

Michael Burns, bassoon

with Inara Zandmane, p

Mark 8084—54 minutes

(10815 Bodine Rd, Clarence NY 14031)

Michael Burns is associate professor of bassoon at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and plays in the Eastwind Trio d'Anches and several other regional ensembles. He has selected a fantastic program of music for bassoonists and written by bassoonists, including one of his own compositions. I am honored to share at least the College-Conservatory of Music lineage with him, and he is an excellent and accomplished performer, as this album reveals.

The program opens with a cult classic in the bassoon world—John Steinmetz's Sonata. His intent for this piece is that the piano play an equal partner to the bassoon and push the bassoon to its limits to achieve "intense expressivity", Burns accomplishes this and much more. Often the music evokes the sound of the fascinating Japanese *shakuhachi* as well as Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. Burns seems to have whittled the perfect reed and found the perfect embouchure to produce the *shakuhachi* sound, and there is strong emotion and intensity in his performance. 'Browning' (II) is great example of Steinmetz's skill at composing for his own instrument. His intuition for what makes the instrument sound good plus the skill and art of a musician like Burns blows the listener away. III, 'Lament', is another example of the type of setting that the otherwise comic bassoon is suited for. Great composers through music history have understood this. Great performers have been able to capitalize on this. One cannot write this music without understanding and feeling pain in the world, and one cannot endure performing such music if one is not in tune with the mourning.

After such a work, one cannot imagine what might come next, but Michael Burns has programmed his own *Aotearoa Sketches*, a compilation of two short works originally written for horn and flute. The first movement is a bit of a somber tune in two larger sections separated by a bit of incidental music that shifts the listener's attention from one musical thought to the next and is also used to open and closes the movement. II evolves from a point where I leaves off, and slowly draws more and more subtle jazz influences. Nearly two-thirds of the way through the piece evolves to a jovial melodic work that would find few displeased listeners.

David Kirby's *Reverie and Dance* is rooted in "set" theory, a mathematical concept extrapolated into music. For me, these concepts are always gratifying, as much of my own

background is mathematics and music—a convergence of disciplines not often explored. Kirby, who also studied at CCM, originally wrote the work for the clarinet. Burns adapted it and has performed it a number of times, including at International Double Reed Society conferences, an annual event that draws bassoonists and oboists from everywhere for a week of performances, lectures, and amusing happenings.

Ray Pizzi's 'Prima Vera', a six minute jazz and funk ballad, is a mellow piece inviting the listener to sit back and chill for a while before the program closes with Ronald Klimko's sonata. Klimko has edited the IDRS Journal since 1982 and reviewed bassoon recordings for as long. Aside from what he might say of a performance of his own piece, the work is evidently not performed often on account of its apparent difficulty. Burns makes it sound less difficult than it probably is. Klimko, a bassoonist, understands the soul of the instrument. After buying a new Heckel, he says, he wrote this piece to show it off. The listener can be sure that Burns, even if he doesn't have the same series Heckel, has something to show off.

Dr Burns has chosen a wonderful and rewarding program of music to share with us. The lyricism and inspiration beyond the music are fully realized by his ability to sing through his instrument. He communicates the essence of each piece with an intimate understanding and applies his style and technique with elan to give us this grand bit of artistry.

SCHWARTZ

Johnny Reinhard, bassoon

Pitch 200214—64 minutes

This is a compilation of concert and studio recordings of contemporary music for bassoon with various other instruments. All of the works employ microtonal writing; some use techniques like playing on the bocal and clacking the keys; and a few use other wind or percussion instruments. There is a trio for bassoon, guitar, and double bass, and probably the most interesting piece (by Reinhard) is called *Talibanned Buddhas* with cello, gongs, metal bowls, and bells, and the soloist on contrabassoon. There's also a Duo for Kaval and Bassoon.

Unaccompanied works are sprinkled through the program giving the listener a chance to warm up to the steep demands that this music presents. The first work, *Dune*, by Reinhard uses a number of these multi-phonetic and special effects, which emulate traditional Middle-Eastern stringed instruments. It occasionally sounds like a nightmare—or as the performer says in his (online-only) notes, a