

# CLASSICAL Dynamic discs diverse



John Button

Psathas: Fragments. Stephen Gosling (piano), Jeremy Fitzsimons (percussion), New Zealand String Quartet Trust MMT2047 (CD 47mins)

Blake: Symphony — The Islands, We all Fall Down, Echelles de Glace, The Furnace of Pihanga New Zealand Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lucas Vis, Philip Walsh and Marc Taddei. Atoll ACD403 (CD 71mins)

**B**OOTH of these discs were launched before a concert of New Zealand music by the NZSO in late May and, in every respect, they couldn't be more different.

Yet each is an important document of a significant voice in our creative musical life, and each deserves serious attention both in New Zealand and in the crowded musical environs beyond our shores.

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John Psathas has already carved a niche for himself in the performance scene in New York and his works figure in the repertoire of percussionist Evelyn Glennie.

He is also performed regularly in Greece, and his *View from Olympus* featured in a concert at the Manchester Commonwealth Games in 2002.

His music veers from atmospherically minimalist, as in the title piece *Fragments* on this disc, to frantically energetic, and his quirky, highly individual style is difficult to mistake for anyone else.

The five works on this disc cover his range of moods and styles superbly and are distinguished by performances of authority and sumptuous virtuosity.

The dazzling Anglo/American pianist Stephen Gosling is an obvious star, but everyone concerned covers themselves with glory.

Okay, this is not a very full disc — but does this matter? Given the self-contained nature of the programme and the quality of the music and the performances, possibly not.

The serious, dark orchestral works of Christopher Blake occupy a different musical world.

The three shorter tone poems are each splendid pieces, but the masterpiece on this disc is the *Symphony — The Islands*.

This was an NZSO commission, and its three movements take their inspiration from sonnets by Charles Brasch, published in 1939. This is dark, restless music — there is nothing of the happy South Seas image here — but it is richly coloured, multi-hued and immensely powerful. There is a single-minded quality that grabs the listener and, with the lithe motif that winds through each movement, a sombre poetry that stays in the mind's ear.

All the works are given fine performances, but *The Islands*, under the Dutch conductor Lucas Vis in a live concert from the Aotea Centre in Auckland, is even more than that. Engineer Barry Hartley manages, under the circumstances, a stunning recording.

