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FIVE

Review by: David Hurwitz



Artistic Quality: 9
Sound Quality: 7

Just a few seconds' listening to The Stranger, Grief (an aria—very well sung by soprano Rannveig Braga—taken from his opera Chéri, based on the novel by Colette) reveals composer Michael Dellaira's sympathy for text setting and flair for vocal writing. A former rock guitarist and singer, Dellaira's sensitivity to the meaning of words and their careful selection and apt musical enhancement characterizes all of the music here save the sweetly lyrical, purely orchestral tone poem Three Rivers. Stylistically this is conservative music, but not facile, and the composer's training as a guitarist seems evident in his frequent recourse to

simple arpeggio accompaniments. But he's not afraid of counterpoint, as the ebulliently rhythmic "The Campers at Kitty Hawk" from the choral triptych USA Stories clearly demonstrates.

Perhaps the finest work on this disc is the collection of four Emily Dickinson settings gathered under the title This World is not Conclusion. Not only are the verses marvelous, but Dallaira finds memorable musical analogs for all of them. The third movement in particular moves from its simple opening to a remarkably sonorous and richly colored climax, and the final number "Heart! We will forget him!" begins with the requisite orchestral palpitations without ever lapsing into mere crude illustration. Above it all lie elegantly sculpted, soaring vocal lines, here eloquently sung by Cantori New York and warmly accompanied by conductor Joel Eric Suben. The composer notes that he hopes to continue setting Dickinson's poetry, and he should: they sound well together.

The final work, Colored Stones, a song cycle for baritone and piano, gets an excellent performance from baritone Chris Pedro Trakas and pianist Jennifer Peterson, even if the voice sounds overly aggressive in an excessively resonant acoustic. The poems, a sort of grown-up answer to Carl Sandberg's Hailstones and Halibut Bones, are as much fun to read as the music is to hear. In fact my only complaint with this release, as just suggested, concerns the sonics: for the most part clear and honest, but with an annoying touch of distortion at the climaxes in "Heart! We will forget him!". Still, Dellaira's work really deserves notice, particularly by song recitalists and choral directors. It would grace any concert and makes very enjoyable home listening as well.

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Recording Details:

Album Title: FIVE
Reference Recording: None

MICHAEL DELLAIRA - The Stranger, Grief; Chris Pedro Trakas (baritone)



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USA Stories; Three Rivers; This World is not
Conclusion; Colored Stones

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