

Drum Dances

John Psathas

Kembang Suling

Gareth Farr

Volume Pig

Gareth Farr

Te tangi a te matui

Helen Fisher

Pounamu

Helen Fisher

Five scores from Promethean Editions were submitted for review containing music by John Psathas, Helen Fisher and Gareth Farr.

John Psathas' *Drum Dances* is for the unusual combination of solo piano and drum kit and was composed especially for virtuoso British percussionist Evelyn Glennie in 1993. In an introductory note the composer cites powerful influences on this work from jazz and rock of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The heritage is a fruitful one and this piece has deservedly won numerous performances, its high-impact energy lending it appeal to audiences as well as providing a gratifying challenge for performers.

Gareth Farr has also acknowledged a diversity of musical influences on his personal style. *Kembang Suling* for flute and marimba is subtitled "Three Musical snapshots of Asia". The first postcard draws on the sounds and patterns of gamelan and the Balinese bamboo flute the "suling". The second section is an extended flute solo (the work is dedicated to Alexa Still) suggesting the Japanese shakuhachi, with a simple chordal accompaniment provided by the marimba. Farr himself describes the third section as being characterised by complex rhythms and the scales of South India and it makes a lively conclusion.

Volume Pig, by the same composer, is a light-hearted work of visceral rhythmic excitement for percussion quartet. The writing is predictably demanding and rewarding for the players and noisy enough to fulfil the composer's explanation of the work's title "Volume pig – colloquial name given to a person with a particular propensity for composing music of an unusually loud nature".

Two works for flute by Helen Fisher are published in one volume. *Te tangi a te matui* (The Call of the Matui) was written to the memory of her mother and calls for a solo performer to sing (alto voice) the opening incantation which is based on a traditional karakia. The same performer intersperses the chanting with solo flute playing. In some places singing and playing are called for simultaneously, creating an ingeniously integrated sonic landscape. Second in this volume is Fisher's *Wings of the Wind*, a single movement work for solo flute. Subtle and effective use is made of multiphonics and pitch bending, as well as wide variation of tone colour, including whistle tones. Both works have been widely played and it is good to have

them available commercially.

By the same composer, but calling for larger forces, is *Pounamu*, dating back to 1989. The title (Greenstone) was inspired by a traditional Tainui invocation "May the calm be widespread, May the sea glisten as the greenstone, May the shimmer of summer ever dance across your pathway". The SSAATB choir has a shimmering part evoking, perhaps, the sea, above which the solo flute elaborates and dances. The flute part has been played in some performances by koauau or shakuhachi with the composer's blessing. *Pounamu* is an attractive short piece that manages to synthesise convincingly aspects of our Western and Maori musical traditions.

Managing director of Promethean Editions, Ross Hendy, is also the series editor. He has established a benchmark of high production values in the scores published to date.

Generic covers of heavy, hand-somely embossed cardboard enclose all the scores to produce a pleasing effect of distinctive brand identity. Spiral wire binding is used, a choice which ensures the scores readily lie flat for performance situations. The only drawback to this system is the absence of a spine to each score, making shelving in libraries a little difficult. On balance the advantages probably outweigh the drawbacks.

The appearance of a new, serious and innovative commercial music publisher in this country is to be warmly welcomed. On Promethean's Internet site Hendy describes the company as "not a 'New Zealand' music publisher but a music publisher located in New Zealand. We publish, promote and market emerging and established composers. Specifically, Promethean Editions publishes music that could be described as contemporary classical, art music or 20th century music." From Promethean's Internet listings, the majority of scores published to date appear to be chamber works by New Zealand composers.

The scores are relatively expensive by New Zealand standards at about \$35 each but this is by no means unreasonable in terms of the international market Promethean aims to be part of. The company deserves every support and best wishes for the future from the musical community of New Zealand.

– Martin Lodge