New Operas by Heggie & Adamo in Dallas
Piano Mania in Seattle
Jewish Music with Evgeny Kissin
Music in Taiwan
World premieres in Los Angeles, Cleveland, St Paul, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati

Over 400 reviews
March 2-19
Sarasota Opera wraps up its 28-year survey of Verdi’s complete works as Victor DeRenzi conducts Aida and The Battle of Legnano at the Sarasota Opera House.

March 5, 11, 13
Houston Grand Opera presents the world premiere of Carlisle Floyd’s chamber opera Prince of Players. Patrick Summers conducts Ben Edquist in the leading role at the Wortham Theater.

March 6
Grant Gershon leads his Los Angeles Master Chorale and the Bang on a Can All-Stars in Julia Wolfe’s Pulitzer Prize-winning Anthracite Fields at Disney Concert Hall.

March 7-40
Eighth Blackbird tours to Washington DC’s Kennedy Center, Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, Winchester VA’s Shenandoah Conservatory, and Vancouver BC’s Orpheum Annex with a concert that includes selections from their album “Fables”.

March 10-13
Yannick Nezet-Seguin leads eight soloists, three choruses, and the Philadelphia Orchestra in four performances of Mahler’s Symphony of a Thousand (No. 8) at Verizon Hall.

March 13, 21, 30, & April 1
Violinist Jennifer Koh and pianist Shai Wosner continue their “Bridge to Beethoven” series, pairing Beethoven’s Violin Sonatas Nos. 3 and 10 with a new Anthony Cheung work based on Sonata No. 10 at Rockville MD’s Kreeger Auditorium, New York’s 92nd Street Y, and San Francisco’s Herbst Theatre. On March 30, also at the Herbst, they intersperse a new work by Andrew Norman with Beethoven Sonatas Nos. 1-3.

March 19-20 & April 8-10
Bella Hristova is soloist in the first two performances of David Ludwig’s Violin Concerto, first with Jaime Laredo conducting the Vermont Symphony in Burlington and Rutland, then with Michael Stern and the Kansas City Symphony at the Kaufmann Center.

April 5
Leon Botstein conducts the Bard Festival Chorale and American Symphony Orchestra in Delius’s rarely performed Mass of Life at Carnegie Hall.

April 7-10
Leif Ove Andsnes, Christian Tetzlaff, Tabea Zimmermann, and Clemens Hagen travel to Chapel Hill NC’s Memorial Hall, New York’s Carnegie Hall, and Chicago’s Orchestra Hall to perform Brahms’s complete piano trios.

April 14-16, 30
Composer Jonathan Leshnoff hears the world premiere of two of his works: the Clarinet Concerto with principal Ricardo Morales, Yannick Nezet-Seguin, and the Philadelphia Orchestra at Verizon Hall (also on the program, the world premiere of Maurice Wright’s Timpani Concerto with principal Don Liuuzzi) and Zohar (paired with Brahms’s Requiem) with Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony at Symphony Hall, a program they take to Carnegie Hall April 30.

April 14, 16, 17
William Christie and Les Arts Florissants perform Andre Campra’s opera-ballet Le Fetes Venitiennes at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

April 15 & 17
Cameron Carpenter plays the US premiere of his transcription for organ and orchestra of Rachmaninoff’s Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini with Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony at Heinz Hall. Also on the program is Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 10.

April 22 & 23
Organist Paul Jacobs is soloist in Guilmain’s Symphony No. 1 with Matthew Halls and the Indianapolis Symphony at the Circle Theatre. Also on the program are works by Messiaen, Milhaud, and Ravel.
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Great Scott at Dallas

Heggie & Adamo Premieres at Dallas Opera

McNally’s often hilarious, however, never occurs. The opera-football conflict, for a potentially farcical face-off between foot-

A s the curtain rose on the Dallas Opera’s October 30 world premiere of composer Jake Heggie and librettist Terrence McNally’s often hilarious Great Scott, hopes were high for something far less sobering than their first operatic collaboration, Dead Man Walking. The story of Great Scott, a co-commission with San Diego Opera, revolves around the opening night premiere of Vittorio Bazzetti’s 180-year old opera, Rosa Dolorosa, Figlia di Pompei (keep in mind, this is all fiction). Long thought lost, the manuscript was discovered by world famous mezzo-soprano, Arden Scott (Joyce DiDonato), in a drawer at home. The opera star Arden Scott discovers that greatness is truly a matter of heart” resulted in a number of hokey, over-sen-

timentalized scenarios. Scott’s serious moments seemed tacked on, as if the creators feared that a hilarious evening of operatic entertainment could not possibly stand on its own.

Heggie’s overture, beautifully paced by conductor Patrick Summers, lost no time in suggesting what was in store. Any curtain opener that moves from a busy, ghost-like riff on ‘The Red River Valley’ to a mish-mash of pseudo-Rossini and non-descript Broadway cannot possibly end in a funeral march.

If the overture was clever, some of the plot developments and casting bordered on brilliance. The machinations of Tatyana Bakst (Allyn Perez), a young over-the-top ambitious Eastern European soprano who attempts to dethrone Scott, came across as a lite-version of the classic back-biting rivalry of Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter) and Margo Channing (Bette Davis) in the movie All About Eve (1950). Perez’s over-the-top impersonation and the libretto’s welcome deviations from the expect-
ed bitch fight made it possible to enjoy the fun without fastening one’s seat belt.

Cliche or not, the gay love angle between Roane Heckle (countertenor Roth Costanzo), the high-voiced (as in gay) stage manager who runs a very tight ship, and Eric Gold (bass Kevin Burdette), the obviously dyed-blond conductor with a soft spot for cute gay boys, succeeded. Playing legs that would have left Marlene Dietrich about like an inflated dolt. Rodell Rosel may not have had the tenor voice of the century, but he made the most of his silly, inconsequential character. Mark Hancock was adorable in the speaking role of Sid’s 11-year-old son.

But the story stumbled when it tried to be everything at once. There were too many Hall-
moments and too many plot turns that went nowhere. Heggie missed a major oppor-
tunity when the Ghost of Bazzetti’s exchange hangs in the balance as opera star Arden Scott discovers that greatness is truly a matter of heart—resulted in a number of hokey, over-sen-

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Roth Costanzo sang with a power rarely heard from a countertenor. He also moved about the stage with total ease, which gave greater power to his character’s transition from silly to serious. Burdette shone most as the Ghost of Bazzetti. Although he needed to resort to falsetto for his highest notes, the beautiful resonance of his voice made his char-
acter’s dispensation of sage advice believable.

Gunn remains one of the most suave and seductively voiced baritones around, which means he was typcast to perfection. Mayes managed to sing quite well as Wendell Swann as he pumped his gym-toned pecs and strutted about like an inflated dolt. Rodell Rosel may not have had the tenor voice of the century, but he made the most of his silly, inconsequential character. Mark Hancock was adorable in the speaking role of Sid’s 11-year-old son.

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The music was intentionally filled with droll stereotypical effects. By employing dra- matically inappropriate elongated trills, mult- i octave runs, and silly staccato effects in Rosa's cabaletta, 'Cosa M'Importa' and climactic Mad Scene, Heggie tipped us off that Vittorio Bazzetti was not unjustly ignored—those familiar with the bel canto idiom quickly realized just how second-rate the fictional Bazzetti was. Special kudos go to Von Stade as the most lovable arts administrator of them all. Attired by Crowley in sparkling blue sports cap and jacket, Flicka was every inch the natural stage animal as she freely moved about and dis- played legs that would have left Marlene Diet- ric's legs in the shade. She played her part for all its worth. At 70, she sang with admirable strength and steadiness, while retaining the ability to touch the heart like few others.

With every technical effect expertly exe- cuted and a figure worth fighting over, DiDo- nato proved herself a star once again. In the admirably clear superior acoustics of Win- spear Opera House, the particular heart-tug- ging quality of her voice came through admirably. And thanks to Stage Director Jack O'Brien and Choreographer John de los San- tos, her acting and movement—and everyone else's, fact—was dynamic and convincing.

Perez sounded too thick at the top of her considerable range, as if so much time in big houses has encouraged her to push up rather than let her voice rise naturally. Nonetheless, the inflated quality of her instrument worked to her absurd character's advantage.

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Great Scott and Becoming Santa Claus

Jake Heggie: Great Scott

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with Arden primed us for the most moving of mad scenes, but the silly music made depth impossible. But for people who could let go of trying to make sense of it all and allow laughter to take over, Great Scott was a hoot. Its music may not call for an original cast recording, but its hilarious scenarios deserve a Blu-ray and DVD.

Mark Adamo: Becoming Santa Claus
Wayne Lee Goy

With the opening night performance on December 4 of Mark Adamo’s Becoming Santa Claus Dallas Opera reached the impressive mark of three premieres in one calendar year. At the same time, composer Adamo opened yet another pathway on his remarkable exploration of what an opera—and an opera libretto—should be.

With Little Women in 1998, Adamo expanded Louisa May Alcott’s narrow world of small-town girlhood into a broadly lyrical exploration of personal transformation, essentially producing a “family-friendly” opera with an added philosophical bent. In 2005 with Lysistrata, he shaped Aristophanes’ ancient comedy of sex, war, and the battle of the sexes into a musically elegant, bawdy parable of the same timeless topics, sacrificing the broader appeal of Little Women for a sharper-edged comment on the human condition.

While Little Women has predictably become one of the most frequently performed contemporary operas, and Lysistrata has a good chance of a permanent spot in communities with a sophisticated, open-minded audience, Becoming Santa Claus presents the dilemma of a superbly conceived and crafted opera that leaves one wondering exactly who the audience is.

Adamo gave himself the extraordinary challenge of drawing together various strands of the Christmas legend, bravely stirring together elements from the biblical narrative of the birth of Jesus and the adoration of the Magi with an attempt to explain the parentage of the Christmas legend, as in Lysistrata and Little Women, Adamo here produced his own take on those earlier works, he did not rely on a single, identifiable source. Drawing from the traditions of JRR Tolkien’s Middle Earth and L Frank Baum’s Oz, he creates a world that is in some ways the same world we live in but, on the other hand, not. The adolescent Prince Claus, for instance, belongs to a Tolkiensque race of elves—which also includes, in this version, the Three Kings of the Christmas narrative, as well as Prince Claus’s jealous, temperamental, and hovering mother. The initial action takes place in an art-deco-style polar palace shared by Claus and his mother with a troupe of comically Baum-esque assistants named Ib, Yab, Oh, and Yan.

The young Claus’s adolescent ennui eventually and predictably transforms into the extraordinary generosity we associate with the idea of Santa Claus; Adamo pulls off a remarkable literary trick in managing to absorb the Christian nativity narrative into a broadly universal (and post-Christian) fable where the principal character achieves his final apotheosis only after finding the manger empty and the child already gone—at which point he redirects his newfound generosity toward all children.

In its score Becoming Santa Claus offers dizzying complexity but produces constantly engaging, striking musical effects. The cast includes mezzo-soprano Jennifer River as Queen Sophine and tenor Jonathan Blalock as Claus (a role which will always demand, incidentally, a full-grown tenor who can convincingly portray an adolescent boy). The vocal writing that was demanding on all levels, and conductor Emmanuel Villaume held the combined vocal and orchestral forces together admirably. Director Paul Curran found the right combination of whimsy, fantasy, and credible characterization in designer Gary McCann’s appropriately lavish picture-book setting.

Clearly intended to take a spot in the repertoire as a holiday piece in the tradition of Hansel and Gretel or Amahl, Becoming Santa Claus is an impressive literary and musical accomplishment. But the expense and expertise required to mount a production, as well as the question of audience, loom large.

Bel Canto Premieres, Powerful new Wozzeck
John von Rhein

The Metropolitan Opera, among a few other top-tier opera producers, might have something to say about General Director Anthony Freud’s stated aim to make Lyric Opera of Chicago “the great North American opera company for the 21st Century.” Utopian dream, or ambitious game plan for hardened future development? Time, of course, will tell.

Meanwhile, the various artistic innovations, increased cultural services to greater Chicago, and world-class productions, given as part of both Lyric’s main stage subscription season and as projects of Lyric Unlimited (its community engagement wing), bode well for the success of Freud’s lofty ambitions. They also lend cachet to this first full Lyric Opera season to fall under the planning of Freud and his administrative colleague (and fellow Brit), Music Director Andrew Davis.

Before Lyric’s 61st season got underway in September with a sunny new Marriage of Figaro, local audiences were given several extended peeks into Freud’s vision for Lyric’s new future. It’s a utopian vision predicted on increasing the relevance of opera for a variety of audiences and, in a broader sense, sending the message about the strength of Chicago’s culture around the world.

High-profile collaborations with other Chicago arts organizations have been central to turning noble intentions into practical reality, many of those partnerships spearheaded by soprano Renee Fleming, Lyric’s first-ever creative consultant. (The superstar diva has held the post since 2010, and her contract has been extended through 2017.) She was busy on numerous fronts last year. She helped to nurture young Chicago-area vocal talent through master classes at local music schools and Lyric Unlimited’s vocal partnership program for high school students. She developed a multi-year, multi-faceted Chicago Voices project (to be announced in full in 2016). And she tapped up-and-coming Matthew Aucoin to compose a young people’s opera, Second Nature, which had its successful world premiere at Lincoln Park Zoo in August.

Not least, as project curator, Fleming chose the Peruvian-born American composer Jimmy Lopez to write the music for Bel Canto, a two-act adaptation of the best-selling 2001 novel by Ann Patchett, for its world premiere by Lyric Opera on December 7. The libretto is by the Cuban-American playwright Nilo Cruz.

Five years in the making, Bel Canto was Lyric’s first main stage commission since 2004 and only the seventh world premiere in its history. While flawed dramatically, the new opera’s chilling timelines (the premiere came less than a month after November’s terrorist massacre in Paris) and the poetic resonance with which the music and drama came together made the premiere a memorable occasion. Bel Canto drew a gripping performance from a large international cast (singing in eight languages) under Davis’s incisive baton, along with a remarkably clean, cohesive staging by Kevin Newbury.

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guages) under Davis’s incisive baton, along with a remarkably clean, cohesive staging by Kevin Newbury.
Both the book and opera are based on the widely reported hostage crisis that took place in Lima, Peru in 1996-97, when armed members of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement stormed a gala reception at an official residence and took scores of international partygoers hostage. The opera transfers the Lima Crisis to the Peruvian vice president’s mansion, retaining Patchett’s narrative arc. The hostages include a world-famous opera diva, Roxane Coss, and the host of honor, a Japanese electronics corporation chairman, Katsumi Hosokawa, who had agreed to attend the gala reception on condition that Coss, whose singing he has long adored, be there to sing at his birthday party.

Like John Adams’s Death of Klinghoffer, another contemporary American opera that includes singing terrorists, Bel Canto is less concerned with geopolitics than human values. As the days of standoff between the terrorists and the army commandos outside the compound wear into weeks, a Stockholm syndrome-type scenario comes into play. Out of this welter of quarantined humanity, unlikely bonds are formed, and improbable romantic relationships ensue. The more interesting of these involves Coss (sung by the compelling soprano Danielle de Niese) and Hosokawa (the imposing South Korean bass-baritone Jeongcheol Cha), she motivated by a need to be loved by one man, he by a desire to make love in the flesh to a goddess of song he has long worshiped from afar. The other, less credible liaison involves the young guerrilla Carmen (the lustrous mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges) and Gen Watanabe (the smoothly produced lyric tenor Andrew Stenson). Hosokawa’s multilingual translator.

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Seattle, the Piano Town

5 Major Pianists in 7 Weeks
Melinda Bargreen

Seattle has long been a piano town. The long-running President’s Piano Series at the University of Washington has a large and discerning following. Savvy presenters also know that the presence of a piano soloist on an orchestral program is likely to be a draw. But even in this city of the ivories, the 2015 fall concert season was unusual. The Seattle Symphony launched its 2015-16 season with its first-ever piano competition, judged by the orchestra’s first-ever Artist-in-Residence, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, countryman of Music Director Ludovic Morlot (both are from Lyon). Thibaudet and the competition winner, Kevin Ahfat, also served as soloists for the orchestra’s opening-night gala. Seven weeks later Thibaudet returned as recitalist in a solo program in Benaroya Hall. In between, a remarkable concert line-up brought to Seattle Lang Lang, Andras Schiff, Jonathan Biss, and Alexander Melnikov.

The September 19 Seattle Symphony opener that offered two very different rewards. The first was hearing the competition’s winner in the last movement of Barber’s piano concerto, a wild ride indeed and one Ahfat traversed with obvious relish while pushing the music to the edge of control. Later in the concert, 54-year-old Thibaudet made Saint-Saens’s Concerto No. 5 (Egyptian) a glorious kaleidoscope of exotic sound that vividly brought to life the composer’s time in Luxor. Thibaudet’s leisurely and luxurious interpretation rose to considerable drama and virtuosity.

With some trepidation I set out for Benaroya Hall a few weeks later for an afternoon orchestral concert with Lang Lang performing Mozart’s Concerto No. 24 and the Grieg concerto with guest conductor Jakub Hrusa. Recent media appearances by the Chinese-born superstar suggested “fast, loud, and overly choreographed” playing was in store. What we heard was a pianist whose explosive technique and penchant for display were reined in for some sensitive Mozart. He phrased No. 24 with flowing lines of considerable delicacy that seemed to float in the air. Nothing was overplayed; everything was stylistically appropriate.

The Grieg was quite different—full of violent explosions of keyboard fireworks. He led Hrusa and the orchestra on an unpredictable chase through the score. Languishing exquisitely over one phrase, taking off like a startled reebok in another, Lang Lang put his inimitable spin on the Grieg, but it wasn’t all “fast, loud”; there was some real poetry as well.

The next afternoon Andras Schiff arrived on the same stage for one of his “Last Sonatas” recitals. Benaroya Hall displayed not one but two concert grands, neither of them played the previous afternoon. The modern Steinway, a sonic gem, was selected at Schiff’s request by
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Seattle-based pianist Craig Sheppard, Schiff’s colleague and friend since the 1970s when both were Leeds Competition laureates. (Sheppard won silver to Murray Perahia’s gold in 1972; Schiff trilled his way to the bronze medal with Pascal Devoyen, behind Dmitri Alexeev and Mitsuko Uchida). Adjacent to that modern instrument was a rebuilt 1876 Steinway—brown, glossy, carved, curved, and scrolled, looking positively rococo next to the black modern grand Schubert knew for his pre-concert chats, arrived with a microphone to introduce the two instruments and to allay any audience fears that there would be a change of program or pianist.

Schiff has been touring the country with two “last sonatas” program: one with the second-last sonata and another with the final sonatas of Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert; in Seattle he played the latter. The first two sonatas, Haydn’s No. 62 and Beethoven’s No. 32, were played on the modern Steinway. The Haydn was a virtual textbook of the infallibility possible in attack, touch, articulation, and shading; this was Schiff at his most subtle.

The Beethoven was in a different sonic universe: larger-scale, more portentous, more disturbing. Schiff’s performance raged against life and fate, but concluded with a poetic simile of life and fate, but concluded with a poetic simile. Every note was considered, weighed, to introduce the two instruments and to allay any audience fears that there would be a change of program or pianist.

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The Beethoven was in a different sonic universe: larger-scale, more portentous, more disturbing. Schiff’s performance ranged against life and fate, but concluded with a poetic simplicity that spoke of resignation and reconciliation. Every note was considered, weighed, freighted with meaning. Schiff created a wonderful presence galvanizing Seattle violinist Artur Grisky and cellist Walter Gray with strongly marked passages. Sometimes there was a bit too much of a good thing, as when Melnikov lunged at the keyboard, attacking some notes and chords so strongly that the neighboring notes were struck as well. He drew a huge sonority from the piano. Some chords sounded like cathedral bells; other times he commanded a wide range of articulations and effects ranging from sparse to full-voiced.

Perhaps it is fitting that Thibaudet had the last word. Half of his November 8 recital on Benaroya’s mainstage he had already performed here in May 2010. That half, Ravel’s Pavane for a Dead Princess and Miroirs, speaks of his French-born side; but he is also half German. Both in 2010 and 2015 he paired Ravel with a major piece by a German composer, Brahms in 2010, Schumann’s Scenes from Childhood and Piano Sonata No. 1 in 2015.

“If there’s one composer above all who’s special to my heart and always will be, it’s real-ly Ravel,” Thibaudet told a Boston interviewer in 2011. That love was amply evident in his 2015 Seattle program. For all the technical fire-works—and there were plenty, particularly in the Miroirs—Thibaudet never ceased to amaze me with his ability to encapsulate a miniature world inside the deceptively childlike simplici-ty of Ravel’s Pavane or the Schumann’s Traumerei. For the latter, the pianist created a feather-light swirl of sound that really did evoke a dream world. In these simple pieces, every note spoke; there was incredible sophis-tication in its naivete.

Schumann’s Sonata No. 1 has never been one of my favorite pieces; the first movement in particular suffers from stylistic limitations and from its insistence on a rhythmic motif that isn’t very interesting. But Thibaudet breathed new life into the sonata, especially in the mysterious, smoky Aria movement. He held onto a few beautiful passages as if reluctant to let them go. The playing was remarkably unburdened and spacious.

The most exciting performances of the afternoon came in the five movements of Miroirs. The pianist evoked scene after sensu-sious scene: moths and birds that flutter and dart like quicksilver, a rocking boat with its whiff of salt air. Few pianists can approach Thibaudet’s remarkable skill in coaxing colors and atmospheres from the keyboard. The exu-berant and technically tricky Alborada del gracioso, with its repeated figures and glis-sandos in thirds, was tossed off as if the challenges were nothing.

