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“BLACK BEAR’S HUDSON VALLEY TALE” – A Musical Storytelling

CD reviewed by Jacqueline LeClair, Bowling Green, Ohio

This 2009 CD contains one work, “Black Bear’s Hudson Valley Tale,” a musical story for young children presented by the eclectic and imaginative ensemble, Madera Vox. The narrator/singer along with musicians colorfully paint the story with original music written by the group’s percussionist, David Gluck. Children’s author Iza Trapani wrote the story, an adventure in the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains that takes Black Bear on an archetypal transformational journey. The performance is lovely and the children’s chorus that sings on some the songs is a nice touch. Gluck has written evocative music to with Trapani’s story. The music is playful and fun, a combination of styles including influences from Classical, folk, jazz and popular musics. Madera Vox’ s perfectly quirky collection of instruments adroitly portrays the spectrum of moods and characters called for by the exciting story, ranging from sad ballads to hair-raising chase scenes. The oboe, English horn and bassoon are particularly well featured in solo passages.

The sound quality and balances on this CD are excellent and add to the CD’s clear, easy to understand quality. Families with children ages 4 – 8 or so would love to listen to this musical story. Madera Vox performs this musical story live in their community and on tour along with other intriguing repertoire. We can also look forward to their IDRS Conference appearance this summer.

Chamber ensembles like Madera Vox that perform in a variety of community locations like libraries, coffee houses and schools – bringing live classical music to the community – are essential for maintaining the vitality of serious live music. Of course, it is especially important to perform for children to spark their imagination about our instruments and music. Bravo to Madera Vox for their commitment to this terrific repertoire and reaching out to families and kids!