



Deep Blue Ian Clarke

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British flutist Ian Clarke, professor of flute at London's Guildhall School of Music, made his international debut at the 2001 NFA Annual Convention in

Dallas, and appeared again at the NFA's 2005 convention in San Diego. His second CD, *Deep Blue*, is another remarkable recording from a remarkable musician.

Clarke would qualify as remarkable purely for his flute performance, possessing a huge sound and flawless execution that effortlessly incorporate extended techniques as needed. It is an approach that is perfectly matched to his material, which consists entirely of original compositions by Clarke himself—who is also a remarkable composer. Many of his pieces have entered the standard repertoire, aided by meticulously prepared sheet music available from his website at ianclarke.net. Students in particular benefit from this, as Clarke is also a remarkable educator.

Given the impeccable execution of this material by Clarke and pianist Tim Carey (including intricate overdubbing on “Curves,” with Clarke playing all three flute parts), the focus turns to the compositions themselves. What is remarkable about these is the genre: Clarke has created a sound world entirely his own, one that hovers intriguingly between several different genres.

While his recordings are classified as “classical”—*Deep Blue* is moving up the “classical” charts in the UK—that designation is of even less than usual use here. They have a jazz sensibility at times, although they are certainly not jazz—there is no improvisation here. They should probably be called “contemporary” music, but Clarke’s work is very different from much of that genre. It is almost entirely tonal, if quite chromatic and/or coloristic in places, and the extended techniques

are always subservient to the overall musical purpose. The result is that Clarke’s sound world avoids the trap of being locked into the one-dimensional affect characteristic of much contemporary music.

A case in point: The opening title track combines subtle manipulation of intonation with a sensibility that hovers between timeless universality and a pop ballad. All these pieces are full of color and movement, programmatic to some degree—though not as much as “The Great Train Race” from Clarke’s first CD—and possessing an engaging freshness. Of course, this is only his second recording, and it remains to be seen if he can retain that quality after his 10th or 20th. So far the signs are very promising.

—Peter Westbrook