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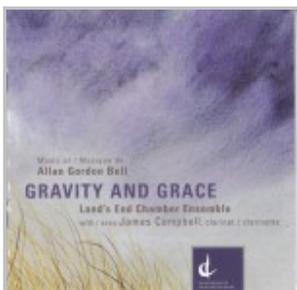
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY

Allan Gordon Bell – Gravity and Grace - Land's End Chamber Ensemble (/index.php/booksrecords2/moderncontempo/24364-allan-gordon-bell-gravity-and-grace-land-s-end-chamber-ensemble)

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Allan Gordon Bell – Gravity and Grace
Land's End Chamber Ensemble
with James Campbell
Centrediscs CMCCD 19013

Gravity and Grace is a collection of recent chamber works by Alberta composer Allan Gordon Bell, featuring Calgary's Land's End Chamber Ensemble with guest James Campbell on clarinet. Bolstered by great performances by the core piano trio and guests, Bell's music shimmers and shrieks, grumbles and growls.

Bell is afflicted with delight in sonority and fascinated by the physical fact of consonance, using an effective range of dissonance as a foil. He expresses a kind of gratitude to the world around him in all these works. He is a strongly visual composer; in one piece sounds create images of falcons rising on thermals above the prairie or cascades of water tumbling into pools. In *Field Notes* he begins with a depiction of two rivers meeting and finishes with a sunset. *Sweetgrass* wraps paired contrasting images of the prairie around a still central movement that takes a page out of Béla Bartók.

The album title derives from the final work on the disc. *Trails of Gravity and Grace*, for clarinet cello and piano, was commissioned by Toronto's Amici ensemble. As good as the title is, it is the weakest part of a strong collection. The limited palate doesn't suit the composer, and I must confess that at times I found Mr. Campbell's intonation questionable.

Apart from that, the playing is solid and committed; I especially enjoyed *Sweetgrass*, (written in 1997, the earliest of these pieces) for a sextet requiring three guests: Calgary musicians flutist Mary Sullivan, Ilana Dahl on clarinets and Kyle Eustace on percussion. Bell is wise to write for some common groupings in the contemporary idiom: here it's "Pierrot plus percussion." *Field Notes* is written for the same group as *Quartet for the End of Time*.

Both Bartók and Olivier Messiaen could be fellow travellers with Bell. They shared a similar mystical regard for the natural world and made efforts to incorporate that world into their music. Bartók's *Contrasts* and the Messiaen *Quatuor* would ride alongside *Field Notes* quite comfortably.

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