



Clarinet & Saxophone

Spring 2024 Volume 49, No 1

Ted Planas

REMEMBERING THE
MULTI-TALENTED
INSTRUMENT
MAKER AND
MENDER

I did it my way

ALASTAIR
PENMAN
ON RELEASING
HIS OWN MUSIC

Creston's Sonata

KYLE HORCH ON THE CONTEXT
AND CHALLENGES OF A
SAXOPHONE CLASSIC

Tribute to Charles Hine

COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS
OF CASSGB BID FAREWELL
TO A MUCH-LOVED
CLARINETTIST

Introducing Arctic Saxophone

OLAASDAHL ROKKONES

PLUS: NEWS | REVIEWS | SAXOPHONE FINGER SPEED | FREE SHEET MUSIC
DIARY LISTINGS | LEGERE FRENCH CUT REEDS | COMPOSITION COMPETITION



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARIUS FISKUM

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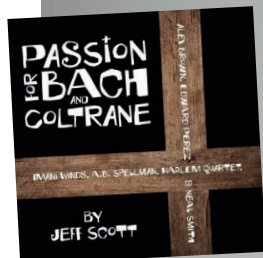


66th Grammy Award winners

Imani Winds (pictured) received three Grammy nominations and won best Classical Compendium for the group's album *Passion for Bach and Coltrane*. The piece, by Jeff Scott, is a concert-length passion oratorio that combines elements from jazz and classical music. As well as Imani Winds, the album guest stars poet A.B. Spellman, the Harlem string quartet and jazz trio Alex Brown (piano), Edward Perez (bass) and Neal Smith (drums).

The clarinetist of Imani Winds, Mark Dover (pictured), was also a producer on the album.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra and conductor Riccardo Muti won the Grammy for Best Engineered Classical Album for *Contemporary American Composers*, featuring works by Philip Glass, Jessie Montgomery and Max Raimi. The Los Angeles Philharmonic won Best Orchestral Performance for Thomas Adès' *Dante*, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel.



Jess Gillam signs to Intermusica

Jess Gillam has become the first-ever saxophonist to sign to music management company Intermusica. Her solo work will be managed by artist manager Jessica Barra, whilst her ensemble will be managed by Maebh Lehane as part of Intermusica's Imagine portfolio. Jess broke the news herself via her social media channels, where she told her followers: "I can't wait to start this new chapter with a brilliant team. This is just the beginning. Lots of exciting times ahead!"



**PRIZE:
£500**

CASSGB Saxophone Composition Competition for Young Composers

CASSGB would like to announce a competition for composers to submit a piece for unaccompanied saxophone. The winning composition will be used as the set piece for the forthcoming CASSGB Young Saxophone Soloist Competition.

The piece should be written for solo unaccompanied saxophone and aimed at Grade 8 level players. It can be written in any style or genre and should last around two minutes. The whole piece must also fit on two A4 pages, as the winning entry will be reproduced in the centre pages of a future issue of *Clarinet & Saxophone* magazine.

The competition is open to UK nationals or non-UK citizens resident in the UK, and is open to students and non-students. Both members and non-members of CASSGB are welcome to apply. There is no entry fee. The closing date for entries is 1 May 2024.

Music submitted for the competition should not currently be published online or in print. Entrants must be aged 25 or under on 1 May 2024.

The composition should be submitted using computer notation software and submitted as a PDF file. Entrants should also complete an application form, which can be downloaded from www.cassgb.org.

Any queries, as well as completed application forms and compositions, should be emailed to membership@cassgb.org.



CLOSING DATE FOR ENTRIES: 1 MAY 2024

When Ola Rokkones and I connect over a video call for our chat about his album *Arctic Saxophone*, it is – appropriately enough – dark, cold and icy both outside his window in Tromsø, Norway, and outside mine near London. That very morning I have skidded my car on the ice and am glad to be back in the relative warmth of my home office. But when Rokkones turns his screen to show me the view outside I see that in his corner of Northern Norway, it's significantly more wintry – virtually dark outside even though it's midday. It's a fitting time to interview the saxophonist about the icy soundscape of his recording of three contemporary saxophone concertos. The title of his album references not just his Norwegian hometown, but the links of these three composers to the Arctic. He is on a mission to prove that it's not essential to be based in a capital city to have a thriving and creative musical career – and he's doing a great job of it. Rokkones has had a successful and super-productive year by anyone's standards; *Arctic Saxophone* is one of four releases that he's managed to put out in addition to completing a Masters' in Musical Performance at the Conservatory of Tromsø.

