

Calls and Echoes: American Sonatas for Trumpet and Piano

Eric Berlin, trumpet · Nadine Shank, piano · MSR Classics MS1395

Review by Barry Kilpatrick, American Record Guide, November/December 2013

Calls & Echoes SUDERBERG: Chamber Music VII; sonatas by Stephenson, Friedman, Kennan Eric Berlin, tpt; Nadine Shank, p — MSR 1395—74 minutes

Eric Berlin is principal trumpet of the Albany Symphony and a faculty member at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. His first album was excellent (Jan/Feb 2008: 203). This one is, too, and for the same reasons: solid and interesting program of modern works, beauty of tone, tasteful playing style, and impressive technical skills.

James Stephenson composed his Trumpet Sonata (2001) for Richard Stoelzel, who made its first recording (March/April 2005: 210). It's a terrific piece with daunting technical demands and attractive harmonies; both Stoelzel and Berlin give the work powerful readings.

This is my introduction to the Trumpet Sonata (1996) by Stanley Friedman, and from what I can tell this is its only recording. It is a moving work, based on 'The Morning Trumpet' (1835), a shaped-note hymn by CF White. I is assertive and speaks a free, dissonant harmonic language. Much of II, where the hymn is presented and variations begin, is touchingly tonal. III continues the variations and becomes majestic.

The most striking thing about Robert Suderburg's Chamber Music VII (1984) takes place right at the outset of I and II, when the trumpet plays short phrases into the piano and causes its strings to resonate sympathetically. The special effect is heard quite prominently here. It's a thought-provoking piece, and these artists always play thoughtfully.

That results in a terrific reading of Kent Kennan's Trumpet Sonata (1956), a landmark work that is often played with force and stridency. Ever since Scott Thornburg's beautiful, lyrical account (July/Aug 2003: 202), I have valued performances that hold harshness at bay and bring out the work's introspection. This is one of those—Berlin maintains warm tone most of the time, plays assertively at peak moments, and engages in meaningful dialog with his outstanding collaborator, pianist Nadine Shank.