

new notes **Reviews**

CD Review: Pedro Amaral - Works for Ensemble

London Sinfonietta conducted by **Pedro Amaral**

1. ... *Textos, Parafrases, Perspectivas...* for piano and 9 instruments (1994/96)
2. *Spirales* for 16 instruments (1998)
3. *Organa* for 8 instruments (2001)
4. *Paraphrase* for 17 instruments (2006)

Label: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGFCD1001)

Length: 61:06

Reviewed by Christian Mason

Uploaded 3/1/2008

This nicely produced disc provides us with an interesting introduction to the work of Portuguese composer Pedro Amaral (b. 1972). This is his debut CD, and the works presented span his career from his first acknowledged work ... *Textos, Parafrases, Perspectivas...* (1994/96) to the recent *Paraphrase* of 2006, revealing a composer with clarity of expression and a refined sense of sonority. The music is accompanied by lengthy and informative liner notes, including an introduction by Paul Griffiths and a substantial interview with the composer, in which he identifies Boulez as 'probably the most defining antecedent in my genealogy'. This statement along with Amaral's comment that 'my reflections focus on the Darmstadt generation in particular because this has exerted the strongest influence over contemporary musical thought', places his work firmly in the 'modernist tradition' and it is likely that this release will be most appreciated by those who share Amaral's respect for the avant-garde.

This is not to say that his music sounds entirely like that of his predecessors, but that he comes across as being well aware of his cultural context. A distinct, deep-thinking and attractive musical personality is evident. Running through all of these works is a sensitivity to the listeners need for identifiable and memorable musical elements which hold the flux together. Particularly engaging is the slowly-paced ritual quality of *Organa*, in which the gradual emergence of stately melody, the use of perfect 5ths and the bell-like tones of crotales distantly evoke the medieval organum to which the title refers. *Spirales* is a work characterised by florid embellishments and colourful effusions within a clearly articulated, but never predictable formal structure. While ... *Textos, Parafrases, Perspectivas...* and *Paraphrase* are both works in which sections of rugged energy and rhythmic vitality are related by contrast to calmer contemplations. This use of contrast seems a necessary device to sustain attention over the course of these long single movement works, each of which last almost 20 minutes.