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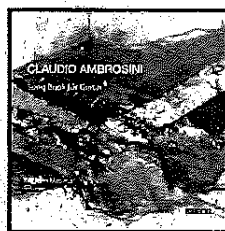
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Albert Tiu



Carpe Diem  
String Quartet



Andrew Smith



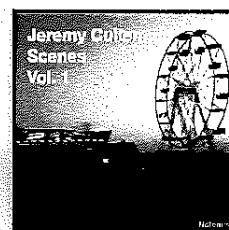
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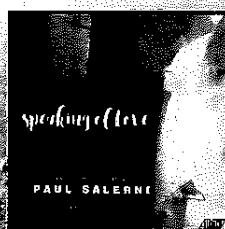
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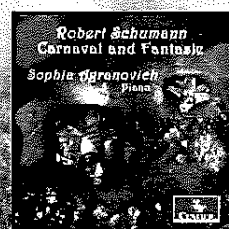
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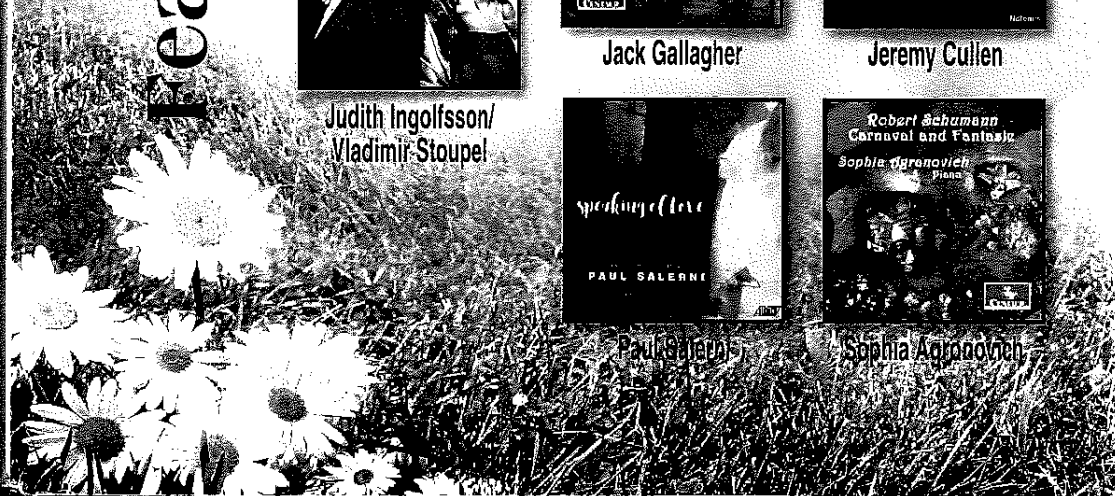
Jeremy Cullen



Paul Salerno



Sophia Agnonyan



pieces traverse quite a few decades.

Sadly, there is not a great deal listed by Ambrosini on ArkivMusic, although a disc of his piano music on Stradivarius performed by Aldo Orvieto (33908) has certainly caught this reviewer's attention. Given the length of Ambrosini's works list so far ([composers21.com/compdocs/ambrosic.htm](http://composers21.com/compdocs/ambrosic.htm)), it seems only right to conclude this review with a cry for more of his music to be made available, while acknowledging that Mesirca's disc is a giant step in the right direction. The idea of an *opera buffa* (*Il giudizio universale*) from Ambrosini's pen is particularly intriguing. **Colin Clarke**

## Inspired by Poetry: The Songs and Chamber Music of Paul Salerni

BY DAVID DEBOOR CANFIELD

*Fanfare* readers have previously met Paul Salerni in 34:4, wherein he was interviewed by Henry Fogel. In my own interview with this fascinating composer, whose music I've reviewed on two occasions prior to this one, I obviously do not wish to reinvent the wheel, and so have attempted to cover areas not dealt with by my esteemed colleague. I contacted the composer in January of 2017 for the exchange that follows below.

