



Emanuel Gruber and Keiko Sekino present works by Schumann on Delos

Op 70, and viola players and the *Fairy-tale Pictures*, Op 113. Yet taken on their own terms, these creations have their fervent say and sweep the listener along as shaded by the cello's contemplative personality.

In Gruber's mellow hands, everything else on the disc emerges as a deeply considered essay, often with touches of wise humour and even world-weariness. When Schumann is at his most rustic, as in the Op 102 folk pieces, Gruber heightens the weighty nature of the tunes. The collection's beloved 'Langsam' is both tender and regretful, as only the cello can render it.

Sekino is a discerning partner throughout the programme. She gives no hint that she objects to conceding to the cello the thematic material in Lothar Lechner's transcriptions of two piano pieces – 'Abendlied' from Op 85 and the sublime 'Träumerei' from *Kinderszenen*. No wonder: Gruber treats it all with loving care.

Donald Rosenberg

Sheffer

The Conference of the Birds

(versions with and without narration)

Joyce DiDonato narr Moravian Philharmonic

Orchestra / Jonathan Sheffer

Navona © NV6037 (52' • DDD)



Jonathan Sheffer brings many of his estimable skills as composer and

conductor to the table in *The Conference of the Birds*, an enchanting orchestral work based on a 12th-century epic poem by Farid ud-Din Attar, a Persian Sufi. As led by the composer, the premiere recording features two versions of the piece – one with narration featuring mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato almost giddily reciting Sheffer's text and lending distinctive voice to all sorts of avian characters.

The Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music commissioned the piece in 2014 for a family concert, and it should have a healthy life in the concert hall. The work, about birds seeking a leader in an uneasy world, has roots in several other scores in the genre, including Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, as well as nods to Stravinsky and Britten. But Sheffer's discerning instincts for atmosphere and colour give the score its own glistening and touching identity.

With his extensive experience as a film composer, Sheffer here demonstrates the importance of pacing, mood and gesture.

Every detail serves to advance and heighten the narrative in the most concise terms. The piece should appeal equally to listeners young and old.

As much fun as it is to hear DiDonato go to town as narrator, the orchestral version is an opportunity to savour the delightful squawks, chirps and other bird effects that Sheffer weaves so deftly into his nuanced sonic fabric. He conducts the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance vibrant in detail and soaring when the birds take wing. **Donald Rosenberg**

Thompson

Requiem

The Philadelphia Singers / David Hayes

Naxos American Classics © 8 559789

(55' • DDD • T)



In a parallel universe, Randall Thompson's Requiem – touched by the deaths of a young

choral director who was 'incredibly passionate about the choral art' and of a personal friend – might have become a standard work. Thompson was already a dean of American choral composers, and the Requiem was his personal statement on