

Music and Book Reviews

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200 Years of Belgian Horn School? A Comprehensive Study of the Horn in Belgium 1789-1960 by Jeroen Billiet. (corecole.be). 2008, various prices depending on destination. Includes main volume (336 pages), Annex (104 pages), 3 audio CDs, CD-Rom, and more.

Belgian hornist Jeroen Billiet is a free-lance player of modern and natural horn, and a teacher at the music conservatories in Tielt, Brugge, and Oudenaarde. *200 Years of Belgian Horn School?* is the result of six years of research while a post-graduate student at the Orpheus Instituut in Ghent. His goal was to write the first definitive history of horn playing in Belgium with an emphasis on native players and teachers, as well as other influential figures that had some impact on national horn-playing. In the process of gathering information, he traveled all over Europe to visit libraries and other archives and museums, as well as conduct interviews in order to find as much primary and corroborating evidence as possible of the players, the teachers, their instruments, their repertoire, and their careers. Some of the names, both historical and current, are familiar to us. Some are surprising in their connections to Belgium and Belgian music-making. Some are surprisingly unknown, at least until now. In all, Billiet has provided the horn world with an outstanding resource of surprising value and connection to other important countries and musical developments over the past 200 years.

The main volume of this resource begins with a general historical background, including perspectives on the horn from F.J. Fétis, François Gevaert, Victor Mahillon, and Henri Dubois, four Belgian musicians and writers who commented on how the horn was played in Belgium over the period in question.

Next, the histories of various conservatories are described, in particular those in Brussels, Liège, and Ghent, followed by some general comments on the horn in Belgian military bands, civil wind bands, and orchestras. The next section looks at five generations of players, those active in Belgium, and Belgians who went abroad. The best part of this section, besides all the terrific details, is the interviews Billiet conducted with Edmund Leloir, Georges Caraël, Francis Orval, and André Van Driessche, which really bring the history of these generations to life.

The following section is devoted to musical instruments that were used and/or manufactured in Belgium. As one who has studied a great deal about the horn in 19th-century France, I was not surprised to discover the close connection between the two countries, most clearly manifested in the activities of the Sax family. It was very interesting to learn, however, that many other Belgian makers and designers were influential over the years, including Mahillon and Van Cauwelaert, who were important makers of valved instruments in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The most significant and unique information presented in this section are the wonderful pictures and the accompanying CD recordings. Useful and interesting photos are included of instruments and players holding them, accompanied by a full range of case studies that offer technical specifications of the instruments and mouthpieces. The CD tracks offer fantastic perspectives on repertoire, instruments, and historical performances, including some that feature the use of historical instruments pictured in the book, most of which are from private or museum collections. Kudos to Billiet for including these excellent elements that complete the "musical loop" of player, composer, instrument, and music. The performances, several by Billiet himself, are excellent.

The final section in the main volume consists of annotated lists of solo and pedagogical repertoire, also connected to CD tracks. The lists offer many lesser-known or previously unknown (to me, at least) recital works. Billiet's summary conclusions provide a general overview of everything presented in the volume, and answers the question of why the book's title ends with a question mark – his extensive work has provided clear evidence of a Belgian horn-playing tradition, but he is not so convinced there is a separable "school" of Belgian horn-playing. The definition of a "school" is elusive – is it determined by a tone color, some aspect of technique, or some other defining characteristic? Does it come from one player or many? This is why books are written, recordings are made, and compositions are created.

Otherwise, for this publication, the Annex provides lists of source materials for the work done, footnotes to the entire main volume, and some additional lists of references and CD contents. There are also some handy laminated cards that show

player/teacher lineage and locations at a glance. On the whole, this is truly an impressive piece of scholarship, and Billiet is to be heartily congratulated. One can quibble about some formatting issues in the volume itself, and some of the English text (presumably Billiet's translations) could use more editing for clarity and consistency. These quibbles, however, take nothing away from the scholarly and practical value of this impressive work.

Belgium has had a long, storied tradition of horn-playing with distinctive personalities and important contributions felt all across the horn world, and Jeroen Billiet's work is a marvelous celebration of that tradition. JS

Prairie Dawg Press, 514 N. Juliette Avenue, Manhattan KS 66502; prairiedawgpress.com, is an independent publishing company specializing in music for bassoon and oboe. It has recently expanded its offerings to include a wider range of repertoire. Here are the first sent to *The Horn Call* involving the horn.



