



What a fantastic recording! If clarinetists (or any other musicians) have not heard Libby Larsen's music, now is the time! Not only is the music wonderful, but Caroline Hartig is simply virtuosic in her performance of it. As well as possessing the ample technique required to perform these pieces, the listener gets the feeling she has an uncanny sense of line and insight into the music. Indeed, it is her ability to make the expansive leaps sound so connected and natural which makes these performances really successful. Usually it takes several hearings of any recording, especially those of newer music, to start to gain an idea of what the music is all about. Not so this time. Maybe I was unaware of the deeper meanings of the music, but from the first "come out of nowhere" attack of *Corker*, to the last sounds of *Song Without Words*, they had me. It was the quickest 55 minutes of listening I have ever experienced. The music takes great inspiration from jazz idioms, and Ms. Hartig skillfully paints different colors with her sound to match this.

Corker, written for clarinet and percussion (commissioned by Robert Spring), combines exciting, improvisational-like lines with insistent, driving rhythms in the accompanying drum set. The mood changes somewhat as the percussionist is required to switch back and forth to marimba and vibes, providing a rich harmonic accompaniment for the clarinet.

"Deep Blue" and "Salt Peanuts" make up *Blue Third Pieces* for clarinet and guitar. Taking the characteristic blues interval, the minor third sliding to the major third, and the stereotypical jazz rhythm long-SHORT-long. Ms. Larsen weaves together numerous stylistic references to these idioms.

The next selection on the CD gives the recording its title. *Dancing Solo* was commissioned by Ms. Hartig, who gave its premiere at Carnegie Hall in 1994. It seems suitable that this piece should make up the centerpiece of the disc, as it showcases the talents of both composer and performer superbly. *Dancing Solo* is comprised of four short, wonderfully contrasting movements. Although played by just one instrument, Ms. Hartig brings out the implications of multiple lines, especially in the last movement entitled "Flat Out." Exemplifying its name, it requires the clarinetist to alternate between an omnipresent, heavily rhythmic, driving ostinato and passages of wildness, giving the listener the impression of a soloist improvising over a rhythm section. It is in *Dancing Solo* that Ms. Hartig really demonstrates her musicality and prodigious technique. Whether it is executing one attack after another from silence (*à la Abîme des oiseaux*), or negotiating the sometimes steep, angular melodic lines, Ms. Hartig impresses. Her beautiful sound in the altissimo is not strident in the least, until she wants to add a certain amount of edge befitting the music.

Black Birds, Red Hills is Ms. Larsen's representation of six paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe. Originally scored for soprano voice, clarinet and piano for a multimedia presentation with slides of O'Keeffe paintings and narration based on the painter's own written thoughts, it is here presented in its revised version which replaces the soprano with viola. Depicting the striking landscapes, there are some fabulously eloquent melodic lines with a harmonic language so unique, yet almost familiar sounding.

Three Pieces for Treble Wind and Guitar again illustrates the composer's mastery of this instrumental combination. More mild in tone than the previous selections, it utilizes interesting harmonies which time and again seem to twist and turn into marvelously voiced and consonant cadences.

Rounding out the disc is *Song Without Words*. Scored for clarinet and piano, it was written as a memorial for a close friend of the composer. The optimistic tone alternates between meditative and rejuvenating passages as "three and four-note melodic fragments toll in the low bass and high treble registers throughout as a kind of cantus-

firmus invocation of Richard Lambertson," the composer's friend.

The sound throughout is excellent. The instruments are very present, but without a kind of deadness that makes the listener feel as though the performers are only three feet away. Also, the very informative liner notes give the sources for securing scores to all of these works. This recording is highly recommended without qualification as great music wonderfully played.

by Christopher Ayer

Dancing Solo — Music of Libby Larsen.

Caroline Hartig, clarinet; Robert Adney, percussion; Christopher Kachian, guitar; David Harding, viola; Kevin Purrone, piano. All selections composed by Libby Larsen: *Corker*; *Blue Third Pieces*; *Dancing Solo*; *Black Birds, Red Hills*; *Three Pieces for Treble Wind and Guitar*; and *Song Without Words*. INNOVA RECORDINGS 512. Total time 55:10. (Available from Innova Recordings, 332 Minnesota Street, Suite E-145, Saint Paul, MN 55101-1300 / tel. 612-228-1407)