

her vocal maturity allows her to achieve an emotional depth all the more memorable for the scarcity of female voices amid the inevitably male-dominated casting.

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Music of Bernard H. Garfield. John Clouser, bassoon; Elizabeth DeMio, piano; Ellen dePasquale, violin; Stanley Konopka, viola; Richard Weiss, violoncello; Michael Hope, baritone; Julia Lockhart, piano. Azica Records ACD-71254, 2010.

The bassoon is one of those instruments that receives new compositions as one might receive scraps after the main meal. Few composers begin their careers with a desire to focus their creative energies on producing literature for the bassoon; rather, compositions for the instrument generally follow those for piano, violin, flute, or other more popular instruments. Popularity is not the only obstacle to composing for the bassoon, however. The idiosyncrasies of the instrument require empathy from composers that some are not willing to give. With those obstacles in mind, bassoonists are always eager to learn of new works, especially those that feature the instrument well.

Bernard H. Garfield (b. 1924) knows the bassoon intimately. He served as principal bassoonist of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1957 to 2000. In this prominent position he was featured in a number of solo recordings that are esteemed by many generations of bassoonists.¹ The International Double Reed Society recognized his lifelong achievements by awarding him honorary membership, the Society's highest distinction. What is little known about Garfield, however, is that he completed a master's degree in composition before his work as a professional bassoonist. Many of the compositions on this compact disc come from his days as a student composer.

Garfield's compositions are well crafted and always tonal, and what they might lack in twentieth-century adventurism they compensate for with sanguine lyricism. The first half of the recording is devoted to bassoon literature. Garfield's compositions feature the bassoon at its best. Jocular leaps add excitement to the faster movements, and the tenor register (G³–G⁴) of the instrument is employed with poignancy in lyrical moments. He features the high register with appropriate orchestration, realizing that although melodic climaxes can be reached on the highest notes of the instrument, the bassoon produces less volume in the upper register. The slower movements for bassoon and piano show the influence of French literature. For example, the melodic gestures and harmonies are reminiscent of Debussy's vocal works and Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte*.

¹ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Concerto in B-flat, K.191 (Columbia MS 6451); Carl Maria von Weber, Andante and Hungarian Rondo (Columbia MS 6977); and W. A. Mozart, Sinfonia Concertante and Franz Joseph Haydn Sinfonia Concertante (Columbia ML 5374).

The Quartet No. 1 for Bassoon, Violin, Viola, and Violoncello (1950), the first selection on the disc, provides a genre in which Garfield makes his most compelling artistic statement. The counterpoint is engaging, and the forms of the movements feature concise structures typical of a neoclassical composition. The first movement contains lively interchanges between the bassoon and the strings, with the punctuated staccato notes exploiting a favored feature of the bassoon. In the second movement Garfield gives the bassoon ample opportunity for expression in all registers. The first half of the movement showcases the high register. In a surprising choice, however, the movement ends *pianissimo* in the low register, the loudest register of the instrument. Garfield brings about this effective ending by supplying the bassoonist with two muted fingerings for the last C#² and F#². The third movement provides excitement with mixed meters, acrobatic leaps in the bassoon part, and a fugal section for all instruments. The work forms a wonderful complement to Irving Fine's *Partita* (1951), a neoclassical woodwind quintet that Garfield would have no doubt performed with the New York Woodwind Quintet. Bassoonists often draw on chamber works with strings such as those written by Gioacchino Rossini and François Devienne, but few works in the twentieth century have gained widespread acceptance. Quartet No. 1 compares favorably with other contemporary chamber works for bassoon and strings, and it predates the most commonly performed works by Bernard Heiden (*Serenade*, 1955) and Gordon Jacob (*Suite for Bassoon and String Quartet*, 1969).

The latter half of the disc features works for solo piano and a set of three songs for voice and piano. The *Sonata, Tribute to Scarlatti* (1947) is noteworthy for its attractive first movement with compelling melodic sequences. The Three Songs for Voice and Piano are not likely to find their way into standard vocal literature, but they are pleasant nonetheless. "Then Come You Near" (1951) is a setting of text by Thallis Hoyt; "Lullaby" (1947) presents poetry by Thomas Dekker; and "Ebb" (1952) sets words by Edna St. Vincent Millay. The *Pieces for Piano* comprise four studies titled "Prelude in B-flat Minor" (1951), "Morning Serenade" (1949), "Lexie's Dance" (1951), and "Hornpipe" (1949). They remind one of works a student might perform for Trinity Guildhall examinations, which are annual international graded examinations administered by Trinity College in London. The *Pieces* are short works with technical and expressive demands appropriate as etudes for middle school or high school students.

The recording, however, is not without a few faults. The words to the songs are not provided in the notes. Most disappointing, however, were some choices made by the recording engineer. The close microphone pickup on each instrument could have allowed for a more balanced presentation of the Quartet. However, the panning of the work leaves the ensemble off center with the bassoon and violin in the left channel, the viola centered, and the cello to the right channel. The two most active voices—bassoon and violin—thus crowd and compete with each other for the limited acoustic space. In the compositions with piano, the bassoon is occasionally overpowered by the brighter timbre and louder dynamics of the piano. This problem is particularly pronounced in the *Scherzo*. With those issues aside, the recording gives a realistic presentation of each instrument and voice with rich timbres that are never harsh. The microphone placement for the bassoon is

especially well done—not an easy feat for an instrument with eight feet of tubing and noisy key-work.

One might best characterize this recording as a *Festschrift* or, more correctly, a *FestDigitalschallplatte*. The impetus arose from John Clouser's performances of Garfield's music and the desire of several of Garfield's students from the Curtis Institute to honor him. Clouser's performances are beautiful. His playing features a warm, full tone with an expressive vibrato. The intonation is impeccable, as one might anticipate from a musician who is tenured Principal Bassoon with the Cleveland Orchestra. Elizabeth DeMio's contributions are noteworthy as well, as both a collaborator and soloist. Michael Hope and Julia Lockhart provide expressive nuances to the songs with appropriate intimate sentimentality. The string trio, comprising Ellen dePasquale, Stanley Konopka, and Richard Weiss, render artistic performances in the Quartet with bassoon. This disc will naturally be of great interest to bassoonists. Clouser's fine playing is a welcome addition to anyone's collection of recordings. Furthermore, recorded performances of compositions by one of the United States' prominent bassoonists, a composer who fully understands the instrument, are presented here commercially for the first time.

Terry B. Ewell