

The Clarinet



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All We Are Given We Cannot Hold.

Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble: Kevin Noe, conductor and artistic director; Lindsay Kesselman, soprano; Erika Boysen, flute; Gunnar Owen Hirthe, clarinet and bass clarinet; Nathalie Shaw, violin; Norbert Lewandowski, violoncello; Ian Rosenbaum, vibraphone and glockenspiel; Oscar

Micaelsson, piano; Garth Newel Piano Quartet: Teresa Ling, violin; Evelyn Grau, viola; Isaac Melamed, violoncello; Jeannette Fang, piano; with Mingzhe Wang, clarinet; Haven Trio: Lindsay Kesselman, soprano; Kimberly Cole Luevano, clarinet; Midori Koga, piano. D. Biedenbender: *Shell and Wing*; *Red Vesper*; *all we are given we cannot hold*; *Solstice*. Blue Griffin Recording, BGR649. Total Time: 77:54.

This lovely collection of works by David Biedenbender features several groups and is unified by the composer's lyrical and poignant music. It is a treat for the listener to be immersed in Biedenbender's evocative work through the lens of such strong performances on this well-crafted and executed album.

Shell and Wing, recorded by the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, is based on text by Robert Fanning and beautifully interpreted by soprano Lindsay Kesselman. The group cohesion and strong ensemble intensity matches Biedenbender's musical portrayal of love, loss, and yearning.

The next piece on the album, *Red Vesper*, is recorded by the Garth Newel Piano Quartet with Mingzhe Wang, clarinet. Inspired by an evening prayer ritual and the beauty of our national parks, the group matches the dramatic musical setting with a unified and cohesive sound and a strong arc throughout the piece. Wang's effortless and rich tonal palette is a wonderful part of this profound work, and his mastery of the clarinet is on full display. He blends perfectly with the strings, creating a nuanced and effective soundscape. If there was any slight critique, it would be that the engineers could have let Wang's warm and inviting tone come through a bit more in the mix.



Phases. Sam Boutris, clarinet; Sophiko Simsive, piano. L. Cahuzac: *Cantilène*; R. Schumann: *Three Romances*, op. 94; L. Bassi: *Fantasy on Themes from Verdi's "Rigoletto"*; C. Debussy/arr. S. Boutris: "Clair de Lune" from *Suite Bergamasque*, L. 75; C. Nielsen: *Fantasy Piece in G minor* for clarinet and piano; C.M. von Weber:

Andante et Rondo Ungarese, op. 35. Musica Solis, MS202401. Total Time: 47:07.

Sam Boutris leads a diverse career as concerto soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician while also maintaining a full private studio. His students have earned prizes in the International Clarinet Association student competitions and gone on to attend many prestigious institutions. Boutris is a graduate of the Curtis Insti-

Biedenbender describes the poetry of Robert Fanning on the track *all we are given we cannot hold*, as immersed in the art of finding the profound beauty in fleeting everyday moments. On his website he encapsulates the *gestalt* of the piece in reference to a conversation with a friend:

We were talking about how my children often snuggle up and cuddle with me, and she was reflecting on how her grown child no longer does that when she said, "cherish those moments. They are so special and beautiful, because you won't realize until later that it was the last time that they did that seemingly small thing." There are so many moments in life like this, and my hope with this piece is to reflect on their poignant beauty in an attempt to live in them more fully.

The Haven Trio, polished and imaginative, is the perfect group for Biedenbender's diverse and expressive compositional style. Comprised of Lindsay Kesselman, Kimberly Cole Luevano, and Midori Koga, the group is equally poignant as they are virtuosic. Seamless in their execution and their ensemble work, the group is so unified in sound and technical acumen that they can switch effortlessly between traditional and extended techniques without so much as a ripple in the texture of the music. The amazing musicianship of the players allows the listener to be immersed in Biedenbender's ethereal music and Fanning's touching poetry. Luevano's clarinet playing is as rich in tone as it is deep in interpretation. Her vocal and effortless technique allow the listener to be fully immersed in the musical moment. With impeccable technique and flawless unity of sound, Luevano's ensemble playing on this album is nothing short of a *tour de force*.

The album concludes with *Solstice*, recorded here by the Garth Newel Piano Quartet. The piece evokes the changing of the seasons in the beautiful Allegheny mountains. The performers are obviously comfortable as a group and match each other beautifully in expression and technical elements.

— Stephanie Zelnick

tute of Music, Yale School of Music, and The Juilliard School, and a recipient of the "Musica Solis" Grand Prize award at the 2019 Chamber Music Northwest International Clarinet Competition. In *Phases*, his debut album, Boutris is joined by pianist Sophiko Simsive who is a solo and chamber musician of the highest caliber.

According to the liner notes, "This album pays homage to the composers—but not necessarily to the same compositions—whose gravitational pull drew clarinetist Sam Boutris into distinct phases of his musical development." The works on this album include many pearls of our literature as well as some less frequently performed pieces such as Claude Debussy's "Clair de Lune" from *Suite Bergamasque* (arranged by Boutris) and Carl Nielsen's *Fantasy Piece*. These works should be added to our diet to enjoy the subtle nuances of the clarinet.

Boutris and Simsive present an elegantly crafted and engaging performance throughout this album. Boutris's vocal tone quality,