

feeling at least some small measure of her sadness and longing.

Most of the other songs on the disk were written by professional, thoroughly trained composers, and that is fully evident in their level of musical sophistication. Viktor Ullman (1898–1944), a former student of both Schoenberg and Zemlinsky, is represented by three Yiddish songs that demonstrate his assured craftsmanship. Carlos Taube (1897–1944) was both an orchestral conductor and composer whose only surviving composition is “Ein Judisches Kind,” an exquisite song for voice, violin, and piano that makes us long to hear all of the music that would seem to be irretrievably lost. James Simon (1880–1944) is responsible for most lush and overtly romantic songs in this collection with his *Drei Lieder aus der Chinesischen Flöte*.

The only one of these composers who escaped arrest and death at the hands of the Nazis was Norbert Glanzberg (1910–2001), who lived out much of World War II in the unoccupied region of France, thanks to the assistance of notable musicians like Georges Auric and Edith Piaf. Always mindful of his good fortune and the tragic fate of so many others, Glanzberg wrote a number of pieces in memory of those who perished in the Holocaust. The twelve songs that comprise his *Holocaust Lieder* were composed in 1983 after he read a newly published collection of Holocaust poetry, titled *Der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland*. It is here that we experience the most unvarnished ugliness of the Holocaust, from the suffocating ordeal of the transport trains to the sickening stench of the ovens. But there is also considerable beauty in these texts and songs, including “Alter Baum” (Old tree) that

could almost be a latter day sequel to Schubert’s “Der Lindenbaum.” Glanzberg’s soothing melodic lines call up happier days of the past, but the cello’s countermelody keeps the sorrow of the moment close at hand. The sweetest of these twelve songs may also be the most heartbreaking. “Allen Vögeln” (All the birds) has the singer asking for freedom for all imprisoned birds, sunlight for all flowers in the shadows, and that all suffering people may find hope and consolation in a thousand stars above their heads. The author of this extraordinary poem, Johanna Kirchner, was one of the bravest and most relentless workers in the resistance before she was finally arrested and executed. Thanks to this disk, her inspiring story lives on.

It is fortunate indeed that these precious songs have been entrusted into the loving and capable hands of soprano Rachel Joselson and pianist Réne Lécuaona. One can tell that they have given their hearts and souls to this undertaking, and they deliver musical perfection at every turn. The liner notes include an essay about the prison camp at Terezin, biographies of the composers and poets, and full texts and translations. Such a project deserves nothing less.

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***Southerly: Art Songs of the American South.*** Jos Milton, tenor; Melinda Coffey Armstead, piano. (Albany TROY 1622; 50:33)

James Sclater: *Beyond the Rainbow*: “Anticipation,” “For Bill Chickaway,” “Miss Emma,” “The First Amendment,” “Nancy Hargrove,” “Quiet.” Dan Locklair: *Portraits*: “Ernestine Saunders,” “Unknown,” “Brooksie Malloy.” Price Walden: *Abide with Me—Five Songs of Love*: “That night,” “In the Garden,” “Be

not afraid,” “Interlude: Night,” “Abide with Me,” “If you will have me.” John Musto: *Shadow of the Blues*: “Silhouette,” “Litany,” “Island,” “Could be.”

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Nothing quite equals the special pleasures derived from a recording that is truly fresh in its musical offerings or approach. *Southerly* is such a recording. Jos Milton, an assistant professor of music at the University of Mississippi, describes in the liner notes how moving to Oxford in 2011 opened his eyes to the cultural richness of the American South. He was especially fascinated at how the region’s tumultuous history and the resiliency of its people helped galvanize a vibrant literary legacy that thrives to this very day. It should come as no surprise that the American South has a strong legacy of art song as well; the big surprise is that it took this long for someone to think of putting together a recording devoted entirely to such songs. It’s fortunate that the first such recording was in the capable hands of an artist as accomplished as Milton. This was clearly a labor of love, executed with a relentless attention to the smallest detail, and the result is one of the most enthralling art song releases of the last twenty years.

