

CD Review—***Bird as Prophet: David Bowlin, violin***

By Mike Telin



On his latest CD, violinist David Bowlin presents an astonishing array of works that showcase his extraordinary ability as an interpreter of diverse styles of contemporary music. Released on New Focus Recordings, *Bird as Prophet* is a fantastical listening journey for all — not just new music aficionados. Throughout the recording, Bowlin proves himself to be a player of abundant technique, however it is his innate expressive abilities that make this album so attractive.

Bowlin's musical prowess reveals itself on the album's opening track — Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronisms #9* for violin and electronics (1988). Here the violinist doesn't just skirt around the pre-recorded sounds, he finds his way inside them, bringing out the inner beauty of the composer's abrupt mood changes and musical body slams.

A founding member of the International Contemporary Ensemble, Bowlin is joined by ICE cellist Katinka Kleijn in Alexandra Karastoyanova-Hermentin's *Kastena* for violin and cello (2003). The haunting work begins with a cello drone over which Bowlin plays a dramatic cadenza that is full of heart-wrenching imagery. The ensemble between players is astonishing, especially in the extended unison passages that move apart ever so slightly and then reunite.

Pianist Tony Cho joins Bowlin in Martin Bresnick's alluring *Bird as Prophet* (1999), a work inspired by the music of Robert Schumann and Charlie Parker. Full of Romantic glory which is totally embraced by the performers, this fascinating piece doesn't reveal

its full self on a first listen. Sudden emotional changes and harmonic structures that initially sound odd, sound perfectly natural the second time around.

Following a magical performance of George Walker's brief *Bleu* for solo violin (2011), the album returns to the music of Russian/Bulgarian composer Alexandra Karastoyanova-Hermentin, this time for *Mari Mamo* for violin, flute, and percussion (2009). For nearly 17 minutes, Bowlin, flutist Conor Nelson, and percussionist Ayano Kataoka weave together colorful lines of this Bulgarian folk music-inspired piece. Near the end the players remain silent while the composer sings an improvised melody in the Bulgarian tradition.

Bird as Prophet concludes with Du Yun's stunning *Under a Tree, an Udātta* (2016). "Udātta" refers to an inflected raised tone in Vedic chant, and you can hear the microtonal shadings in the violin part. With a recording of Vedic Sanskrit chanting as his partner, Bowlin finds his way inside the composer's exotic sound world that draws you in and holds your attention. His commanding playing turns this spellbinding piece into a work of symphonic scale.

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