Brass Quintet by Verne Reynolds. PDP 107, 2009, \$45.00. First edition.

Sonata Concertare for horn and piano by Verne Reynolds. PDP 128, 2009, \$30.00. First edition.

It is our good fortune that Prairie Dawg Press, an independent music publishing company initially founded to provide obscure or neglected works for double reeds, has begun offering works by Verne Reynolds. Their rapidly expanding catalog (which, at the time of this writing, is not complete on their website) includes a broad range of works for various instruments by Reynolds as well as several chamber works (that include horn) by other composers. Two of Reynolds' previously unpublished compositions available as of 2009 are his Brass Quintet of 1987 and the *Sonata Concertare* for Horn and Piano, which was completed in 2001.

The Brass Quintet, originally commissioned by the Wisconsin Brass Quintet, is a virtuosic composition of great artistry and integrity. Reynolds (whose total compositions currently number 117 on the ASCAP website) was a founding member of the Eastman Brass Quintet whose mission was "to raise the artistic level of the brass quintet." He addressed this mission rather extensively in *The Horn Handbook* (Amadeus Press, 1997), a truly inspiring text that conveys the breadth and depth of his pedagogical insights and musical aesthetics, and his biography on the IHS website (follow the link from "Honorary Members") quotes him as saying, "We try to get an integrity and an artistic level that would come as close as we can to the finest string quartets that you can imagine."

The four movements of the quintet (under five minutes each) are titled "Fanfares and Interludes," "Caprice," "Cavata," and "Patterns." While the IHS biography divides Reynolds' compositional style into three periods, the first two being "influenced by Hindemith" and "twelve-tone," the program notes

provided in the Brass Quintet score quote his own elaboration regarding the third period: "From the middle seventies up to the present time, I freed the whole thing up, and just write whatever comes into my head, make use of every technique that I know about – whatever I think suits the purpose at hand. I try to use it." The melodies, harmonies, and tonalities of the quintet exhibit the influence of Hindemith much in the same way as "Etude No. 6" from 48 Etudes for French Horn (1954-59). I have always been impressed by the beauty of so many of these etudes that were written with such demanding pedagogical objectives in mind! The sheer technical demands of the brass writing in the quintet also resemble those of these etudes, wherein Reynolds was very deliberately and conscientiously trying to "push the envelope."

In the first movement, the fanfare passages require two trumpet players who will relish sixteenth-note triplets (at quarter note equals 92) in demanding moving patterns as well as repeated pitches: the other three parts have only the repeated pitches in a more merciful number of bars and rhythmic patterns. The interludes feature gorgeous harmonies resulting from beautifully crafted counterpoint.

The "Caprice" movement strikes me as a whimsical test of whether the "great minds" of the members of the performing brass ensemble can indeed "think alike" when it comes to the subdivisions of the 6/8 meter. This exciting and colorful brain-teaser features a pointillistic treatment first of individual notes, played by individual players, then longer melodic fragments with combinations of players in unison, "handing off," or overlapping, all in eighths or sixteenths at 92 for the dotted quarter beat.

The "Cavata," true to the literal meaning of the term, appears to be an aria-like melody "excavated" from the preceding movement, initially given a fugal treatment beginning with the eight-bar statement in the horn, followed by tuba, then trombone, embellished by the trumpets, built to a climax, then fragmented to colors and harmonies in lessening motion – a significant contrast to the other three movements.

The last movement features a profound escalation of the rhythmic complexities of the second movement intensified by pitch patterns reminiscent of those found in the most intense freebop – essentially limited to the trumpet parts and most often with the two trumpets in unison. I had forgotten about Reynolds' regard for jazz and jazz musicians until I looked at this movement and reviewed the references he made in *The Horn Handbook*. In this movement, the precise coordination of the subdivisions throughout all five parts now includes some alternations of duples and triples (i.e., eighths, triplet eighths, and sixteenths at quarter equals 144), as well as tied rhythms and syncopations that obscure the meter. In addition to the only-occasionally-chromatic patterns, some of these lines have large, fast leaps. Remember, Reynolds demanded fast tempos for many of the 48 Etudes, especially in addressing large leaps – an intention he defended in *The Horn Handbook*, wherein he also