

**MORGAN HAYES**

## **VIOLIN CONCERTO & OTHER WORKS**

**Keisuke Okazaki** violin

**Jonathan Powell** piano

**Esbjerg Ensemble**

**Christopher Austin** conductor

This elegant showcase comprises nine works, of which the largest is the 18-minute, single-movement, chamber-scaled Violin Concerto, written in 2006 (and revised in 2009) for the present fine soloist. The piece moves with vigour and colour washes comfortably between avant-garde jaggedness and a sort of nostalgia for the traditionally violinistic. ... Powell is soloist on the densely expressionistic Slippage (1999), for piano and ensemble, and by himself plays four typically pungent works ... Hayes's version of Squarepusher's Port Rhombus makes a striking overture.

***Paul Driver, The Sunday Times***

The startle factor is high. Expect spontaneity and, in the piano pieces particularly, an impression that the gestural activity has been born out of improvisation, under the hands, with the surfaces worked as a painter might. Variations of density and intensity are present, cheek by jowl, and an abundance of contrasts which take one by surprise more often than not, as the endings certainly do, arriving like shutdown. Expect also the piano keyboard to be treated as a metaphor for musical space, like a canvas. Hayes is minded to be percussive rather than lyrical in his piano-writing and there are frequent passages reaching high saturation levels of horizontal and vertical activity. More interestingly, there are surprises, throughout the disc, which derive from his interest in approaching musical material of diverse kinds, as they do in the work of Michael Finnissy, his principal teacher.

NMC has given Hayes an attractive visiting card which makes me curious to follow what he will do next. I've had the pleasure of recognition in returning to most of what's on offer here, and I warm to the freshness. Excellent performances and recording all round.

***Stephen Plaistow, The Gramophone***

The music of Morgan Hayes is full of references to ordinary things, but with a suggestion of something dark. The most substantial piece is the Violin Concerto, which is beautifully played by Keisuke Okazaki and the Esbjerg Ensemble. Among the other pieces are some witty piano miniatures played by Jonathan Powell, and a delightful arrangement of Squarepusher's Port Rhombus.

***Ivan Hewett, The Daily Telegraph***

(The Violin Concerto) is a piece full of explosions and lyricism, the solo violin energised and sent spinning aloft by propulsive outbursts from the ensemble. I didn't know Hayes's music before this disc, which, by the way, is otherwise full of fascinating miniatures, but he is clearly a resourceful composer with a teeming imagination, and he has that rare ability to make (in the case of his Violin Concerto) sixteen players of acoustic instruments produce sounds you have never before heard and to arrest the ear with them.

***Andrew Ford, Inside Story***

<http://inside.org.au/musical-alchemy/>

Hayes's Violin Concerto (2006) is a seductive work, full of rapturous writing and striking sonorities, often fragile and evanescent, from both soloist and ensemble. It depicts the violinist's attempts to take flight and soar above the ensemble, often thwarted by percussive tuttiis ... Soloist Keisuke Okazaki has a thin but superbly focused sound, just right for the role he assumes in this piece,

and his performance, although never overdramatic, is full of passion. When he finally breaks free in a sudden explosion of energy and virtuosity near the end of the work, it's a joy to hear.

**David Kettle, *The Strad***

The focus of the first disc devoted to Morgan Hayes's music is a fine performance with Keisuke Okazaki as soloist of his 2006 Violin Concerto. It's the longest single span of music (at 17 minutes) the 38-year-old former pupil of Michael Finnissy and Simon Bainbridge has composed so far. Its starting point was a passage from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in which the character Lucky suddenly erupts into speech for the first time, and there is a sense in which the solo violin sometimes seems to be lecturing the ensemble, which is doing all it can to cut him short. Even without the literary subtext, though, the Concerto is a beautifully wrought piece, with long, expressive lines punctuated by fierce collisions, and underpinned with a clear tonal scheme. Clear, undogmatic musical thinking is also a feature of the other pieces, including the set of piano miniatures, *Strides*; the 2003 ensemble piece, *Port Rhombus*, based on a track by Squarepusher, and even the denser textures of the early mini piano concerto, *Slippage*.

**Andrew Clements, *The Guardian***

Solo piano features prominently, the First Book of *Strides* suggesting a leap across musical time and space besides evoking the archetypal jazz idiom as suggested by its title, while the Second Book of *Strides* is more integrated stylistically and more systematic in its backward traversal from unequivocal modernism to an expression where Baroque and even Renaissance traits are capriciously invoked. *Three Distressed Surfaces* makes inventive play with procedures that bear apt analogies to the visual connotations of the titles, whereas *Puppet Theatre* looks to the eponymous painting by Paul Klee in its gradual progression from disjunctive activity to simmering expectation; and *Lute Stop* vividly juxtaposes the chordal and the linear in what is almost a sequence of variations on its ongoing process.

With sound that is up to NMC's customary high standards, along with insightful notes on each work by Bayan Northcott, this is a highly recommendable disc of music from a figure who, among those British composers now approaching their forties, seems as likely as most to make the breakthrough onto the international stage.

**Richard Whitehouse, *International Record Review***

Bayan Northcott's notes reveal that Hayes's day job has been accompanying dance classes, and it shows in the sense his music gives of muscles in movement, as well as the sense – not unallied – of a beat all the more powerful for so often being averted. Hayes can do soft piano – one piece from his *Strides* series is a drift of Ivesian nostalgias (again the transatlantic accent) – but much more of his music for the instrument is dynamic, nervy, on edge.

All of this, however, is not to discount the achievement of delicacy and exhilaration in the disc's title piece, which is much the longest item (seventeen and a half minutes) and perhaps the most seductive, for its gorgeous scoring and for how the lyrical violin and the more abrupt ensemble (though either can influence the other) knock against one another and so, as in a pinball game, detonate bursts of active colour. Keisuke Okazaki is the outstanding soloist here and in the solo pieces.

**Paul Griffiths**

<http://disgwylfa.com/>

The violinist Keisuke Okazaki is a marvel. The way he captures the interplay between that lovely arching lyrical sense and this kind of sprite, hobgoblin dance quality – he gets beautifully well.

**BBC Radio 3 CD Review**

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