

The Clarinet

(International Clarinet Association)

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by Theodore Jahn

Multiplicities. Richard Nunemaker, clarinet; with assisting artists Sylvie Beaudette and Scott Holshouser, pianists; Jay Harper, Kemoki Bunting, Brian Fruechtenicht, Scott Cummings, percussionists, David Colson, conductor; the T'ang Quartet (Yu-Ying Ng and Chek Ang, violins; Lionel Tan, viola; and Leslie Tan, cello). Jody Rockmaker *Multiplicities* (1995); David Colson: *Dragon Music* (1997); John Anthony Lennon: *Spiderdance* (1995); Richard Lavenda: *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings* (1997). RED MARK RECORDS CD 9213. Total time 58:37. (Available from Red Mark Records, 2832 Spring Grove Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45225 (<http://www.liben.com>))

The title *Multiplicities* sums up in one work (word?) the great variety of contemporary clarinet techniques and sounds to be heard on this CD. The soloist, Richard Nunemaker commissioned the four featured pieces from members of the Houston Composers Alliance (Music by Living American/Houston Composers), of which Nunemaker is past president.

The contemporary music styles represented are somewhat conservative and very accessible, even on first hearing. These engaging pieces are extremely well written for the clarinet and seem tailor-made for Nunemaker who is noted for his extraordinary skills in both classical and jazz music on clarinet, bass clarinet and saxophone.

Each composition features the performer in a different instrumental setting. The title piece, *Multiplicities* by Jody Rockmaker, is unaccompanied. *Dragon Music* by David Colson employs percussion ensemble for accompaniment. In *Spiderdance* by John Anthony Lennon, Nunemaker performs as part of a clarinet and piano duo, and the clarinet forms an equal partnership with string quartet in *Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet* by Richard Lavenda.

Rockmaker's *Multiplicities* is a tour de force of multiphonics writing for clarinet. The first note is a grating multiphonic with downward and upward pitch slides, followed by delicately produced two-note multiphonics and finally a chord progression consisting of a series of multiphonics. The multiphonics are interspersed with so-called normal sounds such as glissandi and soft, fast finger passages of 32nd notes. The logical presentation of this varied material gives the piece a definite sense of form. The great variety in timbre and motivic gestures makes *Multiplicities* the showpiece of the album and displays Nunemaker's ability to move from technique to technique with amazing flexibility.

Colson wrote *Dragon Music* for clarinet and a full battery of percussion including piano, which often provides an ostinato above which the other instruments add color and their own percussive energies. The clarinet, which is, of course, the main attraction, is employed in many ways like a percussion instrument. Rapid trills, fast rhythmic figures and extreme flourishes suggest an oriental dragon procession complete with fire-crackers. The clarinet also portrays the dragon in a more subdued and almost languid mood,

employing sustained, jazz-oriented figures which give Nunemaker ample opportunity to showcase a quasi-improvisational style; minimal percussion effects provide atmosphere and a sense of rhythmic pacing. The well-crafted and exciting *Dragon Music* is a substantial addition to the clarinet/percussion repertoire.

Lennon's *Spiderdance* is the most delightfully descriptive piece on the CD and will surely become a recital standout. As a duo for clarinet and piano, it depends heavily on the piano to describe the movements of a spider, with the clarinet providing commentary as a kind of witness to the spider's movements. The outstanding pianist, Scott Holshouser, gives a vivid impression of a spider marching up and down the keyboard.

Lavenda's *Clarinet Quintet*, commissioned to fill half an evening's program, is a large, difficult-sounding work in three movements. The first movement, "Blaze," is an exciting display of technical fireworks performed with precision by Nunemaker and Rice University's excellent T'ang String Quartet. The slow-moving "Serenade" contains rich string and clarinet sonorities evoking a little of the atmosphere of the second movement of the Brahms *Quintet*; in fact, at one point there is a startling melodic quote by the clarinet from that movement. The last movement, "Dynamo," is a showpiece containing many jazz elements and rhythms which are tossed back and forth between clarinet and strings. This piece integrates the use of clarinet and string quartet very well, with the clarinet being a part of the ensemble and not always the leading voice.

All of the performers on this album are first-rate. Nunemaker is particularly stellar. He displays effortless control of the many 20th-century techniques required by these compositions while still maintaining beauty of tone and natural ease of expression. I recommend this recording very highly, not only as a fine performance but also as a presentation of four excellent pieces of contemporary clarinet music, which deserve to be heard and performed often.