

Artist: Mark Morton  
CD: Thresholds  
Released: 2002  
Label: Basso-Profondo  
www.Asodb.com  
Genre: Classical

Dr. Mark Alison Morton is a virtuoso bassist with an impressive musical background. In addition to his orchestral and solo efforts, many writings and masterclasses he is well known as an exceptional teacher and pedagogue. He's won first prize in the International Society of Bassists' Solo Competition, was assistant instructor to Gary Karr, and holds a doctorate from the famed Juilliard School. He has authored the "Dr. Morton" series of books and is artistic director of the American School of Double Bass. With such a busy schedule it is no wonder that his recording output is still in its early stages. *Thresholds* is Morton's first solo CD although he did share a disc with legendary bassist Gary Karr which featured the music of Paul Ramsier.

Morton states in the liner notes that "This compact disc has a twofold purpose: One goal, of course, is that it would be listened to and enjoyed on a purely musical level. The other is that this CD would be used as a reference for bassists to hear examples of music that they might be playing or will be inspired to play in the future."

The selection of music reminds me of Gary Karr's earlier recordings with its unique collection of lesser-recorded yet essential bass literature.

*Thresholds* includes the following compositions:

- Sonata in G minor - Eccles
- Vocalise – Rachmaninoff
- Gavotte - Lorenziti
- Kol Nidrei - Bruch
- Allegro Appassionata - Saint-Saens
- Apres un Reve - Faure
- Concert - Capuzzi
- Prayer - Bloch
- Romance and Rondo -Keyper
- Grassland Song - Chang Pao Yuan

With a few surprises, the choice of music consists of staples of the double bass literature. I dare say that every serious high school and college bassist has performed or is currently practicing one of these pieces. I have never heard the Lorenziti piece before receiving this disc. It is a delightful piece and I plan on programming this newfound gem on my next recital.

So, how does the disc sound? In a word, 'precise'. Morton is exact in aspects beyond mere technique. His interpretations are thoughtfully presented. His articulation is beautifully clear. His tone is beautiful and sonorous. His vibrato is exquisite; perfect in speed and width.

The disc opens with the Eccles Sonata, an interesting opener with its slow first movement but the first two notes will have every bassist on familiar territory. On the introduction he plays the melody as written but on the repeat he adds some very beautiful ornamentation; exactly what this melody needs if

one is going to hear it twice. Student bassists are now going to have to rethink their playing of this and justify their lackluster reiterations of this theme!

Morton's superb playing continues throughout the disc. Each piece contains just as much thought and planning as the previous. Lest I forget to mention the accompaniment, Dianne Frazer Cross performs all accompaniments on piano and complements Morton well. Morton chooses to use a piano accompaniment in each instance, even the concerto; probably the most familiar scenario for his intended audience. Although the Eccles Sonata was in all probability intended for harpsichord and of course the concerto to be played by an orchestra the piano is the most likely candidate for students.

My only complaint, albeit quite negligible, is both the bass and piano have a substantial tone, which occasionally makes for a dense mix. Perhaps this is a production issue as some slight equalizer adjustments on my stereo made for cleaner listening.

Mark Morton is an incredible musician and is doing many great things in the bass world. Students and professionals alike will welcome this CD into their collections. I look forward to future volumes in Mark Morton's *Thresholds* series. His skillful playing is sure to inspire bassists everywhere, including this writer.