

## Classical Candor

By John J. Puccio

Abel, who described the songs of a previous album, "The Dream Gallery," as "a post-modern synthesis of classical and rock," takes his compositional creativity a step further in "Terrain of the Heart" ... .

The album contains three song cycles, the first called *The Dark-Eyed Chameleon*, sung by soprano Jamie Chamberlin, accompanied by Victoria Kirsch on piano. The songs, Abel explains, are his way of sharing some of his inner self, a "release valve" serving as a way for him to deal with the pain of an especially painful breakup. The songs are a poignant reminder of life's turmoil and trauma, the kinds of things we have all experienced.

... We get a good deal of tortured introspection in *Chameleon*, the songs full of pathos and distress. The piano accompaniment nicely captures the mood of each piece, and Ms. Chamberlin conveys a sweet sense of anguish throughout. Some of these songs are downright heart-wrenching, so expect a sort of long day's journey into night here. Fortunately, they are quite fetching, too, "Your Girl" a particularly touching work ... .

The second set, *Five Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, offers settings of poems by the Bohemian-Austrian poet and novelist of the early twentieth century. Soprano Ariel Pisturino sings the songs, again accompanied by Ms. Kirsch on piano. The poems themselves are rather puzzling at times and perplexing, so it's best just to go with Abel's sensitive musical explorations and not worry overmuch about the meaning and messages of the lyrics. The atmosphere of these songs is darker ... . Ms. Pisturino's singing encapsulates the evocative soul of each piece, and Abel's piano arrangements for them are equally severe; yet the glumness also has an oddly appealing optimism about it, so it's not all doom and gloom.

The final set is *Rainbow Songs*, four songs by Abel performed by Ms. Chamberlin (and) Ms. Kirsch. These are probably the most positive tunes in the collection, so it's nice to go out with them. These are also doubtless the most colorful and rhythmic songs on the program, yet one can see how they might not communicate to a mass audience. They're a bit too serious for that, a bit too intellectual, their melodies serving the words rather than trying consciously to reach top-ten trends.

... There is much to enjoy and contemplate in Abel's consciously "artsy" songs, with their thoughtful and well-considered lyrics and music. They're worth a listen.