



AUDIO REVIEWS: AUGUST 2021

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Nature: Chamber Music for (Bass) Clarinet.

Fie Schouten, clarinet, basset horn, bass clarinet; Jelte Althuis, bass clarinet; Eva van de Poll, violoncello; Tatiana Koleva, percussion. C. Tsoupaki: *Calling*; O. Messiaen: *Abîme des oiseaux*; J. Harvey: *Cirrus Light*; K. Saariaho: *Oi Kuu*; G. Aperghis: *Façade-Trio*; M. Finnis: *Mankind ReMix*. Sol Classics, 010. Total Time: 39:35.

Nature: Chamber Music for (Bass) Clarinet is an album with a wealth of new music written specifically for the low clarinet family. Many of the works are for unaccompanied instruments along with two works for bass clarinet as a chamber instrument.

Written for Fie Schouten in 2015, **Calling** by Tsoupaki showcases her lyrical, soft dynamic playing. Schouten's ability to use timbral definition to highlight the growth of intensity in repeated passages creates a sense of movement much like floating. Extended techniques including quarter tones, short glissandi and timbral trills accent the melodic lines. This piece is called a "lamento" by the performer and mimics the emotional build leading to deep sobbing.

Schouten performs Messiaen's landmark work, **Abîme de oiseaux** on the basset horn in this recording, which alone makes it interesting. The timbre of the basset horn is a nice addition to the soft and mysterious opening of the piece. Schouten's understanding of the low clarinet family shines with her ability to control the full

range of the instrument producing a tone quality that is smooth and dark, lending to a recording that is truly unique and special.

Harvey's *Cirrus Light* is strategically placed after two lyrical works highlighting the disjunct micro-themes and phrases present in the music. After hearing Schouten's mastery of the low clarinets, we are treated to a piece that features her soprano clarinet playing, which is equally as colorful, alive, effervescent and beautifully presented in this work. Schouten's command of the extreme ranges of the instrument and variety of articulations are showcased here.

Saariaho's *Oi Kuu* translates to "Oh Moon." In this homage to moon phases for bass clarinet and violoncello, Schouten exhibits stellar ensemble playing. Her control of bass clarinet multiphonics is astounding here; all notes are clear and balanced. Combined with de Poll's command of harmonic use and balance, the listener is treated to a unique palate of color that sounds unlike anything else on the album.

Similar to the Saariaho work, Aperghis's *Façade-Trio* makes full use of all sonic possibilities on the bass clarinet. We hear Schouten and Althuis bringing life to this intense and emotional conversation between two bass clarinets. Koleva does a breathtaking job playing the percussion in such a delicate yet present way that sounds well-balanced and thoughtful.

Referred to by Schouten as a special bonus track, *Mankind ReMix* is a work written for her by Finnissy, and in the words of the composer, "about human nature, and mankind as cultivator of nature." Thematically, this works well at the end of the album because it ties all previous works together. Schouten's unaccompanied bass clarinet playing is again featured in this stirring and lyrical work with declamatory melodies evoking imagery of standing on a mountaintop overlooking a vast swath of land. Schouten captures the depth of character with a gorgeous, warm sound used to elegantly phrase and connect even the largest intervals to create a sense of vast isolation that is somehow familiar.

The diversity of works presented combined with Schouten's expert performance on bass clarinet, basset horn and soprano clarinet make this album a must-listen for all connoisseurs of low clarinet and its music.

- Vanessa Davis