



RUDENSTEIN State of the Union. Clarinet Sonata. Piano Sonata No. 7 in 3 Movements • Richard Stoltzman (cl); Paul Dykstra (pn); D'Anna Fortunato (mez); Matthew Dibattista (ten); John Whittlesey (bbar); Ron Haroutunian (bn); Terry Everson (tpt); Consuelo Sherba (va); Emmanuel Feldman (vc); Bill Manley (perc) • MMC 2161 (63:25)

Contemporary American Composer Roger Rudenstein studied with Fu Yuan Soong and Walter Hilse. He is the composer of five full length operas and a musical, which have been performed in New York and New England. He is also the recipient of the Masterworks of the New Era Award, and has been recorded on the similarly adventurous ERM label. His music is tonal (though he occasionally pushes the envelope) and more akin to that of the composers of the old Howard Hanson Eastman Conservatory School than to those of Pierre Boulez's old IRCAM circle.

In the notes to this release, he states, "I have a large repertoire of recently composed chamber works which reflect my engagement with music and my reaction to the greed-based, warlike, national security state we now suffer in. This part of my work is dubbed The Nightmare of Reason opus and comprises the pieces I have composed since the destruction of the World Trade Center and the senseless war in Iraq."

In State of the Union, composed in 2006, Rudenstein takes three phrases from Bush's 2005 State of the Union speech—"No peace without victory," "Addicted to oil," and "A dark vision of hatred and fear"—and treats them to settings for voice and chamber ensemble. In reference to the second of those three statements, I recall a letter to the editor in the Trenton Times wherein a reader took Bush to task, observing, "[H]is stating that we are addicted to oil is like Jack Kevorkian complaining that his patients always die." Rudenstein's settings are appropriately dark, sinister, grotesque, and poignant. The piece ends in a quietly wordless elegy for "the tens of thousands who have been destroyed in the senseless conflicts of our time."

In State of the Union, as well as in the two sonatas (also composed in 2006) that follow it on this disc, Rudenstein works with tiny thematic kernels that he subjects to rigorous contrapuntal treatment, much in the manner of Hindemith. As in the best of Hindemith, this counterpoint is highly expressive. Repetition, augmentation and diminution of time values, and manipulation of dynamics are combined masterfully to produce music that, in the words of Beethoven, "goes from heart to heart."

This is finely wrought stuff, requiring performers of both insight and technical chops to put across. The performers on this release are all easily of that level, and are captured on a recording that is both highly detailed and timbrally accurate. William Zagorski