

music, without repelling any sector, shows they are not only the trail-blazers in tearing down barriers, but remain the market leaders as well. They cracked the marketing nut long ago and have long since attained the holy grail; brand loyalty.

Being honest, I expected the Kronos concert to include several items that would irritate me, and that together with the €45 ticket price would normally have been enough to stop me going. But I also hoped my prejudices would face a challenge. The programme had

to make you more curious about the film than its music.

The next section comprised the only two pieces not arranged for Kronos, but actually written for them as concert pieces. This difference was immense, as it turned out. Kevin Volans' eighth quartet, *Black Woman Rising*, was soaked in the language of earlier Volans pieces; that impression was dominant throughout, and in fact the composer says that it quotes a number of pieces written in the late 90s. But the piece made a very cogent whole

example, high glissandi perverting the beautiful air 'Port na bPúcaí'. The juxtaposition of Kronos with Tony MacMahon, though sincerely motivated, might as well have been a crude marketing ploy to show that Kronos' openness and adaptability has no limits; unfortunately it does.

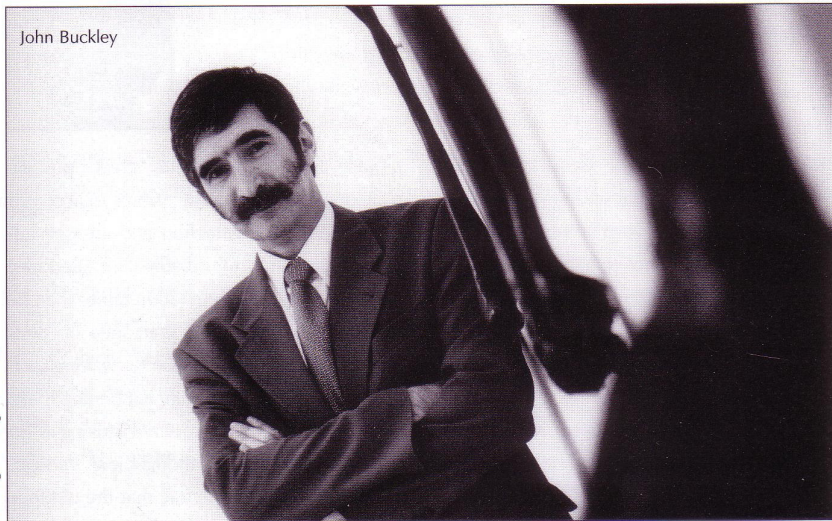
The second encore was prefaced with anti-Bush remarks, and the introduction 'this tune was made famous by Jimi Hendrix in 1969': it turned out to be a brilliant polyphonic feedback-bedecked perversion of 'The Star-Spangled Banner'.

In winter light

In a CD recorded and produced by guitarist John Feeley, he and flautist William Dowdall collect together, as if in a reference book, John Buckley's guitar and flute music. All the pieces except the last one are for the solo instruments. *In Winter Light* is the last piece on the CD and is for alto flute and guitar. John Buckley is not a composer who brings any strong sense of 'breaking with the past' to his music, he is perhaps a 'no logo' composer. In these pieces, which include his two substantial guitar sonatas, there is always a strong sense of linear evolution. The listener is led gently enough along: Buckley allows many comforting gestures such as accelerando coupling crescendo or ritardando coupling decrescendo. These can turn the thrill-seeking avant-gardist off, but in fact there is a strength of structure and beauty of harmonic invention that deserves every real music enthusiast's attention. Buckley often writes his quicker movements in a moto-perpetuo style, with self-replicating figuration that can shut down some of the listener's emotional engagement, but it is brought back into play in slower movements, where non-dramatic surprise, epiphany even, is the reward for immersion in the harmony. The consistency of Buckley's writing does not really call for the singling out of one piece here, but the second guitar sonata, the most substantial work here, could serve as an introduction to his world.

There are three options: Like Gordon, you can strive to become a brand, like Volans you can bask in a brand's reflected glory, or like Buckley you can evade the question and risk being misunderstood. Each brings its own advantages and disadvantages. Young composers, take note. ■

John Buckley



Pic: Eugene Langan © CMC

various genres each in its own section, so the first three items were arrangements of popular Mexican music from the 1930s-50s. These made an impression of melancholy sentimentality, with occasional bursts of cheerier but soupy melody. The third of the three had a further layer added, having been adapted and arranged for film, with an accompanying tape featuring among other things gongs and temple blocks, creating an effect of re-composing to give a sense of danger-music; rather cheap. The next two items were for me a segue into the contemporary music area, starting with the much more interesting piece *Children's Hour of Dream* by Charlie Mingus. Although he shared, broadly, a similar tonal language to the first three items, here was not a trace of saccharine; instead a darkly intense dream-like logic carried the listener. With the next piece, *Requiem for a Dream* by Clint Mansell, we were returned to shoddy film music, with a boring underlay of accompanying material overlaid by a dull melody. After a while one last-ditch transfusion of excitement came, in the form of a massive textural lurch into scratchy quasi-industrial timbre. The effect was

that I would look forward to hearing again. Here was a composer who has acquired a strong presence through his proximity to 'brands' such as Kronos coupled with his force of musical personality. The next piece, *Potassium*, by Michael Gordon, a composer synonymous with the tougher Bang On a Can brand, took advantage of the presence of amplification in a way that the Volans did not. This was the only piece in the programme to exploit amplification as an artistic element, and as such it stood out. Taking its time to unfold, nevertheless the piece was gripping, as simple rock-guitar effects such as fuzz and heavy reverb were applied intelligently and humorously to the string quartet, allowing them to return to material with this added layer completely changing its context.

The final section of programme was four traditional tunes from Tony MacMahon with the quartet accompanying. Most of the time the accompaniment seemed a somewhat harmless and completely unnecessary embellishment, though somewhere folk were spinning at 78rpm in the grave. At other times the quartet's material intruded quite tastelessly; for