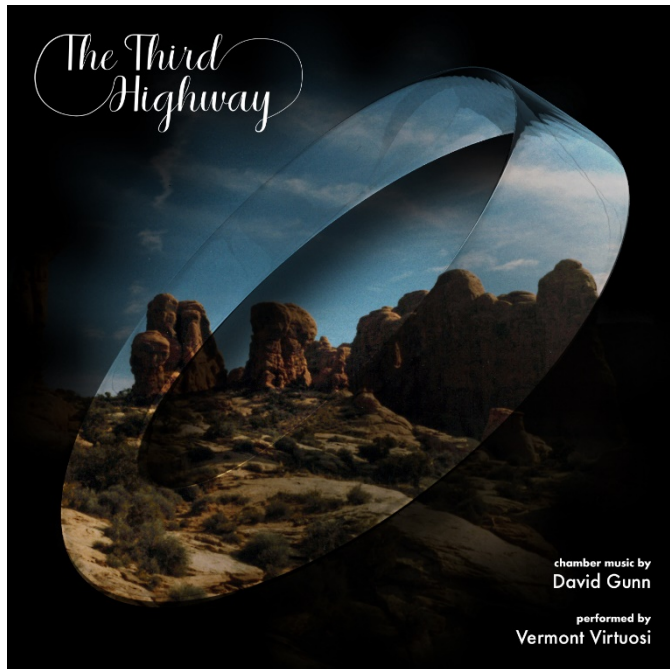


# Sequenza 21/

The Contemporary Classical Music Community

## David Gunn – The Third Highway

Posted by [Paul Muller](#) in [Uncategorized](#)



*The Third Highway* is a newly released CD of impeccable chamber music from composer David Gunn, performed by the aptly named Vermont Virtuosi. Described as “Six musical journeys of lyricism, counterpoint, and elegantly syncopated rhythms”, it is all that and more. A charmingly conventional ensemble of piano, strings and woodwinds in various combinations populate the six tracks of this album with masterfully constructed music and extraordinarily refined playing. This CD is everything you could expect from contemporary chamber music – thoroughly burnished and beautifully recorded.

The first track on the album is *The Conchoid of Nicomedes* (2006; rev. 2016) and this begins with a mysterious repeating figure in the flute and a heavily ominous series of piano chords. The clarinet and bassoon entrances round out a nicely balanced woodwind ensemble that also

includes a flute. An optimistic and energetic feeling pervades this piece and sets the pattern for Gunn’s chamber music: carefully crafted interleaving passages, always changing in tempo and texture. The independent bassoon, clarinet and flute lines weave in and around each other with pleasing precision as each of the instruments in the ensemble are heard almost continuously. The playing is cleanly articulated and confident as the various phrases unfold. This piece, with four parts, is the largest ensemble of the album but it never loses any agility or sharpness as the musicians navigate a whirl of intertwining passages and changing tempos. *Conchoid of Nicomedes* is expertly written and scored, with strong performances to match.

Track 2 of the album has the agreeably whimsical title of *In the forest, 400 owls discover a giant badger; it’s raining* (2003; rev. 2013). This duo opens with lovely repeating phrases in the middle piano registers that evoke a soft summer rain. The clarinet entry adds a cheerful feel with its bright, continuous melody line. The tempo is moderately fast – almost bouncy – and carries that optimistic sense of freedom found in a carefree walk through the woods. The piano accompaniment is always on target and the clarinet is expressively played. *In the forest, 400 owls...* is an engaging and pleasing piece, beautifully envisioned and masterfully performed. Clarinetists would do well to add *In the forest, 400 owls...* to their repertory – it is the perfect finale to a concert program.

*Les visions de Bellimar* (2013) is next, and this piece begins on a deep chord, followed by a solemn piano solo. The viola and flute follow with sedate entrances, continuing forward with independent melodies that delicately interweave in somber aspect. The tempo increases at 2:20, raising the energy to a more active level. The slower pace returns at 3:20 and the piece now acquires a sense of grandeur, especially in the

piano line. As *Les visions* proceeds, many emotions pass through the music, sometimes relaxed, sometimes anxious, sometimes subdued, while at other times intense. The various instrument lines are always well-crafted and the transitions are navigated by the musicians with a sure touch. As with the other pieces on this CD, *Les visions de Bellimar* is always evolving as the melodies continuously interact and blend to create a beguiling listening experience.

*Euphonicum Tangenturis* (2010; rev. 2013) follows, and opens with a haunting clarinet and flute duet. This continues with two independent lines that sweetly intermingle with a settled and cordial feel. The woodwind playing is precisely expressive, and when the piano enters there is an expansive feeling as the pace and volume pick up. Many notes weave in and out, and there is always good ensemble between the players. New emotions arrive in rapid order – playfulness, uncertainty, a questioning feel – now turning slower and more deliberate, but still interleaved and complex – now upbeat and optimistic. The playing by the trio follows the changing contours of the music perfectly. After a sudden stop and a brief silence, the mood becomes more deliberate and warmly reflective until the piano picks up the tempo again and the piece drives ahead. The woodwinds follow brilliantly and the clarinet becomes briefly raucous with a short, but well-timed, Klezmer screech. A quiet and introspective stretch is followed by a bright crescendo that extends to the finish. *Euphonicum Tangenturis* is agreeable and engaging music that consistently delivers a lively mix of impressions and sensations.

*The Third Highway* (2014), title track for the album, begins with expansive piano chords followed by an introspective melody in the violin. The flute joins in with an independent line, the trio characteristically weaving in and around each other. The passage work is beautifully expressive and the blend of the flute and violin lines is highly polished. The expansive piano chords return, followed by a strongly declarative flute solo. More adroit phrases trade off in the flute and violin, mixing in a complimentary elegance. A suddenly slower tempo and new pitches in the lower flute register add to a quiet and subdued feel. A faster tempo and crisp ensemble playing drive the piece to its vigorous finish.

The *Forbidden Flute* (2004; rev. 2013) duo closes out the album. A strong opening of piano chords and declarative flute passages establish an exotic and somewhat forbidding feel. The flute line gradually becomes more fluid while remaining enigmatic. Eventually a more active flute dominates with a series of constantly changing phrases while the piano keeps a strong beat underneath. The playing here is excellent in both parts as the piece oscillates between the strongly purposeful and the distantly mysterious. The flute is playing almost continuously, with breaks of even a few bars rare, but there is no reduction in the power or dynamism of the rapid passages. The last three minutes seem like an extended crescendo, building impressively to the finish. *Forbidden Flute* is a fine showpiece for the ambitious virtuoso and will not fail to impress even the most sophisticated listeners.

Vermont Virtuosi are:

Claire Black, piano	Laural Ann Maurer, flutes
Arturo Delmoni, violin	Julian Partridge, bassoon
Karen Luttk, clarinet	Tatiana Trono, viola

Recorded on location at Williston, Vermont by Peter Engisch

*The Third Highway* is available from [CD Baby](#) and [Amazon](#).

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