

À la claire fontaine: Music in Krieghoff's Quebec. The Beckwith Ensemble: John Beckwith, piano and harmonium; Lisa Lindo, soprano; Darryl Edwards, tenor; Dianne Aitken, flute and piccolo; David Greenberg, violin; Trevor Tureski, percussion. Compact disc. Opening Day Recordings ODR-9321.

The premise for this compact disc is to present a series of French-Canadian musical compositions which date from the same period during which the Dutch-born painter Cornelius Krieghoff was actively painting Canadian landscapes. The time frame is mid to late nineteenth-century (Krieghoff's dates are 1815-72), and the compositions date from 1830-97. *À la claire fontaine* was first presented live in-concert to accompany a series of exhibitions of Krieghoff's work. The 24 selections include traditional folk songs, echoes of First Nations' music, sacred music, marches and dance music, art songs, and theatre music.

Obvious care was taken in choosing works which would be representative of the prevailing styles and genres of the time. Beckwith's arrangements are believable, since they maintain a natural simplicity and utilize instrumentation common to the period. Parts written for harmonium, flute, piccolo, violin, percussion, and piano have a genuine feeling of folk art. Supporting this approach is the unpretentious presentation by the ensemble members. At no point do the performances sound affected or overbearing; they are tastefully delivered as they might have been heard in the parlor, auditorium, or sanctuary. The recording is engineered with clarity, fine balance, and richness of sound.

One shortcoming relates to the liner notes. While they go to great lengths to explain the pretext for the recording, and the rationale for

the selections therein, there is too much attempt to associate specific compositions with various Krieghoff paintings. Furthermore, some additional background material about what actually constituted "Krieghoff's Quebec," as well as biographical detail about Krieghoff himself, would have enhanced their didactic impact. Translations are provided for each vocal selection.

These pieces reveal some interesting aspects of nineteenth-century Québécois music. For example, the sacred compositions are strongly oriented toward a folk style of the time and, except for the part-singing, could readily be mistaken for secular art songs. The various arrangements by Ernest Gagnon are of particular note. Interestingly, all of the selections written by Calixa Lavallée are presented in English, and they provide a glimpse of an early Canadian composer's theatrical style, even if he was residing in the United States at the time of composition.

Most of the music is available in the various anthologies of the Canadian Musical Heritage Society, and does not appear to require more than intermediate to advanced ability to perform. Overall, this is a commendable disc, and a successful realization of what the ensemble intended. It is a fitting addition to the revelation of Canada's musical history.

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