

Ars Phantasia

La Papillonne



Somewhere between classical and contemporary music there is an aural bridge composed of highly refined notes and if we follow it, it leads to a place of rich rewards. Oftentimes the bridge is never crossed, but this time on the album **La Papillonne** by **Ars Phantasia** is it crossed, revisited, and fortified as the two worlds become one happy place. I had heard only one song from the album before I got interested, but my interest never wavered. The music had elements of romantic and jazz genres as well as modern intonations and the combination was more than pleasing. Ars Phantasia is a performance piece for stage that blends conceptual music and colorful optics. The music is performed by Hitomi Nishioka, a pianist popular in the France and Japan. The visuals are by graphic artist **Lisk Feng**. The album contains a booklet of stunning artwork to accompany the blissful music within. My album has fourteen tracks whereas the listing has only twelve. Don't tell anybody. Join me as we enter the mystical, wonderful world that is ancient Japan.

Strangely, **Fountain of Dream** is a serious piece. It opens the album with a series of single notes that ring like bell. The music seems to envelop me like a mist, vague and wispy at first, then with more definition. As the emotionally rich music flows, the listener in me is bathed in its warmth and beauty.

**Aux Ailes d'un Papillon** (Over the Wings of a Butterfly) is one of my favorites and the first song I had heard from this performance. I could imagine the flutter of butterfly wings. The flying jewel is inquisitive, going everywhere at once. The voice of Hitomi's energetic piano is exuberant as the main character. **Don't be Afraid** is only 26 seconds long. No sense dwelling on fear when the rest of the world contains so much beauty and peace. **Belle Paix** (Beautiful Peace) is one of the longest pieces at over seven minutes, but it is complex as it changes its points of view throughout the presentation. It contains Italian influences mixed daintily with warm contemporary themes from the world of nature. There is a tiny touch of triumph in the music.

**I'm an Angel** is a contemporary composition with a great deal of animation. This angel is on the move, flying high above, looking down, and watching for a despaired heart in need. The music has a hidden strength, a fortitude of spirit. It reminded me (in a positive way) of Howard Bake's theme for The Snowman. It has an insubstantial fascination that pique's the imagination. Feng's illustration for the song **Colors** is the beautiful face of a young girl and, ironically, the drawing actually contains very few different colors. It is the face of innocence, of curiosity, and of wonder. It is the face of hidden beauty. The tune is graceful, soft, and melodic. Composer Aleix Riera's simple arrangement resounds with a repetitive, yet melancholic cadence.

There are some unexpected jazz components in the tune **Escape**. They are deftly blended with some adagio movements that define emotional changes as the music unfolds. It is a somber tune with contrasts colored in shades of gray, rather than other colors and tones.

La Papillonne is the collaborative work of more than twenty talented people and would stand on its own as a brilliant recording even without the wondrous storyline and artwork, but this is a concert of talents and a clear cut case of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. I stared at the illustrations as each song was performed and the story composed itself. I liked every track on the album. It is reminiscent of a Cirque du Soleil soundtrack, but with a great deal of classical enhancements. Put it on, press PLAY, and the adventure begin. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews