

# CD

## CD REVIEWS

### Clarinet

#### KATHERINE LACY PLAYS MOZART

Katherine Lacy (clarinet)  
Duncan Riddell (director)  
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Chamber Soloists

This new recording of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, by Katherine Lacy, principal clarinet of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO), demonstrates an exceptionally high level of artistry. Lacy is joined in the concerto by the RPO, and by soloists drawn from the orchestra for her performance of Mozart's quintet for clarinet and strings, the disc's other featured work.

I was inspired to review this record because of an article by Peter Eaton in this issue (see page 22) telling the story of the English tradition of large-bore clarinets and his own involvement in it. Lacy is a leading exponent of these instruments (made by Eaton) so one question on listening to the recording is: can you hear the difference? This debate is perhaps futile; after all, it's not what you play but how you play that matters. Nevertheless, to my ear there is the clear presence of an English sound in Lacy's playing: that characteristic bloom and breadth; a forthright, declamatory quality at louder dynamics; and a certain grainy woodiness. But more than this, Lacy has managed to refashion this sound from an older era into something that meets modern expectations for intonation and smoothness, while also offering something refreshingly different from recent recordings of the concerto that tend more towards a globally homogenised clarinet sound. Of course, non-nerds may simply hear a lovely, warm tone and wonder what on earth I'm talking about.



For the concerto Lacy uses a basset clarinet made by Eaton (although not in the quintet for some reason, where she plays the normal A clarinet). This means that we get the extra four semitones at the bottom of the range, with the whole compass of the instrument coming across smoothly and resonantly. This isn't always so: basset clarinets can sometimes sound a bit uneven, which seems not to be the case with Eaton's model, at least in Lacy's hands. (In the last issue of *Clarinet & Saxophone* we heard from Roeland Hendriks, who decided to record the concerto on the normal A clarinet due to what he feels is the compromised tone of the basset, sacrificing the 'authenticity' of the extra notes for the more urgent need just to sound good.)

Lacy is clearly a highly accomplished musician and approaches both works with a sunny, relaxed charm. Her dynamic range is wide, with some real whispers at the pianissimo end, and the mix is just right in terms of balance. The orchestra is polished and supportive, as are the chamber soloists in the quintet. Lacy conforms with the modern trend of adding improvised ornaments on repeated phrases, but does so relatively unobtrusively, never exhibiting virtuosic ego. Is the soulful depth of the concerto's slow movement completely present? That will be for each listener to decide, but the sweetly floating sonority conjured here is certainly exquisite. Perhaps the quintet was a missed opportunity as a partner work – why not something more unexpected to help the record stand out? Still, this release will more than earn its place alongside the other 900 recordings of the Mozart concerto you probably already own. And if your CD shelf or download tray won't take the strain, fear not, you can listen on Spotify – and I recommend that you do.

Chris Walters



#### BUDDY DEFRANCO: SEVEN CLASSIC ALBUMS

Four-CD set  
Real Gone Jazz

Here are over four-and-a-half hours of truly magnificent studio recordings by Buddy – the first, of very few, able to capture the essence of Charlie Parker/Dizzy Gillespie's 'bebop' style on the clarinet. This is a superb collection of accessible modern jazz, predominantly linked to the 'Great American Songbook' and well matched to Buddy's incredible talents: a beautiful 'round' sound (throughout the entire range), a delicate vibrato (where needed), wonderfully forceful articulation (driving his ability to 'groove' with his compatriots) and a generous flow of fertile improvisation (seamlessly embracing all the 'changes'). Material appears to have been sourced from Norgran and Verve 50s albums, some of which appeared in the UK on MGM. There is not a single duff solo from anyone involved, and each CD has a number of outstanding 'five-star' tracks, which I will mention.

CD 1 contains the record *Buddy DeFranco* (1952), featuring Kenny Drew (piano), Jimmy Raney (guitar) Curly Russell (bass) and Art Blakey (drums). Also: *The Artistry of Buddy DeFranco* (1954) with Sonny Clark (piano), Eugene Wright (bass) and Robert White (drums). Knock-out tracks, from the second album are: 'Gerry's Tune' (a modified 12-bar), 'Autumn Leaves' and a very fast 'Now's the Time'.

