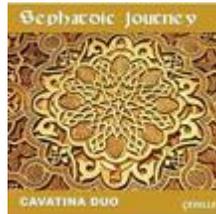


“Sephardic Journey”

Works of ASSAD, LEISNER, RIVERA & Others – Cedille

by Audiophile Audition/ June 12, 2016/ Classical CD Reviews



By all means give this gorgeous album a chance.

“Sephardic Journey” = ASSAD: Sephardic Suite; LEISNER: Love Dreams of the Exile; RIVERA: Plegaria y Canto (al Bodre de la Mar); ALAN THOMAS: Trio Sefardi; JOSEPH WILLIAMS: Isabel – Cavatina Duo/ Avalon String Q./ Desiree Ruhstrat, v./ David Cunliffe, cello – Cedille CDR 90000 163, 75:44 [Distr. by Naxos]

What are the chances that two separate albums, each titled Sephardic Journey, would appear on two different labels one month apart? Pretty miniscule I would assume, but this is exactly what has happened. I can't comment on the Avie release featuring Apollo's Fire since it is not under consideration, but this new release with the Cavatina Duo (Eugenia Moliner, flute, and Denis Azabagic, guitar) and guests is simply lovely in all respects.

What is a “Sephardic Journey”? In this case, the married duo discovered that they had roots in the Sephardic Jewish world that was established on the Iberian Peninsula around the year 1000 AD. It spread throughout Spain and Portugal, finally coming to a rather disparate ending when Spain's Catholic monarchs opened a period of horrendous persecution in the late 1400s. The culture, by all accounts, was lively and deep, the kind that comes not only from a dispersion, but from one that also counted much of its identity from the distinct roots of its place. And in this case that means Spain.

The music here is disparate as well, a common basis being the melodies found in this Spanish/Jewish era, few of which can actually be traced to pre-1492, but for the most part that is where it ends. This is no class in musicology, but five newly-composed works bent on reflecting the spirit of this age and its people using music produced in that realm if not necessarily of that actual period. These composers are not by necessity of that origin, but each of them responded to the commission with enthusiasm and a definite sense of the overall catholicity of the music and the people. The results are five very different but uniquely beautiful takes on the gems of this culture, and there are many moments that, while standing apart in style, are bound by a very common haunting beauty.

The sound is superb, and this disc should surprise many.

—Steven Ritter