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Borrowed Tracks

Ken Elkinson

2008 / August Son Productions

39.7 minutes

"Borrowed Tracks" is Ken Elkinson's fifth solo piano release, and contains his arrangements of ten classic cover tunes that he has recorded over the years. The songs range from Stephen Sondheim to Fiona Apple, The Beatles to Coldplay, Bob Marley to Joni Mitchell. Not your typical piano stylist by any means, Elkinson makes these pieces uniquely his own with unpredictable chord and rhythmic changes that keep the music interesting well beyond a play or two. Despite the diversity of the music, Elkinson keeps the tone of the album even and smooth enough for background music, but complex and challenging enough for repeated listens.

The first "borrowed track" is The Beatles' classic, "Eleanor Rigby," one of my own favorite songs from that era. Elkinson's version is pretty straightforward, allowing the poignant melody to tell the story. Peter Gabriel's "Here Comes the Flood" also allows the melody to sing with a simple left hand accompaniment that enhances the emotional content of the song. Joni Mitchell's "Blue" is a graceful ballad that makes a beautiful piano solo. My favorite track is "The Meeting," by Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe. The strong but gentle melody carries an emotional message that is played with delicacy and heart. "Saturday Sun" by Nick Drake has a gospel style that contrasts with the rest of the album, adding a different twist to the mix of sounds. Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" has a quiet, hopeful melody that is played from the heart, keeping it simple and direct. "Never Is A Promise" has a lovely flow despite a shifting meter that gives it a slight edge. The closing track, "Send in the Clowns" is a bit of a surprise since the other songs have rock roots. It fits in just fine, though, with interesting chord changes and rhythmic alterations that give it more of a jazz style.

As usual, Ken Elkinson defies categorization with "Borrowed Tracks" - not quite new age, not quite easy listening, not quite pop or rock, not quite jazz, but a fascinating blending of all of the above. It is currently available only as a download from www.kenelkinson.com. There are samples to "taste" there, so check it out!

Kathy Parsons

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