

REVIEW 15



WHITE DAWN

Songs and Soundscapes by David Lumsdaine.
2 CDs

Lesley-Jane Rogers (soprano)

John Turner (recorder)

Peter Lawson (piano)

Jonathan Price (cello)

Gemini conducted by Martyn Brabbins.

Metier msv 28519

Australian Landscape The Billabong at Sunset (Lake Emu)

A little cantata in memory of Tracey Chadwell for soprano, recorder and piano

Australian Landscape II Frogs at Night

Blue upon blue for solo cello

Australian Landscape III Raven Cry

Six postcard pictures for piano

Australian Landscape IV Serenade

A tree telling of Orpheus for soprano and ensemble

Australian Landscape V Hunting a Crested Bellbird for Dr Gilbert at Palm Creek

Metamorphosis at Mullet Creek for solo recorder

A Norfolk Songbook for soprano, recorder and piano

Cambewarra for piano

David Lumsdaine is Australian, born in Sydney in 1931. He studied at the New Wales Conservatory and at the University of Sydney. He came to England to study with Matyas Seiber in 1953 and with Lennox Berkeley at RAM. Here he set up a contemporary music room known as the Manson Room. He was a schoolteacher, and a proof reader for Universal Edition. He became a lecturer at Durham University where he set up an electro-acoustic studio. Later he moved to King's College, London and, with his wife Nicola LeFanu, set up a lectureship. He now lives in York.

Lumsdaine has as main ingredients in much of his music his love for his native Australia and the sounds of birds even visiting the area where I live to record the sounds of waders. His reproduction of Australian birdsong is partly because of the unusual way that birds cry on that continent. They have the amazing ability to sing in tune even in large groups and in harmony. They have perfect pitch and the higher the pitch the more clear is their sound and they have a harmonic series.

These are not the birdsongs that Messaien tried to reproduce in many of his works. Lumsdaine has taken this much further by producing actual recordings birds singing. The bird song in the Soundscape number 1 were recorded on the Darling River in 1984 and is a glorious and beautiful sound... nothing but real birds singing ? No, we have frogs, crickets and bees... a glorious sound!

A Little Cantata in memory of Tracey Chadwell follows. The words are by the composer himself and movements one and three are instrumental pieces. The performers are Lesley-Jane Rogers, John Turner and Peter Lawson. The themes are Lumsdaine's usual representations of nature, from mountains to butterflies and from grasshoppers to berries. It is an enchanting work with luscious sounds.

Australian Landscape II introduces us to night time frogs in what is a rather haunting soundscape.

Blue upon Blue is a short piece for solo cello which comprises a modal melody and a Japanese influence. This is poetic music but I find the cello's sounds to be ugly, irreverent and reminiscent of the ugly sounds of a famous British cello concerto

Australian Landscape III gives a sunrise and a gorgeous dawn chorus with Australian Ravens and a kingfisher with a strange bass note. Very, very interesting

The Six Postcard Pictures for piano are
Overture a la francaise
March hardly militaristic
Rhapsody moments of ecstasy, spells of calm,
Nocturne, almost a nightingale
Sonata including features of at least 3 typical movements
Toccata barely touching on the concept; a hint of Ravel?

This suite introduces us to the composer's dry sense of humour. I would like to say more but perhaps I should not. I love the humour!

Australian Landscape IV is marked serenade where we are transported to the open country near to the riverside. The birdsong is again is both enchanting and captivating with solos and duets

A Tree Telling of Orpheus is the most substantial vocal work on these two discs. The poem is by the late Denise Levertov and was premiered by Mary Wiegold at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in 1991. It was commissioned by Gemini. It is a most compelling composed work on these discs, full of colour and vocal variety and an admirable continuity. Lesley- Jane Rogers is superb with a wonderful range, not only of notes but of tone. Her intonation can only be admired in this challenging work. The discs are worth it for this work alone although there is so much more to admire.

Australian Landscape V is the hunting of a Crested Bellbird. Dr Gilbert is the distinguished British Composer, Anthony Gilbert.

Metamorphosis is an amazing piece for solo recorder expertly played by John Turner who captures bird song better than any instrument or work to date.

A Norfolk Song book for soprano (the excellent Lesley-Jane Rogers) and recorder sets ten short poems by the composer and dates from 1992 when the composer lived in the north of Norfolk. Nature and the countryside are the themes. It was first performed by Tracey and John Turner and the Whitworth gallery in Manchester in 1993. The music sometimes sounds desolate and lonely but the vocal line is always full of interest and the recorder is so very effective in its bird song imitation

Tracey Chadwell was a fine soprano, a lovely singer and a delightful person with whom I corresponded many times as she wanted to perform John Veales' Song of Radha. Her early death from leukaemia in 1996 robbed us of a great talent and a truly loving woman.

Cambewarra is an area of Australia and its characteristics are captured in this solo piano work lasting just over half an hour and set in three parts. The music has colourful harmonies and a personal modality. The calmness and birdsong that pervades his music is here and the angular leaps (for example at the beginning of the first movement) recall Humphrey Searle's Suite, Op 29. My concern is that Lumsdaine's music does not always flow; there are too many rests and the music is static but when the music does flow it is fascinating and often exciting. The sounds and the harmonies are exquisite. Peter Lawson is an excellent exponent of this music.

A fascinating double album for all genuine lovers of music but, perhaps, not for the narrow minded people who think that all modern music is not music at all. While I hope music lovers will avail themselves of these discs ornithologists should as well

Highly recommended.

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