

Beacon Media (San Gabriel Valley, Ca.)

By Bill Peters

The Dream Gallery (features) an outstanding ensemble of singers and musicians ... (who) bring formidable resumes in both the performance realm as well as academe.

The songs, or portraits, Abel has conceived strike at the bleakest, most disillusioned among us. "Helen (Los Angeles)" was once the pride of Fontana, but now watches as her friends and her marriage dissolve. Soprano Mary Jaeb sings in clear tones effectively presenting the music and lyric Abel brings to describe the dysfunctional family. In "Todd (Taft)," ... Abel describes a dry, raw environment and lyrics that can see only "barren lands and tumbleweed." Baritone David Marshman is suitably dour.

In turn, Abel focuses on Berkeley ("If only we could build a wall to keep out those who would pollute our purity"), with mezzo Janelle DeStefano nicely dramatizing the snob-liberal; San Diego ("We're in La Costa for now, but soon we'll be moving up to Rancho Santa Fe") gets a saccharine treatment from the sweet-sounding Delaney Gibson as the music drives to a pseudo rock beat.

Richmond brings the wonderfully dramatic bass of Carver Cossey to Abel's best treatment, but also the most devastating assessment ("Broken glass, broken lives"); and onward to Soledad, an immigrant haven near Salinas, where alto Martha Jane Weaver sings movingly ("We had to fight to belong here"); and finally, Arcata, the northernmost spot geographically, with tenor Tom Zohar presenting a stage-y style in the final track, asking, seemingly, what Abel had in mind all along: ("What now?").

Certainly there will be no Chamber of Commerce trophies given out (for "*Gallery*"). (But) musically, Abel is more than a little competent.