

DVD-Video Reviews - December 2003



Heavy Organ - Tribute to Virgil Fox (2003)(DVD/CD Combo)

MOZART: Fantasy in F Minor; VIERNE: Claire de lune; REUBKE: Sonata in C Minor; HEBBLE: Londonderry Air; FRANCK: Grande Piece Symphonique - Richard Morris, Ruffatti pipe organ, Spivey Hall, Atlanta

Studio: Circles International/SeeMusicDVD

Video: 16:9 full screen enhanced of Digital Light Organ

Audio: Dolby Digital 5.1

Extras: Booklet with program notes, color photos, history of Spivey Hall, organ specs, artist's bio, technical info on Kaleidoplex

Length (both DVD & CD): 67:34

Rating: ****

Now for something completely different...

Another combo DVD plus standard CD disc package, but this one is not your usual DVD at all. It is not a video of the organist at the keyboards - only the music - a typical program Virgil Fox would have presented - in excellent 5.1 sound. The on-screen images come from a gadget which Fox had commissioned to provide some exciting visuals for his touring show "Heavy Organ" in the 60s and 70s. It is a complex kaleidoscope called the Kaleidoplex which creates ever changing mandala-like abstract circular patterns in the center of the 16:9 screen (it also adapts to 4:3 screens) in connection with the music being heard. It divides images into 64 separate segments. The note booklet has a section on Visual Background Attributions, which lists in order the sources of art and photographs for each of the musical selections' images. These images are also seen in low contrast in the background on either side of the mandala. For example, the Mozart Fantasy - originally written for a musical clock - has an astronomical ring dial at one point to tie in with the music. Digital electronics match the rotation and changes of the images to sync with the beat of the music. An unusual and captivating experience; I don't think I've ever enjoyed the big Franck organ symphony quite so much as with the surround sound and compelling imagery on the screen. There's also a separate 44.1 CD of the music selections, which I actually slightly preferred when channeled thru ProLogic II in my Sunfire preamp, but without the color organ it wasn't nearly as much fun.

- John Sunier