

**KIM:** *Violin Concerto; Dialogues; Cornet*

Cecylia Arzewski, v; William Wolfram, p; Robert Kim, narr; Irish Radio Symphony/ Scott Yoo

Naxos 559226—57 minutes

The basic facts about Earl Kim (1920-98) are deceiving: he was a student of Schoenberg and Sessions, deeply admired Beckett, and for most of his career taught at Princeton and Harvard. I say these facts are deceiving because the standard view of the postwar American compositional elite might lead one to conclude that Kim must have written unpleasant, "academic" music as part of the 12-tone mafia that was supposed to have been running the show on the East Coast from their lifetime positions at Ivy League universities. Indeed, opening up the notes to this disc you'll find talk of hexachords and palindromes and arrays (oh my!), which seems only to confirm the assumption.

But put the disc in, listen to the luscious, throaty tone of Arzewski's violin as it sings, gulps, sobs, and laughs its way through Kim's deeply felt and instantly accessible concerto, and you'll put those fears to rest. Kim liked to say "I am reducing everything to its maximum" when asked about his compositional approach—a maximum of humanity and a reduction of nonsense. (Those who insist that where there are hexachords and palindromes and arrays there is nonsense will be pleasantly surprised.)

The violin concerto has a complicated but readily comprehensible and user-friendly form: two parts, each consisting of little pieces related to each other as episodes, variations, introductions, and finales. Kim has a superbly fluid sense of the orchestra, as does Yoo, a Boston-based conductor who worked with Kim before the composer's death. The only real complaint that could be made about the recording concerns the unusually close miking of the solo violin, making it almost sound like it's meant to be an amplified violin (or a viola).

*Dialogues* is a ten-minute piece for piano and orchestra. One dialog is between the performers, and another is certainly between musical languages: muted mid-century modernism debates with a more tuneful lyricism in the piece, with good points made on both sides.

The program concludes with a half-hour work for narrator and orchestra that sets Rilke's poetic war story *Cornet*. I don't often like narrated works, but this one has the advantage of a really good text, and Kim (a man of extremely refined literary tastes) treats it with great respect and without falling into soundtrack cliché. The actor Robert Kim, the composer's nephew, gives a sensitive performance as narrator: like his uncle, he lets the text speak for itself and doesn't drown it in histrionics.