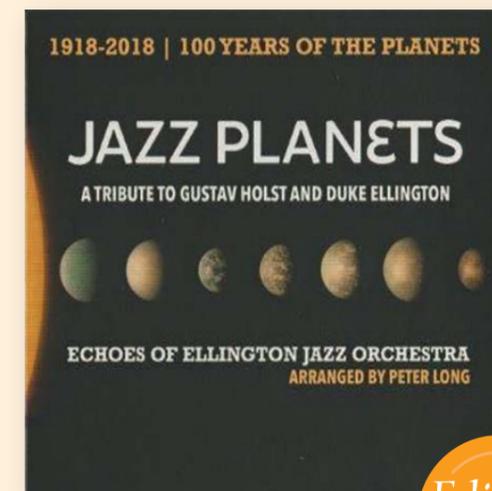
CD 2 contains *Pretty Moods* (1954; line-up as for *The Artistry of Buddy DeFranco*) and *Buddy and Oscar play George Gershwin* (1955) with Oscar Peterson (piano) plus a full orchestra with smatterings of a big band sound. Knock-out tracks: 'Yesterdays' played up-tempo from *Moods* and 'Strike up the Band/I got Rhythm' from *Oscar*.

CD 3 contains *Buddy DeFranco Waiters* (1956) with Jimmy Rowles (piano), Harry Edison (trumpet), Barney Kessel (guitar), Bob Stone (bass) and Bobby White (drums). Also: the first four tracks, all five-star, from *Mr Clarinet*, 1957. This latter album is the gold standard of bop clarinet playing – 'Buddy's Blues', 'Ferdinando', 'It Could Happen to You' and 'Autumn in New York' with Kenny Drew, Milt Hinton and Art Blakey all delivering the very best of small-group modern jazz, which carries on with CD 4.

CD 4 commences with the last four tracks from *Mr Clarinet*: 'Left Field', 'Show Eyes', 'But Not for Me' and 'Bass on Balls'. The collection finishes with another triumph of small-group competence: *Buddy and the Oscar Peterson Quartet*, made up of Buddy, Oscar, Herb Ellis, Ray Brown and Louis Bellson. Every track is a winner: 'Sweet and Lovely', 'Fascinatin' Rhythm', 'Love for Sale', 'Easy to Love', 'Pick yourself Up' and 'They Can't Take That Away from Me'.

All in all, an awesome example of clarinet technique at a bargain price.

Kenneth Morris



#### JAZZ PLANETS

Echoes of Ellington Jazz Orchestra  
Arranged and Directed by Pete Long  
Right Track Records

Fans of Duke Ellington's orchestral excursions will love this CD. Some classically oriented folk might consider it a desecration of Gustav Holst's most famous work. Whatever! Your reviewer considers it a triumph of big band writing and performance. Both Ellington and Holst were extraordinarily skilful and innovative arrangers, capable of introducing combinations of instruments that convey images in the minds of listeners relating to either the participating musicians or the titles of individual movements. Pete Long, as the big band chart architect/contractor/clarinet soloist and director, has managed to do both, and, as he jokes in his splendid CD promotional video at [www.jazzplanets.com](http://www.jazzplanets.com), 'for the same money!' Pete's arrangements are superb and brief excerpts can be found in the video.

For the benefit of readers my review will highlight the single reed content – but the band as a whole is made up entirely of top-rank sessioneers, and not every track contains a sax or clari solo, but all involve the reed section somewhere. Performance standards are exquisite – matched vibrato, fast unison runs, much doubling, and inclusion of Ellington's soloist mannerisms – demonstrating the skills expected of today's session players.

Colin Skinner delivers the alto solo on 'Venus' with gorgeous sonority, a truly beautiful re-incarnation of Johnny Hodges. The extensive baritone solo is played by Jay Craig. Forgive my sentimentality, but as Jay soloed expertly against a piano backing I had a vision of Harry Carney driving the Duke around in heaven with smiles on their faces. 'Neptune' gives Pete the opportunity to pay his respects to Jimmy Hamilton with a really impressive clarinet solo.

All nine tracks provide us with 52 minutes of what I can only describe as a delightful 'modernised Ellington aura' – in no way diminishing its attractiveness, in every way holding our attention for the entire performance and, in a subtle way, improving the final product by introducing a modern groove into the backing rhythm section (most noticeable at the completion of both 'Uranus' and 'Pluto').

I repeat: an absolute triumph of modern big band arranging and performance. Recommended most strongly.

Kenneth Morris

Saxophone

Editor's choice