

[The Classical Review CDs/DVDs \(/cds-dvds\)](#)

- [Home \(/\)](#)
- [CDs/DVDs \(/cds-dvds/\)](#)
- [CD Reviews \(/cds-dvds/category/cd-reviews/\)](#)
- [DVD Reviews \(/cds-dvds/category/dvd-reviews/\)](#)
- [Articles \(/cds-dvds/category/articles/\)](#)
- [News \(/cds-dvds/category/news/\)](#)
- [Archive \(/cds-dvds/archive/\)](#)
- [Sites \(#\)](#)
 - [Chicago Classical Review \(http://www.chicagoclassicalreview.com\)](http://www.chicagoclassicalreview.com)
 - [South Florida Classical Review \(http://www.southfloridaclassicalreview.com\)](http://www.southfloridaclassicalreview.com)

Search

ORCHESTRA 2001 To the Point

July 01, 2011

By Michael Quinn

CASCARINO Blades of Grass***

HIGDON To the Point

REISE To the River Within*

RUDIN Canto di Ritorno**

SCHULLER Concerto da Camera+

Maria Bachman*, Diane Monroe** (violins), Dorothy Freeman*** (English horn), Orchestra 2001 / Gunther Schuller+,

James Freeman.

Innova 745



orchestra 2001

to the p

Higdon
Rudin
Schuller
Cascarino
Reise



http://www.amazon.com/s/?url=search-alias=popular&field-keywords=ORCHESTRA%202001%20To%20the%20Point%20%20%20Andrew%20Rudin%2C%20Diane%20Munroe%2C%20Dorothy%20Freeman%2C%20Gunther%20Schuller%2C%20Innova%20Recordings%2C%20James%20Freeman%20&link_code=wql&camp=212361&creative=380601&encoding=UTF-8

Now into its third decade, Orchestra 2001 has been an ardent (and consistently imaginative) champion of new American music both in the concert hall and the recording studio under the stewardship of its founder-conductor James Freeman.

Founded in 1988, the Philadelphia-based outfit's discography reaches double digits with this tenth release – its first for Innova Recordings – which couples four pieces composed during the last decade by living composers with the late Romeo Cascarino's 1945 setting of a poem by Carl Sandburg, *Blades of Grass*.

The album takes its title from Pulitzer Prize-winner Jennifer Higdon's *To the Point*, a re-working in 2004 for string orchestra of the third movement of her Fourth String Quartet, *Impressions* (which is available on Naxos, played by its dedicatees, the Cypress String Quartet.) Composed the previous year, the composer describes it as "a musical response to the artists of the Impressionist period in both music (Debussy and Ravel) and painting (Monet and Seurat)."

This new version tightens the focus of the quartet to the second movements of the Debussy and Ravel quartets, with Higdon nimbly lighting upon their mimicry of the exotic sounds and textures of a Gamelan ensemble (the appearance of which in Paris during the 1889 World Exposition caused something of a sensation.) There's something delightfully onomatopoeic about Higdon's gleeful use of dancing, darting pizzicato throughout the piece, a device that brilliantly conjures up the pointillistic daubing of a brush on canvas. Multiple themes run in parallel and entwine one into the other with nuanced ease, Higdon capturing the dash and immediacy of putting paint to paper with feeling for both impulse and expression. James Freeman conducts with an appropriate lightness of touch, the orchestral playing adroitly paced, well proportioned, and flowing with unforced naturalness of feeling.

Composed in the same year as *To the Point*, Andrew Rudin's *Canto di Ritorno* also has its origins in an earlier work, having begun its life as a one-movement sonata for violin and piano. The title alludes to Dante's *Inferno* both structurally and thematically: "canto" hinting at the singing nature of the violin; the single-movement concerto organized, as is the poem, by sections; and "ritorno" a reference to the re-emergence by Dante and his Roman poet guide, Virgil, from Hell into the world.

The revision stretches sonata form into the more robust guise of a violin concerto whose own "interior program" (in Mahler's words) deals with a period of personal crisis during which "the person dearest to me" (in Rudin's words) underwent a serious medical crisis before recovering.

That autobiography finds expression in music that is often pained, occasionally tortured and constantly underpinned by an emotionally wrought working out, its peristaltic moments of tumult, pandemonium and brief repose realized with enormous agility, sympathy and unflinching candor by soloist Diane Munroe and Orchestra 2001.

The most recent work here, Jay Reise's *The River Within* – composed in 2008 for Orchestra 2001 and soloist Maria Bachmann – is also a violin concerto. One, in fact, that shares some affinity with Jennifer Higdon's *To the Point*, its own "rhythmic polyphony" owing something to the hypnotic 'foreign' influences of jazz and the Carnatic music of southern India.

