Brian Crain - Spring Symphonies (2005)

1.Andante Cantabile 06:17 2.Andantino 04:00 3.Adagio Con Amore 07:05 4.Allegro Maestoso 04:58 5.Piano Solo 04:18 6.Andante Affettuoso 05:09 7.Adagio Appassionato 05:41 8.Largo Maestoso 06:36 9.Allegretto 05:15 Brian Crain - Piano Czech Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra Petr Vronsky - Conductor

The intensity of Barber's Adagio, the wit of Gershwin's Rhapsody, the harmony of Beethoven and Brahms the space and reflection of Faure and Debussy. Brian's "Spring Symphonies" reminds us of why we love orchestral music. ---cdbaby.com

In 2004, Brian Crain took the opportunity to reflect on his recording portfolio by revisiting his catalog and re-recording with a string quartet. Apparently, this was one small step toward the giant leap that Crain has made here. The great adventure is that his latest recording includes a collaboration with the 52 member Czech Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. This progressive statement comes without the backing of any recording label and yet the results are grand and magnificent.

In a short two-year period, Crain has gone from the synthesized string arrangements of the 2003 Sienna to organic warmth of the quartet arrangements on his retrospective release last year. This time around Spring Symphonies, despite all the risks and investment is not only a heroic but equally bold and successful creative step. Crain not only collaborated with a full orchestra, he also traveled to the Czech Republic which was probably a huge financial risk taking into account that the project comes with no label backing.

Considering the creative use of an orchestra, the classical influences are obvious and are even reflected in the title of the compositions that are also divided into two symphonies. The intermission comes courtesy of the one stripped down track appropriately entitled “Piano Solo”. The tempo is slow and the mood very somber giving the album its most philosophical and reflective moment. Otherwise, the remainder of the album makes full use of the orchestration made available to Crain who continues to emphasize the melody line that he repeats over and over with additional embellishments from various members of the orchestra. Though Crain maintains his own identity his blending of classical movements along with memorable memories brings to mind the musical comparisons of Tim Janis. The tearful strings of “Andante Affettuoso” are about as powerful as the vapors of an onion to the naked human eye.

Also most memorable is the opening movement “Andante Cantabile” that is arousing and emotive. Countered by Brian’s piano bridge brings the listener to the early realization that Spring Symphonies has something very special to say. Though not quite as complex, it would be daring to compare this album with David Foster’s Symphony Sessions and the equally remarkable Skyline Firedance of David Lanz. Again, keep in mind that these two talented artists created their epics with the backing of major recording labels. Crain still managed to pull this feat off without the same assistance.

Frankly, all of the movements are for the lack of a better phrase, very moving. But one specific mention should be given to “Allegro Maestoso” that has a stunning piano bridge that returns the listener to a luscious string overture. It is simply wonderful, as is the entire 49 minutes and odd seconds of this ambitious and audacious album.

Brian Crain has shown the ability not only to create and compose but do so on a grand scale whether it comes with major label backing or not. This artist will not be stopped and is starting to secure the word of mouth that is far overdue. However, Spring Symphonies is so superior to anything Crain has done that the only negative aspect is how does he follow up on this tour de force? However, this is a great quandary to be in. ---Michael Debbage, mainlypiano.com

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