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CD Review: 'Two x Four' Showcase for 2 violins

By Roy C. Dicks, June 28, 2014

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This disc offers four compositions for two violins performed by noted master Jaime Laredo and his former student Jennifer Koh, a virtuoso in her own right and the impetus for the recording’s imaginative programming.

The disc begins with J.S. Bach’s Concerto for Two Violins in D minor, a work still fascinating listeners and challenging performers after three centuries. The soloists establish a sprightly pace in the first movement, ably accompanied by the Curtis 20/21 Ensemble, led by Vinay Parameswaran. **The soloists have pleasingly contrasting tones – warmly burnished from Laredo, brightly gleaming from Koh –** making it easy to follow Bach’s overlapping and entwining lines. The slow second movement has quiet emotional thrust and the third’s rapid-fire dueling boasts astutely varied dynamics.

The Bach is an appropriate springboard to three contemporary works, starting with Philip Glass’ 1995 piece, the lovely, floating “Echorus.” Lush massed strings support the solos, which move sometimes in soothing arpeggios, at others in long-held, ethereal tones, making for a mesmerizing experience.

The other two works, both Koh commissions premiered in 2012, have edgier intentions but are never off-putting. Anna Clyne’s “Prince of Clouds” begins with stark chilliness but soon opens into soaring exhilaration, evoking freewheeling flight above the earth. David Ludwig’s four-movement “Seasons Lost” attempts to address climate change by conjuring vivid seasonal differences. The carefree flirtation of “Spring” and the blustery buzzing of “Fall” are the most arresting, especially with **Laredo and Koh’s intense playing, beautifully reproduced** by Cedille Record’s engineers.

Jaime Laredo