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By Mark J. Estren

The deepest and most affecting of the three song cycles on "Terrain of the Heart" is *The Dark-Eyed Chameleon*, which traces the end of a love relationship in forthright and emotionally fraught words by Abel himself. The final song, "Cataclysm," ... reflects the emotional devastation experienced when love self-destructs. Abel's vocal writing is essentially tonal and basically in the art song tradition, but his piano accompaniment is not, partaking of jazz and rock elements and generally requiring the pianist to be far more a participant in the drama and emotion of the songs than is usual in classical lieder.

Soprano Jamie Chamberlin and pianist Victoria Kirsch make an excellent pair in *Chameleon*, their voices (the piano does often sound like a second voice) intermingling at times, contrasting at others, singer and pianist heightening the emotional turmoil effectively as the cycle progresses and eventually bringing matters to a point of acceptance Chamberlin and Kirsch also do a first-rate job with the four *Rainbow Songs*, which are more loosely connected and more lyrical than dramatic.

Kirsch is again the pianist (and) Ariel Pisturino the soprano for *Five Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, the only music here for which Abel did not himself write the words. The dreamlike, surrealistic, enigmatic poetry of Rilke (1875-1926) has fascinated many composers, and all have struggled to find musical ways to reflect images that are sometimes religious, sometimes mystical, sometimes entirely inward in focus Abel's cycle is somewhat more distancing ... than the other two, although it is certainly well sung, and Kirsch's pianism fits it with a sure understanding and uncompromising technique.