

TAKEMITSU, PIANO WORKS. Roger Woodward (pi). Etcetera/Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ Ⓢ KTC1103 (73 minutes: DDD). Items marked * recorded at a performance in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney on September 16th, 1990.

Corona*. The Crossing*. Far Away. Les yeux clos. Litany. Pause uninterrupted. Piano Distance. Rain Tree Sketch.

It's good to see Roger Woodward back in the recording studio after so long an absence. A tireless champion of contemporary music he was once described as "the sacred monster of the avant garde". His pioneering recordings back in the 1970s did much to further awareness of many European and Australian composers, and it's our loss that his brilliant recordings of works like the Barraque Piano Sonata (Unicorn-Kanchana) and Bussotti's masterpiece *Pour clavier*, (EMI) have not found their way on to CD. However, the enterprising Netherlands-based label Etcetera have pounced on this remarkably talented musician, and are bringing us a series of recordings that have resulted from Woodward's own annual Festival of New Music in Sydney, Australia. We already have Xenakis's colossal ballet *Kraanery* (Etcetera Ⓢ KTC1075, 12/89) with Woodward directing his own Alpha Centauri Ensemble, and Etcetera have promised a two-disc set of Morton Feldman's piano music for release this spring.

Meanwhile we have this recording of Takemitsu's complete piano works to content ourselves with. Woodward is no stranger to this music, having recorded four of these works for Decca's Headline label in the 1970s (n/a), and also having worked closely with Takemitsu since 1969. The piano music makes an ideal introduction to that composer's music as it charts particularly well the stylistic changes of this fascinating composer. The earliest of the works on this disc *Pause uninterrupted* (1952-9) owes much to Debussy, Messiaen and Scriabin (influences that played an important role in his development).

In the 1960s and 1970s his music became more experimental *Far Away*, *Piano Distance* (which reflects the European avant-garde trends extolled by composers such as Boulez, Stockhausen and Bussotti) and the graphic scores of *Corona* and *The Crossing* are a good example of Takemitsu's interaction between East and West. Just as John Cage had fallen under the spell of Japanese zen Buddhism in the 1950s, so Takemitsu fell under the

spell of Cage, particularly Cage's ideas on aleatoric music and indeterminacy. *Corona* was one of the works featured on Woodward's earlier disc for Decca, and I marginally prefer that version for its wider dynamic range and Woodward's more structural conception of the work. On this disc it's been combined with another graphic score *The Crossing*; in much the same way that Cage's *Fontana Mix* and *Aria* can be performed either separately or combined.

The more recent pieces, *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982) and *Litany* (1990) reflect Takemitsu's return to a less radical approach to composing. The influences of Messiaen, Scriabin and Debussy are still apparent, though these are blended into what has now become an instantly recognizable personal voice.

Roger Woodward's refined pianism and communicative skills allow the listener to enjoy this subtle, fastidious music to its full potential. The sound is on the whole very fine, though the recording of *Corona* and *The Crossing* (taken from a live performance) are less well focused than the studio recordings.

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