



Clarinet & Saxophone

Autumn 2023 Volume 48, No 3

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On demanding change via the ClarEquality campaign

Making new music

NAOMI SULLIVAN INTERVIEWS MUSICIANS AND COMPOSERS ABOUT THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Single-reed choirs

NIGEL WOOD SHARES HIS WISDOM ON ENSEMBLE PLAYING



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Clarinetist's labour of love

Dissertation on double-lip embouchure from the 1970s now available online

Clarinetist Jennifer Deegan has worked hard to digitise a dissertation about double-lip embouchure so that it can be available online for everyone. The document, entitled *The Double-Lip Embouchure in Clarinet Playing*, was written by Victor A. Battipaglia whilst he was studying at the Eastman School of Music in 1975. Deegan said: "I'm an adult learner, and I started playing single lip, but when I got to grade four my embouchure muscles were hurting during the long pieces. I switched to double lip after reading about it on an online forum, where my attention was also drawn to this thesis. I read it and absolutely loved it. I have now made the switch to double lip myself and find it really suits me well, and makes the clarinet feel like an extension of my own body when I play."

Of course, at the time the dissertation was a typewritten document, which was scanned and converted to a pdf by the Eastman School. Deegan wanted to make this more accessible and easy to read for everyone, including those who might need to use accessibility software or translation tools, so she has been working for two years on converting the file to a modern word document and then a pdf. She said: "I am so happy to have been able to make this format conversion so that the work can be accessible to a wider audience. I'm really grateful to the author's wife, Dr Diana Mittler-Battipaglia, and to the Eastman School of Music's Sibley Library, for giving their permission." The edited dissertation is available to view at chlorophyllosophy.co.uk/

Jennifer Deegan



Georgia State University appoints Dr. Jack Thorpe

Former alumnus returns to teach at his alma mater

The School of Music at Georgia State University has appointed Dr. Jack Thorpe as Artist Affiliate of saxophone. An alumnus of the school, Thorpe is committed to championing underrepresented voices in classical music. In 2002 he initiated a project to commission six composers from traditionally marginalized communities to create solo and electroacoustic works for saxophone. His saxophone duo, Vex, has premiered groundbreaking compositions by Emily Koh, Yaz Lancaster and Anthony R. Green. Director of the School of Music, Dr. Chester Phillips, said: "We are delighted to welcome Jack Thorpe back to Georgia State University. His outstanding achievements, dedication to artistic collaboration and commitment to promoting diverse voices align perfectly with our institution's values. We are confident that Jack will inspire and mentor our students while contributing to our vibrant musical community."



Dr. Jack Thorpe

Impromptu Saxophone recital in flooded Ukraine

Andriy Levishchenko played the national anthem amid shelling and flooding



Andriy Levishchenko

An amateur saxophonist brought some defiant hope to Kherson as he played the Ukrainian national anthem from the rooftop of a flooded house as Russian shells fell nearby. The flooding occurred in June after the collapse of the Kakhova dam on the Dnieper river. Levishchenko, 46, worked in

logistics and cargo before the war, and learned the clarinet at school, before taking up the saxophone during the pandemic. He said he would also love to play Ukraine's national anthem in Crimea, which has been occupied by Russia since 2014.

WOMEN play clarinet too

Earlier this year, the hashtag #womenplayclarinettoo took social media by storm, as female players responded to an overwhelmingly male line-up in musical events. Bass clarinetist Dr Sarah Watts introduces the campaign that became ClarEquality, explaining how it started, the frustrations behind it, and why it is so needed

ClarEquality: A pledge for fair representation

"I am an ally and advocate for equality and diversity in the worldwide clarinet community. I will inquire about, support and insist on increased visibility for underrepresented populations, races and ethnicities and those with disabilities in events and programmes that I take part in."

In Spring 2023, more than 20 clarinet events, masterclasses and competitions popped up on social media. Each one had the same thing in common: not one of these events included any female clarinet players in guest tutor roles, as performing artists or on competition juries. Marginalised members of the clarinet community decided that it was time to raise awareness of the simple fact that a large percentage of players are being cut out of professional opportunities in the clarinet world.

A hashtag of #womenplayclarinettoo quickly started, to form a protest against such events. This started with female players simply leaving this hashtag underneath social media posts, and very quickly many players from young students to emerging professionals, as well as established teachers and performers, gained the courage to share this widely too. This was followed by a 'women play clarinet, too' frame (featured on the cover of this issue), designed by clarinetist Carrie RavenStem, which female players used as part of their profile pictures on social media. What started as a shout for gender representation was followed by requests from other marginalised groups including clarinetists of colour, the LGBTQIA+ community, and players living with disabilities.





MAKING MUSIC

©The Laefer Quartet recording *Strata* at RBC Recital Hall

Naomi Sullivan, new chair of CASSGB, takes us behind the scenes of commissioning composers for the Laefer Quartet's debut album, and asks the creators and performers of music about the nitty gritty of working together

My best experiences with music have always been whilst collaborating with colleagues who are now – I hope – friends. If I had a different job, I imagine this wouldn't be so easily true, due to an acute fear of corporate group ice-breaking chats and tight-jawed team-building activities. But finding people who would like to work, play and happily collaborate with me seems priceless. Not always easy or straightforward, but definitely a good thing.

During the summer, I worked on a quartet album of new works with the Laefer Quartet.

