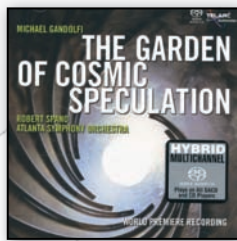


Super Fidelity

By John Sunier

www.audaud.com



Michael Gandolfi|The Garden of Cosmic Speculation—Orchestral Suites|Telarc MC SACD-60696

This is a world premiere recording and the first recording of a major orchestral work by American composer Michael Gandolfi, who brings some fresh, accessible sounds to symphonic music. The real garden the music references is the creation of US architect Charles Jencks, who says it's a metaphor for the physics of our universe. One example of a garden feature and the music for it is *The Willowtwist*. It's a shiny metal sculpture something like a Möbius strip. Its music is a twisting, cyclical piece whose surface details are also circular. *The Universe Cascade* is a neo-Baroque suite of dances which quotes Bach. The physical counterpart is a cascade down a stairway, interrupted by landings inscribed with the major events in the history of the universe. The music traces the flow of Western music's history using quick quotations beginning with Gregorian chant and ending with Steve Reich. This one gets my recommendation!

Mahler|Symphony No. 2|Mimi Cortese, sop/Lucetia West, contralto|Orig. Westminster 2-track DVD-R HDDVD137

Mahler's Second Symphony is the one usually chosen to introduce his unique sound world to new listeners. The opening movement introduces a musical struggle between will and death. The slow movement is the simplest and most beautiful Mahler ever wrote, and the short *Urlicht* movement has the contralto singing one of the composer's most inspired songs of faith. The *finale* builds to a gloriously stirring conclusion with the two singers' voices floating over the hushed chorus and ends with a tremendous pealing of bells and sounding of horns. This exciting performance was released on LP and open reel. HDTT processed the sonically superior tape version and transferred it digitally to high-res 96k/24-bit DVD so the final result is about as good as listening to the original tape. Mahler's Second has had good performances by Kaplan, Bernstein, Tilson-Thomas, and Abbado but this powerful Scherchen performance sometimes bests them all in terms of its sheer intensity, and the sonics are superb.



Steve Reich|Music for 18 Musicians|Grand Valley State Uni Ensemble|Innova MC SACD 678 [www.innova.mu]

What an unexpected musical and audiophile treat! The minimalism of Steve Reich has probably been exposed to more listeners via this "trippy" work than any of his others. It's about the only work of his I ever listen to: The interlocking rhythms and melodies build inexorably toward some really swinging jazzy

orchestration and it has "watershed" status in Minimalism similar to Terry Riley's "In C." This band of university students and volunteers honed their performance to such a high level they stunned audiences—including the critic for the *New York Times*—at the "Bang on a Can" music festival. They later recorded the work in surround in the St. Cecilia Music Centre, and here it is. Comparison with the original Nonesuch CD shows few musical differences and this SACD puts the players all around you—adding 100% to the musical experience—and the sound is more transparent and impactful. A "New Music" must-have!



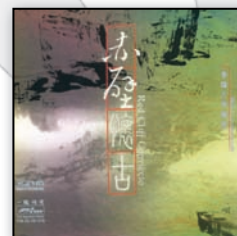
Wayne Horvitz Gravitas Quartet|One Dance Alone|Songlines MC SACD SGL SA 1571-2

Many Songlines SACDs make for difficult listening. However, this one's second track—*A Walk in the Rain*—immediately caught my ear. At first, even though the spatiality and realistic presence of each of the four acoustic instruments is uncanny, I felt all the other tracks wandered too far from

their melodic and tonal centers to interest me, but by my third repetition I began really enjoying the entire disc, even in ordinary stereo. The Gravitas Quartet plays in a sort of chamber version of what used to be called the "Third Stream." There is no rhythm section and no lead saxophone or trumpet. An adventurous statement from a leading pianist and composer in the alternative jazz area, this album shows how a seemingly classically-oriented chamber ensemble can blend jazz, blues, and creative improvisation and come up with new expressive possibilities without resorting to such strictures as the sonata form or big band swing.

Wei Li|Guzheng Solo|Red Cliff Capriccio|First Impression Music FIMK2HD076

The amazing thing about K2 HD releases is that JVC's engineers have somehow found a way to upsample recordings to 192k/24-bit and then super-bit-map them down to CD standard while retaining most of the enhanced fidelity. This new FIM release was engineered by Reference Recordings' Keith Johnson, renowned for the amazing presence and realism in his recordings. Featuring Wei Li, the world's leading guzheng player, it will naturally appeal to audio buffs of Chinese background, but when you hear the broad range of exquisite string sounds cascading from the speakers you, too, will be captivated. I found the sounds no different—and perhaps offering even a wider variety—than a solo classical guitar recital. The expressive power of this string instrument is astonishing. Its metal strings deliver powerful attack transients yet the quiet lyrical passages are as soft and delicate as if they were played on a koto. The realism of the K2 HD recording is truly astounding.



Lars Erstrand|Swingcerely Yours|Opus 3 MC SACD CD22081

Seventy-two-year-old Lars Erstrand is one of the world's best-known jazz vibists. His style is rooted in the Swing Era and his general approach is close to that of the great Lionel Hampton. This SACD is a compendium of tracks from his past CDs and LPs for Opus 3. All were recorded two-channel with a Blumlein setup, so they've been able to recover the ambient information for the surround channels. The disc's first two sets of excerpts are from 1983 and '84. Erstrand and guitarist Bertil Fernqvist turn in an absolutely lovely interpretation of the slow movement of the *Concerto D'Aranjuez*. The next sets from 1986 pay tribute to the Benny Goodman Quartet, with tunes closely identified with Benny, including a swinging *Stompin' at the Savoy*. Tracks from the "Dream Dancing" album follow, some featuring Kjell Ohman on B-3, so the LFE channel gets some action: one track is actually titled *One for the Woofers*!