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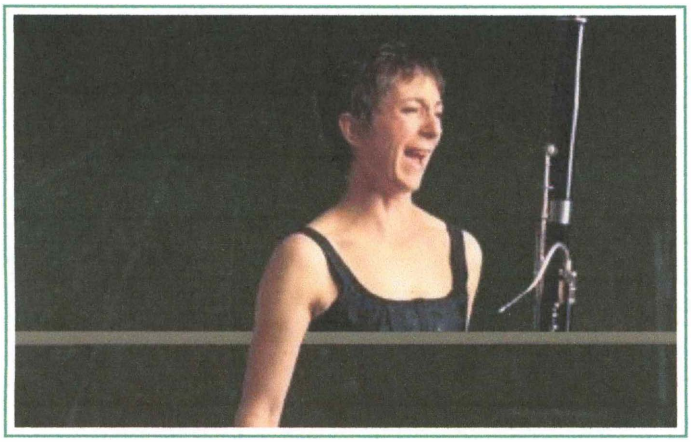
Virtuosic Bassoon: Craving Irrational Exuberance



"The future of classical music lies solely in the hands of musicians who really, really love it, and who live to perform the masterworks of all periods."

— Nadina Mackie Jackson

"The debates, before and since, over the issue of our money standard have mirrored the deliberations on the manner in which we have chosen to govern ourselves, and, perhaps more fundamentally, debates on the basic values that should govern our society. For, at root, money is the lubricant that enables a society to organize itself to achieve economic progress. The ability to store the fruits of one's labor for future consumption is necessary for the accumulation of capital, the spread of technological advances and, as a consequence, rising standards of living... But how do we know when **irrational exuberance** *has unduly escalated asset values, which then become subject to unexpected and prolonged contractions as they have in Japan over the past decade? And how do we factor that assessment into monetary policy? We as central bankers need not be concerned if a collapsing financial asset bubble does not threaten to impair the real economy, its production, jobs, and price stability."*

— Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve Board Chairman, lecture at American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, 05-DEC-1996

« ...manie à la perfection....l'instrument se rélève tout au long du récital très proche de la voix »

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" [It is useful to think of chamber music as] a narrow deep area between the novel and film. "

— Lewis Baltz

– Réjean Beaucage, La Scena Musical, DEC-2004

DSM: Do you think classical musicians tend to be more meticulous, more conformist, more submissive to authority, more self-sacrificial, more possessive, more empathetic, more disposed to think that others "take them for granted", more hypochondriacal ... more Enneagram ***2-ish*** ... than other kinds of musicians, and more than people in general?

CMT: What have you been reading?! That's the most inflammatory bullshit I've heard in quite awhile!

DSM: Oh, nothing in print. Just an acquaintance—someone who honestly thought she was reaching out to me, to visit about my interests and friends. I suppose she was merely floating a bit of the horrible misconceptions about classical music that exist among non-musically-inclined Americans. Compound that with her deep personal interest in Myers-Briggs and Enneagram analysis of personality types and you get the picture.

CMT: Well, the personal attributes that you need to master anything in life include a very high level of self-discipline. There're other eccentricities that're empirically associated with giftedness and intense focus on solitary activity—practicing your instrument or devoting yourself to composition for prolonged periods are by no means unique in that way. Where do you suppose these popular, idiotic prejudices come from anyway?

DSM: Who knows! Probably more important that we draw attention to musicians whose extrovertedness and exuberance and charm are so obvious and universal that they can blow away stupid prejudices and maybe enlighten a few people. Icons of why we do what we do!

CMT: You know, Nadina Mackie Jackson is probably, for me, the most brilliant, shining example of an icon in this way. Humble beginnings in northern BC to chamber music wizardess. Utterly mind-blowing performances and recordings.