*I'd like to begin by exploring a subject that is obviously dear to your heart, and that is your family. First of all, it was your wife, Laura, who brought you into contact with the poetry of Dana Gioia. How else has she impacted your life and your music?*

Laura is an opera and theater director. When we first met I wasn't a big fan of Italian opera, a disgrace considering my ethnic heritage. She convinced me of the value of the direct emotional communication in composers such as Verdi and Puccini. It's a quality I have allowed myself to embrace and champion. Laura was also the person who suggested that I do an operatic adaptation of an episode of the Dick Van Dyke show. The result, *The Life and Love of Joe Coogan*, is one of my favorite projects and led to my interacting with Carl Reiner and his poet daughter Annie. A previous Albany CD (*Touched*) features a song cycle on Annie's poems. Of course, there's so much more: Laura was my guide to the feminism displayed in my orchestral *FABLES* (for which Dana wrote the narration), the director of the definitive stagings of my operas, my fellow lover of all things Italian and Beckettian, and the wonderful mother of my wonderful children.

*I also note the participation on the present CD of your two sons, violinist Domenic and percussionist Miles. How did you foster a love for music in them, and how old were they when they decided to follow a musical career?*

Well, there were always musicians and music in the house. More importantly, we had both boys start to learn to play the violin using the Suzuki Method at the age of three and a half. I have a sister-in-law who is a Suzuki teacher, and I eventually served on the Suzuki Association of the Americas Board of Directors. Two years of that service were as its chair. All of this is to say that I believe in starting children in music as early as possible, not necessarily with the idea of having them become professional musicians, but rather with the idea that music is a vehicle for training a beautiful heart (Suzuki's words) and a great way to learn to interact positively with one's fellow human beings. After a visible childhood as a young violinist, Domenic was faced with the choice of going to a fine liberal arts college or a fine music conservatory. I believe when he chose the latter, he had made up his mind to be a musician. Miles was an interesting case. At the age of five, he announced to us that he wanted to play percussion. Although we asked him to learn violin and piano first, when the time came for percussion lessons (age 12), he was ready. He has since stuck to the very difficult path of becoming an orchestral percussionist. You might be interested in an article written in the *New York Times* this summer about Miles's perseverance: [nytimes.com/2016/07/25/arts/music/at-tangle-wood-a-young-musician-leaps-from-the-stage-crew-to-the-stage.html](http://nytimes.com/2016/07/25/arts/music/at-tangle-wood-a-young-musician-leaps-from-the-stage-crew-to-the-stage.html)

*I read the article, and it portrays an interesting synthesis of your son's talent and persistence!*

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*Have either of your sons ever composed music, and if so, how have you guided them in this?*

Both have had some experience writing music. Domenic has had some interesting projects: a setting of a Billy Childs poem, a score (violin and cello) for a film promoting the Maltz Museum in Cleveland, and a somewhat composed, somewhat improvised score for *Inferno*, Italy's first silent film (1911). The latter was written for violin and bass and was Domenic's final project in a seminar in Italian neo-realist cinema he took while he was a music graduate student at Yale. Miles's forays into composition include a setting of a poem by his best high school friend, a string quartet, and an arrangement of a pop piece for the percussion ensemble at the Round Top Festival in Texas. In all cases, I gave them no guidance.

*You stated in your interview with Henry Fogel that your music is different because of your becoming familiar with—and setting—the poetry of Dana Gioia. Could you open that up for us a bit—can you guess in what ways your music would be different now had Laura not chanced upon one of his poems in The New Yorker?*

There are so many ways that Dana's poetic words and our activities together have shaped my music. In the most general sense, I found my voice when I found Dana's words. His Italian lyricism provoked mine, his penchant for writing immediately appealing, "popular" poems, allowed me to incorporate into my own music the popular idioms I loved, his embracing traditional poetic forms opened the door to my re-examinations of traditional musical forms. In a deeper sense, I always feel like I am simply the musical translator of Dana's words. His poems are almost always musical, hence my real job is to realize the music that is already there.

I also witnessed this "finding of voice" with my composition teacher Earl Kim. When he found the writings of Samuel Beckett and started to set those words in the most economical, true-to-the-poet fashion, he found his own voice. Interesting paradox that in trying to realize the artistic voice of another human being, one actually finds one's own, that by surrendering yourself enough to embrace another, you embrace yourself.

