Bruno Sanfilippo - The Poet (2016)



1 The Poet 3:35 2 Before Nightfall 3:40 3 Silk Offering 3:55 4 Dead's Hope 1:19 5 The Legend Of The Sailor 4:08 6 An Omen 4:29 7 The Book Without Words 4:55 8 Seventy Seven Years Later 5:17 9 Iron Horse 3:44 10 The Four Keys 2:52 11 Abandoned Carousel 2:03 Bruno Sanfilippo - piano Pere Bardagi - violin Julian Kancepolski - cello

Over the last several years, Bruno Sanfilippo has been making a focused move toward establishing himself in contemporary or modern classical composition. With The Poet, I feel he has found his current apex, and is rapidly becoming a composer who, although perhaps noted as a “New Age” artist, is breaking well beyond the borders of that delineation. The Poet is minimalist chamber music, with Sanfilippo joined by cellist Julián Kancepolski and violinist Pere Bardagí. Each piece feels delicate and flawlessly sculpted, the kind of thing you want to gingerly hold up to the light and turn over and over to see every facet. To me, the work here is lightly glazed with just a touch of sadness that never crosses into a less desirable tone of melancholy. It’s pensive and true. The title track, the moving “Before Nightfall,” and”Silk Offering” all pull the listener into that introspective cocoon while also giving us a feel for the easy chemistry between the players, the balance of the instruments’ tones. Bardagí’s lines reach straight for the heart on “Before Nightfall,” and Kancepolski’s counterpoint helps drive it home. “Silk Offering” is a beautiful blend where Sanfilippo’s patient phrasing lays down a bed for the pleading voice of the violin and the more stringent tone of the cello to work out their conversation. The pace is slow, underscored with drama, and the piece is vivid. The more minimalist side of the work comes out later, with “Dead’s Hope” and “The Four Keys” both opening with repeating arpeggios that speak of the influence of Glass and Reich. “Dead’s Hope” is short, more like an exercise in building intensity. It reaches constantly upward, then simply stops. “The Four Keys” is a true showcase for the strings and the potency that can come from repetition. We hear the same phrases, yet they seem to rise up in meaning with each new pass. It seems like Sanfilippo wanted to roll out as many different approaches as practical on The Poet. “Iron Horse” goes strong on theme with Sanfilippo playing alone on what I assume from the sound is a prepared piano. Its notes have a metallic ring and resonance to them, and the piece jerks along like rusted machinery, its awkward pauses creating very strong mind’s-eye imagery. “The Book Without Words” seems to grow beyond the small trio feel in places, reaching for something

more symphonic with tympani rolls and layers of strings. Sanfilippo's music-box playing keeps it anchored in a glistening simplicity. And if you'd like your heart broken, the short solo piano piece "Abandoned Carousel" will do it for you in exactly two minutes. It's the closing piece, and whether Sanfilippo meant to do this or not, it dovetails seamlessly back into the first piece. It is about as perfect a continuation of feeling as I've ever heard. So if it's on purpose, bravo.

The Poet is an exquisitely beautiful set of works. While minimalist in compositional approach, the pieces here are full in ways that utterly belie that tag. The effect on the listener is maximal, certainly. These are pieces that land with emotional impact and demand focused attention. They may be delicate, but they are strong. Sanfilippo grows almost exponentially as a composer with each new release. The Poet is amazing, it is a must-hear, and it has become a personal favorite of mine. Listen to this now. --hypnagogue.net

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