

Alan Matthews
Denial's End



Where words always fail, music will suffice. Luckily, pianist and composer **Alan Matthews**'s music speaks volumes. **Denial's End** is Matthews's second album and it is just as poignant as his first called *The Ineffable*, but this one started with a deeper emotional platform, and it has a more thoughtful tone. Even the title of the album is a significant label. Denial's End. The theme of this contemporary twelve-track album is one of surrender, of acceptance, and of love in a way. Many of Alan's songs are more than five minutes long, but invest the time. It will be well worth it. Joining Alan on the collection are **Charlie Bisharat** (violin), **Jeff Oster** (flugelhorn), **Jill Haley** (English horn), **Tom Eaton** (bass), **Noah Wilding** (vocals), and **Will Ackerman** (guitar).

How appropriate is it that Matthews begins the recording with **The Ineffable**. The word itself is enigmatic and one has to look it up for clarity. It means something so astonishing that it is beyond words and it suits the music very well. It is a gentle piece almost to the point of fragility. The impression is one of melancholy and full of wishful thinking. It is a great start.

Vestiges is a perilous song for its sentiment. It is what is left over after the fact. But what is the fact? Is it a love that has broken and lies in a thousand pieces on the floor or a heart empty of all emotion. Alan extracts a great deal of pathos from this track, but there are positive moments that balance out the piece well.

Perplexing as it sounds, the tune **She Returns - She's Always Leaving** has a melody that is quite refined while having an emotional roller coaster ride from within. The downward spiral is sorrow, while the upward lift is hopefulness. One of the best tracks on the album for me.

The title tune **Denial's End** is a pivotal tune that spares no sentiment. Alan's polyphonic composition, featuring Bisharat's responding violin is as doleful as it gets. Alan's resonant piano melody covers the listener in a blanket of heartache. No matter how many times I listened to it, I could never hear a happy ending, but that is what made it wistfully beautiful.

The Long Road Home has just enough of Jill Haley's English horn to make it mournful. It is a placid tune, almost restful. You take the long road home because either you really don't want to go there or you have lost your way. Either is a heartbreak for one that has made the journey through life and has never been fortunate.

Alan goes solo on the tune, **A Thought of You**. It can be anything that sparks a memory. The taste of a piece of fruit, the trolley car jangling down the track, or even just the rain. But then you remember the smile or the touch, the talking and the not talking. It comes flooding back like a deluge. This mesmerizing song fills the heart with desiderium, a very rare thing at best.

The song **Flowers Die** is just sad. It could be a dozen long stemmed roses, a potful of daisies, or just a handful of violets. The joy that flowers bring fades over time, but the memories of the

giver, the occasion, the timing, well, that makes thoughtfulness a virtue for the heart. Through Alan's piano music and Noah Wilding's ethereal vocal, you can feel the sense of loss and the treasured remembrances.

Acceptance...and After is almost the grand finale. We have so far had eleven tunes to get steely, but there can be no refuting the fact that it is over. The medley has a lot in it for a simple refrain including awareness, surrender, and last of all, defeat. The last song is another rendition of the Ineffable and Alan adds his own sense of closure to the mix. The tune is something he is familiar with, something comfortable. Almost cathartic if you will.

I truly liked all of the tracks, but I caution you that this album has a lot of emotion hidden deep within the music. There are times however, when life should take a wrong turn and it needs to be slowed down. Then you play this kind of music. This is catch your breath, reorient yourself, and spend a little bit of time on introspection music. As I did for Alan Matthews, first album, I highly recommend this music. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews