the most lyrical, and Isabel Rossi finds just the right cantabile against Silvie Cheng’s well-balanced, scrunchy chords. The angularity of the final “perpetuo” perfectly maintains the consistency of Orrego-Salas’s harmony while delivering a spiky, mobile finale; all credit is due to the quicksilver reactions of both Rossi and Cheng.

Finally, and offered in the manner of an “extra track,” there comes an arrangement by Kim Kashkashian and Robert Levin of *El Sampedrino*, a song from 1968 by Carlos Guastavino. It is the perfect encore. (Kashkashian, incidentally, had previously offered the only other recording of *Mobili*; all other works on this disc are recorded premieres.) Detailed documentation, fine recording quality, and performances of the utmost affection define this notable release. **Colin Clarke**

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