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DAVID GUNN, SOMEWHERE EAST OF TOPEKA

(Albany Records, CD)

Somewhere East of Topeka is really a Vermont Contemporary Music Ensemble album, as they play all the David Gunn compositions here. The collection is quite a good one. As quirky as it is academic, Somewhere has a wonderful sense of play, allowing high art and silliness to mingle. This must have been great fun to make, as strings, brass, woodwinds, piano and other instruments dance nimbly through more time signatures than you could shake a stick at. Unless, of course, you happen to be a master stick-shaker, as the central Vermont composer himself seems to be. The VCME play Gunn with great aplomb, turning out more than an hour's worth of humorous and ear-pleasing tunes. Bright, concise melody lines encourage the listener to bop along, nearly oblivious to the changes in time signature — except you'll be tapping your toes one minute and waltzing around the room the next. Titles like "Katmandon't," "The Help Me Rondo" (an amusing take on the Beach Boys classic) and "Dance of the Hasidic Chigger Hecklers" reveal Gunn's twisted sense of humor. "Not the Right Balloon" adds pun-filled verbal imagery to the mix. Somewhere East of Topeka is refreshing and definitely worth checking out.