*Speaking of Kim, you've become quite an authority on the music of your erstwhile composition teacher at Harvard. What led you into this interest in his music? Did your interest develop before, during, or after your studies with him?*

I only knew of Earl Kim by reputation before I started studying with him. In my first few years as his student, I did not have a particularly close relationship with him. After he saw me conduct a Mozart opera, he asked me to assist him in the second of his evening-long music-theater works (*Narratives*) that use the words of Samuel Beckett. That event happened during my final year as his student. As the musical coach for the great actress Irene Worth and the conductor for the single conducted piece on the program, I had to learn his music intimately. That was a revelation—his music was so perfectly matched to Beckett's words, so economically expressive, so beautifully made and radical at the same time. It set the standard for my music, and in some ways, trying to reach that standard was initially a block. When I found Dana's words, the unblocking started. In fact, one of the songs on this CD was one of the first moments when I started to find my voice. "The Song" is a poem of Dana's written "after Rilke," that is, as a loose translation of Rilke. It happened to be the case that Earl Kim was in the midst of setting Rilke (*The Seventh Dream*, *Coronet*, etc.) at the time. So when I sat down to set Gioia's "The Song," I had it in my mind that I would set it "after Kim" as Dana had written his poem "after Rilke." The idea was to try to write the song the way I thought Earl would have. The result was not really Earl's voice, but rather a song that relied on his economy of expression, his direct and simple (not simple-minded) translation of words into music. In trying to imitate Earl's voice (impossible), I started finding mine.

*With the variety of styles you employ, not only in Tony Caruso's Final Broadcast, but in the songs on the present CD, would you call yourself a "poly-stylist" or some similar term? The advantage of stylistic fluency is probably obvious, but do you see any disadvantages in writing in so many diverse styles?*

I'm not sure I want a stylistic label for myself. I believe the content of what needs to be communicated in a piece should dictate the "style." Maybe, I'm an "idea-ist." I try to follow the paradigm set up by my musical grandfather, Arnold Schoenberg, when considering style and idea.

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*The String Quartet no texts. How does it aspects of love, as the*

This quartet was in at the time. So a duet for violin and of a larger ballet entire cause when we lived and taught Domenic ethnic heritage is Celtic wrote was a jig. That good dance movement trio was a lyrical experiment the final movement quartets, about the entire piece, abstract as it is

*You explain the below), but aren't you quartets? Would your instance? Or, would you eventually be perform*

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*In Fogel's interview,*

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He put primacy on the idea, that the idea of a piece will dictate its style, that your job as a composer is to find the most effective, economical language and structure to realize the idea of a piece. A recent example: I have been setting some poems by Cynthia Rylant, one of which ("Bed") describes a married couple with seven children who have to very quietly make love with the children asleep in the room. That quiet and restrained love-making seems to me embodied in the bolero, so I use the rhythm and language of bolero to set the piece. The style is dictated by the idea.

*In your previous interview, you also jokingly refer to disagreements in how you wanted to set some of Dana's material with him, referring to the vigorous disputes of two hot-blooded Italians. Obviously, your friendship with Dana transcends any disagreements, but in settling these disagreements, was one of you able to convince the other of the validity of his position, or did you find some middle ground where each of you could be happy (or at least equally mildly uncomfortable)?*

The most memorable and productive instance of this *litiga* (arguing) between us was the creation of the final scene in *Tony Caruso's Final Broadcast*. Dana had supplied me with the text for the first nine of the 10 scenes of the opera, and I pretty much set what he gave me. By the way, the variety in approaches in those scenes is a good example of my wanting to use the most direct and economical means to communicate the idea/emotion/picture of a musical moment. The challenge there was to make it all cohere, a challenge I hope I faced well, but with no small help from the clever verbal pivots provided by my partner.

Without giving away the entire story of the opera, I wanted to have a final scene where there was a clear romantic or erotic interchange between the main male character and one of the three female visions that visit him during the course of the opera. Dana had something more abstract in mind, something a little more spiritual. In the end, he found a way to make that final scene both spiritual and erotic. I think it is one of the best moments in our work together. After all the performances of the piece, audience members have had animated conversations about exactly who this woman was: a lover, Death, a bringer of redemption, etc.? And, at the same time, I have happily witnessed tears in the eyes of audience members as the piece ends. Somewhere in between Dana's and my notion of this climactic scene, something special and unique happened.

