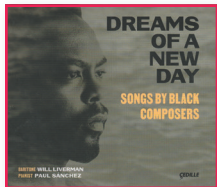


Dreams of a New Day – Songs by Black Composers

Will Liverman; Paul Sánchez
Cedille CDR 90000 200
(cedillerecords.org)



► *Dreams of a New Day – Songs by Black Composers* is an album that features art songs by eight composers. From Henry Burleigh

(1866-1949) to Shawn E. Okpebholo (b.1981), the album showcases several generations of composers and a repertoire that offers an honest, and, at times, devastating, account of life for African Americans in the United States. Composers set music to texts of raw poetry by American poets and artists such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes and Adela Florence Nicolson.

Paul Sánchez captures our attention with a breadth of pianistic sonorities and timbres while baritone Will Liverman's skilled and beautiful singing elicits all of the nuances of challenging topics that include the Middle Passage, Civil Rights, past and present injustices, and Black pride. Most poignant are Okpebholo's *Two Black Churches* songs (*Ballad of Birmingham* and *The Rain*, commissioned for the album) and *Birmingham Sunday* (Richard Fariña 1937-1966). Whereas the first pair combines several tragic events and deals with race-based violence, the last song reminds us that while dreaming of a new day, the road to equality for all is still ahead of us.

The booklets included with the album provide both context and the rich history behind the repertoire with a 15-page song booklet and a 20-page extensive program note booklet written by Dr. Louise Toppin, a specialist of African American composers' concert repertoire.

Sophie Bisson

Scott Ordway – Girl in the Snow Julia Dawson; Anna Naretto Acis APL85820 (acisproductions.com)



► Composed by Scott Ordway, *Girl in the Snow* is a song cycle featuring Canadian mezzo-soprano Julia Dawson and Italian pianist Anna Naretto. Inspired by Saint Augustine's

Confessions, a deeply personal and philosophical narrative, Ordway creates allusive metaphors to describe both the imaginary landscapes of the mind and the places where we store memory. The girl in the snow is initially portrayed as a young girl wandering a snow-covered dreamland and remembering parts of her relationship with nature. The eight songs of the cycle total approximately 37 minutes of music and as the cycle progresses we understand the girl to be a woman reminiscing about her life, the events that have shaped her since, the love she experienced, ultimately, coming back to the present and "awakening" to the end of her life.

Dawson and Naretto act as narrators and bring the audience on an intimate, philosophical journey. Their connected interpretations give life and meaning to poetry that needs a touch of decoding but music that is rich in sounds and colours. Naretto's playing is nuanced and deliberate while Dawson's tone quality and colour, distinctively mezzo-soprano, are written in a range more closely aligned with a higher soprano. This, along with the solemn and ethereal nature of the work, especially in the *Memory Play* sections, leaves the listener feeling unsettled, perhaps intentionally, about the sometimes intangibility of remembrance.

Sophie Bisson

Boundless Sirens Leaf Music (leaf-music.ca)



► The ethereal polyphony of the Sirens Choir is absolutely bewitching on *Boundless*. You would be forgiven for falling prey to the charms of the women of this

Prince Edward Island-based choir as they wax eloquent with their celestial 11-voice harmonies on this disc. So perfect is this programming that it is surprising to note that this debut didn't happen much earlier.

This is a quietly potent recording. Its feminism is whispered rather than broadcast, with all the singers conveying a sense of strength, joy and spontaneity. Ensemble director Kelsea McLean guides, with a firm hand, the often delicate musicality of the group. Together with the rest of Sirens, she is able to inspire a performance where balanced rhythm, soaring harmonies and subtle dynamics are both flexible and dramatic. The overall sound is highly translucent, made more memorable in the meditative atmosphere of St. Bonaventure's Church, where the recording took place.

The music of *Selene's Boat* and of *Boundless* is utterly captivating. *Turlutte acadienne montréalaise* may be the disc's apogee. By the time you get here, however, you may wish that you had a booklet of lyrics with which to follow the vocalists; it's a small price to pay for listening to this outstanding music. Odysseus may have resisted the mesmerism of the Sirens of the Aegean Sea, but you will not be able to resist the charms of these Canadian singers.

Raul da Gama

What we're listening to this month:

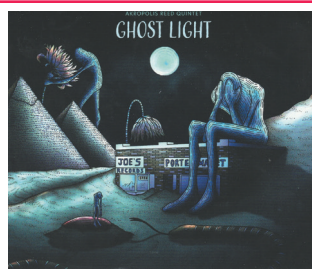
thewholenote.com/listening



#4

Andrzej Pietrewicz

First public release by independent Port Credit composer. An uplifting and intriguing original chamber suite for small ensemble and voice.

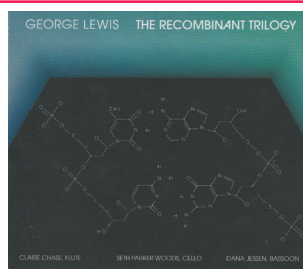


Ghost Light

Akropolis Reed Quintet

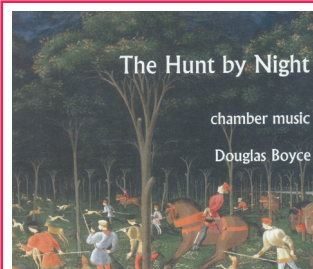
"Akropolis Reed Quintet have evolved a collective voice that appears to be organically integrated."

-The Wire, review of Ghost Light



The Recombinant Trilogy
George Lewis

Works for instrument and electronics that use interactive digital delays, spatialization and timbre transformation to transform acoustic sounds into digitally created sonic personalities.



The Hunt by Night
Douglas Boyce

A collection of his finely wrought chamber music. Boyce's music balances an affinity for subtle motivic development with vigorous rhythmic energy.