

Ings. Christina Petrowska Quilico, piano. Toronto: Welspringe Productions WEL0008, 2008. 2 compact discs. Contents: Disc 1: *Glass houses* / Ann Southam (8:44) — *After Handel's "Vesper"* / Gavin Bryars (13:15) — *Première communion de la Vierge* / Olivier Messiaen (7:29) — *Première sonate* / Pierre Boulez (10:27) — *Quivi sospiri* / David Jaeger (10:15) — *Star filled night* / Alexina Louie (7:02) — *Les yeux clos* / Toru Takemitsu (4:42) — *Apparitions* (4) / Lowell Liebermann (11:08). Disc 2: *Six Ings* / Henry Cowell (8:41) — *Fantasy pieces* (4) / David Del Tredici (8:52) — *Winnsboro Cotton Mill blues* / Frederic Rzewski (9:02) — *Capriccio for piano* / Masamitsu Takahashi (6:05) — *Suite (Prelude, Wannabe a rag, Ballade, All boogies)* / Bill Westcott (16:10) — *I'll never be the same ; Don't get around much anymore* / Art Tatum (1:36) (1:18) — *Surfacing* / Omar Daniel (10:46). \$24.99*

Ings, pianist Christina Petrowska Quilico's twentieth album, is a diverse collection of performance recordings made and broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation over the last several years. The two-CD set, released in May of 2008, appropriately takes its name from the American composer Henry Cowell's 1917 set of short pieces featured at the beginning of the second disc. Cowell's pieces (*Floating, Frisking, Fleeting, Scooting, Wafting, and Seething*) have little in common with each other apart from the piano instrumentation. The set's title, *Six Ings*, underscores this disparity and by so doing brings out the pieces' only remaining similarity. Each is a gerund, an action. The emphasis for Cowell is not on the specifics of each piece, but on the quality of "action" they all share: their "ing." So too, in this CD set, "ings" is a metaphor for the common thread running through every piece, the presence of Petrowska Quilico herself. The metaphor places emphasis on the masterful performances instead of the specifics of the pieces themselves.

Now a Professor of Piano Performance and Musicology at York University, Petrowska Quilico made her performance debut at age ten with the Royal Conservatory of Music orchestra in Ottawa. Shortly after, she began studies at the Julliard School of Music and, at fourteen, had her New York debut with the Municipal Arts Orchestra at Town Hall. Later she studied musicology at the Sorbonne in Paris and composition in Berlin and Darmstadt with György Ligeti and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Petrowska Quilico has since devoted her career to promoting a union between contemporary and traditional repertoires and has become a champion of Canadian new music.

This is made clear in the repertoire chosen for this album and by the passion and grace with which it is realized. Contributions from Canadian composers Ann Southam, Alexina Louie, Omar Daniel and David Jaeger (who also produced the album) are featured prominently with works by composers from England, the US, France, and Japan. The pieces present many levels of complexity, accessibility and style, and all are handled with precision and dedication.

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The ordering of the pieces creates a general narrative shape on each CD. On the first, we begin with the slowly evolving, yet highly active, tonal-textural landscape offered by Ann Southam's *Glass Houses*. After the rhythmic repose and gentle confidence of Gavin Bryars' *After Handel's "Vesper,"* we move quickly into murkier waters. Messiaen's *Première Communion de la Vierge* is a shimmering, almost explosive work, with all the deep colours and sweeping gestures for which the composer is known. Boulez's *Première Sonate*, with its sharp angles and abrupt yet supple phrasing, provides relief to the preceding pieces and leads well into David Jaeger's *Quivi Sospiri*. The only electro-acoustic work on the album, *Quivi Sospiri* marries the timbre and intensities of the piano with electronics in thrilling and unexpected ways. *Star Filled Night* by Alexina Louie brings us back to the purely acoustic, with upward gestures and broad sparkling brushstrokes of light and colour. Takemitsu's *Les Yeux Clos* complements *Star Filled Night* through its introspective exploration of a different kind of darkness. Rounding out the material on the album's first disc is Lowell Liebermann's four *Apparitions*. Liebermann confidently lays out four simple and moving pieces whose breadth and warmth are matched only by the weight that each carries.

The second disc begins with fresh and lively performances of Henry Cowell's *Six Ings* followed by David Del Tredici's *Fantasy Pieces*. The anachronistic titles of the four pieces ("Adagio: espressivo," "Poco Allegretto," etc.) contrast with the lively raw (sometimes atonal) spirit that each possesses. Next is Rzewski's oft-played *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*. Here the juxtapositions between the mechanical and the lively, the fixed with the free, come to life under Petrowska Quilico's relentless fingers. Lesser-known composer Masamitsu Takahashi follows Rzewski with his *Capriccio for Piano*, where traditional Japanese sounds are fused with American jazz. Bill Westcott, Petrowska Quilico's colleague at York University, follows with his *Suite*, a set of four jazz-steeped, emotionally tumultuous short pieces. Two brief arrangements by the virtuoso jazz pianist Art Tatum demonstrate, perhaps more vividly than any of the other pieces on the album, Petrowska Quilico's range on the instrument. Canadian composer Omar Daniel completes the final CD of the album with his composition, *Surfacing*. This relentless and poignant struggle delivers a strong conclusion to the album whose energy refuses to subside even through its final moments.

The recordings themselves are all quite good, except that crowd noise is an issue on several of the tracks, especially during the performance of Del Tredici's *Fantasy Pieces*. Frequent coughing and commotion may be heard at almost any moment in the performance. The overall recording quality on both discs is a little muffled and unclear. This may be easily remedied by increasing the treble setting on one's stereo to taste.

What is perhaps the most markedly impressive aspect of this collection is the fantastic energy that Petrowska Quilico brings to even the most distant musical extreme without compromising her technique. The dynamic range of sensitivity and boldness that she brings to every piece on this album is truly remarkable. This is a terrific example of the human energy that is at the core of all music, and that is often lost in the face of extended techniques, new notations, and philosophical abstractions.

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