

CD Review

100 NAMES: Rebekah Heller, bassoon

by Larry and Arlene Dunn



International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) bassoonist Rebekah Heller has released an exciting debut CD on Tundra Records, ICE's own new label. Heller's performance on this album affirms her as a leading voice reimagining the role of the bassoon in contemporary music. Leveraging ICE's practice of collaborative commissions with noteworthy composers, *100 NAMES* presents five wildly different works that probe the full range of sounds a bassoon can be coaxed to produce.

Opening with Edgar Guzman's *∞¿?* (2008), loud electronic static noise is paired with Heller's provocative low blasts and sputtering high staccato notes. As the electronic drone repeats and morphs, Heller wails in a free-jazz riff reminiscent of Sam Rivers or Albert Ayler.

Marcelo Toledo's *Qualia II* (2011) is full of the sounds of the Argentine jungle. And the jungle comes alive with the chirps of birds, animals scurrying in the underbrush, and the gurgle of a flowing river. Heller produces shrieks (made by blowing her reed into cupped hands) and whispered exclamations of percussive key-tapping mixed with expressive breaths and thin melodic threads.

The sounds of ancient horns and exotic tones populate Dai Fujikura's *Calling* (2011). Exploiting the bassoon's raw, raspy timbre, the piece has a distinct messaging cadence and plays out in call-and-response fashion, beautiful and tender with long-held notes.

Heller literally becomes a trio during Marcos Balter's *...and also a fountain* (2012), performing on bassoon, percussion, and narrating text from Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*. With a sharp strike on a wood block she recites Stein's text in a mystery-shrouded whisper. Strange eerie sounds emanate from the bassoon in response to her own recitation, punctuated here and there by triangle clangs, rattle shakes, and block strikes. Heavy reverb provides a mesmerizing atmosphere of overlaid sounds. The piece concludes in a cascade of swift hard hits on the wood block and screeching bleats from the bassoon.

The CD closes with *On speaking a hundred names* (2010) by ICE percussionist Nathan Davis. The title plays on the fact that bassoon is an instrument where a multitude of fingerings are capable of producing the same sound. From its elegiac beginning, this is the most tonality-centric composition on the CD, complete with electronics repeating and transforming the bassoon sounds achieved through live processing. A wild middle section

is a track meet for Heller's fingers. Sounding like an organ grinder on LSD, it gives way to a quiet contemplative mood, with a slow-building crescendo to the finish.

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