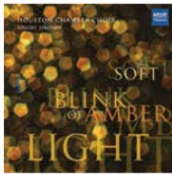




The Houston Chamber Choir celebrate their 20th birthday with a disc of new commissions on MSR Classics

mysterium **Theofanidis** Messages to Myself
DA White The Blue Estuaries
Houston Chamber Choir / Robert Simpson
 MSR Classics © MS1499 (56' • DDD)



The Houston Chamber Choir celebrate their 20th birthday with first recordings of commissions to five American composers; all save one is more than 50, and in their otherwise unrelated series of reflections on love, life and death each is committed to the power of music immersed in words, and to keeping the choir's characteristic tonal purity, harmonic precision, virtuosity and sense of musical exploration foremost in mind.

For the title-track, Jocelyn Hagen immerses herself meditatively in Julia Klatt Singer's fireflies, 'ancient mating dreams, and the soft blink of amber light'; Christopher Theofanidis's *Messages to Myself*, set to poems by Whitman, Rumi, Amy Beth Kirsten and Yeats, may be the most purely inventive music on the CD. Wayne Quin's *O magnum mysterium*, commissioned by the Whitewater Chamber Singers at the University of Wisconsin, is a wonderful study in gentle reverence, rising to an emotional peak. There is a similar note of gradually

awakening, nearly spiritual ecstasy in David Ashley White's 'Train Tune', the fourth of his *The Blue Estuaries*, when Louise Bogan's poetry proposes 'in the clear night of stars / Swing their lights westward / To set behind the land'.

Dominick DiOrio's 17-minute *A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass*, to poems by Amy Lowell, is scored for the choir with a solo part for marimba. It's a *tour de force* of inventive thinking and unique colour, which DiOrio calls a 'cantata-concerto', and brings the programme to a brilliant conclusion with a cascade of notes at the lines, 'Joy! With the vigorous earth I am one'. **Laurence Vittes**

'Theme & Variations'

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 30, Op 109
Mozart Piano Sonata No 11, K331
Schubert Impromptu, D935 No 3
Carol Rosenberger pf
 Delos © DE3452 (62' • DDD)



Carol Rosenberger's previous recordings of classical repertoire revealed her to be an extremely sensitive and caring yet relatively unassertive interpreter, and that's the case here. She transforms the disarming lyricism of Schubert's B flat Impromptu's opening

theme into an introspective dirge. The second and fourth variations take wing but are as reticently projected as the minor-key third variation; you won't find the shapely animation and suppleness of Horowitz or Schnabel. The latter's spirit, however, benignly hovers over Rosenberger's protracted intensity at the outset of the variation movement of Beethoven's Op 109.

The only problem with the pianist's generally slow tempi concerns her frequent, increasingly predictable and ultimately generic *ritards* at phrase endings. The second movement transpires at less than a true *prestissimo* and is a shade generalised in detail, although the opening *Vivace* is flexible, poetic and full of subtle nuance.

Rosenberger's polished pianism cannot be faulted in the Mozart A major Sonata's lengthy first-movement variations, yet she downplays the music's dramatic build and exhilarating momentum. Her similarly soft-grained and rounded-off Minuet and Trio emerges as a highly chaperoned dance with no touching allowed. Fortunately the briskly paced, discreetly accented 'Rondo alla turca' displays much more energy and sharpness of character than Rosenberger hints at elsewhere.

The slightly distant perspective conveyed by these recordings dating back to 1997 does justice to the pianist's attractively plangent-sounding Bösendorfer Imperial concert grand. **Jed Distler**