

Pinnacles: Music of Diana McIntosh. Diana McIntosh, piano, narrator, electronics. Toronto: CMC Centrediscs 15810, 2010. 1 compact disc (61:20). Contents: *Approaching Kilimanjaro* (13:13) (Laurel Ridd, flute; Karl Stobbe, violin; Daniel Scholz, viola; Yuri Hooker, cello; Ben Reimer, percussion; Diana McIntosh, piano; Michelle Mourre, conductor) – *From Wapta Ice* (Diana McIntosh, piano, spoken-text narration) (6:19) – *Uhuru Kamili* (Beverley Johnston, percussion; Diana McIntosh, piano) (13:12) – *Porini, Porini, Porini!* (Vincent Ellin, bassoon) (5:11) – *Just add water* (Ben Reimer, percussion) (11:23) – *A Rose is a rose* (Diana McIntosh, piano, live electronics) (8:03) – *On a glacier* (Laurel Ridd, flute; Ben Reimer, percussion) (4:22). \$17.98

Pinnacles contains seven recent compositions by the composer-pianist, Diana McIntosh, an artist who has been in the forefront of Canadian new music activities for several decades, especially in Winnipeg, her place of residence for over forty years. A prolific composer, McIntosh has written for virtually every medium. However, given her pianistic abilities, a talent which she has used to champion countless new pieces and contemporary classics, it is perhaps not surprising that the piano features prominently in her works; on the present disc, the instrument is found in four of the pieces.

The opening work is the sextet, *Approaching Kilimanjaro*. Scored for flute, violin, viola, cello, percussion and piano, the thirteen-minute composition was written in 2006 as a result of McIntosh's 2002 concert tour of Kenya. The two-movement work is intended to, in the words of the composer, "evoke the mystery, the excitement and the awe of seeing this spectacular mountain." The first movement is contemplative, with contrapuntal textures generated by a variety of interactions between the instruments. The mood of the second movement is more animated and ecstatic; repetition features prominently.

The second piece on the disc is the 2004 *From Wapta Ice*, a six-minute work for piano, spoken text and tape. The author of the text is the Banff poet, Monica Meneghetti. Both the poem and McIntosh's composition are responses to the vast Wapta Icefield, located in the Canadian Rockies. This is the weakest composition on the disc. Although it contains some beautiful piano harmonies and effective tape sounds, it does not capture the grandeur and evocative imagery of the poem. Further, McIntosh's voice is not strong enough to carry successfully the narration. The performance would have been much more effective if a trained theatrical voice had recited the lines.

The next composition, entitled *Uhuru Kamili*, dates from 2003. The title of the thirteen-minute work, scored for percussion and piano, comes from a Swahili phrase which means "complete freedom." There is a fascinating dialogue between the piano and a variety of percussion sonorities. The interchange—adroitly handled by percussionist Beverley Johnston and McIntosh—contains constant shifts in moods, dynamics and textural changes. The riveting large-scale arch design of the piece leads to a thrilling energetic section, followed by the final subdued

repose. The composer notes that the work's harmonic material is based on an East African folk tune, which may account for its slightly more diatonic sound compared with the other pieces on the disc.

The fourth piece is a five-minute work for solo bassoon entitled "Porini, Porini, Porini!" It was written for Vincent Ellin, whose performance of the piece is outstanding. The title comes from the call that a South Kenyan safari guide repeatedly made to his home camp: "Porini, Porini, Porini! Do you read me? Over." The intent of the rondo-designed composition is programmatic. The refrains are slightly modified repetitions of this unique rhythmic statement. By contrast, the various episodes are musical depictions of the Amboseli savanna, including chanting and storytelling, animals and birds.

Just Add Water is an eleven-minute work for solo percussion that dates from 2008; it was written by McIntosh on commission for the percussionist, Ben Reimer. The piece is once again highly programmatic in structure. Specifically, the design is intended to evoke the traversal of water on a mountain. The dry river bed of the opening is portrayed by "earthy" percussion instruments such as tin and clay pots. Gradually, however, the pitched melodic activity becomes more animated (first by the vibraphone and then by other pitched percussion instruments), depicting first a slight water trickle, then a stream, a quiet pool, waterfalls and, ultimately, turbulent white water. The piece ends on a calm note, suggesting that the trail has veered into deep woods. Every aspect of the composition is superbly negotiated by Reimer.

McIntosh's 2010 *A rose is a rose ...* is an eight-minute work for piano and live electronics. The piece is an excerpt from a larger theatrical work, entitled *McIntosh the Stein Way*, which employs texts from Gertrude Stein's poems. At one point, the text, "convincing to anyone, convincing to almost anyone," is recited, followed by "A rose is a rose...." The piano piece begins with the rhythm and contour of Stein's text. Essentially, the work's design is generated by McIntosh selecting particular phrases, gestures and harmonies, which are then repeated in an echo effect by live electronics; the pianist must then continuously interact with these electronic repetitions. It is a fascinating work since the pianist's response to the electronic sounds will naturally be different each time.

The final work on the disc also dates from 2010. *On a Glacier* is a four-minute composition for flute and vibraphone. Exquisitely performed by Laurel Ridd and Ben Reimer, this slow composition, with its undulating arabesque lines by the flute, harmonically supported by sustained harmonies by the vibraphone, evokes the lonely splendour and mysterious ambience of mountain glaciers.

As noted above, McIntosh performs on four of the seven pieces, while the remaining three were written for the performers on the recording. As such, the recording can be considered pretty much authoritative. The informative booklet in French and English contains background details about the compositions and biographies of the performers. However, the text used in *From Wapta Ice* has unfortunately been omitted.

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