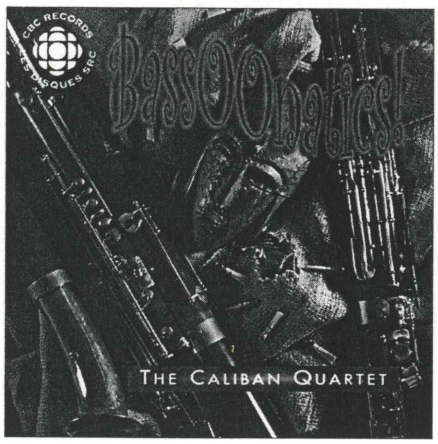
I have heard in over 40 years of concert-going — at the 1996 Lanaudière Festival near Montreal. Don't let the word "youth" fool you; these musicians play as well as any orchestra you care to name, combining the spontaneity and enthusiasm of youth with the self-assurance and artistic mastery of experienced pros.

Vine's Oboe Concerto is far and away the best work on the disc, idiomatically written for soloist David Nuttall (an outstanding musician). The concerto combines passages of haunting lyricism, pastoral loveliness, gaunt splendor and virtuosic jaunts. Sculthorpe's Piano Concerto, like other works I have heard by this composer, evokes images of bigness and grandeur through unconventional means. By fashioning small motives into repetitive and constantly changing patterns (a kind of super-sophisticated minimalism, if you like), Sculthorpe creates hypnotic, trance-like effects akin to the experience some visitors report when encountering the vast and fantastically colored Australian wilderness. Lumsdaine's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, for which the disc is named, is the longest but least substantial work here, an episodic concertante work for solo cello and orchestra. It is also the only work that really puts this magnificent orchestra on its mettle.

— *Robert Markow*



"BASSOONATICS!"
Includes music by Gershwin, Brahms, Sibelius, Weill, Piazzolla, Lennon & McCartney, and others
The Caliban Quartet, Mark Duggan, percussion
CBC Records MVCD 1116
Performance: ☆☆☆☆☆
Sound: ☆☆☆☆

The bassoon is not normally known as a solo instrument. Its usual place is in the orchestra or perhaps at the bottom of a wind quintet. The four bassoonists of The Caliban Quartet, symphonic bassoonists all, are not content with this state of affairs, however. Their virtuoso and expressive playing on this disc of 17 arrangements and original compositions makes a very good case for the bassoon as an instrument worth hearing in its own right.

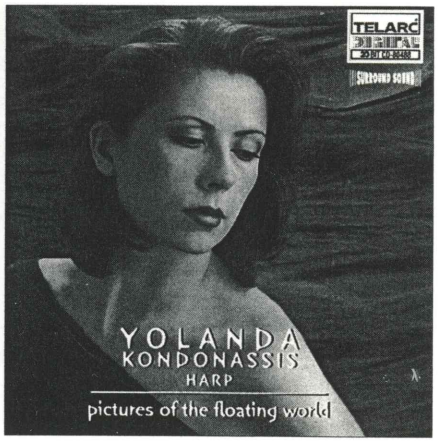
The bulk of the recording is made up of arrangements of music by everyone from Mozart (a little *Gigue*, K.574) to Gershwin ("I Got Rhythm" and the Three Preludes), Sibelius (Suite from *The Tempest* and the Piano Sonatina No. 1) and Lennon & McCartney ("Oh! Darling"). The three original works are by Mitchell Clark (*Madrigal*), Michael Welsh (*Tango*), and Bill Douglas (*Azuzre*).

The bassoon turns out to be quite a versatile instrument and this is a varied and entertaining program made even more successful by the assistance of percussionist Mark Duggan in several numbers, and by some clever programming: a group of tangos by Stravinsky, Welsh, Weill and Piazzola, for instance.

The predominance of the bass register almost inevitably makes the sound a little constricted, but the addition of percussion in some pieces helps to open out the sound stage. Throughout the disc the four bassoons are individually distinguishable and the characteristic clatter of the bassoons' keywork is audible but not distracting.

Bassoonists, of course, will love this disc, but anyone else with an ear for the offbeat will also enjoy this combination of high spirits and highly expert playing.

— *Scott Paterson*



"PICTURES OF THE FLOATING WORLD"
Music for solo harp by Debussy, Ibert, Rochberg, Hasselmans, Tournier and others
Yolanda Kondonassis, harp
Telarc CD 80488
Performance: ☆☆☆☆
Sound: ☆☆☆☆☆

This is the fifth Telarc recording from Cleveland-based Yolanda Kondonassis, who reaffirms her position as one of the world's leading harpists with "Pictures of the Floating World."

This imaginative compilation was inspired by Kondonassis's professed love of water — its look, feel and sound, and the "liquid thoughts" it conjures. The title refers to things Japanese — both the country and the traditional wood-block painting for which it is renowned, Ukiyo-e. George Rochberg's composition of the same title (actually, the first of three) is both the most interesting and the most substantial work on this recital. Through its evocative quality and the composer's understanding of idiomatic harp technique, Ukiyo-e, a world of vaguely Eastern sensibility while employing purely Western compositional processes.

Kondonassis herself also contributes a piece, *Liquid Shadows*, a kind of subterranean seascape, a "hypnotic ballet of light and movement," as she describes it. Written in a modern yet accessible style, it leans closer to Rochberg than to Debussy, and invites picturesque imagery while listening. The remainder of the program incorporates two examples of Debussian "water music" (arrangements of "En Bateau" and "La Cathédrale engloutie"), two arrangements of Asian folk songs (one Chinese, one the ever-popular "Haru no umi" of Michio Miyagi), and three original French pieces by Tournier, Hasselmans and Ibert, the latter ("Reflets dans l'eau") performable on either harp or piano.

Kondonassis once again proves herself to be a sensitive and intelligent musician capable of subordinating technical concerns to musical ones. Her unusually warm, full tone is further characterized by great vibrancy and resonance, which has been perfectly captured by Telarc's engineers — close and immediate without sounding overly miked. There is suf-