

Joseph Akins

Dream World



The ninth release from contemporary composer and pianist **Joseph Akins** called **Dream World** is quite different from his previous works. His usual offerings have a lightness and homespun humor about them. Sometimes they are like hymns. **Dream World** is a serious, sometimes somber collection of songs written during the pandemic in his home studio. This is music with gravitas. Each tune in some way reflects the sorrow, the sacrifice, and the anxiety that is shared not by just neighbors and friends, but by an entire planet. Fortunately the music is also well balanced with several hopeful songs; music with light and sunshine and notes of promise.

The album begins with the tune **Dream World**. It is a refrain I can only label *Musica Obscura*. There is something quite dark in the music, something hard and cold and somewhat foreboding. Akins' music offers an appropriate description of our current situation. The world is full of sorrow, of doubt, of sickness. And it is like a nightmare.

Striking a sense equilibrium is the next tune, **Peacefulness**. It is a soft, elusive submission of quietude using a sparse amount of notes, but the melody has a subtle sweetness, a built in warmth if you will, that creates comfort for the weary spirit.

One of my favorites on **Dream World** is a work called **Whispers in the Woods**. It has some understated classical elements in the music, but the tune has a calming effect with its rhythmic flow as if I was walking along a verdant forest path on a quiet evening. We can hear the voice of the wind through the trees and if I listen closely, I can hear it murmur that the night is coming, the stars are not far behind, and my dreams will be everything I'd hoped for. It segues nicely into the night song, **A Moonlit Dance**, a languid waltz with a touch of Southern charm à la country pianist Floyd Cramer. Joseph's nuanced piano tune talks of the moon as it illuminates the clouds from within reminding all of us of that well known silver lining. It is surely something to look forward to as you dance a slow circle with your partner.

Akins gives us an inspired contemporary piece called **Who Am I?**. The music is a journey, albeit a short one that takes place in the soul of every being. During this particular time, more than any other time, there are very few who do not question their existence in the scheme of things. Why the misery? Why the sorrow? Why is the world on fire? The passionate piece gives us time to reflect and hopefully, gain some answers. It is one the best works on the album.

One of the lighter tunes on **Dream World** is called **The Bird Song**. In the very back of the song you can hear the bird warbling, or perhaps it is a bit of imagination at work. Doesn't matter. What we feel is a lightness, a sense of unburdening that is like a panacea to the soul. Maybe it is time we spread our wings and aim to the heavens.

Night Storm is a surreptitiously pensive piece. It is not a storm that describes incessant rains or howling winds or crashing thunder, but a storm that forms within the minds of humankind. It is all the pain of the world. All the questions unanswered. And all the thoughts that scurry through the mind like an unseen electricity with nowhere to discharge. Akins dynamic tune disperses the force in a more gentle fashion, but the energy remains within.

There is a lot of truth in Joseph Akins music. This substantive album of solo piano tunes observes the current conditions of the planet and gives us multiple direction in which to turn. It also suggest a unity, something we all share no matter our God, no matter our geography. Joseph Akins is not only a gifted composer and pianist, but he contributes more than his share of grace as a teacher of music at MTSU. I have reviewed him a number of times and his music has always been honest and from the heart. Highly Listenable. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews