

THE CLARINET

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CD Review

By Michele Gingras

RICHARD NUNEMAKER: GOLDEN PETALS. Igor Stravinsky, *Ebony Concerto* (1945); Janice Misurell-Mitchell, *Alone Together* (1987); Paul English, *The Saxophone, for Solo Saxophone and Female Narrator* (1991); William Thomas McKinley, *Golden Petals* (1985); Artie Shaw, *Concerto for Clarinet* (1940); Playing time 67:06. MMC Recordings Ltd., 240 West Street, Reading, MA 01867-2847; CD-MMC2005.

Here is a recording perfectly adapted to the beginning of a new century. Depending on different viewpoints, this is either a fantastic breakthrough or simply another step towards a synthetic world....

Richard Nunemaker is a member of the Houston Symphony Orchestra where he performs on the clarinet, bass clarinet and saxophone. This recording displays his admirable versatility and expression on these instruments, and features two important jazz concertos, and three new American Works. What is unique about the making of the disc is the electronic orchestration of both concertos. The works have been given new sonorities through re-orchestration for clarinet and computer-assisted synthesizers by jazz pianist Paul English.

Richard Nunemaker knows jazz. He plays freely and idiomatically expresses a full palette of emotions. His versatility on several instruments is impressive and he has the background to match. He has recorded tributes to Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman with Newton Wayland and the Houston Symphony, two Pro Arte compact discs entitled **STOMPIN' AT THE SAVOY** and **AMERICA SWINGS....**

The new music works on this CD include Janice Misurell-Mitchell's *Alone Together*. Currently on the faculty of DePaul University, Mitchell earned several composition awards and grants. *Alone Together*, a single-movement duo for bass clarinet and double bass (used in its jazz mode) is introspective and quiet, with both instruments in their low range. The style fluctuates from jazz to free jazz to atonality. It is an interesting conversation between players allowing much space for Quasi-improvisation....

...*The Saxophone for Solo Saxophone and Female Speaker* by Paul English. English is one of the most respected jazz pianists in Texas. He performed with such jazz greats as Dizzy Gillespie, David Liebman and Arnett Cobb. He devotes most of his time studying and developing his skills as a serious composer, and already has written numerous works. *The Saxophone* uses a 1924 text by English newspaper correspondent William Bolitho Ryall. Many ideas in this piece work very well. The speaker's phrases often are matched by the sax's expressive playing....
Nunemaker's virtuosic jazz playing is right on....

Golden Petals by William Thomas McKinley is the featured new work on the CD. Born in New Kensington, PA, in 1938, McKinley is one of America's most prolific and sought after composers. He learned jazz piano as a child, and by the age of 12 was a member of the musicians union. He has worked with Richard Stoltzman, who has inspired, commissioned, and performed a host of McKinley's works which mix jazz and classical roots. *Golden Petals* is a large-framed dramatic two-player concerto for bass clarinet plus saxophone and double bass, commissioned by Nunemaker. The accompaniment is refreshing in that a real orchestra is used, The Pierrot Plus Ensemble with David Colson conducting. Along with the Shaw concerto, this is my favorite work on the recording. It has minimalist and improvisatory elements which are precisely notated. Double bassist Peter Herbert is quite amazing with his high harmonics and flashy pizzicatos. Nunemaker sounds terrific on the soprano sax. The piece is intense and interesting, with a great sax cadenza.

The Pierrot Plus Ensemble was formed by music director and conductor David Colson in 1986. The group consists of eight professional musicians, five of whom are members of the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Students at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music supplement the ensemble, enabling Pierrot Plus to present chamber works for any number of players. I give the ensemble and Richard Nunemaker an A+ for their performance on this CD. The Shaw concerto... is a dazzler and is a good reason to acquire the CD.