

The British Double Bass ^{New}
L. Berkeley Introduction and Allegro for Double Bass and Piano, Op. 80^a. **A. Bush** Music for Double Bass and Piano, Op. 93^a – No. 1, Meditation; No. 2, Scherzo. **Ellis** Sonata, Op. 42. **Jacob** A Little Concerto^b. **Lutyens** The Tides of Time, Op. 75^a. **Maconchy** Music for Double Bass and Piano^a. **McCabe** Pueblo for Solo Double Bass. **Pitfield** Sonatina for Double Bass and Piano^a. **Reynolds** Hornpipe for Double Bass and Piano^a. **J. Walton** A Deep Song for Double Bass and Piano^a.
Leon Bosch (double bass); ^a**Sung-Suk Kang** (piano); ^b**Musicanti**.
Meridian CDE84550 (full price, 1 hour 9 minutes).
 Website www.meridian-records.co.uk. *Producer* Richard Hughes. *Engineers* Susanne Hughes, Alex Gettinby. *Date* 2007.

Anthologies of this kind are inevitably going to reflect a plethora of different idioms and approaches, but perhaps that is all to the good. With the proviso that you should not listen straight through at a sitting, when for instance the sequence found here of Bush/McCabe/Lutyens/Reynolds might leave you marginally bewildered stylistically, the present collection can otherwise be wholeheartedly recommended, not just as a snap-shot of the diverse repertoire now available to bassists but as a calling-card for one of the finest of the instrument's current exponents.

Leon Bosch is a phenomenal player, convincing one that the days of the bass as capable only of gruff and out-of-tune sounds, or simply of comic turns, are a thing of the past. Instead, fluency, lyricism, accuracy and imagination have become the *sine qua non* of any aspiring player. These qualities are all on show in the various pieces assembled here, which are by ten different composers. One work has an orchestral accompaniment, the Gordon Jacob *A Little Concerto*; two are unaccompanied, the Ellis and McCabe works – and interestingly, they contain some of the more challenging music on the disc; the remainder are expertly accompanied at the piano by Sung-Suk Kang, with a well-judged recording balance between the instruments.

At the conservative end of the spectrum, the pieces by Alan Bush and Thomas Pitfield mainly invite the player to search out the instrument's ability to sustain a melodic legato via music of innate tunefulness: the middle movement, called 'Quodlibet', of the Pitfield *Sonatina* from 1969 even toys attractively with a folk tune. Lennox Berkeley's *Introduction and Allegro* from 1971, commissioned by Rodney Slatford, who is behind a lot of the repertoire here, requires not only a similar lyricism in its first half but some flying fingers in the remainder. A couple of rather less ambitious pieces put an unexpected emphasis on charm and gracefulness: Reynolds's *Hornpipe* (1927) and the glowing, sonorous *A Deep Song* by John Walton, which more than lives up to its

title. Though intended for young players it is a distinct challenge to any bass player in terms of a rich sound production. The pieces by Lutyens and Maconchy are grittier in idiom and more adventurous technically, and again both succeed in making the instrument a flexible and expressive vehicle.

I was also very struck by the sheer variety of sounds conjured up in the two unaccompanied works: the McCabe is the longest single movement here and the writing responds to an intriguing programme: a description of an American desert landscape. However, I suspect that the most immediately attractive work of all will be the one that Bosch has sensibly put first on the disc, Jacob's 15-minute *A Little Concerto*. Anyone who knows something of this composer's music will not be surprised to learn that it is extrovert and attractive, even cheerful, and that it is impeccably crafted. Bosch and the small string group that accompany him play it to the manner born.

The booklet notes are exhaustive, even exhausting, running to some 15 pages. They embrace a personal message from Bosch himself, a profile of the artist and his rise to fame by Andrew Green, a commentary from bass veteran Rodney Slatford that encompasses both the history of the instrument and the expansion of the bass repertoire for which he himself has been extensively responsible, as well as the publication history of many of the pieces here recorded; and full notes on those pieces, in some cases written by the composers themselves. Various sponsors of this release, including four composer trusts, are also given full credit, and rightly so.

It is good news indeed that similar such recordings are planned, of a wide variety of further bass repertoire. In Leon Bosch's capable hands, they are sure to be of consuming interest. *Piers Burton-Page*