

## DAYTON: *All in the Sound*



Procell, Arnold; Hawker, Hubbard; various musicians.  
English texts. Navona Records NV6510

**THIS COLLECTION** of vocal music comes from the imaginative mind of composer Peter Dayton, who specializes in creating fresh contemporary repertoire for voice and accompaniment, whether it be piano or some less conventional instrument, such as violin, harp, guitar, celesta or horn. The agile, intrepid soprano Katie Procell returns from Dayton’s earlier song album, *Stories Out of Cherry Stems*, this time sharing duties with three other soloists, as well as a male vocal quartet.

The eponymous two-song set *All in the Sound*, with texts by William Carlos Williams, begins with “The Shadow.” The words and the freely flowing three-quarter rhythm seem to celebrate nature pleasantly, but the unsettled harmony hints at an ominous underbelly. Soon, the melodic line lurches up to a high B on the last word of the line, “Spring closes me in / With her arms and her *hands*,” by which point the natural world has become downright threatening. The second song cranks up the drama even more: in the unusual concluding description “A lady’s eyes—waking / centrifugal, centripetal,” Dayton tops the high C on the second syllable of “centripetal” with a startling E-flat on the last syllable. It’s an arresting one-two punch, which Procell delivers blazingly.

In the cycle *Just a Leaf*, Henry Hubbard's mellifluous tenor is well suited to the concise romantic entreaties of Paul Blackburn's text for "Invitation Standing." In "Evening," with a text by William Bronk, Hubbard and the excellent pianist Valerie Hsu flower beautifully together through the Molly Bloom-like phrase "oh, it is all as if, but as if, yes, as if they sang songs, as if they praised," and Hubbard manages a high D-sharp with remarkable ease.

*Botticellian Trees*, a bracingly original four-song cycle setting poems by Williams, features Procell again, this time with the nimble violinist Sarah Jane Thomas. The two sound like they're languorously improvising with the violin providing vivid representations of spring's rustlings.

Procell also performs "Beyond Dimension," for soprano and harp, which sets an unpublished fragment by Vicki Hearne. From just a few enigmatic lines about stars and the room the poet writes in, Dayton conjures an otherworldly soundscape featuring an unusually chromatic harp part, rendered with zest by Erin Baker. Baker also performs with soprano Arianna Arnold in Dayton's setting of Robert Burns's "Like a Red, Red Rose," whose attractive setting avoids the sing-song rhythm of the text.

In the first song from *Hidden Texts*, for piano and guitar, Dayton gives musical shape to the intriguing but discursive text from a spy-themed verse novel by poet John Hollander, and he turns the second piece, "Do Not Be Ashamed," with a dystopian text by Wendell Berry, into an unsettling, Kafka-esque musical monodrama. Hubbard delivers the dense texts with dramatic force, and Andrew Weed performs the exceptionally thorny guitar parts heroically.

Arnold returns for *Wilde Colours*, which sets three poems by Oscar Wilde and features Aaron Thacker on celesta. "Grey, Black, and Brown" is pointillistic, tonally restless and resolutely unconventional. Wilde would have approved. "Blue, Gold, Grey, Ochre, Yellow" is meditative and more euphonious; Arnold's alluring vocal timbre blends well with the resonant tone of Thacker's celesta. (Arnold also brings gratifying clarity to a set with characteristically cryptic texts by Gertrude Stein.)

Solo horn and male vocal quartet provide another serendipitous combination in the boldly innovative "The Second Coming," with text by Yeats, which traverses a wide palette of often piquant harmony and includes some well-placed vocal slides. Featuring impressive performances by the singers and hornist Shona Goldberg-Leopold, this challenging work merited an instant replay.

After that, "Fresh in the Triumph," the final track—which the notes describe as using "the language of 1990s folk-pop Broadway musicals"—is an almost shocking turnabout. It's sold by the Broadway-ready tenor Ben Hawker, with Thacker on piano. Dayton, a rugged

individualist, proves he can also create a convincing genre composition, although it still bears his stamp of sophistication. —*Joshua Rosenblum*