



parallel universe in which classical music plays a meditative role susceptible to national and regional influences, in which colour, arc and serenity are the key imperatives, and for which Gerard Schwarz is the perfect conductor. The highlight is Hovhaness's Saxophone Concerto, in which Greg Banaszak milks the tone and timbre of his unaccountably neglected solo instrument in an irresistible series of romantic episodes, evocative at times of Tchaikovsky in his exotic *Nutcracker* mode. Each of the three movements includes diverting episodes and ingenious structural devices; the first, for example, ends unexpectedly with a quiet, genuinely moving fugue.

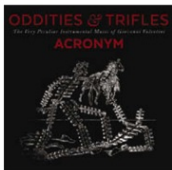
The disc starts off with *Prelude and Quadruple Fugue*, Op 128, a short but sumptuous *tour de force* written for Howard Hanson and the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Festival of American Music in 1954. Symphony No 48, *Vision of Andromeda*, however, commissioned in 1980 by the New England Conservatory of Music and here receiving its first recording, stretches out too comfortably into its half-hour length. Still, it's so seamlessly constructed that while it may be easy to lose the musical thread, it's easy to jump back in.

The Eastern Music Festival Orchestra is excellent throughout and the booklet-notes by Hinako Fujihara Hovhaness, the composer's sixth wife, provide inimitable insights such as: 'Travelling into the galaxy of Andromeda was an endless journey – so he wrote, and wrote, and wrote!' **Laurence Vittes**

Valentini

'Oddities & Trifles – The Very Peculiar Instrumental Music of Giovanni Valentini' Canzonas

ACRONYM with Beth Wenstrom *vn*
New Focus © FCR904 (68' • DDD)



Early music ensemble ACRONYM's third recording is devoted entirely to 17 canzonas by the now obscure Giovanni Valentini (c1582-1649), who rose from obscurity himself to become Hofkapellmeister of the Holy Roman Empire and play a part in the diversification of vocal music into purely instrumental roles. The title, 'Oddities & Trifles', a bow to the composer's slight rhythmic and metric eccentricities, headlines quite a pleasant CD.

Valentini's *Canzoni, libro primo*, printed in 1609 when Valentini was working in and



Jason Vieaux and Yolanda Kondonassis: 'Together' in lesser-known American repertoire

around the Polish court in Warsaw, showcases the quality that helped develop his reputation, leading him first to Graz and then to Vienna. Played with expertise, enthusiasm and an almost tactile sense of timbre by different configurations of ACRONYM's 12-member band, occasionally made more sumptuous by a theorbo/guitarist and harpsichord/organist, highlights include a 10-minute-long violin sonata of mellifluous beauty, a delightful organ solo and a concluding, harmonically haunting Sonata a 4 in G minor which may, viola da gambist Kivie Cahn-Lipman in his booklet-notes suggests, 'be possibly be the first notated *ppp* in music history'.

The sound, recorded at a historic 18th-century meeting house in rural New Hampshire, is intimate and quiet, and yet occasionally almost startling in its clarity and realism. Defining its interest in forgotten composers such as Valentini, ACRONYM stands for 'Altmusik Camerata Resurrecting Old – but New to You – Music'. Although Valentini might not have appreciated the name, he would certainly have fallen in love with the playing. **Laurence Vittes**

'Together'

K Fitch *Knock on Wood* Hovhaness *Sonata*,
'Spirit of Trees' Montsalvatge *Fantasia*
Pujol *Suite mágica* Schocker *Hypnotized*
Yolanda Kondonassis *hp* Jason Vieaux *gtr*
Azica © ACD71297 (70' • DDD)



Most of the music on this disc is likely to be unfamiliar to the general listener,

but not for much longer if harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and guitarist Jason Vieaux have their way. And why shouldn't they? Each is a splendid artist who has carved out a solo career on her/his respective instrument. Bringing them 'Together', as this disc is called, was a very bright idea.

It's smart partly because the repertoire and the performances dispel myths about what these instruments can offer. The harp isn't all heaven and the guitar isn't all earth and passion, as portrayed by composers who apply myriad colours and expressive threads using strumming, plucking and percussive techniques.

But no matter. Máximo Diego Pujol's *Suite mágica* delivers on the promise of its title with four Argentine-tinged movements of ardent allure. The three movements of Xavier Montsalvatge's *Fantasia* sing and dance in spicy and delicate Spanish flavours. For something blending the ethereal with exotic and natural worlds, there's Alan Hovhaness's Sonata for harp and guitar *Spirit of Trees*.

All of those pieces were written within the last three decades or so, and Kondonassis and Vieaux have set out to add to the canon for their special pairing. Two works they commissioned here receive first recordings: Gary Schocker's sweet and haunting *Hypnotized*, with a songful fourth movement entitled 'Together', and Keith Fitch's many-layered *Knock on Wood*, which indeed finds the musicians tapping on the bodies of their instruments when they aren't conversing with an almost rapturous sense of cohesion.

Donald Rosenberg