

Review from American Record Guide

ROREM: Piano Album I; 6 Friends Carolyn Enger

Naxos 559761—51 minutes

These 33 piano miniatures by one of the American masters of the form are quiet celebrations of love and friendship. Ned Rorem just turned 90, and this album is a testament to his long run as one of this country's finest composers. Piano Album I brings together pieces from 1978, written for Rorem's lifetime companion Jim Holmes as well as other friends and colleagues, including Judy Collins and Eugene Istomin. Six Friends, from 2007, are tributes to Marian Seldes, Jerome Lowenthal, and others. The pieces from both sets are intimate, wistful, and beautifully crafted. If there is any significant difference or break in style between the works in this 29 year span, I can't detect it. Many of these brief evocations became the germs of larger works, yet each one evokes a tiny world of its own. It's hard to pick favorites among so many gems, but I find especially beautiful 'For a Perfect Friend', a gift "for Jim on Christmas eve", and 'For Rosemary', a tribute to Rorem's beloved sister. These are by no means schmaltzy pieces. There is a bittersweet lyricism in Rorem's shorter works; it's just that the emphasis is on the sweet.

The other thing to celebrate in this album is the pianist, who is ideal for this project. Carolyn Enger's playing is beautifully nuanced and songlike through all of these pieces—by no means an easy achievement. There are no opportunities for grandstanding here. These are not big statements, but very personal ones, and Enger brings them fully to life. Many of these are world premiere recordings, making this an important album as well as a warmly appealing one.

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