The disk opens with *Beyond the Rainbow*, a set of six songs by Alabama-born composer James Sclater (b. 1943) featuring texts by Ovid Vickers that spring out of his childhood in Georgia. “Anticipation” is a lighthearted description of the sort of ordinary adventures with which two energetic boys might fill a lazy afternoon. “Billy Chickaway” veers into very different emotional ground, as a teacher muses about the uncomfortable prospect of working with a young native American whose sense of identity and truth will

very likely be seriously shaken by what he is about to be taught. Sclater's use of uneasy dissonance and slithering melodic lines captures the discomfort of the text. "Miss Emma" has much the same flavor, but with just a touch of flamboyance to describe an odd local woman who loves to fish; it's not every day that an art song includes a detailed description of baiting a hook. "First Amendment" is a richly detailed account of a Pentecostal service that includes a dramatic scene of snake handling. One detects a whiff of the music of Charles Ives here, but it is more a matter of homage than imitation. "Nancy Hargrove" is a tender-hearted description of an elderly, blind woman who lost all five of her sons during the Civil War. The set ends with "Quiet," in which a man who is disturbed and distracted by his wife's guinea hens takes matters into his own hands. Together, the songs create a sort of kaleidoscope of colors and moods that are thoroughly ingratiating.

*Portraits*, a set of three songs by Dan Locklair (b. 1949), may occupy a mere five minutes, but it leaves a deep and lasting impression. The texts are officially attributed to Emily Herring Wilson, but her poems sprang directly from the words of three southern African-American women. In "Ernestine Saunders" we are hearing the pained musings of a black woman who cannot reconcile her happy memories of shopping in Paris with the sobering reality of being all but ignored by the shopkeepers in the Alabama city in which she now lives. "Unknown" sets out a series of unanswerable questions about someone who has gone before; Locklair wisely chooses to leave the wistful melodic line unaccompanied. The set ends energetically with "Brooksie Malloy," as a woman joyously recalls her own baptism.

John Musto's *Shadows of the Blues*, as the title suggests, derives inspiration from both the musical and poetic language of the blues. All four songs are gems, but specific mention must be made of "Silhouette," which features a jarringly lighthearted description of a lynching; the text is by Langston Hughes. It is a truly brilliant way to bring us face to face with the racism that was and remains an inescapable element of the southern story. Fortunately, the set also includes powerful rays of hope, including these moving words from "Island":

Wave of sorrow, do not drown me  
now.  
I see the island still ahead somehow.  
I see the island and its sands are fair.  
Wave of sorrow, take me there.

Rounding out this fine collection is a work commissioned by Milton for this project. Price Walden's *Abide With Me: Five Songs of Love* features a combination of two poems by Walt Whitman, the lyrics to two beloved hymns, and a poem by one of Walden's closest friends. The result is a work of powerful emotional intensity and passion. It is especially revelatory to have the words of "Abide with me" and "In the Garden" treated as love poems and set to brand new music that is almost impossibly gorgeous. These five songs inspire the finest singing on the disk; it is as though the composer had an almost uncanny sense of how to unlock the richest, most arresting colors of Milton's voice.

Milton's singing is unfailingly beautiful throughout all of these songs, save for a couple of fleeting moments in "Ernestine Saunders" that take him into uncomfortable heights. Otherwise, this is singing beyond reproach, especially in his finely tuned musicality and immaculate diction.

Pianist Melinda Coffey Armstead's wonderful playing is a consistent joy; she could not be a more sensitive or responsive collaborator. This release includes extensive program notes on all of the repertoire, biographies of the composers and artists, and full texts. In short, this recording is exemplary in every way.

## STILLED VOICES

The opera world is still reeling from the shocking death of South African heldentenor **Johan Botha** (1965–2016), a singer both renowned for his exceptional abilities and beloved for his warmth and kindness. His untimely death leaves a gaping void in major opera companies around the world that turned to Botha for casting such fiendishly difficult roles as Tannhäuser and Otello. In an operatic world increasingly preoccupied with visual allure, Botha was a rotund and uncharismatic presence; that he was still able to secure a place at the pinnacle of his profession simply underscores the brilliance of his vocalism. To experience Botha's greatness, one should first turn to four DVDs from the Metropolitan Opera that preserve his superlative performances in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Otello*, *Aida*, and *Tannhäuser*. They are not the last word in theatrical nuance or sophistication, but vocally they are far and away the finest assumptions of these roles to be heard in recent years. Botha's Siegmund and Calaf are preserved in commercial video releases, but neither of these roles was quite so congenial to his gifts and he is surrounded by more lackluster casts. There is also a DVD of a glittering gala concert at the Vienna State Opera in 2005 (Euroarts) that marked the 50th anniversary of that celebrated house's