

» DAILY REVIEW

CD finds Hotoda's essence

BY JOANNE F. VILLENEUVE

From the opening, rain-like pianissimo notes of "Metamorphosi" by Jun Kouda, pianist Rei Hotoda captivates the listener not only with the choice of pieces she has selected for her first solo album "Apparitions," but also with her flawless technique and her musicianship.

The recording also conveys a sense of who she is: The petite woman, who was born in Japan and grew up in the United States, may seem fragile at first glance, but there is an underlying strength both in her person and her playing.

In this album, she explores sonorities, rhythms and forms by Asian composers who have integrated Western concepts in their work.

The opening piece is a perfect example — one moment quiet and lyrical with a transparent melody, then gutsy with a recurring bass line supporting vibrant treble clef material.

Next, "Rain Tree Sketch" by Toru Takemitsu has an ethereal quality that Hotoda masterfully transmits, while "Piano 4 (An Automat in Sugunami Ward)" features spoken words by the pianist, punctuated by spare music.

Starting off with ponderous chords in the bass offsetting a wild descending melody in the right hand, "Genso-shi" by Noriko Hisada is a work of contrasts, as the texture lightens up and the dynamics diminish for a section before reanimating just before the ending.

"Hidden Voices" by Kotoka Suzuki opens with a series of single tones in an



"Apparitions"
Rei Hotoda
(Signpost Music)

erratic-sounding pattern and rhythm, which is interrupted by the same bass chord, then gives way to a shimmer of melody, abruptly cut by the recurring bass chord, shifting the focus to the rich sounds of the bottom octaves of the keyboard, only to be followed by a study of the higher registers.

Subito pianissimo attacked chords followed by long pauses, percussive noises inside the piano make Toshio Hosokawa's "Nacht Klänge" a surprise-filled work, while Canadian composer Chan Ka Nin's "Rhythm of Life" begins with a four-note melody, translating into many energy-driven guises through the piece.

Another prepared-piano piece, "Glimpses: Movement 3 Chant" begins inside the instrument with plucked strings

giving the piece an other-worldly feel, while the final work "Reflections in the Water" by Vincent Ho, the WSO's current composer-in-residence, combines the playing of keys and the plucking or strumming of the instrument's strings.

The driving melody in the high register gives way to a harp-like section of legato broken chords, descending passages and concludes with a return to the upper octaves, with a repeated note then a sole tone cluster — a fabulous choice for the last cut.

This collection of nine tracks is enchanting, stylistically working together to create a homogenous and exciting whole that opens a world of sound combinations that meld traditional Asian approaches with contemporary Western music.

Hotoda pays a wonderful tribute to these composers, paying attention as much to what is heard as to what is barely perceptible — like note attacks and decay and unconventionally long rests.

I thoroughly enjoyed it and imagine that it can appeal to all ages.

While in Winnipeg — Hotoda has just concluded a three-year term as the conductor-in-residence with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra — she conducted a concert with singer/songwriter Steve Bell and together, they saw this project to fruition.

In fact, this album is the first classical CD produced by Bell's Signpost Studios in Winnipeg and is available through signpostmusic.com.

• jvilleneuve@brandonsun.com