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FRANÇAIX | SCHULHOFF | MOZART
KROMMER | OLTHUIS



Pro Contra! Works for Bassoon & Contrabassoon

Simon Van Holen

Members of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra



SUPER AUDIO CD

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Pro Contra! Works for Bassoon & Contrabassoon

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Members of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

Simon Van Holen bassoon and contrabassoon

Sylvia Huang violin

Mirelys Morgan Verdecia violin

Frederik Boits viola

Martina Forni viola

Honorine Schaeffer violoncello

Pierre-Emmanuel de Maistre double bass

JEAN FRANÇAIX (1912-1997)

Divertissement for bassoon and string quintet (1942)

[1] Vivace	2:24
[2] Lento	2:44
[3] Vivo assai	2:05
[4] Allegro	2:26

ERWIN SCHULHOFF (1894-1942)

Baßnachtigall for contrabassoon solo, op. 38 (1922)

[5] Melancolia	2:25
[6] Perpetuum Mobile	0:49
[7] Fuga	1:21

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Sonata for bassoon and cello, KV 292 (1775)

[8] Allegro	5:22
[9] Andante	4:19
[10] Rondo-Allegro	3:20

FRANZ KROMMER (1759-1831)

Quartet for bassoon, 2 violas and cello, op. 46 no. 1 (1804)

[11] Allegro	8:42
[12] Andante	5:02
[13] Menuetto. Moderato-Trio	4:04
[14] Rondo	3:36

KEES OLTHUIS (b. 1940)

[15] Concertino for contrabassoon and string quintet (2014) **19:33**

total time 68:20



Bassoon and contrabassoon; a kaleidoscopic rainbow of virtuosity, concentrated into a single CD. Perhaps there's nothing unique here, but nevertheless it is something quite special and unusual. No one could argue that either of these is among the most popular of 'classical' instruments. The contra's popularity rating would probably be as low as its pitch! And this is no great surprise. One consequence of its extremely deep register and particular sound is that composers have been less than lavish with their contributions to its repertoire. In popularity contests, the bassoon would probably do a little better than its big brother, though it would still be unlikely to reach the top 10. All too often, and despite all of Prokofiev's best intentions, it gets associated with the grumpy grandfather in *Peter and the Wolf*. This is fairly disrespectful of the bassoon (to say nothing of grandpa).

One of the oldest references that can be found to the "Fagotcontra" dates back to 1619 (the *Syntagma musicum* of Michael Praetorius), but the instrument had to wait until the twentieth century to really find its feet, amidst what was a wide-ranging exploration of new sonorities. When the contrabassoon made an appearance in orchestras before this period (apart from a few notable solo passages), the instrument was more often seen than heard, as it was usually only deployed to double up the bass parts, giving those lines a distinctive tinge of extra colour. Even following the instrument's wave of emancipation last century, the very first composition ever published for solo contrabassoon, the *Baßnachtigall* (1922) by Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942), is still something of a rarity. Schulhoff, a Dadaist who had been completely disillusioned by the First World War, explained in his postscript to the score of the piece that it

was purely and simply a grotesque and sarcastic statement, trampling on the toes of the establishment.

For general enlightenment, as a profession of faith:

If the divine spark may be found lurking even in a sausage, then why not in a double bassoon? This is therefore dedicated to poetical friends and aesthetes – in short to all hypersensitive souls as an “experience”.

While everyone else is swooning to the sweet tones of violins, then take note. I always do the opposite just in order to provoke you, you petty marionettes, fops, bespectacled pseudo-intellectuals; you pathological hot-house plants and decayed expressionists. I admit without any shame to having been created out of muck and to revel in muck! But you lot are already born with immaculately ironed creases in your white tie and tails – you who merely exist! In order to keep my distance from you all, I'll take a firm grip on my monocle and make you show me some respect!!!

Erwin Schulhoff (1922) *translation by William Waterhouse, 1978*

Still, *Baßnachtigall* sounds much less provocative than this text would tend to suggest; serious and droll at the same time, even occasionally fleet of foot, and with a tendency to virtuosity. The *BACH* motif in the *Perpetuum mobile* and a *Fugue* leave us in no doubt that the classically trained Schulhoff (a pupil of Reger, Debussy and others) was fully aware of what he was up to. But, as might have been expected in the historical context – Schulhoff was a Jew and had been a convinced Communist from the 1930s onwards – the piece was

condemned from the outset as being ‘Degenerate Art’. Schulhoff died in 1942 in a Nazi concentration camp.

