

Audiophile Audition, April 2004

DAVID GUNN: Somewhere East of Topeka - The Vermont Contemporary Music Ensemble - Albany Records TROY535

Gunn is a composer of today who obviously follows in the footsteps of Gillis ((Don Gillis, Missouri-born composer, 1912-1978). He is posed (at least it seems to be him) in the note booklet in a striped prison uniform hitching a ride under a sign proclaiming “Hitchhikers May Be Escaping Inmates.” Gunn, like Gillis, is a melodist and uses clearcut rhythms and harmonics, though in a more modern, deconstructionist manner. Klezmer and pop music in general are among his influences. Even the humor involved in these good-natured creations is more modern, more surrealist. Take for example the opening one of these 16 short pieces – Cowbellies. The composer notes say, “Marked Andante with a full udder, this bovine blues follows the multiple-stomached digestive process of man’s best friend.” Another piece in the style of a perpetual motion duo for violin and piano is described as a short-attention-span version of minimalism. Unusual combinations of instruments show up in Gunn’s chamber compositions – for example the trio Khartoumaraca: for marimba, cello and clarinet.

Not the Right Balloon is a surrealist story-song narrated by the composer, and Do Aliens Wear Sombreros? is sung by a female voice. It’s a hoot, both musically and humorously. Here’s the titles of the selections, not including the title tune and those already mentioned: Katmandon’t, Going Like Sixty, The Help Me Rondo, Dance of the Hasidic Chigger Hecklers, Out of Cahoots, Hunting Tuna, Missing Inn March, Out of the Dark, Fossick, Running Lights

– John Sunier