We start with a chat about the inspiration behind the three new commissions. *The Heart, It Soars*, by Alexander Aarøen, is a grand, thematic, John Williams-style concerto seemingly designed to showcase the best of the saxophone. Rokkones is passionate about commissioning new music, particularly orchestral music, to create new performance opportunities for saxophonists. "Orchestras always say to me there isn't anything to play [for the solo saxophone], only Glazunov. So I said to Alex, why don't you write the new Glazunov concerto? I think he liked the idea. And this is what I also want for this piece is that other people can play it too. It's not technically difficult, so I hope it's played again."

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'Alex' is Alexander Aarøen, also from Northern Norway, and at ten years' Rokkones junior, an up-and-coming composer. There seems to be a level of mutual musical understanding and inspiration between the two; they first encountered one another back in their school days. Rokkones says: "I remember being on a school concert tour in Tromsø, where I was performing free jazz improv with a drummer and a spoken-word poet. Obviously this isn't especially accessible music, so not everyone liked it all the time. But I remember one person sitting in the front row and I heard him whisper to his friend, 'We need to try this at home.' And this was Alexander! His approach to music is very playful. But I also recognised that his musical language is very accessible and very romantic and this is why I wanted him to write this."

Rokkones feels a certain level of responsibility to commission new music for saxophone, but also feels he isn't alone in this: "I really want to show this music to the world and to inspire other saxophonists. I do commissions partly to be able to play great music – but also to inspire others and make music for them. It's not only me though, I think a lot of saxophonists today do this work. Sigurd Raschèr commissioned the Glazunov concerto and a lot of the other classical works that saxophonists are playing today were commissioned by him. And if one person can do so much then we can all contribute a little bit. I have done my best."

Rokkones is certainly offering quite a scope of different soundscapes even on this one, wintry album. The second piece, *Seven Portraits*, by Alexander Manotskov, is quite a departure from the sweeping romanticism of Aarøen's work; an experimental seven-part composition full of multiphonics and requiring experimental techniques such as slap tongue and playing without the mouthpiece. Rokkones says: "This work is all about testing different timbres and possibilities of the saxophone. We had a workshop together where I showed him multiphonics and he wanted to see whether he could orchestrate these. He wasn't interested in just producing experimental music though – there had to be a reason for it. There are strange techniques here but also recurring melodies and motifs." *Seven Portraits* is in seven short parts ranging from not quite three minutes to six-and-a-half minutes, and each one is named after an Archangel. This seems to be a creative way for Manotskov to characterise the various experimental techniques ➡

Going it alone

The recorded music industry has evolved hugely over the last few decades. What does this mean for the musicians who want to share their work? Alastair Penman discusses the pros and cons of self-releasing your music and shares what he has learned along the way

In the immortal words of The Buggles, "Video Killed the Radio Star". Whilst I'd argue that radio is actually still doing okay for itself, streaming services such as Spotify, YouTube and even Apple Music seem to be slowly killing the careers of all but the most popular of musicians. Before the advent of streaming, recording and releasing CDs (or tapes/vinyls) could provide a good additional income stream for musicians. However, there has been a 95% decrease in sales of CDs since the peak in 2000, and sales are now at their lowest level since 1986 (Data for USA*). Whilst this drop in CD sales has been largely replaced by streaming, unfortunately this doesn't provide nearly the same income for artists.

