

Le Ben Franklin Post (Paris)

By Isabelle Boucq

Helen is an upper-class woman from Los Angeles discarded for a trophy wife after dedicating her life to her ambitious husband. Naomi is a yuppieish resident of Berkeley who feels morally smug while carefully keeping the underprivileged at a safe distance. Lonnie is a 70-something black man who has lived a segregated life in the industrial city of Richmond, across the bay from San Francisco. Luz, a native Mexican, must also fight for acceptance in a society that prefers to keep its immigrant workforce on the fringe.

The seven portraits Mark Abel paints in *The Dream Gallery* tell seven representative versions of the California dream, a dream mistreated by harsh realities. A Californian for 30 years, Abel is blunt and yet compassionate, filling his portraits with details that ring true. The composer writes in the vein of Jacques Brel and Leo Ferre. He found seven singers, familiar figures on the Southern California opera and symphonic scene, to lend their voices to his gallery of the disenchanting. The music, lyrical and gripping, serves well-crafted texts.

"I describe my music as post-modern art song. Through poetic texts, I try for a larger commentary about society," explained Abel, a former journalist who is releasing his third CD with *The Dream Gallery*.