
Music Sojourn

Music Reviews and Additions To The Coolstreams Archives

Pianist Emerges From Ambient Closet! – Ken Elkinson – Music For Commuting

Summary: I have enjoyed and programmed Ken Elkinson's New Age Instrumental piano solo CDs for many years now, but when a box set of 3 cds arrived, titled Music For Commuting Volumes 1-6, I was not sure I was going to get through 3+ hours of piano solos and maintain enough interest. So it was a complete surprise to hear what played upon inserting the first disc. Well crafted, engaging Ambient & Electronica sound bytes! I use bytes because the 3 disc set contains 60 short (by current Ambient norms) 3-4 minute tracks (the longest track is 4:38), 20 per disc. Obviously, this won't be anything like Robert Rich's Somnium, or the typical soundscapes of Rudy Adrian, Between interval, Darshan Ambient, etc., and the majority of Ken's compositions are not quite that intricate, nor are they dark or brooding – more are airy and bright. They are quite satisfying, however, and most will take you on a brief journey into a space or atmospheric realm of your choosing, or, when combined with the suggestion of the title, may evoke a new perspective on a specific segment of your commuting patterns. The set is organized into Monday thru Friday volumes of 10 songs each (Monday & Tuesday on disc 1, Wed & Thur on disc 2, etc.), with the final 10 song theme volume titled "beyond" including the intriguing "typewriter, dentist" (beware that almost subliminal high speed drill).

I am impressed with Ken's unexpected shift from the Ivories to the synths. While some ambient connoisseurs may shun the consistently short tracks, they are enjoyable nonetheless, with the only complaint that they may end a bit too soon after you have become immersed in the theme. Noting that many tracks are, to me, reminiscent of earlier (1980s-1990s) electronic artists, one curiosity of mine is why Ken did not include the actual piano in at least some of these compositions because the closest comparison in that case may have been to perennial favorite Tim Story ("Plateau" in Vol. 2 comes closest to this sound).

Genres (& sub genres): Ambient, New Age, Relaxation, Electronic, Space Music, Electronica

Listening Impressions: Tranquil, peaceful, relaxing, exciting, soaring, drifting, calming, reminiscent, harmonius

Similar to: Michael Stribling, some aspects of Richard Bone, Alpha Wave Movement, and in Robert Rich's Catalogue: Geometry (1988);

Many tracks are also reminiscent of earlier electronic music artists like Windsor Reily (The Move Of Life), Ray Lynch, Vangelis, Michael Genest, Peter Maunu & others.

Notes from the artist / label: Ken will be donating a portion of the proceeds from this project to the ALS Association (fighting Lou Gehrig's Disease)

- Scott Ericson