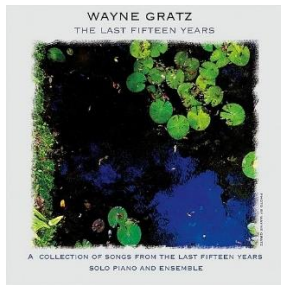


Wayne Gratz

The Last Fifteen Years



How do you sum up a long chapter in an ongoing lifework? You create an album that speaks for it as does pianist **Wayne Gratz**' very satisfying release, **The Last Fifteen Years**. This album is a musical chronology of a career that actually started out thirty years ago. It continues to document one of the most notable Contemporary/New Age pianists on the planet. Wayne Gratz came upon the New Age Music scene, for that is where much of contemporary music was lumped into at the time, in 1989 with an album called *Reminiscence*, and released an album just about every year thereafter on the Narada and Enso labels. Year to date he has about 22 albums. His music has always crossed over many genres, from classical to contemporary to folk and several others. What he does best is compose music for the piano with light accompaniment. But fear not, his solo piano compositions are just as strong. *The Last Fifteen Years* is chock full of delightful fare from previous recordings. No small irony that the album has fifteen songs.

Soul to Soul is deeply emotional and sounds like a bit of soul baring. From the album of the same name, Wayne exposes his heart in this melodic confession. When beauty and tenderness are blended together, they sound like this.

With background voices softer than breezes, the track **A Silent Wind** (*Four Steps to the Ocean*) blows in like a summer soundtrack. The feel is surprisingly cinematic as the melody captures sunshine, blue skies, and a day not soon to be forgotten. Gratz loves his nature themes and this work offers several of them.

From Wayne's previous album *Safer Places*, **Even with the Rain** is a wonderful balance of piano and cello with the cello almost resembling a Theremin. The leaden skies are more of a promise than threat. The rain comes down to nourish not only the thirsty land, but the thirsty soul as well. This is one of my favorites on the recording.

Colors of Autumn (*Light, Lands, and Shoreline*) is a solo piano tune that reflects the current sentiment of this late September day. The goldenrod is bright, the purple iron weed is royal, and the poplars are about to rain leaves down upon the landscape. Wayne's piano is textured with vivid notes of color. You can almost smell that leafy sweet scent in the forest.

A Search for Certainty (*Soul to Soul*) is another favorite. First, I liked the title. Nothing cryptic here, just a quest for answers. Second, the music is divided into parts. The mini-trilogy consists of the search, the discovery, and the triumphant return. Every poignant note leads to the finale when the question is answered.

The album closes with the introspective track, **The Trill of Life** (*Soul to Soul*). This cascading melody is a soul searching composition. It also contains a thread of melancholy, but the overall theme is one of hopefulness. Toss is a modicum of courage and you have an anthem for your own life. The music is also very calming, a side effect of mindfulness that is much needed in our lives today and tomorrow.

The Last Fifteen Years not an ending, but an embarkation point for Mr. Gratz. If anything, it says this is what I have done so far, but now, onto more and better things. Keep creating them, Wayne. We'll be listening. Highly recommended. – R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews

