

MYSTIC POP

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“CUE”

Ken Elkinson

There's a playfulness to Ken Elkinson that somehow spills its generosity through the notes of his luminous piano playing. Simply consider the CD jacket for “Cue,” which includes a laundry list of personal tidbits listeners may or may not be curious about, from his dress shirt size and favorite bottled water to his most embarrassing moment and favorite scene from the movie “Napoleon Dynamite.” The clever musician also makes a cross world puzzle — or “Thank Cue,” as he refers to it — of the names of all those who have contributed to the making of the CD, and then, briefly putting aside his droll humor, notes two nonprofits that he has agreed to support on behalf of two artists whose work appears on the CD, poet Elizabeth Spires, and songwriter and fellow pianist Tom Freund. And it is all of this that infuses Elkinson's poetic piano pieces — a spirited exuberance, even as it brushes up against more poignant or dramatic moments; a sharp intelligence; and heartfelt sincerity.

“Cue” is an elegant and emotive musical rendering on solo piano, Elkinson conjuring both a sense of place and time on tracks like “Oregon Coast” and “January,” plying a delicacy and tenderness from his ivories with compositions such as “Lightly” and “Maybe.” Bolder passions linger more vividly, too, with the darker-tinged “Firefly,” while the closing “Beautiful Sadness,” a song written and here sung by Freund, is an affecting blend of yearning and acceptance that points to the lessons in embracing our sorrows.

- Naila Francis