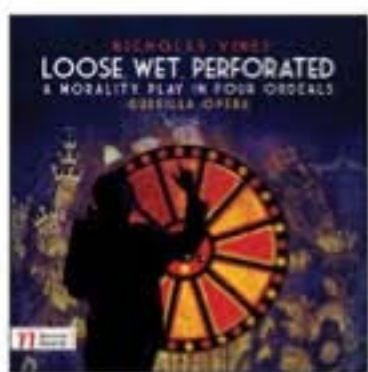


Met played more lushly, but never with the transparency that Nelson and his musicians achieve here. The performance fields a chorus made of three ensembles—those of the Opéra National du Rhin and the Badische Staatsoper, along with the Strasbourg orchestra's own. The hugeness of these forces may have been too much for the engineers to handle: the sound, wonderfully clear and spacious through most of the set, becomes constricted at big choral moments. But a few moments of sonic congestion hardly impede our view of Nelson's—and Berlioz's—vast conception. —*Fred Cohn*

## Vines: *Loose, Wet, Perforated*



**CD** De la Guardia, Lobo; Dodson, Church; Advocat, Stäudlin, Moore, Williams. Text. Navona NV6124



**PRUDES BE WARNED:** Nicholas Vines's *Loose, Wet, Perforated* is a dirty, dirty opera.

But if you can stomach some naughtiness, this recording from Boston-based Guerilla Opera is hilariously bizarre. The composer took as his model the medieval morality play, infusing it with not-so-moral literature from that era—the potty humor and “locker-room talk” of Chaucer, Rabelais and the *Carmina Burana*. The allegorical characters Loose and Wet, respective symbols of sin and saintliness, undergo four ordeals in an enigmatic contest, the winner of which will be made whole in the midst of a “wholly unwholesome world.” In the first trial, the Ordeal of the Cross, the competitors attempt to “crucify” one another into submission by inventing increasingly disgusting blasphemies that they insert into a hagiographical account of Saint Angilbert. The good-hearted Wet, sickened by Loose's pornographic and scatological heresies, embarks on a quest to “denounce indecency.” Vines ultimately offers a cynical view of humanity: Wet comes to the realization that sinful-

ness is rewarded, as evidenced by the meddling narrator and emcee, dubbed Perforated, who helps Loose to lie and cheat her way through the ordeals. In the final lesson presented in the story's epilogue, the characters remind the audience that, like Perforated, “we are not whole, but wholly perforated”—that is, holey rather than holy.

Vines matches the gratuitous vulgarity of his libretto with a grotesque and often disturbing musical language. The opera is scored for a four-person chamber ensemble, though the players on this recording make a ruckus. Busy-sounding accompaniments sputter, snigger and gurgle below the surface, suddenly bursting out with jarring ejaculations—siren-like screeches from clarinetist Amy Advocat and saxophonist Philipp A. Stäudlin and suggestively drooping glissandos from trombonist Chris Moore. But there's also a quirky, carnivalesque quality to Vines's music that suits the opera's Lewis Carroll-style puns and paradoxes. The composer sets up colorful passages for percussionist Mike Williams that unfold in a cartoonish sequence of noise events; ratchet, castanets, hi-hat and the marvelous rattling of the vibraslap follow, one after another, like a Rube Goldberg machine. Playful musical parody abounds, notably in the mock-solemn “Preamble,” for which Perforated sings a burlesque of Gregorian chant punctuated by dissonant woodwind fanfares. Later, Vines frames the first ordeal as a campy game show, which opens with a quotation of the little swirling motive that signaled scene changes in the 1960s *Batman* TV series.

Countertenor Doug Dodson makes for a sleazy Perforated, inserting sappy pop-inspired scoops into his angular vocal line and breaking out in manic, cackling repetitions of a single pitch. Brian Church's light, lyric baritone is ideal for the quixotic Wet; Vines casts him as a naïve hero from tragic opera, combining the coloratura of Monteverdi's Orfeo with the stuttering of Britten's Billy Budd. Soprano Aliana de la Guardia struts her stuff as the wanton Loose. She has a trashy moment of vulnerability when her character performs a striptease, rubbing her

“bits” against a greased-up pole while she sings of unresolved daddy issues. De la Guardia's performance conjures an atmosphere of pathetic trailer-park depravity; accompanied by murky, moaning winds, she slides lewdly between pitches, reaching higher and higher into her piercing upper register as she laments her shameful impulse to “climb fast and loose.” —*Joe Cadagin*

## Aldridge: *Sister Carrie*



**CD** Zabala, Jordheim; Phares, Morgan, Cunningham; Florentine Opera Chorus and Company, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Boggs. English text. Naxos 8.669039-40 (2)



**THIS EXCITING NEW OPERA** by composer Robert Aldridge and librettist Herschel Gar-

fein—the team behind the well-received *Elmer Gantry*—had its premiere at Milwaukee's Florentine Opera Company in October 2016. It faithfully follows Theodore Dreiser's disturbing 1900 novel about the star-is-born rise of Carrie Meeber, a small-town girl who flees home in search of something better, and the simultaneous fall of George Hurstwood, the married and successful Chicago restaurant manager whose fatal attraction to her seals his doom.

Aldridge and Garfein are very good at large-scale musical sequences with cinematic sweep; here, they're set in the oppressive shoe factory where Carrie first finds work, in Hurstwood's restaurant, inside a theater where Carrie is auditioning for a show and between a group of trolley strikers and the homeless men recruited as their replacements. Only a few numbers misfire. Carrie's big Act I aria, “Everything is paid for,” in which she contemplates the fact that her would-be paramour, Charlie Drouet, has set her up in an apartment and is paying her bills, is lush and opulent, but clearly there are darker, more cynical implications to such an arrangement that are not reflected in the music. The Act II play-within-a-play—Carrie's first