**FANFARE**

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022

ERYLMAZ Dances of the Yoğurt Maker. Hoppa! 3.1 Miniatures: Sets Nos. 4 and 5.2 Thracian Airs of Besime Sultan. Insistent Music3 • Carpe Diem Str Qrt; Erberk Erylmaz (1, 2darbuka, 1, 2davul, 1, 2wooden spoons, 3pn) • MSR 1786 (60:11)

Well, this is a ride and a half. I had no idea really what to expect from the front cover of the disc except for some folk dancing. That is certainly nailed in place, in music of vibrant life. The gritty beginning to Dances of the Yoğurt Maker (2014) sets the scene and initiates a set of eight “improvisations” on Turkish folk dances for string quartet. The origins of the music lie in Southern Turkey, famous for its yoghurt and dairy products (hence the title); all songs used are love songs that use dairy products as a methodology for communicating this most elusive of emotions. There is stomping, and some calling out by the performers. It is quite the achievement to convey the energy of the piece within the confines of a studio environment, but somehow the Carpe Diem String Quartet manages it. The plaintive melodies (the penultimate movement) are beautifully done. Erberk Erylmaz plays a variety of percussion including spoons, the darbuka (a goblet drum), and the davul (a large drum played with mallets).

The darbuka recurs in Hoppa! 3 (2015), which also features the string quartet. The piece shifts its melodic emphasis to folk music shared between Turkey and its surrounding countries. The title, Hoppa!, is a common Turkish cry (presumably close to the Greek “Opa,” which I seem to remember from personal experience is an exclamation that punctuates traditional dances). There is more space for reflection here, which puts the more manic passages into higher relief; one experiences their chthonic grittiness all the more. Parts of this performance are positively joyous (the third movement); the near stasis of the work’s next panel is hugely effective after all that brightness, as is the extended passage for solo violin and drum. It has a sort of bareness combined with primal power that can surely only work out in the wild reel of the finale. The recording throughout is astonishingly present (Rice University, Houston, Texas).

The title Miniatures actually refers to a painting type popular in the Ottoman Empire as opposed to a musical miniature, although obviously the latter applies too. The string quartet imitates the kemençe (an instrument also sometimes referred to as a rebab), a traditional bowed instrument used in Turkish classical music until the late 18th century. The pieces also feature the davul drum, the oldest known percussion instrument. Again, the remit is wide emotionally, taking in whispered time (as in “Taksim” from Set No. 4) and the more extrovert (literal) stomping grounds of the more extrovert numbers.

The feeling of improv once more permeates Thracian Airs of Basime Sultan (2019). It is dedicated to the composer’s grandmother, who was actually from Thrace; “Besime Sultan” was the family’s affectionate nickname for her. As befits such a dedication, the music feels if anything more heartfelt. Thrace now takes in Turkey and Romania, and there are examples of both regions here. Finally, there comes the less geographically-specifically titled Insistent Music for piano quintet (2019). Given the irresistible force of the music’s optimism, there is something of a dissonance between that and the traditionally more sedate, reined-in medium of the piano quintet that adds to the spice of the piece. Parts of the piano are “prepared” in the interior movements (movements two through four; there are five in total). The result is a rattling sound; the composer takes the idea not from Cage particularly but more from the “janissary pedal” on some 18th-Century keyboard instruments that added sounds intended to invoke a Turkish march or suchlike. There is some contrast, but even here there is repetition, as if waiting to take off at any moment.

This is a fascinating disc. Perhaps it is best to take in one piece at a time; there are a lot of short movements here. But the performances are faultless, as are the production values, and the music itself is well worthy of your time.

Colin Clarke

#### This article originally appeared in Issue 45:3 (Jan/Feb 2022) of Fanfare Magazine.