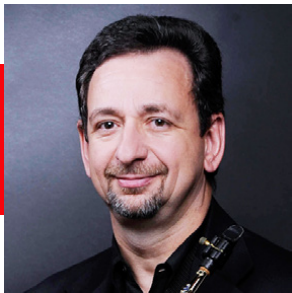


# Saxophone Today

## CD Reviews

### Frank Bongiorno Reviews



#### Frank Bongiorno Review

#### HAWK

“The Saxophone Music of Stuart Saunders Smith”

#### Susan Fancher

Susan Fancher (saxophones), Mark Engebretson (saxophones), Sylvia Smith and Ayano Kataoka (percussion), John Alexander (organ)  
[Susan Fancher's Website](#)  
*Hawk* Is Available From Amazon

As a champion of new music, Susan Fancher has premiered over one hundred new works for the saxophone, and in recent years, has been instrumental in promoting new concertos for the soprano saxophone. She has performed extensively throughout the United States and abroad as a soloist and as a member of various prominent chamber music ensembles, including the Red Clay, Amherst, Vienna and the Rollin' Phones saxophone quartets. In addition, she has numerous recordings on labels such as Arizona University Records, Philips, New World, and Innova Records, among others, and is a contributing columnist for *Saxophone Today*. She currently teaches on the faculties of Duke University and the New England Summer Music Camp.

Stuart Saunders Smith has written over two hundred works for a variety of instrumental and vocal combinations, with a majority of the works for percussion. After initially studying harmony and counterpoint at Berklee, he went on to earn degrees in composition from the Hartt School of Music (BMA, MM) and the University of Illinois (DMA). He is currently the Director of the New Music and Improvisation Ensembles, as well as teaches composition and theory at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Smith's 1980 composition for four saxophones, *Notebook*, is a wonderfully interesting work that takes well-known jazz standards and re-works them using numerous compositional techniques. While the original melodies are not identifiable, the resulting work is a uniquely new and intricate. Fancher is joined by composer/saxophonist Mark Engebretson on alto and baritone saxophone, while she performs the soprano and tenor saxophones on this composition. The musical rapport between Fancher and Engebretson is excellent as their

actions, and reactions, complement one another, as well as allow the music to flow organically throughout the course of the composition.

*Magdalene* is a five-movement trio for soprano saxophone and percussion played by two percussionists. The crux of the piece is based upon the independent communication and interaction among the performers, with only moments of silence for the performers to resolve their parts, as well as regroup for the following section. While there is a meditative and reflective air about this piece, the soprano saxophone part has numerous large intervallic skips into the extreme ranges of the instrument, and there are on-going opportunities for the saxophone tone to be rich and full with vibrato and emotion. Fancher easily negotiates these challenges, allowing the saxophone to sing freely over the interacting percussion, but also sympathetically reacting within the ensemble for a cohesive structure and texture.

Smith's *Husband's and Wives*, a duo for two alto saxophones, allows the performers to decide their own phrasing and dynamics, independently from one another, as the piece develops, in much the same way as a marriage, where two individuals exist united, but with separate emotions and thoughts. The piece is an on-going series of dissonance and consonance, tension and release, as well as excitement and relaxation, and the duo of Fancher and Engebretson successfully portray this ebb and flow in the music with a convincing interpretation of clarity in articulation and variation of dynamism in their playing.

The title cut of the CD, *Hawk*, is performed with solo soprano saxophone. Compared to the other previous works, the only variable left to the performer to negotiate is the level and degree of interpretation the saxophonist imposes on the work. Fancher's tone on this piece, as with the other compositions on this CD, is clear, as well as appropriately pliable, in order to enhance the perspicuity and expressiveness of the piece.

Concluding the CD is *One for Two*. An earlier work by Smith, written in 1971, the piece is for alto saxophone and organ. A darker sounding piece (inspired by conflict in one's thoughts before pending disaster) that incorporates sounds created by each instrument, as well as call and response and contrapuntal passages. In particular, some of the saxophone's extended techniques, performed with remarkable control by Fancher, are effectively used throughout this piece, (e.g., altissimo, multi-phonics, among others) to help represent the conflict and tension within the work.

Hawk is an eclectic set of pieces by Smith and performed skillfully by Fancher et al. Tension and release is an integral component of the music on this CD, but the use of tension and release is not enough for the music to be successful, or for it to convey its creative message to its listeners. It is the crafted balance of tension and release in the music, along with an enlightening and incisive interpretation by Fancher and the performers that allows the music on this CD to not only speak, but also to be heard. §

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