



makes the soloist shine. *Daniel Grabois, University of Wisconsin – Madison*

**Asteria.** Seraph Brass: Mary Elizabeth Bowden and Amy McCabe, trumpets; **Rachel Velvikis, horn;** Hana Beloglavec, trombone; Joana Ross Hersey, tuba. Summit Records 709

Felix Mendelssohn, arr. by Jeff Luke, Scherzo; Edvard Grieg, arranged by Jeff Luke/Thomas Oltarzewski, *Holberg Suite*; Catherine McMichael, *Asteria*; Rene Orth, *Leaguered in Fire, Lagooned in Gold*; Isaac Albeniz, arr. by Jeff Luke, *Suite Espanola No. 1*; Anthony DiLorenzo, *Go*; Franz Liszt, arr. by Jeff Luke, *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*.

This wonderful brass quintet has released a pearl of a CD: *Asteria*. You will be happy to hear these talented performers, who are tight and right for each other. Mendelssohn's Scherzo is arranged adeptly (like most of the music on this CD) by Jeff Luke, trumpeter in the Utah Symphony and once a member of the Atlantic Brass Quintet. Luke's orchestration gives the Scherzo such a nice, light, "woodwind" quality, one almost confuses the piccolo trumpet for an oboe. The playing is competent and the ensemble nicely balanced. Seraph, as a rule, never over-plays or presses; they stay within their sweet spots and sound great, instructive for all performers.

Grieg's *Holberg Suite*, written in 1884, is a tribute to the 200th birthday of Scandinavian playwright Ludvig Holberg. The five Baroque dances would have been in the style of Holberg's experience. The Praeludium is an exciting up-tempo frolic, followed by a lovely Sarabande, and then a lilting, jaunty Gavotte, very pleasant. The horn and trombone are as suited for each other as the trumpets in terms of their matching sounds. It is sometimes difficult to tell which instrument is playing. The Air exhibits beautiful and mournful trumpet lyricism, and this is followed by a contrasting Rigaudon to rekindle our spirits as a square dance might. In fact, it is possible to imagine someone calling "Allemande Left" during the A sections of this energetic final dance.

The namesake of the CD, *Asteria* (stars) by Catherine McMichael, was written presumably for the women of Seraph. Three constellations of mythical women are the titles and musical depictions of the movements. Andromeda, the Chained Princess, sounds like heroine on horseback racing across a wide expanse to deliver critical intelligence to a neighboring village of an advancing enemy, with a bit of Spanish swagger. Nice canonic solo work by the trumpets, as well as the horn and trombone.

In *Virgo, Lover of Justice*, McMichael weaves a compelling meandering path of close harmonies and suspensions, as if literally searching for compromise in the perpetual battles we wage to seek justice and fairness. The message of this movement might be to be mindful that there are several possible pathways to the truth, which is the ultimate and satisfying resolution we experience at the end. It is incumbent upon us to try on all those metaphoric keys, and not to assume we are right too soon.

The piece concludes with *Pleiades, the Sailing Queen* and her Daughters, named after a constellation that, when it appeared in the night sky each spring, signaled the start of the sailing season in ancient Greece. McMichael evokes wave-like motion and extremes in range, especially in the trumpets, to

perhaps signify the expansive sky into which we might star-gaze.

Rene Orth's *Leaguered in Fire* is inspired by an Edith Wharton poem and is intended to explore the confluence of color in a sunset. The form might be considered through-composed, as the ideas coming into focus seem to melt into each other, and the result is something new, much like the light of a brilliant sunset changes by the moment. Seraph is called to apply some extended techniques (i.e., stopping, mutes, and wind sounds). The ending of this interesting piece is rather lonely, as if the sun has unsympathetically abandoned the world.

The *Albinez Suite Espanola* is another of Jeff Luke's arrangements. The octave leaping in the trumpets in the Granada is impressive, like calls of love from a tall mountain. The Sevilla is light and fun. Up to this point, Seraph seems dynamically reserved, not confined per se, just always mindful of achieving great sound. But in this movement a group crescendo displays a new gear of sonic power heretofore not seen (heard). Pay attention to the feats of articulation that are achieved in *As-turia*.

Anthony DiLorenzo's *Go* is a tour de force, energetic show stopper. It is an aggressive, all out, do or die kind of performance, the sort worth bragging about back in the locker room after the big win!

The encore to this terrific CD is the *Hungarian Rhapsody*. Just sit back and be wowed. Good work, Seraph! (NP)

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