

for inspiration writes that ‘this connecting thread stretches back to the early twentieth century and is filtered through my twenty-first-century imagination’. Originally written as the sonic component of a video installation, *Pause* subjects the Charles Ives fragment to a sequence of rearrangements, cyclical patterns, repetitions and ruptures over the course of the nearly 10-minute piece (the longest track on the disc). This work despite its repetitive treatment of the Ives excerpt, avoids adopting an Ivesian aesthetic, and seems more conventional in its formal development, growing to more predictable peaks and valleys of activity.

The final track on this release, *Tessellate*, is most unlike the others. Scored for solo cello and electronics, the work is fast-paced and uses a highly rhythmic sonic vocabulary in the electronic part, reminiscent of glitch music. As opposed to *where distant city lights flicker on half-frozen ponds* where the electronic resonators are subtle in their reinforcing of the solo violin’s line, the electronics in *Tessellate* rise up, becoming a dominating force in opposition to the cello. This work, like the others on the disc, is based on layered repeating patterns of material. But in this case, the patterns are perhaps less obvious to the ear.

Nangle describes the act of composing as ‘threading a narrative through sound’. But beyond the more surface level feature of recurring intertwining patterns, Nangle more accurately threads narratives through history – drawing connections through works of the past via direct quotations and embedded aesthetic allusions. Within Jonathan Jones’ words Nangle by chance stumbled upon a remarkably precise description of his own work, on display on this new release: ‘time-freezing, somber and ecstatic’.

William Dougherty
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REBEKAH HELLER, *Metafagote*. Steiger, Fujikura, Eckhardt, Lara. Tundra 006.

Bassoonist Rebekah Heller is committed to expanding the repertoire of solo and electro-acoustic works through close collaboration with composers interested in writing for the often-unsung instrument. Each composition on the album was written specifically for Heller between 2012 and 2015, and each work showcases different facets of her virtuosity.

Rand Steiger’s *Concatenation* for bassoon and electronics opens the album with a declamation of the bassoon’s lowest register in the form of

perpetual motion that morphs into six other rich and varied motivic areas. Composed in 2012, Steiger’s 16-minute work is a self-described ‘nested etude’ that exploits both Heller’s technical dexterity and her sensitivity to phrasing. The electronics play an important role in differentiating each of the seven varieties of material, as each take a unique approach to signal processing. Quivering tremolos are treated with echoes and spatialisation, slow, expressive glissandi excite resonant filters, rapid and succinct motives are harmonised, and heavy, powerful tones are fed into unexpected distortion. In *Concatenation* the processing serves to expand the bassoon’s timbral palette; true to the title of the album, Steiger and Heller create a ‘meta’ bassoon, rather than a case of acoustic solo and digital accompaniment.

Concatenation is an exhibition of Heller’s admirable performative agility. She moves seamlessly between technically demanding etude-style material and beautifully phrased melodies, a jump that is not often heard in bassoon writing.

Heller’s emotive phrasing is on equal display in Das Fujikura’s 2014 work for bassoon alone, *Following*. Heller worked with Fujikura on an earlier piece, *Calling*, that is featured on her first album, *100 Names*. While Fujikura explored the bassoon’s multiphonic capabilities in *Calling*, he dials back the extended techniques in *Following*. The lack of novel sounds is quite refreshing; Fujikura allows the listener to devote one hundred per cent of her focus to the contours of the melody. Fujikura crafts his twisting and haunting melody to cover the full range of the bassoon in a brief and almost formless five minutes. Although Heller expertly shapes the energy flow of the melody, the dynamic remains fairly static throughout the work. For such a lyrical piece, it is a shame that the dynamic range was not wider. in the recording.

Jason Eckhardt’s *A Compendium of Catskill Native Botanicals, Asarum canadense, “Wild Ginger”* is similar to *Following* in length and instrumentation. Eckardt writes that the six minute solo piece is inspired by wild ginger, a ‘perennial whose delicate, dark-purple flower, often concealed by the plant’s leaves, is supported by branching rhizomes that grow underneath’. *A Compendium* begins with gestures that recall, in both shape and register, the famous bassoon solo opening of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*. These gestures bloom into more elaborate shapes that slip into the spaces between half-steps and occasionally give way to extended periods of silence. The shapes continue to grow in complexity, becoming faster and more intricate,

until the opening gesture returns at nearly two-thirds of the way through the piece. A final twisting gesture, this time in the lowest register, follows the recapitulation. The energy of this low register foray is broken by another extended silence that reveals a meditative final section of breathy long tones and fragile multiphonics.

The segue from *A Compendium* to the album's final and most ambitious piece, Felipe Lara's title track *Metafagote* (2015), is stark. The unadorned coda of Eckardt's solo work gives way to Lara's dense and driving piece for solo bassoon and six accompanying bassoons. *Metafagote* is flexible in its instrumentation; the piece can be performed live with either seven total bassoonists or one soloist and pre-recorded tape, similar to Steve Reich's *Counterpoint* pieces. Supported by a New Music USA Project grant, *Metafagote* is the culmination of close collaboration between Heller and Lara. Their cooperation is easily heard throughout the work. Together, the musicians are able to exploit and transform the bassoon's idiosyncratic timbres, stretching the norms and expectations of bassoon repertoire. The multiple layers of bassoons often sound synthetic, causing the listener to question whether the source is acoustic or processed. Throughout the course of the 18-minute work,

the soloist moves in and out of focus, engaging with the accompanying layers in different ways: interlocutor, listener, instigator.

Heller's technical virtuosity is on full display. Lara's material covers the gamut of bassoon timbres, from dense multiphonics, screeching overtone sweeps, and frenetic bisbigliandi, to percussive slaps, breath tones and aching glissandi. The harmonic palette is fairly static throughout the long piece, but I did not find it bothersome. The energy flow comes from the changes in timbre and texture, not from changes in harmony. That said, there is an especially beautiful harmonic release at the 13:20 mark, accompanied by a contrabassoon pedal tone. This pedal tone continues as energy builds through more turbulent solo lines. Suddenly the accompaniment falls away and the solo bassoon is left to articulate a final line, ending the work with sputtering slaps.

Heller's admirable artistry is matched by her technical prowess on all the pieces of *Metafagote*. Composers interested in writing for the bassoon should take note of this album, as it showcases the true heterogeneity of the instrument's colours.

Heather Stebbins
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