Elegant, laid-back performances and sonorous recordings sum up the spirit of a city

'Manhattan Music'
Bernstein Mass – Suite (arr Sweeney)
B Tovey Manhattan Music
R Wright Shaker Suite (arr Scatterday)
Tyzik New York Cityscape
Canadian Brass; Eastman Wind Ensemble / Mark Davis Scatterday
Opening Day @ ODY368 (65' • DDD)
It’s an illustrious crew that gathered to pay
unrelated homage to New York City and the
legendary Mercury “Living Presence” recordings
of Frederick Fennell and his Eastman Wind
Ensemble (EWE). There’s Bramwell Tovey,
music director of the Vancouver Symphony, and
Jeff Tyzik, popular pops conductor in Vancouver,
Rochester and Portland. And, of course, the
combined forces of Canadian Brass and the
current EWE conducted by the ensemble’s
fourth conductor, Mark Davis Scatterday.

It’s an odd combination of retro and current
music-making and technology. The recordings,
produced by Dixon Van Winkle and made in the
Eastman Theater in Rochester, the location of
the 1950 Mercury recordings of the EWE and a
beautiful 1920s concert hall in the second stage
of a major renovation to be completed in 2010,
have extraordinary depth and impressive deep
bass, qualities which to some might seem the
antithesis of Mercury’s outrageously up-front,
almost self-consciously audiophile analogue
sound in the 1950s. The performances, too, are
more elegant and laid-back than Fennell
obtained from his bands. Perhaps it’s the music,
each of the arrangements and original
compositions created specifically for the project.
Tovey’s 18-minute Manhattan Music has
appropriately enough, the sleek, sophisticated
feel of Manhattan chic, cool and jaunty. The
arrangements of Bernstein and Rayburn Wright,
a beloved figure in the history of jazz studies and
performance, are beautifully if a bit
anonymously played.

Fortunately, the concluding work, Tyzik’s
five-movement, 23-minute New York Cityscape,
which begins with a rag and a tango and ends
with a tarantella that whirs away into the night,
is anything but anonymous. The most beautiful
moment on the disc, in fact, is the work’s fourth
movement, “African Dance (Wall Street & East
Cityscape) is the most
beautiful moment on the disc
with an unexpected, almost
subliminal hypnotic power’

River l7099”, which, considering the massed
brass forces, has a totally unexpected, almost
subliminal hypnotic power.

River brings urgency, detail and drollery to
the repertoire’s myriad demands. John Hess’s
pianism helps mightily in awakening the music’s
inner voices. **Donald Rosenberg**