

American Record Guide

May/June 2005 Issue

This is an engaging collection of modern and contemporary American pieces for flute and piano. Several of these works are homages and pastiches. Mark Lehman's *Three Souvenirs*, from 2002, include a gentle, lovely 'Minuet in Honor of Gabriel Fauré, a perkier, drier 'Souvenir de Prokofieff', and a lyrical 'Barcarolle on a Theme of Giacomo Puccini.' The latter, the most haunting of the souvenirs, is based on the opening "river" melody in Puccini's *Tabarro*, but the melodic shape and flute coloring are also reminiscent of the opening motif in Ravel's Introduction and Allegro. All three souvenirs have a bittersweet elegance and poise, invoking the spirit of their dedicatees in a voice of their own. Lehman, who contributed the authoritative annotations for this release, writes for ARG.

Other pieces have a melancholy neo-tonality not unlike Lehman's. Gary Schocker's *Fond Farewell: Meditations on September 11*, is a quiet, unassuming tribute to those who lost their lives, with no hint of anger or an ideological agenda. The earliest work, Lukas Foss's *Three American Pieces*, by turn lyrical and spirited, invoke a Coplandesque innocence and openness, with more than a hint of Rodeo. Katherine Hoover's 1981 *Medieval Suite*, the lengthiest work, has as its centerpiece an elaborately lyrical movement called 'On the Betrothal of Princess Isabelle of France, Aged Six Years', a piece used in the PBS special, "The Artist Was a Woman."

The collection also includes some fast playful pieces: Hoover's 'Demon's Dance', the finale of her suite; Vincent Persichetti's bright 'Parable XII' for piccolo, based on an original hymn tune; and Gary Schocker's comical 'Airheads', a set of bagatelles for flute and clarinet.

Flutist Jeannine Dennis meets the daunting technical demands of these easily and plays the more song-like works with varied tone and limpid reserve. Philip Amalong's pianism is sensitive and nuanced; especially in Lehman's *Souvenirs*. Rounding out a gratifying picture is a resonant, realistic recording: listen, for example to the brilliant sound at the rousing end of Foss's 'Composer's Holiday'. The Schocker, Persichetti, and Lehman works are premiere recordings, giving this release an added importance.

JACK SULLIVAN