American Reflections
Leonard Garrison
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This CD features two Robert Beaser compositions. Souvenirs for piccolo and piano (2002) contains six miniatures, of which the longest, “Spain,” is just under six minutes, while the shortest, “Happy Face,” is about two minutes. Garrison and pianist Jonathan Sokasits render these evocative little pieces with the lyrical sensitivity and joyfulness that each requires, the piccolo playing is sophisticated and even elegant. “Y2K” evokes all the questioning and uncertainty of mood we remember from that millennial turning. Variations for flute and piano (1982) may perhaps be more familiar to listeners. Garrison executes each of the variations with appropriate technical virtuosity, but what I most enjoyed, as in the piccolo and piano composition, was the sensitivity with which pianist and flutist seemed attuned to each other’s music-making. There is no unnecessary haste here, no apparent anxiety, to conclude the musical conversation.

Nino Rota:
Improviso
Albatros Ensemble
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This disc of works by Nino Rota is recorded by the Albatross Ensemble, featuring flutist Stefano Parrino, with Alessandro Marangoni on piano, Alessia Luise on harp, and Giovanni Crola on flute. The opening track is the arresting Trio for flute, violin, and piano, a dramatic piece of writing with its turbulent first movement, passionate central movement, and dazzling finale. The Sonata for flute and harp is an expressive and characterful three-movement work and a gem in the repertoire. Tre Pezzi per due Flauti (three pieces for two flutes) begins with an imitative movement performed here by two well-matched players. The second movement is simple and mournful, and expressively performed. The piece ends with a highly enjoyable florid waltz. The Cinque pezzi facile per Flauto e Pianoforte were written a little before the duets, and are a set of five simple melodies, each with its own individual characters. The Allegro veloce for flute and piano is, as the title suggests, a virtuoso display with charm and energy. With a duration of under two minutes, this wonderful miniature would make an excellent encore piece for a recital. The final track is the Rotafantasy, a trio arrangement by Rocco Abate that brings together many of the film soundtrack themes that Rota is known for, including La dolce vita and I Clowns. The disc also features two wonderful performances of works for violin and piano, the Improviso and the Sonata for violin and piano. This is a highly enjoyable disc of repertoire not previously known to me. The Albatros Ensemble perform with flair and serve as excellent ambassadors for Nino Rota’s excellent music.

—Carla Rees