



# Review: *ZigZags*

Solo Compact Disc

Joanna Ross Hersey, Tuba and Euphonium

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This is the second solo CD recording by Dr. Hersey, the first being *O quam mirabilis* in 2010. She again teams up with her husband, William Bendrot, in a tuba and electronic music setting for four new original works, *Tether*, *Shatterdome*, *One*, and *Kakera*. The other works on the program are *O Virgo Ac Diadema* by Hildegard von Bingen arranged for tuba and electronics, *ZigZags* for solo tuba by Faye-Ellen Silverman and Hersey's first foray into composition, *Convent Window* for unaccompanied tuba. Hersey is currently the principal tubist with the Carolina Philharmonic, a member of the Alchemy Tuba-Euphonium Quartet, a Yamaha performing artist, and Associate Professor of Tuba and Euphonium at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

*Tether* is an interesting juxtaposition of the tuba not only in a solo role but also in an accompanying role against the electronic music described in the program notes as "based on futuristic cyberpunk anime compositional imagery..." It is quite fascinating to hear the swirling textures, tuba riffs and pedal notes, as well as blending of analog and digital sounds.

The *Convent Window* unaccompanied work is described by Hersey as "Hildegard von Bingen pausing for a moment of calm reflection at her window." It is indeed a reflective piece not out of character with the ebb and flow of von Bingen's music and well-executed as a very personal reflective work.

*Shatterdome* brings back the electronic music element but with pulsing repetitive rhythms, percussion background, and the tuba acting in an improvisational manner usually slower than the background rhythms but also playing against the rhythms back and forth like jazz improvisation with a Phrygian modality.

The heart of the CD, *ZigZags*, is a tour de force by Faye-Ellen Silverman for the solo tuba. It has something of everything including extreme range, tricky rhythms and intervals, multiphonics, and other extended techniques. Hersey really shows off her versatility and mastery of the instrument with this work.

*One* brings back the electronics, again with a driving percussive rhythm but also with underlying repetitive harmonic movement. The tuba rides on top of the rhythm slowly changing the melody in contrast to the loop-like accompaniment. I really enjoy this kind of music. Later, Hersey overdubs herself with tuba harmony and countermelodies that takes the music to a new level of interest.

The *O Virgo Ac Diadema* adds an undulating electronic background to the actual von Bingen melody played by the tuba. I love the last part of the lyrics of the original music roughly translated as "O branch God had foreseen your flowering on the first day of his creation and he made you for his word as a golden matrix O praiseworthy Virgin."

The last work on the recording, *Kakera*, is another reflective tuba and electronics work with lots of low register melodic fragments that repeat against a percussive background. It so reminds me of work common in sequencing software where the interest is not the constant repetition so much as the mutation of the sounds over time while maintaining the same insistent chord progression and rhythmic vitality.

The entire album is quite different from what we would call mainstream tuba recordings. The original tuba and electronics work, a major unaccompanied tuba work all juxtaposed with Hildegard von Bingen, herself a musical visionary, sets this recording apart from anything else. Brava!