

CD Review—**Katherine Jolly, soprano:
*Preach Sister, Preach***

by Daniel Hathaway



Soprano Katherine Jolly showed up for her new job as Associate Professor of Voice at the Oberlin Conservatory earlier this fall with a recently-issued CD in hand. *Preach Sister, Preach* is a fresh collection of new works by Evan Williams, Katherine Bodor, and Evan Mack that set some of Emily Dickinson’s 1,800 poems, a treatise on climate change, and *bons mots* by thirteen women that reveal a humorous side of feminism.

A graduate of the Cincinnati College-Conservatory, Jolly joins pianist Emily Lap Chua to open her

album with *Emily’s House*, Evan Williams’ witty settings of short and sometimes enigmatic glimpses into the sequestered world of the famous poet of Amherst, Massachusetts. “I dwell in possibility” is bright and fragmentary. “The bee is not afraid of me” is a scherzo that begins with a high, trilled buzz in the piano. “The Shelter” ends, Schumann-like, with a long, ruminative piano postlude.

At the other end of the recording, soprano and pianist shine in *Preach Sister, Preach*, brief, sometimes tiny epigrams set to appropriately witty music by Evan Mack. He writes slinkily for Mae West (“Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere”), chooses a boogie-woogie for Gilda Radner (“Women can cry, they can wear cute clothes, and they’re the first to be rescued off sinking ships”), and conjures up something resembling the *Jeopardy!* theme for Lizz Winstead (“I think, therefore I’m

single”). There are fourteen quips in all, and they’re all delightfully conceived and performed. Jolly adds a spoken comment here and there as well.

The mood turns deadly serious in mid-album with Katherine Bodor’s setting of a daunting text: David Wallace-Wells’ *New York Magazine* article “The Uninhabitable Earth,” a solemn meditation that ends on a hopeful note:

But climate scientists have a strange kind of faith: we’ve found a way to engineer our own doomsday, and surely we will find a way to engineer our way out of it, one way or another, because we must.

The composer, who holds degrees both in mechanical engineering and music composition, has set the text starkly but alluringly for soprano, two violins, viola, and double bass. Joshua Harper conducts, and Katherine Jolly, who sings brightly and clearly on all the tracks on this recording, puts the words across with surprising effectiveness.

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