The hall erupted in cheers when Thibaudet sounded the final triumphant chords. Then it was off to the encores: three of them, each quite different in form and mood: Brahms’s celebral, heart-wrenching Intermez-zo, Op. 118/2, followed by Chopin’s fluttering and speedy Etude, Op. 25/3, and finally, the easy charm of Schubert’s ‘Kupelwieser Waltz’ in G-flat.

Thibaudet took the same program to Carnegie Hall four days later. Would it have been nice to have had wider recital repertoire choices from such a fine artist? Certainly. But when the playing was this wonderful, revisiting earlier repertoire was downright heavenly.
A native of Soviet Russia and current Manhattan resident, Kissin, 44, has long been a student of Yiddish culture. The inclusion in the recital of poetry by Yitzhak Leybush Peretz, a father of Yiddish culture, honored the era of a century ago when there was an artistic alignment between refined music and populist literature, as well as a shared audience.

Kissin recited from memory seven poems in each half of the program. His speaking voice was deep and resonant, his gestures expressive but not lavishly excessive. Supertitles gave us an immediate translation of the poetry, which tangentially addressed moral principles through concise descriptions of day-to-day life and largely avoided any explicit religiosity. A friend of mine who also attended and is fluent in Yiddish complimented Kissin’s fine command of the language.

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The following evening the American Symphony Orchestra delved deeper into the same cultural vein. Though there were more resources at hand (a full orchestra) and at least twice as much music on the program, the program was decidedly less revealing and engaging. Music Director Leon Botstein’s credentials as a musical thinker and impresario are admirable and undeniable, yet encountering him as a conductor repeatedly comes as a disappointment. No matter how exotic his programs, he has an ability to flatten the experience into something drab, almost lifeless; and he tolerates lackadaisical and sloppy playing from his musicians. Given the evening’s theme, one had to ask, “Haven’t the Jews already suffered enough?”

This was the first time that the program opener, Krein’s Rose and the Cross Suite, was played in New York. Its five movements are rich in pictorial gestures (a castle, an ocean, a final death scene), but the effect was consistently tepid. Anton Rubinstein’s Cello Concerto No. 2 was more attractive and lively, thanks primarily to the fine young soloist, Istan Vardal, who played with a lean tone and crisp agility. The concerto “spoke” as the most explicitly Jewish writing of the two nights at Carnegie. Inflections in the modal melodies seemed to reflect folk song and also brought to mind a bit of Kissin’s Yiddish.

Salonen’s Karawane at L.A. Phil

E ven when it seems like the rest of the musical world is shriveling up into a ball of basic repertory, the Los Angeles Philharmonic continues to forge ahead with an agenda drenched in new music. That’s not to say that Walt Disney Concert Hall is going all-contemporary all the time. Hardly. In between the two concerts in late fall that are in review here, Gustavo Dudamel led one containing nothing but Bach and Mendelssohn. Beethoven’s ubiquitous Violin Concerto, Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4, and Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 were the chief selling points in surrounding concerts; and the L.A. Master Chorale continued to pack em’ in with Messiah singalongs.

Nevertheless, on the weekend before Thanksgiving, an adventurous music lover could sample the US premiere of a major work by the LA Phil’s former yet still often seen Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen, and 17 days later he could return to Disney Hall for a wild ramble through some rarely trodden avant-garde paths, courtesy of three Los Angeles-based string quartets. These are interesting times.

With the departure of Pierre Boulez from the scene, Salonen has become the leading active composer-conductor in the classical world. One important indication of his rising stature is that other conductors are increasingly taking on his compositions, and he even entrusts premieres to them now and then.

Lionel Bringuier, 29, Salonen’s assistant conductor from 2007 to 2009 at the Philharmonic and now music director of the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, gave the world premiere of Salonen’s new symphonic-choral piece Karawane in Zurich in 2014, the German premiere in Bamberg later that year, and the US premiere November 20 with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. (I heard the repeat performance the next day.) Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic will get it next on March 17-19.
Russian Jewish Composers with the American Symphony
Joseph Dalton

During a week when The Nutcracker and Messiah were occupying most of Manhattan’s musical life, Carnegie Hall’s main auditorium was the site of back-to-back programs of music by Russian Jewish composers from the first half of the 20th Century. Evgeny Kissin’s recital on December 16, which also included his recitation of Yiddish poetry, was part of the pianist’s season-long Perspective series there.

According to Carnegie officials, it was a coincidence that the American Symphony Orchestra decided to explore similar terrain the following evening. Music by one composer, Alexander Krein (1883-1951), actually closed the Kissin program on Thursday and opened the ASO program on Friday. Otherwise, the quality of performances made the two concerts extremely different.

The recital opened with Ernest Bloch’s Piano Sonata, Op. 40. First impressions suggested that Kissin was working a kind of magic on material that had seldom been given such care and finesse, bringing graciousness to something often garbled. But before long I say if a couple of hesitations in tempo were the pianist’s or the composer’s doing, but they were passing moments, and the music ralled as Kissin gave a commanding heft to the final chords.

Krein’s Dance Suite, Op. 44, ended the program with the most romantic and life-affirming music of the night, which is to say that it was also the most tonal. The five modest dances alternated between a pastoral and a parlor feel, yet there was little that lingered in the ear. A native of Soviet Russia and current Manhattan resident, Kissin, 44, has long been a student of Yiddish culture. The inclusion in the recital of poetry by Yitzhak Leybush Peretz, a father of Yiddish culture, honored the era of a century ago when there was an artistic alignment between refined music and populist literature, as well as a shared audience.

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This was also the first time New Yorkers heard both of the works on the concert’s second half. There seemed to be a sunrise trying to show through in the brief From Shelley by Minkil Ngesin (1883-1957). But a screeching horn marred the view; and, instead of a gradual flow of light, the music arrived in a choppy slide-show manner.

The massive, overstuffed Symphony No. 1 (1906) by Maximilian Steinberg (1883-1946) marked the last portion of the concert something to endure. But give the neglected Lithuanian-born composer—a pupil and son-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov (who preferred his music to Stravinsky’s) and teacher of Shostakovich—credit for serving up a surplus of ideas. Peter Laki’s program notes cited a list of German romantic influences; but the music felt more brash, theatrical, and forward-looking than that.

Yet another comparison between the Kissin and ASO evenings was that the sparse selection of works on the recital allowed the rare and complex works room to breathe. If the American Symphony had refrained from delirious torquing of music, the pieces might have been easier to take in—and perhaps they would have arrived better prepared.

Salonen’s Karawane
at L.A. Phil

2 World Premieres by 3 String Quartets
Richard S Ginell

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As it turned out, Karawane is Salonen's most overt attempt yet to connect with a mainstream symphonic audience; he seems to have been veering closer and closer with each opus.

That irony, in a way, because Karawane is a setting of a famously kooky poem by one of leaders of the Dada movement, Hugo Ball. The “text”—if that's what you want to call it—expresses nothing; it is made up of syllables strung together into words of some kind of imagined language that has a mischievously dry wit, so it’s not unlikely that he would cotton to this kind of deliberate nonsense. Yet the text stimulated his orchestral imagination in a serious way, creating a luminous wonderland of timbres, born no doubt from his extensive experience conducting the world's best orchestras.

The 27-minute piece is divided into two roughly-equal halves, both launched by the low-level buzzing of the Los Angeles Master Chorale murmuring and whispering. The first half is the luminous one where the vocal parts dissolve into vowels (think ‘Sirenes’ from Debussy's Nocturnes). The second half eventually becomes a wild dance that has a visceral primordiality with sections containing muffled brass glissandos, whomp ing drums, and thick string chords marked with percussion. I wouldn't know if Salonen had Villa-Lobos's Choros No. 10 in mind—i rather doubt it—but that's what this section reminded me of. Karawane may very well become Salonen's most popular piece to date, if there are enough orchestras and choruses that are able to play it (it sounds like a difficult score).

Bringuier displayed a tight wide-screen grip on its colorful facets. The conductor also brought an assured master's touch to the 27-minute piece. The Formalist Quartet, which came into being on Shostakovich's 100th birthday in 2006 and likes to play music that surely would have been branded “formalist” by the composer's tormentors, played a transcription of Cage's gentle Music for Mallets, where the thumps and bumps of a prepared piano were faithfully imitated by the pizzicato strings. The Calder followed with a transcription of Christian Wolff's Edges, where spare scratchings and tiny glissandos were succeeded by agitation and extended techniques galore.

Later on, all three quartets offered a further definition of Dada with Fluxus member George Brecht's so-called String Quartet, where the “score” simply consists of the words “shaking hands”. They did as asked, adding hugs as a presumably sanctioned deviation from the score. That's it. Some were amused; others pondered the concept of performance art in everyday life. I was gratified by its brevity.

Putting the Cage-ian stuff aside, the Lyris Quartet offered a fluidly luminous rendition of Ben Johnston's eloquent variations on the 18th-Century hymn tune 'Amazing Grace'—his String Quartet No. 4. Next came Steve Reich's Triple Quartet. It is most often heard with one quartet playing over tapes of two recorded quartets. Hearing the Calder, Lyris, and Formalist groups going at it on stage made the piece sound tougher and grittier.

Two world premieres rounded off a most unusual evening. The Calders made their way through Canticles of the Sky by one of the current composers-of-the-hour, John Luther Adams. It is four movements of seamless, sustained, surging and ebbing textures that merely offer more of the usual thing from this source. In Tristan Perich's Triple Quartet, an electronic score backed the 12 members of the quartets with harmonium-like sounds that blended compatibly with the acoustic strings in a dense, rich, minimalist score that grew to symphonic proportions near the close. The musicians were playing to click tracks (audio cues to synchronize sounds)—nothing unusu al about that, this being the film capital— with the electronic parts emanating from 12 speaker cones suspended from 12 microphone booms matched to each player. This last nugget of information I had to mine from one of the players after the concert, for the uninformative program notes were of no use whatever.

Yet even without knowing how the piece worked, the audience—much of it young—had a good time with it. Disney Hall's orchestra and side seats were packed that night, proving that new music coupled with lower prices does catch on—here, at least.

Sorromme's Two-Viola & Rands's English Horn Concertos

Daniel Hathaway

Three members of the Cleveland Orchestra were soloists in premieres of works commissioned for them. On November 19 principal violist Robert Vernon, due to retire at the end of the 2016 Blossom Season after 40 years, joined his stand partner Lynne Ramsey in Richard Sorromme's Concerto for Two Violas on themes from Smetana's From My Life with Music Director Laureate Christoph von Dohnanyi on the podium. This was a Cleveland Orchestra commission.

Then on November 27 Lionel Bringuier was guest conductor for Bernard Rands's English Horn Concerto, a work commissioned by the Oberlin Conservatory of Music to celebrate its 150th anniversary and to honor Cleveland Orchestra solo English Horn Robert Walters, who serves as professor of oboe and English horn at Oberlin.

Sorromme's concerto is equal parts nostalgia and invention. He based it on themes from Smetana's Quartet No. 1, a piece that figured memorably in the lives of Sorromme and Vernon, who studied the work with Cleveland Orchestra Concertmaster Joseph Gingold at the Meadowmount summer school in the Adirondacks. The quartet also figures in the orchestra's institutional history: George Szell arranged it for the ensemble and played it on his first set of concerts as the orchestra's music director in 1944.

Sorromme's new work is not so much a solo vehicle as the celebration of an orchestral family where two violas assume a prominent role, and everybody gets to join the party. On top of a full string section, Sorromme calls for triple winds, full brass, harp, piano, enough percussion to keep five players busy, and even an accordion. The concerto unfolds in two long movements, each divided into a number of sonic scenes separated by silences and often interrupted by new ideas proposed by the percussion. Sorromme's keen ear for orchestral color reveals itself from the beginning, when a dramatic gesture leaves a clarinet note floating high in the air above low brass and piano. Later, oozy trombones (a reference to Smetana's drunken sailors in the quartet) take the lead, and the first movement ends with a sudden lick of music.
As it turned out, Karawane is Salonen’s most overt attempt yet to connect with a mainstream symphonic audience; he seems to have been veering closer and closer with each opus. That is ironic, in a way, because Karawane is a setting of a famously kooky poem by one of leaders of the Dada movement, Hugo Ball. The “text”—if that’s what you want to call it—expresses nothing; it is made up of syllables strung together into words of some kind of imagined imaginary language. When the musicians have a mischievously dry wit, so it’s not unlikely that he would cotton to this kind of deliberate nonsense. Yet the text stimulated his orchestral imagination in a serious way, creating a luminous wonderland of timbres, born no doubt from his extensive experience conducting the world’s best orchestras.

The 27-minute piece is divided into two roughly-equal halves, both launched by the low-level buzzing of the Los Angeles Master Chorale murmuring and whispering. The first half is the luminous one where the vocal parts dissolve into invocations (think ‘Sirenes’ from Debussy’s Nocturnes). The second half eventually becomes a wild dance that has a visceral primitivism with sections containing brassy glissandos, whooping drums, and thick string chords marked with percussion. I wouldn’t know if Salonen had Villa-Lobos’s Choros No. 10 in mind—I rather doubt it—but that’s what this section reminded me of. Karawane may very well become Salonen’s most popular piece to date, if there are enough orchestras and choruses that are able to play it (it sounds like a difficult score).

Bringuier displayed a tight wide-screen grip on its colorful facets. The conductor also brought an assured master’s touch to the piece. The LA Phil’s New Music Group—the usual participants in the Green Umbrella new music series—took the night off, and the Calder Quartet was given carte blanche for a concert. In a spirit of generosity the Calder invited the Lyris Quartet and the Formalist Quartet (love that name!) to share the program with them. All three groups contain relatively young, fearless, highly-skilled players for whom “categories” is just a word not to be taken seriously.

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Two world premieres rounded off a most unusual evening. The Calders made their way through Canticles of the Sky by one of the current composers-of-the-hour, John Luther Adams. It’s four movements of seamless, sustained, surging and ebbing textures that merely offer more of the usual thing from this source.

In Tristan Perich’s Triple Quartet, an electronic score backed the 12 members of the quartets with harmonium-like sounds that blended comfortably with the acoustic strings in a dense, rich, minimalist score that grew to symphonic proportions near the close. The musicians were playing to click tracks (audio cues to synchronize sounds)—nothing unusual about that, this being the film capital—with the electronic parts emanating from 12 speaker cones suspended from 12 microphone booms matched to each player. This last nugget of information I had to mine from one of the players after the concert, for the uninformative program notes were of no use whatsoever.

Yet even without knowing how the piece worked the audience—much of it young—had a good time with it. Disney Hall’s orchestra and side seats were packed that night, proving that new music coupled with lower prices does catch on—here, at least.

Two Cleveland Orchestra Premieres

Sorrentino’s Two-Viola & Rand’s English Horn Concertos

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A poignant first viola solo opens the second movement, answered by the second soloist. Clear quotations from Smetana’s quartet thread their way through the texture, interrupted by a Smetana-inspired polka that uses tom-toms and mallets. Conversations between the two violas, solo violin, and accordion lead to an intense valedictory duet. The work ends with increasingly smaller fragments of the opening theme passed back and forth between soloists and orchestra.

The piece is well written, expertly scored, and fun to listen to. Dohnányi led a crisp performance, and Robert Vernon and Lynne Ramsey played with beautiful tone and presence—when you could actually make out what they were playing. Scoring solo violas against low brass leads to predictable results.

Bernard Rands’s English Horn Concerto is also scored for large orchestra, but the English horn has a clear acoustical advantage as a solo instrument, and Rands took care to save larger orchestrations for interludes between solo passages. At my first hearing on Friday, it was clear that the concerto has good bones. Hearing its third performance on Sunday, which was more relaxed and settled, allowed me to concentrate on the flesh of the piece.

Set in three movements (‘Fantasia’, ‘Aubade’, and ‘Homage to C-AD’ [Claude-Achilles Debussy]), the piece is strikingly rhetorical: the soloist has a lot to talk about, and the orchestra is there to back it up with force and nuance. A horn solo (splendidly played by Michael Mayhew) inspires the rest of the section to slow fanfares. The final chord is marked by a striking crescendo and diminuendo.

Passacaglia-like bass lines introduce the third movement, and dreamy wind textures and trembling strings reflect its dedication to Debussy. A rhythmic passage for percussion leads to a big, orchestral blast. The brass intone a striking unison theme, answered by a muted fanfare from the trumpets.

Then comes a cadenza. Walters played it soulfully, visiting the highest and lowest notes on his instrument, then making eloquent moments out of single long notes. Toward the end Rands seems to allude to the “sea” motif from Britten’s Peter Grimes.

Both concertos came in the middle of a program, and in each case the programmers chose handsome companion works to frame the premières. Dohnányi’s program appropriately began with Smetana—not the quartet that inspired Sorghomme, but the Overture to The Bartered Bride—and ended with Schubert’s Symphony No. 9. The music director laureate restored the string setup to the formation he used during his tenure (from left to right, first violins, cellos and basses, violas, then second violins), enough of a change from Music Director Franz Welser-Most’s configuration to cause uncommonly cautious playing as the overture’s skittering fugue passed through each of the string sections.

There was nothing at all tentative about the Schubert. The orchestra sounded glowing—ly robust as the strings surged from wave to wave of glorious sound in the opening movement; and the winds contributed pristine, blended color with unflagging stamina during the long symphony. The orchestra probably could have played this piece without any help from the podium, but Dohnányi’s obvious joy in shaping and caressing its many alluring details was inspiring.

Bernard Rands’s impressionist-inspired concerto was bracketed by French music: Debussy’s Prélude of the Afternoon of a Faun and Berlioz’s Symphonie Fantastique. Bringuier scaled the strings down for the Debussy, allowing the orchestra’s superb winds to play intimately. Joshua Smith’s flute solo began almost inaudibly; it moved seamlessly into other wind colors. Bringuier and the orchestra held nothing back in the Berlioz, delivering a vivid tour through the composer’s opus postumous. No sooner was the hall quiet when first violins, cellos and basses, violas, than second violins), enough of a change from Music Director Franz Welser-Most’s configuration to cause uncommonly cautious playing as the overture’s skittering fugue passed through each of the string sections.

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Set in three movements (‘Fantasia’, ‘Au-bade’, and ‘Homage to C-AD’ [Claude-Achilles Debussy]), the piece is strikingly rhetorical: the soloist has a lot to talk about, and the orchestra listens and responds with intelligent commentary, either by way of solos, small combinations of instruments, or as sections. Many of the English horn lines are adorned with single notes from the chimes, as if to comment on the piece’s own highly prismatic nature.

Passacaglia-like bass lines introduce the third movement, and dreamy wind textures and trembling strings reflect its dedication to Debussy. A rhythmic passage for percussion leads to a big, orchestral blast. The brass intone a striking unison theme, answered by a muted fanfare from the trumpets. Then comes a cadenza. Walters played it soulfully, visiting the highest and lowest notes on his instrument, then making eloquent moments out of single long notes. Toward the end Rands seems to allude to the “sea” motif from Britten’s Peter Grimes.

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The two scales, just a whole-tone apart, interact and slide into each other, taking on shifting character and color. Eventually they reverse direction, driving a rising sequence of two-note oscillations. The orchestra’s part develops along similar lines, building tension that is finally released in fierce outbursts. The piano takes up a quirky leap-frogging pattern in the second movement. The scales return at the end, speaking softly, almost with a whisper, as if exhausted.

It was not always clear what was happening in The Blind Banister, but the sounds and textures that Andres composed, both in the orchestra and the piano, are unfailingly compelling. (Andres himself is an accomplished pianist.) Biss played with rapt concentration, displaying impressive agility, and Santora was an assured guardian on the podium.

The Andres piece, it turns out, is “the start of something big,” to quote the late, great Steve Allen. It is the first entry in a five-year program where the SPCO will commission various composers to write their own piano concertos based on each of the five Beethoven concertos.

“Think of them as companions, commentaries, or responses to the Beethoven concertos,” said departing orchestra President Bruce Coppock during a pre-concert on-stage discussion with Andres, who lives in Brooklyn NY. The orchestra plans to premiere one of them each season, pairing it with the relevant Beethoven concerto.

“Too much of them,” Biss said, “is too much of the same.”

For his first new production as interdant at the Paris Opera, Stephane Lissner planted a bold flag by hiring Romeo Castellucci for the Schoenberg, last produced by the company, in French, in 1973. The Italian avant-garde director’s powerfully evocative imagery and the performance’s musical excellence went a long way to balance the cool intellectualism of the score.

Schoenberg began work on the opera in 1928 when he began to confront his own Jewish roots and the specter of anti-Semitism. It proved a long undertaking that he never finished. The two acts he completed were first performed in 1954, three years after he died. His libretto, based on the book of Exodus, treats the difficulty of understanding and communicating the abstract nature of the god who will lead the Chosen People out of Egypt. Moses, who communes with God but struggles to speak, expresses himself in sprechgesang, a cross between singing and declamation; his silver-tongued brother, Aaron, is given a lyrically melodic extended aria.

Castellucci’s bold, enigmatic stage pictures gave abstract concepts the power and mystery of dreams, using broad strokes punctuated with telling detail. In the opening scene, when Moses converses with the burning bush, sung by the chorus, the stage is filled with gauzy white figures milling about in a fog behind a scrim, as a magnetic recording tape unspools from a reel into the prophet’s hands. Holding fistsful of tape, Moses wrestles with how to convey the new deity’s edict, while words flash on the scrim, one at a time, with increasing speed as that conveys Moses’s feelings of being overwhelmed by language.

