

“Kathryn and Peter Play the Recorder” offers a lovely sound-world in which to get lost. Written for the recorder duo Kathryn Bennetts and Peter Bowman, with whom Wolters has enjoyed a long relationship stretching back to 1997, the first disc of this utterly beguiling release places the recorders in a variety of contexts, joined by bass and intoning voice (Suzie Burkis (sic.)) in *The Voyage*, voice and harpsichord for *7 Shakespeare Songs* and *My Own Step-song*, and amplified ensemble for *German Folk Tunes* (...). Wolters writes in the sleeve notes about wanting to use the particular mechanics of recorders – fingers flexibly controlling pitch – to explore microtonality in the context of ‘pop harmony’. This is just one of the many admixtures and reference points called up by these teasing, characterful works.

The recorder and ground bass in *The Voyage* bring us back into the sound-world of the quasi-Renaissance explored on *Danserye*, though the declamatory voice here connects more with contemporary monodrama. The aforementioned ‘pop harmony’, meanwhile, is heard in *The Voyage* in things like a repeated F-G-Am sequence and a whole passage that hovers loosely around Gm. This kind of harmonic language is qualified by the roving microtones of the recorders, though, which scribble colour on top of the blunt diatonic motions of the plucked bass.

The shorter *She Stays* is a kaleidoscopic *pas de deux*, the two recorders curling around each other serpent-like, whilst *My Own Step-song* is a tense, expostulatory recital spotlighting Burkis (sic) that uses harpsichord and recorders, again exploiting the fruitful contrast of diatonic sequences and curving, sighing microtones above them, to frame and qualify the singer’s anxious verses. *Seven Shakespeare Songs*, which include brief settings of familiar lyrics from plays such as *King Lear*, *Measure for Measure* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, is perhaps not as distinctive as the other pieces on the disc, hewing closely as it does to sometimes routine voice-led text setting. But the clarity and poise of the songs are appreciated nonetheless.

(...)

The second disc of *Play the Recorder* consists solely of a 40-minute narrative tone poem, *Kathryn und Peter durchqueren die Antarktis* (Kathryn and Peter Cross the Antarctic). Where pieces like *German Folk Tunes* and some of the numbers from *Danserye* are fun and demonstrative, the Antarctic piece is austere and still; but it is no less enticing for all its concentration. The piece formed the basis of a radio play and stage show, both produced in collaboration with theatre artist Marcus Droß. Heard here we only have the two recorders’ hypnotic unisoning and tilting conversation, a duet of constant steady motion in which one recorder seemingly describes the surface off the ice whilst the other speculates about the bedrock below. Tiny little extensions, isolated trills and meek curlicues around eighth-tone microtonal melodies make up the matter of this piece, which draws one’s attention in and holds it for long durations through subtle arcs of dynamic swells, psychoacoustic projection and registral ballet. Bennetts and Bowman’s playing is delicate and mesmerizing throughout.”

Stephen Graham

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