

Clarinet Brillante

Weiner, Bassi, Cahuzac, Bozza, Kovacs, Kalliwo-
da, Bach, Gershwin

Caroline Hartig; Claude Cymerman, p

Centaur 2572—73 minutes



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On to Centaur 2. I was little prepared for the coiled virtuosity that sprang at me from Caroline Hartig, an associate professor at Ball State University (where *do* these places get such talent from?). There are simply no weaknesses in this woman's playing, and believe me, I look close and hard. Technically, she is as first-rate as I have heard. The opening *Peregi Verbunk* (a sort of rhapsodic Hungarian dance) by Leo Weiner will knock you over, as Hartig dazzles with numbing, blazing fluidity and rich, luxuriant, gypsy-like fervor that I would have thought possible only to a native of the region. She is even able to convince me of the value of Luigi Bassi's *Concert Fantasia on Motives from Verdi's Rigoletto*, adding a degree of Italianate suavity and bravura that pulled me from the recital hall to the opera theater. Yes, the show-offiness is there—kind of hard to get rid of that—but it is totally subordinated to the riches of Verdi's score.

There is almost too much here to mention. Louis Cahuzac's (1880-1960) *Variations sur un Air du Pays d'Oc* is a marvelous tribute to a once famous and influential French player. Eugene Bozza—a name revered by most wind players—turns in a rustic, harmonically clever *Bucolique*. The *Morceau du Salon* by Johann Kalliwooda is one of the most famous of such pieces in the 19th Century and here is given a definitive reading. Just listen to how Hartig navigates the extreme ends of this instrument! Puffy, fragrant lows are complemented with superb, resolute highs that lack nothing in weight or substance. Musically, all one needs to do is turn to the amazingly idiomatic transcription of Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia*. This is great Bach playing by any standard, and I am confounded at the depth of perception and understanding that is brought to this performance, unusual for a player who is confined to the literature of a solo wind instrument.

Gershwin's *Three Preludes* have been arranged over and over for almost every instrumental combination you can think of, but never so effectively as here. Mind you, it doesn't quite replace the memory of Nadia Salerno-Sonnenberg playing them in concert, or of any number of the original piano recordings, but it can certainly compete.

Yet another opera fantasia is included, this time on *La Traviata*, and Donato Lovreglio's presentation is not nearly as persuasive as Bassi's *Rigoletto*. This is 11 minutes I could have done without, though I cannot fault the playing—only the piece. Hartig and her sympathetic and musical accompanist, Claude Cymerman, have blessed us with a recital that will certainly be in the running for end-of-the-year honors.