

CD Review by Colin Clarke

WOJCIK The Sketchbook.1 Vanishing Lands.2 Lord Sedley's Masque (or the revels of love revealed).3 Closer to Home.4 Sea Songs5 • Raymond Wojcik, cond;1, 3, 4 Arthur Theodore Wilson (nar);1 Jana Tutková (fl);2 Vit Muzi (vn);2 Marian Pavlik (vc);2 Evzenie Brezinova (va);2 Michaela Turková (hp);2 Douglas Wootton (ten);3 Ludmila Hodulikova (acc);5 Moravian PO;1, 3, 5 Rzeszow PO4 • ALBANY TROY 1046 (61:55)

Pictures and Stories

Audio CD; Single

Albany Records

Raymond Wojcik (b. 1957) is a composer and conductor who was composer in residence at the Cape May Music Festival (N.J.) from 2004 through 2006. The Sketchbook (2006) is a piece written for children as well as adults. It is a kind of Young Person's Guide but with the intriguing addition that each instrument is accorded a color, while the story also raises questions of bullying in schools. A young boy pours his creative talents into a sketchbook, which is ripped up by the bullies. A teacher consoles him and nurtures his talents; years later, the boy returns as an artist and gives sketchbooks to all of the students. This is a gently scored tale for narrator (Arthur Theodore Wilson does a fine job) and small mixed chamber ensemble. There is a Stravinskian tinge to some of the harmonies and scorings that makes it difficult not to reference Soldier's Tale. This is a heart-warming story. The instrumental parts are delivered with real panache and with the sort of razor-sharp ensemble that the score requires.

Vanishing Lands (2002) could hardly be more different. The lands in question are farmlands, open spaces, and the culture held within them. The composer himself identifies the clear element of Americana, as well as pointing out the metaphor of the lands as referring to all of the things we cannot keep or hold on to. There is much beauty here, right from the opening references to hymnody; the rather ascerbic nature of The Sketchbook reappears for the central climax, though. The return of the hymn-like opening at the work's close is most effective.

Wojcik describes Lord Sedley's Masque (1982) as "a love child born of a brief affair with English Renaissance music." The work is intended as a masque relating the story of Corydon and Phillis. Wojcik succeeds perfectly, using spicy harmonies but always giving the impression of antiquarian revelry. The Sedley of the title refers to Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701), a member of Charles II's court who apparently wrote the poem "Corydon and Phillis." Douglas Wootton (founder of the group The City Waites) is a superbly characterful singer. The verses of the poem are interrupted by various stylized dances (Sarabande, Pavan, and Morris Dance).

The final two items are based on film scores. The first, Closer to Home (1999), was an independent film by Joseph Nobile that unfortunately ran out of money before it was finished, so Wojcik converted his material into this concert suite. The original film explored issues of mail-order brides (between an American and a Filipina). The music is very lovely, often tender in a manner the subject matter might not immediately suggest. Closer to Home is set in

one continuous, nine-minute movement; *Sea Songs* (1981/97), a film score to an imaginary movie, is cast in five movements. "Winter Sea," the first movement, is a wistful evocation. The delightful, accordion-saturated "Waltz" is a dream, while "Sea Dreams" is painted in colors of the utmost delicacy. Some of the harmonies here tend towards the easy-listening end of the spectrum, though.

This is an entertaining disc. No great depths are plumbed, but sometimes that's no bad thing. Colin Clarke

This article originally appeared in Issue 32:5 (May/June 2009) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

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