

Will TODD (b. 1970)

Songs of Magical Creatures [14:56]

Lights, Stories, Noise, Dreams, Love and Noodles [23:58]

I will Light a Candle [3:59]

Kites, Cards and Constellations [13:33]

Philip Craven (piano), The Finchley Children's Music Group, The Will Todd Ensemble, The Bach Choir/
David Hill

rec. 2018, St Jude's Church, Hampstead, London

SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD591 [56:27]

I last [reviewed](#) Will Todd's music here as part of a two CD set from Signum containing his "Ode to a Nightingale". I enjoyed it very much, and was impressed by his melodic gift and extremely colourful orchestration, but expressed a mild reservation concerning his use of cymbals.

This CD from Signum Classics features a smaller instrumental ensemble and some of the works are unaccompanied or simply have a piano; consequently, a restricted range of instruments is available to the composer. I am pleased to say that this restriction has in no way affected the impact of these works or my enjoyment of them.

The shortest work, *I will light a candle* with words by the composer, is the piece that had the most immediate impact on me, so much so that I played it repeatedly. It is unaccompanied, and the choir, occasionally split into two parts with brief solos. It is very effective and melodically enjoyable, and I feel that it deserves popularity.

The disc opens with *Songs of Magical Creatures*, settings of three songs by Shakespeare, *Over hill, over dale*, *Full Fathom Five* and *If we shadows have offended*. The straightforwardly melodic settings with imaginative orchestration are lovely, including tinkling percussion and brushed cymbals, giving a magical texture that supports the songs so well; *Full Fathom Five* is particularly effective.

Next are settings of children's poems by the poet Michael Rosen, given the overall title of *Lights, Stories, Noise, Dreams, Love and Noodles*, forming a 25-minute cantata. They are performed by the extremely impressive Finchley Children's Music Group together with the adult choir. Once again, Todd's melodic gift is well to the fore, and is designed, I feel sure, to appeal to the youngsters. He occasionally uses a jazz ensemble to accompany them; I have to say that I am not a fan of jazz and never will be, but I must admit that it goes well here, both in the up-tempo sections and the slower ones.

The CD closes with *Kites, Cards and Constellations*, its words by the composer and accompanied by the piano. It was composed as a commission from the Blanco family for the tenth anniversary of Marc Blanco's death, which, in the view of his mother Sheila, has still not been satisfactorily investigated nor explained. Will Todd explains that he wrote the words for *Kites, Cards and Constellations* after discussions with Marc's mother, thereby gaining an impression of his life and character. These discussions helped Todd create the piece, which, like everything else on the CD, is beautifully performed and displays the composer's style very well.

The recording is absolutely first rate, as are the performances. As should be obvious, I have thoroughly enjoyed this disc.

Jim Westhead