

“By a Canadian Lady”: Piano Music, 1841-1997. Elaine Keillor, piano. Compact disc. Carleton Sound CSCD-1006. \$20.98

The title of this disc aptly describes the intent of this recording: it is a collection of piano music written entirely by female composers of Canada. A total of 18 selections are included in a variety of styles. While there is a preponderance of 20th-century compositions, there is also a handful of 19th-century works as well, with some of those selections taken from the anthologies of the Canadian Musical Heritage Society. The recording proceeds in approximate chronological order except for the first selection; the longest work on the recording, “A Long Time Ago in the Future,” by Mary Gardiner, seems to serve as an invocation for the entire collection.

The first group of four compositions, dating from 1841 through 1903, are written in salon style. Of particular interest are the “Molto Felice Impromptu” by Frances J. Hatton and the “Valse-Caprice” by Gena Branscombe, which are melodious and not sentimental. The second group of compositions is by composers who achieved some renown through their longevity: Pentland, Jaque, and Archer are all readily known to Canadian musicians young and old. Their works (“Rhapsody,” “Deuxième Suite,” and “Four Bagatelles,” respectively) are solid compositions and reflect not only a wide variety of styles, but coloristic use of the piano as well. The closing five compositions were all written in the 1990's.

These works by Carignan, Badian, Louie, and Miller are more austere in their approach, yet with considerable investigation of sonorities and textures. The entire disc seems to be unified more by the exploration of color than of rhythm. The overriding concept is a successful one, and is both well-ordered and contrasting.

Regrettably, the one shortcoming of the disc is the sound quality of the recording, which does not entirely support the subtleties of the sonorities. In order to showcase these compositions more effectively, more depth of sound and richness would have added to the listening enjoyment. The performance by Elaine Keillor is tasteful, thoughtful, and restrained, and exhibits a solidly controlled technique. There is no overt sentimentalism or excessive bombast in the interpretation of the 19th-century works, and the listener is allowed to focus on the structure and sound experiments in the contemporary pieces. The liner notes are written by the performer herself, and she presents a straightforward discussion concerning the background and work of the various composers. Dr. Keillor has admirably designed and performed this compilation, and it stands as a recording of scholarly significance.

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