

GLASS SKY REVIEWS



From Donald Rosenberg, *Gramophone*

"East West Continuo, an ensemble of flute and string instruments based in Portland, Oregon, traverse many cultures in *Glass Sky*, a title taken from a work by flutist-founder, Tessa Brinckman. The six pieces reveal influences from Asia, Africa and Europe, with a leaning towards diverse colors, folk-oriented writing and tone-painting. The repertoire is haunting and attractive, the playing marked by temperament and subtle inflection.

Two of the scores are companion pieces. *Glass Sky* and D'Arcy Reynolds *Cloven Dreams* are connected by location: the artist Helen Martins' Owl House Museum in South Africa. Both works contain sounds of nature, including bird calls, as well as depictions of the interior and exterior worlds of museum and artist. Brinckman evokes spirituality through the use of raga, and her musical

borders are expansive. Reynolds creates high-spirited and dark scenes that evoke aspects of Martins' life and her aesthetic. Scored for violin, viola and cello, these scores are vivid, affecting homages.



Jack Gabel's *Through a Gentle Rain* places the Japanese stringed koto in delicate conversation with the alternating timbres of flute, piccolo and alto flute, while Bernard Andres explores scenes from the Old Testament in *Narthex*, a striking series of vignettes for flute and harp. Eleven paintings by the Spanish artist, Miro, in which flute, violin, viola and cello engage in arresting conversations or monologues. The same complement of instruments is employed in Volkmar Andreae's *Flute Quartet*, the most conventional work on the disc, a richly expressive work that whets the appetite for more pieces by the late Swiss composer (and longtime conductor of Zurich's Tonhalle Orchestra).

Brinckman is a flutist of chameleon-like gifts, and her colleagues join her in performances of prismatic shading and virtuoso elegance."

From Christopher Chaffee, *American Record Guide*

"According to the program notes, East West Continuo is a flexible ensemble of flute and stringed instruments, both western and non-western, founded by flutist Tessa Brinckman in 2003. They perform in the Pacific Northwest. This disc is wonderful. I did not know anything about the composers, pieces, or performers when it first arrived, and it was a delight to spend time with this music. Better yet, I think this is a special sort of Pacific Northwest music style. It is a proverbial challenge to use words to articulate how some music styles seem to emerge from certain landscapes, and the best I can do is say that this music somehow sounds like it could only come from Portland, Oregon. In an increasingly homogenized and monochromatic world, it is important to praise and support performers and composers fostering regional flavors and styles. I only wish I heard more of this and less of the same standard warhorses.

There are six pieces here, and all are unique and mostly beyond simple description. I am especially taken by the Gabel, an exploration of different colors created by the flute and Japanese Koto. The longest work is Mark Fish's Pictures of Miro, a set of 11 movements depicting famous Miro paintings. This piece sent me to the library to find reprints of each painting. Given the state of available technology, this disc could use CD-ROM enhancement to display each painting on a computer screen as the music plays - but I can honestly say I could care less; it was fun to spend a rainy afternoon looking at paintings in a book.

The performers play this music with conviction and grace. Flutists looking for unknown music to explore must buy this, and anyone who appreciates great music will enjoy it. I hope this group travels soon to bring their music to a wider audience."

From Brett Campbell, *Eugene Weekly*

"Portland-based New Zealand flutist Tessa Brinckman's East West Continuo paints a series of vivid cross-cultural musical portraits using flute, koto, harp, viola, cello and violin, and their debut CD is one of the loveliest albums I've heard this year. Portland composer Jack Gabel's Through a Gentle Rain evokes a walk in a Portland park. Bernard Andres' Narthex was inspired by medieval churches in Burgundy, while Bay Area composer Mark Fish's ambitious, Ravel-ian Pictures of Miró (2004) swings from playful to pensive to singing to ominous in depicting 11 of the Spanish master's paintings. Swiss composer Volkmar Andreae's captivating 1942 flute quartet will happily surprise anyone who thought mid-century classical music must be thorny and dissonant. Brinckman wrote Glass Sky after a return visit to her childhood South African home, incorporating Hindu raga and early European music to evoke the sculpture garden of the artist Helen Martins' Owl House Museum and the area's wildlife. Brinckman commissioned California composer D'Arcy Reynolds to compose a companion suite, Cloven Dreams, informed by the "magical realism" of the museum's figures and set to an enchanting hybrid of African and European classical musical forms

From Frank Oteri, *New Music Box*

"Paintings by the playful Catalan modernist Joan Miró (1893-1993), previously the inspiration for Bobby Previte's greatest work to date, are also the muse behind Mark Fish's more intimate 2004 Pictures of Miró scored for flute and string trio whose 11 movements total less than 20 minutes. In the fourth movement, "Girl Practicing Gymnastics," the flute convincingly imitates a slide whistle before the trio launches a groove reminiscent of a Viennese waltz over which the flute cheekily intones a hook-filled melody.

