

KEN ELKINSON

Borrowed Tracks

August Son Productions (2008)

Two things elevate pianist Ken Elkinson's digital-only release *Borrowed Tracks* from the likes of "cover tunes that you might hear in the mall atrium." The first is Elkinson's solid taste in what to cover. Peter Gabriel's "Here Comes the Flood," Neil Young's "After the Goldrush" and Nick Drake's "Saturday Sun" are not exactly staples of the silver-haired set gathered in front of Sears munching on cinnamon rolls. Elkinson placates those who need to hear something familiar by also including two mainstream staples: "Send in the Clowns" and "Eleanor Rigby." Lest you think I'm picking on the aforementioned group of folks, I'll admit that even I don't know all these tracks! As a result, I can't comment on how close they are to their original versions - so I'll more or less refrain from remarks in that vein. Heck, I don't think I'd recognize Coldplay's "Trouble" or Fiona Apple's "Never Is A Promise" if I heard it on the radio right now, to be honest. So, as far as *Borrowed Tracks* being a kind of new age muzak, nothing could be further from the truth from where I sit.

The other thing that keeps this CD from the mass of, to be frank, undistinguished cover tune solo piano releases, is Elkinson himself. The man is a master of nuance and subtlety, wringing sincerity and non-cliché emotion from his low key yet dexterous playing, allowing his sparse and relatively uncomplicated arrangements speak volumes without resorting to histrionics, fireworks, or pounding the hell out of the ivories. Bless him for the latter!

Overall, this is a quiet recording, and as such, it's ideal for background music or quieter times. Of course, one can just as easily wile away the ten tracks absorbing each note, whether it be the gentle rolling sensation which propels "After the Gold Rush" or the neo-classical influences which traipse throughout the stately "The Meeting" (which I assume is from a Yes album since it's credited to Jon Anderson, Bill Bruford, Rick Wakeman and Steve Howe). Joni Mitchell's "Blue" is probably custom made for Elkinson's expressive playing style, as he finds the soul of one of Mitchell's trademark's songs with his brief explosions of gentle power juxtaposed with softer passages. Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" (one of the few non-reggae rhythm songs recorded by the famed artist) merits an especially somber and poignant treatment and is an album highlight. Apple's "Never Is A Promise" sounds sad, even tragic at times, while Elkinson's version of "Eleanor Rigby" retains the tragedy of the original but interjects just a dash of jazzy liveliness to juxtapose the sadness.

If there is a low point on the album, it'd be the closing "Send In The Clowns" which somehow loses the drama of Sondheim's classic composition by scaling the usually more emotive piece down to almost whisper intensity. Elkinson's somewhat halting manner of playing also detracts from what should have been the ideal closing track.

That minor critique aside, *Borrowed Tracks* is a solid release and is a refutation to those who would think albums of this type (solo piano cover tunes) are over-produced tripe, sugary sweet confections, or cliché emotions of the worst kind. Ken Elkinson has both taste and talent and when that combination is unleashed (in his gentle and soothing manner) as it is here, I can't help but recommend the result.

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