

Mary Jane Leach: *Celestial Fires*

Experimental Intermedia — XI 107

(Includes: *Bruckstuck*; *Feu de Joie*; *Green Mountain Madrigal*; *Mountain Echoes*; *Trio for Duo*; *Ariel's Song*.)
New York Treble Singers, Virginia Davidson conducting;
Shannon Peet, bassoon; Barbara Held, alto flute; M.J.
Leach, voice. [Source: *Experimental Intermedia*
Foundation, 224 Centre St., New York City, New York
10013.]

For years, Mary Jane Leach performed as a solo, multi-tracking her voice. In recent years she has begun to write for ensembles, but still integrates multi-tracking, or imitations of it, into her work. Her basic style is minimalist, where the performers repeat short, frequently tonal motives at slightly different time intervals, often moving spatially. The result is serene and ethereal-sounding music that seems to float. Although two of the four choral works on this recording—*Bruckstuck* and *Green Mountain Madrigal*—are based on or inspired by other material (Bruckner and Monteverdi respectively), the overall sound is more reminiscent of Legiti works like *Lux Aeterna* and the music of Arvo Pärt, with echoes of Renaissance polychoral composers like Tallis and Gabrieli.

The choral works, all for women's voices, are sung so beautifully that they virtually transport the listener into another realm and make every ending seem like a rude awakening. The only exception to this happens toward the end of *Ariel's Song*, the final work on the disc, where the voices sing a swooping figure that sounds uncomfortably like an air-raid siren and the top soprano's top notes are rather flat. Unfortunately, Leach's notes do not say if these works have texts or merely use phonetic sounds, which would be a handy thing to know, since the music's style makes this unclear.

In addition to the choral music, the disc also contains two works that use multi-tracking: *Feu de Joie* for live and taped bassoon, and *Trio for Duo* for voice and alto flute. Both have the same ethereal, floating quality as the choral works. Leach sings the vocal part in *Trio*, and somehow integrates her singing so well with the flute it's almost impossible to tell the two apart.

This album's New Age-style packaging may put you off, or may tempt you to just let the music wash over you without thinking about it too much. Resist the temptation. This is well-crafted, serious music that deserves to be listened to seriously and carefully. Those who do so will be well rewarded.

—D.C. Culbertson

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