

Review

by Blair Sanderson

A member of [Yo-Yo Ma's](#) popular [Silk Road Ensemble](#) and an acclaimed solo performer in his own right, virtuoso pianist Joel Fan surveys the international keyboard repertoire in this 2006 collection and reveals his versatility in many styles, often with bravura playing. *World Keys*, Fan's debut album on Reference, is a survey of musical approaches from Europe, Asia, Australia, and the United States, reflecting Fan's personal interest in music of many countries, evidently fueled by his touring around the world. The mix of ethnically flavored miniatures with the western keyboard repertoire demonstrates Fan's broad, cosmopolitan outlook, yet the closer one listens to these pieces, it seems that national boundaries are less significant in the program than at first they might appear. There is a kind of mingling or overlapping of sounds and styles that occurs when these pieces are heard side by side, so it becomes difficult to define any particular scale, rhythmic pattern, harmony, sonority, or technique as belonging uniquely to one culture, least of all on the ubiquitous piano. Indeed, the tendency is for the ear to hear the pieces by [A. Adnan Saygun](#), [Dia Succari](#), [Halim El-Dabh](#), and [Qigang Chen](#) as somewhat exotic examples of impressionistic piano music, while the works of [Franz Liszt](#), [Robert Schumann](#), and [Sergey Prokofiev](#) are standard recital fare, and the short pieces by [William Bolcom](#), [Peter Sculthorpe](#), and [Peteris Vasks](#) are representative of contemporary neo-tonal trends. So Fan's "global tour on disc" may not tell us much about real indigenous musical traits, but it is an entertaining presentation that invites thoughts about music's underlying relationships and shows this pianist as an expressive and intelligent artist, as well as a sophisticated citizen of the world. Reference's sound is clean and transparent, with a resonant luster that is highly effective in the quiet pieces.