



April 26, 2009 Sequenza 21

Fancher: In Two Worlds

Posted by [Jay Batzner](#) in [CD Review](#), [Innova](#), [Jay Batzner](#), [Piano](#)

Susan Fancher
In Two Worlds
music for saxophone with electronics
Innova Records

In Two Worlds, Morton Subotnick
Jovian Images, Reginald Brain
SaxMax, Mark Engebretson
Corail, Edmund Campion
Penelope's Song, Judith Shatin
Slammed, James Paul Sain
Aeterna, John Anthony Lennon
Susan Fancher, soprano, alto, and tenor saxophones

In Two Worlds collects recordings of works for saxophone and electronics that cover a wide range of styles and showcase different sound worlds from the 80s, 90s, and today (that latter part sounded like a radio station ad, I apologize). The title track, composed by Morton Subotnick, is at times dreamy and at times driving. Some of the synth sounds are a little dated sounding (the original date on the work is 1987) but the quality of the work and the performance outshine any cheese the synths possess. This recording addresses the issue of historic preservation and performance practice of electronic music. The technology originally used to create *In Two Worlds* is no longer viable and available. Thanks to the interest of Susan Fancher and the programming chops of Jeff Heisler and Mark Bunce, the work gains new life. I love it when a work of this nature is embraced by such talents that are unwilling to let technological adversaries overcome the access to the music.

Jovian Images, for soprano sax and electronics, let's Fancher play around an improvised landscape that provides space and shimmering serenity. Fancher's tone and control are the real draw here, the electronics are more texture than gesture and the focus never turns us away from her solo line. For something completely different, we follow up with *SaxMax* by Mark Engebretson. This work is sneaky, murky, and dark. Fancher's sax murmurs and mutters, the textures of the electronics murmur back and coalesce into a freaky calliope of twisting accompaniment. Fancher really controls this work, guiding and shaping its energies through a myriad of sound worlds. When the drums kick in and the piece turns into a free jazz style jam, it is hard to remember how exactly we got here. It sounds right, though, so I don't ask too many questions.

Solemnity returns with *Corail* for tenor sax and interactive electronics. Fancher's sound is sultry and thick, even as the piece erupts with ebullient pops and snaps. Pound for pound, this piece sounds like it does the most with the saxophone's sonic potentials. An earthy funk groove tries to emerge about 3 minutes in and, again, it sounds like the absolute right thing to have happen. *Corail's* organic processes make you forget about the electronics and just listen to the sound of what is going on. Fancher seems to be playing chamber music with her subconscious.

Penelope's Song seems to take the most traditional approach to sax+computer music. A solid beat starts the piece, representing Penelope's loom from the Odyssey. Fancher sings in a playful and spritely manner which is a fitting match to the sneaky story of the source material. The beat, while persistent, is never sonically static. Shatin resonates the beats, providing extra nuggets of timbre and pitch to the groove. At the same time, Fancher does the same with multiphonics (in a truly integrated and effortless way). There is a lot to listen to on this track and repeated listenings will provide rich rewards.

The last two works, *Slammed* and *Aeterna* are perfect polar opposites to round out the CD. *Slammed* is muscular, angular, rough, and irritating. You start in an uncomfortable place, intentionally, and the energy keeps pushing and pushing and pushing until the whole system reaches the breaking point and snaps. A fun ride. *Aeterna*, with its simple delay, is a lovely and plaintive closer. Instead of dazzling us with computing power, Fancher reminds us why we were interested in this disc in the first place: the soloist. Alternate

fingerings provide the spectromorphology, but it is Fancher's poetic playing that gives this work a real soul. Lennon gives Fancher the right material, the right use of electronics, and just lets the music happen. The piece could keep going but manages to find a perfect ending nonetheless.