

Silver Skies (Megan Sterling, Kristian Chong)

A century of French and Australian flute music persuasively played.

Clive Paget on 10 August 2026 - **LIMELIGHT MAGAZINE**

“Why record these pieces?” asks Megan Sterling, principal flautist at the Hong Kong Philharmonic and Australian pianist Kristian Chong. Their reply is simply that they are among their favourite works for flute and piano, and yet this album is no ragbag of bon-bons. Indeed, it comes across as a thoughtful survey of a century of chamber music and a lively demonstration of how, on occasion, the French approach to the flute has influenced music written in the Antipodes.

It opens with the most familiar music here: Poulenc’s warm-hearted sonata, a work that opens in a mood of Proustian nostalgia and ends in a whirl of Gallic bonhomie. The playing is outstanding (as it is throughout). Chong, a probing, sensitive presence, gives due prominence to the unfolding of Sterling’s lyrical line in the central cantilena before the two players link arms, as it were, in the energetic finale. They are equally compelling in Gaubert’s First Sonata, a piece that really does deserve to be heard more often. The melismatic opening Modéré is a heartbreaker, the s Allegro moderato shaded with a sense of regret that perhaps derives from Fauré. Sterling’s elegant tone exudes sure-footed grace, the balance between instruments is spot on, and the pair’s sense of musical communion is palpable.

There’s a certain Debussyan allure about Carl Vine’s 1992 sonata, which opens in mysterious spinning semiquavers. In a teasing first movement, the shifting tonal centre seems endlessly up for grabs, the two instrumentalists at times seeming to have slightly different ideas. The slow movement almost channels Messiaen, the finale nods to Poulenc, and yet it is somehow all Vine. It’s a world away from Miriam Hyde’s Five Solos, a set of miniatures with their roots in early-20th-century pastoralism (though as French in parts as they are English). “Beside the Stream” ripples and “Marsh Birds” warble before the final “Evening Under the Hill” brings the recital to a close in a mood of gentle serenity.

Frank Martin’s haunting Ballade and Ann Boyd’s iridescent Goldfish Through Summer Rain complete a charmer of a disc on the new Azure Sky label, the brainchild of Hong Kong-based Norwegian music industry executive Astrid Angvik.