



# Oboe RECORDING REVIEWS

REVIEW BY JACQUELINE LECLAIR  
Bowling Green, Ohio

## *falling still*

•Centaur 3182

**Mary Ashley Barret**, oboe

-assisted by Inara Zandman, piano; **Michael**

**Burns**, bassoon; Marjorie Bagley, violin, Alexander Ezerman, cello and Scott Rawls, viola

How many living women composers can you name? Women have been writing classical music for a very long time; but are still woefully under-represented in concert programming, commissions and educational settings. Lisa Hirsch's 2008 article online at [www.newmusicbox.org](http://www.newmusicbox.org), "Lend Me a Pick Ax: The Slow Dismantling of the Compositional Gender Divide" spells out the surprising and disheartening details. We have a long way to go before we will be representing the compositional work by women equally alongside their male counterparts. One hopes we can work together as a music community eventually to represent work by composers of all demographics equally. A step in the right direction is the recent, marvelous CD by Mary Ashley Barret, *falling still*, featuring music by women composers.

**Mary Ashley Barret** is a native of North Carolina, and is the oboe professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She is principal oboe with the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra and has performed nationally and internationally with an impressive list of orchestras and chamber ensembles. Barret has also presented recitals and master classes throughout the United States, Germany, Central America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and China. She was a co-host of the 2003 International Double Reed Society's 23rd Annual Conference, and is a Buffet-Crampon artist/clinician.

This important CD offers works by seven, diverse women composers. The first composer on this CD probably needs no introduction: Mad-

eline Dring (1923-1977), the fascinating British composer, actress, singer, violinist and pianist. She married oboist **Roger Lord** in 1947 and wrote a number of compositions involving oboe, notably *Two Dances* included here. *Danza Gaya* (1965) and *Polka* (1962) are each a couple of minutes long and are absolutely charming. These two tonal bonbons will win over any audience; but at the same time they are poetic and profound. As many times as you may play or hear these duets, they will always sound fresh and make you smile.

The second composer on this CD is Nancy Galbraith (b. 1951) who is a professor of composition at the Carnegie Mellon University School of Music. Her trio *Incantation and Allegro* (1995) for oboe, bassoon and piano is a substantial work lasting just under 14 minutes. It was commissioned by Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra principal players, **Cynthia Koledo DeAlmeida** (oboe), **Nancy Goeres** (bassoon), and pianist Luz Manriquez. "Incantation" features each instrument alone in turns, the oboe and bassoon playing recitative-like material. The two oboe/bassoon duet sections are largely in similar motion and vaguely reminiscent of chant with a tinge of the exotic. The sections with the three instruments playing together are livelier and rhythmic, using the same materials as the solos, but exploring a wide variety of characters. "Incantation" concludes with a piano solo that moves *attacca* into the second movement. "Allegro" is fast throughout, with a tonal rhythmic, motoric texture in the piano and lyrical lines in the oboe and bassoon.

Next we have the music of Gwen McLeod Hall (b. 1957), an august choral music teacher in North Carolina. Hall is known mainly as a composer of choral music. She wrote *Une Chanson sans Paroles* (2007) as a graduation gift for her oboist daughter, **Kathleen Gee**. This 3-minute piece begins with a lovely, gentle and lyrical duet between the oboe and piano. A brief, stronger and rhythmic section interrupts with romantic bravura. But the gentle, lyrical material returns almost immediately. This would be an excellent piece especially for young players to present in recital.

Composer Emily Doolittle (b. 1972) hails from Nova Scotia and currently lives in Seattle, Washington where she is assistant professor of music composition at Cornish College of the Arts. Her work *falling still* is a powerful, gorgeous work for

oboe and strings. From the very start, the piece is gripping and eloquent. Throughout its six minutes, *falling still* maintains its almost hypnotic atmosphere. The strings—other than one short section when they come to the fore—frame the oboe with transparent chords; and the oboe holds forth, singingly. This moody and memorable quartet would be a great addition to many recitals.

The fifth and longest work on this CD is *Bocadillos Floridianos* (2000) for oboe and piano by **Margaret Griebing-Haigh** (b. 1960). **John Mack** commissioned this 4-movement work; and Griebing-Haigh wrote the piece inspired by scenes and creatures on Florida beaches from a short sea-side vacation. Griebing-Haigh is a well-trained and experienced oboist as well as composer; and her website lists quite a few works for pieces featuring oboe, English horn and double reed ensembles. *Bocadillos Floridianos* paints us pictures of the ocean beach using very attractive, approachable language. One can hear that the composer knows the oboe intimately as the writing fits the instrument beautifully. Notably, the fourth movement is tremendous fun, depicting a little jumping lizard by a pool. This piece would be a winner on most any recital, sure to be fun to rehearse and perform and sure to be an audience favorite.

The Pulitzer Prize winning composer Chen Yi (b. 1953) wrote *Joy of the Reunion* for oboe, violin, viola and double bass in 2001, commissioned by the Bennington Chamber Music Conference. Lasting a brief three-and-a-half minutes, this beautiful work is evocative of traditional Chinese music with its modal language, occasional little glissandi, timbre trills and fantastic flavor. *Joy of the Reunion* is a wonderful piece with highly unusual and attractive language. Advanced players will love this piece; and it provides a nice opportunity for oboists to become comfortable with Chen Yi's musical idiom.

This CD concludes with *Four Personalities* by Alyssa Morris (b. 1984) for oboe and piano. The composer premiered the work herself on her 2007 senior oboe recital at Brigham-Young University. Many readers will already be familiar with this work because it is often performed and has been reviewed previously in this Journal. Based on the Hartman Personality Test, each of the four movements portrays a vivid personality. Morris uses very entertaining, tonal and fun musical styles

including jazzy, bluesy, songful and finally driven, fast fun. With its wide range for the oboe and demanding technique, this piece is a great choice for advanced and professional oboists.

The performances on this CD are first rate throughout. Ashley Barret sounds beautiful on every piece, providing each work with the character, technique and style required. Her lovely tone and musical intelligence shine through from beginning to end. All of the other artists on this CD are wonderful as well. Each performance is technically masterful and artistically satisfying.

Congratulations to Ashley Barret and her collaborators for this beautiful and important contribution to oboe recordings. Let us all take this CD as an inspiration to learn more about women composers, perform them and bring them to our students. We are fortunate to have Ashley Barret as a leader in our field, illuminating these excellent works for us.