

Ken Elkinson - Generations Of Yuletide

At the last minute, this beauty of a holiday music recording, Ken Elkinson's *Generations of Yuletide*, arrived in my (ice-cold) mailbox. While it is yet another holiday-themed solo piano offering (my third of that subgenre this season), it's the first one which is ideally suited for late nights in front of a crackling fire. Elkinson is one of my favorite contemporary pianists - I love his unconventional yet fully accessible approach to solo piano music. This particular Elkinson CD epitomizes what I'm referring to as the artist takes traditional carols and a smattering of seasonal secular favorites and treats them to smoothly flowing improvisatory arrangements, sprinkling each one with enough familiarity that less adventurous listeners will still say "Oh yeah, there's the refrain" while those who desire something a little more expressive and introspective will be enthralled with the artist's evocative shading and gentle meanderings away from the expected.

I want to reiterate, and make no mistake about it, this is an entertaining and easy to like album, filled with warm and inviting music. It's an ideal choice as a "just before midnight Christmas Eve" CD, when the hustle and bustle of prepping for the holiday just gets to be too much but you still want to be touched by all those great classics and carols, just not overwhelmed by them.

Besides many of the expected favorites (*Silent Night*, *We Three Kings of Orient Area*, and *Carol of the Bells*), Elkinson also includes some lesser known seasonal carols, such as *Still Still Still*, and *In The Bleak Midwinter*, and also features even less familiar ones too (*The Star of Christmas Morning*, *The Huron Carol*, and *Gabriel's Message*). The CD's back cover even lists each piece's country of origin, e.g. the United Kingdom, Austria, Germany, Spain, the Ukraine, and the United States. In addition to the religious carols, Elkinson performs three of my absolutely favorite secular tunes: *I'll Be Home For Christmas*, "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas", and my all-time fave, *Vince Guaraldi's Christmas Time Is Here*. Every one of this album's sixteen selections is a winner and the only differentiation you will make between them will be a matter of preference and/or your personal taste.

Finally, as on his previous releases, the CD features some funny and quirky liner notes, this time taking the various people who he thanks for assistance and spinning yarns about them tied to *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. It makes for wry and amusing reading and is just another way that this talented and under-appreciated pianist separates himself from the pack. While the days before the holidays are few (as of my writing this review), if at all possible, I highly recommend you seek out *Generations of Yuletide* and order it ASAP. It will make your holiday gatherings that much warmer and enriching as Ken Elkinson helps you appreciate the still and quiet that make this time of year so very special.

Rating: Excellent

- reviewed by Bill Binkelman on 12/15/2008