PRS data is a good way of keeping track of how musicians (specifically writers) are being remunerated. In a recent statement, one of

my compositions had been used on a social media site and had amassed over 32,000 plays. The income from this? £0.22. I'll try not to spend it all at once. In the same period, a different track received 67,000 plays on a BBC Sounds playlist and earned £69.33. This raises the question of why some services are paying 150 times less than others. Crucially, if just 10 of the 99,000 people listening to these tracks had bought a physical CD (which they may have done if we didn't live in a culture where music is expected to be free), then I would have received significantly more income! (If all of them had bought a copy, I'd almost be a millionaire – we can all dream...)

This may sound like a rant against streaming services (which, to be honest, it is). However, on a positive note, streaming offers opportunities to reach a much wider audience, which ➡

* Reference: [statista.com/chart/12950/cd-sales-in-the-us/](https://www.statista.com/chart/12950/cd-sales-in-the-us/)

Alastair Penman

www.cassgb.org

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gear

GEAR REVIEWS

LEGÈRE FRENCH CUT REEDS

£32.50 to £35.50

legere.com

Following on from the last synthetic reed review [D'Addario Venn reeds, Winter 2023 issue], next up is the newly introduced Légère French Cut, described as a refined, symphonic reed that gives players richness and stability in tone, without sacrificing response. Légère's goal for this reed is clear: to craft a synthetic reed that not only mimics but surpasses the qualities of traditional cane. This is a welcome addition to the line-up of Légère reeds, sitting on the darker and more resistant end of the spectrum from both clarinet and saxophone.

I have always had some reservations towards synthetic reeds due to the sound quality being not quite what I have looked for when compared to a cane reed, especially for classical playing. There was always something that didn't quite hit the mark in terms of the roundness of the sound. Whilst I am a fan of the Légère American Cut and use it regularly for show work on tenor saxophone, I never converted to synthetic for clarinet and alto saxophone. However this is likely to change with the introduction of the Légère French cut.

I was immediately impressed; the quality of the sound the reed was able to produce was full and round. Previously when using synthetic reeds in any classical setting I've always found the sound to be slightly weak or too bright, not able to produce an even range or having duff notes, which has dissuaded me from using them. But with the French Cut, these previously unsatisfactory thoughts were becoming a thing of the past. Légère has been working hard to listen to what players have been asking for, a reed that feels and sounds like a cane but with the projection and consistency of a synthetic reed.

Légère achieves this with some key modifications to the design, a more even distribution of material across its vamp, suppressing excessively high overtones and enriching the sound with a fuller, more resonant body. What this translates to is a synthetic reed that has depth and warmth, aimed at classical performers.

Great response has always been a key selling point in synthetic reeds and the French Cut is no exception. I found the response in all registers to be impressive, especially the alto saxophone reeds. Even though the alto and tenor reeds play similarly, I did find the response slightly more immediate with the alto, though only slightly. The Bb clarinet reed also has fantastic response through all the registers, easily projecting the higher notes of the clarinet.

One piece of advice I wish I had been given when I first tried synthetic reeds is that a slightly softer or harder reed can impact the quality of the sound dramatically. You need to really play with the different strengths and find the one that works for you and your setup. Up to a point I think an experienced player will be able to get away with playing on a cane reed that is slightly too hard or soft for a while, without sacrificing the sound quality too much. With synthetic reeds, I don't feel you can, and a slightly too-hard or too-soft reed will have a big difference in the tone production. This is why you will find many incremental strengths with the Légère reeds such as 3.00, 3.25, 3.50, 3.75. When trying these reeds, the strength charts are useful but make sure you try at least the neighbouring strengths.

When it comes to synthetic reeds, I think it's important to talk about the way the reed feels. Natural cane has fibres and slight grit, and after years of playing with cane, players get accustomed to this but with the synthetic reeds, they are all smooth, which can take a while to get used to.

Overall, the experience of the reeds felt very similar between the clarinet and the saxophone in terms of the sonority of sound. Personally, I think the French Cut is a much-needed addition to the synthetic reed market, bridging the gap further between synthetic and cane. I will keep these in my reed cases for my clarinet and saxes.

Thanks to Olivia Wild at Barnes and Mullins for sending these reeds out for me to test. You can find these reeds in most woodwind retailers or purchase them online.

Berdel Efe Gülşen