As Aaron comes to the fore, the mists fade, and the people of Israel—a volatile mob in white pajamas—swarm the large dark space. When Moses leaves for 40 days to converse with God, Aaron undertakes to placate the unruly Israelites by giving them a token idol to worship, and everything goes terribly wrong. When Moses returns, now dressed in black, there is a kind of baptism with thick black fluid, as the crowd’s faith in God and confidence in Moses soured. A viewer might puzzle over the mysterious space-age devices that descended from the heavens, but there was nothing ambiguous about the Golden Calf, embodied by a hulking 2-1/2-ton Charolais steer named Easy Rider that nearly stole the show (he was exposed to Schoenberg’s music for six months before the show, and incited quite a bit of polemics, not least for the beast’s 5000 Euro fee per performance).

Moses was the fine baritone Thomas Mann, who as Aaron, a cross between singing and declamation; his silver-tongued brother, Aaron, is given a lyrically melodic extended aria.
much the center of attention as first among equals, the solo violin engages in intense, des- perate dialogues with the orchestra, as if trying to gain ground. Near the end a sense of hard- fought peace, suggested in an oboe solo, relieves the work’s prevailing tone of gloom and anxiety. Listening to 32 minutes of shrill “anger and sadness” from woodwinds and brass—jarring, directionless sounds—you comes to share Her- sch’s grief, to an extent, and, in a therapeutic gesture, vow never to hear this music again.

Tito Munoz conducted the work alertly, and Kopatchinskaja, who is one of the orchestra’s artistic partners, played with fierce determination. The program also included Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, and that proved too much for her. Citing an arm injury, she dropped out of the third and final concert. Or- chestral works by Mozart and Beet- hoven served as last-minute substi- tutes.

Pianist Jonathan Biss suffered no apparent arm injury the night of November 27 while playing the world premiere of Beethoven’s Violin Con- certo, an intriguing high-concept con- certo by the 30-year-old American composer Timo Andres. Like Kopat- chinskaja, Biss played a double-header, closing the evening with Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 2. The excellent Mischa Santora con- ducted. He was music director of the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra from 2000 to 2014.

The two works are related. Some years after Beethoven completed his concerto, he wrote a cadenza for the first movement. The cadenza has long been of interest to pianists because it reflects a later development in Beethoven’s style and keyboard technique: more expansive and dissonant. The gap between the two styles sparked Andrs’s interest and suggested a new work. The result was an abstraction on Beet- hoven’s cadenza—a kind of musical cubism, a cadenza on a cadenza. The entire 20-minute work is a series of variations on the two des- cending scales that begin Beethoven’s caden- za.

The two scales, just a whole-tone apart, interact and slide into each other, taking on shifting character and color. Eventually they reverse direction, driving a rising sequence of two-note oscillations. The orchestra’s part develops along similar lines, building tension that is finally released in fierce outbursts. The piano takes up a quirky leap-frogging pattern in the second movement. The scales return at the end, speaking softly, almost with a whisper, as if exhausted.

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People obsessed with change create such chaos that reasonable people long for sta- bility.

The excellent Mischa Santora con- ducted, closing the evening with Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 2. The two works are related. Some years after Beethoven completed his concerto, he wrote a cadenza for the first movement. The cadenza has long been of interest to pianists because it reflects a later development in Beethoven’s style and keyboard technique: more expansive and dissonant. The gap between the two styles sparked Andrs’s interest and suggested a new work. The result was an abstraction on Beet- hoven’s cadenza—a kind of musical cubism, a cadenza on a cadenza. The entire 20-minute work is a series of variations on the two des- cending scales that begin Beethoven’s caden- za.

The two scales, just a whole-tone apart, interact and slide into each other, taking on shifting character and color. Eventually they reverse direction, driving a rising sequence of two-note oscillations. The orchestra’s part develops along similar lines, building tension that is finally released in fierce outbursts. The piano takes up a quirky leap-frogging pattern in the second movement. The scales return at the end, speaking softly, almost with a whisper, as if exhausted.

It was not always clear what was happening in The Blind Banister, but the sounds and textures that Andres composed, both in the orchestra and the piano, are unfail- ingly compelling. (Andres himself is an accomplished pianist.) Biss played with rapt concentration, dis- playing impressive agility, and Santora was an assured guardian on the podium.

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en from favor; but it’s easy to understand why the spectacle was such a crowd-pleaser.

Tafelmusik, conducted by David Fallis, provided crisp and expressive playing, nimble dance tempi, and eloquent continuo support for the soloists. As Arimde, soprano Peggy Kriha Dye dominated the stage with her warm, passionate singing and expressive body language, though she lacked the finesse of the French style. Indeed, the most stylish baroque singing came from Les Chantres du Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles, the resident chorus and training academy, directed by Olivier Snchez. Their clarity of timbre and precision with ornamentation offered a master class for all the singers. Tenor Colin Ainsworth’s Renaud warmed into a persuasively romantic hero, with sweet, strong high notes and Byronic good looks.

Opera Atelier’s dancers had major stage time, acting out much of the narrative in ceremonial choreography and pantomime. Their hybrid movement vocabulary effectively shifted among styles as they performed period figures dances, choreographed fights, and big show numbers. The mix of historical style with more modern practices was at first jarring, but it probably resulted in more expressive performances.

The most physically imposing presence was Amour, a non-speaking role danced by guest artist Tyler Gledhill, costumed in loincloth and wings of the type associated with the fairy tale protagonists. This Judith captured the stage in a dress of black and red scarlet, who repeatedly asked why she followed Bluebeard. Her eagerness frightened Bluebeard, who repeatedly asked why she followed him. He at last reluctantly opened the first locked door, and a glass museum-style case holding knives slid out from a side panel. Behind the glass we saw the face of a hairless beast projected on the rear wall, then replaced by the face of a small boy with blood trickling from the grown-up Bluebeard’s nose, her curios. The result was powerful. Warlikowski’s inverted the usual dynamic of Bartok’s grisly scenario, centering Balassa’s gothic tale on the wounded child at the heart of the monstrous Duke Bluebeard. In an extended soundless introduction before the opening downbeat, a glowing, bearded magician in black suit and cape (Canadian John Relyea), aided by a glamorous blonde in a sequined gown (Canadian Barbara Hannigan), conjured a pigeon and a rabbit, and made his assistent levitate. Then he stepped to a stand microphone to recite, in very credible Hungarian, the haunting prologue. As the music began, the silver curtain rose on a black-and-white projection of the Palais Garnier’s auditorium, with a lone woman seated in the front row: Judith (Russian Ekaterina Gubanova). A spotlight picked her out, oozing Rita Hayworth glamour in green satin and red hair; and she made her way to the stage as she sang her opening lines. The projected theater faded to reveal a stage, empty but for a sofa and a sideboard. Typical for Warlikowski, the set was as impersonal as an office lobby, here inspired by the landmark 1928 Maison de Verre in Paris, a neutral backdrop for the high drama to come (sets and costumes by Malgorzata Szczesniak, lighting by Felice Ross, video by Denis Gueguin).

Warlikowski often uses film as inspiration; here it was Beauty and the Beast by Jean Cocneau, who was also the librettist for the Poulenc. Warlikowski flipped the dynamic between the fairy tale protagonists. This Judith was no timid innocent, but a confident sexy woman who couldn’t keep her hands off the Duke (Relyea). Her eagerness frightened Bluebeard, who repeatedly asked why she followed him. He at last reluctantly opened the first locked door, and a glass museum-style case holding knives slid out from a side panel. Behind the glass we saw the face of a hairless beast projected on the rear wall, then replaced by the face of a small boy with blood trickling from his nose. Judith tenderly wiped blood from the grown-up Bluebeard’s nose, her curiosity about the hidden chambers still secondary to her physical eagerness. Glass cases displaying each of Bluebeard’s hidden treasures slid on and off stage; in them, scenes from the Cocteau film played on a vintage-style television set, with the little boy seated next to it wearing a mask and a magician’s outfit. The Duke’s menacing bluster gradually turned into pride over his blood-stained riches (toys), which increasingly disturbed Judith and cooled her desire. As the fifth door opened to reveal Bluebeard’s vast kingdom, the boy emerged hold-
Hannigan, Relyea, Gubanova, and Salonon Gripping
Susan Brodie

The second new production of Stephen Lissner’s tenure at the Paris Opera paired Bartók’s Bluebeard’s Castle with Poulenc’s Voix Humaine. Polish director Kryzystof Warlikowski tied the two one-acts for the soloists. As Armide, soprano Peggy Kriha Dye dominated the stage with her warm, passionate singing and expressive body language, though she lacked the finesse of the French style. Indeed, the most stylish baroque singing came from Les Chantres du Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles, the resident chorus and training academy, directed by Olivier Schneebeli. Their clarity of timbre and precision with ornamentation offered a master class for all the singers. Tenor Colin Ainsworth’s Renaud warmed into a persuasively romantic hero, with sweet, strong high notes. Marie Desroches-Narue’s Suor Angelica was unusually tender toward characters in the throes of extreme emotions. The result was powerfully moving.

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However, after watch-
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New Halls in Xiamen,
Shanghai, and Beijing
Gil French

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audiences were not mature enough. Indeed, in
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But the world is changing fast. From Octo-
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In fact, during the tour discipline was evident
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cient, orderly, and quiet, yet the atmosphere
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Critical comparisons were inevitable
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Yen’s Flying Toward the Horizon, Mendels-
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The music and drama were compelling all evening, but perhaps the strongest performance came from Esa-Pekka Salonen, returning to the Paris Opera after 10 years. He drew power and unusual precision from the orchestra, with particularly eloquent wind solos, especially in the Bartok. Meticulous attention to detail did not interrupt the tense, inexorable drive to the shattering climax, leaving me almost disoriented by the silences that followed each outburst. In contrast, Salonen emphasized the more episodic nature of the Poulenc score, reflecting the soprano’s fragmented state of mind, with jagged outbursts giving way to poignantly lyrical passages. At key points less volume would have allowed the soprano to remain audible, but the instrumental power did reinforce the impression of a woman overwhelmed by despair.

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Also, it was fascinating determining whether the performances actually differed from night to night or whether what I heard was determined by the significantly different acoustics of the halls.

Xiamen’s three-year-old Banlam Grand Theater is a 1500-seat mixed-use hall with a proscenium stage, sloping main floor, and wrap-around balconies. It amplifies treble
sounds, reduces the bass, and bizarrely reflects sound under its balconies. The sound is clear but straight-forward, without ambience; it gives orchestra members no feedback. The back of the hall has three gigantic wings that look even bigger than the Metropolitan Opera's.

Hong Kong’s older concert hall is in the round. When I heard Mahler's Symphony No. 7 there five years ago from two very different balcony seats, the sound as pianissimo sound was dreadful, giving a very raw tone to all instruments. This time from a main floor center seat it sounded much better, at least compared to Xiamen.

In Taiwan swallows nesting in trees in front of homes or businesses is a symbol of good fortune. Ming-Shui Yen, 35, noticed nests in front of a string of restaurants near her home. No one seat it sounded much better, at least compared to Xiamen.

Lu’s interpretation of Brahms’s Symphony No. 2 is anything but a grave mistake. His flurry of wrong notes—lots of rotating arms rather than pinpointed downbeats—but they read him with precision, and those arms wrapped the first two movements into integral flowing wholes. The final two movements, though, were especially striking. Taken at almost metronomic tempos, the conductor infused the third with a waltz-like lift, while he made the first and second themes in the fourth, played at identical tempo, contrast brilliantly.

Chinese audiences in all four cities applauded gently but persistently until an encore was played, here Brahms's Hungarian Dance No. 6 in Martin Schmeling's brilliant orchestra. The hall in Xiamen made it sound like a crazed shout, but in Hong Kong its tossing virtuosity did rouse the audience from their seats. In all four cities they just kept on applauding until either the soloist or conductor told the concertmaster, “No more encores” and led the orchestra offstage.

In Xiamen the audience of only about 400 was mainly families with young kids, teenage couples. (The orchestra didn’t feel slighted; Zubin Mehta and the Israeli Philharmonic drew only 800 to the same hall.) Cell phones, constantly held up to take photos, were instantly red-dot lasered with military personnel. That’s Shanghai, China’s most sophisticated and artistic city, where avant-garde architecture mixes with well-preserved turn-of-the-century warrens and luxurious art deco hotels and shops in tree-lined neighborhoods.

What a relief the sophisticated audience in Hong Kong that I was able to be embraced by the instrumentals Lu elicited as he sustained two or three terraced levels of activity at once. Horn backstrokes expressive, legato—especially Cindy Liu’s solo at the end of the first movement; and the cello introduction to the second movement was utterly sumptuous. Some players describe Lu’s conducting as octopus style—lots of rotating arms rather than pinpointed downbeats—but they read him with precision, and those arms wrapped the first two movements into integral flowing wholes. The final two movements, though, were especially striking. Taken at almost metronomic tempos, the conductor infused the third with a waltz-like lift, while he made the first and second themes in the fourth, played at identical tempo, contrast brilliantly.

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Yen, also an award-winning pianist, now lives in Taipei after years of study at the Eastman School of Music and Universal Academy, Michigan. She keeps fresh by composing works of varying natures—for children, drama-and-light companies, symphonic ensembles, etc. Based on the structural integrity of Flying, she's a composer to be on the lookout for.

The hall in Xiamen did Taiwanese pianist Chun-Chien Yen no favors. Mendelssohn's Concerto No. 1 is treble enough to begin with, and here the upper keyboard sounded brittle, and the lower keyboard all but disappeared. In truth, Yen did himself no favors either; his tempos in the outer movements were so fast he couldn't articulate the rhythms, and his left hand was a boring ostinato with no expression. Nor was he aware that in many passages he was the accompaniment and the orchestra the primary voice. The second movement was quite lovely but not the last word in subtlety. Two days later in Hong Kong with better acoustics, he still came across as a pounder, though the orchestra's sumptuous violins and cellos charmed him in the second movement, and at the very end of the finale Yen closed his eyes and finally was possessed by the music rather than the notes. It was Lu's orchestra that was stellar in Hong Kong—hot, blended, and buoyant.

Yen's choice of encore—variations on Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March'—was logical but a grave mistake. His flurry of wrong notes and rushing tempos proved that the monstrous chords, diminuendo, and arpeggios, concocted by Vladimir Horowitz, were far beyond his technique.

Lu's interpretation of Brahms's Symphony No. 2 was much the same in both performances. In Xiamen the acoustics kept the orchestra at a clear but objective distance; it was in Hong Kong that I was able to be embraced by the instrumental colors Lu elicited as he sustained two or three terraced levels of activity at once. How backpack expressivity, and those arms wrapped the first two movements into integral flowing wholes. The final two movements, though, were especially striking. Taken at almost metronomic tempos, the conductor infused the third with a Waltz-like lilt, while he made the first and second themes in the fourth, played at identical tempos, contrast brilliantly.

Chinese audiences in all four cities applauded gently but persistently until an encore was played, here Brahms's Hungarian Dance No. 6 in Martin Schmeling's brilliant orchestration. The hall in Xiamen made it sound like a crazed shout, but in Hong Kong its teasing vivacity did not rouse the audience from their seats. In all four cities they just kept on applauding until either the soloist or conductor told the concertmaster, "No more encores" and led the orchestra offstage.

In Xiamen the audience of only about 400 was mainly families with young kids, teenagers and middle-age couples. (The orchestra didn’t feel slighted; Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic drew only 800 to the same hall.) Cell phones, constantly held up to take photos, were instantly red-dot lasered with military swiftness; I would have preferred they lasered the 30-something in front of me who, when not talking to his wife, kept whipping open his giant iPad screen. What a relief the sophisticated Sunday afternoon Hong Kong audience was—mainly couples in their 30s to 60s who were genuine classical enthusiasts.

The two most interesting halls on the tour were Shanghai and Beijing. Shanghai Symphony Hall, which opened in September 2014, is in an old, fashionable section of Shanghai that has the feel of the brownstone sections of Manhattan or Boston's Newbury Street, with the streets arches over with sycamore trees. The gracefully landscaped hall with its concession stands and brick exterior seems small only because the auditorium itself is several stories below ground, yet its lobbies still have garden views open to the sky. Seating 1200, it is shoebox shaped but with no right angles—all walls and ceilings are joined by large curves. Attached to pale green-gray plaster walls and ceiling are what look like modern burl wood panels. The stage, only about three feet off the floor, is surrounded on the sides and rear by six rows of seats.

Stadium-style seats rise up behind the first six rows of main-floor seats. In effect, there are no overhanging balconies. Almost all seats offer a mellower blended tone with warm bass presence, but there’s a hitch.

Rachmaninoff’s Symphony No. 2, performed with no cuts, came across as a wall of sound, making all inner details indistinct. Even the snare drum and light cymbals in the second movement were inaudible. Balances seemed neglected, enunciation of phrases was weak, and climaxes didn’t really peak. Even brass rhythms didn’t punch through, and all the triplets in the last two movements were inaudible. The encore, Tchaikovsky’s ‘Dance of the Jesters’ from The Snow Maiden, came across as a banny, unsuble job. What’s shocking is that the acoustics are by Noshizuka Toyota, who designed the stunning acoustics in Los Angeles’s Disney Hall. The architecture by Isozaki Arata, on the other hand, is truly beautiful, especially at night with outside lighting illuminating the landscaping and building.

The hall was mostly filled in Shanghai, and the venue was said to be overbooked as in Hong Kong. In fact, fans there are so dedicated that the next evening about 400 people—mostly elderly who couldn’t afford symphony hall tickets—stood in a downpour for an outdoor wind concert that was eventually moved indoors. That’s Shanghai, China’s most sophisticated and artistic city, where avant-garde architecture mixes with well-preserved turn-of-the-century warrens and luxurious art deco hotels and shops in tree-lined neighborhoods.

What a difference two nights later at “The Egg” in Beijing. Rachmaninoff’s Symphony No. 2 is anything but transparent. (The orchestra was mainly families in their 30s to 60s who were genuine classical enthusiasts.)

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concertmaster led the orchestra offstage. Some ment and at the end clapped less out of enthuziasm for a classical Chinese royal palace with its temple-like roofs, sweeping entrances, and red carpets. (In fact, it was inspired by palaces in Beijing's Forbidden City.) It is in a park in central Taipei that also holds the Chang Kai-Shek Memorial and the National Theater. The serene, gorgeous area is another icon in the true sense of the word. From my time there in 2010 I remember the acoustics to be highly resonant, very clear, and, above all, like two arms that reached out and embraced me in their warmth.

What a surprise on November 18 when Neville Marriner, who turns 92 on April 15, conducted. The hall had just reopened after a three-week renovation. The stage floor was replaced and the seats reupholstered. From the same seats where I sat five years earlier, the sound retained its clarity, warmth, and rich distinction of the cellos and string basses; but the ambiance now has a hollow, echoy, swimming-pool edge. Like the hall in Beijing, a rich mix of sound filled the stage itself, but those arms no longer reached out and embraced me.

In Mozart's Symphony N. 35 (Haffner) downbeat entrances were splayed and rhythms soggy and tempos became slower and slower. It took the startling Chinese cellist Bonian Tian, who turns 30 this year, to inspire Marriner to a more disciplined and dramatic accomplishment in Schumann's Cello Concerto. Lu first heard Tian in Germany, where both live. His appearance here showed him to be an intimate yet passionate player with flawless technique and an ear for colors, soulful drama, and sublime lyricism. He is an artist worth searching for. Marriner gave Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony more spin than the Mozart, but his style still lacked edge and drama. As I exited a lady said to her companion, "Is the orchestra tired from its China tour?" I wanted to answer, "No, it's just Marriner's conducting."

On my last night in Taiwan Shao-Chia Lin conducted an ingenious program where each work echoed the others: Stravinsky's Fireworks, Scriabin's Piano Concerto and then Poem of Fire (Prometheus), fol-
ness created by atmosphere. Subtle violin phrasing made all the difference as Lu slipped into full waltz mode. Even when tempos relaxed, a definite pulse linked all the parts together.

It was in the second movement that I became aware of the Beijing hall's only drawback. While the mellow sound in the front of the hall was crystal clear, blended, and very generous, it didn’t embrace me. Even superb Principal French Horn Cindy Liu was aware of this; try as her section did, they simply could not adjust their tone to give it a rich bloom. In the third movement, unlike in Shanghai, I could hear the famous opening clarinet solo supported by rippling triplets and enriched by tone color (too bad it was played with limited technique and an ear for colors, soulful drama, and rhythms soggy and tempos became slower and slower). His encore was inspired by Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto, with Leopold Auer’s many cuts in the finale, was the middle work on both concerts. Lu reduced the orchestra for both this and the Mendelssohn concerto; I would have appreciated more beef for the Tchaikovsky. Soloist Cho-Liang Lin, who was born in Taiwan and gave up years of living in New York City to join the faculty at Rice University in Houston, suffered from abyssmal jet lag and was unable to sleep at night, resulting in a really rough Tuesday performance in Shanghai and a considerably more artful but hardly flawless first movement at the Saturday performance in Beijing. The middle movement was really lovely both nights, despite appalling French horns. Both Lin and Lu made the finale in Beijing really tight and exciting, except for Lin’s tendency to make slower sections a bit sappy. His encore both nights was the ‘Winter’ Largo from Vivaldi’s Four Seasons, elegantly played with the orchestra’s front row strings.

Following the tour I remained in Taiwan for three weeks that included two more Taiwan Philharmonic concerts at their home, Taipei’s National Concert Hall, which is easy to miss among for a classical Chinese royal palace with its temple-like roofs, sweeping entrances, and red carpets. (In fact, it was inspired by palaces in Beijing’s Forbidden City.) It is in a park in central Taipei that also holds the Chang Kai-Shek Memorial and the National Theater. The serene, gorgeous area is another icon in the true sense of the word. From my time there in 2010 I remember the acoustics to be highly resonant, very clear, and, above all, like two arms that reached out and embraced me in their warmth.

