

Book Review: *A Bassoon Lite, Please* by Alan R. Goodman

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This is a review of “*A Bassoon Lite, Please. Humorous Short Stories*” by Alan R. Goodman, (82 pages. \$11.50), published by the author in 2000 and available from him at 21639 Turmeric Court, Saugus, California, 91350. E-mail: bettynAlan@thevine.net.

Bracketed text is material quoted from a fictional meeting of Very Important Musical Persons (VIMPS) who met secretly in extraordinary session shortly after the book was published. By very good fortune the reviewer obtained copies of the minutes. The mission of the VIMPS is to carry out “our vital role maintaining and encouraging seriousness and solemnity in Classical Music.”

If you have been following Alan Goodman’s ongoing series in the IDRS publications entitled “A Bassoon Lite, Please” you will be outraged or delighted to know that they have been issued in book form. [“. . . since ‘going public’ he poses a very real danger to civilization as we know it”]

It is all Ronald Klimko’s fault. As the IDRS’s vaunted and sainted bassoon editor he first encouraged Alan by printing his essays in IDRS publications. To make matters worse he asked me to review the book. I thought that was not a good idea. I’ve known Alan for a long time – in college, the Army, auditions, marriages, fatherhood and now grandfatherhood. Maybe Ron is getting some of the royalties.

I am not a disinterested reviewer. It would not be a fair assessment. I know him too well. My review would have no credence, no validity. It would ruin the carefully cultivated record the IDRS has of reviews without conflict of interest. Besides, I can’t top his brand of sardonic wit. A review would at least have to do that wouldn’t it? Besides (again) he might take up his vengeful word processor to lampoon my review. Not sure I could survive that.

Nope, it’s not going to work. Not A Good Idea. Therefore, mainly out of self-defense and only partially out of collegial responsibility to the double-reed reading public, this “review” will be more a memoir.

I first heard Alan play when he was a high school senior. I was in my second year as a music education major at the State University College at Potsdam, New York. He was the in the

New York All-State Orchestra, which performed at the Syracuse meeting of the New York State School Music Association in 1959. Rumor had it he was applying to come to Potsdam. I was terrified. I met Alan. He was charming, self-effacing and entirely without pretense. If I remember correctly he refused to be serious about anything. I was very serious in those days, particularly about the prospect of future competition.

He came to Potsdam and we became fast friends. Our mentor was Professor **C. Robert Reinert**. (To this day we share our bassoon thoughts on a regular basis with him. We are very, very lucky to have this musical and personal touchstone in our lives.)

He roomed with me while student teaching, introducing me to gefilte fish and schav. Later, we entered the United States Military Academy Band at West Point a few weeks apart. Al’s laser wit and my inability to keep from reacting to it were a disruptive combination. Some day I hope he will write about his time as Drum Major of the Governor’s Island Band. The Armed Forces Day parade in New York City in 1968 was an unforgettable moment. And what about the time he was colonel’s orderly in basic training? Come on Al, there’s a lot more fodder in your past to make literary hay.

It is hard to believe he is about to retire after decades in the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Come to think of it, they probably need a break from Alan. Even so, I’ll bet the auditions will never be as much fun as they were when he was around.

While I have known for a very long time that he can tell devastatingly funny stories with ornate, complex descriptions, I didn’t realize he enjoyed writing. Recently, he told me he was encouraged to write by Dr. Grace Terry, one of Potsdam’s stellar English teachers. (There were four such teachers on the English faculty. I had three of them, and they were incredibly good.) If Grace Terry uncorked Goodman’s pen she did a great favor for musical humankind. [“Why do we permit orchestral musicians to become literate? It just causes so many problems.”]

Alan’s humor strikes home for many musicians, especially those in performing ensembles. His writing has breathtaking precision. In fact, it may leave you gasping for air. I can only read a paragraph at a time, sometimes only a few

sentences, because I become helplessly out-of-breath with laughter. We need a study to determine if the level of giggling and chortling has risen sharply since his columns appeared in the IDRS mags. One imagines conductors and managers being mystified by the shoulder-shaking in their double reed sections. ["He must be stopped before it gets out of hand."]

Alan's writing style, scenarios and pace vary. The characters are colorful, occasionally believable and sometimes named after real persons. Sometimes they are thinly disguised to protect the guilty. His style continues the satirical tradition of writer-commentators like Mark Twain, Will Rogers and Molly Ivins, and that of musical satirists like Anna Russell, Michael Flanders and Donald Swann. I also detect a dash of Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. Is that because he has lived so long near Hollywood? ["It can't be all that bad, he is after all, a mere bassoonist."]

There is undoubtedly a segment of the musician population that does not enjoy Alan's writing. Read his "Laugh-A-Holic" story. That one is a lot less funny when you think about its deeper

implications. Seriousness is an affliction in the orchestra business. You can't really blame us. After all, livelihoods, seating positions, raises, places on entourages, can be at stake. ["Orchestral musicians are just cogs in the great creative process. They should not be permitted any opinions."]

Be not deceived. Underneath the veneer of Alan's skewering wit beats the heart of a deeply idealistic and committed musician. ["We can't let up in the relentless pursuit of purity."]

Alan's daughter, Melissa Goodman McKean, inherited Alan's sardonic wit. She displays it through her graphic cover art. I recognized many of her models in the portraiture on the cover.

The best recommendation for the book is from my brother-in-law, Stewart Tresouthick. In a letter to Alan he said, ". . . I really like your kind of humor and I enormously like your book. But my liking your humor and your book tells me that maybe I should stop playing my crumhorn."

News Flash: Skinner Reed Book Finally Published!!

As this issue of the *Double Reed* goes to press, we have just received the exciting news that the long-awaited book *The Bassoon Reed Manual: Lou Skinner's Theories and Techniques* by James McKay, with contributing authors Russell Hinkle and William Woodward, has finally been published by Indiana University Press (601 North Morton Street, Bloomington, IN 47404-3796, tel: 812-855-6804, fax: 812-855-7931, email: iupress@indiana.edu) for the list price of \$39.95. The ISBN number is: ISBN 0-253-21312-6. This book will be a great addition to the art of reedmaking and should be on every bassoonists' bookshelf. ED.