

# REVIEWS

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## THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED DISCS:

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## CONCERTS

### NEW YORK

Brian Wise manages to find some string feasts among the holiday fare

WHILE MUCH OF NEW YORK went on a *Messiah* binge in December, intrepid concertgoers who ventured to Bargemusic on the Brooklyn waterfront heard several highly varied chamber music concerts.

A trio of violinist **Tim Fain**, cellist **Wendy Sutter** and pianist Pedja Muzijević

boarded the barge on 12 December for a celebration of the consummately eclectic New York composer and guitarist Joel Harrison. Fain and Sutter are both active in new music circles and together released an album of Harrison's chamber music last year, from which this programme was drawn.

Harrison's music is an amalgam of Minimalism, jazz and American folk styles, as heard in *My Father's Violin*, a two-movement solo violin work built on pentatonic scales and a North Indian raga. Both movements,

'Lonesome Valley' and 'August Winds: Desolation Peak', offered a platform for Fain's bright tone and fluid but emphatic bow strokes, which at times had the bristle of an Appalachian fiddler. Sutter had her own unique technique – 'circular bowing' in which the bow tip changes angle during up-stroke and down-stroke to create a ringing sound and bell-like harmonics of open strings. This was used throughout the twelve-minute solo *Go Toward the Light*.

Fain and Sutter found some common ground in Harrison's *Life Force*, a spare-textured, restless duo in three movements. And with a sharp left turn, the trio devoted the second half to a forceful account of Schubert's Piano Trio no.1 in B flat major, with dynamic contrasts and attacks pushed to the hilt.

**Trio Vela**, an energetic young ensemble that includes violinist Asmira Woodward-Page, cellist Amy Barston and pianist Olga Vinokur made no such allowances to the standard repertoire when it appeared at Bargemusic on 17 December. The concert opened with Jennifer Higdon's 2003 Piano Trio, whose reflective first movement 'Pale Yellow' recalls the breezy folksiness of Aaron Copland, with more contrapuntal ingenuity than the composer in his populist mode. The musicians displayed unanimity of attack, intonation and gesture, especially in its perpetual-motion finale, 'Fiery Red.'

Scott Wheeler's Trio no.2, 'Camera Dances' (1996–9), a four-movement study in spare textures and Stravinskian abrasiveness had an air of delicacy, transparency and sturdy craftsmanship in the trio's hands. I missed the final piece, Fred Hersch's Piano Trio, but Trio Vela had made a fine impression all the same.

Of course, chamber music flourished elsewhere in December, too. The **Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center** gave its annual holiday traversal of Bach's Brandenburg concertos on 21 December. This staple sells out year after year, despite the fact that the pieces weren't written for any holiday.

The pieces allowed some fine turns from a high-class cast of characters: violinists Amy Lee and Jessica Lee brought some dynamic interplay to the First Concerto; the violinist Jennifer Frautschi offered spirited, nuanced playing in the Fourth; the violists Paul Neubauer and Mark Holloway delivered woody warmth to the Sixth, while cellist Fred Sherry and bassist Kurt Muroki provided an earthy foundation.

The Third Concerto was the evening's high point, with an appealing contrast between the muscular, emphatic playing

Life Force: Tim Fain and Wendy Sutter celebrate the music of Joel Harrison

