

apparently taped for some sort of documentary. This is the only color item among the extras.

HANSEN

LAUTEN: *OrfReo*

Marshall Coid (Ray Johnson), Charlotte Surkin (Lethe), Meredith Borden (Persephone, Crow), Peter Castaldi (Lion); The Queen's Chamber Band/ Robert Palmer—4-Tay 11—30 minutes

OrfReo (2004) is a short musical theater piece by Elodie Lauten (composer of *Waking in New York*, a theater piece about Allen Ginsberg, S/O 2003). Her subject is the artist Ray Johnson, who drowned mysteriously off the coast of Long Island in 1995. (He was the subject of John Waters's memorable 2002 documentary *How to Draw a Bunny*.) This is a semi-staged rehearsal of the work, set on the stage of Merkin Concert Hall in New York in front of an audience. The video is rather amateurishly produced, the music decently played and sung by these professional New York performers.

Ms Lauten's piece is in neo-baroque mode, her small ensemble of flute, oboe, and strings supplied with expert continuo by harpsichordist Elaine Comparone and enthusiastic onstage conducting by Robert Palmer. Lauten's harmonies drift all over the map with her patented outer-space voice-leading—an ideal match for the thoroughly strange dramatic proceedings. Orfeo/Ray Johnson (Orf-Ray-o), in search of his beloved Beatrice (why not?), must cross the river Lethe (sung by dramatic mezzo Surkin). "Sing, Orfeo!", the river commands. Persephone appears in the form of a Crow (coloratura Borden): "Death is the only emperor of ice cream!", she chirps virtuosically. "You'll drown!", she warns. "Ray Johnson committed suicide by drowning!" Beatrice, as it turns out, is also Elodie (Lauten). Orfeo will free them both from hell. He is led offstage. The end.

Subtitled "The Orphic Death of Ray Johnson", the piece is simply too delightfully bizarre to criticize too much. The star of the show is countertenor Coid, who plays deceased artist Johnson attempting to cross the river. (Those who have seen the film mentioned above might find it hard to imagine Mr Johnson as a countertenor, but remember he is simultaneously composer Lauten in this scenario.) Coid is of creamy voice and commanding presence; the spectacle is without a doubt something to see. This is essentially a memento of a performance of a piece not likely to be duplicated in the near future, so if you have an interest in this composer's unusual work you will want to investigate this release. I found it fun. No extras, short playing time.

GIMBEL

American Record Guide