



Sephardic Journey

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THOMAS: Trio Sefardi; WILLIAMS: Isabel; RIVERA; Plegaria y Canto; LEISNER: Love Dreams of Earth; ASSAD, C: Sephardic Suite Cavatina Duo; David Cunliffe, vc; Desiree Ruhstrat, v; Avalon Quartet

Cedille 163-76 minutes

Hats off to the Cavatina Duo, flutist Eugenia Moliner and guitarist Denis Azabagic. This well-filled disc is the result of grants from several benefactors and a host of Kickstarter contributors to commission composers to write works for the duo and strings, all inspired by or based on Sephardic songs. The Sephardim are the Spanish Jewish community, speaking Ladino, which is to Spanish what Yiddish is to German. Over the centuries they often had to hide their identity in the face of persecutions from Christians, Muslims—and, more recently, Nazis. They have created an uncommonly beautiful song tradition, and this is a set of uncommonly beautiful pieces performed with high artistry.

The combinations vary. Alan Thomas's three-movement Trio Sefardi is for flute, guitar, and cello. Carlos Rafael Rivera's Plegaria y Canto (al Bodrc de la Mar) is for alto flute, guitar, and violin. After a long introduction, with each player getting something like a cadenza, the work builds powerful rhythmic momentum to an exciting conclusion.

David Leisner's Love Dreams of Earth and Clarice Assad's Sephardic Suite are both threemovement works for flute, guitar, and string quartet. Both composers supply quite original music—this doesn't sound like anything else I know—and both pieces are really attractive.

The one piece for flute and guitar alone, Joseph Williams II, was another commission, by Austin classical Guitar. 'Isabel' was a medieval woman, martyred by the Inquisition. Though seemingly a love song, it is in fact a resistance song, decrying the tyranny of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, both proudly known as "the Christian"—expressing their faith through torture and death.

Each piece is quite tonal, since each is based on Sephardic music, either quotations, paraphrases, or stylistic imitations. It's really delightful stuff, and it's all beautifully played- each of these musicians are real artists; there's not a weak link among them. It's one of the most delightful chamber recordings I've heard in quite a while.

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