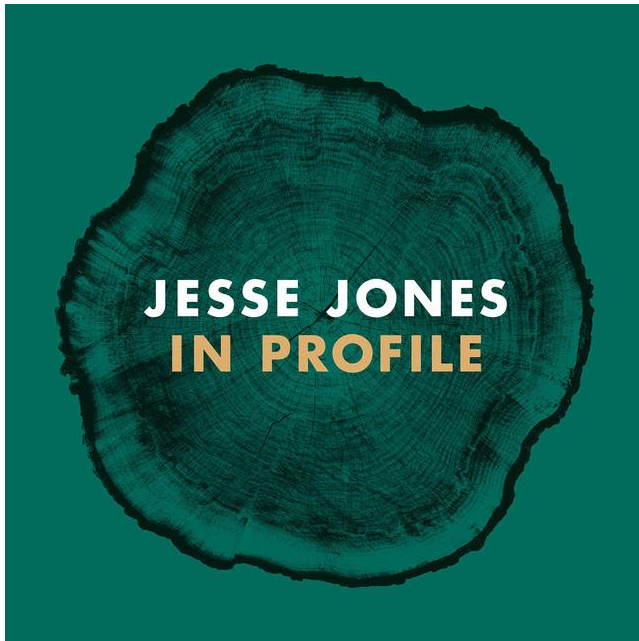


CD Review —***Jesse Jones: In Profile***

by Peter Feher



The path to finding an artistic voice might start in music school, but it doesn't end when you graduate — or even if you become the professor. That process of self-discovery is what connects the five otherwise contrasting pieces on *Jesse Jones: In Profile*, the latest release on the Oberlin Music label, dedicated to works by faculty composer Jesse Jones.

Like the title suggests, *In Profile* offers a portrait. The assortment of compositions featured on the album — all recorded here for the first time and in top-notch performances by Oberlin faculty, students, and guest artists — comes from a six-year

period in Jones' career, 2009-2015.

Inspiration plays an outsized role in the concept of each piece. Jones writes approachably in the liner notes about the moments of insight that kickstart artistic ideas, though his musical realization of these ideas is in a more specialized, less immediately accessible language. His pieces often get their titles from literary works — books, poems, and histories that can serve as readable introductions to the standard listening challenges of contemporary classical music.

Opening the album, *...neither am I a bloodless angel* has its genesis in a line from Chaim Potok's novel *My Name Is Asher Lev*. Jones took the story as a license for personal and creative liberty, and the resulting work — a dramatic and demanding eleven minutes for cello and piano — finds freedom in trying on various musical styles. Hypnotic piano passages flirt with the repetitions of minimalism, and the piece's dark, expressive climax approaches Romanticism. By not adopting any philosophy wholesale, the composer discovers something of himself.

The tension between individuals and influences also applies to Jones' *Snippet Variations*. The work deliberately imitates the style of certain 20th-century composers, though on a small, fragmented scale. Some of the joke is in the instrumentation (clarinet, violin, cello, and piano), borrowed from Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* but here decidedly less serious. But the music that emerges doesn't suggest one particular composer so much as it invokes a generic, spiky modernism.

In contrast, *So Eden Sank to Grief* does show the influence of a specific composer and piece. The dominant English horn sound that opens the work grows more distorted with the emergence of every other instrument in the ensemble (alto flute, then piccolo, oboe, clarinets, bassoons, and horns), building to a *Rite of Spring* whole. Even Jones' source material, a Robert Frost poem about the harshness of spring, shares its outlook with Stravinsky, and the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble, conducted by Timothy Weiss, pulls off the orchestral illusion brilliantly.

Jones has a full symphony at his disposal for *...innumerable stars, scattered in clusters*, a tone poem depicting the Milky Way galaxy. The Oberlin Orchestra and director Raphael Jiménez pay detailed attention to the colorful score, but the subject — outer space — revisits symphonic ground that, from Gustav Holst to John Williams, has lost much of its mystery.

Languido, a short work for solo guitar, closes the album simply. In its straightforward treatment of harmony, in its understanding of instrumental idiom, and in a sensitive performance by Dieter Hennings Yeomans, the piece makes immediate musical sense — a composition that doesn't depend on explanation.

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