

associations with these composers, Gemini can certainly be regarded as ideal interpreters of this music. These are indeed excellent and fully committed performances. Ian Mitchell is a top-flight clarinetist, and special kudos go to the soprano Sarah Leonard. All involved in this recording have a special affinity and dedication to contemporary music, which is clearly communicated in the performances on this disc.

– David Ross

French Clarinet Exports. Béatrice

Berne, clarinet; Jean-Marc Fessard, clarinet. G. Connesson: *Scènes de la vie contemporaine*; B. Cavanna: *Parking Schubert*; I. Bellocq: *Impasse*; J. Jouve: *Musica Elfica, Erratica, Fuggitiva*; C. Mennesson: *Infinite breathing 5*; L. Guérinel: *Humeurs*; P. Hersant: *10 Duos*; T. Escaich: *Ground VI*. Clarinet Classics CC071. Total time: 71:17. www.clarinetclassics.com



It was with great anticipation that I opened this jewel case the first time, as these works are previously unknown to me. The recording is an impressive undertaking: producing premiere recordings of eight contemporary French works for two clarinets. Seven of the eight duos were composed within the past five years. The two clarinetists, Béatrice Berne and Jean-Marc Fessard, are self-described as “key representatives” of the French school in this recording. The Kairos Association, which Berne directs, commissioned three works on this recording and has commissioned many

chamber works that include clarinet. In addition to directing the Kairos Association, Berne has performed on 20 recordings. Her focus is the performing and commissioning of contemporary chamber works. She is a tenured professor of clarinet at the National Conservatory of the region of Clermont-Ferrand. Jean-Marc Fessard has a degree from the Paris Conservatory with highest distinction for clarinet, bass clarinet and chamber music. Contemporary music is likewise his specialty, being the dedicatee of many new works. He is an artist on over 30 recordings. More information about these performers can be found on their websites: www.jeanmarcfessard.com and www.beatrice-berne.com.

The challenges to produce an effective recording of French contemporary clarinet duos are many. This recording is effective because of the great variety of sonic experiences throughout. The instrumentation varies from two clarinets, clarinet and bass clarinet, E-flat soprano clarinet with clarinet or bass clarinet, and two bass clarinets. These works are extremely demanding, and so the clarinetists’ ability to play with great virtuosity on multiple clarinets of the family is quite commendable. Great contrast is produced as both Berne and Fessard exhibit considerable tonal flexibility throughout the recording, producing admirably soft dynamics even in registers when it is not advantageous to do so. Additionally, contemporary techniques are employed such as slap tonguing, pitch bending, smears and circular breathing in a particularly *Moto perpetuo*-esque passage. Most notable is the tonal control on Jouve’s *Musica Elfica, Erratica, Fuggitiva*. Here, Berne and Fessard’s tones are pure, glassy and hollow at times, creating a superb effect.

Duo playing is rather exposed. Berne and Fessard produce superb synchronicity in these rhythmically intricate works. The blend and balance is likewise admirable. I envision rehearsal at great lengths to accomplish the depth of refined ensemble and like-minded understanding of these eight pieces, many multi-movement compositions. The least effective work on this recording was Hersant’s *10 Duos*. Totalling roughly 10 minutes, these short

works lack continuity and connection perhaps since several are transcriptions of other works by the composer borrowed from here and there.

Gratefully, the liner notes include commentaries from the composers for each of their works. Included is mention of other works for clarinet by these composers and each composer’s website address. It was interesting to learn, for example, that one of the composers, Evan Bellocq composed in 2011 *Oufl*, reportedly the sole existing piece written for the octocontralto clarinet in E-flat. The descriptions of the works by the composers provide great understanding for the listener. Mennesson’s description of her piece, for instance, “A swell mixing with kelp and sea-spray again and again before losing itself in the blue coastline,” provides a great picture.

This music places the duo repertoire squarely on the concert stage rather than in the teacher’s studio, where clarinet duo repertoire is often thought of as a highly effective teaching tool. These quality works of French art would be demanding additions to any advanced clarinet recital. Berne and Fessard produced a fine recording that provides exposure to these newest additions to the duo literature.

– Gail Lehto Zuger

Flying Solo. Janet Hilton, clarinet.

M. Arnold: *Fantasy*; E. Roxburgh: *Wordsworth Miniatures*; O. Messaien: “Abîme des Oiseaux” from *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*; M. Turnage: *2 Memorials*; G. Crosse: *A Year and A Day for Clarinet Alone*, Op. 48A; L.

