

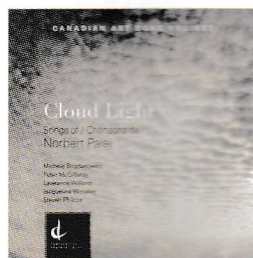
language, English and Finnish. Recommended.

—John Gilks

CLOUD LIGHT SONGS OF NORBERT PALEJ

Centrediscs: CMCCD 22315

Four prominent Canadian singers come together on this disc featuring three song collections and one short scene for vocal quartet by Norbert Palej, Associate Professor of Composition at the University of Toronto—soprano Jacqueline Woodley, mezzo Michèle Bogdanowicz, tenor Lawrence Wiliford and baritone Peter McGillivray. The disc is the latest from Canadian Art Song Project, co-founded by Wiliford and Steven Philcox, who here serves as collaborative pianist.



The title work, at nearly 33 minutes, is the most elaborate and the also the most impressive in terms of its captivating musical language, and for Palej's fascinating, totally innovative accompaniment, which exploits the extremes of the keyboard in a delicate way. It includes 14 songs, with whimsical, nature-themed texts selected from Canadian poet Jan Zwicky's *Thirty-seven Small Songs & Thirteen Silences*. (All but one has the word "song" in its title.) Woodley and Wiliford alternate, each singing a few songs before passing on to the other.

Tenor Wiliford shows off his lovely, lyrical style throughout and creates a hauntingly beautiful white tone in "Apple Song" on the ethereal words "stiff with dreaming of that other world" and again in "Small Song on Being Lost," appropriately on the word "lonely." Woodley, for her part, turns in a powerful rendition of "Small Song" and an ecstatic reading of the miniature, "Small Song: Height of Summer".

The other song sets on the disc are *Three Norwegian Songs* (with texts by Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson) and *Four Lyrical Moments* (on poems by Halina Poswiatowska). The former are set in English and the latter in Polish, the composer's first language and also the first language of the singer, which is apt. McGillivray's robust baritone brings the somewhat gloomy Norwegian songs to life (with some well-executed falsetto passages), while Bogdanowicz is the soloist in *Four Lyrical Moments*, which are quite beautiful and gorgeously performed. The disc closes with *The Demise of Argus Panoptes*, a dramatic Latin setting for vocal quartet and piano with biting harmonies and dense textures. Benjamin Britten comes to mind, but Palej's style is novel, thoroughly approachable and intriguing at every turn.

—Rick MacMillan

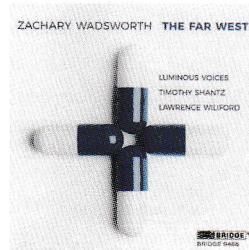
THE FAR WEST WADSWORTH

Bridge: 9466

American composer Zachary Wadsworth's *The*

Far West is a setting for tenor, chorus and strings of texts by poet/priest Tim Duglos, who died of AIDS in 1990. These are very personal and curiously optimistic texts. In "G-9," for example, death is described as "a great adventure" that will end "in just the right place." Only in "Parachute" is there much in the way of anger; in this, AIDS is "an insatiable and prowling beast with razor teeth and a persistent stink."

The settings make good use of the forces deployed.



Most of the time either the chorus, Calgary's excellent Luminous Voices, or the tenor soloist, Lawrence Wiliford, are deployed separately and with some contrasts. Wiliford, for example, uses much darker colours in the central movement, "The Far West," where the poet directly confronts his own impending death, than he does in the more contemplative sections "Et in Arcadia Ego" and "G-9," where his tone is characteristically brighter. The clarity of the solo pieces contrasts well with the richer, more "churchy" sound of the interwoven choral movements. Curiously, the basically elegiac mood is sustained musically even for the much harsher text of "Parachute." The cycle ends cleverly with a final movement setting

Metaphysical poet George Herbert's "Heaven." In this, the chorus sings a series of questions about eternity that elicit single word responses from the tenor that answer the questions in a deep but indirect way. The strings accompany in a direct homage to Bach that ends with ambiguous but hopeful harmonies.

There is great clarity throughout from both the small orchestra and the chorus under the direction of Timothy Shantz. Wiliford's impeccable diction adds to the sense of giving full value to the texts. It's a fine performance.

Before the title piece, there are two *a cappella* works based on the theme of meditating about a journey. The first, *Come to the Road*, sets text adapted from Paul Lawrence Dunbar and is sung by the chorus. For *Up-Hill*, to a text by Christina Rossetti, the chorus is joined by soprano Katie Partridge in a call-response format. Both pieces are tonal and meditative and fill out the disc in a satisfying way.

The recording was made in Calgary's St. Stephen's Anglican Church. It's a bit resonant and I would have preferred a little more clarity, but it's not at all an inappropriate sound for this music. —John Gilks

THREAD OF WINTER LESLIE FAGAN/LORIN SHALANKO

iTunes/CDBaby/
canadianartsong.com

This CD is billed as the first in the Canadian Art Song Series, which must not be