

Classical-Modern Music Review

By Grego Applegate Edwards

The art song cycle today? ... West Coast composer Mark Abel is an exponent who excels in the genre, judging from his recording "Terrain of the Heart." Two years ago I covered another of his for vocal and orchestra, "The Dream Gallery," and I was captivated. I must say he has done the same for me here.

These songs are about feelings, memories, relationships. It is music with a romantic bent, but not like Brahms or Tchaikovsky. There is a connection I feel when listening to the Samuel Barber of *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, in the sense that there is a tonality and expression that is not really European It is tonal music of today without the long baggage train of tradition following behind.

The Dark-Eyed Chameleon and *Rainbow Songs* feature soprano Jamie Chamberlin; *Five Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke* finds soprano Ariel Pisturino as the vocalist. Chamberlin has a powerful operatic presence; Pisturino is slightly more intimate but powerful too. Victoria Kirsch plays the piano parts throughout. She has a fully realized poetic demeanor that does much to bring out Abel's distinctive pianistic concept, both rhapsodic and contemporary.

This is declamatorially vibrant and moving music all around. The through-composed interaction of soprano and piano, of the music and the lyrics, works on all levels. This is art song at a high-water mark of invention.

Abel has created some very fine music here. It may not be on the edge of the future, it is not avant-garde, but it probably could not be that and be as expressively effective as it is. Chamberlin and Pisturino each bring their beautiful vocal instruments to bear on these songs and make them their own. Their dramatic lyric charge puts the music in a certain place that, after getting used to, seems right. Kirsch opens up the piano sound and does the modern yet very pianistically idiomatic parts full justice.

I respond to this music strongly. Mark Abel has a vision and the artists do much to give it a full realization. Bravo!