It takes the merest whiff of the frivolous elegance in Mozart's *Sonata KV 292* to cast off the Prokofiev/bassoon *idée fixe*, and to be enchanted by what Mozart allows the bassoon to achieve, within a limited instrumental range – to sing. Mozart's ability to make instruments sing is in fact unparalleled by any other composer. As it happens, *KV 292* is a tale of probabilities: probably written in Munich in 1775; probably intended as a sonata for bassoon and basso continuo, though the eventual publisher (in 1805) only kept the bass line, because even by then the practice of continuo playing was becoming thoroughly outdated (the bassoon part is entirely predominant here, with the cello being confined largely to an accompanying role); others consider this to be a sonata for two bassoons, because duets for two identical instruments were very popular at that time. The exact situation is unclear, however. The manuscript has been lost, probably forever.

A composer prodigy by the age of 6, and going on to write music with conspicuous ease, reminiscent of Mozart to that extent, Jean Françaix (1912-1997) was occasionally labeled a musical ‘hack’. This did him little harm. Active in virtually every genre, including film and theatre music, he was happy to forge and follow his own path; a path that was little influenced by the evolutions and revolutions in musical thought during the latter half of the twentieth century, leaving the composer true to his early twentieth century musical idiom. Lightness and humour best typify the bulk of the composer's

output: the music of Françaix is a manifestation of French 'joie de vivre'. The *Divertissement for bassoon and string quintet or string orchestra* is a telling example of this, even though it was written during some of the very darkest years in recent history (in 1942). Lively, whimsical, waspish and brimming with rhythmic subtleties, the piece demands extreme virtuosic precision from its performers.

The *Quartet op. 46 no. 1* (1804) by Franz Krommer (1759-1831) – a gallant and dashing work with, as was customary, a contrasting touch of melancholy in its *Andante*, and of course set in classical tonalities – is permeated by the same divertimento ambience. With the bassoon playing a prominent lead throughout, this is effectively a pocket concerto. This impression is enhanced by the composer's decision to use two violas (and no violins) and cello as the accompaniment – really unusual but a superb choice to project the bassoon sound even more clearly.

In his day, Kramář (his name in its Czech transliteration) was a particularly revered composer, one of the most successful Czech composers working in Vienna at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1818, he was promoted to 'Master of Chamber Music and Composer-in-Chief' to Emperor Franz I of Austria, the last composer to fill that post.

As a writer of chamber music, symphonic works and work for the musical theatre, Kees Olthuis (1940) may be more familiar with the bassoon and contrabassoon than almost any other composer. From 1970 until 2005,

he was a bassoonist with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and for many years played with the Netherlands Wind Ensemble and the Amsterdam Nonet. Olthuis's textures show evidence of a thorough knowledge of all possible compositional techniques, with a marked preference for music from the first half of the 20th century. He would describe his own musical language as 'extended tonal'. In his *Concertino for contrabassoon and string quintet* (written for Simon Van Holen in 2014, who gave the work's first performance in Amsterdam on the 4th of February 2015), he combines all this with a lyrical, drama-inspired narrative skill to provide a result not so very far removed from his musical theatre work. The full range of the instrument is explored, its colours are examined, the supple agility of an ostensibly unwieldy instrument is showcased and the dynamic and expressive possibilities are exploited to the full, in a clear musical form based on the ancient principles of contrast and repetition. *PRO CONTRA!* could just as easily have been the title (or subtitle) of this work.

Jacques Van Holen

Translation: Bruce Gordon/Muse Translations



Simon Van Holen

Recognized for his versatility and expressive sound, Solo-Contrabassoon of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Simon Van Holen has performed worldwide as a soloist, chamber and orchestral player.

Born in Belgium, Simon Van Holen received his first bassoon lessons at the age of eight. Although not yet big enough to master the instrument his ambition was well defined. In 2003, Van Holen entered The Royal Conservatory in The Hague and went on to complete his studies in 2010 at the Robert Schumann Musikhochschule in Düsseldorf, graduating with the Highest Distinction under the tutelage of Prof. Gustavo Núñez. He further enriched his studies with Brian Pollard, Klaus Thunemann, Dag Jensen, Stefan Schweigert, Sergio Azzolini and Marion Reinhard.

