

Penguin Eggs

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Silk Road Music

Standing Out (Autumn Cloud Recording)

It's been a long time since we had a new recording from Vancouver's Silk Road Music, which emerged in 1998 with a charming and effortless blend of Chinese, Celtic and Brazilian sounds. So it was a double surprise to see a new release from Silk Road, and to hear the prevalence of flamenco music on this disc.

Silk Road Music has been the umbrella for a number of "world musicians" over the years, but Qiu Xia He (pronounced Chew Shah Her) has always been at the helm. Qiu Xia has expressed gratitude that she learned her instrument, the pipa, in China, so that she has a broad command of its techniques and repertoire. But it was on a government-sponsored tour of Canada that Qiu Xia encountered a world of seemingly infinite genres and styles, and an atmosphere of freedom to explore at will. Qiu Xia had found a home for her adventurous spirit.

Silk Road's recordings have been intermittent since the 1998 release of *Endless*. *Autumn Cloud* in 2005 touted Silk Road's first foray into flamenco music but much has happened in the interim to galvanize that fusion, namely the marriage of Qiu Xia with flamenco guitarist Andre Thibault. The two obviously enjoy a charged conversation between their instruments, and an ever-evolving exploration of their unique blend.

Standing Out opens with a Celso Machado composition, and the years of collaboration between them have made Qiu Xia at ease with this material. She lingers over the melodic phrases and makes them sing, and the piece climaxes with Celso showing off his bubblingly inventive percussion.

Qiu Xia took time off to study flamenco music in Spain and this is put to good use in *Passion's Promise*, co-written with Vancouver composer Moshe Denburg. The piece takes the guitar and pipa into new harmonic territory, complex and compelling, blending a modern sensibility with dramatic jazz riffs for the guitar.

To Mi La brings forth Andre's oud, an instrument he came to master during his fascination with Middle Eastern music. He also beguiles with the bansuri flute on this track, which evokes a range of emotions entirely different from the bravura strumming of the flamenco works.

I recently brought this CD with me on a car trip, which could have been subtitled *Let's All Park On The Freeway And See Who Drives Over The Median First*. I listened through the album twice before I got into second gear, yet still wanted to listen again on the trip back home.

– By Lark Clark