

FANFARE - FEATURE REVIEW by Jeremy Marchant

NEW LULLABY • Aaron Larget-Caplan (gtr) • SIX STRING SOUND 888-01 (52:46)

& Pieces by **JOB, FEIST, TRESTER, WHEELER, SIEGFRIED, SMALL, STOLZ, COOMAN, MCDONALD, VAYO, LEISNER, SCHWARTZ, VIGIL**

It would be too obvious to open this review with a remark about the impossibility of staying awake listening to a CD devoted to lullabies were the lullabies any good, so I won't. In any case, the 14 lullabies presented here are too engaging to risk sleep. Aaron Larget-Caplan began seeking lullabies from composers in 2006. A smart idea: A relatively slight form requiring not too much time from composers is likely to generate returns. And so it has. This CD presents some of the first fruits of the New Lullaby Project (newlullabyproject.com) from some 13 U.S. composers. Perhaps subsequent volumes could trawl for pieces from outside the States. Incidentally, it is interesting that most of the composers represented are men and most of them seem to have been inspired by their own small children.

In his notes, Larget-Caplan suggests that "there are two basic types of lullabies: one gives the listeners warmth and protection, while the second tends to be darker with hints of fear." An interesting idea since I, for one, approached this CD with the assumption that it would be entirely, and deliberately, soporific. However, the permission to add darker elements has stimulated the composers to depart from this norm, greatly to the benefit of the disc. In fact, the definition of lullaby would seem to be stretched beyond even Larget-Caplan's prescription and perhaps it would be best to think of this disc as containing a set of miniatures, largely quiet and moderate in tempo, on the subject of falling asleep rather than as enticements to do so.

At the relatively boisterous end of the spectrum are Francine Trester's *My Darling's Slumber*, which has a strong climax, and Mark Small's ambitious *Descent to a Dream*. This latter documents the various stages of falling asleep, including the arrival of the dream state in which "fantastic ideas and connections that don't go together in our waking moments seem real." These are followed by *forte* strummed chords, which I fear would have woken Baby had she managed to slip into the arms of Morpheus in the first place. No matter. It is an interesting piece that gets a lot into four and a half minutes.

The more elaborate works are carefully positioned in this recital so that they counterpoint the more conventional calls to sleep. Of these, Scott Wheeler's *Nachtlied* and Kevin Siegfried's *Cradle Song* particularly appeal: fresh and tender songs without words. Another clever piece of programming is the way that the pieces that include harmonics gradually predominate at the end, culminating in Ryan Vigil's *Shhhh*, composed entirely of harmonics.

Only *Berceuse* by David Vayo seems unsuccessful to me. It starts magically—with harmonics—but unfortunately soon asks the player to sing "ooos." Then, rather like the cook who discovered that adding a little salt to the food made it taste better so he added a whole lot more, Vayo asks the player to shhhh, exhale, and whistle at length (too loud on the recording). But what is performed vocally seems too thin, too seemingly extraneous to the music, while the guitar part is reduced to a vestigial accompaniment. Definitely a case, here, where less would have been more. And the penultimate track, *Song Softly Sung, in Trying Times* by Eric Schwartz, comes with an inexplicably high level of hiss.

However, these are minor cavils in what is otherwise a remarkably successful, imaginative release. Aaron Larget-Caplan's playing catches every nuance of the music, making the most of a deliberately restricted palette of colors and textures. The recorded sound of the guitar is excellent, striking a perfect balance: intimate, but giving the instrument some space so that the disc doesn't become oppressive. **Jeremy Marchant**

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