*The String Quartet 1.5 that closes this recital doesn't seem to have any program, and certainly no texts. How does it fit in on the disc, given that it also doesn't seem to have any reference the any aspects of love, as the songs all do?*

This quartet was commissioned and premiered by the string quartet my son Domenic was playing in at the time. So I had him always in mind and in ear when I wrote the piece. I had just written a duet for violin and timpani (*The Oak and the Reed*) for him and his brother, a piece that was part of a larger ballet entitled *FABLES*. The music for that balletic duet has Celtic echoes, probably because when we lived as a family in Italy, Domenic's violin teacher also played in a Celtic folk band and taught Domenic some of the elements of the style. (Besides which, the maternal half of my sons' ethnic heritage is Celtic.) With the *Oak and the Reed* in mind, the first music for *Quartet 1.5* that I wrote was a jig. That jig eventually blossomed into the "Gigue" movement of the quartet. Like all good dance movements, the Gigue has a Trio. I knew as soon as it came to me that the tune of that trio was a lyrical expression of love for my sons. It is my favorite tune in the piece and returns to begin the final movement. I could go on about the quartet expressing my love of the late Beethoven quartets, about the erotic love demonstrated in the third movement, etc., but suffice it to say, this piece, abstract as it is, is full of love.

*You explain the reason for its fractional number in your program notes (as I do in the review below), but aren't you afraid of creating confusion among quartets who might want to program your quartets? Would your next quartet, should you write another one, be given the number 2 or 2.5, for instance? Or, would you renumber your first effort as No. 1, should its second and third movements eventually be performed and/or published?*

No, I'm not worried. Who knows if I'll write another pure quartet, and if I do, it may not have a number. And if string quartets want to program the pieces, I'll call the piece whatever they want me to call it if they are kind enough to play it.

*In Fogel's interview, you speak of the marginalization of the arts in our contemporary American*

culture—the story, essentially, of your opera Tony Caruso's Final Broadcast. Is there any way to reinvigorate the arts in this country? Is there any hope that contemporary composers of art music in this country will see a future where their supply of new compositions doesn't greatly eclipse the demand for them? In short, what do you see as the ultimate role of the composer in America in the 21st century?

This is a question everyone in classical music wrestles with daily. I wish I had a magic bullet. I like to think that having children involved in making art early in their lives makes them art lovers for the rest of their lives. There is research that says that the imprinting period for musical taste happens in early adolescence. Maybe getting middle school-aged kids to great classical concerts on a regular basis would be a start. As far as being a composer in America in the 21st century goes, I would hope that we composers could find means of expression that don't compromise our personal integrity but still speak immediately to audiences of many backgrounds. This is something I have tried to do in my music. As Dana has implied in his seminal essay, "Can Poetry Matter," we as artists should not simply write for each other, but also for an engaged and informed public. Reaching a living audience is not a bad thing for a contemporary composer.

*You often perform your own music as a pianist or pianist accompanist. Has performing before an audience affected you as a composer?*

Certainly. You learn what works both from the perspective of the performer and the audience. I continually encourage my composition students to get their hands dirty, to physically know what it is to make music, to experience both the difficulty and joy of this great art. After all, composers need the enthusiasm of performers in order to have their art realized. I try to make my music challenging but doable and fun. I hope that's reflected in the performances by the excellent artists on this CD.

*A good number of your works utilize singers. Are there other genres you have yet to write in that you would like to?*

I would love to write more for the dance. One of the thrills of my life as a composer was the first time I saw the RIOULT Company dance to the music I wrote for the ballet *FABLES*. As you'll see below, Dana and I are in the midst of a hybrid opera/ballet composition.

*Do you have any other CD projects in the works (or at least in mind)?*

Yes. During the spring of 2016, I wrote three song cycles for the superb mezzo and guitar duo of Jessica Bowers and Oren Fader, cycles on poems by David Ferry and Cynthia Rylant. We just recorded two of those cycles with the brilliant producer Adam Abeshouse. Assuming I can get permission, I have a cycle of songs for soprano, violin, and piano on poems by Seamus Heaney (*Arrivals*), as well as a setting of a Heaney poem for soprano and string quartet (*A Kite for Aibin*). I also made a setting of a Kevin Young poem for mezzo and electric guitar. All those songs would go on a CD entitled *Songs and Overtures*. The Overtures would include a piece for percussion and string quartet called *Dalliance*, an "overture" for piano quartet called *Black and Tan*, and finally a solo violin piece called *Autumn in Parco Querini*. But, as mentioned above, there is a bigger project in the offing, that is, an opera/ballet for baritone, actor, three dancers, string quartet, and percussion entitled *Haunted*. The source for the libretto is Dana Gioia's poem of the same name. Dana is doing the operatic/balletic adaptation, another opportunity for us to productively argue.

