

RECORDINGS

DAN LOCKLAIR: SYMPHONY OF SEASONS AND OTHER ORCHESTRAL WORKS. Janeanne Houston, soprano; Jacquelyn Bartlett, harp; Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Kirk Trevor, conductor. Naxos 8.559337. www.locklair.com; www.jamesarts.com. One of America's most distinguished active composers, Dan Locklair uses basic materials in creative and imaginative ways, producing music that is distinctive, fresh, effective, colorful, and accessible. This fine recording offers the opportunity to experience the symphonic side of Locklair's creativity. The *Symphony of Seasons*, in four movements, was commissioned by a multi-orchestral consortium, completed in 2002. Inspired by poems from 18th-century poet James Thomson's *The Seasons*, each movement evokes specific emotions: the exuberant joyful optimism of autumn (quoting "Now thank we all our God"), the melancholy of winter, with its "Vapours, and Clouds, and Storms" (very effectively portrayed through a twelve-statement chaconne), the playful levity of spring (combining elements of the scherzo and waltz), and the warm awakening of summer (employing the melodies of "Sumer is icumen in" and "In the Good Old Summertime"). This is a most compelling contemporary musical essay on the subject. *Concerto for Harp and Orchestra* was completed in 2004. Skillfully performed by Jacquelyn Bartlett, who provided the impetus for the work, the three-movement concerto displays effective writing for the harp (including percussive tapping on the framework), as well as colorful interaction between the soloist and other instruments. It will be a welcome addition to the harpist's repertoire. *Lairs of Soundings* is scored for divided string orchestra and soprano solo. The 1982 work is based on two poems of Ursula K. Le Guin, from her *Hard Words and Other Poems* (1981), which form the basis for the first and third movements. In the middle movement, the wordless soprano meshes with the strings. This music is severe in style, and requires a large dynamic and vocal range, superbly rendered by soprano Janeanne Houston. *Phoenix and Again* is an overture for full orchestra composed in 1983 to celebrate the sesquicentennial year of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., where Locklair is composer in residence and a professor of music. Incorporating a Thuringian folk melody, the music is joyful and vibrant. *In Memory—H.H.R.* is dedicated to the memory of the composer's mother, Hester Helms Locklair. The 2005 composition is scored for strings. Conductor Kirk Trevor considers it a "worthy successor to the Barber *Adagio*." The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra has a long and distinguished history, and is one of Eastern Europe's finest ensembles. They capably capture the American spirit inherent in Locklair's music, playing with vigor, sensitivity, and technical excellence. This is music that needs to be programmed by more orchestras around the globe. It represents some of the best of the contemporary American musical consciousness.

JAMES HILDRETH