



LEISNER *Acrobats. El Coco. Nostalgia. Dances in the Madhouse. Trittico.1 Extremes2* • Cavatina Duo; Katinka Kleijn (vc); 1 Joshua Rubin (cl)2 • CEDILLE 96 (60:08)

England) in which the characters' mental life is subjected to violent surges of thought and emotion, and it's that interior vacillation that's reflected in "In the Wings" and "Flashback" (the first two movements of *Acrobats*). The Yiddish folk song, *Oyf'n Pripetshik*, makes a poignant appearance—it's a memento of the frightened Jews who have mistakenly been bundled with a group of circus performers en route to entertain the Nazis. Their fate is literally "Up in the Air" (the last movement).

*El Coco* is similarly effective at portraying the dread aroused in two children apprehensively watching the approach of a bogeyman (the scary figure in Goya's *Que viene el Coco*): muted, single notes on the guitar, flutters from the flute, a slightly ominous, pointillist style that later coalesces into longer, but still vaguely worried lines. *Nostalgia* is a lovely piece, setting a sweet melody against intricate counterpoint. Two memorable soliloquys, one for each instrument, take the stage before the duo reunites for the recapitulation. *Dances in the Madhouse* is apparently Leisner's most celebrated work. It's a collection of four genre pieces—tango, waltz, ballad, and samba—each imaginatively written, emotionally powerful, and melodically affecting.

Two trios, *Trittico* and *Extremes*, round out the CD. Both reveal the same mind at work, with Kleijn and Rubin adding instrumental color as they blend fluidly with the Cavatina. *Trittico*'s three movements represent the three panels of a triptych, the outer two "light and airy" (the composer's words) and the central episode slower, but not always serene. The middle movement includes two fine solos for cello and guitar. The composer hears an Italian atmosphere hovering over the piece; the triple rhythms and lively pace could suggest saltarellos or tarantellas. *Extremes* consists of two movements with contrasting designations: "introverted" and "extroverted." As might be expected, the first is slow, chromatic, self-reflective. The second is energetic and "wide-open, emotionally as well as harmonically." While I don't share the composer's view that "it has the energy and rhythmic intensity of rock music," I did enjoy the swirling interaction of flute and clarinet and the snapping bass notes from the guitar that bring the piece to a rousing conclusion.

The CD comes with enlightening, but not overly analytical notes by the composer, evocative cover photography, and thorough biographies of the performers. The recording allows the instruments to speak naturally, with a balanced presence that reinforces the collaborative essence of the recital. Leisner's lyricism, gift for melody, and compositional finesse make his music very appealing. In addition, it's doubtful that the Cavatina's sophisticated and artistic playing could be surpassed. There's more potential in the union of flute and guitar than is commonly realized, and this CD provides an incentive to investigate additional repertoire. Cavatina has inspired and commissioned new music of this type and I, for one, look forward to hearing it as soon as possible. Warmly recommended.

**Robert Schulslaper**

David Leisner is a composer, guitarist, and co-chairman of the guitar department at the Manhattan School of Music. His complete music for flute and guitar is here winningly performed by the Cavatina Duo (Eugenia Moliner, flute, and Denis Azabagic, guitar), which presents these fetching works with style, sympathy, and technical aplomb. This is tonal music, rich in invention and melody, emotionally direct, and beautiful. I'm sure it's also a joy to play, with parts that creatively exploit each instrument's potential. Not that there's any use of gimmickry or experimentation for its own sake. There's nothing startling or outrageous in the writing, just experienced, subtle, and wise craftsmanship yielding musically satisfying results. Leisner has a well-developed programmatic sense, unerringly employing the musical *mot juste* to draw his portraits.

*Acrobats* is a case in point: the up and down swing of the tune provides an apt analogy for the vertiginous caprice of daring tricks on the flying trapeze. At least, that's how I first heard it. Actually, the composer was inspired by a short story (*The Tumblers* by Nathan