*Well, I certainly hope I'll be given that CD to review!*

**SALERNI** *For Love or Money*<sup>1</sup>. *Family Letters*<sup>2</sup>. *Speaking of Love*<sup>3</sup>. *Quartet 1.5*<sup>4</sup> • <sup>1,2,3</sup>Sophia Burgos (sop); <sup>1,3</sup>Paul Salerni (pn); <sup>1,2</sup>Dominic Salerni (vn); <sup>1,3</sup>Miles Salerni (perc); <sup>1</sup>Peter Paulsen (db); <sup>2</sup>Robin Kani (fl); <sup>2</sup>Deborah Andrus (cl); <sup>2</sup>Marco Biaggio (vc); <sup>3</sup>Adriana Linares (va); <sup>4</sup>Zemlinsky Qrt • ALBANY 1651 (64:06 □)

It's a wise idea that a CD have a theme of one sort or another; the present disc has, in fact, two themes, namely Paul Salerni's settings of poetry by California poet Dana Gioia, and that of love in its many manifestations. I will never claim to be any sort of expert on poetry. I don't read much of it, and have set only a few poems to music myself. That being said, I do appreciate good poetry on the occasions I read it, and Dana Gioia, with whom I've become acquainted during my tenure as *Fanfare* reviewer, resonates with me more than that of about 99 percent of the other contemporary poets whose work I've read. Thus, it has been no surprise to read Salerni's statements as to how

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 Zemlinsky Qrt • ALBANY

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Gioia's poetry has influenced his music through his setting of it.

The present disc begins with a song cycle entitled *For Love or Money*, and it opens with an ingra-  
 tiating tune called "Pity the Beautiful," which strikes my ears as virtually a jazz ballad, complete with  
 a walking pizzicato bass line with ornamentation from violin, piano, and percussion. The tune is infec-  
 tious, and lingers in the memory. "Cold San Francisco" adopts a slightly more classical style, but re-  
 tains certain jazz sonorities in the piano part. Gioia's evocative irregularly rhymed sonnet deals with  
 lost love, and Salerni captures the bittersweet mood of the text most effectively in his setting of it. The  
 "Alley Cat Love Song" reverts to the overt jazz mood of "Pity," and its humorous text of the wiles of  
 a seductive alley cat "wearing nothing but a flea collar" will bring a smile to the most jaded lips. I must  
 note that this song has been previously issued on another Albany disc (1537) in a setting for bass-bari-  
 tone, alto flute, and guitar. I A-B'd the two versions to see which I liked better, and they're close over-  
 all. The double bass used on the present recording is superior to the guitar in setting the mood, but the  
 alto flute produces a more sultry and seductive sound than the violin does, given the nature of the in-  
 strument. Both singers bring the song across well, but my vote goes slightly in favor of the present so-  
 prano version. The cycle closes with "Money," an up-tempo affair. Salerni had fun playing around with  
 Gioia's catchy phrase, "Greenbacks, double eagles, megabucks and Ginnie Maes," as he repeated it  
 several times in quick succession to amusing effect. Its ending line, "Money. You don't know where  
 it's been, But you put it where your mouth is. And it talks," brought a smile to my lips.

*Family Letters*, a single extended multi-part song, is to my ears almost a miniature opera for  
 solo voice and chamber ensemble consisting of two winds and two strings. The text deals with a sur-  
 viving family member looking through her late father's letters, musing on the fact that everyone he  
 speaks of is now dead. The score draws upon a wide variety of human emotions as expressed by the  
 protagonist, who is at turns regretful, sentimental, and optimistic. Salerni exquisitely captures each  
 emotion, as does soprano Sophia Burgos.

Salerni's music takes a darker and more sober turn in *Speaking of Love*, a cycle of three Gioia  
 love poems. The first of them, "Speaking of Love," deals with some of the more difficult aspects of  
 love, including harsh words and denial, and the music's somber spirit well enhances the text.  
 "Orchestra" assumes a gentle and flowing tone as it sets a text that describes aspects of a woman's  
 absent beloved in terms of various orchestral instruments. Perhaps the most evocative song of the  
 entire disc is the closing "Song" of this cycle. A gently undulating accompaniment undergirds the  
 soprano's limpid lines as she sings of the love that unites two people as a "bow that from two strings  
 could draw one voice." The music is as exquisitely beautiful as the text.