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lowed by Stravinsky’s Firebird Suite (1919). While Fireworks could have used more fireworks, the sumptuous orchestra was the clear star in the piano concerto. Artist-in-residence, Korean pianist Kun Woo Paik, who turns 70 on March 10, was inaudible in the first movement, partly because of the hall’s acoustics and partly because the opening is poorly written—mostly keyboard arpeggios against a rich, romantic orchestra. Even in the gorgeous Andante Paik remained self-contained without the communicative touch of panache necessary to catch the subtle inflections, for example, of seven notes alternating with six in a repeated phrase. What a contrast he was to Lu’s deep-breathed expression and ample rubato. Only in the last movement did Paik finally catch fire, matching the orchestra’s.

Lu signed a second five-year contract at the start of this season. His violins remain flawless, the sumptuous violas and cellos are second to none, and the eight string basses (six of them women) supply a rich, firm, articulated foundation to the orchestra. The flutes and bassoons are firm, and the trumpets are stellar. But the French horns, except for principal Cindy Liu, should be fired. They usually played melodic solos accurately, but the simple stuff, like playing the tonic and dominant tones in a Mozart slow movement, they destroyed regularly at home and on tour.

The biggest compliments about the Taiwan Philharmonic came from both Kun Woo Paik and Neville Marriner, who appreciated the players’ ability. Marriner was more specific, saying that some German and Japanese orchestras are fixed in “the way it’s always done”, whereas the TPO can do anything they’re asked. The TPO has toured Asia and Europe but has yet to tour North America. Their recent recording of Gordon Chen’s Symphony No. 3 and Cello Concerto No. 1 on Naxos are their first to be released in the US. The big questions is: which major US orchestra will be smart enough to offer Shao-Chia Lu his American debut with two or three weeks of concerts? Odds are they’d have clever programs performed with interpretations leading to immediate re-engagements.

Two appointments for Xian Zhang, born in China in 1973: she signed a four-year contract to become music director of the New Jersey Symphony starting next season, succeeding Jacques Lacombe, who leaves at the end of the current season to become music director of the Bonn Opera. She has also signed a three-year contract to become principal guest conduct of the BBC Orchestra of Wales starting in September. The Chinese-American has been music director of Milan’s Guiseppe Verdi Symphony since 2009. She also was a protege of Lorin Maazel at the New York Philharmonic, where she held several conducting positions.

Leonard Slatkin, 71, music director of the Detroit Symphony since 2001, will become music director emeritus in 2018. While conducting only four concerts a year, he will remain involved in artistic and personnel planning until his successor is in place.

Composer and conductor Pierre Boulez, 90, died at his home in Baden-Baden, Germany, on January 5 following a period of physical decline. His many avant-garde compositions were the precursor of his conducting style, which was the opposite of flamboyant: highly intellectual, rhythmically precise, texturally transparent, and exquisitely balanced, projecting brilliant colors, yet, on the surface at least, emotionally cool. He was music director of the New York Philharmonic from 1971 to 1977 but seemed to have more success in his close associations with the Cleveland Orchestra and especially the Chicago Symphony. After leaving New York, he returned to Paris and founded the Institute for Research and Coordination of Acoustics and Music (IRCAM), the contemporary-music center across from the Pompidou Center, where he bolstered its now famous Ensemble Intercontemporain. He was also a prime mover in establishing Paris’s City of Music complex, which later became the site for the city’s new concert hall, the Philharmonie.
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The Poem of Fire is a product of Scriabin's late self-obsessed phase, seemingly variations on a single motif that "catches" again and again, growing eventually to a space-odyssey climax with voweled chorus and pipe organ (both used here). It was here that Paik made a brilliant decision to place the piano not within the orchestra but in standard concert position. This time the piano truly colored this "Color Symphony" (a machine projecting a spectrum of colors was originally intended), practically doubling. Even though the motif itself can easily wear out its welcome, Lu's grasp of form, double spacing, depending on which particular brilliant colors were originally intended), practically doubling. Even though the motif itself can easily wear out its welcome, Lu's grasp of form,

doing. Even though the motif itself can easily wear out its welcome, Lu's grasp of form, dynamic growth, and lyricism proved that Prometheus is a physical work that can be fully appreciated only in performance, not on recordings.

In Stravinsky's Firebird Lu was the true master of movement and lyricism. So disciplined yet flexible were his tempos that the music really felt like ballet. The 'Round Dance' and Lullaby were supremely lyrical, the 'Infernal Dance' excitingly wicked, and the tempo changes in the Finale have never been so perfectly judged.

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Italian Gianandrea Noseda, age 52, will become music director of Washington DC's National Symphony from 2017 to 2021. He has been music director of the Teatro Regio in Turin since 2007, and was chief conductor of the BBC Philharmonic from 2002 to 2011. He succeeds Christoph Eschenbach, 76, who will become music director laureate after eight years with the orchestra.

Leonard Slatkin, 71, music director of the Detroit Symphony since 1992, will become music director emeritus in 2018. While conducting only four concerts a year, he will remain involved in artistic and personnel planning until his successor is in place.
Stephen Lord, music director of the Opera Theatre of St Louis, will become music director emeritus in 2017 and add the title of artistic director of the company’s Young Artist Programs.

At the Dallas Opera both Emmanuel Villaume, who became music director in 2013, and Keith Cerny, who became general director and CEO in 2010, have extended their contracts through June 2022.

Andrey Boreyko, 58, music director of the Naples (FL) Philharmonic since 2013, extended his contract through 2021.

Myung-Whun Chung resigned for the second time in 2015 on December 29 as music director of the Seoul Philharmonic. “Until this issue is resolved,” he added. Put that in the plural: the orchestra in embroiled in a gigantic (some would say “huge”) battle of accusations concerning ousted CEO Park Hyun-Jung, sexual harassment charges against her by 17 employees (10 of whom have been booked for false accusations), alleged embezzlement, etc. Chung’s contract expired December 31.

Scottish conductor Garry Walker, 41, will succeed Daniel Raiskin as chief conductor of the Rhenish Philharmonic in 2017. Earlier he was principal guest conductor of the Scottish National Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic in London.

Vasily Petrenko, 39, who became chief conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic in 2013, extended his contract to 2020.

Two major appointments at the St Paul Chamber Orchestra became effective in January: Jon Limbacher became president and managing director, succeeding President Bruce Coppock, who retired. Limbacher was SPCO vice president and COO from 2000 to 2012. And Kyu-Young Kim became SPCO artistic director. In addition to being the orchestra’s principal second violin, in 2013 Kim also began working with Coppock as head of artistic planning.

Dennis Hanthorn was appointed general director of Opera Naples (FL) in November. He was general director and CEO of the Atlanta Opera from 2004 to 2012, general director of Milwaukee’s Florentine Opera Company from 1989 to 2004, and managing director of the Dayton Opera Association from 1982 to 1989.

Ruth Felt, 76, founder of San Francisco Performances, one of the nation’s biggest presenters of chamber music, recitals, jazz, and dance, will retire in the fall after building it from 7 to 70 events a year. Since its founding in 1979, she has increased its annual budget from $100,000 to $3 million, yet leaves the organization debt-free.

Gary Hanson, who retired from the Cleveland Orchestra on December 31 after 28 years (the last 11 as president), became interim president of the Cleveland Institute of Music when Joel Smirnoff gave only a six-week notice that he’d be retiring after seven years on the job.

David Schillhammer will depart as executive director of the Orlando Philharmonic at the end of February. He has held the position since resurrecting the renamed orchestra from the dissolved Florida Symphony 15 years ago.

David Hyslop became interim executive director of Idaho’s Sun Valley Summer Symphony in January, after his predecessor, Jeanne Teisinger, left to take the same position at Colorado’s Bravo Vail Valley Festival. Hyslop is former CEO of the Minnesota Orchestra and St Louis and Oregon Symphonies.

McDermott, who has been artistic director of Colorado’s Bravo Vail Music Festival since 2011, renewed her contract there until 2020.

Maxim Antoshin departed suddenly in November after just a year as executive director of the Ottawa Chamber Music Society, which runs Ottawa’s Chamberfest, one of the world’s largest chamber music festivals. The board would not comment on whether he was dismissed or resigned. Artistic Director Roman Borys is interim executive director.

Sebastian Schwarz will become general director of Glyndebourne in May in time for its summer opera festival, succeeding David Pickard, who left to become head of the BBC Proms. Schwarz is currently deputy artistic director of Vienna’s Theater an der Wien.

Bernard Foucroulle announced in December he will leave France’s Aix-en-Provence Festival in December 2017 after 10 years as general director. He said, after 25 years as director of Brussels’s Monnaie and Aix, he wants time to devote himself to composing, interpreting, and research.

Makhar Vaziev will become director of the Bolshoi Ballet on March 18, succeeding Sergei Filin, whose contract was not renewed. Vaziev was director of the La Scala Ballet for the past seven years, and before that director of the Mariinsky Ballet from 1995 to 2008. He was named principal dancer of the Mariinsky Ballet in 1989.

Danish composer Hans Abrahamsen, 62, was given the 2016 Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition for Let Me Tell You, a song cycle for soprano and orchestra. The award is presented annually by the University of Louisville.

Russian pianist Alexei Lubimov, who turns 72 this year, became the first Cage Cunningham Fellow at New York’s Baryshnikov Arts Center. The $50,000 award is for a two-year fellowship given “to artists whose work reflects the commitment to collaboration, experimentation, and rigor which characterized Cage and Cunningham’s oeuvres”. Lubimov’s interests range from period instruments to the most contemporary composers.
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Fabio Luisi signed a five-year contract to become music director of the Maggio Musicale in Florence in 2018, while working with Zubin Mehta who will continue as music director emeritus-for-life.

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THIS JUST IN

Dutchman Jaap van Zweden signed a 5-year contract in January to become music director of the NY Philharmonic in 2018. He continues to hold the same position with the Dallas Symphony (since 2008) and Hong Kong Philharmonic (since 2012). In addition, he will serve as music director designate for a year when Alan Gilbert leaves the position in 2017.
Ades: Concentric Paths—Movements in Music

New York

Over the 20 years since Englishman Thomas Ades burst onto the scene with his witty, risque chamber opera Powder Her Face, he has emerged as one of the most prolific composers of our time; but he remains difficult to categorize. His works are deeply rooted in classical tradition, sometimes to the point of homage, but always with an inventive, experimental spin and usually with spiky harmonies, microtones and, above all a rhythmic adventurism that probably looks back to his early work as a percussionist.

Because of his fascinating rhythms, Ades has emerged as a favorite of choreographers. Concentric Paths—Movements in Music, a quartet of dances, was originally assembled by London’s Sadler Wells Theatre. This performance, part of Lincoln Center’s White Lights Festival, was its US premiere. It consists of four very different Ades works, each staged by a separate choreographer using different performers. All of the pieces have been performed before, and none started out as a dance, though one piece, ‘Polaris’, did have a visual component (projections).

First up was ‘Outlier’; its score is Ades’s fiendishly difficult Violin Concerto (Concentric Paths). Violinist Thomas Gould’s performance was edgier and wilder than Augustin Hadelich’s recording. Conducting the Orchestra of St Luke’s, Ades was Gould’s match, evoking the odd mixture of familiarity and other-worldliness that is his hallmark, never more intensely felt than in this work with its surprise twists, its complex cadences, and its subtle integration of tonal and non-tonal sounds.

With this kind of artistry emerging from the pit, the choreography must be dynamite. But in this case the ear won out over the eye. Choreographer Wayne McGregor did his darnedest, but I kept wishing I could see the musicians, which probably wasn’t what he was going for.

So it went, to a surprising degree, through the program’s next two works. The fact that the musicians emerged onto the stage added to their competitive advantage. ‘Life Story’, a setting of a Tennessee Williams bittersweet poem about a one night stand, calls for a soprano and pianist, in this case Anna Dennis and Ades, a piano virtuoso of the first order. The soprano’s role alternates a bluesy cabaret style with an arch-classical one, with cruel octave leaps thrown in. Dennis sang it in a clear non-vibrato voice with fine diction and just the right dramatic sensitivity. The pair of dancers, here choreographed by Karole Armitage, became an added layer of pantomime. Still, with music of this complexity and a text to follow, the addition of dancers means there was a lot to keep up with.

‘The Grit in the Oyster’ is a setting of Ades’s Piano Quintet, with Ades again at the piano and Benjamin Jacobson playing the challenging first violin part. One of Ades’s most exciting works, it sometimes feels like a classical chamber work distorted and reworked by some demonic force. A dazzling
Obituaries

John Duffy Composers Institute at the Virginia Arts Festival to help young composers develop their skills by working with other composers, soloists, and chamber musicians. As composer Libby Larsen said, "His vision was to put the living composer in front of an audience."

Conductor Kurt Masur, 88, died on December 19 in Greenwich CT from complications of Parkinson's disease. He was music director of the New Philharmonic from 1991 to 2002 and of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra from 1970 to 1996. He played a pivotal role in the peaceful fall of the East German communist government in 1989.

Robert Craft, 92, conductor, writer, and musical assistant to Igor Stravinsky for 23 years, died on November 10 in Gulf Stream FL. He had a history of prostate cancer and heart ailments. His books about Stravinsky are numerous, and some commentators question their accuracy.

Composer John Duffy, 89, died after a long battle with cancer on December 20 in Norfolk VA. His mark was his founding in 1974 of Meet the Composer, a national organization that helped composers to have their music heard and be paid an appropriate fee. While he composed his best-known music for television and beamed his music over the airwaves, he was a Mahler scholar obsessed with the composer's Symphony No. 2, which he recorded with the London Symphony and the Vienna Philharmonic.

Economist, journalist, radio host, and amateur conductor Gilbert Kaplan, 74, died of cancer on New Year's Day in New York. He was a Mahler scholar who wrote a history of prostate cancer and heart ailments. His books about Stravinsky for 23 years, died on November 10 in Gulf Stream FL. He had a history of prostate cancer and heart ailments. His books about Stravinsky are numerous, and some commentators question their accuracy.

Pianist Seymour Lipkin, 88, died at a hospital in Blue Hill ME on November 16. He was widely known as a superior pedagogue at the Juilliard School, Curtis Institute, and Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival, a summer festival in Blue Hill. When he died he had been its artistic director for 28 years.

Coloratura soprano Mattiwilda Dobbs, 90, died on December 6 at her home in Atlanta. She made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1956 and was the first female black singer to have a long-term contract with the company. She was overshadowed by Marian Anderson’s 1955 debut and Leontyne Price’s in 1961. Also, she made few recordings.

Ades: Concentric Paths—Movements in Music

New York

Over the 20 years since Englishman Thomas Ades burst onto the scene with his witty, risque chamber opera Powder Her Face, he has emerged as one of the most prolific composers of our time; but he remains difficult to categorize. His works are deeply rooted in classical tradition, sometimes to the point of homage, but always with an inventive, experimental spin and usually with spiky harmonies, microtones and, above all a rhythmic adventurism that probably looks back to his early work as a percussionist.

Because of his fascinating rhythms, Ades has emerged as a favorite of choreographers. Concentric Paths—Movements in Music, a quartet of dances, was originally assembled by London’s Sadler Wells Theatre. This performance, part of Lincoln Center’s White Lights Festival, was its US premiere. It consists of four very different Ades works, each staged by a separate choreographer using different performers. All of the pieces have been performed before, and none started out as a dance, though one piece, 'Polaris,' did have a visual component (projections).

First up was ‘Outlier’; its score is Ades's fiendishly difficult Violin Concerto (Concentric Paths). Violinist Thomas Gould’s performance was edgier and wilder than Augustin Hadelich’s recording. Conducting the Orchestra of St Luke’s, Ades was Gould’s match, evoking the odd mixture of familiarity and otherworldliness that is his hallmark, never more intensely felt than in this work with its surprise twists, its complex cadences, and its subtle integration of tonal and non-tonal sounds.

With this kind of artistry emerging from the pit, the choreography must be dynamite. But in this case the ear won out over the eye. Choreographer Wayne McGregor did his darnedest, but I kept wishing I could see the musicians, which probably wasn’t what he was going for.

So it went, to a surprising degree, through the program’s next two works. The fact that the musicians emerged onto the stage added to their competitive advantage. ‘Life Story,’ a setting of a Tennessee Williams bittersweet poem about a one night stand, calls for a soprano and pianist, in this case Anna Dennis and Ades, a piano virtuoso of the first order. The soprano’s role alternates a bluesy cabaret style with an arch-classical one, with cruel octave leaps thrown in. Dennis sang it in a clear non-vibrato voice with fine diction and just the right dramatic sensitivity. The pair of dancers, here choreographed by Karole Armitage, became an added layer of pantomime. Still, with music of this complexity and a text to follow, the addition of dancers means there was a lot to keep up with.

‘The Grit in the Oyster’ is a setting of Ades's Piano Quintet, with Ades again at the piano and Benjamin Jacobson playing the challenging first violin part. One of Ades’s most exciting works, it sometimes feels like a classical chamber work distorted and reworked by some demonic force. A dazzling
performance of one of Ades’s most demanding works was here aided, especially at first, by the three dancers circling as the music surged and ebbed. Alexander Whitney was the choreographer.

Someone has said that this sort of evening works best when the music illuminates the dancing and the dancing illuminates the music. That was the case for the final work on the program, “Polaris.” The Orchestra of St Luke’s was back in the pit with Ades at the helm for this sci-fi extravaganza with its big sweeping chords. Even as it works through 12 pitches, with canons for each section, the piece keeps returning to a haunting melody. Even without dancers it works as a powerful depiction of sea and sky. “Polaris” was clearly the crowd-pleaser. A big reason was the stunning depiction of sea and sky. “Polaris” was clearly the crowd-pleaser. A big reason was the stunning

Casella: Symphony No. 2 (US Premiere)
Philadelphia Orchestra/ Gianandrea Noseda

Casella's Symphony No. 2 is fascinating but could be read as a mash-up for the cinema, except for the fact that it was composed in 1909. The composer was an admirer of one of his contemporaries, Gustav Mahler, an experimentalist in symphonic architecture. Some structural elements make the work feel like a tone poem that careens into loud echoes of Rimsky-Korsakov. At one moment an “ascending vista” even sounds like a Copland out-take.

The full symphonic sections are pretty soupy, but quieter moments are more compelling—none more so than Casella’s third decrescendo that deconstructs the bombastic architecture, making this piece worthy of study and a second hearing. All of the strings brought richness to the Casella’s less flashy music. His whole body was part of his interpretive delivery. The rapturous reception by the audience coaxed Trpceski back for two encores, Pande Shahov’s “In Struga” and a Chopin waltz.

The horns sounded unstable in this concert until the Casella, which seemed to whip itself into shape with its technical demands and blistering fanfares, Noseda bobbing and weaving on the podium, shaped every articulation to its concussive conclusion with the organ and orchestra volume at full blast. The finish roused the audience to their feet, but to my ears it was the least impressive aspect of the piece.
performance of one of Ades's most demanding works was here aided, especially at first, by the three dancers circling as the music surged and ebbed. Alexander Whitely was the choreographer.

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New York audiences are specialized, and this one drew more of a dance crowd, with a healthy contingent of “be true to your school” Brits. But we music people got our money’s worth as well.

JAMES L. PAULK

Casella: Symphony No. 2 (US Premiere)
Philadelphia Orchestra/
Gianandrea Noseda

Musical America’s 2015 Conductor of the Year Gianandrea Noseda was on the Philadelphia Orchestra podium for two weeks of concerts in November, first with an exuberant mix of Liszt, Sibelius, and Tchaikovsky. He followed on Thanksgiving weekend with the more adventurous US premiere of Alfredo Casella’s Symphony No. 2, 106 years after it was composed. The symphony is a monstrosity of sound and fury that seems, among other things, to anticipate a cinematic aesthetic.

The opening strings were a bit chilly too, as Noseda kept the tempo at a flat clip. But by the slow fade to the waltz gallop, Noseda ignited the orchestra to its full sardonic dimensions. The horns sounded unstable in this concert, but outstandng soloists trompeter David Bigler, cellist Hai-Ye Ni, violist Choong-Jin Chang, and concertmaster David Kim (he excelled both in this piece and the Rachmaninoff) adding interpretive depth.

The horns sounded unstable in this concert until the Casella, which seemed to whip them into shape with its technical demands and blistering fanfares. Noseda, bobbing and weaving on the podium, shaped every articulation; great theatre.

DAVID GORDON DUKE

Prætorius’s Christmas Vespers
Vancouver BC

The presentations of Early Music Vancouver are a much-anticipated part of the Pacific Northwest holiday season. For over a decade “Festive Bach Cantatas” were offered; in 2013, a grand work by Johann Kuhnau made its way onto the playlist. This season there was no Bach at all, but instead “Prætorius’s Christmas Vespers,” the brainchild of Toronto-based conductor David Fallis. Fallis first recorded this project with his Toronto Consort for Marquis Classics in 2005. His formula is straightforward but inspired: he places a Praetorius Magnificat with other pieces that would have appeared in a fairly grand Lutheran Vespers sometime in the early 17th Century—carols, settings of the Credo, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer. For the afternoon of December 20, Fallis bracketed the proceedings with opening and closing congregational sing-alongs, delivered with considerable gusto by the overflow crowd in Vancouver’s Chan Centre for the Performing Arts.

Billed as a Northwest Baroque Masterworks Project, this was very much an integral part of Early Music Vancouver Artistic Director Matthew White’s “Cascadian Strategy” that seeks to forge links between early music groups in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. The Vespers was presented in Seattle by that city’s Early Music Guild, in Portland by the Portland Baroque Orchestra, and in Victoria by the Early Music Society of the Islands. Fallis’s West Coast cast ran to some 13 soloists (with a trio of sopranos and tenor doing much of the musical heavy lifting). Montreal’s Rose de Vents corretto and sackbut ensemble, period string players, three lutes, organ, and local choral back-up (sung in Vancouver by Lars Kaarao’s Laudate Singers).

