

Fanfare Magazine

By Maria Nockin

Mark Abel's *The Dream Gallery* is a beautiful song cycle with a most interesting orchestral accompaniment. The words don't pull any punches. (The work) contains portraits of California cities where various kinds of dreams have been "deferred" in the sense of the word that Langston Hughes uses in his poem *A Dream Deferred*. Abel's raisins in the California sun may fester like sores, but most of them will never explode. They merely fade from public view.

Like Richard Wagner and a few other composers who wrote their own libretti, Abel is as good a poet as he is a musician. As a result, his work demands expert vocal interpretation, and that includes acting with the voice. His cast is excellent and each singer responds well. Above all, kudos go to conductor Sharon Lavery, who has the responsibility for coordinating all the sections of this seven-part cycle.

... When Mary Jaeb sings the part of Helen in Los Angeles, she makes you believe that she has lost all motivation to move on. David Marshman, whose robust voice I have heard live at the San Diego Opera, uses his burnished low notes to illustrate the bleakness of Taft in western Kern County. As Naomi from Berkeley, lyric mezzo-soprano Janelle DeStefano sings that living well is the best revenge, and she makes us believe that she is doing exactly that. Most affecting is Carver Cossey as Lonnie, telling of the death of the postwar dream that was Richmond. Here, you might need a handkerchief because Abel does not pause for political correctness.

When Martha Jane Weaver sings the part of Luz in Soledad, she reminds us of the workers with menial jobs we pass every day but rarely see as individuals. Although Adam in Arcata is young, he lost his way and has become totally disillusioned. Only at the very end does he remember that the sunset over the Pacific Ocean can still inspire us. I might like a more positive ending, but the composer and librettist may well feel that we have no idea of what the future will bring. In any case, this is an excellent vehicle for concert and recital artists and I hope to hear it presented live soon.

The CD's sound is warm and clear. I think that anyone who is interested in modern vocal music will want to own this disc.