A strictly instrumental work fills out the CD, Salerni's *Quartet 1.5* from 2014. The curious title  
 is explained by the fact that his First Quartet, from 1979, achieved only a half birth in that only its  
 first movement (of three, but comprising half of the playing time of the entire work) was ever per-  
 formed and published. So, if the First Quartet was only "half" a quartet, then logic would dictate that  
 the next one would be Quartet 1.5, no? Regardless as to how convinced you might be by the com-  
 poser's logic (and I'd like to hear his entire First Quartet to see if I would want to talk him into af-  
 fixing No. 1 to it), the quartet here is a gorgeous six-movement work (six being 1.5 times the usual  
 four movements). The interval of the perfect fifth is also prominent in this work, and you'll remem-  
 ber that a fifth results when you multiply the frequency of a given pitch by 1.5. Even the keys of the  
 six movements (G, D, C, D, A, E) cover all the open strings found on the instruments in a string quar-  
 tet and these, as you probably know, are tuned a perfect fifth apart.

After a quiet and brief introductory movement, the piece segues into a second movement con-  
 structed as a three-part Gigue-Trio-Gigue. There is a good bit of biting bitonality in this movement,  
 but the gigue feeling is quite pronounced, although it's not the sort of piece one would dance to.  
 Along the way, there are some chords that nudge up perilously close to jazz sonorities. The middle  
 Trio section features flowing melodies in the violins over a syncopated line in the cello (and occa-  
 sionally in the viola). The third movement, *Arioso*, is a gentle movement with much flowing figura-  
 tion in all parts at various times, while movement four is a rather biting and astringent March, with  
 more syncopation than one usually encounters in that genre. The two "bonus movements" are an  
*Intermezzo*, a limpid and static piece replete with beautiful chords and interweaving lines, and

Finale, a movement that opens with a sustained G, under which pizzicato figuration flits about, along with brief motivic figures in the viola and the other violin. Gradually the energy increases to a fairly frenetic level, and some jazz sonorities and figuration are injected into the mix. The quartet is played with verve and technical polish by the Zemlinsky Quartet, whose intonation is also spot on.

For that matter, all of the performances on this well-recorded disc are commendable. Soprano Sophia Burgos does a good job in adjusting her vocal production according to the style of the music at the moment, although I think most listeners would consider her to be at her peak in the more theatrical style of the opening songs. In short, this disc is splendid all the way around, especially for listeners who enjoy stylistic variety as I most certainly do. Heartily recommended. **David DeBoor Canfield**

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Paul Salerni is an American composer who may be familiar to *Fanfare* readers for his one-act opera *Tony Caruso's Last Broadcast*. It was recorded by Naxos as part of its *American Classics* series, and given enthusiastic reviews by this writer in 34:4 and David DeBoor Canfield in 34:6. The poet responsible for the opera's smart and effective libretto, Dana Goia, is the author of the lyrics set by Salerni in this new release. The ensemble is something of a family affair. Salerni, as pianist, is joined at various times by his sons Dominic on violin and Miles on percussion and mallet percussion.

The opera showed the range of Salerni's musical language, particularly the way he taps into a jazz-based popular music style, and this disc does so to an even greater degree. Three of the four songs in the cycle *For Love or Money* are authentically jazzy. The opening song, "Pity the Beautiful," has a gentle swing rhythm, requiring the percussionist to play on kit, while the closing "Money," in a fast four, is practically a boogie. (This cycle is the only item in the program to require double bass.) "Cold San Francisco," the second song, is more austere and less rhythmically driven than the others, but its astringent harmonies are not far removed from the sound of modern jazz, so there is a stylistic consistency across the cycle.

We move further away from jazz in *Family Letters*, although at the mention of the word "fox-trot" a jaunty little dance is deftly sketched in by the ensemble. This single poem is sparsely accompanied, appropriately so as Goia's emotive poetry concerns the discovery of a box of old family letters. The quartet of flute, clarinet, violin and cello literally gives the musing protagonist space, but Salerni's understanding of instrumental texture also allows the ensemble to pack a punch when necessary. One of these moments occurs in the third verse:

*Come back, Dad!* I want to shout.  
He says he misses all of us  
(though I haven't yet been born).  
He writes from places I never knew he saw  
and everyone he mentions is now dead.

I quote the above as an example of the strength and clarity of Goia's poetry. Salerni's setting reflects those qualities, in particular the shifting impressions that occur when you browse through old photographs and letters.

