

AN AMERICAN JOURNEY • Avguste Antonov (pn) • HARTSHORN no catalog number (27:10)

VOLLINGER *Dreams Before You Awake*. ZACHARIAS *First Romance*. SAUNDERS *Starry Wanderers* (excerpts).
ROLLIN *Blue Fantasy*. HOGAN *Cumulis Humilis*

Hans Sachs, as Wagner portrays him, is at an enviable advantage as a critic of both performance and composition. He is himself a master of singing, a master of the instrument on which he accompanied himself, a master poet and composer. He also had a concrete unquestioned canon of musical principles in place with which to judge the quality of a new work. His community was likeminded, having what sociologists would call the same folkways and mores. Today's critics of so-called serious music do not have the benefit of such unity. They are faced with a splintered culture whose reflection can be seen in various aesthetic fragments such as Minimalism, electronic music, atonal music, music without melody, the "wrong note school," music without form, the "bang on a can" school, etc. Hans Sachs might still be of help to them, however, because he was also a wise man, and, according to Wagner, at any rate, his ultimate demand was that music speak the truth in some manner, and speak it from the heart.

With this principle in mind, pianist Avguste Antonov and the composers he represents here receive very high marks. Antonov has a rich and sonorous tone, a profound sense of legato, and a sure technique. His playing is rhythmically aggressive and he has no difficulty in expressing the dramatic as well as the lyrical. The liner notes tell us that he "presents five refreshing works," and I find this to be true. It is indeed refreshing to come upon serious contemporary music that is about *something*: about the same *something* that music lovers search for and find in Beethoven and Bach, as well as more modest or even obscure composers; *something* that needs no prefatory explanation, and rises far above bald entertainment, novelty, money, or self-admiration.

If there is such a thing in this present day as continuity in the Western musical tradition, this repertoire would be a good reference. Atonality is not in the picture, though there is much modality, and, strikingly, not one piece in a major key. Harmonies are standard, seasoned at times with dissonance. There is melodic material, some of it, as in the case of Zacharias's *First Romance*, and Hogan's *Cumulus Humilis*, quite haunting and beautiful. There are also rhythmic patterns that remain within the realm of comprehensibility while still being original and often intriguing. The most imaginative work on this all too short recording is William Vollinger's *Dreams Before You Awake*. It seems to be program music, my guess being, about sounds of the outside world intruding upon deep sleep, while a constant

dream relentlessly returns. Reminiscent of Janáček, Vollinger often writes in musical half-phrases, and melodic inflections close to speech. I deeply admire the depths he reaches by means of such a simple and unaffected musical vocabulary.

Dennis Dougherty, the skillful and devoted sound engineer, has provided a cordial ambient setting for these representatives of “the pure, the bright, the beautiful.”

FANFARE: Raymond Beegle