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## Emily Jaworski Koriath: *These Distances Between Us*

**CD** Songs by Brandwein, Hill, Rudman and Santore. T. Koriath, piano; Santore, Brandwein, electronics. English texts. Naxos American Classics 8.559908



**O**N THE EVIDENCE of this fine release, mezzo Emily Jaworski Koriath is an impassioned advocate for contemporary American art song. Her open, vibrant, pulsing timbre and natural, unaffected delivery are a good match for these glimpses into passionate inner lives.

The cycle that gives the collection its title, Jessica Rudman's *These Distances Between Us*, consists of settings of four poems by Aiden K. Feltkamp that explore both emotional and physical distances between people. In the opening "The Ward," in which the poet endures the ordeal of a loved one's illness, Rudman's starkly effective music depicts the growing frustration of "weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks when your illness hides you from me

within those white walls," as Koriath navigates the challenging vocal lines with mastery and drama. The second song, whose text begins with the album's title phrase, reflects the desolation involved with a long-distance relationship, and incorporates colorful scientific language ("How can I open a tesseract / between our lungs / between the infinitesimal spaces / science stacked between our atoms"). The cycle's concluding song, "The Morning," has unrequited love as its subject and explores the feelings that might result from the much-desired union. Koriath makes the ecstasy palpable amid the subtle piano arpeggiations. The result is heartbreaking.

Craig Brandwein (b. 1959) has two cycles in this collection. The best number from *Four Songs of John Charles McNeill* is the sincere and attractive "A Prayer," in which the poet imagines some sad day when, "stirred with no emotion," it would be better to die. The poignant, mostly triadic accompaniment gives this number a thoughtful, deliberate pace and quiet intensity. Brandwein's *Three Rilke Songs*, which close the collection, are for mezzo and computer-generated electronics. The use of synthesized musical textures seems liberating for the composer; he delves more deeply into the meaning of his texts (Rilke in English by way of various translators), and it frees him up harmonically as well. He seems to know Koriath's voice well, taking her all over her considerable range in a singular perspective on unfulfilled longing. "God Speaks," which closes this set and the whole collection, is inspiring and comforting, with Koriath

descending to a chilling low E-flat on the phrase “beauty and terror” before the song ends enigmatically with an electronic gust of wind.

Jonathan Santore’s *Two Letters of Sulpicia* are also for voice and electronics. The mostly low-register synthesized sounds are remarkably effective in summoning the first century BCE author’s ancient world. Set to Santore’s own free translation, based on an earlier translation by James Grainger, both songs are by turns contemplative and ecstatic. Koriath is positively inflamed singing the rangy melismas on the word “burn” at the end of the second song, and wonderfully expressive in general.

Edie Hill’s cycle *The Giver of Stars: Six Poems of Amy Lowell* opens the collection, leading off with “Pyrotechnics,” which describes a couple’s first meeting. The song begins with a loud, attention-grabbing cluster in the bass register of piano, followed by a rapid glissando upward. The rest of the shortish song, however, is delicate and impressionistic. “Vernal Equinox” has a restless, harmonically elusive accompaniment that reflects the poet’s uneasiness on a rainy, hyacinth-scented night. Both the piano and the vocal line heat up for the vivid concluding line, “Why are you not here to overpower me with your tense and urgent love?” The cycle’s title song has a soaring second stanza (“Let the flickering flame of your soul play all about me”), in which Koriath’s sound pulses opulently with longing.

Koriath is expertly partnered at the piano by her husband, Tad Koriath, who provides strong support in both the roiling, emotional passages and the quiet, reflective ones. Both Koriaths make a strong case for the ongoing vitality of the American art-song tradition and these four imaginative, worthy composers in particular. —*Joshua Rosenblum*