

## AUDIO REVIEWS: DECEMBER 2022

# The Clarinet



[Online]

### Stanley Drucker Heritage Collection: Hidden Gems 8-9.

Clover Field Recordings, CFR 9292. Total Time: 67:24 [Disc 8] 62:58 [Disc 9].

Clarinet legend Stanley Drucker performed as an esteemed member of the New York Philharmonic for over 60 years. In 2009, he was heralded by the Guinness World Records as having the “longest career as a clarinetist.” As *Stanley Drucker: Heritage Collection* producer Jerome Bunke points out, “just prior to the COVID lockdown, Stanley performed with the New York Philharmonic in their Project 19 Series. This marked the eighth decade of his association with the New York Philharmonic which had begun on October 7, 1948.”

**Drucker is truly a cultural icon and a tremendous influence on the shape of American classical music. The *Stanley Drucker: Heritage Collection* is an important part of our collective clarinet history, while also being an enjoyable and effortless listening experience.**

It's thrilling to hear Drucker's consistency and artistry over all those years. So ingrained is his playing in our collective consciousness that his interpretations sound fresh yet familiar. This collection stands as a testament to the vitality and integrity of Drucker's iconic performing.

Some of the pieces on the *Heritage Collection* Discs 8 and 9 are standard works; others were pieces in their nascency when he recorded them, finding life in Drucker's hands. Clarinetist and producer Jerome Bunke shows his skills in this compilation, presenting the perfect mix of repertoire and commentary. The album includes well-written liner notes by Joshua Mietz and photos of composers, collaborators, and the Druckers. Bunke's own artistry is reflected in the pacing and design of this excellent compilation.

The collection begins with Michael Whalen's *Trampoline Harmonics*. Based on children playing on a trampoline, Drucker and the ensemble make the piece sound truly buoyant and organic. The phrasing bounces along and we forget how difficult it is to make a clarinet sound so easy. That is the true magic of this album; that Drucker consistently transcends the instrument and takes us to a place of pure musical enjoyment.

Charles Schwartz's *Five "Love" Arias for Clarinet with Piano*, here played with Harriet Wingreen in 1997, is winsome and lovely. Drucker's lyricism is sweet and plaintive, a great contrast with many of the more technical works on the album.

Drucker's interpretation of Johannes Brahms's *Sonata in F Minor for Clarinet and Piano*, Op. 120, No. 1, is lush and lovely, staying true to the writing with humor and warmth. He makes us feel like we are in on the joke and listening to a conversation between two old friends.

Drucker's control of the instrument and subtle nuance are in full display in John Corigliano's *Soliloquy* for clarinet and string quartet. The interplay of strings and the clarinet make this direct adaptation of the second movement of Corigliano's *Concerto* heartrending and exquisite. Drucker builds his phrases around the strings like the master craftsman that he is, sensitive and nuanced in every detail. He makes the clarinet sound transcendent; singing haunting and touching lines with his string colleagues. His tone is exquisite on this track and the intonation is so incredible that it's hard to hear where his playing begins and that of the ensemble ends.

Meyer Kupferman's *Double Concerto for Two Clarinets and Orchestra* is delightful and irreverent in the hands of Stanley and Naomi Drucker. They nail the interpretation here, sounding virtuosic, jazzy, and on-point.

The Brahms *Trio* was recorded in 2000 with cellist Carter Brey and pianist Gerald Robbins. This recording has so much vitality and energy that the notes almost seem to leap off the pages. The performers play with such finesse and excitement that it's easy to imagine Brahms coming out of retirement eager to write this piece for clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld.

Brahms's *Trio* is followed by Claude Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie* for clarinet and piano. Drucker, here paired with pianist Kazuko Hayami, captures Debussy's poignant writing, alternating immaculate phrasing with crisp articulation. Again, Drucker reveals his full range of color and mastery of the clarinet, swooping through the registers of the instrument with ease.

Alban Berg's *Adagio* for clarinet, violin, and piano was recorded with Ma Si-Hon and Tung Kwong-Kwong. Following Berg into the depths of despair, the trio makes every phrase and gesture stunning without breaking the overall arch of the piece. The ensemble work on this track is nothing short of sublime.

Drucker is again stellar on Nicolas Roussakis's *Two Dances for Solo Clarinet*. He doesn't shy away from the technical challenges of Roussakis's writing, hitting every mark with ease and beauty. As with his long tenure in the orchestra and all the other pieces on this album, Drucker makes this piece sound effortlessly precise.

Scott McAllister's *Black Dog* for clarinet and wind ensemble sings and growls in Drucker's hands. Drucker's interpretation is crisp, clear, and with more than a little bit of New York swagger. His playing gets the essence of McAllister's rendition of Robert Plant's "Hey hey mama, said the way you move, gonna make you sweat, gonna make you groove."

It's tremendous to hear Drucker's incredible style and inspired musicianship on both standard repertoire and more contemporary works. His sparkling sound and technique and his impeccable phrasing remind us of why he is one of the greatest living legends of our instrument. The *Heritage Collection* will soon become an essential part of any clarinetist's music collection.

– Stephanie Zelnick

Stanley Drucker's *Heritage Collection: Hidden Gems 8-9* is available on Amazon.com. Use the link below to ORDER NOW!

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