Michael Praetorius (1571?-1621) sought to give Lutheran religious practice much of the splendor of the early Italian Baroque. While there are moments when his work lacks craft and sophistication, the interplay between the various items in the service created variety and charm. A high premium was placed on intelligibility. Simple choral settings contrasted nicely with the more florid Magnificat. All the performing forces were of a piece: good singing and playing, fine early baroque style, and lots of value-added coro spazzato effects, including a marvelous moment when a trio of sopranos was dispersed around the house with attendant lute players. Good performance practice; great theatre.

Fallis’s Praetorius franchise offers recognizable seasonal fare with a number of familiar carols (‘Joseph Lieber, Joseph Mein’ and ‘In Dulci Jubilo’) that accrue extra meaning and intensity in context. There was plenty of early baroque splendor, and, best of all, a real sense of discovery for much of the audience. For those of us jaded by too much of the same old Christmas fare this was a fine, much-needed and, in its Vancouver incarnation, much appreciated treat for the season.

LEWIS WHITTINGTON

LEWIS WHITTINGTON

American Record Guide
Florida Orchestra/ Michael Francis
Tampa

There is always something exciting about the inaugural season when a new conductor takes the helm of an orchestra. Such was certainly the case on November 6 when Michael Francis led the Florida Orchestra at Tampa’s Straz Center. This was actually my second encounter in two months with Francis, who served as guest conductor with Miami Beach’s New World Symphony in September [J/F 2016].

With the full forces of orchestra, Master Chorale of Tampa Bay, and vocal soloists, Francis chose The Bells by Rachmaninoff for his second concert of the season. It is the composer’s infrequently performed choral symphony. It was sung in Russian with projected English subtitles. While the composer considered it his finest work, it is a bit of a slog for some audiences to swallow. Many claim to miss the big tunes he is noted for, and the opening ‘Silver Sleigh Bells’ is about as happy as it gets for this composer. Depression seems to pervade the Edgar Allen Poe-based text much of the time. Supranor Lyubov Petrova had a tendency to explode on some of her entry words, but she and baritone Lee Pouls were generally up to their tasks. The gentle tenor voice of Kevin Ray had some difficulty penetrating the orchestral texture. Each soloist sang in only one of the four movements. The well-trained chorale, a large body of voices, sang their challenging parts lustily and with fine intonation, including the third movement without soloist.

Francis, who turns 40 this year, is a meticulous conductor with an easily understood baton technique and an obvious enthusiasm that is readily conveyed from the podium. His comments on the music were not in any way patronizing but had all the charm one might expect when delivered with a proper British accent. His description of contemporary composer Christopher Rouse’s Prospero’s Rooms, based on Poe’s “Masque of the Red Death,” was blood-curdling but in a humorous way. Originally composed in 2013 for the New York Philharmonic, the eight-minute piece held no terror for the orchestra as it made its way through what is essentially a game on an atmospheric bit of film, like scoring without the film. It was a sinister, grotesque, but effective audience pleaser.

In Moussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition in Ravel’s celebrated orchestration Francis attempted a somewhat subtitle performance of this not very subtle piece. The brash were mightily impressive, and instrumental solos nicely played, though a bit more character would not have been out of place. Yes, there were some bloopers, but I have heard far worse from major orchestras. The ‘Marketplace at Limoges’ was an especially busy place at the tempo taken, and Schmule, in the skilled hands of trumpet Robert Smith, easily got the better of his argument with Samuel Goldenberg. The ‘Catacombs,’ far more chilling than Prospero’s Rooms, was an exquisitely balanced exercise in tone color; and the ‘Great Gate at Kiev’ was awesome, like Victor Hartmann’s picture. Should you ever go to Kiev and look for the gate, you will not find it. Hartmann’s plan was never built.

A glance at future programs shows Francis’s plan to offer less frequently performed music along with much of the repertoire. His choices no doubt are influenced by his many guest appearances with orchestras around the world. His newly adopted country is well represented this season by such composers as Copland, Barber, Cage, and Rouse. His native land has not been forgotten either, with works by Elgar, MacMillan, and Vaughan Williams scheduled. Film music aficionados were especially pleased when he took the helm at the first Pops Concert program titled “A Night at the Oscars”.

Since the orchestra performs at three locations covering much of the Tampa Bay area, Francis will be kept quite busy hopping back and forth across the scenic 10-mile causeway and filling his additional obligation as conductor of Sweden’s Norrkoping Symphony. Previous Florida Symphony conductor Stefan Sanderling might be a hard act to follow, but Francis should do quite nicely, at least based on the performances I have seen him conduct. Best of all, he is a conductor with personality, and many of us can remember a time when that was prevalent and a distinct asset.
On paper, James Gaffigan’s debut with the New York Philharmonic looked like the usual pre-Christmas concert: light-weight Beethoven and Strauss, with a new piece buried in the middle. It turned out, however, to be a brilliant bit of programming. Everything was organized around comedy and pranksterism, with each piece laughing across different eras at the other.

Gaffigan was the ideal maestro for this idea. His music-making was witty and joyous, with a touch of mischief in his smile, extra pizzazz in his tempos, and a fondness for bright sonorities. I remember him at a rehearsal of Prokofiev’s Symphony No. 5 at Spoleto USA years ago at the start of his career, telling the young orchestra (only slightly younger than he was) that they sounded too heavy, “too Bruckney”, and challenging them to lighten and brighten their sound. Suddenly the symphony shed its wartime lugubriousness, allowing Prokofiev’s impish personality to shine through.

Now a more seasoned maestro (recently appointed chief conductor of the Lucerne Symphony), Gaffigan obviously has more maturity and sophistication; but even with his beard he still looks boyish, and his approach hasn’t changed. The concert opened with a snappy performance of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 4 with buoyant horns, an exuberant scherzo, and a slash-and-burn finale. This is Beethoven’s cheerful intermission between the portentous No. 3 and No. 5, and that’s Beethoven’s cheerful intermission between the portentous No. 3 and No. 5, and that’s exactly the way the orchestra played it. The fake-serious opening was handled with deftness; the “great bassoon joke” at the end was tossed off effortlessly by Judith Leclair.

The contemporary work, Split for piano and orchestra, is also an exercise in wit, though of a decidedly 21st-Century sort. Like many in his generation, composer Andrew Norman is obsessed with what he calls the “narrative-scrabbling” effects of computers and video games. His new piece is a contest between “people being machines and people being people”; between mechanistic noise and effulgent romantic fantasy. He invokes Cage and Cowell, but also Strauss and Scriabin. The pianist it was written for, Jeffrey Kahane, acted as a prankster, provoking chaos in the orchestra, only to find himself turned into the prank as the orchestra began interrupting his more poetic ruminations with shattering, computer-like noises.

In saucy remarks to the audience, Gaffigan spoke of the Philharmonic administrators’ own game, which he called “let’s hide the new piece by the living composer”—a game by no means limited to this concert. The concerto was stuck at the beginning of the second half so no one could leave, but the subscription audience nonetheless gave it an attentive, mildly enthusiastic reception—not bad, given the work’s nonstop 25-minute length and its headache-inducing modernist noise effects from tin cans, flower pots, crashing percussion, and wind instruments with no defined pitch. The piece is actively annoying but also wildly colorful and imaginative. It’s so in-the-moment (indeed, partly improvised) and so rhythmically discontinuous that it’s hard to wrap one’s brain around its structure. But it is certainly fun to sit through, especially with Kahane’s devilish virtuosity on full display. Split was followed by Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks, the granddaddy of all prankster pieces. It too is full of interrupted narratives and wide mood swings. Indeed, what is remarkable is Strauss’s juxtaposition of merriment and bitter-sweet lyricism. This is “comedy” as understood by Shakespeare and Shaw, communicating pathos as well as jollity, shock as well as contemplation. Gaffigan’s approach was so brash that the pathos was nearly drowned out. The winds were so piercing, the tutti so clanging, that the guillotine sequence at the end seemed like one more outrageous stunt rather than a catastrophe. Exciting it certainly was, though also ear-splitting. Here was the New York Philharmonic playing at full throttle in their already over-bright hall.

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ALAN BECKER
Guerrero likes to construct programs that are filled with subtle relationships and happy coincidences. Since the program opened with an organ symphony, Guerrero concluded the concert with the music of Austrian composer Anton Bruckner, an organist who wrote symphonies of heavenly length and cathedral grandeur.

The NSO’s performance of Bruckner’s Symphony No. 4 lasted a full 70 minutes. But sometimes it seemed much longer, since Guerrero took his sweet time, allowing the work’s ruminative music to unfold at an unhurried pace. The opening movement, with its laconic horn theme, exuded a calming sense of repose. The third movement Scherzo was full of energy and thrust.

Any performance of Bruckner’s No. 4 is only as good as its French horn playing, and the Nashville Symphony’s Principal Horn Leslie Norton led her section in playing that was spot-on, with enough emotional heat to warm the soul on a cool November evening. 

JOHN PITCHER

Mahler: Symphony No. 10: Nielsen: Symphony No. 4

Seattle Symphony/ Thomas Dausgaard

When the last notes of Mahler’s Symphony No. 10 died away there was thunderous applause in Benaroya Hall—and a lot of the clapping came from the stage. The Seattle Symphony gave the conductor a rousing ovation. Principal guest conductor Thomas Dausgaard has a special relationship with the Seattle musicians, who followed him closely as he led the symphony to surging life with barely a glance at the massive score.

Already a big favorite in Seattle from his programs traversing all the symphonies of Sibelius [July/Aug 2015], Dausgaard returned in November for two programs, each with another slow movement, has lots of solos and a triplet theme heard previously. Finally, ‘Group Dynamics’, again for full orchestra, grows intense with percussion laced multi-colors, ending with a whack. All in all, Flex was eminently listenable and got a warm reception from the audience.

In the second half of the concert French violinist Renaud Capucon was soloist in Bruch’s Violin Concerto No. 1. Immediately apparent was his warm, satiny tone, displayed to full effect in the second movement. Also apparent was his extremely agile technique in the energetic finale. Especially appealing was the magical, song-like sound he achieved high on the violin’s lowest string.

Capucon’s encore was the Meditation from Massenet’s Thais. Exquisitely performed, it was dedicated to the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris.

The concert ended with Langree’s pulse-quickening performance of Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet with caressing strings—especially the violas—in the love theme.

MARY ELLYN HUTTON

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The following week Mahler’s Symphony No. 10 stood on its own, as it should, a symphonic Matterhorn of about 70 minutes. Dausgaard used Deryck Cooke’s completion of the five-movement masterpiece that was left partly finished at Mahler’s death in 1911. After observing that Mahler would undoubtedly have made many revisions in the sketches and drafts he left behind, Cooke wrote in defense of his completion, “After all, the thematic line throughout, and something like 90% of the counterpoint and harmony, are pure Mahler, and vintage Mahler at that.”

From the questioning statement in the violas that opens the symphony to the final movement, Dausgaard realized the vivid drama of the score, bezeichning and commanding some inspired playing from the Seattle musicians, balancing the music’s extremes with a sure hand. There was the sense of timelessness in the leisurely unfolding of the first-movement conclusion and huge drama later in the heart-stopping bass drum strokes that sounded like the heralds of death in the final movement. At the conclusion, Dausgaard sustained the silence in the house for at least ten seconds, hands aloft and body unmoving. Even in total silence, this is a man who knows how to conduct.

What struck me in each Dausgaard performance was the extraordinary detail of every line and phrase in his interpretation and the clarity of his communication with the players. No musician in his orchestra could be in the slightest doubt about exactly what he intended. A huge repertoire of specific gestures was at his command; and, when he leaned into the orchestra to cajole or to demand, he showed exactly how he wanted the phrase shaped. The resulting performances were remarkably expressive and unified.

MELINDA BARGREEN

Sebastian Currier: Flex (world premiere)

Cincinnati Symphony

The Cincinnati Symphony performed the world premiere of Sebastian Currier’s 30-minute Flex (Concerto for Orchestra) at Music Hall on November 19. Commissioned by the CSO, each of its six movements is marked by a distinctive structure and a wealth of color.

CSO Music Director Louis Langree introduced the composer, who offered comments on the work. The first movement, ‘In the Spotlight’, unfolds over a steady beat, with solos for violin, clarinet, bassoon, trombone, harp, vibraphone, and tuba, each in effect spending time “in the spotlight.” Serving as a slow movement was ‘15 Versions of the Same Phrase’—settings of the same phrase, which itself remains unchanged. The clarinets open ‘Micro-Variations’, which develops the full orchestra in beams of color. In ‘Echoes, Canons, and a Minuet’ soft violins alternate with frenetic winds and brasses, all coming to a soft end. ‘Alone and Together’, another slow movement, has lots of solos and a triplet theme behind it. Finally, ‘Group Dynamics’, again for full orchestra, grows intense with percussion laced multi-colors, ending with a whack. All in all, Flex was eminently listenable and got a warm reception from the audience.

In the second half of the concert French violinist Renaud Capucon was soloist in Bruch’s Violin Concerto No. 1. Immediately apparent was his warm, satiny tone, displayed to full effect in the second movement. Also apparent was his extremely agile technique in the energetic finale. Especially appealing was the magical, song-like sound he achieved high on the violin’s lowest string.

Capucon’s encore was the Meditation from Massenet’s Thais. Exquisitely performed, it was dedicated to the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris.

The concert ended with Langree’s pulse-quickening performance of Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet with caressing strings—especially the violas—in the love theme. MARY ELLYN HUTTON
Ives: Violin Sonatas
New York

Speaking at an unusual November concert in the 92nd Street Y, the dazzling pianist Jeremy Denk compared Charles Ives to Proust, describing him as ‘as drawing inspiration and making art from remembrance of things past. Denk has the musical and literary mastery to recognize and articulate the connection. With Boston-born violist Stefan Jackiw, Denk traversed Ives’s four violin sonatas, interspersing hymns that appear in snippets and explorations in the sonatas. They were sung by the male quartet, New York Polyphony, for a rapt audience of about 850 (estimated total IQ: 127,000).

Ives’s music is the most original ever written by an insurance man in his spare time. Amid dueling tonalities, it incorporates unexpected elements, and tune fragments shoved in and twisted around are but a tame example. ‘Don’t let the ears lie back in an easy chair,’ he warned.

Ives, a musical grinch, would have been satisfied with this stellar triple collaboration. Denk, cut from the same intellectual cloth, does more than routinely play through a program. He thinks it down to the bottom, and then puts it together like a 3-D puzzle.

Composers often travel for inspiration, but Ives did not, other than taking the train to New York, where he did a stint as a church organist and was a longtime partner in Ives and Myrick, a reputable insurance firm. His muse was the Danbury, Connecticut, area—his birthplace and home. Bands, camp meetings, church services, children’s play, war songs—he folded them into a musical patchwork evoking post-Civil War and World War I local life. In his studio (preserved at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in Manhattan) he figuratively tore off the ceiling of his mind and swirled into the stratosphere of reminiscence.

Denk, director of the 2014 Ojai Festival, recipient of a MacArthur “genius” grant, and blogger at ‘Think Denk,’ played the sonatas with Jackiw in reverse order. Between the sonatas, hymn tunes that filter through the music were sung by the quartet in arrangements by Wilbur Pauley.

Ives saw the hymns’ possibilities—soft and meditative or chipper and cheery. He used hymns the way he used small-town life—as a launching pad. It was a pleasure to hear one or two verses of each in close harmony recalling barber shop, though balance was lost in several and the tune buried.

Ives revised the sonatas during the first two decades of the 20th Century. Denk revised them another way, performing them in reverse order, so they moved from assured and cheerful to rhapsodic and introspective. Jackiw’s violin tone, thin at first, poured out pleasantly as the concert progressed.

‘Shall We Gather at the River,’ the hymn that concludes No. 4, ends mid-thought—for the listener perhaps but apparently not for Ives. He typically puts in a few phrases and then he’s done, though the non-ending brings the listener up short. These days we don’t catch every hymn here or in the other sonatas; fashions in hymn choice change and tunes no longer frequently sung in services don’t jump out.

In Sonata No. 3 among ecstatic sonorities recalling Cesar Franck are imploded hymns and songs. No. 2 is vintage Ives Americana, sounding like a hoedown, but turning into pure Ives. You hear ‘Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,’ and one phrase later he’s done here, too.

The sonata heard last (No. 1) is not virtuosic but not simpleminded either and, for its time, out on the edge. Though it came first, it showed what Ives could do with tonality—and tonalities—that contemporaries shunned in favor of 12-tone composition.

This concert is not scheduled elsewhere. Someone should get onto that.

LESLEI KANDELL

**Continued on page 44**
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Andras Schiff: The Last Sonatas
New York

Andras Schiff brought his current recital project to a fitting and magnificent close last Octo-
ber. Three recitals, with the last three sonatas by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, began in March 2015. I was fortunate to attend the final two at Carnegie Hall (July/Aug 2015). Having heard exceptional performances of two sonatas by each composer, I waited for seven months to hear the third on October 30.

Haydn’s No. 62 and Beethoven’s No. 32 made up the first half, and Mozart’s No. 18 and Schubert’s B-flat concluded the recital and the series. These sonatas were composed in a 40-year period, a nexus between the classical and the romantic. These composers wrote more than 100 piano sonatas. Their final sonatas have a valedictory nature, both in content and reputation. Similar stylistic features did not restrict pianist and listener from exploring a wide range of melody, harmony, rhythm, and form. Schiff uncovered a world of content and expression.

Schiff is one of the most intelligent pianists I know. His recital building, even with this self-imposed limitation, was spot on. He began each half of the program with an exuberant sonata. The Haydn and Mozart were the two lightest works on the program, most representative of the classical period. Filled with beautifully phrased melodies, rhythms that bounced and snapped, glittering passagework, and interesting counterpoint, they were also the two shortest sonatas. We were quickly and completely in Schiff’s sound world when the much larger and complex works by Beethoven and Schubert were played. These demand much more from both pianist and audience.

Schiff’s opening sonata was one of the greatest works ever written for the instrument. Its titanic, struggling, and tempestuous first movement is followed by the simplest and most beautiful ‘Arietta’. Its variations explore every dimension of triple time and progress with increasing complexity until breaking into a jazzy, offbeat 12/32-meter dance. Eventually trills become dominant, and we are taken to the highest and quietest part of the piano for the heavenly ending before descent and the final settling on a beautifully voiced C-major chord. Before Schiff released the chord, a boorish jerk yelled “Bravo!” from the balcony and got applause started. Schiff held the chord, but finally gave up with a shrug. I am still angry about this kind of rude, self-centered behavior—it is inexcusable.

Schubert’s final sonata, written only months before his painful death at age 31, “Sprawling” is often used to describe this sonata, but “spacious” is better. When heard with all of Schiff’s nuances, this work gloriously repays attentive listening. The opening movement takes more than 20 minutes with its exposition repeat. Schiff has written that its omission is the equivalent of amputating a limb. Eight bars in, the opening melody is interrupted by a low trill. I think of this as Schubert’s approaching death rumble. Schiff calls it the most extraordinary trill in the history of music. Over the course of 45 minutes, I felt honored to be able to explore this work with someone so intelligent and so able to convey it all so well.

Schiff played the entire concert on a Bosendorfer piano. The encores expanded the compositional time range of the recital and were related to the main works. The Ghost Variations were Robert Schumann’s last piano composition (1854). This substantial 11-minute work, written just before the composer’s death, was perfectly in line with the Schubert sonata we had just heard.

It was then about two and a half hours since the concert started, but the audience kept calling for more. Schiff came out for one final encore, and we were treated to the famous ‘Aria’ from Bach’s Goldberg Variations. For a second I wondered incredulously if he was going to play the whole work, but I recalled that at Schiff’s 2013 Carnegie recital he played the complete Goldberg Variations followed by Schubert’s Diabelli Variations. His single encore that evening was the Arietta from Beethoven’s Sonata No. 32. Here’s a man who integrates everything. [For comparison see Melinda Bargreen’s article, “Seventy-five years on, ‘The Piano Town’,” in this issue; she reviews the same program performed 18 days earlier. —J.H.]

Diana Damrau, soprano
New York

German soprano Diana Damrau made her New York recital debut at Carnegie’s Weill Hall in 2007. Eight years and two children later she returned on October 6, this time on the big stage in Stern Auditorium. Anticipation was in the air, as can only happen when an opera diva gives a solo recital. The 44-year-old ebullient singer is a veteran of both operatic and recital stages worldwide and has to be considered one of the world’s leading sopranos. The main hall was packed, and we were treated to an exceptionally fine recital. With pianist Craig Rutenberg, one of the busiest and most in-demand accompanists in New York, their ensemble was nuanced and consistently at the highest level.

Her opening group of Schubert songs was well constructed with a variety of emotions projected by her gorgeous, silvery voice and rather stylized acting. The well-known ‘Ständchen’ opened the program at a hushed level, followed by a beautiful ‘Du bist die Ruh’. By the time ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade’ reached its climax, raising the hairs on the back of my neck, I knew we were at a very special recital.

Despite the best efforts of both singer and pianist to perform Schubert’s seven songs as an unbroken group, a portion of the large audience insisted on clapping between each song. This prompted Damrau, before beginning her Strauss group, to ask people in a very charming manner to hold their applause until the end of each remaining group of songs, which they did. The Strauss group began with his ‘Ständchen’ and progressed through six songs without applause. Conveying the emotional content of each song with more natural expressions, her breath control and dynamic range were on display here.

The piano lid was fully open, but Rutenberg never overpowered Damrau. He underplayed the Schubert—his ability to play at the quietest levels was astounding—then opened up in the Strauss and was brilliant in the concert’s second half. Damrau’s voice is not huge, but, as with most successful opera singers, it carries very well. It was unusual that she used music for the concert, but, since she was at the Met, offering the audience something on the Met’s return schedule was reasonable for her relying on the printed page in repertoire she has undoubtedly sung from many times.

