

## American Choral Directors Association

**Meredith Monk: *Basket Rondo*; Eric Salzman: *Jukebox in the Tavern of Love*  
The Western Wind Vocal Ensemble  
Labor Records LAB 7094 (2014: 47')**

The pathbreaking American vocal ensemble The Western Wind came together in 1969, with a mission to perform European and American early music, as well as contemporary American music. Having commissioned and performed works by William Bolcom, Bobby McFerrin, Matthew Harris, Tania León, and many others over the years, the group is celebrating its forty-fifth anniversary with the release of this recording of new works by Meredith Monk and Eric Salzman. As detailed in the disc's copious grab-bag of program notes, both pieces were written in close collaboration with the ensemble, with the musical lines, ranges, and characters crafted with each of the six singers' unique voices and personalities in mind.

Meredith Monk's *Basket Rondo* consists of eighth short movements (between forty-two seconds and three minutes each): three "basket" movements (at the beginning, middle, and end), as well as four "bells" and one "calls." Monk's "baskets" are woven; that is, they introduce and display each individual voice, then eventually weave them together so that both the individual colors and combined textures are apparent. Developed via improvisation and workshopping, the work makes use of Monk's usual palette of extended techniques—howls, growls, and shrieks—as well as long, lyrical wordless lines. Despite the lack of text, or perhaps because of it, *Basket Rondo* transcends mere improvisatory technical display, creating arresting musical textures and colors with a wide range of emotional affect.

Eric Salzman's *Jukebox in the Tavern of Love*, on the other hand, is an intensely learned and referential work, but one with a passionate heart beating within. Commissioned to pair with Adriano Banchieri's *1605 Barca di Venetia per Padova*, the piece is a modern madrigal comedy, with a motley cast of contrasting characters spending an evening together in a New York neighborhood bar during a storm-induced blackout. The characters tell their stories, with plenty of interjections from the others, and their stylistically distinct numbers range from the Broadway Dancer's infectious Brug Chug Shuffle—sung with zany enthusiasm by soprano Laura Christian—to the intensely affecting tales of the Catholic Nun and Orthodox Rabbi, beautifully performed by soprano Kristina Boerger and Elliot Levine, Western Wind's baritone and one of two original group members on the disc, along with countertenor William Zukof. Though the recording naturally suffers from the lack of costumes, blocking, and stylized movement that were integral parts of the original conception, the piece still comes across as both musically and theatrically vital—a highly effective updating of a venerable genre.

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