

Janet. Helen Pridmore, soprano. Toronto: CMC Centrediscs CMCCD 17512, 2012. 1 compact disc (46:55). Contents: *Social Sounds from Whales at Night* / Emily Doolittle (12:02) – *Janet* / Martin Arnold (11:56) – *Helen Pridmore Sings, and Sings and Sings!* / Ian Crutchley (16:41) – *Is It Because?* / W. L. Altman (8:59).

...Between the Shore and the Ships... The Grand-Pré Recordings. Helen Pridmore, soprano; Wesley Ferreira, clarinet. Toronto: CMC Centerdiscs CMCCD 17912, 2012. 1 compact disc (48:24). Contents: *Blizzard* / Derek Charke (3:58) – *...between the shore and the ships...* / Derek Charke (4:56) – *Aboiteau* / Steven Naylor (3:11) – *L'Acadie Opus 63* / Michael Parker (8:03) – *Mouvance* / Jérôme Blais (8:05) – *La Victoire* / Scott MacMillan (4:29) – *The Dykes of Acadie* / Robert Bauer (5:44) – *In Autumn* / John Abram (6:09) – *Tout Passe* / Sandy Moore (3:52).

Helen Pridmore's recent recordings from 2012 on the Centrediscs label demonstrate her remarkable ability to perform across a wide range of musical styles and settings. Her first solo CD, *Janet*, is devoted to electro-acoustic music. The second disc, *Between the Shore and the Ships*, is a collaboration with clarinetist Wesley Ferreira in a collection of wonderfully transparent songs. Between the two discs, new compositions are presented by eleven different Canadian composers who, for the most part, are writing specifically for Pridmore's voice and abilities. Together, the discs constitute an impressive contribution to new and experimental music.

Of the two recordings, *Janet* is the more adventurous and experimental in its use of extended vocal techniques and compositional styles. On "Social Sounds of Whales at Night," both the tape and soprano parts are based on humpback whale songs with the voice and the whale singing in duet until the voice takes over with an improvisation based on the whale's musical language. "Janet" is a resetting of the Scottish ballad, "Willie O'Winsbury," for live and multi-tracked recorded voices (both performed by Pridmore), plucked piano, guitar, and banjo. The tape part was made in Pridmore's house and makes use of several fascinating effects, such as having Pridmore sing at full volume with the microphone placed four large rooms away pointed out an open window. "Is It Because" also makes use of unusual manipulations of Pridmore's voice by having her sing with guitar effects pedals in its original version (the pedals have since been replaced by a computer). The most impressive demonstration of Pridmore's abilities is found in "Helen Pridmore Sings, and Sings, and Sings!" Composer Ian Crutchley aptly describes the piece as resembling a "greatest hits record" with the singer performing a series of short selections within the context of an electronic soundscape. The piece is an ideal vehicle to demonstrate Pridmore's virtuosity both in standard voice and various extended techniques. Some of the selections are jarring, notably the brief appearance of the theme song from *Happy Days*, but I suspect the composition, with its use theatrical devices such as changes of stage position and mime, is most effective when performed live.

Unlike *Janet*, which is rich in electro-acoustic textures and extended compositional and vocal techniques, *Between the Shore and the Ships* consists of nakedly transparent songs for clarinet and voice in acoustic settings. The songs on the disc were conceived as part of a Canadian Music Centre event, “New Music in New Places,” in which eight Nova Scotian composers were selected to compose new works for Pridmore and Ferreira. The works were given their first performances on the opening concert of the “Shattering the Silence New Music Festival” in 2010. All of the songs address the expulsion of the Acadians from Grand Pré from 1755 to 1762. The texts are a combination of historical writings gathered from the Grand-Pré National Historic Site and later responses to the expulsion. Although the result is nine compositions by eight composers, the disc is remarkably coherent because of the subject matter and the emotionally loaded content of the texts. There is also a strong sense of time and place since the disc as a whole deals with a historically significant moment of regional and national importance.

The texts chosen by the composers address either the desolation and anguish of the settlers facing deportation or aspects of Acadian lifestyle and culture by focusing on the day-to-day issues of maritime weather and farming and especially the tools—the *aboiteau* or sluice gates and dykes—necessary to harness and survive the natural forces of the region. Clarinet and voice seems like an unusual instrumentation for the project, but it works surprisingly well. The composers mostly treat the clarinet and voice equally, placing them in the same range so they weave in and out of each other’s lines. Both performers achieve a warm blend while producing a wide range of colours and expression. The approach makes the voice more of an instrument while allowing the sentiment of the text to be reflected in the lines of the clarinet. The one departure from this approach is found in “Mouvance” by Jérôme Blais. Here, the text is freely declaimed while the clarinet part, in this case, a bass clarinet, consists of a sound exploration utilizing the instrument’s low range and multi-phonics. Coming at mid-point in the disc, it provides contrast to the more introspective compositions that surround it.

Helen Pridmore’s presence on both discs makes the contrast between them strikingly impressive. Her performances of new and experimental music on *Janet* show strong character and charisma in settings that require not only her interpretation, but her creative contributions as well. *Between the Shore and the Ships*, by contrast, shows a remarkable sensitivity and blend both from her and from clarinetist Wesley Ferreira in intimate acoustic settings. These are convincing performances of imaginative compositions that affirm the region’s strong sense of identity.

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