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Chilean Viola Music

Mobili: Music for Viola and Piano from Chile

Georgina Isabel Rossi, viola. Silvie Cheng, piano.

New Focus FCR268

Total Time: 69:02

Recording: ****/****

Performance: ****/****

Mobili takes its title from a significant work by Juan Orrego-Salas (1919-2019) that anchors this collection of music for viola by Chilean composers. Violist Georgina Isabel Rossi's program is a blend of works from the 1960s and the 21st Century exploring work by six composers. Rossi is a Chilean-born performer who has performed throughout the Americas and is currently a member of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. She is joined here by Silvie Cheng who is known for her championing of new music and has recorded with her brother on the *audite* label.

The program is organized with the opening five works being shorter pieces and the larger multi-movement work serving as the conclusion with a brief encore-like piece to wrap things off. Two pieces by Rafael Diaz (b.1962) open the album. The first of these, *Habra alguien que en sus manos sostenga este caer?* (2009), is for amplified viola and uses a prayer-like folk melody from the Andes' indigenous Pewenche people. The arc of the piece is related to the "sonorities" of prayer and opens with an ascending cry that will shift to a more lyrical, contemplative section. The outlines of the viola line suggest landscapes and there are musical gestures to also indicate bird calls. The Chilean landscape also informs Diaz's *In the Depths of My Distance Your House Emerges* (2013). The composer's ethnomusicological exploration of indigenous music is also present in this work.

The earliest work on the album is Carlos Botto's (1923-2004) *Fantaisie, Op. 15* (1962). His work is among those combining modernist tendencies and references to more traditional forms and genres, of which this work is a fine example. The open piano harmonies provide a careful underpinning of the almost romantic-like emotion of the solo line that moves into more intense segments as the motives of the piece are unpacked and explored in the work which has an excellent dramatic engagement whose episodic nature allows for a variety of challenges to overcome. Federico Heinlein (1912-1999) counts among his teachers Nadia Boulanger. His output focuses on poetic settings with the instrumental works often referencing poetry. That is the case for his *Duo "Do Not Go Gentle"* (1985) which takes inspiration from a Dylan Thomas poem. There are some really beautiful, folk-like romantic lines that provide a warm, emotional core to this music.

Tololo (2011) wraps up this first part of the program. Originally for viola and string orchestra, this David Cortes (b. 1985) work takes its inspiration from the home of an important observatory on Mount Tololo. The music follows the imagination of seeing through a telescope with its ability to see far and zoom in for new detail.

Mobili, Op. 63 is a four-movement work by Orrego-Salas (1967). The first movement has a sparse piano accompaniment and focuses on a long, lyrical line that grows slowly upward. The piano tends to provide signposts and will then revisit the material from the solo line, expanding the harmonic tension. "Discontinuo" is a contrasting movement of jagged and angular writing. Interaction between the soloist becomes heightened here adding to a sense of unease that keeps things on edge. In "Ricorrente", seems to blend a seeking out and have a veiled reference to *ricercare*, with its somewhat staggered commentary between the soloist and piano. The motivic idea introduced is expanded and explored between the two which sometimes come together. The longest movement of the four, it seems to also hold a stronger emotional core which is mined well here by Rossi. Things are wrapped up with a brilliant "Perpetuo" movement to provide more technical and virtuosic challenges.

As a bonus track, the program concludes with a transcription of the song *El Sampredrino* (1968) by the composer often called the Argentinean Schubert, Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000). His music fits into the more folk-inspired styles (a la Ginastera) with nods to the post-romantics. It makes for a touching conclusion.

While the music here tends toward more modernist contemporary qualities, the expressiveness of these pieces is captured beautifully by Rossi who navigates these moments of lyricism with beautiful playing. Her articulation for the rapid passage moments also works to aid the dramatic contrasts of the pieces on this program. The careful placement of these works also gradually expands the tonal palette so that the ear adjusts to the open, modern harmonies. When the music introduces a more romantic-tinged line, they stand out in stunning contrast to the quartal/quintal harmonic piano accompaniment which is handled equally well by Cheng. Perhaps it is the warm tone of the viola which also makes this album further inviting and certainly worth a look for those interested in expanding their musical world. Sound quality is excellent with a perfect balance of soloist and piano, both imaged well in the sonic picture. The piano has a nice warm quality with just enough ambience to warm things up and keep them from being too dry. This is due as much to the excellent performances that are captured in this fine release.