

Rada Neal

Eighth Essence



There are many thoughts and philosophies about the soul. Some say only humans have souls. Others say every living thing has a soul. I'm with the latter. I also think everything that we are constitutes our soul or our essence. Our feelings, experiences, thinking, mistakes, and perceptions are all part of that essence. As emotional beings we need conditions that quiet the mind and replenish the spirit, the essence.

Rada Neal offers up thirteen reflective, contemporary, solo piano tunes that promise to do just that. Appropriately titled, **Eighth Essence** is her eighth and newest album. Receiving the unexpected gift of a piano at an early age, her dream turned out to be crafting emotionally-rich music that would calm the troubled psyche. Eighth Essence seems to satisfy that desire to the benefit of the listener. Many of her songs produce imaginative vignettes. All of them are positively romantic.

The first cut is called **Autumn Beauty** and it sets up the whole album as a repository of nostalgic feelings. It is an old favorite, a chestnut of an earlier time when romance was communicated by handwritten love letters. Cardboard albums full of sepia photographs and visits on a warm Sunday afternoon on the front porch between shy souls were common. Perhaps a leaf would fall as a conversation starter. *"Have you ever read Helen Hunt Jackson?"*

One of the more complex tunes on the recording with obvious classical blandishments is called **Into the Darkness**. Arpeggios symbolize flights of stairs that go plunging down to the lower depths of the unknown. Neal's tune suggests that you should use more than everyday caution. Hopefully when you get through the darkness, you meet up with the light on the other side.

It sounds like the theme to a melodrama. **Loose Ends** is a bit melancholy and even sentimental as one thing concludes and another begins. Rada's tune is gentle and introspective. It suggests that you must come to terms with the fact that some things can never reconciled. The whole thing is a bit of a reverie.

One of my favorites on Eighth Essence is a simple song called **Mila Moja**. My Precious. It is the best kind of paean. This delicate solo piano tune is beautiful in a child-like way. All softness and innocence. It is simultaneously hopeful and lyrical. In one sense tomorrow is a new day of discovery. In another, the stars are watching over you. Very memorable.

Using Old World motifs, Rada performs the tune **Those Places**. As the music plays on you can imagine worn cobblestone streets, lazy rivers that bisect the city, and parks for the children and the birds. The word rendezvous is bravely whispered. When the old man ignites the gas lights, it is time.

Neal's final tune, **Soulful River** is a sad goodbye to a life of romance that was not long enough. As the rivers flows, it carries away the memories, the joyous laughter, the covert caresses, and lots of tears. Not all is sad. Some of those memories are what filled the fragmented heart.

Eighth Essence is a fine album to get lost in. Lots of romance, lots of emotions are offered by this fine pianist. Rada Neal seems able to distill the joy along with the heartbreak and find a formula that works. Throughout the work you have a feeling that this is not the present, but the past. Rada makes it a safe and hopeful place to which your soul can return.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews