

John-Edward Kelly's New Glazunov Recording

Written by Robert Haley

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[John-Edward Kelly's latest saxophone CD release](#) is one that we've been waiting on for a few years! Back in 2000, Mr. Kelly recorded these three concerti with the excellent Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic. Only now have they been released on the Neos label.

Most saxophonists are very familiar with the famous Concerto by Alexander Glazunov. It is easily one of the most often studied and performed works in the repertory. There has been a resurgence of interest in the work from an historical viewpoint, so much so that there will be a presentation at the World Saxophone Congress meeting in July on this topic. While this type of examination of the repertoire of a particular instrument is commonplace among other instrumentalists, it is not always so with the saxophone. I believe the primary reason is that our body of music is relatively young, as is our instrument, and, therefore, has not attracted the scholarly examination into the origins or performances of the music. However, the new edition of the [Glazunov Concerto from Baerenreiter](#), the new edition of the [Debussy Rhapsodie from Henle](#), along with publications from Ethos, are presenting just this type of critical study of our music.

We can catch a glimpse into history through this recording from John Kelly. Mr. Kelly studied the Glazunov from the manuscript score with Sigurd Rascher. His rendition here makes good use of that preparation. Wrong notes in the printed version are corrected as well one tempo indication. The score was restored to the manuscript version and was used for this recording. If one is familiar with Rascher's quite different aesthetic regarding this concerto, you can hear

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the Rascher influence throughout. As presented here, the concerto is not a "show piece" or technical tour-de-force. It is a stately, Romantic presentation of the saxophone as Glazunov heard it back in 1933. We will remain indebted to Alexander Glazunov for providing us the only true Romantic-era concerto for the saxophone. It is with this realization, and from this perspective, that the concerto should be studied and performed. Mr. Kelly does an admirable job in all regards, even providing an excellent, self-composed cadenza in lieu of the published version. Printed articulations and phrasings are not taken as definitive, but this, again, reflects the era of composition. If you need to be convinced of this, just look at how many editions there are of the great violin concerti prepared by different performers throughout the years.

The two other compositions on the recording are music of today. Nicola LeFanu gave the saxophone quartet a wonderful work back in 1985 entitled Moon over the Western Ridge, Mootwingee . Ms. LeFanu offers a

few words about her 1989 concerto: "My

Concerto for Saxophone

is a single movement work lasting about 20 minutes. It has a characteristic and unusual sound world, arising from its virtuosity (in the solo saxophone and strings, too) and also because it employs quarter-tones throughout. The concerto is full of energy and colour; it is essentially a lyric piece, concerned with fantasy and reflection."

As with many of the pieces composed for John Kelly, the 4+ octave range of the saxophone is used without reserve. The Concerto by Krzysztof Meyer was composed in 1992-93 and consists of a lamenting, darkly-textured slow movement and a dramatic seven-sectioned, starkly-contrasted fast movement. The music is passionate, expressive, dramatic. The use of the saxophone is remarkable, utilizing the high register with an unhindered virtuosity. Mr. Kelly seems most comfortable with these types of pieces and he creates a riveting performance here.