

“Bad Entertainment” – by Eric Prindle

Wednesday, September 10, 2014

<http://www.bad-entertainment.net/2014/09/contents-may-differ/>

CONTENTS MAY DIFFER / Pat O’Keefe, Clarinet and Bass Clarinet

Contents May Differ, to be released later this month by Innova Recordings, is the first solo album from clarinetist Pat O’Keefe, co-artistic director of the Saint Paul new music ensemble Zeitgeist. Featuring a well-chosen selection of works by six Minnesota-based composers for clarinet and bass clarinet, unaccompanied in some cases and in others accompanied by electronics or piano, *Contents May Differ* takes listeners on a varied journey through the possibilities of O’Keefe’s instrument.

The album starts out on a light-hearted note with Jeff Lambert’s *Dissonant Grooves*, a short, angular piece with a jazzy central section. Next, by way of contrast, comes the toughest nut to crack on the program, Ann Millikan’s *Dendrite*, which never stays in the same place for long as it explores very different aspects of the bass clarinet’s sound in a series of sections often separated by long pauses. This is followed by the album’s title track, a piece by Scott Miller in which O’Keefe’s clarinet is electronically enhanced and transformed to produce an impressively immersive experience that progresses from delicacy to overwhelming power. Next, we are back to unenhanced solo clarinet with Brett Wartchow’s *Unbound*, a sort of gestural dialogue inspired, according to the composer’s notes, by Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*.

The final half hour of *Contents May Differ* features O’Keefe and pianist Paul Cantrell in two compositions written by each of them respectively. O’Keefe’s *Silent Snow* begins in a mysterious vein before transitioning into an aggressive, syncopated crescendo influenced by Ravel’s *Boléro*. Cantrell’s *The Broken Mirror of Memory*, in turn, calls to mind the “autumnal” sound of Brahms’s late works for clarinet; its four movements explore different facets of a number of recurring themes, occasionally breaking into forceful dissonance but largely residing in a calmer space.

Anyone concerned about the potential monotony of more than an hour of music focused primarily on a single instrument need not fear O’Keefe’s aptly titled album. Having pulled together an extremely diverse program, he allows each piece’s individual personality to shine through in a set of confident, thoughtful performances. *Contents May Differ* is definitely worth a listen for clarinet fans, aficionados of contemporary music, or anyone with an open mind and open ears.