DSM: And her rapport with her audiences! I attended one of her concerts in Ottawa a couple of years ago and, as she accepted the audience's ovation, she triumphantly one-handedly pumps her bassoon up and down above her head—she does a trotting victory "lap" in her elegant black gown, and strides off the stage, beaming, waving. Looked like an Olympic athlete upon receiving the gold medal. The crowd went wild! They went positively wild, just as fans would do in any world-class sport. How often do you see an icon like

that in classical music? How many classical artists have you ever seen evoke such a heart-pounding response in an audience?!

CMT: Yes, Nadina is very special in her ability to do that! Not unique, thankfully, but truly exceptional! I've seen pianist David Deveau produce a similar response in a Boston-area recital last year. So, yes, there are artists who do this—whose personalities are exuberant enough to do this routinely. And, you're right, it's phenomenal when it happens, phenomenal to be part of it. Charismatic's probably the wrong word. But it's like they've cast a spell. The audience is enthralled by the artist and the music. There's a synchrony of thought and feeling, a collective sense of humanity, of history and the human condition, in the air—it's quite a singular experience, and it lingers with every person who is caught up in it. It moves you, makes you want more. And I don't think these artists and composers fit into any particular Enneagram-typeable category!

DSM: Nadina began her career at the University of British Columbia and studied at the Curtis Insitute of Music in Philadelphia with Bernard Garfield and Sol Schoenbach, graduating in 1981. She plays and records with the Aradia Ensumble. She's also performed with Handel & Haydn Society of Boston, Ensemble Caprisce, and Tafelmusic. Her sustained notes catapult into frenetic motion—she is very acrobatic. Her expressive leaps between registers compel you to follow. Like listening to a riveting speaker—it's theatre and chamber music combined.

CMT: The ongoing flow of melody emanating from Nadina on-stage reveals a surprising range of moods and expressive shadings of which I never thought the bassoon to be capable.

DSM: I most like the pieces with meatier musical content and the strong performance style. The rich tone and adventurous style—quite a contrast to many bassoonists, who can be thin, pinched and lacking

in warmth.

CMT: We have to hear, the audience must hear, and most of all the musicians must hear, the music. That emphasis on hearing, and a response in the musicians' playing, is central to Nadina Mackie Jackson's conception of performance. Her sense of balance and respect for the individual player prevents her work from becoming self-referential, no matter how virtuosic it is.

DSM: And why is the supply of this vivacious chamber music commodity so scarce and volatile? In finance—overseeing the monetary policy of almost all countries—you have a central bank, a federal reserve bank or monetary authority, which is responsible for the monetary policy of the country, or for a confederation of them such as the European Union. The central bank's primary responsibility is to maintain the stability of the currency and money supply, but more active duties include managing interest rates on credit, and acting as a lender-of-last-resort to the banking sector during times of financial crisis.

CMT: The central bank also tends to have supervisory powers to ensure that banks and organizations don't behave recklessly or fraudulently. In most countries, the central bank is state-controlled and has little or no autonomy, which allows for the government intervening directly in monetary policy. An 'independent central bank' is designed to minimize or preclude government interference—like the U.S. Federal Reserve, the Bank of England (since 1997), the Reserve Bank of India, the Bank of Japan, the Bank of Canada, the Reserve Bank of Australia and the European Central Bank. You're thinking of some syllogism like the following:
money:chamber_music :: central_bank:chamber_music_bank ?

DSM: Just a thought. I acknowledge that it's got some worrisome implications. 'Centralized anything' is worrisome. But, on the other hand, we're talking about public cultural infrastructure. Privatization and free-market infrastructure in other domains have been pretty unsatisfactory so far. And you have to admit that the U.S. NEA has had a tough row to hoe in terms of budget and appropriations in recent years—you have to admit that entities like NEA are only one part of a solution [to arts financing]. Other countries' government arts endowments also have a tough time, with large fluctuations from year to year. I'm just wondering what other concepts there are out there, that would help to insure the solvency and stability of chamber music and classical music in general.

- Nadina Mackie Jackson website
- Windfest, Wilfrid Laurier University Chamber Music Workshop