

THE FLUTIST

QUARTERLY

CDs



Live from China Rhonda Larson

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Rhonda Larson and Ventus' new recording, *Live from China*, blends traditional music from Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Celtic lands, and the Americas, all with Larson's trademark technical fireworks

and flawless phrasing. Musicians Chris Rosser (piano/keyboards/electric Oud), Carolyn Koebel (world percussion), and Eliot Wado-pian (bass) add a rhythmic and textural vitality to the project.

Anyone who has heard this flutist perform live will know what this recording first presents to its listeners: Rhonda Larson has a seriously high level of artistry with a flute in her hands, whether it is wooden or silver, eastern or western, small or large. She is conversant in the languages of classical, jazz, and world music, at the least.

What this live album adds to the conversation about Larson is a depth of understanding. Beneath the simple charm of her playing, beyond her lightning-fast technique, clear articulation, and sweet sound, is a hunger for and a realization of a melding of traditional world music with what is perhaps the most American of idioms, found in the intersection of jazz and rock and roll.

On tracks like "Horse Race," a traditional Chinese tune in a

setting by Larson, the addition of percussion and piano render a melody that might have been less understandable in its natural setting into something that makes perfect sense to a Western ear, rhythmically and harmonically. Rosser's electric Oud turns "Dance of the Yao Tribe" into something especially compelling; the timbre of it is unusual and cannot be mistaken for guitar for more than a moment.

There are several opportunities for the listener to appreciate Larson's expressiveness and beautiful sense of phrase and line on tracks like "Nova Scotia Farewell," "The Boatman," and "Whispering Hope." Perhaps the most striking moment of the CD comes on the track called "Your Collar," where at several points, an undeniable similarity between the melody and ornamentation of this traditional Chinese tune and that of some of the western selections arises.

The final track, "Metamorphosis," is a recent composition of Larson's, in which she presents pioneering techniques involving singing (her concept of flute/voice unison) and a style of pitched tonguing that sounds remarkably like bongo drums. Like its namesake, the composition morphs smoothly from a slow and lyrical melody into something more mobile and active before erupting into a quick, kicky kind of dance.

Throughout *Live from China*, the style changes, instrument changes, and timbre and texture and geographical changes create an interesting narrative, told in the voice of Larson's varied, expressive musical imagination.

—Jessica Dunnivant