

2003

X (Ros Dunlop)

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Publication details

Hannan, MF 2003, 'X (Ros Dunlop)', *Music Forum*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 41-42.

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X

Ros Dunlop (clarinets)
Great White Noise GWN004
www.greatwhitenoise.com.au

Ros Dunlop is one of those rare performers who is dedicated to the performance of contemporary classical works. This CD features the work of 10 composers, some of whom Dunlop has worked with closely over the years. She has assembled a very engaging collection of solo works for different sized clarinets, but favouring the bass clarinet. Some of the works use synthesised accompaniments.

Elana Katz-Chernin's *Twenty Five Measures* (1996) is a skittish concoction lasting less than a minute. Like many well-crafted miniatures, it whets one's appetite for a more fulsome development of the ideas presented.

Steve Ingham's *The Bastards Broth* (a wordplay on Miles Davis' *Bitch's Brew*) is an Zappaesque fusion of clichéd jazz styles and modernist gestures. Does humour belong in music? Maybe not, as this 1993 work walks a wobbly line between parody and crassness.

New Zealander Eve de Castro-Robinson's *A Chaos of Delight* (1995) is an effective exploration of birdsongs from her country. It begins with fragmentary melodic gestures punctuated with slap tonguing and becomes more lyrical as it progresses. It seems to have been influenced by the clarinet solo from Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*.

Richard Vella's *Cut to the Chase* (2001) is a frantic moto perpetuo miniature that tests the technique and lung capacity of the performer. It too has the listener wanting more.

John Rimmer's *Hauturu* is one of the most satisfying listening experiences on the CD. Its complex structure unfolds in a relaxed and organic manner and its melodic detail is always engaging.

The *Tagore Songs* by Jane Brockman represent a welcome lyrical respite in this largely atonal collection. Even so her three pieces display a modern understanding of exotic melodic strategies and richly textured accompaniments.

Frenzy and Folly, Fire and Joy lives up to its title. The virtuosity and fluidity of the writing for clarinet is a testament to Graham Hair's high levels of musical understanding and compositional craft.

The nine miniature movements of Barney Childs' *Instant Winners* for E flat clarinet (1986) are perhaps the most enigmatic tracks on the CD. They sometimes appear disjointed as individual pieces and are not convincingly structured as a collection.

The improvisation agenda of Judy Bailey's *You Can Take It Anywhere* (2000) pays off handsomely. In a way this work is richer in rhythmic and pitch inflection detail than any

of the fully composed works on the CD. Naturally this is as much a tribute to Dunlop's inventive skills as to Bailey's ability to provide the necessary performance strategies.

The audio-visual origins of Martin Wesley Smith's *X* (1999) unfortunately do not translate well to the CD medium. Wesley-Smith's artistic practice depends greatly on the images that he assembles in a multimedia program (Director), so this audio version appears as structurally and stylistically disjointed as a series of film music cues would be without the motion pictures. If you ever get a chance, however, to see the live multimedia version do make the effort. It's very powerful political art about the East Timor situation.

There are a few passages where Ros Dunlop teeters a bit rhythmically (e.g. on tracks 2 and 4), but on the whole her technique, understanding and interpretation of the works is admirable. The CD is also well recorded and produced. I certainly would like to recommend it. I found myself listening repeatedly to quite a few of its tracks, which is always a good indication of quality.