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**Found Objects: New Music for Reed Trio****PEN Trio****Summit Records****©2019****\$12.99****Reviewed by: Dr. Eric Schultz**

Many of the standard pieces for reed trio, including pieces by Bozza, Franck, Ibert, Milhaud, and Tomasi, were written for and dedicated to the Trio d'Anches de Paris. In the liner for their debut album, *Found Objects: New Music for Reed Trio*, the PEN Trio proclaims a noble mission – to continue the work of the famous Trio d'Anches de Paris. Over the course of the past decade, it seems the group has been able to carry that torch quite well, commissioning works by a number of composers, and premiering these works in a variety of venues to bring the reed trio to a wider audience.

The PEN Trio consists of Nora A. Lewis, oboe; Phillip O. Paglialonga, clarinet; and Eric Van der Veer Varner, bassoon. The new album features four works written by four different living composers:

Composer William Bradbury explains in the album liner that his work *5\*4\*3 (except after C)* was instigated by his study of gamelan with Sumarsam, the Javanese master musician and teacher. Inspired by the use of five notes we would call a pentatonic scale, Bradbury set out years ago to write a piece using only five pitches. Aptly named, *5\*4\*3*, this piece uses only five notes for three players (flute, piano, and bass). For the PEN Trio, Bradbury reconsidered this idea but rewrote the rulebook. Over five movements, the pentatonic scale begins and ends the work, and is used throughout. However, after the note C (outside of the original scale), the work is freed from restrictions for a time.

The first movement is beautiful in its simplicity, and the tone quality of the trio shines. The pitch content is freed in the second movement, "Presto," when the C is introduced, which seems to force the third movement into a C minor reminiscent of David Maslanka in style. The fourth and fifth movements drift back to the original pentatonic collection.

In the notes for *Found Objects: On the Beach*, composer Jenni Brandon explains her inspiration – long walks on a California beach in the winter of 2013. Wondering about the stories of the objects she found, she decided to put this program to music. The six movements, "Tumbled Stones," "Kelly Green Sea Glass (solo clarinet)," "Driftwood," "Black Feather on the Sand," "White Sea Glass (solo oboe)," and "Seashells," each tell the story of a found object on the beach. The two solo movements stand out in this work. There is a pristine quality to the writing of each that brings out the quality of sea glass, and their simplicity would make them excellent stand-alone pieces for a young soloist looking to perform more recent music. Given that there are not many solo pieces for either instrument written by women composers, teachers should take note of these.

The name of *Oblique Strategies* by Aleksander Sternfeld-Dunn references the mid-70s deck of cards co-developed by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt featuring cryptic aphorisms intended to spur creative thinking. A theme and variations, each was created by pulling a card from the deck and following the written instruction.

Theme: Go outside. Shut the Door

Variation 1: What are you thinking right now?

Variation 2: Do we need holes?

Variation 3: Don't break the silence

#### Variation 4: Listen to the Quiet Voice

#### Variation 5: Children's Voices - Speaking - Singing

The third variation is particularly brilliant, ostensibly a contemporary take on a Bach invention. In fact, the melody is so disorienting that it almost seems like a fugue. Sternfeld-Dunn explains in his note about the work that his former composition teacher, Charles Argersinger, passed away from Parkinson's around the time he began writing the work. Because he was a clarinetist, the clarinet serves as the protagonist of the work and the piece is also an homage to his legacy.

To conclude the album, *In Threes* by M. Shawn Hundley features high energy and incessant rhythm to the end. Between articulate tutti sections, almost minimalistic, each instrument has a solo referencing a lyrical melody, but it never appears exactly the same. In this way, the work plays with the idea of repetition and familiarity. Matching articulation between the three instruments would be a challenge for most ensembles, but the PEN Trio achieves a great result.

Overall, the PEN Trio is to be commended for their work on this album. The group plays with precise rhythm and articulation, an excellent sense of intonation, and above all, beautiful tonal colors. Commissioning the music of living composers is so important for our field today. As someone who also takes the commissioning of new music seriously with my Pierrot (plus percussion) Ensemble, and particularly from marginalized groups, I was thrilled to see at least one composer from a historically underrepresented group. I mention this because I believe it is so important for classical music, moving forward, to be more inclusive.

In the words of Benjamin Britten, "*For that, as I see it, is our job: To be useful, and to the living.*"

#### **About the Reviewer**

Eric Schultz is an award-winning clarinetist based in New York City. As the 2019 1<sup>st</sup> prize winner of the American Protégé International Competition, he will be performing a solo recital at Carnegie Hall this season. He is also the 2019 1<sup>st</sup> prize winner of the Brussels Grand Prize Virtuoso International Competition, and 2014 recipient of the prestigious Rislov Foundation grant for excellence in classical music, awarded for his performance of Carl Nielsen's *Clarinet Concerto*. As an expert on contemporary articulation techniques, Schultz has been invited to perform and present at several international conferences, including the College Music Society conference in Vancouver and the International Clarinet Association conference in Ostend, Belgium. Schultz has commissioned and premiered the music of composers such as Liliya Ugay, Chiayu Hsu, Larry Baker, Omar Surillo, and Tony Solitro, and is the founding clarinetist of the Victory Players contemporary chamber ensemble. He currently serves on the music faculty at Iona College, where he directs the Iona Ensemble. As a committed teaching artist, he also serves as a faculty mentor for the Harmony Program, a non-profit that brings music education to underserved communities in New York City. Schultz will begin his appointment as Assistant Professor of Woodwinds at Coastal Carolina University in the Fall of 2020. He completed his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in clarinet performance at Stony Brook University.