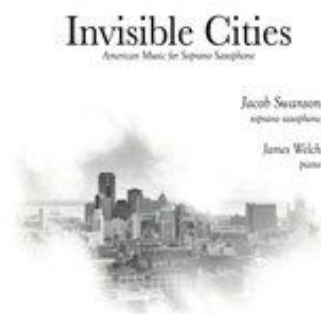


CD Review

Jake Swanson: *Invisible Cities*, American Music for Soprano Saxophone

by Mike Telin



Saxophonist Jacob Swanson has become a familiar face on the Cleveland music scene. Audiences have come to know his artistry through outstanding performances with his longtime collaborator Sarah Marchitelli (Jake & Sarah) on Trinity Cathedral’s Brownbag Concert series. In recent years, the Duo has also appeared on Lorain County Community College’s Signature Series and at the Bop Stop as members of the Decho Ensemble. On his recently released CD — *Invisible Cities*, American Music for Soprano Saxophone — Swanson reveals himself as

a soloist of impeccable taste.

During the six works featured on the album, Swanson reminds us what a beautiful instrument the soprano saxophone is. He performs with a handsome tone, flawless technique, and great musical sensibilities. The partnership between Swanson and pianist James Welch is superb. This is not just a recording for your collection, but one to be added to your “favorites” playlist.

Nathan Hall’s five-minute-long *Invisible Cities* (2008) is a highlight. The work was inspired by a poem-novel of the same name by Italo Calvino in which the author imagines Marco Polo and Genghis Kahn describing their travels and dreams to each other. The melody, taken from the traditional Syrian lullaby *Ainte*, is exotic in its harmonic structure. Beginning slowly, *Invisible Cities* evolves into a whirling dance, finally ending with piano in the lowest range and the saxophone in the very high “altissimo” range, which Swanson plays splendidly.

At 22 minutes, Eric Ewazen’s *Down a River of Time* is the longest work on the album. Ewazen, a Cleveland native, originally composed the piece for oboe and

strings in 1999, but the melodic, neo-Romantic work fits the soprano sax like a glove. During the three movements, Swanson becomes the storyteller as he takes listeners through the process of losing a loved one, and to the ultimate joy that their memories bring.

Everett Gates' *Incantation and Ritual* (1963) is entirely based on a scale derived from Scriabin's "Mystic Chord." Written for Carina Raschèr, the brief, four-minute-long composition for solo soprano saxophone is a little gem, and Swanson makes it shine.

Engaging sonatas by Ronald Caravan and Lawson Lunde, along with Walter Hartley's *Diversions for Soprano Saxophone and Piano*, round out this most enjoyable CD.

Recorded at the State University of New York at Fredonia by Tim Bausch, the sound quality and balances between the soprano sax and piano provide an excellent listening experience. The CD is available on Jacob Swanson's [website](#), [CD Baby](#), and [Amazon.com](#).

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