

# The Clarinet

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## PETE FOUNTAIN 1930-2016

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Howell's tone has an abundance of attributes – a well-focused center, a fluidity reminiscent of Jimmy Noone and a becoming evenness from the bottom to the acute register. His use of vibrato is sparing and generally occurs at the end of a phrase, providing just enough momentum to keep the sound in motion. Altogether it is a welcome sound, atypical among improvisers.

Bronislau Kaper's "Invitation," written for a 1950s movie with Lana Turner (one of Artie Shaw's many ex-wives), is a song of considerable complexity. According to jazz scholar Ted Joia, it "uses all 12 tones as a chord root at least once." The quartet gives it a propulsive Latin cast. One wonders, though, about the players' allegiance to the song, as some of the harmonic underpinnings (three II–V–I's in descending whole steps) seem lost in modal, Coltrane-like "sheets of sound."

A highlight of the release is a version of Bird's "Confirmation," one of the few Parker heads not based on the changes of a standard. It is set at quarter note = 252, a brisk tempo (the *Charlie Parker Omnibook* has Bird clocking in at 208 bpm). It is a flowing reading by Howell with no impediments and an arresting and thoroughly idiomatic solo by Pesaturo.

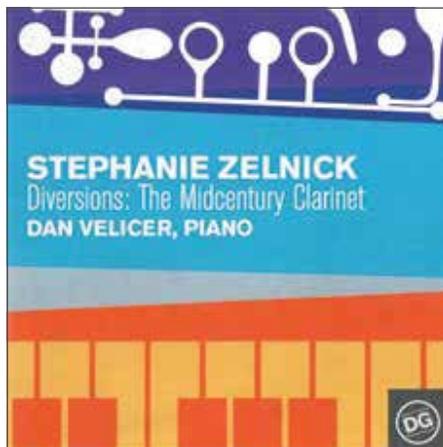
By all means, check out this CD and keep an eye on this multi-talented artist as he enters the pantheon of improvising clarinetists. *Impressive* is the word.

– W. Henry Duckham

#### **Diversions: The Midcentury Clarinet.**

Stephanie Zelnick, clarinet; Dan Velicer, piano. E. Schulhoff: *Hot Sonata*; B. Martinů: *Sonatina*, H. 356; F. Poulenc: *Sonata*; D. Milhaud: *Duo Concertant*, Op. 351. Artist produced. Total time 45:23. [www.stephaniezelnick.com](http://www.stephaniezelnick.com)

Stephanie Zelnick is an associate professor of clarinet at the University of Kansas and is principal clarinet of the Boulder Philharmonic. She was formerly principal clarinet of the Central City Opera for 16 years and has performed extensively as a soloist and chamber musician, playing in renowned venues and festivals throughout the United States and abroad.



Zelnick's newest CD, **Diversions: The Midcentury Clarinet**, captures the spirit and essence of the mid-20th century in this wonderfully curated collection of pieces. Many might be familiar with her first solo CD, **Diaspora**, that was released in 2012. This, Zelnick's second solo compact disc, is a compilation of works for clarinet and piano by 20<sup>th</sup> century European composers.

The liner notes offer:

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was indisputably a time of great upheaval, tragedy and change. **Diversions** captures four different musical snapshots from this unique epoch. Francis Poulenc, Bohuslav Martinů, Darius Milhaud and Erwin Schulhoff were all born in the 1890s and embraced writing solo pieces for wind instruments in various incarnations.

**Diversions** offers the listener a wonderful palette of mid-century clarinet music and provides a perspective into this tumultuous time in culture and history.

The album begins with Erwin Schulhoff's *Hot Sonata*. Schulhoff, a German Jew in a Czech cultural milieu, was brilliant at drawing on a multitude of styles and influences from his diverse background and surroundings. His *Hot Sonata* was originally written for alto saxophone in



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1930 and was arranged for clarinet in 2014 by Nathan Jones. The piece begins with a ragtime-inspired bass line in the piano that sets up the saucy and smooth clarinet melody, which effortlessly dissolves into cascading triplets. The meandering and casual cool that Zelnick achieves evokes the mood and feeling of a street café in France. Her dramatic flair is especially compelling in the sultry swing of the third movement and sparkling technique in the fourth movement. The clarinet's timeless sound fits perfectly with Schulhoff's aesthetic and makes *Hot Sonata* just as effective on clarinet as it is on saxophone.

The three other compositions on this disc are staples in any clarinetist's repertoire. Zelnick's performance of Bohuslav Martinů's *Sonatina* (1956) provides a compelling representation of the elegance and flourish of *Les Six* influences combined with forceful Czech melodies.

