

Horae (Pro Clara)

'Kenneth Hesketh, one of the UK's most vibrant voices, has a brand of modernism that reveals true love for sound itself, and in the sure hands of Clare Hammond, Hesketh's sure voice shines powerfully forth. The major work is the 42-minute, 12-movement Horae (pro Clara) ('Breviary for Clare') written for Hammond. Suffused with beauty, this is highly evocative and fragile (as marking such as 'as fleet as a humming bird' and 'like intertwining chime clocks' indicate). Perhaps Hammond could have given even more to the contrastive 'maniaco ed instabile' section, but it seems a small point in the majesty of this performance. Inspired by Keats'Ode to a Nightingale. Through Magic Casements is an elusive reaction to the original, while Notte Oscura, a transcription from Hesketh's opera The Overcoat, is granitically gestural. The concluding Japanese Miniatures are far from miniature in heft, despite the charming stories they tell. A significant release.'

International Piano

September 2016

Magic and mystery along with clock-like mechanics, feature again in the compositions for piano brought together on this new disc from BIS. It is extremely well recorded, with Clare Hammond (for whom the most substantial piece was written) playing throughout with a winning combination of technical subtlety and expressive spontaneity in music that presents plenty of challenges to the performer. The 40-minute Horae (pro Clara) is an ambitious transformation of the idea of the Book of Hours into a sequence of 12 movements that can be played in any order, and therefore avoid the conventional structural process of a steadily building dramatic momentum. There are contrasts between quasi-Impressionistic figuration and more forceful, fragmented states reaching what sound like brief outbursts of sheer rage in the final section. Overall, however, the emphasis is on a kind of tranced meditateness that is also effective in the shorter pieces that frame Horae (pro Clara). In particular, the two compositions from 2002, Notte Oscura and Three Japanese Miniatures, are outstanding in the way that what Hesketh has described "as his tendency to 'scepticism and a sense of pessimism' keeps the individual pieces veering away from predictability while making very satisfying wholes. The last of the Miniatures, the only truly scherzo-like music on the disc, provides a notably effective close.

Gramophone

Arnold Whittall

June 2016

A pianist by training, Kenneth Hesketh is best known for his compositions for orchestra, of whom Sir Simon Rattle, Vasily Petrenko and Oliver Knussen, among others, have made themselves advocates. The four piano works presented on this CD, beautifully interpreted by the dedicatee of the main work, Clare Hammond, spread themselves like a large liquid landscape, despite the indexing, pushing the listener to listen in one sitting, so captivating is this music.

Superlative sound capturing illuminates the ease with which Clare Hammond masters the complexities of this programme.

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