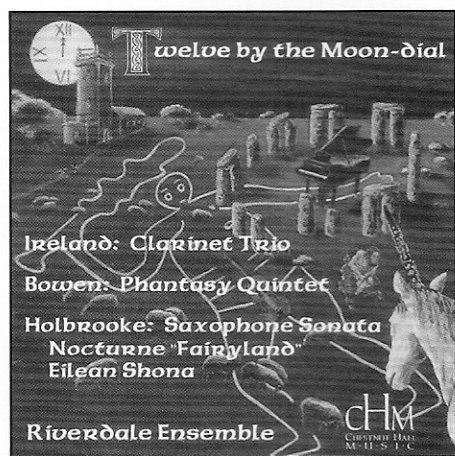


Twelve by the Moon-dial. Riverdale Ensemble: Stephen Fox, clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano & alto saxophone; Ellen Meyer, piano; Laura Jones, cello; Susan Lipchak, viola; Joyce Lai & Aleksandar Gajic, violins; András Weber, cello. York Bowen: *Phantasy Quintet*; John Ireland: *Trio in D*; Josef Holbrooke: *Nocturne "Fairylang," Eilean Shona*, and *Sonata* for saxophone and piano. CHESTNUT HALL MUSIC CHM080930. Total time 78:52. www.riverdaleensemble.com



When I received the Riverdale Ensemble's new CD, **Twelve by the Moon-dial**, I was delighted to examine the programming. Finally, someone had paid attention to some terrific British chamber music that had slumbered for too long in an unjustly forgotten state. The composers represented are York Bowen, John Ireland and Josef Holbrooke.

One of the exciting repertoire selections made by clarinetist Stephen Fox is Ireland's *Trio in D* for clarinet, cello and piano. Upon hearing Ireland's name, one could have expected Mr. Fox to serve up the beautiful *Fantasy-Sonata* for clarinet and piano, the one work of Ireland's that is familiar to most clarinetists. Instead, together with Ellen Meyer and Laura Jones, Fox offers the full-scale three-movement trio that has been collecting dust since it was written in 1914. As clarinetists, our choices for this wonderful combination of instruments are deep and varied, and for those among us who dare to venture beyond Brahms and Beethoven, yet another compelling option longs to be rediscovered. The performance of the trio is filled

with a kind of vivacity and joyful music making that occurs when the participants are enthusiastic about what they are playing. It's no wonder they achieve such ebullience in their performance. They are clearly keen to make a strong case for this composer. Ireland's trio is a robust effort by a man with an assertive musical personality who, while preserving his own individuality, was able to successfully assimilate his teacher's rigorous training. Charles Villiers Stanford, Ireland's professor at the Royal College of Music, would have loved the sober primary theme insofar that it radiates the old master's esteem for Teutonicism. On the other hand, British roots are in no way camouflaged throughout the second movement. Here an unmistakable English tune, one that could have come right from Gustav Holst's pen, comes markedly to the fore.

The *Phantasy Quintet* by York Bowen is not only winsome, but it is also innovative. Bowen, a composer of late-Romantic style music, wrote the first bass clarinet quintet between the years 1932 and 1936. It evidently took a long time for a composer to come to the idea of writing a clarinet quintet employing the bass clarinet instead of the usual soprano, but Bowen's results are compelling. Bowen, forgotten today mostly because the Second World War disrupted the momentum he was generating, also wrote a fine sonata for clarinet and piano. The *Phantasy Quintet*, Op. 93, for bass clarinet, two violins, viola, and cello is a substantial 14-minute work that will inspire you to dust off that new low-C bass you bought and call up your string-playing friends for a chamber music evening. The performance by Stephen Fox on bass clarinet is terrific. He manages the instrument with finesse, musicality and agility. The other members of the quintet, Joyce Lai, Aleksandar Gajic (violins), Susan Lipchak (viola), and András Weber (cello) all deserve special praise for their dedicated playing.

Eilean Shona, a short but enthralling clarinet quintet by Joseph Holbrooke, has been recorded at least twice before. This piece belongs in the repertoire of anyone who plays clarinet quintets, and I am pleased it is getting enough attention to warrant at least three recorded versions. This version is tender, sweet, and sounds like it was recorded in the same live acoustic as the other tracks on the CD. Another terrific piece of repertoire by this com-

poser is for clarinet, viola, and piano. The single-movement *Nocturne "Fairylang"* is a worthwhile addition to the repertoire for this combination of instruments. The trio, inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's poem with the same name, gives a strange impression upon first hearing due to the programmatic elements intended by the composer. This is an asset, however, and the music wears well upon a second hearing.

This recording is recommendable on two fronts. First, the music belongs to those who want to hear beautiful repertoire that is too rarely played in concerts. Some of these pieces may even become some of your new favorites. Secondly, all performers are superbly suited to the music and do their best to convey its substance to a new audience. Additionally, the recorded sound is abundantly live, but it is pleasing and retains its clarity. The microphone sound recalls the warmth generated by the old ribbon microphones. I hope the Riverdale Ensemble continues its efforts to beautifully record chamber music that needs to be heard anew.