The Poulenc *Sonata* (1962) here displays Zelnick's crystal-clear tone and beautifully shaped phrases. The delicate passages of the "Romanza" movement are navigated with seamless legato and are beautifully expressive, yet stylistically fitting. The third movement of the *Sonata* is delightful, with witty interplay between clarinet and piano. Zelnick and Velicer perform this movement with a spirit that was surely intended by Poulenc.

The album closes with *Duo Concertant* (1956) by French composer Darius Milhaud, which according to the liner notes is a "light and energetic romp, filled with South American, jazz, and French influences." Zelnick's vibrant interpretation is purely expressive and allows the music to come alive. Especially beautiful is her treatment of the slow section in the middle of the piece. The plucky character of the beginning is elegantly traded for a sweet and nostalgic lullaby. Each note is shaped with care and warmth so that Zelnick's full range of color effortlessly shines through. The ending is an exciting resolution for the piece, and indeed, the whole album.

**Diversions** is a very enjoyable CD. The recording quality is fantastic and the clarinet and piano are always well balanced. This album's unique value comes from not only the engaging performances but also from the presentation of these

pieces together. This thoughtful rendering of these important mid-century clarinet works would be an excellent addition to any clarinetist's library.

— Anna Roach

**The Captive Nightingale.** Elena Xanthoudakis, soprano; Jason Xanthoudakis, clarinet; Clemens Leske, piano. A. Spath: *Alpenlied*; C. Kreutzer: *Das Mühlrad*; H. Proch: *Scheitzers Heimweh* and *Die gefangene Nachtigall*; J. Baptist Wenzel Kalliwoda: *Heimathlied* and *Der Sennin Heimweh*; F. Lachner: *Seit ich ihn gesehen* and *Er, der Nerrlichste von allen*; F. Schubert: *Romanze* and *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*; J. Sobeck: *Meine Hemat*; P. von Lindtpaintner: *Der Hirt und das Meerweib*. Signum Records SIGCD398. Total time 64:50. [www.signumrecords.com](http://www.signumrecords.com)

**The Captive Nightingale**, trioKROMA's new release, explores little-known pieces that are thematically similar to Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (*The Shepherd on the Rock*). The trio provides a solid reference recording for many of these romantic German rarities for soprano, clarinet and piano.

Soprano Elena Xanthoudakis is the driving force behind this disc. Her sparkling, flexible voice gives gorgeous color to the stories. Her research also unearthed many of these previously unrecorded works. Her brother, clarinetist Jason Xanthoudakis, provides the clarinet obbligato, deftly matching his sister's musicianship. Pianist Clemens Leske provides a sensitive accompaniment, though these selections – originally intended for salon performances – rarely give him a chance to shine.

What emerges overall is a disc full of birds, maidens, shepherds and valleys. In short, this is a pastoral music lover's dream. Unfortunately, *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, the most famous work in the collection, overshadows the other composers' offerings. Hearing it near the end reminds the listener of what the other tracks aspire to be. Elena Xanthoudakis's performance of Schubert's masterpiece is lovely, showcasing her round sound and



flawless technique.

Of the remaining works, three stand out as gems. Peter von Lindtpaintner's *Der Hirt und das Meerweib* (*The Shepherd and the Mermaid*) is a substantial piece about desire and deception with ample opportunity for word painting. The shepherd, portrayed by the clarinet, is seduced by the mermaid-soprano into the sea and, presumably, his death. The story is gripping and the writing effective.

Another rarity, Heinrich Proch's *Die gefangene Nachtigall* (*The Captive Nightingale*), exudes wistful mourning and gives the musicians plenty of opportunities to showcase their skill. Finally, in *Der Sennin Heimweh* (*The Homesick Milkmaid*) there are great opportunities for interplay between the voices.

The performers provide readings that showcase their masterful sense of ensemble. Unfortunately, this CD is marred at times by its production. In some numbers, the balance between the voices is superb, showcasing a captivating dialogue between the vocalist and clarinetist. *Der Hirt und das Meerweib* is particularly well done. Most tracks, including *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* and the opening piece *Alpenlied*, suffer from balance issues. The ensemble plays like a well-oiled machine but it is often hard to hear the piano and clarinet lines over the voice. It is as if they recede into the songs' various valleys, and then reappear after the soprano's phrase. This was tested on various speaker systems without improvement.

Overall, this disc's value lies in Elena Xanthoudakis's vocal virtuosity and her dedication to expanding the repertoire.