

**Review of CD Contrabajisimo & CD Bassa Nova
in BASSWORLD Dec. 2005**

These two discs represent the most recent of German double bassist Christine Hooch's contributions to the discography of our instrument. Released in 2004 and 2005, respectively, these recordings demonstrate her ability to engage her audience in a wide variety of repertoire and her passionate approach to music making.

On Bassa Nova Hooch demonstrates her control of the presents works ranging from the familiar to those that bear further attention. Opening with Bottesini's Allegro di Concerto 'Alla Mendelssohn', she immediately demonstrates her ability to project a clear tone and the lyricism she uses to craft each phrase. Hooch moves fluidly from genre to genre, with command of tone, articulations, and nuance at every turn. Protopop's Sonata 1963 and Jean Francaix's Mozart New-Look are the most familiar selections. These, along with Emil Tabokov's Motiv. Bottesini's Tutto il mondo serro with mezzo soprano Claudia Nüsse is artfully done. Duo Piasso gave the European premiere of the Suite in three Movements by Leo Eylar, and this may be the first time the piece has appeared on a commercial recording. The Adagio from Dimitri Shostakovich's The ClearStream gently rounds out the disc. With the unaccompanied Tabokov we get to hear the full range and nuance of Hooch's playing. Their choice of repertoire is creative and the playing by both Hooch and Nussbaum is top-notch.

Contrabajisimo consists primarily of works by Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla. Hooch embarked on this project after performing Kicho, one of the few original pieces Piazzolla wrote for the bass. The arrangements are her own in collaboration with pianist Barbara Nussbaum, and include violin on three of the works. Ernst-Ludwig Leitner's Concerto for double bass, winds, percussion and harp, which is heavily influenced by Piazzolla, is also on the disc. The range of emotions that Hooch captures between the exquisite tenderness and the suspended tension that is ever-present in the tango is mesmerizing. The haunting familiarity of Legratango, Oblivion, Milonga en Re, and Tanti anni prinia, carries over into Kicho and Contrabajisimo, and Hooch demonstrates her control of shading and clarity of her tone on each piece. Barbara Nussbaum expertly complements the melodic line of the double bass; this music is truly a duo each line, whether harmony or melody, needs to balance with the others, and the ensemble is terrific. Winfried Rademacher's violin playing blends in, emerging from the bass line, and weaving through the texture to give it subtle color and inflection. The Concerto by Leitner is lightly scored with flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, two horns, two trumpets, trombone and tuba, in addition to the harp and percussion. Modeled after the instrumentation of Mozart's Gran Partita, the bass is given the role of the first violin. Not only does the instrumentation echo Piazzolla's own preferences, but Leitner also hints at Adios Nonino without ever quoting it directly. This is a charming yet striking piece, well balanced in ensemble, and gives Hooch yet another venue in which to shine.

I had the additional pleasure of hearing Hooch perform several of the Piazzolla pieces live at the 2005 ISB convention, accompanied by Nussbaum and violinist Renata Artman-Knific. The audience, captivated by their affection for the music of Piazzolla, was completely drawn in by the sheer energy of the performers as they played their hearts into this music. The feeling of the disc is more of a controlled energy, but the heard is all there - captured for the continued enjoyment of the listener.

Review by Andi Beckendorf