

To Music: Canadian Song Cycles. Wanda Procyshyn, soprano, Elaine Keillor, piano. Ottawa: Carleton Sound CSCD-1013, 2009. 1 compact disc (76:43). Contents: *To Music* / Healey Willan (7:30) – *Love in a Life* / Gena Branscombe (15:56) – *Limericks* / Edward Manning (3:28) – *Secrets* / Robert Fleming, (4:37) – *Of Time and the World* / John Weinzwieg (6:11) – *Amour comme un oiseau captif* / Jeanne Landry (12:37) – *Divertimenti* / Euphrosyne Keefer (4:36) – *Autumn* / Patrick Cardy (12:35) – *Three Poems from the Sanskrit* / Deirdre Piper (9:13). \$20.98

Carleton Sound is to be commended for the release of this important album of previously unrecorded Canadian song cycles that features the versatile gifts of soprano Wanda Procyshyn and pianist Elaine Keillor. *To Music* is a rich compilation of songs, dating from 1904 to 2002, by a distinguished lineup of composers.

Procyshyn is an accomplished singer whose light, bright soprano voice perfectly suits this repertoire. She is brilliantly partnered by Keillor, a Distinguished Research Professor Emerita of Carleton University. Their performances are enchanting. One is carried along by their sensitive response to the ebb and flow of feeling and drama in this portrait gallery.

The album's title, *To Music*, is also the title of the opening song cycle, written by Healey Willan in 1904. Procyshyn expressively communicates Robert Herrick's text. In the third song, "To Becalme a Sweet, Sick Youth," the musical motives from the opening song are heard, bringing the cycle to a triumphant close.

Love in a Life (1911) is Gena Branscombe's setting of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. In listening to Branscombe's cycle, one cannot help but compare it with the more familiar settings by Oskar Morawetz and American composer Libby Larsen. In both of these later settings, the dialogue is transformed into a musical metaphor of resolved and unresolved harmonies which inform the harmonic language. Branscombe's setting, although written in a late nineteenth-century lush musical language, is sparer, featuring speech-like recitative and lyrical passages. The expression of love and loss in life is sensitively delivered by both performers.

Comedic, understated music is revealed in Edward Manning's *Limericks* of 1911. The brevity and simplicity of the musical writing effectively captures the humour in each of these three songs. The five-line limericks pack a punch in the quasi-recitative, *parlando* delivery. The final song, "The Monk of Siberia," quotes Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*.

Robert Fleming is represented with *Secrets* (1945), a collection of three songs with texts by William Henry Davies. Procyshyn displays her vocal nimbleness in these engaging, fanciful pieces.

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John Weinzweig uses his own texts in *Of Time, Rain and the World* (1947). The elements of melody, harmony and structural progression are ordered into a twelve-tone row or series that provides the unifying basis for the songs. Weinzweig's texts are highly sensual and full of expressive possibilities in dealing with the mysterious, spiritual elements of time, rain and the world. The soprano's use of straight-tone, devoid of vibrato, is the right choice here.

Jeanne Landry uses her own poems in *Amour comme un oiseau captif* (1999), a romantic setting of eight songs. Prochyshyn negotiates the high-tessitura vocal writing and sustained phrases of the cycle with aplomb.

Euphrosyne Keefer's *Divertimenti* (2002) is drawn from the composer's texts written for children. This is a delightful addition to the recital program, with the performers playfully engaging in renditions of a cat, an elephant and a bear. There is an exotic reference to South Indian flute music in the second song, "The Elephant."

Patrick Cardy's song cycle, *Autumn* (1993), consists of three short songs with texts by the composer. The first song, "Alba," is an impression of the mystery and grandeur of an autumn dawn. The second, "Aspects of Rain," is a patter song with a tongue-twisting text suggestive of rain. The third song, "Twilight," nostalgically evokes the power and sorrow of memory. The authoritative performances of these songs are the highlight of the album.

Deirdre Piper's *Three Poems from the Sanskrit* (1999) is an appropriate close to the album. The cycle, a "world music" fusion of Western art music with Indian inflections of harmony and rhythm, brings us to the twenty-first century. The sensual poems are a translation of the Sanskrit. The rich harmonic language is notable for its accessibility and exotic lyricism.

The recording, which was made at City View United Church in Ottawa in August 2009, is well captured and consistently balances the soprano and piano. Keillor's notes on the composers, works, and performers are excellent. The song texts are given in English or in their original language with translations.

Overall, the album's aim is successfully achieved in a program in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Although I was only familiar with the cycles of Willan, Weinzweig and Cardy, I look forward to including all of these gems in my own and my students' programming repertoire.

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