

Solus. Toronto, Ont.: Centrediscs, 2003. CMCCD 9603. One compact disc. \$19.98. Heather Schmidt, piano. Contents: *Sprint* (7:07); *Chaconne* (11:19); *Solus* (11:13) / Heather Schmidt; *Star Burning Bright* (7:51) / Kelly-Marie Murphy; *Danse Sauvage* (11:53) / Allan Gordon Bell; *Je reponderais...* (22:32) / Malcolm Forsyth.

Not yet thirty years of age, Heather Schmidt is clearly emerging as one of Canada's most vital musicians. As a composer, she has received numerous awards and commissions from a number of our country's most prestigious musicians and performing ensembles. In addition, a number of her works have been recorded to great critical acclaim. (Her Cello Concerto, for instance, received a 2003 Juno nomination for best classical composition.) She is currently composer-in-residence for the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra. However, Ms. Schmidt also has an active career as a performer: she is a formidable pianist with a flawless technique and complete command of her artistry. Schmidt's musical double-life harkens to a type of art-music composer who may not yet be extinct, but since the early twentieth century has certainly been on the endangered species list—the virtuoso concert performer who also performs her own music.

This new CD recording contains piano music by four Canadian composers: Allan Bell (*Danse sauvage*), Malcolm Forsyth (a trilogy of pieces entitled *Je reponderais...*), Kelly-Marie Murphy (*Star Burning Blue*) and Schmidt herself (*Sprint*, *Chaconne* and *Solus*—the latter also serves as the CD's title). As Schmidt points out in the introductory liner notes, the four composers are related on two fronts. First, they have all spent a significant portion of their careers in Alberta. The early

training of both Schmidt and Murphy took place in Calgary, while Bell and Forsyth have had distinguished academic careers at the universities of Calgary and Alberta, respectively. Second, there is a three-generation teacher-student lineage: both Murphy and Schmidt studied with Bell, who was himself a student of Forsyth.

From the pyrotechniques of such visceral pieces as Schmidt's opening *Sprint* (the title comes from the four-note motive of her *Sprint* cell phone, C-C-C-G) and Murphy's programmatic *Star Burning Blue* (a musical representation of the life cycle of a supergiant star) to the expressive and contemplative *à Purcell: Fantazia Upon One Note* by Forsyth (the first piece of the trilogy), Schmidt's beautifully recorded CD is a winner. (Special praise for the impressive sonic quality and balance of the recording must be handed out to the producer, David Jaeger.) All the compositions are fairly recent, dating from 1996 to 2003 (*Sprint* is the latest composition; *Danse sauvage* dates from 1996), and thus give a sampling of each composer's more current musical activities.

The composers contribute to the excellent and informative bilingual liner notes and biographies. All four are articulate and insightful in conveying the ideas of their compositions, balancing both technical and metaphorical views of each piece. In fact,

after reading these exceptional program notes, I began to lament the absence of such writing in other contemporary music recordings. Although the point may be obvious, the overall presentation of such recordings could be significantly ameliorated (especially for first-time audiences of a particular composer or repertoire) if more time and care were put into this element of the package.

All said, I will be shocked if this CD is not short-listed for a Juno Award. It is a stunning recording on every level, and I offer it my highest recommendation.

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