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CD Review by Robert Schulslaper

 **IN EVENING AIR** • Carolyn Enger (pn) • ENGER (59:18)
 Available at carolynenger.com

BEETHOVEN *Bagatelles*, op. 126/1, 2, 3, 5, 6. **SCRIABIN** Preludes, op.11/10, 13; op. 51/2. **HANSON** Miniatures: *Reminiscence; Longing; Lullaby*. **COPLAND** *Midday Thoughts. Down a Country Lane. Midsummer Nocturne. In Evening Air. Sunday Afternoon Music*. **ROREM** *For Mary. For Marian. For Rosemary. For Ben. For Barbara. For Don*. **LIEBERMANN** Nocturne, op. 20/1

Although subtitled “The Art of the Bagatelle,” few of this CD’s 25 selections fit the dictionary definition of a bagatelle as “a short piece of classical music, usually for piano, written in a playful style.” Short they may be, but playfulness isn’t much in evidence. Rather, the mood is often peaceful, sometimes tinged with apprehension, thanks to modernity in line and harmony. These miniatures—overall a more accurate term than bagatelle—are, in producer (and *Fanfare* contributor) Carson Cooman’s fine phrase, works that evolve out of “irrepressible musical desire.” He goes on to say that, “For a pianist, these personal statements provide exquisite challenges and represent a composer’s technique at its most ‘naked.’ In several pages (or sometimes only several phrases), a small world must be both created and explored.” Carolyn Enger convincingly inhabits these worlds in miniature, lavishing tone, carefully calibrated pace, “inwardness,” and stylistic awareness on each, while blending the music’s varied aesthetics into a thoughtfully designed program.

For example, listen to how Rorem appears to adopt and extend certain aspects of Copland’s language: neighbors on the CD, Rorem’s *For Mary* almost seems like a continuation of Copland’s *Midday Thoughts*, which immediately precedes it. (I’m not claiming that Rorem used Copland as a model, just that these two pieces share a similar approach.) Although Rorem is often thought of as a composer with strong French ties, in this program it’s Hanson who sounds more French, at least in his



Reminiscence, which recalls Ravel's *Pavanne*. Scriabin, though, sounds like Scriabin: the three preludes don't display the overt Chopinisms of his early period, and op. 51/2 anticipates his mature, "metaphysical" style. Lieberman's Nocturne is delicately atmospheric, with an unadorned melody undulating over an equally simple accompaniment. Although Lieberman may have been inspired by Chopin to write a series of nocturnes—he hopes to match Chopin's 21 and so far has completed 10—here he doesn't surprise the listener with a turbulent middle section (a frequent Chopin device).

Throughout the recital, Enger's dynamic control and emotional sensitivity complement her keen sense of timing and proportion. My one mild criticism is that in Beethoven's op. 126/6 she underplays passages that could be more robustly dramatic. Of course, it's always interesting to hear different points of view, and Beethoven certainly has his graceful moments, which Enger interprets with great finesse: I was particularly impressed by her fioritura in op. 126/1, which was beautifully integrated into the overall conception. "In Evening Air" (the CD title, taken from Copland's piece of the same name) is an attractive mix of familiar and rarely heard music, with Rorem's recently composed pieces (published 2006) appearing on disc for the first time. Enger performs on a beautiful instrument, one ideally suited to the repertoire and her interpretations: it's been recorded with just enough hall ambiance to enhance both its tone and Enger's subtle pedaling. This is a lovely release to be savored slowly rather than in one extended session, the better to appreciate the music's intimacies. **Robert Schulslaper**

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