

M. BROUWER *Aurolucent Circles*.¹ *Mandala*. *Pulse*. *Remembrance*. *SIZZLE* • Gerard Schwarz, cond; Royal Liverpool PO; Evelyn Glennie (perc)¹ • NAXOS 8.559250 (65:05)

Margaret Brouwer (born in 1940) is head of the composition department at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Based on this excellent new Naxos recording, she has an individual voice with a fine ear for orchestral colors. Her 2002 Concerto for Evelyn Glennie—*Aurolucent Circles*—is immediately arresting, with its powerfully phrased opening voiced in the lower strings. The evocative entrance of Glennie in its potent mystery reminded me of some of Holst's outer and more arcane planets. This is appropriate, as the concerto's first movement is titled "Floating in Dark Space." Besides virtuoso passages for the soloist accompanied by full orchestra, the work has strongly contrasting sections employing two concertino groups which show off the very fine first-desk players in the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Glennie's solos cover a kaleidoscopic range of percussion instruments and colors. The second movement, "Stardust," takes those colors and plays them about the stage, drifting and more often sweeping through various sections of the orchestra. The final movement, "Cycles and Dances," continues the notion of motion about and through the orchestra in a frenetic dance interrupted by lower brass—a favorite gesture of Brouwer's. Glennie is the star around which all this revolves. The recording of the concerto (and the remainder of the disc as well) is both exciting and detailed, with a convincing sense of space around the instruments.

Mandala was inspired by a Tibetan sand painting and a Dutch psalm melody (Psalm XCI in the

Dutch Reformed hymnal.) The trombone intoning the Psalm tune could equally be playing a version of the Buddhist *om*. Adding to this interesting musical-cultural mix are musicians whispering barely audible bits of random text, always with the ever-present Psalm never far from the surface. Whether this adds up to a work that will stand up to repeated hearing remains to be seen: I have a strong feeling it well may.

Pulse is an accessible and attractive score with an unexpectedly melismatic theme heard mainly from the winds and then the solo violin. As someone who usually appreciates the elegiac mood, I was looking forward to hearing *Remembrance*, dating from 1996 and the earliest score on the recording. It is affirmative rather than mournful, but perhaps somewhat long for its material.

Brouwer's musical commentary on the rapid pace of 21st century life is expressed in the disc's final work *SIZZLE*. Three trombones and a horn play a similar role here as in *Mandala*: they stand apart in time and space, representing different currents in a fast moving stream.

Gerard Schwarz's performance of all these works is authoritative and convincing. He is ably abetted by his orchestra and the fine production and engineering. **Michael Fine**