The second half opened with a compendium of French songs. Humor, sadness, beauty, and love were all present in these six songs. Damrau’s command of the language was superb as she shifted gears between emotions and musical styles with ease. Selections from Manuel Rosenthal’s Chansons du Monsteur Bleu offered Damrau the opportunity to draw snickers and even laughter from the audience. She was quite comfortable being funny in “the words of a little boy who makes fun of grownups and many other things” as the composer, a pupil of Ravel, described what he put to music. Dvorák’s exuberant Gypsy Songs, sung in the original German, closed the program on a brilliant note.

The first encore brought us back to the beginning with another serenade: Brahms’s ‘Vergebliches Ständchen’, a much more extroverted song than the two that started the concert. The enthusiastic audience was able to coax one more encore, Strauss’s ‘Morgen’, allowing both singer and pianist to bring things back to the concert’s hushed and beautiful opening.

Koh & Hosner: Beethoven & Iyer
San Francisco Performances

The San Francisco Performances concert series has collaborated with stellar violinist Jennifer Koh to create and perform a bold four-night “Bridge to Beethoven” series—Beethoven sonatas plus new and recent musical reflections on them created by active composers from both sides of the Atlantic. In recognition of this and other innovative recital enterprises, Chicagoan Koh was named the 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year by Musical America.

JAMES HARRINGTON
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American Record Guide

March/April 2016

Music in Concert

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In the first recital of the series, Koh tackled the challenges of technical high-hurdles, virtuoscopic passage-work, and acoustical adjustment to the reworked Herbst Theatre, closed for the past two years. Koh’s principal partner was Shai Wosner, who himself has commissioned and played new works with distinction.

The first of the new Beethoven-Modern works, Bridgetower Fantasy by Vijay Iyer (rhymes with wire), is passionate and revolutionary as much as Beethoven’s sonatas were. It emphasizes percussive effects in both violin and piano. The resemblance ends there, though some day musicians with microscopes may find shards of Beethoven deep in its score. Contemporary techniques, including direct plucking of piano strings, finger-taps, and playing the violin col legno (on the wood, not the strings), brought the score to life during the 18-minute piece that is divided into four sections. Apart from a four-note figure, themes are few, percussive attacks numerous. This tour-de-force opus gives the violinist more virtuosic passages—something superlative Koh excels at.

I have long regarded Koh as a virtuoso technician first and foremost. But in Beethoven’s Violin Sonata No. 1 she showed an engagingly playful and whimsical side, ending with dancing triplets in the finale. Unlike many recitalists, she regards the pianist as an equal partner, reflecting Beethoven’s priority on the title page, “Sonata for Piano and Violin.”

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Then came the masterly Kreutzer Sonata (No. 9), premiered by the Afro-European violinist George Bridgetower, Beethoven’s esteemed collaborator until their eventual falling out (over a girlfriend, it was said). Here Koh pulled out all the stops with admirable virtuosity in the recapitulation of the first movement, directing the strings to play the opening theme as bursts of pizzicato and ponticello created a decidedly pointillistic atmosphere. Koh’s playing was as compelling as the music, and the audience was in raptures.

The performance lasted about four minutes. The first is primarily written in the key of D major, and the second played about with odd sounds, scratchy passages, and violent dramatic contrasts. The idiom of both works is atonal, yet the effect of the first is beautiful and serene, contrasting effectively with the outbursts in the second.

The second work is the subtitle of Leos Janacek’s Quartet No. 2, written in 1928, the year of his death. The four-movement 26-minute quartet is the introduction to the last movement of the program with such joy and conviction. The Pacifica Quartet for having thought of such a surprising program, played with such joy and conviction.

After intermission second violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson pointed out that working with Elliott Carter and his music involved learning how not to play together. His lecture was most amusing and prepared us well for Carter’s Quartet No. 5, a work in seven movements with five interludes, taking 20 minutes. Much of this work divides the players into pairs who have musical conversations together; other moments are for solo instruments.

Carter’s basically light though dissonant atmosphere prepared us well for the final work on the program. Beethoven’s last opus (Quartet No. 16) is a curiously light-textured and light-hearted quartet. The music is more fittingly serene, contrasting surprisingly with his Nos. 12, 13, and 14, which are lengthy, dramatic, and frequently tragic. The only potential tragedy in this quartet is the introduction to the last movement that begins with the question, “Muss es sein? (Must it be?), which keeps returning until the Allegro breaks in with the “Es muss sein” (It must be!), after which we resign ourselves happily to death and whatever comes next.

This was so appropriate to the basic intent of this program that it left the audience going home with thoughts of the future, grateful to Beethoven for developing such a positive attitude towards it, and grateful to the Pacifica Quartet for having thought of such a surprising program, played with such joy and conviction.

The look of the quartet was a little odd, since the first violinist was a small but joyous black-haired woman. Facing her was a six-foot violinist sitting on a huge piano bench and looking rather serious. Then there was the second violinist trying to play with everyone, and the cellist who communicated with smiles and gestures. All in all, the individuality of the players suited the styles of the music well. The sound of the hall was clear and warm.

DAVID MOORE

The Pacifica Quartet has made a fine name for itself over the last 20 years. They have played at number of concerts specializing in one composer: all of Beethoven’s, Mendelssohn’s, Shostakovich’s, and Elliott Carter’s quartets. The program played on December 9 at New York’s 92nd Street Y gave a fresh slant on things by combining the late works of Carter, Janacek, and Beethoven into one program. One interesting point is that these three composers wrote these works at the very end of their lives. Carter’s Quartet No. 5 was from 1995, but the Two Fragments that opened this program were written in 1999 when he was 96 years old (he lived to 103). In the case of both Beethoven and Janacek, the quartets were their last works.

If this seems like a gimmick, it wasn’t. The program made a powerful impression. It started with Carter’s Two Fragments, each lasting about four minutes. The first is primarily written in harmonics; the second played about with odd sounds, scratchy passages, and violent dramatic contrasts. The idiom of both works is atonal, yet the effect of the first is beautiful and serene, contrasting effectively with the outbursts in the second.

Carter’s Quartet No. 5, a work in seven movements

...
Shostakovich was doing something the performers loved, but they weren’t necessarily doing it fast enough. “Opus” will challenge your perceptions of what is possible with the human body and draw you deep into a world of physical daring,” said Circa’s artistic director Yaron Lifschitz in a program note. He goes on, not mentioning any particular accompaniment. (Hey Shostakovich, are you liking this?)

The mixed music-circus format worked at least as well—if with less class—when the troupe joined the Boston Pops at Tanglewood last August under the name Cirque de la Symphonie. There the assortment of light musical repertory favorites was more forgiving to acrobatic feats: juggling to Bernstein’s Overture to Candide or strongman-wrestling to Bach’s Toccata and Fugue (the one animated with the shapes and brilliant colors in Disney’s Fantasia). Not so bad.

The single act (or trick or display) that fit into both performances was Kathryn O’Keefe’s being suspended high on a fabric streamer. Her meditative gyrations to the early Shostakovich piece, with three string players on the ground, far below, were as rhapsodic as they had been last summer to an excerpt from Swan Lake. The main difference was that at BAM she conveyed tangled passions, while at Tanglewood, in a split, she used one hand to twirl a man dangling beneath her. It was probably a coincidence, but the director picked up on the double possibility.

At the outset, acrobats were in black and white varieties of leotards, resembling the white shirts and black pants of the musicians. For the final quartet they got serious in black bathing suits—better for flashy stunts and also hinting at beach festivities during the more boisterous movement, when a blue-lighted woman, the black-haired woman. Facing her was a six-foot strongman-wrestling to Bach’s Toccata and Fugue (the one animated with the shapes and brilliant colors in Disney’s Fantasia). Not so bad.

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The last work is the subtitle of Leos Janacek’s Quartet No. 2, written in 1928, the year of his death. The four-movement 26-minute work is surprisingly similar in sound to Carter’s. Written in homage to his beloved one, Kamila Stosslova, it, like Fragments, combines a series of sound effects with contrasting loving emotions. The basic idiom is relatively tonal and folk-influenced; but, coming after the Carter, it was amazing how alike the effects were, particularly in the finale, where pizzicato and pizzicato created a decidedly pointillistic relation. Out of this the Pacifica players created a basically friendly effect, while staying thoroughly true to the tremendous contrasts prevalent in both works.

After intermission second violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson pointed out that working with Elliott Carter and his music involved learning how not to play together. His lecture was most amusing and prepared us well for Carter’s Quartet No. 5, a work in seven movements with five interludes, taking 20 minutes. Much of this work divides the players into pairs who have musical conversations together; other moments are for solo instruments.

Carter’s basically light though dissonant atmosphere prepared us well for the final work on the program. Beethoven’s last opus (Quartet No. 16) is a curiously light-textured and lightweight quartet that ends with a clear, strong, and fully satisfying song, and which in fact is the subtitle of Leos Janacek’s Quartet No. 2, written in 1928, the year of his death. The four-movement 26-minute work is surprisingly similar in sound to Carter’s. Written in homage to his beloved one, Kamila Stosslova, it, like Fragments, combines a series of sound effects with contrasting loving emotions. The basic idiom is relatively tonal and folk-influenced; but, coming after the Carter, it was amazing how alike the effects were, particularly in the finale, where pizzicato and pizzicato created a decidedly pointillistic relation. Out of this the Pacifica players created a basically friendly effect, while staying thoroughly true to the tremendous contrasts prevalent in both works.

The Pacifica Quartet for having thought of such a surprising program, played with such joy and conviction. The look of the quartet was a little odd, since the first violinist was a small but joyous black-haired woman. Facing her was a six-foot violinist sitting on a huge piano bench and looking rather serious. Then there was the second violinist trying to play with everyone, and the cellist who communicated with smiles and gestures. All in all, the individuality of the players suited the styles of the music well. The sound of the hall was clear and warm.
**Nielsen Quartets**

**New York**

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center sponsored an unusual concert on November 12. The Danish String Quartet played all four of Carl Nielsen’s quartets in the Rose Studio, a relatively small place on the 10th floor of 70 Lincoln Center Plaza. The room accommodates about 100 people and was full.

The program began with a video made by the Chamber Music Society containing an analysis of the quartets. Considering the length of the concert and the detailed notes already in the printed program, this seemed like sending coals to Newcastle, but it was well done. Then out came the four players: violinists Frederik Oland and Rune Tønsgaard Sorensen, violist Asbjørn Norgaard, and cellist Fredrik Schøyen Sjølin. Further explanation of aspects of the quartets was provided by the players before each work. The program was chronologically ordered, and Sorensen and Norgaard gave amusing comments on various aspects of the music and their work as a quartet.

Three players wore black suspenders—a curious conglomeration of order, and Sorensen and Norgaard gave amusing comments on various aspects of the music and their work as a quartet. No, but they were being watched after the first quartet to see if they were being amplified. No, but they were being watched. There were in those days, and he withdrew from concert life high even in the half-empty hall.

The music for this section under conductor Lothar Koenigs, who gave the Met his brilliant 2010 staging of The Nose by Shostakovich, was commissioned to stage Lulu this season, with Levine conducting. But the music director’s health is precarious these days, and he withdrew from Lulu in order to maintain his other commitments. So German conductor Lothar Koenigs, who has achieved considerable success with Lulu in Europe, was brought in. Another German who has made a name with this opera, soprano Marlis Petersen, was cast in the demanding title role. To add to the drama, she announced that these would be her final performances in the role.

The result was one of those great nights that, if we’re lucky, come along once or twice in a season. Kentridge’s riveting production was bold and imaginative, and it brought a sort of order to Berg’s adaptation of Wedekind’s sprawling play. Kentridge’s use of projections set a new standard for this art form, drawing us into a fanciful, surreal expressionist dreamscape. Images rushed by: woodcuts from peripheral artists, nudes, drawings of Berg; a hand turning pages of a book that is, in turn, splattered with inkblots, forming a sort of Rorschach test—not unlike the opera itself—with its ambiguity about guilt and innocence. The art deco sets added to the mood, along with outrageous costumes including, for Lulu, two-dimensional black-and-white nude drawings of herself.

Two silent characters were added: a woman wearing formal menswear who was constantly on stage either playing a (mute) piano or posing dramatically and a butler who wandered around the stage with a stylized gait. This and other effects seemed calculated to enhance the sense of insanity pervading the opera—the same madness Berg sensed in the Nazi regime. (Berg died in 1935 without completing the opera; the third act was completed by Austrian composer Friedrich Cerha.)

Berg’s 12-tone score is among the most challenging in the repertoire. Koenigs’s approach seemed more lyrical than Levine’s, a bit more subdued. He never covered his singers; his pacing and balances were exemplary. Over the three-hour course of the evening (four with intermissions) he steadily built towards a shattering climax.

Petersen, on stage for most of the opera, was phenomenal. The role asks for sounds manifesting the full range of emotions from

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**American Choral Works**

**RIAS Chamber Choir, Berlin**

At the chamber hall of Berlin’s Philharmonie on November 10, the RIAS Chamber Choir clapped and stamped its feet. An arpeggio was ripped from the inside of a grand piano. Switch from a poem by Heiner Muller to a fairy-tale about a glowing moon flower, set to shivering a cappella harmonies and interlocking piano motives. In AIM—Ich Gehe (AIM—I Go) Swiss jazz musician and composer Nik Bärtsch weaves together texts from three sources: Muller’s posthumously published “Dream Texts”, Shakespeare, and a story by his eldest daughter Aina. A single dream emerges through common themes such as rival sisters, pilgrimages under moonlight, and a man on his death bed—a rite of passage that Bärtsch describes as a “departure into both death and life”. RIAS gave the work its premiere in Amsterdam before bringing it to Berlin.

One of the three texts, Muller’s is given the starkest treatment. The poetry is spoken and set to raw textures such as the back of a mallet drawn across the keyboard (performed by the Turkish duo Uluf and Bahar Dorduncu). But AIM steers clear of academic solipsism, freely integrating ambient jazz and American-style minimalism. One of the most interesting moments emerged with the transition from “Dream Texts” to the “King Fool Episode”. The reclining chair where a man has died in Muller’s fragment is set to a dance-like rhythm and repeated during an adaptation of King Lear to tell a story at once morbid and playful. The music for this section under conductor Florian Helgath was catchy enough that when repeated as an encore, a couple of teenagers danced in their seats as if at a club, keeping the energy high even in the half-empty hall.

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**Berg: Lulu**

**Metropolitan Opera**

Among James Levine’s passions are the operas of Alban Berg, and he has used his considerable power to ensure that thoughtful productions of Lulu and Wozzeck are regularly mounted here, conducted by himself.

South African director William Kentridge, who gave the Met his brilliant 2010 staging of The Nose by Shostakovich, was commissioned to stage Lulu this season, with Levine conducting. But the music director’s health is precarious these days, and he withdrew from Lulu in order to maintain his other commitments. So German conductor Lothar Koenigs, who has achieved considerable success with Lulu in Europe, was brought in. Another German who has made a name with this opera, soprano Marlis Petersen, was cast in the demanding title role. To add to the drama, she announced that these would be her final performances in the role.

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Three players were in Broadway black with no jackets, but Sjølin wore a white shirt with black suspenders—a curious conglomeration of outfits. This individuality was characteristic of the performances and of the music itself. Nielsen, born the same year as Sibelius (1865), lived until 1931. His musical style was more forward-looking than Sibelius, though also melodic and folk-influenced. Nielsen had a way of contrasting his musical material that was highly original, mixing tragedy and humor.

The real glory of the evening was in the playing itself. These musicians related to each other, having a musical conversation that was reflected in their movements and glances as they worked together with great unanimity of intent, faultless intonation, and a balance of energy high even in the half-empty hall. Nielsen is fully as important to our musical world as Sibelius but in a totally different way. His style is deliberately more ambiguous than Sibelius but by no means inferior. Nielsen deals in contrasts of many kinds, and his strength lies in the relationship between figures and the overall grandeur of the story. These players brought out both sides of his music in a really outstanding way. I hope to hear them again.

—David Moore

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Glass: Appomattox
Washington National Opera

On November 14, 24 hours after news broke of the terrorist attacks on Paris, I was sitting in the opera house of the Kennedy Center in Washington listening to a chorus of women sing, “This is the last time. War is always sorrowful. Let this be the last time.” While the sentiments had a painfully current resonance, the time was the Civil War. The scene, both mournful and exalted, opened Appomattox, an opera by composer Philip Glass and librettist Christopher Hampton. This production by the Washington National Opera was the premiere of a revised version of the opera that was given in San Francisco in 2007. Here it had an entirely new second act.

The reworking of the opera was prompted by the Supreme Court’s striking down portions of the Voting Rights Act three years ago. The new second act jumps ahead 100 years after the end of the Civil War to depict the struggles of the 1960s, especially the political efforts by President Johnson and Martin Luther King to assure that blacks got the right to vote.

Besides the poignant use of a women’s chorus, which also ended the opera, Glass’s choral writing furnished some of the evening’s other high points. A hushed prelude to the first act has soldiers singing the “Patriot’s Guard” to each other. A second hushed prelude to the first act ends with soldiers singing “O, The Race” to each other.

Robert Wierzel’s skillful lighting, the stage became a courthouse or church, the White House or a prison. Every cast member was deployed in dual roles. This was probably an economic necessity, but it turned out quite effective. Bass Soloist Howard, a Washington native, appeared briefly as Frederick Douglass in the first act but made a stand-out performance as King in the second.

Soprano Melody Moore was excellent, first as Julia Grant, wife of the general, and later as Viola Liuzzo, a civil rights worker.

If there was a star of the evening it was the imposing baritone Tom Fox, who portrayed both presidents. As Lincoln he was earnest and upright, though somewhat faceless. His LBJ, on the other hand, was baldly physical and multi-layered—principled but cravenly political, and also thoroughly profane.

The contrasting depictions of Lincoln and Johnson indicated the vast differences in quality and character between the opera’s two acts. The first carries on for a good 90 minutes and has vast stretches of dry dialog and historical detail, none more lengthy and tedious than the prolonged negotiations, first in correspondence, then in person, between Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S Grant. Glass’s music did little to relieve the tedium as it rolled out beneath the vocal proceedings like so much carpeting. Better drama can be found in some of Ken Burns’s PBS documentaries.

But in the hour-long second act Glass’s trademark arpeggios became well-placed emotional tools. When President Johnson bore down on George Wallace, the brass underscored the pressure. As J Edgar Hoover revealed his illegal duplicities, the swirling emotions added to the chill.

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Gordon Getty, B2, one of the sanest composers on the planet, launched an engaging one-act opera of spooks, cadavers, and madmen at San Francisco Opera on December 8 that showed him to be a better librettist than composer. His mind-trip, Usher House (2014), walked the tantalizing lines between reality, fantasy, life, and death distilled from the nebulus outlines of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

Getty, listed as the 212th wealthiest man in America, is a San Francisco financier-turned-composer of vocal works. For years he has donated generously to SFO and dozens of other companies, raising critical eyebrows. Getty’s new Usher Opera, is a viable and intimate addition to the opera repertoire.

In Usher Getty’s vocal lines are mostly recitatives that repetitively hop up and down a perfect fifth or fourth, reflecting some of the mental fragility of Roderick, the last of the Usher clan. His music, with subdued orchestral effects, is thoroughly consonant, carrying some of the anguish of the doomed man in both works.

Director David Pountney brought forth strong characterizations blended with nebulus Poe uncertainty. The runners in this piece, co-produced with Welsh National Opera, were the immense video projections of the mansion designed by Niki Turner and David Haneke; it shifted constantly from chamber to lavish chamber and showed apparitions of past Usher lords and ladies. It ended with the building’s mighty stones collapsing, like a house of cards.

The singer-actor baritone Brian Mulligan portrayed Roderick with resonant voice and the anguish of the doomed man in both works. Lawrence Foster was the reliable conductor.

Good ghost stories in opera are few and far between. Getty’s Usher House, his third opera, is a viable and intimate addition to the genre, but it would probably be much more effective if paired with a lighter work or comedy. But here it was a double bill with Debussy’s Chute de la Maison Usher, based on the same Poe story, in the American professional premiere of Robert Orlledge’s reconstruction based on Debussy’s unfinished score.

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Besides the poignantly use of a women’s chorus, which also ended the opera, Glass’s choral writing furnished some of the evening’s other high points. A hushed prelude to the first act had soldiers singing the Civil War song ‘Tenting Tonight’ above a gently undulating orchestral accompaniment. Later, Martin Luther King led a kind of revival; here Glass daringly reset several verses of ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’ to a new melody. It made me listen with fresh ears.

If there was a star of the evening it was the impressive baritone Tom Fox, who portrayed two presidents. As Lincoln he was earnest and upright, though somewhat faceless. His LBJ, on the other hand, was boldly physical and multi-layered—principled but bravely political, and also thoroughly profane.

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Bass baritone David Pittsinger was wobbly and insecure as Robert E Lee, but he returned both steady and severe as the white supremacist Edge Ray Killen in the opera’s penultimate scene, set in 2011. Killen’s lengthy diatribe contained the most lyric music of the night, truly operatic in the traditional sense. Such a combination of raw hatred and ravishing beauty came as a sicken- ing reminder: war is not the only struggle that seems to have no end.

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Poe, listed as the 212th wealthiest man in America, is a San Francisco financier-turned-composer of vocal works. For years he has donated generously to SFO and dozens of other companies, raising critical eyebrows locally. His best-known previous compositions are the cantata Joan of the Bells and the opera Plump Jack.

