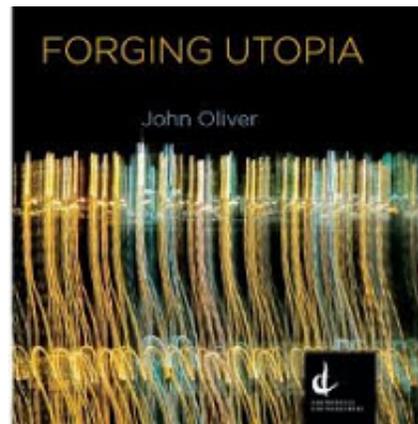


# John Oliver, Forging Utopia

John Oliver, composer of orchestral singularities. His new recording of orchestral works, *Forging Utopia* (CMC 17612) makes it clear that Canada has a new voice, emerging full-blown to those of us who have never heard him.



The National Arts Centre Orchestra under David Allen Miller, the CBC Vancouver Orchestra under Mario Bernardi, the Windsor Symphony under John Morris Russell, and the CBC Radio Orchestra under Jacques Lacombe give the four works quite respectable readings. The works define Maestro Oliver as a keenly sensitive vehicle for realizing massed, complex sounds.

There are Ivesian collages and cacophonies, Messiaenic multi-stylistic contrasts, Zappaesque sarcasms, mysterious washes punctuated by sharp intrusions from various solo instruments, grotesqueries of great disparities, masterful use of mezzo-soprano Judith Forst (on "Unseen Rain") and a general musical narrative style that engages and immerses the listener in fantastic worlds.

He orchestrates with some definite brilliance, making full use of the innovations and sonic possibilities that 100 and more years of experimentation and trial-and-error refinements have created, giving for him a legacy of artistic possibilities. And yet there is something about the music that shines, glistens and speaks in its own right as John Oliver and nobody else.

Each of the four works has its own distinct mood and sound, with "Face in the Abstract" and "Raven Steals the Light" going the more dynamic, spectacular

route. The latter is a good one to start with to get a feel for his reworking of 100 years of orchestral innovations and crafting it all into his own personal signature way of proceeding.

This is new music with a capital /n/. It's an exciting program and it will provide many hours of enjoyment and exploration for those who seek the emerging voices of today. I hope we all can follow where he goes next in future releases. He is one of the most promising orchestral composers of today.