*Speaking of Love* is a much earlier work, written in 1993, as opposed to the other vocal items that date from 2015, but the composer's harmonic palette and ability to create a mood is already well established. Salerni sets these three poems, on the subject of lost love, for a small ensemble of piano, marimba/vibraphone, and viola. Two of the lyrics are translations by Goia of poems by the Romanian Nina Cassain and by Rainer Maria Rilke. The opening song, "Speaking of Love," literally requires the singer to speak. This juxtaposition of spoken and sung words is done with a minimum of disruption to the musical fabric and feels apt for the subject matter: our inability to sustain love.

Soprano Sophia Burgos proves to be a major asset throughout these performances. Her range is wide, and she is required to sing some very high passages (where she sounds totally secure), yet there is also warmth in her middle and lower registers. In jazz-tinged moments she is able to swing convincingly without sacrificing timbre or imitating a husky jazz vocalist. Her diction is impeccable: I was not at all surprised to read that she had studied with Dawn Upshaw. The accompanying musicians are in the same league, although perhaps less challenged by the material.

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figuration flits about, along with energy increases to a fairly high level. The quartet is played with precision and is also spot on. The vocalists are commendable. Soprano singing to the style of the music at its best peak in the more theatrical moments, especially for listeners who appreciate DeBoor Canfield

Fanfare readers for his one-act opera of its *American Classics* series. DeBoor Canfield in 34:6. The disc is the author of the lyrics set to the music. Salerni, as pianist, is setting poetry of the former head of the NEA, Dana Gioia (a frequent collaborator and friend of Salerni), and a fine string quartet.

In his excellent program notes, Gioia says "For me, poetry is primarily a musical art, a slightly quieter sibling to song." Gioia happens to be an extremely knowledgeable lover of operatic and Liedersingers and it is logical that he would enjoy working with a composer on having his poetry set. The two collaborated on an opera, *Tony Caruso's Last Broadcast*, favorably reviewed in *Fanfare*. *For Love or Money* sets four very different poems, and Salerni responds with four very different songs. In some, the jazz and pop influence is very strong. Others are closer to the classical art song. What Salerni does have is a genuine gift for melody, for actual tunes, and the very first song will have you tapping your toe, and perhaps trying to sing along. Albany has thoughtfully provided texts to help, though Sophia Burgos's diction is clear enough that one rarely needs to refer to them.

The opening song, "Pity the Beautiful," is followed by "Cold San Francisco," quite different in its musical grammar—austere and haunting. The third, "Alley Cat Love Song," will have you chuckling thanks to the composer's (and poet's) wit. Gioia describes how the final song, "Money," in a manner that I could not improve upon: "... gradually rocks like a Southern funk band fronted by Igor Stravinsky."

*Family Letters* is a single song, almost 10 minutes in length, which begins with restraint but expands broadly to something quite powerful. Again, it demonstrates the composer's command of a variety of musical idioms and his ability to meld them into a unified whole. *Speaking of Love* is a cycle of three songs, and is tender, lyrical, and quite moving. Each of these song cycles is scored for voice and a chamber ensemble, and all are brilliantly performed. Two of the composer's sons are involved in the performances, but this is not mindless nepotism; they play very well, as does the composer at the piano. And soprano Burgos is an ideal interpreter. She sings with a variety of timbres, as the music requires, and with complete communication of the texts.

After those three cycles, the disc concludes with *Quartet 1.5*. This 32-minute piece is a bit more severe than the songs, at least at first, but the beautiful lyricism of the Arioso movement and the delicacy of the writing in the Intermezzo make for effective contrasts. Again, Salerni's melodic gift comes to the fore. The name of the piece, *Quartet 1.5*, reflects a few themes noted by the composer in his notes: "In homage to late Beethoven, the work has six movements, 1.5 times the normal number (4) of movements in a string quartet. The melodic and harmonic content of the music relies heavily on the fifth (an interval 1.5 times the frequency of its initial note). Fifths are reflected in the key structure of the piece." All of that can sound like a gimmick, but there is nothing gimmicky, or forced, about the music, which flows beautifully. The second movement jig is influenced by Celtic music, and again one cannot help tapping one's toes.

Excellently balanced recorded sound rounds out what is a delightful, engaging disc that should be attractive to anyone with an interest in tonal American music. Tonal does not mean simple-minded, for some of the music here is challenging in a very good and healthy way. **Henry Fogel**

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