

SOMEI SATOH

Toward the Night

NEW ALBION NA 056CD • 1992, 49:43

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★

Sound Quality ★ ★ ★ ★

Though written several years apart, the three pieces on *Toward the Night* have much in common: all are clear-eyed meditations on death, grounded in Buddhist philosophy; all possess a stark lyricism; and all employ a similar musical approach. Certainly, the pieces comment on and build upon one another, creating a genuinely moving whole greater than its parts.

Ruika, for cello and strings, is “an anthem to mourn the souls of the departed.” Brief musical passages lapse slowly into silence, only to have their themes rephrased and repeated. The mournful, commanding tone of cellist Masaharu Kanda is especially noteworthy. *Toward the Night*, relatively the weakest of the compositions, uses the string ensemble Endless to continue the ideas of *Ruika* and serves as a bridge to the disc’s final track, *Homa*.

Written for soprano and strings, *Homa* is a prayer for the peace of composer Somei Satoh’s late grandmother. The text, chanted as a mantra, is sung by Kyoko Sato, who first sounds tentative, then angry and confused, and ultimately accepting. Her strong, clear final note is followed by the simple sound of a cymbal—a moment of great calm, and a resolution of the composer’s own feelings of anger and confusion.

—Michael Giltz