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RIVERS OF LIGHT

Catherine Nelson reviews discs of American repertoire exploring the work of women composers



Tim Fain's disc 'River of Light' (Naxos 8.559662) takes a whistle-stop tour through short works for violin and piano by US composers, all written in the last 60 years and sharing a similar lyrical aesthetic. Fain shows off his impeccable technique in the streams of impossibly fast spiccato arpeggios of Philip Glass's *Knee Play 2*, but he is equally winning in more melodious territory. Aaron Jay Kernis's *Air* somehow has the spirit of a much-loved Paul Simon song in the modal feel to its melody and its melancholy harmonies, as Fain relaxes into its gorgeous phrases. William Bolcom's *Graceful Ghost Rag* is reflective and lovely, and Fain makes the complexity and intensity of Richard Danielpour's *River of Light* really speak. The recorded sound throughout is bright and immediate. Particularly appealing, too, is Jennifer Higdon's plaintive and chromatic *Legacy*, with its searching, brittle melodies, and Ruth Shaw Wylie's wandering and enticing *Wistful Piece*.

TM&C: HAUSER

Higdon's music also pops up on the **Lincoln Trio's** *Notable Women* (Cedille CDR 90000 126), recordings of trios by contemporary female composers. Here, as with Fain's project, the pieces sit well together, and the Lincoln players tackle each with interpretative flair, on a disc with a warm and mellow recorded sound. In Lera Auerbach's *Trio*, a spiny, witty prelude comes unwound at the end, and then cello and piano begin the romancing in the *Andante*, the violin joining with beautifully arching lines. The whole ends with a tempestuous *Presto*. Higdon's two-movement *Piano Trio* brings us back on to more traditional harmonic ground. The flowing lines of the opening 'Pale Yellow', underpinned with a keen sense of yearning, make a delicious contrast with the impulsive, racing declamations of the second movement, 'Fiery Red'. Elsewhere, Augusta Read Thomas's *Moon Jig* bristles with energy in its jazz-inflected rhythms, and in the disc's most substantial work, the 20-minute

Trio Cavany by Grawemeyer Award-winning Joan Tower, the players deliver a deliciously expansive performance, unfolding the composer's richly textured phrases with pace and supreme clarity of expression.

Female composers are showcased, too, on a ProMusica Chamber Orchestra disc, *Triumvirate* (Summit DCD 573), featuring world-premiere recordings of concertos by Tower, Auerbach and Gabriela Lena Frank. Cellist **David Finckel** and pianist Wu Han join forces for Frank's dancing, spirited double concerto *Compadrazgo*, Finckel's warm-throated tone soaring out across the orchestra. The exquisitely songful outpourings of Auerbach's concerto grosso-like *Fragile Solitudes* are spun with endless delicacy by the **Borromeo Quartet** over lush, blurred textures in the orchestra. Director Timothy Russell keeps the mood taut and focused in a performance that's utterly enchanting. Tower's *Purple Rhapsody* has much to live up to, but **Paul Neubauer's** velvety viola tone is perfectly suited to its long-drawn phrases, and once again soloist and orchestra effortlessly pull the listener in. The recorded sound is perhaps just a little dull, but this does little to mar an otherwise very persuasive disc.



Interpretative flair from the players of the Lincoln Trio