

**Review of 3 Concerti. Concerto for piano and orchestra by Alexina Louie, Concerto No. 1 for piano and orchestra by Violet Archer, and Piano Concerto by Larysa Kuzmenko (2010), by Christina Petrowska Quilico**

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void. It now lies in the hands of other scholars to paint the rest of the picture.

Iain Gillis  
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Christina Petrowska Quilico: *3 Concerti. Concerto for piano and orchestra* by Alexina Louie, *Concerto No. 1 for piano and orchestra* by Violet Archer, and *Piano Concerto* by Larysa Kuzmenko. Centrediscs, 2010. CMC CD 15610.

This new release under the Centrediscs label is quite unique: it consists of three piano concerti by contemporary Canadian women composers, performed by a prominent female Canadian artist who is known for premiering and promoting new music alongside the more traditional Classical and Romantic canon. According to the liner notes, this project of women's piano concerti was the result of teaching graduate classes in gender and performance at York University, where Christina Petrowska Quilico wanted her students "to hear the brilliance of Canadian women composers, especially in live performance." These recordings of concerti by Alexina Louie, Violet Archer, and Larysa Kuzmenko seem so amazingly flawless that it is difficult to believe that they are, in fact, live performances.

As is typical of Louie's style, *Concerto for piano and orchestra* is a blend of eastern and western influences and is highly dramatic. Her piano music is particularly notable for its contrast of aggressively rhythmic chordal sections with incredibly fast

passagework, and this work is no exception. At the same time, I appreciate that the piano isn't always featured as a solo instrument; it is fascinating to hear how it shifts between foreground, middleground, and background, sometimes merely adding texture and colour to the orchestra. Unsurprisingly, Petrowska Quilico interprets her varying roles as a pianist well.

Louie's concerto is very technically demanding and requires much stamina on the part of the pianist. The first and last movements in particular run the risk of sapping a performer's strength and energy, and absolute precision is necessary for the fast running lines, glissandi, and quickly-leaping chords. Although the middle movement is more impressionistic, textural, and lyrical, it requires a perfect balance of controlled dexterity and expressive freedom of movement to produce the delicate, shimmering textures that dominate the piano part. Despite the work's inherent challenges, Petrowska Quilico by no means disappoints: as has come to be expected of this internationally-acclaimed performer, her playing is sparkling, energetic, and powerful.

After listening to the brilliant performance of Louie's piece, I am a little disappointed by the quality of the audio in the recording of Violet Archer's concerto. While I have few complaints about Petrowska Quilico's interpretation and performance of the work, it is particularly noticeable in the solo melodic passages of the second movement that pitches in the upper register of the piano have a slightly odd quality to them; they lack a certain richness and don't seem to sing out as they should. Despite the audio quality, Petrowska Quilico delivers another satisfying

performance, although at a couple points in the first movement I found myself wishing that the fast running passages in the piano were a touch crisper and brighter with less pedal.

Archer's concerto can be identified as neo-classical in style, and I particularly enjoyed the playful, folk-like opening theme of the first movement. The second movement is more lyrical, while the third movement is particularly energetic and exciting, again showing off the pianist's exceptional virtuosic abilities.

Kuzmenko's concerto, on the other hand, is more heavily influenced by the epic works of the Romantics such as Rachmaninov. There is a delightful crispness to Petrowska Quilico's articulation in the first movement which is impeccably mirrored by the orchestra in the sections featuring woodwinds and plucked strings. The contrasting sections of lyrical melodies, lush harmonies, and atmospheric textures with driving, intense rhythms recall Kuzmenko's dramatic solo piano work *In Memoriam to the Victims of Chernobyl*. However, it is the second movement that I find particularly compelling: in the first variation of this theme and variations, Petrowska Quilico achieves a wonderfully sparkling, crystalline quality in the upper register of the piano that is further highlighted in the orchestra with the use of vibraphone, glockenspiel, wind chimes, and high string harmonics.

The pianist's exceptional precision and dexterity is evident in the minutiae of the performance: for example, the very fast repetition of a single pitch, which initially draws the listener's attention due to its exposure in terms of registration, orchestration, and duration, is played perfectly clearly and evenly,

maintaining intensity throughout. Like Archer, Kuzmenko reserves the most energetic and virtuosic elements for the final movement, and Petrowska Quilico neatly navigates the difficult angular and rhythmic themes that travel between registers.

Although already a highly musical and sensitive interpreter of new music, not to mention extremely technically proficient and dynamic, Petrowska Quilico was fortunate to be able to consult with each of the three composers prior to the performances, which is the unique benefit of performing works by living composers. In fact, Kuzmenko's concerto was specifically written for Petrowska Quilico, and this disc captures the world premiere performance. *3 Concerti* would be an excellent addition to the audio library of anyone interested in exciting new Canadian music or superior piano performance.

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