



CD Reviews

Pianism

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ARMEN DONELIAN

Mystic Heights: Grand Ideas, Volume 2 (Sunnyside)

What we have in *Mystic Heights* (Sunnyside) is an exercise in tranquillity by Armen Donelian. Simply put, it's a lush, introspective outpouring of eight original ideas, six of which include elegies and homages. No "Enigma Variations," just highly personal sketches. The title track is generally free but at all times gentle. "Ode" is an elegy for one of Donelian's spiritual teachers; "Devotion" is an aptly titled reaction to the playing of saxophonist Joe Lovano; a borrowed motif comes from his most influential piano teacher, Richie Beirach, who helped Donelian fuse his classical and jazz backgrounds. The gossamer bitonality of "Exiled Dreams" is Donelian's goodbye to saxophonist Thomas Chapin, who died in 1998. "Spree" effectively breaks the intense rubato of reflection and gives his left hand a chance to show it is equal to its counterpart. But nowhere in the album is a hint of his colorfully eclectic ethnicity—predominantly Armenian, with added flavors of Turkish and Syrian.

-Harvey Siders