

bouffe. She sings beautifully, with seemingly infinite agility and a boundless top range. Amid the rowdy vaudeville of the first scene, Eurydice's rapturous envoi, "La mort m'apparaît souriante," becomes a moment of lyric ecstasy.

The contrast between Lewek's raucous demeanor and her impeccable vocalism creates a kind of comedy in itself.

The entire cast enters into the comic spirit. Joel Prieto is a lounge lizard of an Orphée, sleazy and ripe for cuckolding. Marcel Beekman and Martin Winkler, as Eurydice's divine suitors, Jupiter and Pluto, are a rowdy pair of baggy-pants clowns. Anne Sofie von Otter, as L'Opinion, sings with a voice that's a mere ghost of its former self, but she holds the stage with unquestionable authority. It's a pleasure to see her again.

In Proust's *Within a Budding Grove*, the narrator sneeringly describes a man who "yawned at Wagner and raved over Offenbach." The musical performance in this *Orphée* discredits that bit of snobbery. The score is full of vitality, invention and sophistication, all qualities that conductor Enrique Mazzola brings out in his buoyant reading. The music gets the deluxe treatment from the Vienna Philharmonic, and the whole thing sounds simply gorgeous. —Fred Cohn

Peterson: *Voir Dire*



CD Pecce, Laurenzo; Surrena, Martin, Mattingly; various musicians, Subbaraman. No texts. Red House Music



COMPOSER Matthew Peterson and librettist Jason Zencka's *Voir Dire*, billed as a "courtroom opera," is a refreshing take on what contemporary music-drama can be. Zencka, who was a crime reporter in central Wisconsin in the late 2000s, adapted the libretto from cases he chronicled on the beat. His sure-handed text is gritty, colorful, often profane and clearly true-to-life.

Peterson has set it in a panstylistic but direct idiom, with a keen instinct for which musical genre will best illuminate the emotional landscape of these damaged and flawed characters.

The opera begins with a judge in his chambers, singing a ruminative aria about the flaws of the judicial system. The music is propulsive, with driving sixteenth notes on the hi-hat cymbal amid minor-key rumblings and instrumental flickers. Next comes a flashback to the mother of Jeffrey Schumacher, a convicted teenage killer, making a 911 call as her son is attacking her. The cop, dispatcher and medic then rattle off a horrific list of the murder weapons. But the story is more complex than it initially appears: Jeffrey's mother suffered from Munchausen syndrome by proxy; she victimized her son by forcing pills on him to keep him sick and in need of her care. This is revealed, spectacularly and creepily, when the mother appears from beyond the grave, voiced simultaneously by all five singers, in luridly dissonant harmony (or equally disconcerting unison). Peterson's score is particularly effective and original in the mother's appearances, with ghostly, tinkling accompaniment underscoring the swooping, taunting vocals.

Though the gruesome mother-son tale emerges as the opera's through-line, they are just two among numerous unfortunate souls whose woeful stories unfold throughout the piece. One woman sings about having been punched in the stomach by her abusive boyfriend when she was five months pregnant. A college professor confesses to uploading child pornography. And in one skillfully rendered sequence, an estranged husband and wife appear simultaneously onstage, even though their interrogations occurred at different points in time. (This scene takes a dark turn.)

Five first-rate young performers each play one main role and multiple supporting ones. Soprano Christina Pecce, appalling yet alluring as the mother's ghost in a sinuous, extended aria, also gives a terrific comic turn as a frazzled prosecutor, who keeps dropping her papers but rattles off case summaries in perfectly turned lines of dactylic heptameter. Mezzo Anna Laurenzo brings

pathos, rich, vibrant tone and impressive intelligibility to Alycia Simpson's grisly account of her abusive relationship and subsequent miscarriage. Tenor Andrew Surrena gives a captivating performance of a lilting, haunting and ultimately fevered aria that paints an initially sympathetic portrait of the hold his estranged wife has on him. (Your heart goes out to him until the gut-punch of the next scene, when you realize he was trying to justify raping her.) Baritone Trevor Martin, as the abject Professor Milton, sings with great lyricism and maintains an analytical, articulate tone in his self-annihilating exploration of how he fell into his disgraced state. And bass-baritone Nate Mattingly, as Judge Dodsworth, is a charismatic, rock-steady anchor for the whole thing, equally at home with edgy, bluesy swing and the declamatory recit style more typical of contemporary opera. Toward the end, the Judge himself is interrogated, in a moving and climactic quasi-Baroque passacaglia in stately three-quarter time. A few tracks later, a beautiful musical-theater-style anthem ("Speak the truth"), with an arching, syncopated melody, serves as a fitting capstone for the piece, both morally and musically.

Peterson shows great contrapuntal skill with dramatic layering of vocal lines in several key passages, including the arraignments of both the murderous teenager and the pedophile professor. The nine-piece chamber ensemble, under the impressive leadership of Viswa Subbaraman, performs flawlessly in this challenging multigenre assignment. —Joshua Rosenblum

Snider: *Mass for the Endangered*



CD Gallicantus, Crouch. Texts. New Amsterdam/Nonesuch



SARAH KIRKLAND SNIDER composed *Mass for the Endangered* (2018) in response