

RENDLEMAN *Symphonic Overture*¹. *Song for My Son*². *Poems of Margaret Proctor Wood*³. **LOCH** *Remembrance*⁴. *Transformation*⁵ • Gerhardt Zimmermann¹, John Yaffe⁴, cond; Warsaw Natl PO. Gerard Schwarz, cond; Seattle SO². Jerzy Swoboda, cond; Krakow PO⁵. Kay Lowe (sop); Scott Tilley (pn)³ • MMC 2095 (56:17 □)

This recording presents eloquent corroboration of Duke Ellington's pronouncement, "If it sounds good, it probably is good." None of Rendleman's pieces will shock musical patrons of more traditionally oriented tastes than mine, and those of you who like to hang out in Darmstadt, or who find the music of Meyer Kupferman congenial, will find his sheer craftsmanship appealing. His music is unabashedly tonal. Its surface is tuneful, its harmonic language is direct in the manner of Copland in his 1940s Americana-oriented scores. Given this baggage, what counts here is Rendleman's freshness, inventiveness, and unadorned eloquence.

Richard J. Rendleman Jr. was born in 1949. In 1981, he began composition studies with Robert Ward, a composer known to me only by his Symphony No. 1 as recorded on an anciently mono American Recording Society LP (ARS-9-B), and featuring its eponymous orchestra under the direction of Dean Dixon. That symphony is clearly a product of the American symphonic efflorescence of the 1930s and 40s, and does much to illuminate Rendleman's compositional approach.

The great number of years between Rendleman's birth and his first formal music-study was a result of his interests in other things. He first became a professor of finance, specializing in derivative securities markets. His later writings on the relationship between stock returns and quarterly earnings surprises contributed to subsequent stock price volatility in the early to mid 1980s. Oh well, another stereotype bites the dust; but then, Charles Ives also managed to navigate the supposedly mutually exclusive worlds of business and art.

Rendleman's two seemingly retrograde orchestral works on this release manage to do what many of our best avant-garde composers accomplish, but from the opposite direction—to make us rethink the fundamental elements of music. Their melodic and harmonic material is as clear and affecting as that of William Billings, but Rendleman's manipulation of them, along with his handling of the orchestra, is decidedly modern. It is a case of linguistic sophistication at the service of pure and simple expression. Both the Warsaw National Philharmonic under American conductor Gerhardt Zimmermann (*Symphonic Overture*), and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra under Gerard Schwarz (*Song for My Son*), capture and exude the disarming spirit of the music before them.

The essence of that spirit is found, in distilled form, in the earlier song cycle titled *Poems of Margaret Proctor Wood*. Wood was Rendleman's grandfather's first cousin and a French teacher at the Danvers, Massachusetts, high school. She devoted her spare time to composing poetry chronicling the small-town world that she knew. Her homespun words, coupled with Rendleman's music, quickly elevate her themes from specific to universal realms. The collaboration of soprano Kay Lowe and pianist Scott Tilley provides fine advocacy, and shows these songs to be on par with those of Copland's *Old American* cycles.

Frank Loch, like Rendleman, is a man of multiple talents. A member of the George Washington University Virginia Campus Advisory Board, he serves as vice president of Stanford Telecom's Advanced Communications Systems Division at the GWU University Center adjacent to the Virginia campus. He has also served in technical and management positions at NASA. Given this technological bent, it comes as no surprise that he and his wife, Lenna Reid, are both electronic keyboard virtuosos.

At first, his two orchestral pieces on this release struck me as frames for uncomfortably New Age pop tune—style melodies underpinned by simple harmonic progressions leading to predictable climaxes—*Mr. Holland's Opus* writ large. Subsequent hearings revealed that these pieces are not mere crossover treacle—music dumbed down to appeal to a wider audience than it otherwise would—but neatly (with utmost efficiency) wrought compositions with lives and spirits of their own. Put another way: *Mr. Holland's Opus* with real musical content. As in the cases of Rendleman's scores, the performances are technically unassailable and musically satisfying, and provide a fine close to a thoroughly enjoyable release. To quote another dictum, this time by Arnold Schoenberg: "There is still a lot of music to be written in C Major."

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The sound is fine, conveying not only the timbres of the instruments but the more indefinable spirit of the music.

William Zagorski