

REVIEWS OF SCOTT JOHNSON'S *AMERICANS*

Philadelphia Inquirer

by David Patrick Stearns
Sunday, Jun. 27, 2010

After decades of building his guitar-based chamber works around prerecorded voices, composer Johnson reaches a level of artistic consolidation here that perhaps even his greatest admirers couldn't have anticipated. Thanks partly to breakthroughs in electronic technology, his use of prerecorded voices in his three-movement *Americans* emerges with an intricacy, sophistication, and fluidity that leave little questions as to what it all means.

The title piece is based on fragmented voices of Afghan immigrants in the United States, talking about how Americans tend to look alike and dreaming of what their homeland was like in more orderly times. The other pieces on the disc - "The Illusion of Guidance," "Bowery Haunt," and "Anthem Hunt" - don't consistently maintain that level of brilliance, but always take rock-music reference points out of their usual formula and put them at the service of Johnson's tough, uncompromising imagination and taste for musical density.

San Francisco Chronicle

by Joshua Kosman
Sunday, August 1, 2010

Composer Scott Johnson has a canny signature move: He takes taped snippets of casual speech, often no more than a few seconds long, and builds elaborate contrapuntal tapestries out of their inherent melodies. The results could easily devolve into silly gimmickry, but they don't, and at their best they're profound and beautiful. "Americans," the 20-minute triptych that leads off Johnson's new CD, is his most arresting work in years. It includes the reflections of a Chinese immigrant and of an Afghan American mourning for a homeland she scarcely remembers, and those two movements frame a Babel of various voices that creates a vivid melting pot in sound. The effect is both haunting and exhilarating, and Johnson's ebullient instrumental work, dominated by electric guitars and woodwinds, gives the whole thing an eerie vitality. The three instrumental pieces that fill out the disc don't approach that level - they're largely single-idea creations that don't elaborate much. But "Americans," a vibrant, multilayered masterpiece, makes it all worthwhile.

Los Angeles Times

By Mark Swed
August 29, 2010

Scott Johnson is a post-Minimalist composer and electric guitarist who has created groundbreaking works with sampled speech. His sources have included Patty Hearst and the late political writer I.F. Stone. In "Americans," which has come out on Tzadik, he turns to the voices of American immigrants. "Americans all look the same to me," one says, Johnson's score bouncing the words back and forth rhythmically and contrapuntally against a backdrop in which the lines become grooves and enter a listener's consciousness in sly and alluring ways.

Time Out New York – 10 Best Classical Albums of 2010

by Steve Smith
January, 2011

Any new release from this exacting guitarist and composer is cause for celebration; that the titular work on this one turned out to be among his most provocative creations was a substantial plus.