

Sonorities of a Tenor Tuba and a Symphonic Saw

By DANIEL J. WAKIN

ODD things come out of the woodwork when you move offices, as The New York Times did recently. Among the items unearthed were a number of unusual, even bizarre CDs: a testament to humankind's ability to master the unlikelyst of instruments and to carve the classical music audience into the tiniest of niches. Hearing these CDs provided the thrill of listening to fantastically accomplished practitioners of the esoteric. Some are great musicians to boot. Here is a dog's breakfast of recordings saved from the mover's purgatory.

KALEVI AHO: CONTRABASSOON, TUBA CONCERTOS (Bis Records) Mr. Aho is an accomplished Finnish composer with a penchant for large works and concertos. Here he plumbs the depths, writing for two of the lowest instruments in the orchestra. Somewhat sadistically, he also writes into the upper registers, although the really low notes are the most thrilling. While written on a large scale, the concertos have many chamber music passages and moments of interplay between the soloist and other instruments.

The tuba player here is Oystein Baadsvik, a Norwegian virtuoso who has carved out a career as a soloist. Lewis Lipnick, the contrabassoonist of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, performs the other work, which he commissioned. Mr. Lipnick calls the concerto the hardest for his instrument. It is also one of a precious few. (Gunter Schuller wrote the first in 1978.)

SAWING TO NEW HEIGHTS WITH STEVE AND DALE (4Tay Records) Dale is Dale Stuckenbruck, a busy New York-area freelance violinist who also happens to be a virtuoso of the musical saw. Steve is Steve Margoshes, who wrote a musical based on the movie "Fame" and the Broadway-sounding tunes on this CD.

The saw has deep musical roots in rural 19th-century America, where it became popular



in music halls and among missionaries. Mr. Stuckenbruck, who stops at hardware stores in search of the finest instruments, plays a 28-inch Tru-Value model with crosscut teeth. He holds the handle between his legs, bends the top to make different tones with his left hand and bows with his right, using a double-bass bow. He achieves vibrato by shaking his right foot.

The well-played saw sounds similar to the theremin, an electronic instrument with an otherworldly quality. Mr. Stuckenbruck's violin technique gives him the ability to play with nuance, color and sensitivity.

SCREAMERS: DIFFICULT WORKS FOR THE HORN (Crystal Records) The main performer here is John Cerminaro, a former principal horn player with the Los Angeles and New York Philharmonics. He seems to have a troupe of acrobats in his

lips. He plays music requiring unbelievable agility: quick leaps between registers, chords created by humming at an interval with played notes, skittering fast notes. Difficult horn music is not just screaming: Mr. Cerminaro splats out impressively long lines in Schumann's Adagio and Allegro, demonstrating prodigious control. Other works here are by the contemporary composers William Kraft, Rand Steiger and Henri Lazarof.

MARCEL TABUTEAU EXCERPTS, WITH LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI CONDUCTING THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA (Boston Records) This recording will appeal to connoisseurs: of the oboe, of the Philadelphia Orchestra sound, of Stokowski's mannerisms. But it should also be studied by anyone interested in how musical traditions are handed down. Mr. Tabuteau, who died in 1956, is the undisputed godfather of oboe playing in this country. A legendary teacher, he established a supple style and a rich sound, and his pupils, and pupils' pupils, have populated the great orchestras of the land. The recording has 37 tracks, most of them ranging from 20 seconds to several minutes, featuring famous oboe snippets from the orchestral works of the masters. The recordings date from 1924 to 1940, and the sound quality is not great. A big bonus comes at the end: almost

the entire Sinfonia Concertante by Mozart for oboe, clarinet, bassoon, French horn and orchestra, with Mr. Tabuteau's eminent section mates also playing solo.

FROM THE BALCONY (Summit Records) The euphonium derives its name from the Greek for "sweet voiced," and Matt Tropicman's playing here is very much that. Essentially a tenor tuba, the euphonium is mainly a band instrument, but Mr. Tropicman makes a serious case for its role as a solo instrument. His recording features selections from Bernstein's "West Side Story" and Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet." The instrument fits well with the jazzy bits of "West Side Story" and makes for an exceedingly mellow, if soulful, "Maria." The Prokofiev may be less successful but is still technically impressive. Both have piano accompaniment, and percussion is added to the Bernstein.

VIRTUOSO ACCORDION (Bridge Records) Consider this 2007 release the latest statement on serious contemporary accordion music, a rich realm that has been the subject of study in conservatories for years now. The works here, played by Mikko Luoma, are challenging to the ear and mind. The contrast between the complex, intricate writing and the clichéd polka and café sound so ingrained in our ears is fascinating. After some dedicated listening, one hears an organ, woodwinds, even viola harmonics. Now how about a duet of the virtuoso accordion and musical saw?

ONLINE: MUSIC CLIPS

Excerpts of works performed by Kalevi Aho, Dale Stuckenbruck and John Cerminaro:

nytimes.com/music