In addition to being a highlight of Portland, Oregon-based flutist Tessa Brinkman's exciting collection of recent music for flute and strings (with the widest interpretation here, there's a track featuring a koto), Fish's Miró pictures are also a great excuse to feature Geoffrey Fairburn's gorgeous Miró-esque painting Eclipse II 1984 on the cover although I wish the CD booklet could have also reproduced the 11 Miró paintings that triggered Fish's music..."

From Peter Mechen, *Music Matters New Zealand*

"New Zealand flutist, Tessa Brinckman, has lived and worked in the United States for a number of years, and on the evidence of her recently issued CD, *Glass Sky*, plays her instrument with great beauty and eloquence. Through a Gentle Rain is a piece by American composer, Jack Gabel, influenced by his experience of Japanese life and culture and writing for flute and koto mellifluously and evocatively. The most substantial work on the disc is *Pictures of Miro*, for flute, violin, viola and cello, by Mark Fish – 11 pieces inspired by works by the Spanish painter. I particularly enjoyed the graphic instrumental realizations of the second piece, "Dog Barking at the Moon", and the angular rhythmic flexibilities of "Girl Practising Gymnastics". There's a Quartet by Volkmar Andreae, known also as a conductor, but on the evidence of this work a gifted composer with a penchant for lush, romantic though never over-indulgent textures. There's also a piece by Brinckman herself, a work called *Glass Sky*, which gives the CD its title, a stunning evocation of arid landscapes and ambient birdsong, inspired by the composer's visit to South Africa. Well worth investigating if you're looking for music occasionally spiced with an exotic flavor."

From Robert Hugill, *Musicweb International*

"The combination of flute and strings or harp can easily take on a very French feel; there is something about the timbres that easily conjures up ghostly echoes of Ravel. The composers on this disc of chamber music for flute either embrace this francophilia or do their best to avoid it. The music is performed by the New Zealand flautist Tessa Brinckman with her group, the East West Continuo.

In the first piece, *Through a gentle rain*, composer Jack Gabel deliberately evokes Japanese music by using a traditional Japanese instrument, a koto, to accompany the flute. The result, to my ears, sounds evocatively Japanese but I imagine that to Japanese ears the results are more a mixture of Japanese and Western sounds.

French harpist Bernard Andrès embraces his heritage wholeheartedly and in *Narthex* for flute and harp, produces a piece which from its very opening hints at Ravel and Debussy. The inspiration is a series of Old Testament sculptures from Romanesque churches in Burgundy. I found the work gently evocative rather than vividly characterised. Andrès spices things up with a number of interesting special effects, getting the harpist to rap the sounding-board, rattle the tuning key in the sound hole and getting the flautist to slide a finger inside the flute head joint, resulting in curiously eerie glissandos.

Mark Fish's *Pictures of Miro* uses a series of pictures by the Catalan artist as the inspiration for eleven short movements for flute and string trio. Fish's orchestration is wonderfully transparent and his melodic outlines often very French. But he also includes more hard-edged material as he responds to some of Miro's more dramatic canvases. All the movements are quite short, mixing whimsy and lyricism with intensity and humour.

The *Flute Quartet* by Swiss composer Volkmar Andreae is another work which wears its Gallic charm on its sleeve. Andreae was director of the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra and this quartet was first performed in 1942 by flautist Andre Jaunet. The work is both charming and evocative.

Tessa Brinckman's own work *Glass Sky* gives the disc its name and is another piece where the composer uses a new sound-world, thus exorcising the old one. It was inspired by a visit to Helen Martins's Owl House Museum in the desert plains of Karoo, South Africa. Brinckman was born in South Africa and the work evokes her memories of this place. Spare of texture, it is built from a series of bird calls. Brinckman mixes and matches these calls to create a climax in a work which mixes eastern and western ideas.

D'Arcy Reynolds's Cloven Dreams was commissioned as a companion piece to Glass Sky. Reynolds uses the interior of the Owl House as her inspiration. Her melodic material is attractively folksy, again a new sound-world exorcising the old. The aura here is more Copland than Ravel. Reynolds combines her melodies with some distinctively rhythmic material and as the piece progresses, produces attractive polyrhythmical accompaniments; all in all a fitting conclusion to an imaginative recital.

Brinckman and her colleagues give pleasure in all of the pieces here. Not everything played is a masterpiece, but all the pieces are interesting and imaginative."