

Journal of the IAWM
International Alliance for Women in Music
Volume 21, No. 1 2015

Janice Misurell-Mitchell: *Vanishing Points*, pp. 45-46
Southport Composers Series S-SSD 0138 (2013)

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Vanishing Points is a collection of eight works by Janice Misurell-Mitchell, a composer on the faculty of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Written for a variety of instrumental combinations, the pieces are linked by a sense of intensity, even danger. According to the disc's liner notes, *Vanishing Points* is "how the listeners perceive the development of musical material." This development is the key to listening to each piece, as Misurell-Mitchell continually changes and transforms musical motives through fragmentation, wide dynamic contrasts, and repetition. Her style draws upon gestures from rock and jazz, in addition to classical approaches, and it engages the listener's attention and imagination.

Tension and risk are present immediately in the first track, *Agitación*. Aggressive and angular in character, the music reminds one immediately of Ligeti's *Désordres* etudes for solo piano. While it moves eventually into a "cooler," less agitated section, which sounds almost like a movie soundtrack, the aggressive nature of the piece as a whole is never far away. The combination of the fluid piano and crisp mallet percussion works well here.

Based on the gospel tune "Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground" by Blind Willie Johnson, *Dark was the Night* straddles well the classical and popular music worlds. Opening with strums and single-note melodic lines common to solo guitar music, the occasional appearance of bent pitches reminds us of blues influence. String noise from the guitar, frowned upon in traditional classical playing, is audible, but here it is not unwelcome. Misurell-Mitchell utilizes typical extended techniques for the guitar, such as slaps and slides, and while harsh accents create sounds that are almost unpleasant, they do not seem out of place. The piece has an improvised sound to it, although one assumes that it is fully composed. It would benefit the listener to hear the original "Dark Was the Night"; Misurell-Mitchell captures its haunting feeling, and the ending of her version is very reflective of early Delta blues guitar work. Maria Vittoria Jediowski delivers an impressive and satisfying performance.

Vanishing Points/Quantum Leaps is a three-movement work for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano that creates undertones of anxiety through silences and very soft long notes which alternate with brief, frenetic activity. Misurell-Mitchell makes effective use of clarinet trills and string tremolo on many of the long tones, enabling her to maintain the sense of agitation without having to sacrifice the ideas behind the melodic material. John Bruce Yeh (clarinet) and the Lincoln Trio offer an informed, persuasive performance of this complex work, each exhibiting a convincing technical and expressive proficiency.

Flute flutter tonguing, bends, and trills bring the listener right onto the slippery ice at the beginning of *On Thin Ice* as the marimba offers a steady arm for balance. Its unrelenting, repeating melody also provides the continuing sense of tension and risk that pervades all of the disc's compositions. The flute and marimba engage in a call-and-response dialogue, punctuated by harsh sung/played notes in the flute in a Jethro Tull-esque style. Writing for two such timbrally different instruments is a challenge well met by the composer; the contrast between the flute and marimba is exploited so as to avoid sonic confusion. Caroline Pittman (flute) and Gregory Beyer (marimba) skillfully engage in a spirited dialogue that sometimes borders on a duel.

Misurell-Mitchell's original *Deconstruction Blues*, for English horn and keyboard, was meant to challenge notions of the traditional settings for these instruments. This CD presents her arrangement of the work for Hammond B-3 organ and bass clarinet, a secondary "deconstruction" of sorts. Misurell-

Mitchell does not just attempt to re-create the blues with an unexpected instrumental combination but instead offers a different perspective (a variation on the “Vanishing Points” theme). One shouldn’t look for traditional twelve-bar blues, soulful melodies, or improvisation here. Instead, the offering is more of a sampling of generations of blues musicians’ riffs. Richard Nunemaker, bass clarinet, and Abraham Stokman, organ, bring an authentic vibe to this track.

Compression—in both the number of performers and duration of the piece—seems to rule in the final selection on the disc, *border crossing at sunset*. Scored for voice and flute, the work is performed by one person. Misurell-Mitchell is the performer and presumably the author of the poem recited at the beginning of the work. Its text is not provided in the liner notes, one of the few criticisms I have of the CD. The lyrics speak of “crossing to get away,” “crossing to get through,” plus repeated iterations of “border.” This is followed by individual words simultaneously sung and played, with occasional interruptions in the form of flutter-tonguing, harmonics, and accented pitches. The composer proves that she is an adept performer as well as a seasoned composer, communicating clearly the sense of danger and intensity that seems to be the album’s leitmotif.

Vanishing Points offers an intense but pleasurable experience in sound, imagination, and emotional depth. The performances took place in a variety of locations, including Milan, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Northern Illinois University, with no sacrifice or difference in recording quality as a result.

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