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The restless composer has had one hand in jazz, one in classical. Here he brilliantly blends the two, adding ethno-folk into the mix. Musically audacious, and one of the finest recordings you'll ever hear, period.



The three new Chesky works on this stupendous-sounding disc are easily his boldest, most ingenuous and fully realized compositions yet. One needn't be a classical music critic-and I've never claimed to be one-or even an experienced classical music listener (a claim I can make), to immediately grasp and appreciate both the conceptual audacity of the music, which melds traditional classical motifs with flamenco accents, South American folk music and contemporary jazz, and the skill displayed by the composer in weaving the thread of his concept throughout the three pieces. If you want a high-concept one line "treatment," how about "Chesky and Stravinsky Joyride South of the Border and Return to New York to write up the trip?"

The driving opening to the "Concerto For Violin and Orchestra" (soloist, Tom Chiu) sets the tone for the three pieces. The insistent string figures, accented by tympani are reminiscent of "The Rite of Spring," but the distant handclaps give the opening a staccato flamenco feel. The orchestration, featuring flutes, woodwinds, harp and glockenspiel paints with a broad yet delicate brush of cascading colors. Nervous energy abounds as the solo violin enters, leading the orchestra on a high energy chase around the main themes, with the violinist seemingly riffing more like a jazz soloist than a classical musician reading the notes, though of course that's what he's doing. Large bursts of bright colors alternate with patches of dark, lurking shadows, culminating in an insistent almost violent, unresolved climax.

The third movement, to my ears at least, references the Brandenburgs, Beethoven and "The Rite of Spring," all the while remaining true to Chesky's very personal, restless ethnomusical vision.

I'll skip the rest of the concerto's play by play because the annotation does a better job. You needn't know a *danzón* from a calzone, however, nor need you have a working understanding of the structure of the traditional concerto and how Chesky frames his composition around it, to be thrilled by this piece and literally riveted to your seat, both because of the music and the absolutely hair-raising high quality of the recording.

"The Girl From Guatamala," featuring solo soprano Wonjung Kim, sets a José Martí poem ("Poem No.9") translated and sung in English to Chesky's dramatic music, which continues the flamenco style handclapping motif, adding castanets to the mix. If the title has you involuntarily thinking "tall and tan and young and lovely," forget about it! The 7:33 piece tells the story of the girl from Guatamala who literally dies of a broken heart. Martí of course wrote the poem "Guantanamera," popularized by The Weavers.

Finally, there's the "Concerto For Flute and Orchestra" (Jeffrey Khaner, flute), which continues the Euro-classical/flamenco/Brazilian/Argentinian thread, drawn by the sensual, hypnotic and often intense and angular flute lines. As in the other two pieces, violent collisions bracketed by vistas of delicate beauty and intricate counterpoint fill the air in a brilliantly choreographed dance of disparate cultures. Fireworks abound throughout, with Chesky not allowing a measure's worth of filler to interfere with the musical tempest he's created.

The playing by all involved in the Area 31 ensemble is riveting and totally sympathetic to the difficult task of mixing jazz, classical ethno-folk and whatever else Chesky throws into the mix. When you read the musicians' credits, that will come as no surprise. Violinist Chiu has performed with everyone from John Zorn to Ornette Coleman. Jeffrey Khaner is principal flutist of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

This disc is a modern, reference quality sonic spectacular that will test the limits of your audio system's ability to deliver dynamics, spaciousness and weight. There are some stunning, yet subtle deep bass drum thwacks in the second movement, among other noteworthy fireworks.

The disc opens with a few seconds of "room noise," and if you're system does deep bass, you'll feel as if you've been transported to that room. Then all hell breaks loose on one of the most spacious and transparent soundstages you're likely to hear on your system-especially on the SACD layer. I have yet to listen to the multi-channel mix. Instrumental timber and three-dimensionality are first class, and there's an incredible ease and openness to the recording that is truly rare in my listening experience. Dynamics are literally hair raising and with the lights out, you are there. This is David Chesky's finest moment as a composer as far as I'm concerned, and his label's as well.

If you've gotten this far into the review, you need to own this disc both for the absolutely stunning sound and especially for the audacious music.