

JOEL FAN
West of the Sun

If you are a piano music buff, are adventurous and like variety in a program, than this great CD of piano works by North and South American composers will bring you endless hours of listening pleasure. **Joel Fan**, a versatile and accomplished pianist who is constantly performing around the globe and is a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, offers us a buffet of various spicy dishes in this recent collection.

The program launches with an addictive little Brazilian tango by **Ernesto Nazareth** that will get your foot tapping immediately. It's followed by a Caprice by that New-Orleans king of the keyboard, **Louis Moreau Gottschalk**. A Cuban dance that mixes traditional harmonies with Creole rhythms, all the while showing off the pianist's virtuosity. When **Astor Piazzolla** takes a break from writing tangos, he can write beautiful moving melodies like the one found here in his piece titled **Flora's Game**. It is based on the *milonga*, a dance from Argentina that existed before the tango. One of the main works on this recording, is the **Piano Sonata No. 1** by **Alberto Ginastera**, one of my favorite composers from Argentina. Its second and final movements, full of cross-rhythms, exotic harmonies, and furious energy, are fantastic displays of pianistic writing and demand the most from the interpreter, in terms of speed and stamina. The contribution from the American **Amy Beach** is a short piece called **Fireflies** which very much resembles a Chopin etude and is probably just as difficult to play well whilst giving it the proper spirit. This excellent program ends with the **Samuel Barber Piano Sonata Op. 26**, another piano piece that demands the utmost from the performer. Aside from the beautiful *Adagio* movement, it is in a constant state of momentum, and ends with a dazzling show of virtuosity built around a strange but intriguing fugue. Other composers well represented on this recording are Villa-Lobos, Bonds and Bolcom.

Throughout all of these differing pieces, Joel Fan displays a versatility and brilliant technique second to none, and can easily travel from jazzy New-York style riffs to Cuban rhythms without effort. My only quibble with this excellent **Reference** recording is this; and maybe if someone at the label reads this, they could elucidate as to why this is. From track 3 (Piazzolla) to track 4 (Ginastera) there is a noticeable change in the instrument's tone. The recording sessions occurred over two days, so did they switch pianos at some point, or did they suddenly change the recording set-up, or use different recording equipment ... ? I know this is picking, but I like to know what I am listening to. So, for new and intricate piano works to spice up your collection, this CD is a definite recommendation.

Jean-Yves Duperron