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It's not often that I really enjoy reviewing CDs by solo wind or brass players (and even less that I will even review a CD by a solo percussionist). Usually, they're just not that interesting to listen to, unless their names are something like James Galway. But when I put this CD on, there was just something about Caroline Hartig's playing, as well as the delightful accompaniments by Manami Sano, that made me sit up and take notice.

Forced, as I am, to rely on the inane "biographies" that are really just puff pieces for the artists, all I can tell you about Hartig is that she has performed with orchestras and contemporary music ensembles throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Asia; she has premiered the works of such composers as William Bolcom and Donand Martino; she has performed on NPR's *Morning Edition*; and she is professor of clarinet at Ohio State University. All of this is simply wonderful promo copy, but tells us nothing of what makes Hartig tick: why she chose the clarinet and how she became such an expressive artist on it. But that she is. Every note in this remarkable recital is not only beautifully produced, but is deeply imbued with feeling and nuance. She makes you like this music, even such show-off pieces as Giacoma's *Fantasia for Clarinet* on *Cavalleria rusticana* or Carl Baermann's *Souvenirs de Bellini*, so that in the more meaningful music on this disc (such as the André-Bloch *Denneriana* and Louis Cahuzac's gorgeous *Pastorale cévanole*) one is captivated by Hartig's come-hither style and sensuous timbre. She is, quite simply, an amazing talent, one of the few wind players I've heard in the past quarter century who made me like her due to the extraordinarily high quality of her feeling and phrasing.

A note on Hartig's technique: You don't notice it. By that, I mean that everything comes out of her instrument with such tremendous ease that technique as such doesn't enter your consciousness. The notes are simply played, making phrases and full of feeling; the rest doesn't matter. Alas, what does matter is the poor quality of much of the music. There are, simply, too many fluff pieces here, too many operatic transcriptions or pieces such as the Louis Cahuzac *Cantilène* that sound like tran-

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scriptions of some *bel canto* music. It's a shame, too, because she is such an outstanding musician. It's like listening to Pablo Casals play *Yankee Doodle* or *The Caissons Go Rolling Along*. Yes, you can tell it's a great artist playing it, but what's the point? The music says nothing other than the feeling Hartig puts into it. By contrast, the "klezmer" music of Kovács is delightful, thankfully about as close to operatic paraphrases as *Bei mir bistu schein* is to *Che gelida manina*, but here Hartig's tone is too classical. Listening to Benny Goodman and Don Byron might have helped.

In addition to the wonderful playing, the sonics on this CD are simply spectacular. You would swear that Hartig was in your living room with you. There is a "back" to her tone so that you can almost hear it in 3D, and all this without SACD surround sound nonsense. Overall, a splendid disc and one worth hearing for this superb artist. **Lynn René Bayley**