

Recording Reviews

Calvin Smith, Editor

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New York Now. Manhattan Brass, Ann Ellsworth and R.J. Kelley, horns. Wayne du Maine and Lew Soloff, trumpets; Michael Seltzer, trombone; David Taylor, bass trombone. Enja Records ENJ-9548 2. Timing: 61:33. Bernstein recorded 2005-2006 (Ann Ellsworth) at Memorial Chapel, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut; Schnyder recorded April 10, 2007 (Ann Ellsworth) at Middle Collegiate Church, New York City; D’Rivera and Marsalis recorded April, 2009 (R.J. Kelley) at Middle Collegiate Church, New York City.

Contents: Leonard Bernstein/Jack Gale, *West Side Story*; Daniel Schnyder, *Euphoria*; Paquito D’Rivera, *Four Songs*; Wynton Marsalis, *Spiritual and Blues*.

This is not your grandfather’s brass quintet! How can I describe this listening experience? Think about the various rock and roll “super groups” that have been formed over the years – Cream, Crosby, Stills and Nash, and Traveling Wilburys. Add Manhattan Brass to that list. With the lineup of Wayne du Maine and Lew Soloff, trumpets, Michael Seltzer, trombone, David Taylor, bass trombone, and hornists Ann Ellsworth (Bernstein/Schnyder) and R.J. Kelley (D’Rivera/Marsalis) the “super group” description fits. Huge talents are combined here to make an even more impressive whole. Manhattan Brass has opened a whole new world of brass quintet performance. They are carving their own special niche – they are stellar.

In the *West Side Story* set they play with impressive rhythmic energy, excellent balance, and a style that should be seen as an ideal to achieve. Jack Gale’s arrangements are absolutely first class and this recording should be heard by any brass quintet that is planning to program these Bernstein songs.

Daniel Schnyder’s *Euphoria* is a new masterwork to be added to the brass quintet (plus soprano saxophone) repertoire. It musically tells the Biblical story of Abraham, his wife Sarah, and Sarah’s servant girl Hagar. The seven movements are evocative and beautifully describe the scenes and events of this story. The soprano saxophone is artfully fused into the brass quintet as an equal member. Schnyder’s music is completely capable of standing alone but every time I listened to it I wondered if some choreography would enhance the experience and help emphasize the story line.

Thank you, Paquito D. Rivera for *Four Songs*. They are *Wapango*, *Danzón*, *El Cura*, and *Sofia*. Exquisitely and virtuosically written, they will challenge performers, even those with very high technical skill and musical maturity. This is exceptional music played with emotion, energy, and flair.

Spiritual and Blues by Wynton Marsalis was written for Manhattan Brass. They are musical gems. Wayne du Maine has

written, “The two movements on this recording are some of the most exciting, deep, fun, and proud compositions we have ever performed.” They are certainly all of those things, and when performed by truly exceptional musicians who are also enjoying themselves, the listening experience is profound. Ann Ellsworth, who has since left the group, and her successor, R.J. Kelley are strong and essential elements in this quintet. They both play with virtuosity, precision, and a stylistic mastery that could be matched by few, surpassed by none. CS

Bohemian Horn Concertos. Steven Gross, horn. Camerata Filarmonica Bohemia, Ji í Havlík, conductor. Summit Records DCD 546. Timing 57:58.

Contents: Ji í Havlík, Concerto for Horn and Strings; Jan Václav Stich-Punto, Concerto for Horn and Orchestra no. 5 in F Major; Antonio Rosetti, Concerto for Horn and Orchestra no. 2 in E^b Major.

This CD by Steven Gross and the Camerata Filarmonica Bohemia conducted by Ji í Havlík should be in every horn players recording collection for many reasons. The first reason is that it contains exceptional performances. Steven Gross delivers all three concerti with a virtuosity that seems effortless, with flair and aplomb. His articulations are clear and precise. Legato passages are smooth with a clean precision. This is horn playing at the highest level.

Another reason to own this CD is that it introduces us to a relatively unknown composer and his horn concerto. Ji í Havlík is a hornist with the Czech Philharmonic whose reputation as a composer and conductor is growing internationally. This concerto is one that should become a standard in our repertoire. In three contrasting movements it affords the soloist ample opportunities for demonstrating bravura playing, *cantabile* expressiveness, and exciting technical display.

A third good reason to obtain this CD is for the splendid presentations of two early works for horn. The concerti by Stich-Punto and Rosetti, in addition to being excellent music, are important for their place in the history of the development of horn concerti.

The Camerata Filarmonica Bohemia is a very fine ensemble. Led by Maestro Havlík, they are an excellent partner to Gross’s superb solo performance. This is a well recorded CD with a warm, rich sound, with clarity and presence. CS

De Herfst Blaast Op Den Horen (The Fall Now Blows its Horn). Jeroen Billiet, horn and natural horn soloist; Jan Huylebroeck piano. The Mengal Ensemble: Jeroen Billiet, Bart Indevuyt, Mark de Merlier Frank Clarysse, natural horns. Steven Bossuyt, keyed bugle in B^b; Jan Huylebroeck, Ophicleide in C. Phaedra 92065. Timing 61:52. Recorded March 22–25, 2010 at Pomme Charell–Maldegem, Belgium.

Contents: Joseph Ryelandt, Sonata in E, op.18; Martin-Joseph Mengal/arr Charles Heylbroeck, *Romance* from Concerto no. 1, for Horn and Orchestra; Serge Gaucet,