

# **Red Sky Prairie**

**By**

**Sharon Fendrich**

**Written by**

**Steve Sheppard**

It is not often that I get to review the work of a debut artist I know personally, especially one that I remember so well from a meeting with our friend *David Lanz*, and Fendrich names Lanz as one of her musical heroes, so here now, with the release of this her debut album **Red Sky Prairie**, she takes her first steps into the world of becoming an official recording artist, and what stunning first few footfalls they are indeed.

**Red Sky Prairie** is part of the new and growing revolution in music called Neo Classical, and this addition must probably rank as one of the most impressive to be released for many years. The starting point of our voyage of tone is a track called **L'Dor Vador**. Ok, so I had to look this one up as my Hebrew is one of many languages I have no grasp of at all, it means from generation to generation. The softness of touch on this piece was so noticeable and the added instrumentation and vocals would go onto make this simply the best start to an album I have heard for years.

On **A Secret's Song** we have a film score waiting to happen, a tribute to the work of *James Homer (Somewhere Out There)* maybe, but a full flowing, emotional and moving opus indeed. Fendrich follows the passionate refrains from an excellently played Violin (*Wilfred Sassen*) and thus the result is pure genius bathed in the beauty of a truly moving arrangement.

**Within Whispers** has to have one of the most inventive starts I have heard for some time, the wind blows softly across the face of time; do we hear its words of wisdom? The Celtic influence on flute here creates a fresh, but familiar backdrop of sound, and this symbiotic partnership between the piano of

Fendrich and her flautists *Helen Hendriks* and *Les Muller* are but a beauty to listen to, a wonderfully crafted duo here of instrumentation, this is one song I would advise listening to many times over.

I think I may have hinted to Sharon that one thing I love as a music writer and listener is to hear the sounds of a storm in a composition, such a scene setter for me, and it looks like she has taken me up on that suggestion with this next piece, her title track **Red Sky Prairie**. Storms however are balanced with the natural calm of the nature and here I do believe she has created a classic tune that will be loved by many listeners, who like to cross the borderlands of the new age genre into the neo classical. Perfectly timed crescendos a wonderful passionate fluency, all go to create in my view one of the most complete pieces of music I have heard this year.

There is a moment of time when the mood changes and you can feel it deep within your musical soul, that time has now arrived with the offering **Song of the Dove**. Fendrich has utilised the talents of Russian vocalist *Anna Emelyanova* on this her first release, and that talent shines so brightly on this quite breath-taking composition. The lyrics are from the little used world language of Esperanto and manifest a true feeling of a desired peace in a track that is one the most empowering perhaps off the album.

An amalgamation of languages is within your realm now on the piece called **Never Alone**. The combination of English, Spanish and Yiddish vocals all go to manifest a real one world, one people ethic. Fendrich on this performance in particular, has that beautiful *David Lanz* influence flowing through the piece, and that cannot be a bad thing can it? Whilst listening to the track one can really feel a sense of togetherness come from the composition and even the piano is seemingly played with this in mind. **Never Alone** is a very complex offering, extremely well delivered and very well played.

We have now started our journey down from this hillside of musical mastery, and as we do so we come across a charming musical narrative called **Moonswept**. Here is a track that illustrates just how a multi-instrumental offering should be played, this combination of Flute, Harp, Violin, and of course piano, gifts us a piece that is not only full flowing, but utterly beautiful and quite fun to listen to as well.

This next piece is perfectly placed on the album, as we are now swimming in the deeper waters of the release; it is called **Bittersweet Memory**. I have had many of these in my life, those happy moments that are tinged with a small grey cloud of regret and longing perhaps. This track for me does exactly what I described above, the combination of flute and piano provide us with a moment to open the memory box, and then gently close it again, remembering the lessons we have learned. The performance here is so moving and deeply touching; Fendrich on piano employs a gentle touch of the keys, but adds more weight when needed, the strings just further manifest a deeper moment of emotion for us to all enjoy.

Sorrow is a reality we have all felt at one time or another, and the art in making music to heal such wounds is well known, few can do it brilliantly and it is to that list that the artist now must be added. **Last Tears** is the track we flow with now and combines strings and piano in a way that doesn't just move the heart, it literally tugs at it with such a powerful surge of emotive brilliance. The Cello (*Joep Willems*) in particular here, adds a whole new dimension to this offering and Fendrich's piano performance is so deeply moving.

The back story behind this next piece is a devastating tragedy that occurred to the occupants of the fateful Alaska Airlines flight 261, who all perished after an accident. Fendrich at the time was not sure if one of those lost was someone she knew. The vocals are in Latin and create a truly memorable moment of heartfelt music, the sweeping string sections add to that, and allow this river of sadness to flow to its final destination of peace, thanks to this most emotional narrative we now know as **In Memoriam**.

Our last stop on this simply marvellous debut album by pianist **Sharon Fendrich** is called **That September Day**. I guess all of us have our memories of 9/11; I was live on radio at that time and had to hold it all together for hours describing all I saw. This has to one of the hardest tracks to have not only put together but also played, but Fendrich does it so well, and manifests along with the multi-instrumental and vocal nature of the composition, a perfect ending track, one that rounds off one of the best debut albums I think I have ever heard.

It seems a life time ago since we met up with the artist, and to now look at this amazing journey she has embarked upon literally brings tears of joy to my eyes, for in my view she has probably produced the perfect debut album, kudos to her team of other artists, all previously mentioned within this review as well.

The production quality and art work, each lush performance, yes it is all right here for you and done so brilliantly, that you're going to want to be ready and waiting for the next album to arrive. Fendrich has created the perfect beginning for what we all hope is going to be an extremely long, happy and forth coming career for the artist. **Red Sky Prairie** is an album I am more than happy to recommend, no I will go further, I literally insist you buy it, truth being, said Neo Classical music simply doesn't come any better than this.