

**MATTHEWS *A Book of Hours. For Jonathan Kramer. Island. Duo for Violin & Piano* • The Capital Trio • ALBANY TROY 1239 (65:10)**

I felt a kinship with William Matthews from the very first bars of the intriguing music on this CD, and when I opened the booklet to read his bio, I discovered that we were born in the same year (1950). Since our musical aesthetic is quite similar, too, I immediately felt almost as though I know him, even though we've never met. Like me, he also composes in varying styles, as the several works on this CD demonstrate. Lest you think I'm just patting myself on the back, then, when I praise his music, I assure you that our styles are quite different, even if we do seem to share some ideals.

*A Book of Hours* is a suite for piano trio cast in six movements as a secular take on the days in medieval monasteries spent in prayer, devotion, and study according to the church hours. Here, a day in the Maine woods is instead depicted, with a particularly loud catbird whose habit was to begin its song at 4:00 a.m. providing the matins, leading through four intermediary movements, and closing with a gentle tribute to Thelonius Monk as its complines. The fifth movement, "Friday Night Fish Fry (Uneven Song)" is a delightful romp through repeated rhythmic patterns, meant to suggest the Maine method of folk fiddling. *Hours* combines a fluent lyricism with rhythmic vigor, effectively incorporating silence as one of its compositional devices. I particularly like the way Matthews makes occasional use of repeated notes in parts of this work. Unlike most minimalist composers (which he emphatically is not), he knows just how long each sequence of repeated notes should last, lest it become wearisome to the ear. (There you have it – a thinly-disguised intimation of my dislike of the whole minimalist school!) The listener is presented with masterful juxtaposition between the faster sections of this work, full of vitality, and the slow, where time seems to stand still.

The second work, *For Jonathan Kramer*, is a tribute to one of the chief mentors of the composer and is stylistically quite different – long note values predominate here – from *A Book of Hours*. In this work, the composer has skillfully combined the piano trio with electronic sounds, combining altered sounds of the trio itself with computer-generated tones. Its spoken beginning caught me quite by surprise the first time I heard the work, and is explained in the above interview. On the basis of having heard this work several times, I would guess that Kramer was a gentle and soft-spoken individual. His ideas about the nature of musical time and counterpoint have been incorporated into Matthews' moving tribute.

*Island* is a strictly electronic work, largely utilizing *musique concrète*. It is similar to *A Book of Hours* in that it leads the listener through the course of a day, again set in Maine, where the composer and his family at one time had a vacation cabin. The opening watery sounds, depicting the nearby beach, usher in a feeling of oneness with the world of nature that pervades the piece. One hears reference to meadow birds, elder ducks and a loon, intertwined with the more mundane sounds of an airplane, a car and the voices of the composer's two young children at play, which form an amusing and touching climax to the work.

The final work, *Duo for Violin and Piano* brings the listener back to the world of acoustic music. Its simplicity reminds me a bit of Virgil Thomson, except that the piece is better written than anything Thomson was capable of (sorry, another prejudice!) This is the most tonal music on the CD, with key centers firmly planted in A-flat Major and F

minor. The lyrical opening section eventually gives way to a section infused with rhythms of smoldering Latin sensuality, but the piece ends with a whisper.

Performances of three of the four works involve the members of The Capital Trio, which plays throughout with clarity, precision and manifest musicality. The sonics of the CD do justice to the music. This is a disc that I shall enjoy repeatedly, given Matthews' ability to create masterful works in varying styles. While I do not believe that any of the works on this CD will be a tough nut to crack for those with minimal exposure to contemporary classical music, I do recognize that my musical tastes may cover a broader spectrum than do those of many *Fanfare* readers. Consequently, there may be some who would like two or three of the works herein, but who might have more difficulty in appreciating the strictly electro-acoustic *Island*, or perhaps even the partly electronic *For Jonathan Kramer*. Otherwise, enthusiastically recommended to all comers.

**--David DeBoor Canfield**