In this age of heightened eco-awareness a CD such as this might suggest a worthy but anodyne collection of ‘mood pieces’ that once auditioned is soon forgotten. Nothing could be further from the truth, for these are works of rigour and reward, very well performed by the Meininger Trio. This ensemble was founded in 2000, yet the liner-notes indicate they’ve earned an enviable reputation in just a few years. As for this music, it’s blessed with pleasing vigour and sustained invention.

Barcelona-born Elisenda Fábregas’s *Voices of the Rainforest* starts in the steaming jungles of Papua New Guinea; from the absorbing evocations of *Awakening* - a dawn chorus like no other - to the welcome patter of rain in *Evening rainstorm* the writing is plain and pithy; yes, there are the usual onomatopoeia - the deluge ends with a gentle, slowing ‘drip’ for the piano - but it’s discreetly done. Christiane Meininger’s alto-flute playing is agile and atmospheric, Francoise Groben’s opening cello tune wonderfully warm and eloquent. The recorded balance is close but not bleached, so individual timbres - in the night music for instance - are keenly registered.

American composer Kate Waring’s *Alapana* takes us west, to India, whose profound mysteries are evoked by a sinuous cello line and piano strings plucked from within the body of the instrument itself. That the now twining, now animated flute doesn’t sound at all hackneyed is testimony to Waring’s tasteful writing and Meininger’s artfully shaded playing. *Alapana* ends as it began, with the musical equivalent of a cinematic fade to black. This is a gorgeous piece, and one that beckoned me back several times during the course of this review.

Libby Larsen’s *Slow Structures* - a response to the frozen landscapes of Minnesota; it’s an etched and angular take on the vicissitudes of life in this northern state’s hostile winters, so mercilessly portrayed in the Coen...
brothers’ dark thriller Fargo. The eponymous Slow Structures is an ice castle of cold beauty and pure stillness, its sculpted flute lines underpinned by a mesmeric cello tune and a restless piano part. This is music of rarified loveliness, and this trio shape and project it superbly; indeed, Silent Syllables is simply ravishing, the contrasting optimism and warmth of the snow melt a sure harbinger of Spring. Larsen’s subtle range of colours, textures and rhythms is astonishing, making Slow Structures the most accomplished and memorable piece here.

If Larsen’s landscape changes with glacial slowness, the Chinese composer Chen Yi’s Night Thoughts moves with rather more alacrity. Based on an ancient poem by Li Bai (701-762) its distinctly eastern sound world - what gorgeous, fibrillating flute figures - merges seamlessly with a chunkier western idiom, epitomised by trenchant writing for the cello and piano. Really, it’s the enchanted flute playing that hovers in, and haunts, the mind long after the music has ebbed into the silence from which it sprang.

What a discoveries this trio and these works have turned out to be. I was spellbound by the quality of music and musicianship here, aided and abetted by a recording of sense-twitching tactility and sophistication. Factor in detailed liner-notes with artist bios and illuminating comments on the works played and you have a disc of rare distinction and depth.

Utterly absorbing; this music will give lasting pleasure.

Dan Morgan
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