

Review from: FANFARE MAGAZINE

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TONIGHT • Linos Sax Qrt; Thorsten Blumberg (perc) 1 • MUSICAPHON 56905
(Hybrid multichannel SACD: 71:02)

Every so often, publisher Joel Flegler will send a CD or two that the reviewer hasn't requested, but which he thinks will be of interest. I must confess that, at first blush, this one seemed an odd choice. A saxophone quartet playing medleys and suites from Broadway shows didn't seem like anything that would particularly interest the readers of Fanfare, or me for that matter. Well, I was completely wrong on the last count and I am willing to bet I was on the first count too.

An extended suite from Leonard Bernstein's most popular work, *West Side Story*, is the major work on this SACD. Anyone familiar with the composer's own suite, *Symphonic Dances*, will have some idea what to expect here. Staying very true to the original, arranger and quartet soprano saxophonist Andreas Hilner has transcribed and arranged many of the same sections that Bernstein used, but he has also added over 20 minutes of music, including the vocal version of "Maria," the "Promenade," and "Jump" from the high school dance, "I Feel Pretty," and "Officer Kruppke." Other sections, like the "Cha Cha" version of "Maria" are given in fuller versions. The suite does not attempt to follow the arch of the story line as the composer generally did, instead interleaving contrasting sections and ending on the upbeat and virtuosic "America." It is all very well chosen, and the only lingering concern was that a saxophone quartet arrangement would be a pale imitation of the original brilliant orchestrations. No worries on that count. The Linos Saxophone Quartet is a veteran ensemble, hailing from Düsseldorf, with an impressive repertoire ranging from transcriptions like these to the traditional saxophone quartet works. They do Bernstein's music full justice, recreating the complex rhythms, bright instrumental colors, jazzy impudence, and touching lyricism of the original score with startling effectiveness. These five musicians, with WDR Radio Orchestra percussionist Thorsten Blumberg, play the often wonderfully complex passages with such precision, blend, intonation, and style that it is simply jaw dropping in its realization. If you respond as I did, you will be making a list of people for whom you will play this recording long before your first hearing has ended.

The other three works on this release are an imaginative set of variations on Harold Arlen's most famous melody, "Over the Rainbow," by baritone saxophonist Stephen Pottmeier, his medley of tunes from Loewe's *My Fair Lady*, with a couple of surprising and entertaining turns on the familiar tunes, and a jazzy arrangement of tunes from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* by veteran American arranger and composer Bill Holcombe. Certainly more like I was expecting when I first saw the release, these smaller pieces make an appropriate set of encores to the principal work. That amazing arrangement is the reason for buying the disc, along with the beautifully airy and detailed sound and the absolutely top-drawer performances. Not just for saxophone enthusiasts, this one could be a Want List candidate. *Ronald E. Grames*