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Bacchanale

Guy Few, trumpet; **Nadina Mackie Jackson**, bassoon; Toronto Chamber Orchesta; MSR Classics (MS1201) distributed in the U.S. by Albany Records. Due for release at the IDRS Conference, June, 2007.

Besides the *Concerto for Trumpet, Bassoon and Strings* by Paul Hindemith, there have been very few works combining these two diverse instruments - until now that is. In this breathtaking CD consummate bassoon artist Nadina Mackie Jackson joins forces with solo trumpet artist Guy Few and the Toronto Chamber Orchestra under conductor Kevin Mallon to provide a full album of rich, new works for this very combination.

The CD begins with a stunning new work by Canadian bassoonist/composer Matthew Luissier. And stunning it is in every way. It is in the standard three movement (Fast, Slow, Fast) concerto genre, with a slow introduction to both the fast movements, and it is decidedly tonal. But the style is lovely, melodious and stunningly beautiful in every way, with jazz and latin-like rhythms propelling the music forward with warm, "heart-on-sleeve" music. What a lovely work! That is not to say that the *Concerto* character of virtuoso "show off" music is not there. Certainly there are many passages that do this very well for both instruments. But this is somehow less important than the gorgeous "flow" of lovely music that best charactizes this work. I am thoroughly convinced that this exciting new piece by Lussier will (and should!) become a classic in the bassoon chamber music repertoire.

The Lussier *Concerto* is followed next by a solid and exciting performance of the Hindemith *Concerto* mentioned earlier. Here one finds all the somber, driving force expected from a Hindemith composition. Both soloists are on top of their game - their ensemble playing, especially the unisons (or octaves) are gorgeously together and breathtakingly in tune. Also in three movements, (two longer ones, and a delightfully short, fast, almost humorous - for Hindemith anyway - final movement), this work has deserved a consummate performance, and with this recording we finally have one.

After these two *Concerti* for both instruments, the soloists give us lovely performances of works for solo bassoon and solo trumpet and orchestra. Nadina plays another gorgeous work for bassoon and strings - a single movement 3+ minute work - once again by Matthew Lussier. Guy Few then follows with a dynamic performance of Vincent Persichetti's *The Hollow Men* for trumpet and strings, a dramatic single movement work just under 8 minutes in length, which is not heard as often as it should.

Following this is a Shostakovich *Waltz* for both instruments and orchestra, cleverly arranged by Nadina's husband, Fraser Jackson. It is a "tongue-in-cheek", brief three minute work heavily steeped in the pseudo sarcastic style that Shostakovich did so well. Matthew Lussier's *Bassango*, a delicate work for bassoon and strings, follows, again elegant and totally "chic" in a way that makes you want to get up and tango around the room. I loved it! Nadina is at her most "seductive" self here. Gosh, she can play! The title work *Bacchanale* by Lussier for both instruments follows. This is an exciting piece - much more dramatic and dynamic than Lussier was in his previous compositions. It is also more extensive at 8+ minutes in length. Each instrument has various long and short solo passages back and forth. This provides an interesting "dialogue" between the two voices that gets quite "conversational" at times. As before, the style is essentially tonal throughout, with the composer favoring minor keys. The work then comes to an end with a final exciting flourish.

And if you want to hear pure virtuosity by both instruments the final *Dance* by Shostakovich, arranged again by Fraser Jackson, gives you just that! It is performed at lightning speed in shortly under three minutes and has everything: rapid passage work, machine gun-double tonguing, etc, etc, and with the fascinating addition of a snare drum to the string accompaniment, brings this wonderful recording to a convincing conclusion in fine fashion!

I have always felt that the biggest problem with performing the Hindemith trumpet/bassoon *Concerto* (or any work with that combination of instruments) was achieving a decent balance between a somewhat "loud" brass instrument and a somewhat "soft" woodwind. Here there is no such problem. All it requires is a sensitivity to this "problem", and a wonderful concept of "ensemble" that these two consummate artists obviously have, and the problem disappears. Moreover, the beautiful string playing of the Toronto Chamber Orchestra complements, indeed strongly underlines the incredible quality of this wonderful CD.

I feel fortunate to have had the privilege of reviewing this recording prior to its release. According to Nadina, this recording is funded in part by FACTOR (The Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent On Recordings), and we can expect more wonderful recordings in the future. For now, ALL bassoonists (and trumpeters!) will want to get this one. It is marvelous, exciting music making at its absolute best. Don't let it get away.

Rating: 4(!) Crows