



October 26, 2010

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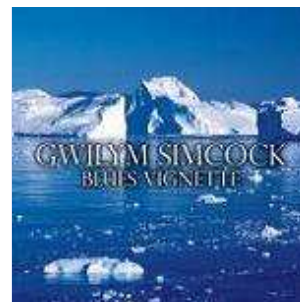
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Simcock, Gwilym: *Blues Vignette*

The latest release from British pianist Gwilym Simcock, an ambitious double CD set entitled *Blues Vignette*, demonstrates his unique ability to successfully straddle the line somewhere between jazz and classical music. However, in the words of the artist himself the music on this collection is *"neither jazz or classical, it is just music and the type of music that interests and stimulates me"*.



Regardless of how you want to categorize it Simcock seems more focused on making that all important emotional connection with the listener, which I think is something that most artists strive for when they create their art. I can honestly say though that with *Blues Vignette* he has succeeded in a big way.

The album which as mentioned is a double CD contains over two hours of music and features Gwilym performing in a solo setting, as well as in both a duo and trio configuration as well. Largely made up of original compositions and improvisations he shows his extraordinary range and versatility as a player early on by offering up a truly moving interpretation of the second movement of Greig's "Piano Concerto". He then follows that up with his arrangement of the Barry Mann/ Cynthia Weil penned "On Broadway", a track that has been covered by everyone under the sun since The Drifters first had a hit with it back in 1963. On the surface these two compositions appear to be polar opposites and yet with Simcock's guiding hands and skillful, lyrical playing it's nothing less than a musical marriage made in heaven. The other major highlight for this reviewer on the first disc is the absolutely stunning suite for cello and piano, on which Simcock is joined by classical cellist Cara Berridge. Clocking in at a shade over twenty minutes the duo enraptures the listener for the full duration with some incredibly moving melodies. In addition to highlighting the world class talents of both of these musicians, the grand scope of this musical suite just further proves what a highly skilled composer and arranger

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Simcock is as well.

The transition over to disc two is absolutely seamless as Gwilym gently eases the listener in on "Introduction" with a contemplative piano melody, before his new trio of Russian bassist Yuri Goloubev and drummer James Maddren are formally introduced into the fold on the track "Tundra", which is showered with Simcock's most vibrant and upbeat playing thus far. The title track is an eight minute tour de-force that is the very definition of how to successfully utilize light and shade, as this song is full of peaks and valleys. Another gem here is the twelve minute original composition "Longing To Be", which features another gorgeous melody and some beautifully fluid playing from Gwilym. This multi-faceted original piece of work is sandwiched between the trio's spot on interpretations of Sonny Burke's "Black Coffee", Gershwin's "Nice Work If You Can Get It" and another jazz staple, "Cry Me A River". The lively original "1981" brings *Blues Vignette* to its rousing conclusion.

Blues Vignette is a remarkably diverse and engaging listening experience from beginning to end, which is a significant accomplishment just when you consider the volume of music that has been offered up here. Fans of Brad Mehldau and Keith Jarrett should take note because with this album Gwilym Simcock has definitely reached the point in his career where he deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as these legendary musicians.

Track Listing

Disc One: Solo/ Duo

- 1) Little People
- 2) Exploration on Mvt II of Grieg Piano Concerto
- 3) On Broadway
- 4) Improvisation I - Statues
- 5) Improvisation II - Letter To The Editor
- 6) Improvisation III - Be Still Now
- 7) Caldera
- 8) Jaco and Joe
- 9) Suite For Cello and Piano: Part 1-Kinship
- 10) Suite For Cello and Piano: Part 2- Homeward

Disc Two: Trio

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Tundra
- 3) Blues Vignette
- 4) Black Coffee
- 5) Longing To Be
- 6) Nice Work If You Can Get It
- 7) Cry Me A River
- 8) 1981

Added: October 24th 2010

Reviewer: Ryan Sparks

Score: ★★★★★

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