

# GRAMOPHONE

## Bresnick

Going Home – Vysoke, My Jerusalem<sup>a</sup>.  
Ishi's Song<sup>b</sup>. Josephine the Singer<sup>c</sup>. Strange  
Devotion<sup>b</sup>. A Message from the Emperor<sup>d</sup>.  
Prayers Remain Forever<sup>e</sup>  
<sup>c</sup>Sarita Kwok vn <sup>b</sup>Lisa Moore pf <sup>d</sup>Michael  
Compitello, <sup>a</sup>Ian Rosenbaum vib/mari/spkrs  
<sup>a</sup>Double Entendre; <sup>e</sup>TwoSense  
Starkland © ST221 (61' • DDD)



Martin Bresnick's reputation as one of America's most prominent

composition teachers sometimes overshadows his own very considerable creative gifts and wide-ranging body of work. Although each of this disc's works is inspired by personal stories and literature, their purely musical narrative trajectories speak eloquently and powerfully for themselves.

The opening piece, *Going Home – Vysoke, My Jerusalem*, largely consists of slow-moving interplay between violin, viola, cello and oboe that achieves a haunting ebb and flow between aching intensity and wistfulness. *Ishi's Song*, for singing pianist, takes its cue from a song sung by the last surviving Yahi Native American and is both powerfully and sensitively performed by Lisa Moore. The music's rhythmic hocketing and primarily pentatonic arrangement evoke traditional Gamelan sonorities along with a more pliable, less rigid take on the 'written-out rock'n'roll' post-minimal aesthetic adopted by some of Bresnick's more prominent students. However, another solo piano piece, *Strange Devotion*, digs even deeper and reveals Bresnick's complex yet controlled harmonic language and assiduously building keyboard

“Highly recommended.”

textures operating at full expressive capacity. *Josephine the Singer* for solo violin begins with striking high harmonics (gorgeously executed by Sarita Kwok) that soon settle into passages in double-stops and arpeggios which Janáček might have recognised as his own. *A Message from the Emperor* is a Kafka story set for vibraphone, marimba and narrators. While Bresnick deploys both instruments imaginatively in regard to varied mallet strokes and myriad wood/metal combinations, the one-dimensional, automaton quality of the narration leaves something to be desired.

No qualms at all, though, about the dark, brooding and emotionally substantial *Prayers Remain Forever*. Moore and cellist Ashley Bathgate give as much colour and meaning to the impassioned virtuoso outbursts in the final pages as they do to the central section's rapid, subtly shifting arpeggios and the long-lined introduction. In addition to Bresnick's programme annotations, his former student David Lang contributes a heartfelt opening essay. Highly recommended. **Jed Distler**