

A great veteran:
Al Gallodoro in his pomp



Thrilling originals from Grofé and Gershwin, in that order

Grofé • Gershwin

'Symphonic Jazz'

Gershwin Second Rhapsody^{ac} (orch Grofé)

Grofé Gallodoro's Serenade^b. Grand Canyon Suite^c.

Mississippi Suite^c

Al Gallodoro *asax*.^{ab} Lincoln Mayorga *pf*

'Harmonie Ensemble/New York /

Steven Richman

Bridge © BRIDGE9212 (64' • DDD)

Ferde Grofé's reputation is based largely, and quite unfairly, on one work, the beloved *Grand Canyon Suite*, though he ventured much further during a varied, adventuresome career. In addition to imposing compositional gifts, the New York-born musician was a crack arranger who did some of his finest work for that visionary purveyor of jazz, Paul Whiteman, and his orchestra. Grofé's projects for Whiteman included the original orchestra versions of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, Concerto in F and Second Rhapsody.

Grofé and Gershwin meet again on this beguiling new disc from Harmonie Ensemble/New York, led by Steven Richman, which includes several premiere recordings of pieces as originally conceived by Grofé. While Gershwin is the more famous name on the recording, Grofé's rightly is printed in larger letters – high tribute indeed to a musician who summoned abundant magic as painter of sonic pictures and a keen mixer of instrumental colours. Grofé made lean, clean use of Whiteman's ensemble, with its dominant reeds, saxophones, brasses and small entourage of strings, banjo, percussion and piano/celesta.

Hearing Grofé's first thoughts on his *Grand Canyon Suite* and *Mississippi Suite* likely will be

revelatory for listeners with the better-known symphonic versions in their ears. In the Whiteman Orchestra incarnations, these narrative soundscapes travel on shimmering and brilliant journeys. The prevalence of saxes and reeds brightens textures that are weightier in the string-dominated orchestral guises. We may not want to live without the latter, but encountering the former provides thrilling aural glances into an era gorgeously preserved.

Richman's spot-on sense of pacing, balance and emphasis guarantee that every Grofé-conjured utterance receives discerning and shapely animation. The ensemble and solo playing likely would bowl over both the composer and Whiteman.

As arranged by Grofé, Gershwin's Second Rhapsody claims heightened lightness and

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urgency, especially in this performance with Lincoln Mayorga as nimble, vibrant pianist. And the disc has an amazing bonus: Grofé's concisely charming *Gallodoro's Serenade* for saxophone and piano, featuring the eponymous original soloist. At the time of this recording in 2004, Al Gallodoro – who played alto sax and other instruments with the Whiteman Orchestra and the NBC Symphony under Toscanini – was almost 91. The sweetness and virtuosity of his artistry haven't dimmed with time.

Donald Rosenberg

Menotti • Vierne

Menotti Missa O Pulchritudo^a

Vierne Messe solennelle^b

^aJoan Gibbons *sop* ^aDeborah Fair *mez*

^aJohn Vorrasi *ten* ^aThomas Sillitti *bass*

^bThomas Weisflog, ^bDexter Bailey *orgs*

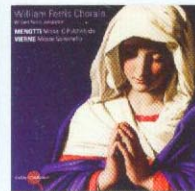
^{ab}William Ferris Chorale; ^aComposer

Festival Orchestra / ^{ab}William Ferris

Cedille FOUNDation © CDR7001

(73' • ^aADD/^bDDD). Recorded live ^a1982, ^b1988

No apologies for the Romanticism as a first-rate Chicago ensemble is honoured



The two works on this release from the William Ferris Chorale were written 80 years apart but they very well might have been composed within the same decade. Both abound in thematic material and harmonic language that maintain firm grips on Romanticism. This is not a surprise in the case of Louis Vierne, the blind composer who learned his craft at the heels of Franck and Widor.

Then again, conservatism is hardly news when it comes to Gian Carlo Menotti, who has refused to jump on avant-garde bandwagons during his long career (he was 95 last July). Like many of his

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works, *Missa O Pulchritudo* (1979) unapologetically – and, let's be honest, quite exquisitely – basks in tonal gestures of luminous expressivity. It is a large-scale work for orchestra, chorus and four vocal soloists that embraces its sacred messages in music of hushed reverence and eloquent splendour. And never assume Menotti was slumming in terms of inventiveness: He dropped the *Credo* for a motet setting of "O Pulchritudo" that adds pulsating energy and warmth to the text's statements about beauty and peace.

Vierne's *Messe solennelle* encapsulates the complete Mass text in five handsomely conceived movements. The piece derives much of its appeal from the scoring for four-part chorus and two organs – here a massive EM Skinner and a tracker-action Visser-Rowland at Our Lady of Mt Carmel Church in Chicago. The sonorities are sensational, with choristers soaring amid the vast array of organ colours.

The performances date from 1982 (Menotti) and 1988 (Vierne), when the Chicago-based William Ferris Chorale appears to have been in golden health. Ferris, who died in 2000, built an ensemble vibrantly responsive to words, inflection and dynamics. The group sounds luxurious in both works, and the soloists in the Menotti are first-rate.

Donald Rosenberg