In Usher Getty’s vocal lines are mostly recitative that repetitively hop up and down a perfect fifth or fourth, reflecting some of the mental fragility of Roderick, the last of the Usher clan. His music, with subdued orchestral effects, is thoroughly consonant, carrying on an American tradition from Floyd, Barber, and Menotti. Given a cast of just three singers plus a dancer and off-stage voice, an eventual chamber-opera version with small orchestra might make sense.

In his libretto Getty solves the dramatic problems of Poe’s inscrutable tale very adroitly. Roderick’s dearly beloved twin Madeleine is sometimes a cadaverous dancer, sometimes a distant voice from the crypt. His friend-visitor is now Poe himself, a tenor voice of reason attempting to right Roderick’s desperation. And Dr Primus (bass Anthony Reed), perhaps an antecedent reincarnated, is a sinister sorcerer foreseeing the future and manipulating life and death like a god.

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soliloquy outpourings of the ill-fated Roderick (Mulligan again) in a guise more pitiable than attractive. It has neither Debussy’s unique orchestral colors nor, in Orledge’s reconstruction and orchestration, the dramatic impetus vital to opera. Orledge is an English composer who has made orchestrations of Debussy’s unfinished works a cornerstone of his career. Before SFO offers tickets to the French consul general, they should warn him that Mulligan could use a course or two in French pronunciation.

PAUL HERTELENDY

Lulu—from page 47

naivete to rapacious exploitation, and for vocal styles from coloratura to dramatic soprano, with jazz thrown in. Moving and contorting herself with an athleticism rarely seen on the opera stage, she burned with Callas-like charisma, entirely plausible as the seductress she portrayed.

In reviewing the Met’s season-opening Otello for this magazine, I commented: “Otello isn’t a dance, but it needs...” In fact, Kentridge’s Lulu, especially Petersen’s physicality, rose to the level of dance.

This was a night of luxury casting all around. Susan Graham portrayed the Countess Geschwit with poignancy and a powerful top. Baritone John Reuter was a powerful Dr Schon, doubling as a spine-chilling Jack the Ripper. Tenor Paul Groves struggled a bit as the Painter. Bass-baritone Martin Winkler was superb both as the Animal Trainer and Rodrigo the acrobat. Daniel Brenna sang nicely as Alwa. And at the age of 78 baritone Franz Grundheber managed a sturdy portrayal of Schigolch, Lulu’s older friend.

The house was packed and the audience at rapt attention, with little intermission shrinkage. This was a night to savor and remember.

JAMES L. PAULK

RIAS—from page 46

The rest of the program underscored Bärtsch’s ability to test formal and stylistic boundaries in a manner not unlike the American avant-garde. Elliot Carter’s Defense of Corinth for speaker, male choir, and four-hand piano, written in 1941 for the Harvard Glee Club, draws upon conventional musical vocabulary to cast a cutting glance at the destructiveness of war. Helgath drew buoyant rhythms from the excellent chorus while speaker Andrew Redmond was authoritative but appropriately tongue-in-cheek.

The evening opened from the balconies with John Cage’s Four 2 for mixed chorus. The performers shape a selection of notes within time brackets; that led to spare open harmonies, but they eventually grew repetitious. More absorbing were the kaleidoscopic colors of Morton Feldman’s wordless harmonies in Christian Wolff in Cambridge, where the conductor determines duration.

Wolff was the only living American composer on the program. In his ‘Evening Shade, Wake Up’ for mixed choir, free-floating harmonies emerged from intimate clusters. They were in authoritative hands, despite the RIAS Choir’s imperfect English diction. The singers maintained immaculate tone as they turned their backs on one another and left the stage one by one, as per Wolff’s instructions in the score.

It was a clever dramaturgical touch to use Wolff’s Duos for Pianists I and II for partly prepared instruments to frame Evening Shade. The alert Dorduncu Duo exchanged material by means of cueing. Only the beeping of a watch at the end of the performance ruined its mystique.

REBECCA SCHMID

Word Police: Irony & Ironic

This noun and adjective are commonly used to describe something odd, curious, sad, coincidental, improbable, even unlucky—but they do not mean any of those things. Irony is the use of words to describe something quite different from and often opposite to their literal meaning (American Heritage Dictionary). Synonyms to “ironic” are sarcastic, caustic, sardonic, and satirical. An "ironic" observation or statement involves ridicule. It is obvious from the context that most of the time that is not what current users of the word mean. People routinely use words without knowing what they mean. No one seems to use the dictionary any more—and thus they end up sounding ignorant.

To begin a sentence "Ironically," is as bad as beginning a sentence with most words ending in -ly and followed by a comma. Yet that is so common that grammatically sensitive people can hardly read anything any more without becoming irritated. (The most common are "thankfully", "hopefully", "sadly", "regretfully", "similarly", and "admittedly").
The Land of the Timid

The USA has become a wimpy place. The evidence is everywhere. Everyone seems afraid of everything. We are not “the land of the free” but the land of the timid.

Children are outrageously overprotected. 60 years ago children “went out to play” and disappeared for hours on end—and no one worried. They walked to school or caught the bus—and no one worried. They were given much more responsibility than they are now. (Today in Japan young children are still treated that way: they are sent out to do errands, they ride the subways and busses alone, and so on.) Today there is a huge line of cars at every elementary school when the school day ends. Parents think they have to pick up the little darlings so they don’t have to walk or cross a street. (All the little darlings will be fat before they are 12, because they get no exercise. They will also be wimps, like their parents.)

College students are increasingly protected from “offensive” ideas. Why? A decent education requires coming to grips with ideas you don’t like. But people nowadays claim they are “offended” by those ideas. They feel no obligation to respect people who disagree with them—or even to listen to them. But it even applies to adults: when was the last time you had a vigorous conversation, an argument, something challenging? Do you subscribe to any magazine that questions your ideas and opinions? The Internet has isolated people from each other and made it possible to filter what you are exposed to so you won’t have to deal with anything inconvenient. That is wimpy, childish, and inexcusable.

People mostly have phones now with “caller ID”. They won’t answer a call unless they recognize the number. Naturally, they miss a lot of calls. ARG can’t get thru to them. Often their friends can’t if they are not calling from home or from their usual number. And why do people do this? Because they can’t deal with a sales call or a charity call by just saying “no”. What is wrong with people who can’t say “no”? It’s pitiful.

People are afraid of confrontation, so they don’t say what they really think. In fact, they try not to say anything. “Texting” has become a way of avoiding conversation, as young people freely admit.

No one questions “received wisdom” (conformity of thought) in meetings; they just go along and never “rock the boat”. They are afraid to do anything that might bother anyone else.

People are afraid to be critical; for example, they give everybody a standing ovation at concerts. Here wimpiness meets sentimentality (they are closely related). If you are not confident that you know a great performance when you hear one, you can just treat every performance as if it were great. That is very irresponsible, but audiences have become that timid. One of life’s great obligations is NOT to praise what is not worthy of praise.

Insincere praise is everywhere; it is especially dished out to children (in the name of “self-esteem”) who seldom deserve praise at all.

People talk about “issues” or “challenges” instead of problems or disappointments or handicaps. Yes, our use of language is getting wimpy, too.

People can’t resist change or “the latest thing” and become slaves of technology instead of asking whether the changes and new things are needed or worthwhile—whether they make things better.

I read recently that 37% of adults are afraid to be out after dark. They aggravate the problem that if good citizens abandon the streets, the streets get increasingly taken over by bad ones. Crime has been declining almost everywhere for many years—but of course TV news plays up every crime and makes it seem you are taking your life in your hands if you go out after dark in our cities. TV news has ruined our cities. TV news is responsible for the massive insecurity—the fear—that affects most people in this country. It makes wimps of all who watch it. News is by far the worst thing TV does.

TV in general is bad for your health: the more you look at it, the worse your health gets, and the more likely you are to die (American Journal of Preventive Medicine). But it is also notorious for creating passivity. News, sports, entertainment—it all just reduces you to a passive lump on a sofa. It thinks your thoughts for you, and it feeds your fears. Americans are
adicted to passive entertainment—even in sports—and it means that increasingly they don’t think at all (or exercise).

Massive linguistic conformity rules. People sound fake and unreal, because what they say is “pre-approved” by the media and everyone around them. They talk—as they think—in safe cliches. What people say no longer reflects what they really think—or would think if they let themselves think. (That is too risky—someone else might disapprove or find it “offensive.”)

We are (in most of the country) very timid drivers. Part of the problem is that we force people to drive who should not be driving. Maybe half the drivers on the road are too timid to be good at it. They don’t seem to be able to merge, for example. The “acceleration lane” entering an expressway has become a “stop and worry” lane. They don’t take the right of way when they are supposed to, but timidly hang back and let the other car go. I call it the “Go ahead, dear” syndrome; maybe they think it’s a matter of courtesy. The truth is, good driving involves being assertive when you have the right of way and taking it—but whether out of imagined courtesy or just plain wimpiness, many drivers do not. If you are behind one of those wimps you would like to push them forward.

When it comes to driving, the US has infantilized all of us. We are not allowed to use our judgement or even to develop judgement. There are signs and laws that tell us what to do in every situation, from the speed we can drive around the next curve to when we can pass. There are cops hiding around every corner and at the bottom of every hill—sometimes there are even cameras—to keep you in line and make you a wimpy driver. Good drivers are fast, efficient, assertive; but our whole society is producing timid drivers. We reward timidity and penalize alertness—in driving as in everything else.

People are afraid of the weather. Again the “media” are responsible for constant alarms. The entire Cincinnati area closed down a day or two this winter when a snowstorm was predicted. Nothing happened. That happen every winter. People are terrified. One wonders what our ancestors did in bad weather. I suspect they simply put up with it. I don’t understand why so many events get cancelled and why people seem to panic.

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People are afraid of smoke; many even claim to be “allergic” to the tiniest whiff of the vague smell of tobacco smoke, even if it’s only found by sniffing the furniture. This is such nonsense! Everyone my age grew up with smoke in all public places—even in subway cars in New York. No smoke was “allergic to smoke”. But then we were seldom allergic to anything. With rare exceptions allergies are a neurotic response to irrational fears and were then recognized as such. These days this has got so bad that most hotels and offices ban all smoking indoors. There is no sensible reason for such a ban. It tells 20% of the hotel’s potential customers that they are not wanted and insults 20% of the employees in an office. Market forces would never permit such a policy. It is done to protect wimps. A French hotel owner tells me it is the Americans who demand such “protection”.

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We are afraid to try new foods and drinks. Most young people convince themselves that they like what everyone else likes. They can’t stand the thought that they might not fit in or might be viewed as different or odd. Supermarket selection in most of the country gets narrower and narrower as the stores get bigger and bigger, because everyone buys the same few things.

They treat music the same way. My friend Robert, who has been at almost every symphony concert I have been to for more than 70 years, tells me he has a new girlfriend who will not go to a concert with him. She says, “That’s just not my music”, and he assures me she won’t even give it a chance. Dump her, Robert! It would seem to take tremendous courage not to conform in beer or food or music. What happened to openness to new experiences? Instead of curiosity we find fear—fear of the new unless everybody we know is adopting it (as in smart phones). Conformity and fear of the new has made most people wimps!

We are miserably self-indulgent and never force ourselves to do anything. Like spoiled children we do everything we want to do, eat anything we want to eat, and so forth. “Self-control” seems a foreign concept—puritanical. We haven’t the character to resist temptation; we just yield like weaklings. And we expect everyone around us to understand and sympathize and not comment that we are weak and immature.

Maybe some of this comes from the blurring between the sexes (a possible side effect of feminism—or of women taking over so many jobs and doing so much writing?). Women today are not bothered by being awake; men are expected to be strong and manly and protect them. When was the last time you heard that? Actually, most women do want to be protected from anything they don’t want to bother with. And most American men are shockingly effeminate in appearance. Of 1950 or 1960. Young men today are afraid of anything unfamiliar. (I repeat: they all wear the same clothes, drink the same beer, listen to the same music.) When I was growing up such behavior and fears would have been considered unmanly—something to be ashamed of. We now see children being forced to act like grown-ups—a terrible deformity. And we assumed that a man had to be aggressive to make something out of himself. We also assumed that becoming a man meant being able to stand on your own two feet—not living off your parents, for example. Parents today have kids in their 20s and 30s living with them. Wimps!

We are way too tolerant. We put up with a lot more than we should. Just think of what we put up with from other people’s children. Or from noisy overgrown children who are physically “adult”. When was the last time you complained to a noisy neighbor or to a parent about your child? And of course we are bullied and pushed around everywhere we turn, from the police to the supermarkets and big corporations. Why do we tolerate that? What happened to the spirit of freedom? We are all too willing to give up freedoms for more “security” (largely an illusion).

The police are bullies—and way out of line in much of this country, but Americans—wimps that they are—put up with police abuse all the time. Cincinnati has outrageous parking meter costs and tickets if your meter runs out. Why do people meekly put up with this? The police enforce parking tickets by arresting people who haven’t paid them—isn’t that overkill? No one wants to get arrested, so people pay, even though it’s outrageous and they hate it. We are all afraid to tangle with the cop bullies and the court bullies.

There are no standards; we never seem to hold people to standards of behavior or morality. Standards give life its backbone and challenge—give a job the same thing, give a marriage the same thing. Life must be a struggle—humans need that. No one is really poor any more, and there doesn’t seem to be any more striving and attaining. People mostly do their jobs half-heartedly. They seldom seem to have their brains fully in gear. Half-heartedness is very wimpy.

Most people are afraid of criticism. We need constant reassurance. We are afraid to stand alone—even to be alone. We need to be in touch with our family all the time. (Stupid cell-phones). Why? Insecure? Or is this just another form of wimpy self-indulgence?

An entertainment culture has made us passive—another wimpy characteristic. We don’t aggressively seek the truth; we just let the media tell us what to think. We never have heard opinions at “information” (a misnomer—it’s designed to get you to buy products). We don’t actively think; we react to the thoughts and ideas thrown in our face by our “media”. Even the way we use words is uneducated and shows that we no longer read books or consult dictionaries. What words mean to us is how we have heard them used. And we all conform; we all use words the way TV and the Internet use them—and that is often simply wrong. Again, passive acceptance of whatever comes our way seems to be the rule instead of vigilance, critical thinking, and individuality. And again one can only conclude that we have become wimps—we have no character or independence or originality. We just conform.

Continued on page 171
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Continued on page 171
John Luther Adams’s *Iliamq*, title from the Inuit, is a 48-minute film consisting of stills of what look like a bridge, a building filtered in red, water, and sky, with a looming thunderstorm. Adams accompanies these images with ghostly electronics. The thunderstorm appears after a while. The atmosphere is moved along with episodes of extended 16th-note drumming. The events alternate until they fade out. Adams describes this as an Inuit shaman “riding the sound to and from the spirit world” accompanied by an icy wind. That pretty much describes it.

**ADAMS: Iliamq**
Glenn Kotche, perc
Cantaloupe 23112 [DVD] 48 minutes

A lot of serious study has gone into the preparation of this project by the four Czech performers. The first two named above are sopranos who also play instruments; the third is an instrumentalist only, and the fourth contributes only percussion. I can respect their decision to sing many of them in a relatively free style of troubadour song, and the ones treated as ensemble pieces include Arab-style percussion and rhythm.

On the other hand, of the 19 selections, 4 of them are given solely in instrumental reductions. This may contribute some variety to the program if you listen straight through. But these songs are songs, for heaven’s sake! The words are at least as important as the tunes, and to strip them away deprives them of any real meaning—the more so as the instruments used for them sound palid and the approach insipid. And in the rest of the selections, the singing is usually limited to a single soprano voice, or sometimes two in unison (though “harmonization” for two singers is sometimes ventured). Even in the instrumentally accompanied songs, the sound is thin and spare. This approach not only rejects the lively sense and hearty feeling of ensemble performance we hear in so many earlier recordings, but it also contravenes the visual evidence in the original manuscripts, showing performing groups of singers and instruments.

The space places the performers at a reverberant distance, allowing us to aerate the atmosphere clearer than clear documentation. The booklet does, to be sure, offer concise but very informative notes, together with full texts and multi-lingual translations.

In all, this is a very above many recordings of this fascinating literature, but by no means an ideal one.

**ANDERSON, LAURIE: Heart of a Dog**
Laurie Anderson, narr; ensemble
Nonesuch 552027—75 minutes

This is the soundtrack of Laurie Anderson’s film meditation on the meaning of life. I have yet to see the film, but the CD works well on its own. The piece consists of brief autobiographical commentary built from many stanzas. A lot of serious study has gone into the preparation of this project by the four Czech

**ALFONSO EL SABIO:** Cantigas de Santa Maria (19)
Hana Blazikova, Barbora Kabatova, Margit Ubelacker, Martin Novak—Phi 17—72:32

The project of assembling a collection of hundreds of songs in honor of the Virgin Mary was one of the greatest among many of the cultural achievements of Alfonso X, “El Sabio,” King of Castile and Leon in the 13th Century. The collection is one of the supreme sources for medieval song in the vernacular (and the two manuscript sources are wonders of illustration). The *Cantigas* have understandably been given recorded attention for a long time, with results varying from the responsible to the contemptible. This release veers toward the former category.

The songs, drawing poetically and musically on Arabic styles as well as Christian, were written in the Galician and proto-Portuguese languages. In character they fall into two contrasting types: the *loos* in poetic praise of the Virgin, and the *miragres*, narrating stories of miracles brought about by the Virgin. Of the 19 items recorded here, only four are *loos*, the remaining 15 *miragres*. As in most recordings made so far, the longer examples are represented by abridged versions built from many stanzas.

**ARENOS: Sequoia Sempervirens:** Voyager 3 Sheets to the Wind
David Arend, db; Salim Washington, sax; Mora-vian Philharmonic/ Jiri Petrdlik, Peter Vronsky
Navona 6015 — 43 minutes

David Arend is a composer and player of the double bass. His music is attractively tonal and colorfully scored for orchestra (not only for the double bass), making me sorry that the program is so short. *Sequoia Sempervirens* is a 12-minute suite written in 2010 that takes us through a night in a California Redwood forest. It is over before one expected it to be.

**BACH, CPE: Flute Concertos**
Alexis Kossenko; The Ambassadors; Art ofPlayers Orchestra
Alpha 821 [3CD] 214 minutes
Alpha 304—70 minutes

“I feel very much in sympathy with the music of CPE Bach, which for me has something very close to us it’s caprable of purring gently and then suddenly clawing you. It’s never totally domesticated, and I love its wild, myste-rious side.” Alexis Kossenko plays CPE with tremendous sympathy and authority and skill. In the concertos, the orchestra uses no vibrato at all, which some people object to; it certainly emphasizes the harsh, grating quality this Bach does not avoid, but rather cultivates. The orchestra engulf the soloist to a degree; that’s how these pieces are written and how they’re balanced, though the soloist is always clear and present enough—unlike Rachel Brown on Hyperion (Jan/Feb 2002). The sound of the orchestra is very close; yet although there are eight violins, the group sounds small because their playing is that precise. Not all of these concertos are familiar even to flute players, and I enjoyed meeting the Concerto in B-flat for the first time.

The chamber works are presented with wonderful verve and spirit and take a conversational tone that differs from the combative, confrontational one in the concertos. The two solo sonatas are for flute and basso continuo in E minor and for clavier and violin in B-flat; the four trio sonatas date from 1747, but two are revisions of earlier works from 1731. These works with the early basis could never be con-fused with pieces by Papa Bach, but perhaps could be equated with the finest and most dar-ling by his father. A few unrelated political themes are treated as ensemble pieces. I expected it to be more expressive of the planets are not particularly evocative to me. I wish I could follow better his train of thought, but I got lost in Voyager. I expected it to be more expressive of the mysteries and grandeur of outer space than the primarily jazzy piece he gave us. But it is music of a fresh kind that I will be glad to hear more of. Both soloists play with conviction, and the orchestra joins them together well, as does the recorded sound.

**BARKER**

**GIMBEL**

**DAVID AREND**

**ALEXIS KOSENKO**

**D. MOORE**

“*Voyager* is more concerned with jazz expression and adds a saxophone to the trip. We are taken on the spacecrafi voyages to Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and beyond. The story of improvisation in the space program and this work lasts more than half an hour. It is pleasant to listen to, though the descriptions of the planets are not particularly evocative to this science fiction fan. Although I found Arend’s music well conceived, I wish I could follow better his train of thought. The title *Sequoia Sempervirens* is a little too vague, I liked *Sequoia Sempervirens* very well, but I got lost in Voyager. I expected it to be more expressive of the mysteries and grandeur of outer space than the primarily jazzy piece he gave us. But it is music of a fresh kind that I will be glad to hear more of. Both soloists play with conviction, and the orchestra joins them together well, as does the recorded sound.”

**The concertos were recorded in 2005 and 2008 but have not been covered in these pages previously. They were released on Alpha 93 (2007) and 146 (2009); the first one, consisting of the concertos in G, B-flat, and D minor, has been reissued recently as Alpha 304. The string orchestra is based in Poland but uses the Italian name *Arte dei Suonatori*. The concertos were recorded at A=415 and the trios and sonatas at A=392 on two modern copies of flutes made by Johann Quantz from around 1745. CPE Bach and Quantz made music together in Berlin in 1726, and Quantz was serving at the court of Frederick the Great, so a Quantz flute has an authentic connection to..."
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GIMBEL
ADAMS: Dances; see HARRISON

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A lot of serious study has gone into the preparation of this project by the four Czech implantation, resulting in a deep intimacy between them. Along the way, the two go through 9-11 together, living contentedly in the West Village, and Lola is a devoted pooch and a happy resident of the streets of New York. Reminiscences of the composer’s life turn to Lola’s death and the death of her mother and of a close friend. A few unrelated political observations are thrown in about homeland security, data collection, and the CIA; but mostly the message is the endurance of love, dreams, and creativity, and it is most moving.

