

## CD Review: Margaret Brouwer — *Shattered*

by Mike Telin



On her latest recording, *Shattered*, released on the Naxos Label, composer Margaret Brouwer has compiled four beautifully constructed and emotionally captivating compositions. Each work reflects her personal and continuing musical journey to come to terms with the first decade of the turbulent twenty-first century. However what makes *Shattered* so appealing is that you do not need to know of Brouwer’s inner conflicts in order to immerse yourself in her alluring music. She has a talent for taking the simplest melody and through her expansive array of compositional techniques, develop it into a polished musical gem. And

even when employing a twelve-tone row, Brouwer never ventures into the realm of compositional gimmickry. Every note she writes has musical purpose.

Margaret Brouwer’s immense prowess as a composer is in full evidence in her *Quintet for Clarinet in A and String Quartet* (2005), which is masterfully performed by the Maia String Quartet – Tricia Park and Zoran Jakovic, violins, Elizabeth Oakes, viola, Hannah Holman, cello and clarinetist Daniel Silver. In her informative liner notes, Brouwer describes the work as “a musical experiment to see whether the overlaying of different cultural influences can add to and enhance each other.” For example, during the opening movement she inventively layers musical quotes from Christian hymns with an imitation of the Muslim *Call to Prayer*.

Soprano Sandra Simon, violist Laura Shuster and pianist Alijca Basinska give an intoxicating performance of *Whom do you call angel now?* (2005) based on *An Angel’s Song* from poet David Adams’s *September Songs: 9/11*.

Margaret Brouwer, who served as head of the composition department at the Cleveland Institute of Music from 1996 until 2008, dedicates a little more than half of the total of 58 minutes of playing time to performances by the excellent Blue Streak Ensemble. Formed in 2011 by Brouwer, all of its members are graduates of CIM.

Flutist Madeline Lucas, cellist Maaike Harding, percussionist Nathan von Trotha and pianist Shuai Wang deliver a rousing performance of the “sometimes rhythmic, sometimes raucous and sometimes mysterious and melodic,” *Shattered Glass* (2007). The ensemble impressively brings the work’s expansive mixture of sounds to life.

Clarinetist Amitai Vardi and violinist Sharon Roffman join their Blue Streak colleagues for a five-star performance of the captivating *Lonely Lake* (2011). Commissioned by Hank and Mary Doll, the work is inspired by their Canadian summer camp. Brouwer artfully creates musical representations of a sand hill crane, wood thrush, belted kingfisher, and song sparrow, along with the solitude of an early morning swim and the glowing reflection of sun on water.

Blue Streak brings this recording to a close with performances of Brouwer’s arrangements of Debussy’s sublime *Clair de lune* and J.S. Bach’s sprightly *Two Part Invention in F major*. More than just arrangements, Brouwer has added her own colorful touches to these well-known pieces.

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