The album, called *Strata*, was the brainchild of saxophonists Amy Green and Stephen Shepherd who co-founded the Laefer Quartet in 2012. *Strata* can refer to layers that occur in the natural world, but also in the manmade world. The album is centred around this theme of layers, and the different ways we as human beings interact, intertwine, and impose on the natural world around us. Starting in the subways of New York City, moving through natural ground-level phenomena, up through the atmosphere to the stars and beyond. Apart from Ben Oliver's *Avalanche* for quartet and electronics, all these pieces were commissions and the quartet worked closely with all the composers.

The very nature of music means it will always be just about impossible for musicians to avoid collaboration. Music alone is delightfully undemanding and just needs any venue other than a vacuum. But for us to make music, it's not really a solitary practise, despite many hours practising alone. I hope it's true to say an important aspect of music is when sound communicates what can't easily be spoken. Or when sound is so cleverly organised then played, music can move listeners to somewhere else. I asked the collaborating performers and some of the composers from this project for their thoughts on commissioning and what collaboration means to them.

GEAR REVIEWS

gear

**BG LIGATURES**

DUO Ligature €117 (silver plated) to €174 (24K gold plated)
 Available from bgfrankbichon.com

"Ligatures. They hold the reed to the mouthpiece. End of..." That's a statement I've heard many times, and of course that's the primary function of a ligature. But if that was the end of it, why would you be able to buy alto saxophone ligatures ranging in price from about £6 to a little under £600, made from a staggering array of materials from brass to carbon fibre and even cryogenically treated string? I've seen cable ties and even dental floss used as a ligature in an emergency, so there is clearly more to it than its most basic function.

I always recommend one initial check when selecting a ligature. Especially on the saxophone, where the mouthpiece is frequently adjusted for tuning, but even on the clarinet, on which your playing angle may need tweaking, there is one vital test that you need to perform even before blowing: hold the mouthpiece and ligature as if to adjust for tuning or tweaking purposes and give it a good twist. If anything moves (apart from the whole mouthpiece/reed/ligature unit), take the ligature off and reject it. It doesn't matter how good the sound is; it's not doing the job it was primarily designed to do – to hold the reed to the mouthpiece!

The material and the plating or finish of a ligature can change the sound, or perhaps more importantly change the way the player feels about their sound. I suspect that we all have an idea of the sound we want to produce. I spend hours selecting the right reed, and like many players, have a drawer full of mouthpieces. I even have custom crooks for my Yamaha saxophones, so for me, selecting the right ligature is really important, as it can change your sound just as variations of mouthpiece and reeds will. As a rule of thumb, the nearer anything is to your mouth, the more it will affect your overall sound (and yes I do use one of those oversized neck screws)! For some years I have been using the BG DUO ligature. It's called DUO because the original fits both clarinet and alto saxophone; and now I use the more recent models on soprano and metal tenor mouthpieces; and on ebonite tenor and baritone mouthpieces. The BG DUO is solid as a rock and even if your cork is tight, it won't budge when you move (or even remove) your mouthpiece. The DUO ligatures have two rubber pads at the rear and two side rails. These are the only parts that directly contact the mouthpiece. The reed is held firmly by two rails that are scored slightly to aid grip on the reed. It has a single screw with a flat round head on the back which facilitates even pressure on the reed. Its distinctive look is finished off with two red screw-tightening brackets. According to BG around 95% of mouthpieces fit a DUO of one type or another. I've found all DUO ligatures to be very free-blowing with minimal resistance and a very open, even sound across the range of the instrument.

The DUO ligature is made of brass and it comes in five different finishes: lacquered, 24k gold plated, silver plated, rose gold plated (an alloy of gold and copper) and (the latest addition) black lacquered. I have been amazed at how something as simple as a plating or lacquer can change not only the tone, but also the response of the instrument and ultimately the way you feel and the way you play! This is a test I have repeated several times to different groups of people and by myself, so I do not need convincing that this is something that is worth consideration, as details like this can make an incredible difference and even improve your playing.

I'm very fortunate that BG has sent me the complete sets of LD (alto saxophone/clarinet), LDS (soprano saxophone/metal alto and tenor) and LDT (ebonite, hard rubber tenor/baritone) ligatures; so this test could go on for a while if I were to comment on every permutation, with every mouthpiece I own, but rest assured that the finishes have the same effect on tone across the board. For this test, I used my usual set-up on tenor saxophone; JodyJazz Jet 8 and Vandoren Java 2.5 reeds. I started the test the same way for each ligature: blowing randomly to warm up, then playing a full-range chromatic scale, followed by a few of my favourite patterns. Then I moved rooms to test in different acoustic settings (I love playing in the bathroom!), finally settling on playing a melody and improvisation on a tune that was appropriate to the way I felt about the ligature.

LDT0 (gold lacquered)

The gold lacquered brass version is, I guess, as clean and natural as you'll get from the DUO range. Not being bare metal, it's fairly mellow, but with great control and evenness across the range of the saxophone. Lower register notes are clear and even and the altissimo is easy and free. In terms of the way it made me feel, after warming up, I wanted to play a jazz ballad (*These Foolish Things*, as it happens!) as that's the vibe I got from the way the ligature responds.

LDT1 (24K gold plated)

The 24K gold plating gives this DUO an immediacy and focus that the lacquered version doesn't have. Suddenly, I feel like a soloist, able to project much more. The tone is deep and rich, with a full set of overtones. Bare metal does seem to make quite a difference. This is something I've discovered in my Yamaha 875EX saxophones and crooks as I favour a silver plate (with gold-plated crook) on tenor and gold-plated alto. I wanted to play fast jazz with this one – *Giant Steps* and *Cherokee* were two