

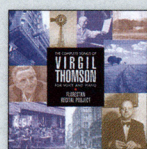
BBC MUSIC CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

A landmark in American song

Terry Blain welcomes the first complete Virgil Thomson edition



SONOROUS BARITONE:
Aaron Engebretsh shines in Thomson's Blake songs



THOMSON

Complete songs

Sarah Pelletier (soprano), Lynne McMurtry (contralto), William Hite (tenor), Aaron Engebretsh (baritone); Alison d'Amato, Linda Osborn (piano), John McDonald (percussion)
New World 80775-2 198:21 mins (3 discs)

This set is as important to the history of American art song as the Barber recordings of Cheryl Studer and Thomas Hampson two decades ago. From two early, already distinctive settings written at Harvard to *The Cat*, a droll duet from 1980, here is the full gamut of the songs written by Virgil Thomson over six decades.

There are 77 of them, and around 20 have never been recorded before. Together, they constitute a formidable body of achievement, kaleidoscopic in its shifting styles and emotions. From the pumped-up, funerary rhetoric of Bossuet's *Oraison funèbre* to the blithe,

Virgil Thomson's songs constitute a formidable body of achievement

delightful *La valse grégorienne*, Thomson is acutely sensitive to syllabic patterns and cadences, inviting them to shape the warp and weft of melody and rhythm.

All four singers major in clarity of diction and fluidity of phrasing. Tenor William Hite's effulgent account of the mini-cycle *Mostly about Love* is one of many highlights,

as is baritone Aaron Engebretsh's sonorous traversal of the *Five Songs from William Blake*. Contralto Lynne McMurtry contributes, among much else, an ardent *Praises and Prayers*, and while soprano Sarah Pelletier's vibrato can be bothersome, she too sings with a vibrant interpretive intelligence. Pianists Alison d'Amato and Linda Osborn provide impeccably prepared and executed support in Thomson's frequently tricky accompaniments, and respond acutely to his mix of down-home, Kansas City folksiness and Parisian sophistication.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the **BBC Music Magazine website**
www.classical-music.com