



DEHLINGER *At That Hour*^{1,2}. *Questa fiamma*¹. *Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa*^{1,2}. *A Dream*². *The Mount*¹. *Fragrance*¹. *Shir Hashirim*^{1,2}. *Requiescat*² • ¹Danielle Talamantes (sop); ²Kerry Wilkerson (bbar); Henry Dehlinger (pn) • AVIE 2424 (62:24 📖)

Henry Dehlinger is a new name to me as a composer, although I have encountered him as a fine collaborative pianist on two discs he made with soprano Danielle Talamantes. One was a collection of Spanish songs (MSR 1476), the other Dehlinger's arrangements of Duke Ellington songs (MSR 1617). According to the notes for this new release, he has taken up composition on a full-time basis only since 2015, and it is no surprise that he wrote the songs on this disc for Talamantes, a singer he knew well, and for her husband, bass-baritone Kerry Wilkerson.

Dehlinger's compositional voice is tonal and fairly conservative but extremely effective. He demonstrates a genuine lyrical impulse along with the ability to compose music that amplifies the words he has chosen to set.

At That Hour is a cycle of ten songs set to poems of James Joyce, five for each solo singer. The first, "At That Hour When All Things Have Repose," beautifully conveys the poem's sense of repose and reflection. The piano writing for "On the Beach at Fontana" creates the picture of the rippling water, and the song itself evokes Joyce's love for his son as he recalls an excursion the two took on the Adriatic coast. "Strings in the Earth and Air" is a touchingly tender hymn to nature, suffused with a subtle jazz undertone. The final Joyce song, "A Memory of the Players in a Mirror at Midnight," written for Wilkerson, effectively conveys the anguish of aging.

The same skills at word setting are evident in the other songs as well. For example, *A Dream* is a setting of a sonnet by Edgar Allan Poe, and the music underlines the loneliness and sadness of Poe's text. *Fragrance* evokes the mystery of the aroma of blossoming flowers in the morning dew. The longest single work is *Sir Hashirim* (Song of Songs). Originally this was the third movement of Dehlinger's five-movement cantata *Kohelet*. After reducing the orchestral writing to a piano, the result was a lush and richly harmonized vocal duet. The other duet here, *Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa* (Love and the gentle heart are one and the same), was composed for the wedding of two of the composer's friends and is sung with passion by this husband and wife team, who sang it at the wedding in Florence.

The final song, *Requiescat*, is a startling setting of a text by Oscar Wilde expressing his grief at the death of his sister two months before her tenth birthday. Perhaps because of Dehlinger's experience in making arrangements of Duke Ellington songs for an earlier disc, he was inspired to set Wilde's poem as an example of a blues stride number. It turns out to be a potent setting.

I hope I have conveyed how much I enjoyed this disc. The fully committed performances by Talamantes and Wilkerson, along with the composer's piano playing, are excellent. I might wish for a bit more clarity of diction from Talamantes, but since the booklet provides all the texts, this is not a serious problem. Clean recorded sound and fine program notes by the composer round out the package. I look forward to hearing more songs from Henry Dehlinger.

Henry Fogel

Five stars: A fine collection of art songs by Henry Dehlinger