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ALIAS *Hilos (Threads)*

Naxos

The ALIAS Chamber Ensemble's new release *Hilos* on Naxos American Classics features works by composer Gabriela Lena Frank, whose multicultural heritage is reflected in the diversity of her musical influences.

ALIAS was founded in 2002 by Local 257 member violinist Zeneba Bowers. Cellist Matt Walker currently serves as executive director, and the collective's musicians on this project include clarinetist Lee Levine, violist Chris Farrell, violinist Alison Gooding, and percussionists Todd Kemp and Christopher Norton. Frank's four compositions feature different combinations of these players and the results take the listener on a most rewarding musical journey.

"Hilos (Threads)," which begins the album, is a new work written especially for Alias, and immediately sets the tone for the whole project with its dramatic opening sequence which features seamless interplay between Bowers, Levine, and Walker, along with the composer's aggressive, startling piano work. Frank's inspiration in writing this piece is the colorful textiles of Peru. Its eight movements run the gamut of human emotion, and the players all rise to the occasion.

The interweaving textures alternately soothe and sparkle, and each player has the spotlight on occasion. Levine's nimble clarinet, in particular, handles some very demanding parts with aplomb.

The duet for two marimbas, "Danza de los Saqsampillos," conjures up exotic South American street scenes and Andean mountain jungles. The melodic and rhythmic execution of this demanding material by percussionists Todd and Norton is excellent throughout. Walker is featured with Frank on the cello/piano duo "Adagio para Amantani," and his performance is a tour de force of the tonal and rhythmic possibilities of the cello.

It starts with a languid feel, and gradually builds to an intense peak before dissolving into a peaceful ending. The final piece "Quijotadas," is a five movement string quartet

piece inspired by Cervantes' immortal character Don Quixote. It has the most traditional instrumentation on the album but the challenging music and varied textures once again show the wide emotional range that is possible when a composer's concept and the musicians' interpretation become one.

The impeccable sound of the album, recorded at Blair School of Music's Turner concert hall and engineered by Gary Hedden, only serves to enhance the dynamics of the ALIAS Ensemble. This album is a fantastic example of the diversity, talent and vision of Nashville's classical music community, and congratulations go to all concerned for a world-class effort. — *Dave Pomeroy*