

Paul Rapoport

Vagn Holmboe is one of the greatest contemporary composers of chamber music; among much else, he has written 18 string quartets (with two more near completion). Regrettably, this is the only current record of his music for this genre, but the regret is slightly mitigated by the high quality of Nos. 15 and 16. Two completely internalized influences on Holmboe are Palestrina and Haydn, and if you don't look for them in these quartets, you will find them . . . looking on in approval. No. 15 in particular has a subtlety and mastery which few composers attain.

In another world completely are these three symphonies of Matthijs Vermeulen. Ecstatic music, with long, highly charged melodies and wild climaxes—and an expressive urgency even in its quiet moments. No. 5 is the profoundest and toughest of all seven symphonies. (Note: No. 4 is subtitled "Les Victoires," which was misprinted in July–August.) Altogether Vermeulen is a remarkable visionary in the history of the symphony.

To piano music: a pleasure it is to be able to recommend Alkan and Sorabji for the second year in a row. Smith's Alkan is not as outgoing as Lewenthal's, but it is more lyrical and Apollonian. The Sonatina is an amazing work of considerable proportions and fertile of imagination, surely among the best introductions to this outstanding composer.

Like the Alkan, the Sorabji by Habermann is a reissue. It's a new packaging of the first Sorabji record ever made. Last year I recommended the second one, also by Habermann. This one has a greater variety of music and thus may be a slightly better introduction to the fantastic, elegant, richly ornamented, exceedingly difficult music of this legendary composer—who, incidentally, championed Alkan's music decades before the recent Alkan revival. Habermann's performances are scintillating—just extraordinary.

HOLMBOE: *String Quartets: No. 15; No. 16.* Copenhagen Quartet. (EMI DMA 048)

VERMEULEN: *Complete Works: Volume 2, Orchestral Music.* Various Dutch artists. (COMPOSERS' VOICE CVS 8384/2; two discs).

ALKAN: *Piano Works.* R. Smith. (ARABESQUE 6516; digital)

SORABJI: *Piano Works.* Habermann. (MUSICMASTERS MM 20015)