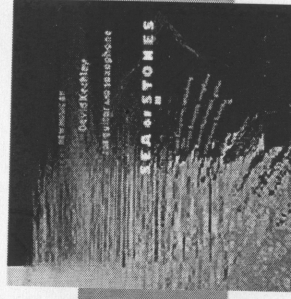
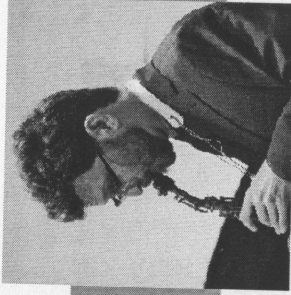


James Noyes Review



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SEA OF STONES

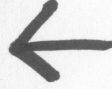
New Music By David Kechley For Guitar And

Saxophone

Frank Bongiorno (saxophone), Laurent Esoppey (saxophone),
Robert Nathanson (guitar), Filhamonia Sudecka
Sea Of Stones Available From Ennova Recordings

When composers take to writing for orchestra with soloists, some of their loftiest conceptions are made manifest. Such is the case with David Kechley and his *Sea of Stones*, a through-composed concerto for guitar and saxophone, commissioned by the Ryoanji Duo (Robert Nathanson, guitar; Frank Bongiorno, saxophone), a work with connotations as old as the universe itself.

Returning to a well that never runs dry, Kechley takes his inspiration for *Sea of Stones* (2003) from his first work for



X guitar and saxophone, *In the Dragon's Garden* (1992). The primary influence for both works came from the composer's visits to a Zen Buddhist temple in Ryoanji, Japan.

Awakening begins with a percussion "roll off" used in temple ceremonies and after the emergence of the soloists, moves into a galloping, compound-meter allegro. Steady streams of 8th notes from the duo interplay with respiring gestures from the orchestra.

Breath-takingly beautiful orchestral colors and plaintive two-note echoes characterize *Dances and Reflections*. Here, the sense of longing is unmistakable, and the music tugs at the heartstrings, featuring the warmth of a sustained and pulsating guitar while the saxophone echoes, embodying the sense of yearning.

The lushness of French horns ushers in *Arrival*, the first real high point of the piece, only to fall into *Dark Dream*, where the saxophone becomes part of the rhythm section, accenting syncopated chords reminiscent of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

Dialogues and Meditations offer a return to the intense lyricism of *Dance*, soaring to unparalleled heights. *Return* yields a reprise of the earlier *Arrival*, while *Last Light* is filled with refracted remembrance.

Kechley has created a work of intense lyricism – one that remains in the mind's ear, and the playing of both the soloists and the members of Filhamonia Sudecka is superb. At times, I would have liked to hear the saxophone in a more intimate role of "orchestral wind" and conversely, a more exposed role for the guitar may have provided greater overall balance, both compositionally as well as aurally. As the composer states, *Bounce: Inventions, Interludes, and Interjections* (2006) "whimsically refers to the character of the opening musical idea." Written for guitar and soprano saxophone, this through-composed work features a relentless back and forth between rhythmic, "vertical" elements and more "horizontal" expressiveness. The opening *Inventions* displays rollicking and boisterous saxophone lines and stabbing guitar chords, expertly executed by Nathanson, while Bongiorno sings sweetly throughout *Interlude*. *Interjections* lifts further off the ground, with greater speed and intensity, combining both styles of writing to an exciting finish.

Point of Departure: Five Pieces for Guitar and Saxophone (2012) is Kechley's most recent foray into writing for guitar and saxophone (doubling on soprano, alto and temple bells). *I. Prologue and Dramatic Expression* and *V. Epilogue and Lyric Recapitulation* feature intimate writing, which, as played by Estoppey and Nathanson, is both gentle and inviting. However, it was difficult for this listener to hear how the middle movements, *II. Quirky, III. Choral, Cadenza and Slow Dance*, and *IV. Relentless*, connect with the outer. I found this work to be the least cohesive of the three.

David Kechley has a substantial oeuvre for guitar and saxophone and this recent recording reveals the genius of such a combination. In particular, with the success of his concerto, *Sea of Stones*, I look forward to how this may influence the creation of larger chamber works (trios, quartets, quintets, etc.) using the Ryoanji Duo as its core. §