



**THE
DOUBLE
REED**

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and recommend it strongly for everyone's listening pleasure.

Rating: 4(!) Crows



PRIMAVERA: MUSIC FOR BASSOON AND PIANO BY BASSOONISTS.

Michael Burns, bassoon; Inara Zandmane, piano.

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This is a difficult, but very exciting review for me to write, since one of my own compositions is included in this beautifully wrought CD. Along with my *Sonata for Bassoon and Piano (For Irmgard) (revised 1997)*, brilliant New Zealand bassoonist, now professor of bassoon at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, **Michael Burns** has selected some wonderful bassoon works all of which have been composed by bassoonists themselves, and recorded them in absolutely stunning interpretations. Among these compositions is my personal all-time favorite work, the *Sonata (1981)* by **John Steinmetz**, which I consider to be the very finest composition for bassoon of the 20th Century. But that is not all. Using a sabbatical leave from UNCG, Michael not only recorded these works but also visited each of us composers for a "lesson" from us on our individual compositions. The result is a CD of incomparable beauty and performance finesse of the very highest order.

Besides the works mentioned above, Michael and his fantastic pianist Inara Zandmane, who is also on the faculty at UNCG, perform Michael's own *Two Aotearoa Sketches (2004)*; *Reverie and Dance (1989/1990)*, by **David Kirby**, and *Prima Vera (2000)* by **Ray Pizzi**. In each case both artists have interpreted and recorded each work with incredible skill and artistry.

What can one say about the Steinmetz *Sonata*? If you have performed it, as I was fortunate enough to have done, then I am sure it has become one of your very favorite works. I heard it for the first time myself at the Rotterdam IDRS Conference in 1995, performed by John himself. I was struck by its beauty, immediately bought the music from John, and performed it shortly afterward. (Now the work is conveniently available in a nice publication by TrevCo Music: TCO 1506).

Michael's interpretation of the Steinmetz is exceptional. His performance of the last movement is so stirring and moving that I can practically cry every time I hear it! I am not exaggerating. What a way to open a CD!

Michael's own *2 Aotearoa Sketches: Moods/Modes* and *A New Year's Piece* follow next. According to the excellent program notes, that are also a valuable addition to the CD, "Aotearoa" is the native Maori name for New Zealand, and is usually translated as "the Land of the Long White Cloud". These lovely two movements are very warm and listenable works written in a neo-classical style of expanded tonality, bordering on impressionism, but with a lot of jazz flavor as well, particularly in the second *Sketch*. There is also some nice jazzy tone bending that Michael adds to the mix in this movement. This work is very exciting rhythmically and colorful throughout. It would be a lot of fun to perform. Like the Steinmetz, it is published by TrevCo (TCO 1332). Hopefully it will reach a larger audience through this recording.

The next work on the CD is another very fine showpiece for the bassoon, *Reverie and Dance* by David Kirby, (also published by TrevCo: TCO 1125). It begins with a beautifully lyrical theme before yielding to a highly rhythmic fast dance. The balance between lyricism and rhythmic excitement is very nicely equated in this work, enabling the bassoonist to showcase both the melodic and technical capacity of the instrument. The style is modern but tonal. All in all it is a fine, listenable work that would go over well with any audience.

Ray Pizzi's *Prima Vera* follows, and once again it puts the bassoon into the realm of pure jazz. After a slow, quite impressionistic intro, the bassoon gets "down and dirty" with a super-cool jazz riff that sounds like it would be wonderful to perform. This eventually gives way to the slow opening theme and the work ends quietly on this note. Wonderful piece, but unlike the others, not published by TrevCo. Instead it is available thru Ray's website: www.raypizzi.com.

My own *Sonata for Bassoon and Piano (For Irmgard)* concludes the CD. I won't describe the four movement ca. 20 minute work, and I will leave it up to the listener to decide its musical worth. What I will note, however, is the incredibly careful and exquisite artistry that Michael and Inara convey in their remarkable performance of it: indescribably beautiful. As the program notes indicate, one of the reasons I have composed so little over the years is my understanding that I don't compose music that is "easy to play". And after years of hearing so many half-hearted attempts to play my music, it simply became easier to quit.

composing than to suffer through the agony of an ill prepared performance. But Michael and Inara have exceeded my highest expectations. And for this I will be eternally grateful to them both for this stellar performance of my very challenging composition. If you like the piece (and I dearly hope you do!), it will be available soon again through TrevCo (TCO 1126).

Everything about this recording is first rate—the music, the recording technique and balance. I recommend it so very strongly to you so that you can revel in the gorgeous sounds and breathlessly beautiful music these two fine artists have created.

Rating: 4(!) Crows



NIKOLAUS VON KRUFFT (1779-1818)

Sonatas for bassoon and fortepiano

Wouter Veschuren, bassoon; Kathryn Cok, fortepiano

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Elsewhere in this issue of *The Double Reed* you will find an interesting article written by the bassoonist in this recording, **Wouter Veschuren**, describing his recent discovery of these two interesting bassoon *Sonatas* by late Classic (or possibly early Romantic) composer, Nikolaus von Krufft and an analysis of them. It is interesting that Krufft was born and lived during Beethoven's time, and with this great master, he shares some of the same stylistic traits. Since Wouter's article describes and analyzes the music so well, I will concentrate on his and his wife, Kathryn Cok's interesting and skillful performance of the works. These are the *Sonate pour le Pianoforte avec accompagnement oblige de Basson in F (1807)*, and *Grande Sonate pour le Pianoforte avec accompagnement de Basson in B flat, Op. 34 (1818)*.

Dutch bassoonist Wouter Verschuren is a well-known and widely sought after period instrument performer. Here he is playing on a 10 keyed classical bassoon by Cuvillier à St. Omer, built around 1810. His musical partner, Kathryn Cok is performing on a 5½ octave fortepiano, constructed in 2007, after a ca. 1805 instrument by Walter and Sohn, so there is no question of the authority of their instruments and resulting sonorities.

While neither sound "modern", nor do they sound so antiquated that one cannot enjoy the artistic skill

and musicianship of both performers. Wouter gets a very nice, full and clear sound out of his early 19th century bassoon. Stylistically, he performs without much vibrato, but the sound is very controlled and clear and enjoyable to hear, possibly quite close to the style of the 19th century performer. Technically, he plays with excellent skill and precision throughout the recording. Much the same technically can be said about Kathryn's fortepiano playing. Although her instrument lacks the sonority and sustaining quality of a modern piano, it still can make a pretty impressive "noise", and I am sure that such pianos as this one, upon which Beethoven and/or Mozart would have performed at that time, would have sounded pretty "sonorous" to their late 18th and early 19th Century audiences. Her technical skills match perfectly with those of Wouter.

Both *Sonatas* are impressive stylistically and length wise. The first is an almost 30 minute work, with the opening *Adagio sostenuto – Allegro brillante e con fuoco* taking up almost half of that time of the three movement work. However, the second *Grande Sonate* is even a bit lengthier at about 32 minutes, due most likely to an almost 10 minute finale of this four movement piece. As Wouter notes in his analysis, the first *Sonata* is quite Classical in style, but the second breathes more of early, sometimes Beethovenesque Romanticism.

Bravo to these two artists, first of all for finding these interesting, impressive works, second for recording them, and lastly for giving use a "taste of the past" with these fine historical performances of them. I strongly recommend this recording.

Rating: 3 Crows



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