

## LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Composed and performed by Lisa Swerdlow

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Review by Pam Asberry

Lisa Swerdlow's latest release, "Lasting Impressions" was nearly two years in the making and is a milestone for this accomplished composer and pianist, as it contains her first ventures into both arranging and orchestration as well as her first trilogy. All the solo piano pieces were recorded and engineered by Joe Bongiorno at Piano Haven Studio in Sedona, Arizona – as always, the piano sound is exquisite – and all the orchestrated pieces were recorded, engineered and orchestrated by Paul Kraushaar at Parasight Records in Grass Valley, California.

The album opens quietly with the piano solo "Listening from the Heart." According to the liner notes, this is a musical tribute to all the people who have touched the composer's life in a profound way. Mesmerizing and thought provoking, this piece led me to reflect upon my own history and those who have influenced me. "Slipping into Dreams" is the first movement of the trilogy titled "Dream Trilogy." The music begins with fast triplets but soon settles into a somber, gentle theme, perhaps meant to represent the mind transitioning from the frenzy of daytime into a peaceful slumber. The trilogy continues with "Dreams in Motion," an exploration of the dream world of flying; in this case, the dreamer seems to be flying with ease and enjoying the view from above, completely in control. "Was It All a Dream?" is the final movement of the trilogy and evokes that feeling of waking up from the dream world and struggling to reorient into reality.

One morning this past winter, composer and pianist Lisa Swerdlow woke before dawn. Without knowing why, experienced a sense of foreboding and found herself reflecting on her life and contemplating all that she hoped yet to accomplish. She climbed out of bed and headed to the barn to feed her horses, as was her habit, just as the sun began to break over the Sierra Nevada mountains to the east of her home. Storm clouds hovered over the horizon, resulting in a spectacular winter sunrise that served to calm her troubled thoughts. The composition that grew out of that experience is the riveting "Dawn Contemplation." Ethereal and atmospheric, every note is filled with passion. One phrase flows into another with melancholic earnestness, building to a powerful climax before resolving gently. This music is powerful and stirring, evoking a range of emotions, everything from apprehension and a sense of urgency to peace and acceptance, and is a fitting soundtrack to the challenging times we find ourselves in as a result of Covid-19.

In "Still Here," the artist describes her multiyear relationship to having Stage 4 metastatic breast cancer and how music has been a major contributor to keeping her alive and healthy. The piece opens solemnly, almost questioningly, then the music rises and falls with powerful emotion and wondrous beauty in expressions of the gamut of emotions I imagine one would experience on the heels of treatment for cancer: profound relief, intense gratitude, a sense of wonder about life in general, a renewed excitement about the future, a deepened closeness to

loved ones. Happily for all of us, Lisa Swerdlow is “still here” and will be sharing her beautiful music with us for many years to come!

“Pentimento,” featuring Kristen Autry on the violin and Alexandra Roedder on the cello, is “an artistic expression of all things that are hidden from view.” Dark and brooding, this piece put me in mind of some of the great violin/cello and piano duets from the great Russian romantic composers, such as Cesar Cui or Rimsky-Korsakov and is a favorite. Autry and Roedder join the piano again in the title track “Lasting Impressions,” Swerdlow’s first venture in arranging, which also features Paul Kraushaar on the drums and electric bass. It begins simply with just the piano and a touch of percussion; the key is minor, and the mood is rather dark and melancholy. As the piece continues, the texture gradually thickens and the music becomes almost conversational as the other instruments join in with countermelodies and rich harmonies.

Next comes the orchestrated version of “Listening from the Heart.” This cinematic gem is truly a masterpiece. In the words of the artist, this music is meant to evoke the feelings one has when walking through the woods or beside the ocean with to a cherished loved one, giving full attention to the moment at hand. With this impressive offering, Swerdlow conjures all these emotions and so many more. The album concludes with “Sing me of Winter,” inspired by Swerdlow’s friend Paul Landry who advised her NOT to do yet another cover of an existing Christmas song but instead to write one of her own. It’s a spirited tune in a fast triple meter; the piano fairly sparkles and the orchestration adds just the right “festive” touches. This is dramatic music that could serve as the soundtrack to a scene in a movie, opening with a sense of urgency that gradually unfolds into excitement and ends with a sweep of the heart and a glorious sense of resolution. Not just for the holidays, this is a piece I could listen to over and over (and I have!)

“Lasting Impressions” is a triumph for Lisa Swerdlow. Very highly recommended!