

MARY JANE LEACH

*Ariadne's Lament* (1998/New World Records)

Leach's music leaves me breathless and swollen-hearted, so mournful are its depths and stunning in its heights. Despite being a practitioner of timbres, dissonances and the science of sound, Leach's music is hardly academic in presentation. A Leach concert is nothing less than transforming to the listener, who, if fortunate, may find him or herself surrounded on all sides by a choir working in sublime sonic gradations and ghost tones — those overtones manufactured by the human ear when confronted with certain tonal dissonances. Minimalism is a key element in her constructions, whether they be for choir, vocal soloist, chamber ensemble (oboe, clarinet and bassoon here on "Windjammer"), or the string accompaniments that occasionally embrace the above variations. Because Leach aims for purity in her work, the compositions evolve slowly and with minimal dynamic action. The payoff of such an approach is a difficult one to attain, but when keenly struck it rewards on an infinitely grander scale than those climaxes achieved through glitz or grandstanding. Fortunately, Leach's wellspring of talent allows her the ability to pull this off time and again. Working with longtime collaborators the New York Treble Singers (check out *Celestial Fires* for further evidence of their achievements together), Leach cuts a wider swath with *Ariadne*, featuring David Lee Echelard in a heart-wrenching duet with himself as countertenor, The Rooke Chapel Choir with the gothic and somber closing track "Song of Sorrows," the Cassatt String Quartet, and soprano Arlene Travis soloing on top of the New York Treble Singers. All involved give flawless performances and wring as much emotion as humanly possible from Leach's minor key epics. A profound and deeply moving musical statement.

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