

URSULA OPPENS

PIANO

THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

CD Review: Elliott Carter's Complete Piano Music

Sunday, November 9, 2008

Scott Cantrell

COMPOSER: Carter

PERFORMER: Ursula Oppens

GRADE: A

RECORDING: Complete Piano Music

LABEL: Cédille

Elliott Carter isn't the easiest composer to love, but he's an important one and, turning 100 on Dec. 11, still composing. (Sadly, no musical organization in the area, not even Voices of Change, seems to be marking the centenary.)

If anyone can make Mr. Carter's very real complexities sound natural, even effortless, it's the pianist Ursula Oppens. And from the 1946 Sonata to the 2006 *Two Thoughts About the Piano*, she plays with authority and eloquence, in first-rate recorded sound.

The Sonata is a contemporary of better-known piano sonatas by Copland and Barber, and shares something of their wartime muscularity. Later works, such as the 1994 piece *90+*, a 90th-birthday tribute to Italian composer Goffredo Petrassi, make more of Mr. Carter's trademark of simultaneous activity in different rhythmic universes.

Stormy episodes cheek-by-jowl with dreamy and whimsical can be a listening challenge. But there's also a distinctively American playfulness to even the knottier pieces here, and some writing of serious virtuosity. Hey, you may even like it!

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