

the excellent musicianship of Alarm Will Sound makes this a unique, educational, and wildly entertaining album.

SAXTON: *Piano Pieces*
Clare Hammond
Toccata 458—55:44

The first piece, “Chacony for Piano Left Hand”, was commissioned by Oliver Knudsen for pianist Leon Fleisher for a premiere in 1988 during the time when Fleisher had lost the use of his right hand. Inspired by Britten’s arrangement of Purcell’s *Chacony* for string orchestra, this piece is so well written for piano that the texture feels as thick as if it had been created by the use of ten fingers, not five. Reminiscent of Ligeti and brooding with its darker harmonic choices, Saxton’s music consists of deeply thoughtful, shimmering musical landscapes. *Hortus Musicae* Books 1 and 2 are collections of miniatures with titles like ‘The Flowers appear on the Earth’ and ‘Light on the Hedge-rows’. Paxton’s sense of dusky whimsy is beautifully put at play here, married with a delicate sense of precision and detail. The pieces in this collection are well matched with the poise and finesse in Clare Hammond’s playing. The final piece, ‘Lullaby for Rosa’, is a suave, Brahmsian lullaby that is warm and rich. Written for Hammond’s daughter, this lullaby is a lovely amuse bouche that says all it needs to in one luscious, minute-long phrase.

CLEMENT: *Preludes*
Eliza Garth, p—Albany 1714—57:46

This album of piano works—*Preludes* by Sheree Clement and *Of Points Fixed and Fluid* by Perry Goldstein—presents a cornucopia of sounds and feelings brought to expert, breathing life by pianist Eliza Garth. Clement’s piano preludes have titles like ‘Gently, Steadily’ and ‘Dramatically’ along with ‘Moderato’ and ‘Allegro’. Clement’s writing is direct, almost melodic, with touches of Gershwin as she executes an idea or parses a technique in each of these short movements. The seed at the heart of each of these movements (two dominant 7th chords in the first prelude, thirds in the 11th prelude) dictates its harmonic and tonal centers, and following these free-flowing thoughts as they flourish from seeds into gestural vines is an intellectual adventure. Goldstein’s *Of Points Fixed and Fluid* is a 15-minute piece that begins with a theme that rumbles in the bass, full of nervous energy that suddenly finds itself in a beautiful plateau of static, soft bell-

like gestures in the higher register of the piano. The piece vacillates between the two, exploring each space before revisiting the other. It’s a sonata that is not a sonata but just as satisfying. Garth’s preternatural sense of timing is on grand display in this piece: she’s given each energetic area the pace it needs to haunt and mesmerize her audience.

New for Violin & Piano

FUCHS: *Duo in One Movement*; **HOOVER:** *Dancing*; **HALLE:** *Amen Choruses*; **KAMINSKY:** *Undercurrent*; **MUSKAL:** *Where Do We Belong?*; **FREUND:** *Life (Still) Goes On*
Julie Rosenfeld & Peter Miyamoto
Albany 1717—64:49

Kenneth Fuchs’s ‘Duo in One Movement’ is vibrant, catchy, and full of ecstatic joy. Katherine Hoover’s *Dancing* is sometimes pensive and delicate, sometimes harried and anxious. John Halle’s *Amen Choruses* is summertime Americana at its best: sumptuous and laid-back, with plenty of blue notes and dapper swagger. Laura Kaminsky’s *Undercurrent* is immediately unnerving, with a single high pitch on the violin that gradually begins to bend lower, descending finally into a sul ponticello gesture. The piano rumbles below these long, sustained, high pitches in the violin. Kaminsky writes in her program notes that “Like most of my works, ‘Undercurrent’ was sparked by my fascination with the natural world and concern about the fate of the earth in this Anthropocene era. Layers below and above, cursing, crashing, combining, conversing.” The devastation that this piece hints at ensures you won’t forget it long after its performance is over. In Tamar Muskal’s *Where Do We Belong? a conversation with Bach*, 8-1/2 minutes of this 11-minute piece are solo violin, and Muskal’s intellectual conversation with Bach is palpable here: faint echoes of Bach lines float in and out of it, and the structure feels like a memory being increasingly retrieved. Haunting and cerebral, this work feels like a tribute to Bach, yet also like an antidote. Stefan Freund’s *Life (Still) Goes On* is an 11-minute nostalgic, questioning duet across time; it was inspired in part by Freund’s father’s work *Life Goes On*. Both men were roughly the same age when these pieces were written, and this final piece on the album—with its melodic straining and tender sighing, its aggravated 16th note passages and rock groove—puts a harsh and necessary spotlight on the bittersweet phrase of its title. Julie Rosenfeld was a force of nature in making this album happen, and her playing is earnest and lovely, wholly embodying

the spirit of each work. Peter Miyamoto's piano playing is sensitive and balanced, with silkiness and aggression in all the right places.

