

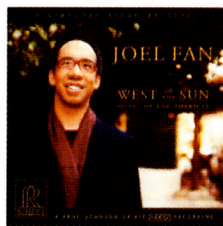
'West of the Sun'

Barber Piano Sonata, Op 26 **Beach** Fire-flies, Op 15 No 4 **Bolcom** Nine New Bagatelles **Bonds** Troubled Water **Ginastera** Piano Sonata No 1 **Gottschalk** Suis Moi! Caprice **Nazareth** Vem cá, Branquinha **Piazzolla** Flora's Game **Villa-Lobos** Chôros No 5, 'Alma Brasileira'

Joel Fan *pf*

Reference Recordings © RR119 (67' • DDD)

A well performed and diverse disc that brilliantly demonstrates Fan's versatility



Playing a gently provocative mix of the familiar and obscure, Joel Fan seems to enjoy an intimate relationship with every composer on this CD. He has a smiling,

clear-eyed, muscle-toned way with the conventional charm pieces (both the Nazareth and the Gottschalk are pure delights), handles the big bruisers (Ginastera and Barber) with control and command, and even stops to discover new repertoire along the way.

Ushered in by the exquisite thirds of Amy Beach's *Fire-flies*, *Troubled Water* proves to be the spiritual heart of the recital, introducing the

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voice of Margaret Bonds, the first black American to solo with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in 1933. Bonds wrote her moving five-minute plea for compassion and understanding in 1967, five years before her death, aged 59. In doing so, she brings forth a great meeting of spirituals, European romanticism and American cocktail jazz.

The wide-ranging variety and fascination of Bolcom's *Nine New Bagatelles* are just what they claim to be, musical diversionary tactics; perhaps they were intended to help members of the California Music Teachers Associations, who commissioned them, to get their students to practise. Fan finishes with a performance of Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata of great quality

and depth which reveals the blocks of light and colour that lie behind the composer's purely musical blueprints.

Recorded at Skywalker Sound by a team headed by Keith O Johnson, the sound in conventional digital sound is beautifully alive, clear and rich. Heard through an HDCD player, the piano gains a startling sense of in-the-room reality.

Joel Fan's booklet-notes have a naive charm about them which unintentionally but valuably underlines the passage of time. Reading that "Samuel Barber was one of the foremost American composers of the 20th century" is a reminder that classical music is increasingly an entertainment for young people who have relatively little memory or knowledge of the recent past. **Laurence Vittes**