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BASSOONATICS!
The Caliban Quartet
CBC
Rating: ★★★

I almost dismissed this CD as pop or crossover schlock. The name of the album, the name of the group, the repertoire (chestnuts by the likes of Mozart, Brahms and Sibelius as well as recent works), the offbeat cover art and the concept — transcriptions for three bassoons and contrabassoon — made me reluctant to pry open the jewel box.

But I gave it a try and I was so delighted I listened to all 71 minutes and 12 seconds in one go. Toronto Symphony Orchestra members Fraser Jackson, Kathleen McLean and Michael Sweeney, along with Nadina Mackie Jackson (and Mark Duggan, who plays percussion in a few tracks) are crack players; Sweeney and Jackson did most of the transcriptions. Their ensemble and intonation are most impressive.

Double-reed instruments such as bassoons have an engagingly rustic, open-air quality. If I may liken sound quality to food, the Caliban's dark, chocolaty, nutty texture is a guaranteed stress chaser. — *D.L.*