

Diana Gilchrist Sings Songs of Canada. Diana Gilchrist, coloratura soprano; Shelley Katz, piano. Compact disc. Carleton Sound CSCD-1003. \$20.98

If you seek an exploration of Canadian art, popular and patriotic songs (with piano accompaniment) dating from the late 18th century to the present, lyric coloratura soprano Diana Gilchrist and pianist Shelley Katz serve up an exciting and wondrous program of unknown repertoire with exuberance, refinement and secure technical prowess. Indeed, this is a sublime musical marriage between Gilchrist and Katz, a husband and wife duo who bring their sophisticated, generous musical gifts to this project.

After receiving a music degree from Carleton University and spending four years as the founding Artistic Director of Opera Lyra Ottawa, Diana Gilchrist studied in New York and London. She has made an impressive operatic career in opera houses throughout Europe as well as performing with leading orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic, the Brandenburg Philharmonic and the BBC Symphony. Montreal-born Shelley Katz holds a Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School in New York and a multi-disciplinary Ph.D. from England. He has worked as a conductor, soloist and chamber musician with some of the world's leading singers. The last dozen years, Diana Gilchrist and Shelley Katz have performed regularly together on the concert platform and for radio and television. They live in England where they serve as Musicians in Residence at the Queen's University in Herstmonceux.

This delightfully varied disc (20 tracks, 67 minutes) traces the developments of English, French and German song in Canada from 1790 to the 20th century from the most

simple strophic folksong/parlor ballads, romances and chansonettes to grand, coloratura operatic fireworks. At first glance, of the 19 composers represented, the only familiar names are Sir Ernest MacMillan, Barbara Pentland and Calixa Lavallée. (2 fascinating contributions from the composer of Canada's national anthem). One discovers some true musical gems in the music of August Descarries, Léo Roy, Clarence Lucas, Francis Woolcott and Gabriel Cusson. It is a well-programmed disc that moves easily from the opening flourish of "Spirit of Life" by William Dichmont (1882-1943) to the contrasting, non-traditional harmony of John Burge's (b.1961) "There is a Medlar Tree." To all these songs, Gilchrist brings a pure, crystalline, sparkling timbre, laser sharp clarity and musical sensibility in her love of text and superb phrasing. She is equally secure singing in French, German, and English. As well, her parody of the French language accent is suitably silly in Francis Woolcott's (ca. 1840) comical "Oh! No, We never talk in French." Ample lambent vocal quality and tender expressivity illuminate every verse of Léo Roy's (1887-1974) "Petit Prière." Another impressive highlight of this CD, and of Diana Gilchrist's enviable technical facility, is displayed in the daring interpretation of Stephen Codman's (ca. 1796-1852) "The Fairy Song." Singing with complete abandon, Gilchrist responds to this drama with a thrilling, uninhibited performance. As an accompanist Shelley Katz provides understated, sensitive shaping to textual nuances that enhance and support the performance of these songs as well as displaying his ample technical powers and

polished musicianship in solo piano preludes, interludes and postludes. The disc closes with “Andalouse” by Calixa Lavallée, a French aria spiced with a Spanish bolero idiom. Lavishly performed, complete with stylish embellishments, Gilchrist’s voice soars, easily negotiating the demands of the high coloratura *tessitura*.

Elaine Keillor’s liner notes provide a solid foundation as well as a clear historical context for understanding the selected repertoire. However, it would have been interesting to have had more detailed discussion of the songs from Keillor’s research; perhaps she was under word

constraint. Also, the organization of the material may be confusing to students as the discussion of the music does not follow the progression of the songs as presented on the disc. The complete song texts appear in the original language with an English translation. The recorded sound of this Carleton sound disc is vivid and clear. *Diana Gilchrist Sings Songs of Canada* was recorded at the University of Surrey, Guildford, England, in December 1998 and may be ordered by visiting the Web site of the Canadian Music Centre: www.musiccentre.ca

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