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CD/DVD Reviews

by Andrew Lorenz

DREAMSONGS & THREE CONCERTOS

Aaron Jay Kernis

*Paul Neubauer, vla, Joshua Roman, vc, Aaron Jay Kernis, pno,
Royal Northern Sinfonia cond. Rebecca Miller*

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This CD of three concertos by Aaron Jay Kernis is most satisfying on many levels. To quote the composer, he uses “a very wide terrain of musical language and moods.” The music is attractive and imaginative with varied orchestral colours. Soloists, Paul Neubauer (viola), Joshua Roman (cello), Aaron Jay Kernis (piano) and the Royal Northern Sinfonia conducted by Rebecca Miller are superb and the recording quality is excellent.

Highlights include *Kora Song*, from the two movement cello concerto *Dreamsongs* (2013). Inspired by the African kora, a plucked gourd, it is both lyrical and brilliant with passages of virtuosic *pizzicati*. The magnificent, heartfelt performances continue with Neubauer’s rendition of Kernis’s substantial 32’ Viola Concerto (2013-14). The *Romance* is beautiful and the final movement is based on the Yiddish song *Tumbalalaika*. Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 inspired *Concerto with Echoes* (2009) although the listener would not realise this from the opening textures. Kernis writes that “The heart of the piece, the slow movement is essentially a *Passacaglia* built on slowly moving bass lines, mirrored layers of melody and open harmonic spaces.” Two fillers round out this enjoyable recording: a charming arrangement of *Tumbalalaika* for viola and piano followed by Kernis playing Fughetta, Op.32 No.4 by Robert Schumann.