

I am no expert on classical music, although I am far from being a novice either, having listened to it on and off since I was 8 years old. However, rather than comment on how closely pianist Michael Dulin recreates the eleven classical compositions which serve as "jumping off points" for the songs on *Timeless* (some are note-for-note renditions), I'd prefer to focus on the album as a whole. Obviously, with the source material coming from composers such as Chopin, Debussy, Beethoven, Liszt, and Schumann (among others), it stands to reason that if you are not a fan of "long hair" music (as it used to be referred to), you should probably skip this recording. While Dulin's interpretations can sometimes put a new spin on the piece (e.g. incorporating subtle application of synth strings or orchestrations), more often than not the piece is wholly compatible in spirit and overall sound to the original. This is, obviously, good news for lovers of those original compositions (which include Debussy's "Claire de Lune," Chopin's "Nocturne in D-flat Major," and Beethoven's 5th piano concerto, "The Emperor"), but it may prove problematic for new age piano lovers who prefer the "traditional approach" of artists such as Lanz, Gratz, or Spielberg.

That said, these are certainly lovely performances, showcasing Dulin's adroit subtlety (his control of nuance in these almost universally quiet and sedate pieces is admirable and emotive). Also worthy of note is his discrete use of high quality synthesizer embellishments as well as his tasteful improvisations (such as the playful intro to and intriguing duet-reworking of Erik Satie's signature piece "Gymnopedie #1" here re-titled "Simply Satie"). In fact, the last time I heard such restrained use of electronic strings was on the Michael Hoppé/Tim Wheeler collaboration, *The Yearning*. These string orchestrations never dominate the piano, instead fleshing out some of the selections quite nicely, adding just enough dramatic "oomph" to flavor the track with something extra.

While I have tended to shy away from whole-hearted endorsement of this CD, that should not be taken as a criticism of the recording itself, which is a beautiful piece of work from the artist. Instead, consider my review a "cautionary" statement to fans of previous Dulin recordings, such as *Atmospheres* or *The One I Waited For*. While the selections on this album are all, for the most part, gently romantic piano and synthesizer (or solo piano) pieces, there is no escaping the fact the music is firmly rooted in the classical idiom (an obvious statement). However, if you are looking for a piano music album to play in the background (or even listen to directly) that is soothing and yet not somnambulant or syrupy, *Timeless* certainly will fit the bill. As a final comment, devotees of classical music - have no fear. Michael Dulin's interpretations would offend the sensibilities of only the most zealous proponents of strict adherence to the originals. Translation: *Hooked on Classics* this ain't! What it is, though, is recommended.