

David Kane -- Cadence Magazine

(1) SIORA "Vis-a-Vis" (Miowan 1003)

(2) SIORA "Visions of the Dry Bones- Jewish Songs" (Miowan 1004)

(3) Phyllis Chapell & SIORA "The Other Side of the River" (Illumination 1002)

Three strong efforts from SIORA, a group co-led by vocalist Chapell and keyboardist Kleiman (recently deceased, unfortunately). Their mission is the promotion of what they term "World Jazz", a term that, after hearing these three CDs, is certainly an apt one. Though clearly coming from a Jazz base, this music is infused with various "world" elements; language (seven on (1) alone); instruments that range from the penny-whistle to the Dumbek as well as rhythmic and melodic styles derived from Jazz, Jazz-rock Fusion, Brazilian, Latin, Middle Eastern/Jewish, Celtic and others. Their personal fusion of these elements is successful and they somehow manage to retain fidelity to their ethnic inspirations while producing satisfying Jazz. Kleiman emerges as a real creative force here with his strong playing, arranging and composing. Chapell also impresses with her expressive, supple voice, her command of languages (as sung at least) as well as a being a co-writer (lyrics probably) on several tunes on (1). Another element of their artistic success is the inclusion of key guest musicians such as the peripatetic Howard Levy among others. As I mentioned, all three CDs are admirable in their own way. (1) is a good introduction to the group as it features a "around the world" smorgasbord of the group's influences with tunes from Brazil, France and Israel et al. as well as an imaginatively re-concieved "Habanera" from *Carmen* and a couple of nice originals ("Moment" and "Goodbye").

I admit that my expectations were a bit low for (2), the CD of Jewish songs as I contemplated a wearying 41 minutes of lugubrious minor key Jewish tunes.

Happily, though the album does consist of nothing but lugubrious minor key Jewish songs they are clothed in Kleiman's creative arrangements that, while retaining the

melodic integrity of the originals, manages to find all manner of interesting reharmonizations and rhythmic settings to invigorate the necessarily limited raw material. I don't speak Hebrew so I can't comment on the accuracy of Chapell's pronunciation but it sure sounds correct (as do all of her multi-lingual songs). The third CD, (3) was produced posthumously but features Kleiman throughout. It also features my favorite tune from all three CDs, "A-E-I-O-U", a musically appealing song that also manages to sum up what I imagine is the group philosophy- "We are all connected". Needless to say, I really enjoyed all three CDs and as I listened to Kleiman's excellent musicianship I wondered why I had not heard of him beforehand. I was thus saddened to read of his sudden departure but at least he has left behind these these three excellent CDs to document his admirable creative spirit. I hope Chapell keeps the group together and continues to promote their particular vision of "World Jazz" as it is a worthy concept indeed.

Recommended.