

Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano review by John Story

DANKNER Alto Saxophone Sonata. HARTLEY Dance Suite. LUKÁS Lento drammatico. STARER 5 Preludes. SUBER *Angels*

This is the sort of review, in the back of the magazine, of a disc with a fairly obscure soloist of a specialized instrument playing entirely unfamiliar music, and I often wonder just who will read it. In this case, I have to hope it is more than the composers and the students of the soloist, alto saxophone player Lawrence Gwozdz, who has assembled a program of new music that is almost entirely a winner, beautifully played and recorded. Gwozdz teaches sax at the University of Southern Mississippi, and is a student of Sigurd Raschér. Not being an aficionado of the saxophone, I will have to take on faith that this is the source Gwozdz's very sweet sound, which employs a generous vibrato in the French manner of woodwind playing. Certainly, it suits the present program to perfection.

Probably the major work is Stephen Dankner 's Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano, which runs about 20 minutes. The basic sound of the music harks back to the harmonic usage of Debussy and Ravel, something that the sound of Gwozdz's playing emphasizes. The opening Moderato explores, almost obsessively, a three-note cell somewhat in the way that Debussy does in the finale of his Cello Sonata. The ensuing Elegy and Presto finale are of a similar high quality. If this were written for a string soloist (or transcribed for clarinet) it would be the current darling of recital programs everywhere, it is an absolute gem, and, fortunately, the rest of the program lives up to this brilliant opening.