

CD Reviews



Grey Sky and Bittersweet (2007)

Ann Sweeten

2007 / Orange Band Records

57.2 minutes

“Grey Sky and Bittersweet” is pianist/composer Ann Sweeten’s seventh CD over a ten-year period. Marking a turning point in her professional life, Sweeten says in the liner notes that she has “discovered new levels and a much heightened nuance in both composition and performance.” Produced by award-winning artist Will Ackerman (founder of Windham Hill Records) and recorded at Ackerman’s Imaginary Road Studio on a magnificent Steinway grand, Sweeten’s soulful piano is occasionally accompanied by a group of stellar acoustic musicians who play on many of Ackerman’s productions. The music is reflective of the passage of time and a meditation on being at a crossroads in life, creating musical poetry that is graceful and searching as well as deeply personal. Sweeten’s playing is strong and confident, but also feels tender and vulnerable as she looks within for answers to life’s questions. In a few words, this is a gorgeous and emotionally powerful album!

Beginning with “Water Diamonds,” Sweeten sets the mood with a tranquil, flowing piano solo. The left hand creates a steady yet not quite predictable feeling of motion while the right hand provides the sparkling “diamonds” of light. “Looking Back” adds Eugene Friesen’s sensual cello to the elegant, pensive piano. Warm and nostalgic with a touch of regret, this is an emotionally compelling piece. “Dawn On Red Mountain” includes Noah Wilding’s haunting, wordless vocals and Jeff Oster’s flugelhorn. Ambient and floating, it captures the peaceful majesty of a quiet dawn. “Autumn’s Last Caress,” a solo piece, has the feeling of a deeply introspective improvisation - spontaneous, unguarded, and from the heart. “A Winter’s Reverie” begins as a piano solo, becoming a duet for piano and guitar (Ackerman). Dreamy, completely at ease, and very content, the music wraps around you like a toasty comforter. “Eclipse” is dark and mysterious with a Native American flavor. Light percussion and native flutes imply vast open space and convey a feeling of slight unease. “Rainbow Moon” is a quietly elegant solo that exudes a graceful calm - a favorite. “Falling, Still” is a trio for piano, cello (Friesen), and English horn (Jill Haley). Overflowing with longing and passion yet very serene, it’s a beautiful closing for an exceptional album.

“Grey Sky and Bittersweet” is a sure thing if you are looking for a peaceful piano CD to relax and lose yourself in. It is available from www.annsweeten.com, cdbaby.com, amazon.com, and iTunes. Highly recommended!

Kathy Parsons
MainlyPiano.com

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