

Augusta Read Thomas

*** * * * * The Auditions; Avian Capriccio; Plea for Peace: Ripple Effects; Two Thoughts About The Piano; Selene; Your Kiss**

Axiom Brass Quartet; ICE Ensemble; Third Coast Percussion, et al *NimbusNI6402 78:32mins*

The American composer Augusta Read Thomas has an intense voice, with an exceptional ear for timbral detail, clarity and the control of ebb and flow. This compilation, the eighth in a series documenting her music, centres on the ballet score *The Auditions*, written for the Martha Graham Dance Company, premiered in 2019: a mystical concept in which cycles of yearning aspiration and ascent seem to admit the protagonists gradually to higher planes of existence. It's tremendously compelling, full of rhythmic sparkle, subtle shades of mood and a brilliant sense of interplay between the intriguing selection of instruments, the only downside being a slight over-reliance on high frequencies, seemingly a recurring feature of Read Thomas's style. Similar issues apply in *Selene* for percussion quartet and wind; but both receive sterling performances, respectively by the ICE Ensemble and Third Coast Percussion.

Avian Capriccio is a quirky showpiece of three works for brass quintet, a quirky mix for depicting the likes of hummingbirds or swans. *Ripple Effects* for carillon duet and *Two Thoughts About The Piano* require - as do the other works - exceptional precision: special plaudits are due to the pianist Daniel Pesca. Perhaps the vocal works are ultimately the most touching: a wordless *Plea for Peace*, sung with pure expressiveness by Jessica Aszodi which allows stillness and fervour to shine through, and in 'Your Kiss' the soprano Claire Booth aspires to Read Thomas's stratospheric shining high pitches. The composer carries us with her into another world which, this time, becomes *human*. *Jessica Ducher*