

# The New York Times

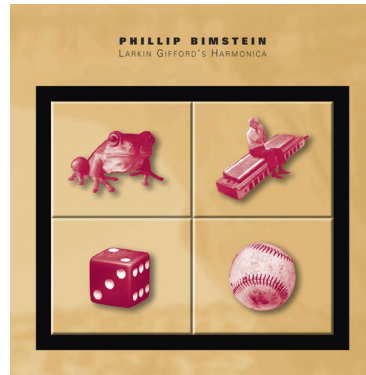
## Phillip Bimstein: 'Larkin Gifford's Harmonica'

*Stephen Caplan, oboist; Sierra Winds; Equinox Chamber Players; Abramyan String Quartet. Starkland ST-214; CD.*

PHILLIP BIMSTEIN is a man of the people, and the animals too, apparently. Mr. Bimstein, a conservatory-trained composer, has been the leader of an alternative-rock band; the mayor of Springdale, Utah; and an environmental advocate. But he is perhaps best known for his quirky electro-acoustic compositions, in which instrumental performers mingle with sampled storytellers and sound effects.

"Larkin Gifford's Harmonica," Mr. Bimstein's second CD on Starkland, is an engaging introduction to his work. The title piece is built around the voice of an elderly Utah neighbor, who reminisces about his lineage and love of music. Mr. Bimstein surrounds the narrative with a swirl of Mr. Gifford's tootling harmonica. Even more charming is "The Bushy Wushy Rag," in which a St. Louis ballpark beer vendor is accompanied by manic announcers, noisemakers and swatted balls while the Equinox Chamber Players perform lines derived from Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag."

Mr. Bimstein doesn't miss the ob-



vious pun in "Casino" when his narrator, a former craps dealer originally trained as a priest, recounts a mention of dice in Milton's "Paradise Lost." (Sound it out.) The Sierra Winds play tuneful, dancing figures, augmented by rattling dice and burbling slot machines.

Mr. Bimstein's fascination with the sounds of nature surfaces in "Half Moon at Checkerboard Mesa," in which the oboist Stephen Caplan engages in intricate call-and-response with a chorus of chirping frogs. But "Rockville, Utah, 1926," an acoustic string quartet based on an earlier electronic piece, proves that the irresistible charm of Mr. Bimstein's music has less to do with technology than with his uncanny knack for finding the music of everyday life.

STEVE SMITH

**"The irresistible charm of Mr. Bimstein's music has less to do with technology than with his uncanny knack for finding the music of everyday life."**

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