

Drawing clear inspiration from the medieval choral traditions that grew out of the resonant cathedrals of Europe, Mary Jane Leach arranges for voice pieces that sound both holy and exotic.

Calling on the nine-member all-female New York Treble Singers and the Cassatt String Quartet (resident quartet for New York's Bang on a Can Festival), "O Magni Vasti Creta" is a stunning opening for the disc. The nine-minute piece's half-dozen refrains are in ancient Cretan, Italian and Greek; thus Leach reaches into her toolbox of the antiquities for phrases and verses of fitting content and tonality.

The album also contains one instrumental. "Windjammer" is a languid rhapsody of incomplete, suggested themes shared in conversation between oboe, clarinet and bassoon. Leach began her work as a composer accompanying herself to an eight-track recorder. She revisits this technique with magical effect in "Tricky Pan." Taking its lyrics from sources in the 1300s, this is a piece for solo countertenor and tape beautifully executed by David Lee Echelard (Blue Heron Consort).

The title track is Ariadne's wailing in the round from Monteverdi. The disc closes with Leach's own work on the same theme, "Song of Sorrows," a powerful hymn of the forsaken, majestically performed by the mixed-voice Rooke Chapel Choir.

Thomas Schulte

Copyright © 1994-1999 CDNOW, Inc. All rights reserved.