Composed for a Classical-sized orchestra, it adds spice to its formalist leanings by stripping the orchestral forces back to single winds and brass with the addition of piano (which operates as the default continuo) and a small selection of percussion instruments. The result is something both predictably spare and surprisingly lush, solo winds and brass proving slickly adept at providing astringently contrapuntal commentary on a solo violin line that, itself, soars into virtuosic reveries of 19th-century dimensions. Bachmann seems wholly inside the sinuous, labyrinthine twisting and turning of the music, the orchestral accompaniment delivering elegant framing and support.

Gunther Schuller's *Concerto da Camera*, which borrows its title from an earlier piece by the composer, was co-commissioned in 2002 by Orchestra 2001 and the ProArte Orchestra in Boston, where Schuller is Conductor Laureate. Like Reise, Schuller takes an unconventional instrumental approach, pairing flutes, oboes, trumpets and trombones with a small array of strings, harp and a sole percussionist.

With mellow tones all but eliminated – "very much like a painter who has always used the full color spectrum suddenly limiting his palette to, say, only black, gray, and blue-green" – Schuller makes much of the reduced timbral palette left to him to create something characterized by "a tarter, brighter, friskier sound." That's a claim perhaps best reserved for the second half of this through-played, *chiaroscuro*-contrasted, two-movement piece, its dusky, mysterious opening giving way, via sliding, otherworldly-sounding *glissandos* on high-pitched strings, to an agitated, seething and surging conclusion dotted with floating, darting, Will-o'-the-Wisp figures folding in and out of the orchestral landscape with Stravinskian impudence and imperiousness. It's an altogether engrossing piece and

beautifully realized, the composer himself keeping Orchestra 2001 simultaneously taut and tensile.

Dating from 1945, Romeo Cascarino's *Blades of Grass* is the oldest work in the program and the only one not to be recorded live in concert. To know that it was written while the composer was serving in the American army and inspired by the double Pulitzer Prize-winning Carl Sandburg's poem *Grass*, an ironic meditation on combatants who have suffered death through centuries of war – "Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo ... And pile them high at Gettysburg / And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun" – is enough to appreciate the heart-rending poignancy of what is, in effect, an extended lament.

Dorothy Freeman, whose performance of the piece in concert in 1994 prompted Cascarino to note on her score that she had "played the part better than anyone," is a hauntingly eloquent advocate for the piece. Orchestra 2001 accompany with due reverence for music whose melancholy wistfulness and fragile beauty lingers long after the final note. It leaves one wishing that Cascarino had found something in Thoreau or Walt Whitman worthy of setting.

All of these performances are premiere accounts on disc (the Cascarino excepted, having been previously recorded by the Philadelphia Philharmonia and JoAnn Falletta for Naxos in 2006) and all have been captured with impeccable attention to atmosphere and pristine detail in various venues in Philadelphia – the Trinity Center for the Higdon; the Perleman Theater at the Kimmel Center for the Reise; and the Lang Concert Hall at Swarthmore College, where Orchestra 2001 is the ensemble-in-residence, for the other three.

As an example of how intelligent, approachable, digestible and rewarding new American classical music can be, this new release has much to recommend it. A pity, though, about the drab, chilly-feeling sleeve image, which seems to suggest a darker, more monochrome experience than is provided here by a faultless orchestra-and-conductor team playing at the top of their game.

[Share This \(javascript:void\(0\)\)](#) [Share This \(javascript:void\(0\)\)](#)

Posted in [Featured \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/category/featured/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/category/featured/) Tags: [Andrew Rudin \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/andrew-rudin/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/andrew-rudin/), [Diane Munroe \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/diane-munroe/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/diane-munroe/), [Dorothy Freeman \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/dorothy-freeman/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/dorothy-freeman/), [Gunther Schuller \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/gunther-schuller/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/gunther-schuller/), [Innova Recordings \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/innova-recordings/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/innova-recordings/), [James Freeman \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/james-freeman/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/james-freeman/), [Jay Reise \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/jay-reise/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/jay-reise/), [Jennifer Higdon \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/jennifer-higdon/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/jennifer-higdon/), [Maria Bachmann \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/maria-bachmann/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/maria-bachmann/), [Michael Quinn \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/michael-quinn/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/michael-quinn/), [Orchestra 2001 \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/orchestra-2001/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/orchestra-2001/), [Romeo Cascarino \(http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/romeo-cascarino/\)](http://theclassicalreview.com/cds-dvds/tag/romeo-cascarino/)

Leave a Comment

Name (required):

Email (will not be published) (required):

Website:

Message:

Subscribe

 <http://feeds.feedburner.com/TheClassicalReviewCdDvd/> [CDs/DVDs RSS feed](#)

 <http://feeds.feedburner.com/TheClassicalReviewCdDvd/>

 <http://twitter.com/theclassicalrev/> [Follow on Twitter \(http://twitter.com/theclassicalrev\)](#)



[f](#)

Copyright ©2011 [The Classical Review \(http://www.theclassicalreview.com/\)](http://www.theclassicalreview.com/). All rights reserved. [Contact Us](#)

[/contact/](#).