

MUSGRAVE *Narcissus*, *Orfeo I*. **SHATIN** *Gabriel's Wing*³, *Fasting Heart*, *Kairos* • Patricia Spencer (fl); Linda Hall (pn)¹ • NEUMA 450-95 (64:57).

Seekers after Truth and Beauty will find this Neuma in his corner music emporium under Patricia Spencer, Flute. In keeping with in-house etiquette, a two-composer compilation gets itself discussed here in the richly cosmopolitan alpha section rather than out there in the Siberia of collections. And so we ensnare the reader's attention with Thea Musgrave's celebrated name. But not before remarking Neuma's first mover and custodial engineer, Shirish Korde's, predilection for music of a distinctly ethereal cast, not to mention a fondness for the flute. And no, that's *not* a complaint; an observation, rather, having to do with the role of "little," generally one-man/woman operations, as an instrument of their proprietors' tastes. But the flute is a lovely wind, and Patricia Spencer is a lovely flutist. And perfumed atmospherics permeate one's space. Thea Musgrave and Judith Shatin both employ electronic augmentation to the flute's soaring lines, twice and once respectively. For Musgrave's *Narcissus* (1987), a remarkably affecting, albeit wordless, retelling of the legend, we have digital delay. For *Orfeo I* (1975; I cannot account for the Roman numeral), Spencer's flute operates in the foreground against a multi-textured/layered-tape of James Galway's

flute, and, again, I am unable to account for Galway's participation, except to observe the beauties of its electro-transfigurations. Not that any of this need matter to the disinterested listener: both *Narcissus* and *Orfeo I* strike me as cameo masterworks. I had no idea that Musgrave, whose reputation rests largely on her operas, is such a master of electronic media.

Both legends, that of Narcissus and Orpheus, of course end badly; how remarkably well Musgrave conveys their flavors! *Orfeo I*'s hellish redolence, the eerie dangers hovering about, plays on the ear as palpable. For *Narcissus*, menacing darkness defers to flighty innocence, the naive youth's culminating and fatal encounter with water an expertly wrought heightening of a self-absorbed unworldliness.

Judith Shatin's *Gabriel's Wing*, for flute and piano (1989), likewise conveys in its nine minutes a well-crafted sense of ecstatic climax. *Fasting Heart*, for solo flute (1987), its title taken from a Taoist discipline, follows a similarly programmatic path in attempting to express "listen[ing] with the breath." And meditatively this chanter does play, embellished along the way by simultaneous vocalizing.

Kairos, "for flute, computer, and effects processing" (1991), at 15:50 differs from Musgrave's *Narcissus* by eight seconds. I would love to draw further parallels but cannot. Shatin's electronic effects conspire by and large in the creation of a preternatural space for the flute's sentimental journey. We again at moments hear Spencer's voice, albeit much processed. (The notes go into good technical detail.) " 'Kairos' is a Greek word signifying the most propitious moment for a new undertaking, as in Ulysses setting out on his journey. [This] suggested [to me] a compositional journey on several levels: an adventure into a new medium, a shaping of the musical sojourn, and a particular relationship between the flute and the electronic aether."

Much of this program makes difficult demands, and I hear no tentativity, reach, or strain; a strong sense, rather, of Patricia Spencer's skillful empathy. If it's a rapturous mood you're after, this well produced Neuma provides it in high-quality abundance.

Mike Silverton