

RECORD REVIEW

DAVID KEANE: *Lyra*. Music Gallery Editions MGE 29 (1979). (Available from: Music Gallery Editions, 30 Saint Patrick Street, Toronto, Canada M5T 1V1.)

One of the most enjoyable albums of electronic music to have come to my attention recently is this collection of four pieces composed by David Keane and released by Music Gallery Editions. Three of the pieces involve live performance with pre-recorded tape, while the fourth piece, *In Memoriam: Hugh LeCaine*, is purely electronic.

Perhaps this last piece is the place to begin for it highlights several aspects of Keane's work which characterize the album as a whole. Clearly this is a deeply felt piece; in Keane's own words: *In Memoriam* attempts "to portray my admiration, and deep regard, in purely musical terms, for a great scientist, artist, philosopher and friend." The famous rising pentatonic scale from LeCaine's own *Dripsody* is quoted at the beginning and end of Keane's piece, and from it springs much of the material for *In Memoriam*. The opening quotation is set in a texture of drip-like sounds — a texture which recurs during the middle and at the end of the piece, and which obviously both provides a fitting sonic context for the quotation and forms important associations with the sound world of LeCaine's piece. The greater part of *In Memoriam*, however, evolves very slowly from long sustained gently moving tones whose multi-layered texture creates a dense harmonic polyphony used to most moving effect in the section immediately prior to the final *Dripsody* quotation. In this latter section the clearly implied B flat minor harmony, with insistent dissonant appoggiatura tones constantly moving, may perhaps be an intentional reference to a funeral key, but for me what is expressed is (in harmonic and textural terms not unrelated to the techniques of an earlier Elizabethan era) a poignant evocation of the sadness of the passing — an exquisitely poised lament.

For a piece lasting sixteen minutes the range of material and gesture is not very great. Nevertheless, the processes of change are of a nature to be readily perceivable and in a sense, therefore, significant and absorbing. The sounds created are also rich in color and texture, gentle and handled with great sensitivity. Much the same general characteristics apply to the other pieces on this album. In each case Keane limits himself to a very restricted field of sounds, both electronic and live.

The first piece, *Lyra*, features Monica Gaylord in a piece for piano and tape recorder in which the piano part is restricted to the repetition of one F sharp. However, within the confines of that pitch limitation we hear an interestingly varied world of rhythm and timbre (the latter

effected by suitable manipulations of the piano string and by various modes of attack). The piece seems to take its form from the piano part and considerations of the possibilities of timbral varieties which it offers within the aforementioned restrictions: four large sections each of which exploits a different area of rhythm and timbre. Each section is demarcated by a tape insertion which presents essentially similar rhythmic and timbral variations in electronic terms. The piano and tape complement each other well.

Elegy, a piece for double bass and tape recorder, is played here by Joel Quarrington. The interdependence of performer and tape is more marked here than in *Lyra*. In particular, effective use is made of the tape as a "tonic" drone over which the double bass is able to create harmonic tension; or again, the tape provides a continuous soft cloud of shifting harmonics which colors dramatically the sound of the solo bass. The characteristics of material limitation and perceivable processes of transformation are again evident.

Undoubtedly the most dramatically exciting piece is *Evening Song for soprano and tape*, based on texts by poet and film-maker Bruce Elder and created for the sound track of Elder's film *Sweet Love Remembered*; the soprano is Karen Skidmore. Here the interplay between tape and performer becomes a creative force in itself; sonic ambiguities arise as a result of contacts between tape and singer so that the listener is bewitched by uncertainties.

All in all, this is an absorbing and thoroughly enjoyable album. True, the music covers only a fairly restricted range of mood and gesture; there is little dazzling instrumental or vocal virtuosity, no attempt to impress with "exciting" synthesized sounds; the overall mood is quietly restrained, pacific, and the music always thoughtful, tasteful, technically polished and poised. The record itself is well produced and the recording quality is excellent — surprising, perhaps, in view of the fact that both *Lyra* and *Elegy* are recordings of live concert performances presented at the First Annual Festival of Electronic Music at the Music Gallery in Toronto in January 1979. The tape parts of all the pieces were realized in the electronic music studios of Queen's University, of which David Keane has been director since 1970.

David Piper

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