

AUDIO SOCIETY OF ATLANTA

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Vivaldi: Bassoon concertos, Vol. 1
Nadina Mackie Jackson, bassoon
Nicholas McGegan, director
MSR Classics MS1451

When you think about it, the bassoon has gotten a bad rap. People who have never bothered to listen attentively to it may be prejudiced by the wedding guest's retort to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner: "Dost hear the loud bassoon?" Or they will remember the line in the song "76 Trombones" from Meredith Wilson's hit musical *The Music Man* about "Each bassoon having its big, fat say!" They would be surprised to know that the long double reed actually has a rather soft voice and makes its impression in an ensemble through its unique baritone timbre and the penetrating effect it imparts.

In Vivaldi Bassoon Concerti, Vol. 1, British Columbia native Nadina Mackie Jackson takes full advantage of the beautiful voice of the bassoon, which British novelist E. M. Forster once described in *Howard's End* as the most romantic-sounding of all musical instruments. Playing in a choice ensemble composed of Aislinn Nosky and Julia Wedman, violins; David Rose, viola; Raphael Dubé, cello; Dominic Girard, bass; Lucas Harris, lute and guitar; and with the celebrated Nicholas McGegan as director and keyboard player, Jackson's brilliant artistry shines out like a jewel in a perfect setting. Her sound is bold and full, and she isn't afraid of risk-taking as she takes her instrument scampering nimbly up and down scales throughout its range. Without overstating the bassoon's capabilities, she explores them with a gleeful abandon that infects the entire group with her zestful excitement. She plays with deeply expressive feeling in the languorous slow movements, mostly marked Largo or Larghetto, of the eight concerti she has selected for this first release in a projected series.

You may be surprised to know that Vivaldi composed more concerti for the bassoon (37) than any solo instrument other than the violin. Considering that nobody else had forseen the possibilities inherent in the solo bassoon before Vivaldi's day (and all too few have done so since) it is remarkable that he did not hesitate to pay it the compliment of writing the sort of arpeggios, rapid scales and register leaps normally reserved for the violin. In the outer movements of the Concerto in E minor, RV 484, we hear music of a Vivaldian élan we normally associate with his concerti for flute or violin. In the Presto opening movement of the Concerto in E-flat major, RV 483, we have her undertaking fast rapid-fire passages with a machine-gun intensity that is, nevertheless, far from mechanical in feeling. The ensemble participate in the happy spirit of the occasion in the very light-hearted opening Allegros of the Concerti in C minor, RV 480 and F major, RV 491.

All of this has been recorded optimally by producer/engineer David Bowles at the Glenn Gould Studio of the CBC in Toronto. It is an auspicious beginning to what promises to be a complete series of the bassoon concerti in five volumes.

Phil Muse