

The Clarinet

Volume 34 Number 2

March 2007

by Dileep Gangolli

The Louisville Project. Richard Nunemaker, clarinet and bass clarinet; with Dallas Tidwell, clarinet; Timothy Zavadil, clarinet and bass clarinet; Andrea Levine, clarinet; Krista Wallace-Boaz, piano; and The Louisville Quartet (Peter McHugh and Marcus Ratzenboeck, violins; Christian Frederickson, viola; and Paul York, cello). Jody Rockmaker: *Rothko Landscapes*; Marc Satterwhite: *Clarinet Quintet* and *Las viudas de Calama*; M. William Karlins: *Just a Line From Chameleon* and *Improvisation on "Lines Where Beauty Lingers"*; Meira M. Warshauer: *Shevet Achim*. ARIZONA UNIVERSITY RECORDINGS CD 3127. Total time 75:08. (available from Web site: <www.aurec.com> or tel. 520-749-9895/fax 520-749-9893)

I have a great admiration for Richard Nunemaker. Rather than settling into a well-respected career as the bass clarinetist of the Houston Symphony Orchestra, Nunemaker has embarked on expanding the clarinet and bass clarinet repertoire by commissioning and performing works by leading composers of our time. These works are usually quite challenging, requiring fervent dedication and inordinate amounts of practice time to bring to gestation. Accomplishing this feat is not easy, especially while holding down a full-time orchestral position with one of the leading orchestras in the United States.

Nunemaker's fifth solo CD, titled *The Louisville Project*, is a joyful collaboration with several colleagues, consisting of music he commissioned and premiered in Louisville and Chicago. It was recorded in Louisville in 2003 with musicians based in Louisville, including clarinetists Dallas Tidwell, Timothy Zavadil, and Andrea Levine - all members of the Louisville Orchestra. Most of the compositions were recorded under the supervision of the composers.

The first selection heard is by Jody Rockmaker (b. 1961), entitled *Rothko Landscapes*. Written in 2000 and inspired by two abstract paintings by the famous painter Mark Rothko, this composition, for four clarinets, employs extended techniques including an emphasis on multiphonics. The performance by clarinetists Nunemaker, Tidwell (on Bb clarinets) and Zavadil, Levine (on A clarinets) is accurate and refined. The performers approach the music with a keen sense of blending and texture—as important in this musical composition as it is in Rothko's visual masterpieces. This three-movement work shows off the dynamic possibilities of the clarinet, especially its ability to play in the softer dynamic range. With an emphasis on suspension, tight harmonies, and parallel melodic lines, Rockmaker, who teaches at Arizona State University, has added an interesting and inspired work for clarinet quartet.

The Clarinet Quintet by Marc Satterwhite (b. 1954) was written in 2002 and consists of three movements. Satterwhite, a faculty member at the University of Louisville School of Music, employs the standard combination of clarinet and string quartet, but adds an unusual quirk by asking the soloist to perform on bass clarinet in the final movement. The first movement is angular, using dramatic register leaps to

emphasize the wide range of the clarinet. An intense rhythmic motion powers the momentum of this movement from beginning to end. The short second movement, a scherzo marked "Presto delicato," acts as a playful bridge to the third movement. An understated atmosphere is created through the use of clarinet grace notes and string pizzicatos. In the third movement, Satterwhite demonstrates his understanding of the timbre and tenor of the bass clarinet. Rather than being obvious by exploiting the low notes of the instrument, the bass clarinet is scored in its resonant middle range, creating a haunting falsetto luster to the accompanying string quartet. Kudos to the Louisville Quartet, quartet in residence at the University of Louisville School of Music, for taking on the demanding task of learning this score with obvious dedication and enthusiasm.

Composer M. William Karlins (1932-2005) died while this recording was being mixed and it is dedicated to his memory, giving the project an emotional poignancy. Karlins, a longtime faculty member at Northwestern University, had compositions performed by leading international institutions, and he was especially proud of his works for clarinet and saxophone. The composer is represented by two selections on this CD, *Just a Line From Chameleon* (2001) and *Improvisation on "Lines Where Beauty Lingers"* (2002). The first work is a duet for two clarinets performed by Nunemaker and Tidwell. The second work is scored for solo bass clarinet and dedicated to Nunemaker. The theme is taken from a jazz composition written by a friend of Karlins and requires the performer to interpret the piece in a "cool jazz" style while adhering to the explicit directions regarding pitches, rhythms, and dynamics indicated by the composer in the score. Nunemaker makes good use of the artistic license afforded the performer by creating an intimate jazz atmosphere evocative of Eric Dolphy or Gerry Mulligan, while maintaining a Classical sense of proportion and measured restraint. Nunemaker's flexibility on bass clarinet shines in this work.

The music of Marc Satterwhite is repeated in *Las viudas de Calama (The Widows of Calama)*, a composition written in 2000 as a homage to the victims of the purges by Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Inspired by a poem by Marjorie Agosin, this work is scored for bass clarinet and piano. As would be expected by the title and subject matter, this is a brutal and violent composition. The performance is dispatched with abandon and despair by Nunemaker and pianist Krista Wallace-Boaz.

Completing this CD is a work for two bass clarinets by composer Meira M. Warshauer (b. 1949). Based in South Carolina, Warshauer has won numerous prestigious awards and has had compositions recorded and performed by illustrious soloists such as Richard Stoltzman and Paula Robison. Mining her rich Jewish heritage, Warshauer's music draws from spiritual themes expressed in a taut, contemporary style of writing. Her composition on this CD, *Shevet Achim (Brothers Dwell)*, is scored for two bass clarinets and is inspired by the troubled relationship between the descendants of half-brothers Yitzchak and Yishmael (sons of Abraham) who are now Israelis and Palestinians. A soulful outpouring of resignation and hope, this composition is performed with intensity and introspection by bass clarinetists Nunemaker and Zavadil. Contemporary techniques such as glissandi, flutter tongue, and micro tones are employed to evoke both the sorrow and shared promise of the future of this chronically troubled land.

This CD is a wonderful testament to how an individual musician can make a difference in creating a body of literature for our instrument through artistic collaboration with composers and colleagues. The sound and audio quality on this recording is very

good, with special emphasis on capturing the soft, pianissimo volume that the clarinet is so good at accomplishing. The performers are all dedicated to the task that such an ambitious endeavor entails. My only criticism, more a reflection of personal tastes, is that much of the music sounds too similar in aesthetic and approach, and does not display enough variety. Given that Nunemaker has selected composers whose music he champions, it is understandable that the music would lean toward similarity rather than contrast. Perhaps future CDs by Nunemaker will reflect composers whose musical voices reflect the broader spectrum of contemporary music.