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Inside this room

Michael Francis Hannan
Southern Cross University

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Inside This Room
Hobson and Hirschfelder
ABC Classics 472 565-2

Reviewed by Michael Hannan

What happens when an opera singer teams up with a movie composer to make an album of original songs? The result is a strange beast indeed if *Inside This Room* is any indication. David Hobson and David Hirschfelder have co-written most of the compositions on this album. There is no indication on the CD booklet of what the distribution of creative duties were but presumably Hirschfelder has done the bulk of the elaborate arranging for the album and Hobson has written the emotionally charged and often very poetic lyrics. The musical approach is varied- there is a focus on folk-like melodies but the arranging takes the music in all sorts of stylistic directions. Of note is the inclusion of a number of multicultural musicians in the credits, notably the Martinetsa Women's Choir. They are used to provide their highly-charged Bulgarian (and other) sounds and rhythms to the arranging mix, but also feature in a track ("Sin I Byal") upon which Mara Kiek is also a composition collaborator with the two Davids. For me this is the most powerful track on the CD, and one ironically where Hobson takes a less prominent role as a vocal soloist.

Percussion-based grooves are featured in the arranging, but no drum kit. The absence of kit thankfully removes the expectation that this is a classical singer attempting to make a pop or rock album. Rather the inventive use of percussion grooves locates the music in a variety of syncretic world music and other contemporary music spaces. Another notable aspect of many of the rhythm tracks is the blending of rhythmic string section playing with percussion.

Hirschfelder's screen music background allows him to build the music tracks in a very dramatic fashion. The excitement of the folk-like "Mackerel Skies", for example is maintained by very skilful orchestration development including an innovative use of violin harmonics. The string arrangement of "Going Home" moves gradually from chordal pads to rhythmically active playing to build its climaxes. Sometimes, however, the orchestration lapses into saccharine territory, for example in the almost ambient "One Passing Moment".

Elsewhere there are forays into medieval music ("Ad Mortem Festinamus"), and latin jazz ("The Word") and some strange combinations of sounds and ideas. In "Eternity" a cimbalom (using an Arab tuning) combines with central African singing style, contemporary musical theatre song and a spoken text ("Eternity isn't a long time. Eternity has nothing to do with time."). The composition "Do You Have a Question" also uses a spoken text ("What's the meaning of the universe, what's the meaning of a flea? It's just there, that's it! Your own meaning is that you are there!") combined with minimalistic film music textures, ambient piano, and vocalised Indian rhythmic patterns (bols) and no vocal solo.

It's hard to know who this record will appeal to. Certainly Hobson's opera fans might find it stylistically disturbing while Hirschfelders film music and pop album fans might

not be able to relate to the classically-trained vocal sounds. But it's certainly a very varied and inventive sonic concoction.