

STRINGS ATTACHED – June 2011

Early, Classical and Beyond

Written by Terry Robbins

Lawrence Dillon, on the other hand, is an instantly accessible composer, and the CD of his **Violin Music** marks the recording debut of the Mexican-American violinist **Danielle Belen** (Naxos 8.559644). Her playing is terrific from the outset, with a full, warm tone and a daunting technique. There isn't a single moment on the entire CD when you don't feel that she is in complete control, both technically and musically. There are seven pieces here, covering a period of 25 years. The story behind the two solo violin works, *Mister Blister* - the opening track - and *Fifteen Minutes*, is quite fascinating, and was the genesis for the CD. In 2006, Dillon was one of fifteen composers asked by violinist Piotr Szewczyk to write a short solo violin piece of a few minutes' duration; Dillon left the project for several months and, becoming somewhat confused, thought he was to write a one-minute piece. He ended up writing sixteen, and, unable to pick one, sent them all to Szewczyk. The virtuosic *Mister Blister* was rushed off in a single afternoon when the error was pointed out. The other sixteen pieces were rearranged into *Fifteen Minutes*; Szewczyk ended up premiering both works and putting them on his website, where Belen found them while looking for an American composer to feature on her debut CD. They are varied and quite dazzling - and in one of the movements Belen is even required to accompany herself on a kazoo! The earliest work on the disc is *Façade*, a deceptively simple student work from 1983 that I found quite captivating, but which apparently caused a stir at its premiere. Frequently performed since then, it is a particular favourite of Belen's. **David Fung** is the accompanist. Canadian born violist **Juan-Miguel Hernandez** joins Belen for the *Bacchus Chaconne*, a 1991 work that Dillon wrote as part of his coming to terms with the last-minute loss of a commission for a cello concerto that he was just completing after 18 months' work. The Violin Sonata *Motion*, from 2008, was originally scored for flute and piano, although Dillon had always had a violin adaptation in mind; he finally made this when Belen contacted him in 2008 to ask about recording his complete violin works. Fung is again the accompanist, as he is in *The Voice*, a transcription of an aria from Dillon's 2001 opera *Buffa*. **Stan Muncy** accompanies Belen on marimba in *Spring Passing*, a 1997 version of an elegy Dillon wrote for his father, who died when the composer was only 2. The always-reliable Naxos team of Norbert Kraft and Bonnie Silver handled the production at St John Chrysostom Church, Newmarket, and the CBC's Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto. The former location, with its added resonance, was used for the solo string works.

