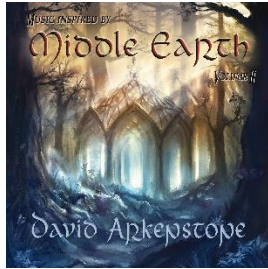


David Arkenstone

Music Inspired by Middle Earth Vol. II



Listening to **The Shadow of the Past**, the first track of David Arkenstone's Music Inspired by Middle Earth Vol. II is like opening one of the books a second time and hearing, as well as visualizing, all you missed the first time. Within fourteen superlative tracks, Arkenstone revisits the fantasy world to bring you innovative musical incites of adventure, intrigue, and mystery. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the journey. David Arkenstone needs no introduction, no recounting of his past accomplishments. He is one of, if not the, foremost artists that represents fantasy music on the planet. He is pretty much the creator of the genre.

**The Shadow of the Past** is somewhat dark and dreamlike as if everything is shrouded in haze. As the mists finally part we see vignettes of bleak rocky barrens, fast flowing rivers without a shore, and unnavigable seas of desert sand. The challenges ahead seem insurmountable right now, but there is always hope. One of the more light numbers on the album is called **The Green Dragon**. Full of bright violin, feel-good accordion, and playful percussion, we might as well jump up on a table ourselves and dance away the night. Into the valley, up into the hills, and through the trees we see **The Light of Imladris**. Sensual, soft strings and harp and in the distance, a heralding horn announce our presence. Our senses are assailed with the intricate beauty that the Elves of Rivendell have carved from the heart of the forest. Our next task is to figure how to enter these magic gates. Anyone have a clue?

It is Gandalf the Grey who reminds us that he is the **Servant of the Sacred Fire**. Arkenstone's urgent sounding score is a scenario of bacchanalia around the bonfire, a message of what is to come seen in the flames, and a hasty response in which we pray is enough time to rally the forces. Murky and mysterious is the place called **Calas Galadhon**. It is the largest city of Lothlórien, protected by a deep moat, bounded by stone, and shrouded in secrets. David's sweeping orchestral vision for this land is shadowy, but with grandeur for its notable history. Powerful horns announce that we are entering **Fangorn Forest**. We are beset by a tangle of roots older than man, with trees that can tell of the times past and how they were cut down by Dunédain, but as the Ents are somewhat forgiving, they once again made friends with man. The Fangorn Forest is full of close canopies, mossy outcrops, and dappled light. Arkenstone's score catches the light, clears a path, and encourages us to wonder on.

The album contains several epic numbers and my favorite is called **Shadowfax and the White Rider**. It is so easy, due to the music's coursing attitude, to visualize the White Rider, his cape streaming behind him, to hear the thunder of the horse's hooves as he gallops across the plains, and to see in the far distance the reason for our journey in sight.

There are some taboos that must never be broken. One is to never disturb the waters of **The Forbidden Pool**. Few know that it conceals one of the entrances to Henneth Annûn, the place of the Rangers. If a stranger is to disturb the pool, death awaits. The Gollum, unaware, is about to find out the fate of one who intrudes on this secret place. Arkenstone's theme is furtive and fluid with the imagined ripples of water and the echoing of the falls. It feels like we are being watched.

**The White Tree of Gondor**, featuring earthly chorus, solemn strings, and an achingly beautiful score is a tune reminds us that no matter what sorrow and loss transpires, there is a future. With the bloom of bright, white flowers, this trees symbolizes new growth and new life. The music is a promise fulfilled. Bringing to mind and heart companions, friends, and soldiers, **The Houses of Healing** offers solace to us as we remember those we loved and lost. David's emotionally rich hand on this finely crafted ballad reminds us of endless marches, battles fought, and victories hard won. Other tracks include **Daughter of the River, The Great River/The Argonath, Minas Morgul, and The Returning**.

David Arkenstone's follow-up to Music Inspired by Middle Earth is every note a winner as is the first. His melodic essays are page turners for the mind as well as the spirit. Who would like to return to those adventures that so vividly piqued our imaginations as children and adults? It is time to go back my friends. Excellent recording. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews