

of the last movement requires each member of the orchestra in turn to stand up, extinguish the light on his or her stand, and leave the stage. Point made!

I had a seat in the front row of the church and was therefore able to hear the orchestra at its best and see everything that was going on. I have nothing but praise for the members of the Brandenburg Sinfonia under Robert Porter who played with passion and panache. The forces were small – I recall there being only 9 strings in Haydn's *Farewell* and fewer still in Mozart's *Divertimento* (played without conductor and directed by Guest Leader Richard Milone) – but they made an excellent team and it was fascinating to watch the process of communication by eye contact and body language.

While the Mozart *Divertimento* was mellifluous, the Haydn forceful and at times even severe, it was Adam MacKenzie's performance of Mozart's *Violin Concerto No.3* arranged for bassoon which stole the show. Many double-reeders will know of – and perhaps possess – Gwydion Brooks's arrangement and performance of this concerto, and if so they will know what breath-taking playing Adam had to aspire to. Judging by the applause which followed his performance, the audience thought he more than met expectations, and they were delighted when he played an arrangement of Bach's *Aria* from the *Suite No.3* as an encore.

All in all this was an evening of beautiful music, beautifully played. The large audience (Japanese and other tourists much in evidence) clearly enjoyed it, and I have no doubt that those who might never have heard a bassoon concerto before will have left thinking that this instrument of impressive stature and sonority was really rather special! Bravo to all concerned!

Jefferey Cox

**Boojum for Bassoon and Orchestra**  
by Kelvin Thompson  
premiered by Joshua Wilson (bassoon)  
Enfield Young Symphony Orchestra  
Philip Colman (conductor)  
9th July 2012

It was with great interest that I went along to the Premier of this new bassoon concerto by Kelvin Thompson as both Kelvin and I had played in the West End show *The Hunting of the Snark* based on the nonsense poem by Lewis Carroll of the same name. It describes, 'with infinite humour the



Kelvin Thompson L with Joshua Wilson (bassoon)

impossible voyage of an improbable crew to find an inconceivable creature', complete with blank maps and characters all beginning with 'B' (Bellman, Beaver, Baker, etc). Each was convinced that the Snark would be something different to them; especially the Baker who had always been told by his uncle to beware, 'for hunting Snarks is all well and good, but if your Snark is a Boojum, then you will softly and suddenly vanish away, and never be met with again.'

Kelvin has always been a fan of the bassoon and when approached by Joshua Wilson to write a concerto, he tackled the idea with great relish, keen to explore the varied characters and voice of the instrument. The work is divided into eight continuous sections, each describing various stages of the fantastic journey and the emotions of the characters. The bassoon is used variously as Narrator, Snark and Boojum, while the orchestra depicts the various other characters drawing on sources from popular music including TV, advertising jingles, pop music, nineteenth-century operetta and the symphonic repertoire.

The Enfield Young Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Philip Colman were certainly up to the challenge of the differing musical styles in *Boojum* (including good use of drum kit) and generally accompanied the bassoon very well. Balance can often be a problem when using the full symphony orchestra, but the combination of a well-projected solo sound, good orchestrations and a well-rehearsed orchestra meant this was never an issue. There was some very impressive playing by Joshua Wilson, who really captured the contrasts, from the high lyrical playing

to the low comedy moments, showing great technical command of the instrument. All the more impressive in my eyes is that Joshua very much initiated the work, first approaching Kelvin to ask about the possibilities of writing a new piece specifically for him and EYSO. Then with help from Enfield Arts Support Services he saw it through to this World Premier – a great experience for so many players.

*Boojum* ticks many boxes for me – it's great to have any new pieces written for bassoon, especially ones that gently introduce both players and audiences into a more modern and varied sound world. The work needs nothing out of the ordinary orchestrally (no expensive hire of rare percussion!), and above all is playable by a good youth orchestra (or indeed any orchestra) and a competent soloist. I do hope that any players and conductors looking for a suitable solo opportunity will go to [www.kelvinthomson.com](http://www.kelvinthomson.com) where the score and a recording can be found.

Pete Harrison

## BOOK REVIEWS

### The Bassoon

James B. Kopp

Yale University Press

In this long-awaited addition to the Yale Musical Instrument series, James Kopp presents 'a history of the bassoon idea' from its obscure origins in renaissance Italy to the digital age. By the bassoon idea he means not just the folded bore but the acoustical properties of the instrument produced by its unique design, in particular the deep chimneys of the tone holes, which give the bassoon its characteristic sound. He shows that any attempts to correct the perceived deficiencies of the instrument which altered the fundamental qualities of the bassoon sound – 'majestic in the bass, touching in the tenor, full and serious in the middle' (Jancourt, 1847) – were abandoned, so that there is continuity of the bassoon idea from the sixteenth century to the present. The late William Waterhouse, commissioned by Yale University Press in 1997, had asked Kopp to co-author the book in 2007, but at his death that same year, left only a detailed table of contents. However Kopp has had access to the Langwill-Waterhouse archive and much additional research material. Faced with such a wealth of resources, including treatises, fingering charts, music, catalogues, trade cards, not to mention historic instruments and secondary sources, Kopp has decided to

give priority to the acoustical design and behaviour of the instrument itself. Nevertheless, there are many insights into repertoire, performers and other topics along the way and the author's experience as a player of modern and historical bassoons and expert reed-maker has informed his approach.

The structure of the book is straightforward. Three chapters deal with origins and early history. There follows a chapter each for the baroque, classical, romantic eras and the twentieth century. We are brought up to date with a chapter discussing 'the bassoonist's world since 1990' after which the contrabassoon, smaller sizes of bassoon, and other relatives are given chapters of their own to complete this comprehensive study. Within each of the chapters dealing with the bassoon proper, a general survey is followed by a review of developments in different parts of the world – France, the Americas and so on. This makes it easy for the reader to trace the history of the bassoon in a particular region. Throughout the book, Kopp notes developments in repertoire, technique, the use of the bassoon by composers and pedagogy. Three chapters devoted to the dulcian family and the precursors and early relatives of the bassoon may seem excessive, but this is one of the book's outstanding achievements. Kopp is a trusty guide through the maze of obscure references, the myriad of names and the myths surrounding the origins of the dulcian. Here the illustrations are a delight, leaving us in no doubt as to what a tartolt or a basson d'amour looked like. It is only right that the dulcian, whose wonderful repertoire is still under-performed, should be allowed so much space.

In later chapters the technical development of the bassoon is covered in detail. The period from about 1830 to 1900, another episode of frenzied experimentation following developments in the science of acoustics, is thoroughly explored. In the French versus German debate, Kopp does justice to both sides and does not neglect the shorter-lived Central European and Anglo-Belgian schools. As to geographical scope, due attention is paid to the use of the dulcian and the bassoon in North and South America, and in the later chapters we are made aware of developments in China and Japan, pointers to a less Eurocentric future. The period instrument revival in the twentieth century is well documented too. Not surprisingly, given the bassoon's history and Waterhouse's career and interests, the emphasis is on western classical music and orchestral music in particular, but for those willing to seek them out there are references to military music, bassoon quartets, jazz and