

Jason Laczkoski: *Come Down Heavy!*

© 2011 Emeritus Recordings 20112. Emeritus Recordings, 1400 E. Crestview Drive, Cottonwood, AZ 86326-4599. <http://cooppress.net>. Jason Laczkoski, saxophone; Joshua Russell, piano; Anna Draper, violin. Reviewed by Thomas Liley.

Released in 2011, this recording by saxophonist Jason Laczkoski presents five works including four original compositions and an arrangement of a well-known song cycle. Laczkoski has studied with Joseph Murphy at Mansfield University and Kenneth Tse at the University of Iowa, where he will soon complete the doctoral degree. He is presently Instructor of Saxophone at Lycoming College in Pennsylvania. Laczkoski is joined by pianist Joshua Russell, faculty member at Illinois State University, and Anna Draper, who is completing graduate studies at the University of Iowa.

Joseph Canteloube (1879 – 1957), born in Auvergne in central France, was a student of Vincent d'Indy and the composer of several now forgotten operas. Following World War I he collected his country's folk music, arranging several of them for voice and piano. Canteloube is best remembered for his setting of 27 folk songs from Auvergne for soprano voice and orchestra – *Chants d'Auvergne* is in many ways more than an arrangement as Canteloube sought to portray the varied and atmospheric locales of Auvergne. Ito Yasuhide has selected the first series of these songs and replaced the voice with alto and soprano saxophones. Laczkoski performs two cadenzas within the five songs of the first series to amply demonstrate his ability to make the saxophone sing beautifully.

*Lan Na Thai* was composed for Andy Wen to perform at World Saxophone Congress XIV, held in Bangkok in 2009. The freely programmatic work is in three movements, each suggesting a different period in Thai history. The first movement, *Sukhothai (The Dawn of Happiness)*, presents a peaceful, idyllic state. The second movement, entitled *Ayutthaya*, reflects a period that was prosperous but troubled by numerous wars with neighboring Burma. *The Chakri Dynasty* concludes the work and portrays the frenetic pace of modern Thailand. Pre-recorded sounds approximate traditional Thai folk instruments incorporating a seven-note scale built of equal intervals.

A second work by Brandon, who owns Co-op Press and Emeritus Recordings, was composed in 2003 to celebrate the centennial of the Wright brothers' first controlled flight. *Celebration of Flight* is written in three movements for alto saxophone and violin. The first movement, "Inspirations", recalls the dreams created by the flights of birds and gliders. The second movement, "Experiments", mixes motifs of contemplation and determination. "Triumphs", the concluding movement, combines 6/8 and 7/8 meters and is intended to be celebratory.

*Penelope's Song* by Judith Shatin exists in several adaptations. The present version was created for soprano saxophonist Susan Fancher and recounts the faithfulness of Penelope, Queen

of Ithaca and wife of Odysseus. During Odysseus' absence of thirty years while at war and in exile, Penelope rejected her many suitors by claiming she would choose no one until she had completed the funeral shroud for her aged father-in-law, Laertes. By day she wove the shroud while by night she unraveled it. Shatin's composition employs electronic sounds derived from a recording of a weaver working on wooden looms.

Evan Chambers' *Come Down Heavy!* was written in 1994 for James Umble and the Cleveland Duo. Like the Cantaloube *Chants d'Auvergne*, each of the three movements is a setting of a folksong. Chambers, however, treats the material much more freely, according to the composer, "to capture some of the raw, rough energy and genuine ache of the music." *Steel Drivin' Man*, based on the worksong *John Henry*, recalls the earthy performances recalled by Chambers of his father. The middle movements are a pair of lullabies. The first, on *I Gave My Love a Cherry*, requires the violinist to retune the instrument (*scordatura*) in a manner used by Scottish fiddle players. The second middle movement is based on *Oh lovely appearance of Death*, sung to the composer by his grandmother. Both slow movements are to be performed with simplicity, intensity, and dignity as they are on this recording. The concluding movement presents the worksong *Drill Ye Tarriers* first as an Irish reel, in combination with *Patsy on the Railroad* as a jig, and finally as a ferocious tarantella.

The recording presents an intriguing variety of music, from vocal transcription to chamber works to electro-acoustic resources. The presentations by these three talented musicians are rich in detail and convincing in performance. Russell's piano playing is solid and with a firm understanding of the music. Violinist Draper performs with a similarly strong grasp of her two scores and displays a vibrant tone that blends well with saxophone. Laczkoski, through a supple technique, rich sound, and ample musicianship, exhibits an impressive command of his instrument. He offers a well-produced debut album that demonstrates his abilities and his promise. One wants to hear him again.

**Thomas Liley** has appeared throughout the United States and in Canada, China, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. Works have been written for him by Claude Baker, James Barnes, David DeBoor Canfield, William Davis, and Frederick Fox. He is co-author of *The Cambridge Companion to the Saxophone*, author of *Eugene Rousseau: With Casual Brilliance*, Director of Scholarly Publications for the North American Saxophone Alliance, and a member of the Comité International de Saxophone. In addition to several World Saxophone Congresses, Liley twice has performed and lectured at the Hong Kong International Saxophone Symposium and the Sichuan Central Conservatory of Music in Chengdu. Liley received the degree Doctor of Music from Indiana University and is a former member of the U.S. Navy Band in Washington, D.C. He has been a Guest Professor of Saxophone at Indiana University, the University of Minnesota, Kansas State University, and the University of Iowa.