Van Holen's career as a professional orchestral musician began even before completing his musical studies. He has been a member of the European Union Youth Orchestra and the Gustav Mahler Jugend Orchester, and has been invited to play in the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestra de l'Opera de Rouen and the Norrköpings Symfoniorkester. In 2007 he won the Academy Position with the Düsseldorfer Symphoniker where he was later appointed Solo-Contrabassoonist in 2011.

Currently holding the Contrabassoon Position with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Simon Van Holen enjoys a rich musical career made up of diverse performing, recording and teaching engagements. He has performed with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, the Tonhalle Orchester Zürich, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and is regularly invited as both a soloist and teacher in Europe and Asia.

An active chamber musician since a young age, Van Holen became the recipient of the prestigious 'Villa-Musica Rheinland-Pfalz' Scholarship. He also took part in the Zermatt Festival Academy and the Gustav Mahler Academy, and had the pleasure of performing with some of the most legendary musicians such as Menahem Pressler, Ingo Goritzki, Jürgen Kussmaul and Wolfgang Boettcher.

In 2013, Simon Van Holen was awarded the prize 'Prix de Salon' by the business circle of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra for his extraordinary musicianship. The award made it possible for the commission of a new work for contrabassoon and string quintet by Dutch composer Kees Olthuis which is presented in this album.

Aside from his orchestral career, Simon Van Holen is Professor of Bassoon and Contrabassoon at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam.

Members of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

Violinists Sylvia Huang and Mirelys Morgan Verdecia play in the violin sections of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Sylvia Huang, originally from Belgium, received her first lessons from her father and started winning prizes while still very young. She joined the Belgian National Orchestra as a second violin when she was 18 and within a year and a half was promoted to co-principal. Mirelys Morgan Verdecia is from Havana, where her musical career started off. She came to Europe over 10 years ago, first to Madrid and then Berlin. Claudio Abbado invited her to play as a member of the Gustav Mahler Jugend Orchester, touring extensively with them as well as with the Verbier Festival Orchestra. She was a member of the first violin section of the Orquesta Nacional de España from 2009 until moving to Amsterdam in 2013.

Violists Frederik Boits and Martina Forni both joined the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in 2013. Frederik, who was born in Antwerp, studied at the conservatoires in Brussels and Amsterdam, going on to lead the viola section in Holland Sinfonia for nine years. From a very early age, he was driven by a special love for chamber music and has played with numerous ensembles including Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Het Collectief and the Nieuw Ensemble. Italian born Martina Forni completed her studies in Amsterdam following studies in Verona. She was a member of the RCO Academy and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. She regularly performs with baroque ensembles including Anima Eterna and La Chambre Philharmonique. As a chamber musician, Martina is a member of the ensemble Lumaka and often makes guest appearances with Askol|Schönberg.

The French cellist Honorine Schaeffer was also a member of the RCO Academy. She studied in Paris and Hanover and has won several prizes in competitions. Following a brief spell in Berlin, with the Berlin Philharmonic's Academy, she returned to Amsterdam to join the RCO as a permanent member in 2014. As an extra player she has appeared with the Orchestre de Paris and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, and performs chamber music at a wide range of festivals.

Pierre-Emmanuel de Maistre's musical career started with the cello before switching to the double bass. He studied in his hometown Toulon and later went on to study in Paris and Essen. He was a member of the Gustav Mahler Jugend Orchester from 2003 until 2007 and co-principal double bass in the Orchestre National de Lille for nine years. He joined the double bass section of the RCO in 2013, and was appointed co-principal two years later.

Sylvia Huang, Mirelys Morgan Verdecia, Martina Forni and Honorine Schaeffer are four enthusiastic chamber musicians who have been performing together as the GoYa Quartet Amsterdam since 2014. In 2015, they won the 'Prix de Salon', which will allow them to make a live DVD recording of all the string quartets by Brahms and Schumann.

Simon Van Holen has been awarded the 'Prix de Salon' 2013. An award established by De Salon, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's business network, to further the musical careers of young musicians of the orchestra. This release is the direct result of him being awarded this prize.

Furthermore, he had generous financial support of Tutti Fagotti GmbH, Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst, Paul Peijzel and many others made possible by Voordekunst.nl.



DE SALON



This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



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**This production is also available as High Resolution digital download
at www.spiritofturtle.com**

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