

## **The Calgary Herald – Review**

### **Ex-Calgarian shows mastery of the classical keyboard**

A newly released CD of Canadian piano music performed by one of Canada's most gifted young musician-composers ought to be a shoo-in for a 2004 Juno nomination.

The disc is titled Solus and the pianist is 29 year old Heather Schmidt, a former Calgary wunderkind now residing in New York.

As Schmidt herself points out in her informative liner notes, the eight pieces featured on the Centrediscs album share ties not only to Alberta, but also a series of student-teacher relationships spanning three generations.

The impressive and superbly engineered album begins with three works by Schmidt; Sprint, a thundering piece, almost Lisztian in tone; Chaconne, a two part work in variation form, with dramatic changes in tempo and colour; and Solus, with its rapidly changing moods and introspective, solitary atmosphere. The swift, furious figurations of Murphy's Star Burning Blue come next, capturing the violence of a disintegrating star.

The ensuing peaceful sections only lead to the rebuilding of greater density and the stage is set for the process to start over again.

Schmidt performs all four pieces with power to spare and the persuasive passion of a true Romantic. Bell's Danse sauvage, which uses improvisatory passages created by Schmidt herself, is highlighted by energetic syncopations - including a jazzy little motto recurring throughout the piece. The wild abandon in its final pages - conveyed with real fire by the pianist - contrasts with the trio of Forsyth works which conclude the album and reveal Schmidt's incredible ear for detail.

Her interpretations of Forsyth's music show both a poetic temperament and emotional commitment equal to her virtuosity.

Forsyth imagines musical answers to Purcell, Schumann and Chopin, respectively. In response to Purcell, for example, is the reflective Fantazia upon One Note, in which the Edmonton composer weaves a beguiling texture around a B, the repetitions soon assuming a theatrical air. The second work, Forsyth's Hommage to Schumann, draws on the importance of the thumbs in Schumann's melodic invention.

Schmidt plays the graceful arabesques and bell-like textures of Thumb-piano with effortless clarity. The work leads naturally to the last composition, in which Forsyth cleverly takes off from Chopin's famous black-key Etude with gentle work using only white keys to suggest an African improvisation.

*Bob Clark*