FEIGIN: *Piano Pieces*
Benjamin Goodman, p
Navona 6147—47:30

More tonal than Rachmaninoff's music, but comparable to his opulence and gestural aggression, is music by Latvian composer Sara Feigin (1928-2011). The pieces on this album show the breadth of her genius, from 'Storm,' a short piece that energetically and earnestly leaps up and down the range of the piano, to her 'Toccatà,' whose moods and harmonies speak to the zeitgeist of the era it was written in. 'Memories' from Four Scenes will at first remind you of Gershwin's summertime, but then it immediately delves into a waltz-like dream world of its own. Feigin's work speaks with an honesty and realism that I appreciate. Benjamin Goodman's piano playing on this album is superb. It speaks with direct virtuosity and does these pieces full justice. The cover art is a beautiful painting of a piano in the sea at sunset; it was painted by the composer's husband. It's a beautiful touch on this sentimental album.

KRASH: *Music*
Jessica Krash, p; Emily Noel, s; Ian Swenson, v;
Robert DiLutis, cl; Tanya Anisimova, c; Laura Kaufman, fl; Members of the Washington Master Choral/ Thomas Colohan, Conductor
Albany 1716—73:31

Jessica Krash's music is melodic, sentimental, full of traditional and jazz harmonies that bend just slightly from what you expect. There is a hard edge in these pieces, but they soar and are soft and sweet in their presentation. *Young Vilna*, for violin, clarinet, cello, and chorus, carries with it a sorrowful undercurrent: the text was taken from questions Lithuanian teens asked of Ellen Cassedy, author of *We are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust* 75 years after it happened. *Sulpicia's Songs* is a luscious and satisfying song cycle, using the poetry of Sulpicia, who wrote around 50 BCE. In her program notes the composer says, "While Sulpicia's heartfelt and brave poems have something in common with a Facebook over-sharer, more important they are carefully-crafted, intelligent creations intended for a specific literary audience among Rome's cultural elite. How do we listen in our own era to young women who are artistic and intellectual?" Krash says that she "composes with the heart of a chamber

musician," and that is decidedly noticeable in this album: the music is well written and engaging, and the earnest and elegant performances of the musicians cry a loud accolade to this body of work that makes history suddenly tangible.

MCENROE: *Piano Pieces*
Yoko Hagino, p
Navona 6144 [2CD] 110:30

Saccharine, romantic, and unfailingly tonal, McEnroe's piano music is nothing new. The composer says in his program notes that "I regard my piano pieces to be more like 'musical paintings,' expressing thoughts and chapters from my life as it unfolds." Sure enough, this album feels like the music is imitating the glorified happiness of Thomas Kincaid paintings. Pianist Yoko Hagino does a marvelous job of bringing out the life in these works. If you're looking for collections of short piano pieces, stick with Debussy.

RUTTY: *Chamber Pieces*
Alejandro Ruty, composer
Navona 6145—71:30

An album that's an answer to the Grammy-winning Goat Rodeo Sessions, this collection of works by Alejandro Ruty is both radically joyful and rhythmic, yet sometimes as deep and soft and sentimental as music gets. Though not technically perfect, the Beo Quartet gives *Exhaling Space* an enthusiastic and rousing performance. *Transparent Sky* (performed here by Fabian Lopez on violin and Inara Zandmane on piano) is a work that fully echoes its program notes, which discuss translucence and transparency in visual space. *Martian Milonga*, performed by Jacqui Carrasco on violin, Adam Ricci on piano, Guy Capuzzo on guitar, Alejandro Ruty on electric bass, and Fernando Martinez Lopez on percussion, is chill and hip, a piece you're going to immediately want to grab a tango partner for. Along with his chops for groove and visual painting, *More Music for Examining and Buying Merchandise* nods to Ruty's psychological interests. According to the program notes, this piece is "actual music for examining and buying merchandise, where sound is designed to encourage spending. As such, the purpose of music is mood regulation and behavior control." This is a very neat album, and one that promises well-rounded worth. I'm certainly going to listen to this again.