There is a piece dedicated to Ms Anderson’s late husband, Lou Reed, posthumously; she closes it with his own “Turning Time Around.”

I look forward to the film (the excerpts I’ve seen look wonderful), but this release makes a great radio play. It is very worthwhile, and Ms Anderson is a beautiful reader.

GIMBEL

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David Arend, db; Salim Washington, sax; Mora-vian Philharmonic/ Jiri Petrdlik, Peter Vronsky
Navona 6015 — 43 minutes
David Arend is a composer and player of the double bass. His music is attractively tonal and colorfully scored for orchestra (not only for the double bass), making me sorry that the program is so short. Sequoia Sempervirens is an 12-minute suite written in 2010 that takes us through a night in a California Redwood forest. It is over before one expected it to be. Voyager is more concerned with jazz expression and adds a saxophone to the trip. We are taken on the spacecraft voyages to Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and beyond. There is a happy feeling of improvisation in both works and this work lasts more than half an hour. It is pleasant to listen to, though the descriptions of the planets are not particularly evocative to this science fiction fan.

Although I found Arend’s music well conceived, I wish I could follow better his train of thought. I thought Voyager was very, very well, but I got lost in Voyager. I expected it to be more expressive of the mysteries and grandeur of outer space than the primarily jazzy piece he gave us. But it is music of a fresh kind that I will be glad to hear more of. Both soloists play with conviction, and the orchestra joins them together well, as does the recorded sound.

D MOORE

BACH, CPE: Flute Concertos
Alexis Kossenko; The Ambassadors; Art of Players Orchestra
Alpha 821 [3CD] 214 minutes
Alpha 304—70 minutes
“I feel very much in sympathy with the music of CPE Bach, which for me has something very feline about it: it’s capable of purring gently and then suddenly clawing you. It’s never totally domesticated, and I love its wild, mysterious side.” Alexis Kossenko plays his CPE with tremendous sympathy and authority and skill. In the concertos, the orchestra uses no vibrato at all, which some people object to; it certainly emphasizes the harsh, grating quality this Bach does not avoid, but rather cultivates. The orchestra engulfs the soloist to a degree; that’s how these pieces are written and how they’re balanced, though the soloist is always clear and present enough—unlike Rachel Brown on Hyperion (Jan/Feb 2002). The sound of the orchestra is very close; yet although there are eight violins, the group sounds small because their playing is that precise. Not all of these concertos are familiar even to flute players, and I enjoyed meeting the Concerto in B-flat for the first time.

The chamber works are presented with wonderful verve and spirit and take a conversational tone that differs from the combative, confrontational one in the concertos. The two solo sonatas are for flute and basso continuo; one in E minor and for clavier and violin in B-flat. The four trio sonatas date from 1747, but two are revisions of earlier works from 1731. These works with the early basis could never be confused with pieces by Papa Bach, but perhaps could be equated with the finest and most daring by his godfather.

The concertos were recorded in 2005 and 2008 but have not been covered in these pages previously. They were released on Alpha 93 (2007) and 146 (2009); the first one, consisting of the concertos in G, B-flat, and D minor, has been reissued recently as Alpha 304.

The string orchestra is based in Poland but uses the Italian name Arte dei Suonatori. The concertos were recorded at A=415 and the trios and sonatas at A=392 on two modern copies of flutes made by Johann Quantz from around 1745. CPE Bach and Quantz made music together for several years; Quantz, serving at the court of Frederick the Great, so a Quantz flute has an authentic connection to...
the music of CPE Bach. In the three-disc set, these works are accompanied by a beautiful booklet that has many pictures and notes on the chamber works but not the concertos. Those are available on the website of Outhere Music. Alpha 304, with only half of the concertos, has a booklet with a 7-page interview in three languages, including English. It’s very intelligent, but there’s no background on the concertos themselves.

If you’re a subscriber, you probably saw my rave of Rebecca Davis’s Two Violins and Quartets by CPE and JCF Bach on Albany (May/June 2015). It’s worth mentioning here because so little is duplicated. I’ll also call your attention to the four other CDs of Bach for flute reviewed in that issue. The recording Mary Oleskiewicz made of flute concertos by Quantz on Naxos (Jan/Feb 2014) would also go very well with these.

**BACH, CPE: Flute Sonatas**

Donotha Seel; Christoph Hamster; p
Hanssler 98057 [2CD] 144 minutes

This set has six more than the “Complete Flute Sonatas” on Brilliant from Musica ad Rhenum (July/Aug 2014) because it includes the five sonatas, W 83-7, and the unaccompanied sonata, W 132. Seel plays a boxwood copy of a flute made around 1720 by Jacob Denner, and Hamster plays a fortepiano that is a modern copy of a Silbermann instrument from 1749. The sound is very close and especially sonorous. The fortepiano is plumply balanced, with the basses and the harpsichord register. Thus the sound of the flute rests on this lush bed. It’s a very sonically comfortable place you might like to spend a while, and contrasts with the hard edges Kossenko brings us and the Outhere Music. Alpha 304, with only half of the concertos, has a booklet with a 7-page interview in three languages, including English. It’s very intelligent, but there’s no background on the concertos themselves.

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**BACH: Brandenburg Concertos**

Cafe Zimmerman—Alpha 300 [2CD] 87:49

This ensemble takes its name from the coffee house in Leipzig where Bach led his Collegium Musicum concerts in his later years. As it happens, hardly any of the Bach works this group has recorded were in fact played there. 34 musicians are listed, not all of them playing in all the performances. They were recorded over some nine years, from 2006 to 2008. The performances of the famous six here have been released previously in various packagings, not reviewed in these pages. Here they are reissued as the first item in Alpha’s new “Collections” series.

The group’s recorded work has impressed me in the past, but I must confess that I feel a bit let down this time around. The performers are crackerjack, highly alert musicians, totally in command of period-style playing. For all that, I find myself only rarely engaged in these performances.

The booklet interview with a number of the players we read that their approach is “essentially a chamber one”. There’s nothing new about that in recordings of this set these days. Nevertheless, they do compromise in the case of the Concerto No. 1. There they use a “mini-orchestra” including a string band of 4-3-2-2-1. For the other concertos, the string playing is strictly one per part. (I note that in No. 3 they ring in Amandine Beyer, a wonderful violinist whose Vivaldi is reviewed below.)

Right away, the most notable element of these performances is the now-common one of speed. While some of the movements, especially in some slow movements, are moderate, in so many other instances they rush furiously as if being chased by a pack of crazed musicologists. The most striking case is in the recurrent minuet of No. 1’s final movement, which suggests a high-speed marathon that would have made minuet dancers drop out in fits. In No. 3, there is not even breath caught to add something to the skeletal “second movement”.

Curiously, one test in Brandenburg record-ings these days is if the harpsichordist enters the speed competition in the remarkable solo at the end of No. 4. Sakuranada’s first movement, Haimovitz points out in his liner notes an interesting per-sonification. Sakurada (Virtue, Peace) and Fama (Fame) taking turns accelerating the Queen of Saxony.

Third, the scores of both these occasional cantatas Bach were pillaged the following year (1734) for numbers in his Christmas Oratorio. The opening chorus and all five arias of 213, the two choruses and all five arias of 214—all the substantive music in both cantatas—are crammed into the larger work, with different and often far less appropriate texts. So these cantatas may first be thought unfamiliar rarities, but all their important music will be recognized by listeners who know the oratorio.

The soloists all do justice to their contrasting roles. Sakuranada’s Virtue, Peace, and Worner (Mercury, Fame) are strongly persuasive. Blaze (Hercules, Athena) brings a lovely voice to his roles, but his vocal color is closer to a soprano than an alto, which makes him less identifiable in his parts. Most appealing of all is Lunn, a real find of a soprano. She would inspire any orchestra as Bellona, but her subtle sensuality and then scrappiness as Lust are truly memorable.

Needless to say, Suzuki has the full measure of all this music and projects it lucidly with splendid work from his choral and period-instrument forces. The sound is vivid. The booklet contains excellent notes, with full texts and translations. A superb addition to Suzuki’s series and recommendable as an individual release, too.

**BACH: 6 Cello Suites**

Matt Haimovitz
Pentatone 5186 555 [2CD] 135 minutes

This is the second monster project played by Haimovitz released recently by Pentatone in their Oxyngale SACD series (The first was of numerous contemporary works—Jan/Feb 2016). These were recorded in April 2015 on a baroque cello and, in the case of Suite 6, a piccolo with five, as leading stars. Both are called “dramma per musica, indicating that they tell a story. In 213, Lasst uns Sorgen, also known as Herku-les auf dem Scheidewege (at the Crossroads), we witness the testing of the young Hercules as he faces a choice between the allegorical figures of Wolf (Lust) and Virtue (Virtue) as to what his life will be, with Mercury celebrating the hero’s predicatively proper decision.

In 214, Tonet iahr Pauken, the “story” has the figures of Bellona (goddess of war), Pallas (Athena, goddess of wisdom), Irene (symbol of peace), and Fama (Fame) taking turns acclaiming the Queen of Saxony.

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Seel plays a boxwood copy of a flute made around 1720 by Jacob Denner, and Hampre plays a fortepiano that is a modern copy of a Silbermann instrument from 1749. The sound is very close and especially sonorous. The fortepiano is pumped and full and sustains far more than you’d expect. It has a sustain pedal, una corda pedal, and harpsichord register. Thus the sound of the flute rests on this lush bed. It’s a very sonically comfortable place you might like to spend a while, and contrasts with the hard edges Kossenko brings us and the more allurant approach taken by members of Queache Music. All these approaches to CPE Bach are valid and worth hearing, but this is the most beautiful.

GORMAN

BACH, CPE: Piano Concertos in C, G, A minor
Michael Rische, Leipzig Chamber Orchestra
Hanssler 15046—56 minutes

Hectic. There is no phrasing, no breathing, no serenity. As a result there is no logic to the music—just chaos. Tempos are always too fast.

Strings scrape and make you cringe. How can anyone listen to this? VROON

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I find this recording of some merit but not enough. I would like to return to it, amid the immense competition of other period-style releases. Especially since the total contents are pretty skimpy, without any of the group’s other Bach recordings drawn on for fillers.

The packaging—a flimsy three-panel album—is guaranteed to fall apart right from its first opening.

BACH: Cantatas 213+214
Joanne Lunn, Robin Blaze, Makoto Sakurada, Dominik Worner; Bach Collegium Japan/ Massaaiki Suzuki—BIS 2161—73:14

Suzuki’s traversal of Bach’s so-called “secular cantatas” has become something of a showcase, a showcase to his long process through the “sacred” ones. This last one reviewed was in Jan/Feb 2014.

This disc makes a very sensible pairing of two cantatas with much in common. To begin with, they were both composed in 1733 as birthday tributes to members of the Saxon electoral family. Second, both are called “dramma per musica,” indicating that they tell a story. In 213, Lasst uns Sorgen, also known as Herkules auf dem Scheidewege (at the Crossroads), we witness the testing of the young Hercules as he faces a choice between the allegorical figures of Wolff (Last) and Tyudent (Virtue) as to what his life will be, with Mercury celebrating the hero’s predictably proper decision.

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BACH: 6 Cello Suites
Matt Haimovitz
Pentatone 5186 555 [2CD] 135 minutes

This is the second monster project played by Haimovitz released recently by Pentatone in their Oxingale SACD series (The first was of numerous contemporary works—Jan/Feb 2016). These were recorded in April 2015 on a baroque cello and, in the case of Suite 6, a piccolo cello with five strings, leading us to believe that they are played in the version “according to Anna Magdalena”. That has been the best-known manuscript, since we don’t have one by JS himself; in fact, there have been recent rumors that Anna M. wrote these works herself! The main reason that this is unlikely to be true is that the former vague and inconsistent bowing indications. Exactly what notes are intended to be bowed together is unclear right from the first bar of the first suite. Two or three notes are put under a slur, but which notes are intended is unclear. Therefore, the choice is up to the player.

Haimovitz points out in his liner notes an interesting fact, that the Prelude of Suite 4 and the Allegamendes of Suites 1, 4 and 6 are written in cut time in Anna M’s manuscript, indicating that one should emphasize only the first and third quarter-note of the bar, not all four quarters. Fortunately, this does not lead him to play these movements much faster than normal, but his cutting down on the rhythmic emphasis has a pleasant effect on his phrasing. By the way, the Allemandes of Suite 6 does not indicate cut time in the copy I have—and a good thing too, considering the incredible details in that movement.

These readings are lively and imaginative,
played with some attention to early music styles using lots of open strings and a few added trills and other ornaments on some repeats, though with some vibrato and a curious love for crescendos and diminuendos on individual notes that I find disturbing on occasion (but if you don’t, go for it). In the Sarabande of Suite 2 he plays a couple of notes that are not in the manuscript. The Prelude to Suite 3 is played with many mannerisms of rhythm and an odd emphasis on beats. The A string is tuned down to G for Suite 5, and Suite 6 is done on a five-stringed cello. The only really unusual aspect occurs in the da capo of the Gavotte in Suite 6: he plays it entirely pizzicato. Anna Magdalena didn’t suggest that I like it. The recorded quality is clean and clear. I enjoyed these readings a good deal, though not more than many others, some of which you might look up in the Cello Overview (Mar./Apr. 2009), others in our more recent issues.

Steven Isserlis is one of the most satisfying cellists I have heard in a lifetime of listening. He has technique and can also write fine and helpful liner notes—as he does here. This program includes the three Bach viola da gamba sonatas played on the cello (as they often are) with harpsichord and with the sound balanced to a T (as they often are). The order of the sonatas has been altered; the G-major SONATA 2 and the A-major SONATA 3 come with a basso continuo. The Scarlatti sonata is one of a small number of his keyboard sonatas that comes with a basso continuo. The Scarlatti sonata is played on cello and harpsichord. The Scarlatti sonata that comes with a basso continuo is one of the Scarlatti preludes from the Orgelbuchlein (Keyboard Practice). For those who can’t read Bach’s music, the CD works very well, but for a visual treat, the DVD is certainly worth your time.
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It took Glenn Gould to bring the work into the standard piano repertoire with his legendary 1955 recording (39 minutes). He set the bar very high, only to surpass it in 1981 (51 minutes). Both recordings are available together; Sony 87703 (Nov/Dec 2002). These inspired dozens of superb pianists over the past three decades to commit their interpretations to records. Most now take some spontaneity and improvisatory, they work so well that I am sure at least some of them are planned and worked out in advance. Sims employs a wide variety of touches, ranging from very smooth legato to sharp, almost harpsichord-like attacks. She also offers legero for a few measures which are enough to catch my attention without ever overdoing it. If this had been recorded in the studio with many chances to redo every detail (a la Glenn Gould), I doubt that a more satisfying rendition could be created.

Tharaud (b. 1968) offers two performances of the Goldberg Variations. I have always found the Goldberg Variations a visual treat, the DVD is certainly worth your time. Tharaud’s fingertips or at the hammers shooting up and down. For the basic enjoyment of the music, the CD works very well, but for a visual treat, the DVD is certainly worth your time.

Levit (b.1987) has selected the greatest sets of keyboard variations from the 18th and 19th centuries and certainly one of the largest, most ambitious and innovative sets from the 20th Century for his three-disc “99 Variations” release. He is still in his 20s, and I am astonished at his abilities in such different musical styles. He plays the Goldberg Variations with remarkable clarity. He keeps to a limited dynamic range but always with beautiful phrasing. He does choose to emphasize the bass line all the way through. Of course, that is the basis for every variation here. Repeats are taken with very little added ornamentation.

The Diabelli Variations are not my favorite set of Beethoven Variations. I have always found the Etroica Variations a little shorter and more concise, full of humor and brilliant piano writing. Levit’s performance grew on me with every hearing. His dynamic range is appropriately wider in this music, specifically written for the piano. Beethoven was a master of the variation form, incorporating every known and many new compositional techniques into his
many independent works and movements in this genre. Levit keeps everything balanced in this, Beethoven’s largest set. Diabelli’s simple waltz was varied by many composers, but none tame and near Bach, all the repetitions are all taken, and the fast variations are very fast.

Given this recording and musical scores, Bach and Beethoven would most likely have accepted, understood, and appreciated each other’s works here. They would no doubt have much admiration for Levit’s playing as well. When they got to the Rzewski, I think they would both have been perplexed. Despite a straight-forward, easily accessible theme, The People United Will Never Be Defeated is a compendium of modern piano writing, blistering with technical difficulties and a number of unique effects. Simply deciphering the score is a challenge: many strikingly original time signatures and metrical groupings, tempo and stylistic directions without precedent, pedal effects, optional vocal cries, and whistling notated with diamond shaped note-heads, and many pages simply black with a huge quantity of notes. It was written in 1975 on a commission from the City of New York, and a champion of contemporary music. Her premiere recording (Vanguard 8056, Jan/Feb 1994) retains the one others are compared to. ARG lists six other recordings, and my favorite is Hamelin (Hyperion 67077, Sept/Oct 1999). Levit is up to every challenge here, and he joins a small and very elite group of pianists who have taken up and conquered this amazing work.

This issue’s Goldberg Variations are certainly a varied lot (pun intended). All are well performed, but for a continually interesting, great sounding recording alone, Sims is the choice. If the visual aspect appeals to you along with a second and third recording, perhaps by the same pianist, then choose Tharaud. If you are looking for piano variations over three centuries with captivating performances of three markedly different great works, then Levit is the choice.

Bach: Lutheran Masses in G minor & G; Sanctus settings (4); Kyrie in C minor

1675) has recently been released (BIS 2121, March/April 2014; 16120, Sept/Oct 2014). He gives a more relaxed and intimate reading of this music with two voices per part—Suzuki uses a choice of 23—and correspondingly light instrumentations. The delicate clarity of tone and exquisitely sensitive nuances of Christophers’s performances are extraordinarily attractive. I would hesitate to say that either performance is better than the other, but they are certainly different.

GATENS

BACH: Mass in B minor

Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists/ John Eliot Gardiner—SDG 722 [2CD] 106 minutes

Back in 2002, writing in Alexander Morin’s Third Ear guide to classical music recordings, John Barker ranked John Eliot Gardiner’s 1985 recording of Bach’s Mass in B minor (DG Archiv) as one of the top instrument recordings of the work. Many other recordings of it have been made since then; and now, 30 years later, Gardiner returns to this masterpiece. The new recording is a bold and vivid reading that exhibits the conductor’s artistic personality without reservation. I expect it will not be the choice for listeners looking for a serenely poised and subtly dignified performance, but admirers of Gardiner will undoubtedly find it irresistible.

The booklet contains an extended excerpt from Chapter 13 of Gardiner’s book Music in the Castle of Heaven (2015). Much of the essay is devoted to the complex history of the work’s gestation and composition over a period of some 40 years. Beyond that, Gardiner seeks to discern Bach’s possible artistic and spiritual intentions, and in the process I suspect there is much as I admire and respect Gardiner’s painstaking attention to the movement and flow of the music and to the interaction of the vocal and instrumental parts. Details of phrasing and articulation are treated with a subtlety that places them at the service of the music as opposed to drawing undue attention to themselves.

In comparison, Gardiner’s gestures are more extreme. The phrasing and articulation in the fugue of Kyrie I sound exaggerated to me. Rapid tempos can be blisteringly fast. The violin obbligato in ‘Laudamus te’ from the Gloria sounds gaudy. ‘Cum Sancto Spiritu’ could easily be used as an interpreter of the music. Readers may have gathered by now that, in general the recording sounds to me excessively close. Nowhere is this more apparent than in ‘Benedictus’, where the breaths of the solo flautist sound like urgent gasps—a distraction that would be greatly mitigated by a more respectful distance such as we have in Radelmann’s recording.

In this recording, as in 1985, Gardiner draws his soloists from the choir. Eight soloists are listed: two each of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. This allows a closer matching of a particular voice with the corresponding solo. David Shipley, for example, brings a deep and robust bass tone to ‘Quoniam’; cutting

American Record Guide
Bach: Lutheran Masses in G minor & G; Sanctus settings (4); Kyrie in C minor by Marco Gioseppe Peranda (c1625-1684), double choir (S 241) is based on the Missa Superba by Johann Casper Kerll (1627-93). The Four settings are included here. The Sanctus in G (S 240) survives in a score written by Bach, but it is likely that the music is adapted from the work of another composer. A Sanctus for double choir (S 241) is based on the Missa Superba by Johann Casper Kerll (1627-93). The score is in D, but the original parts are in E. It is performed here in the higher key. The remaining two settings come early in Bach's Leipzig period, intended for festive occasions in 1723 or 1724. The Sanctus in D (S 238) is modestly scored, but the Sanctus in C (S 237) boasts three trumpets and timpani in addition to oboes and strings. The Kyrie in C minor is adapted from a mass by Bach's Neapolitan contemporary by Francesco Gasparini (1661-1755). Bach replaces Durante’s choral Christe Eleison with a duet setting of his own for soprano and alto.

I have long regarded Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan as the gold standard for Bach’s sacred vocal works, and the present recording sustains that reputation. The performances are exemplary for technical polish, precision, coherence, and musical flow. The soloists are among the finest of their kind. All are veterans of many previous Suzuki recordings. The sound is warm but clear. Listeners looking for a recording of this magnitude will not go wrong. A recording by Suzuki of the remaining two Bach Lutheran Masses plus a Mass in A minor by Marco Giuseppe Peranda (c1625-1675) has recently been released (Bis 2121, not sent for review).

There are several other recordings of the Lutheran Masses. Halasz’s recording of the Kyrie and Gloria, most often with German texts, but on festive occasions in elaborate settings in Greek and Latin. Bach’s four Lutheran Masses are examples of this practice from his Leipzig period. Two of the four are given here. The delicate clarity of tone and exquisitely sensitive nuances of Christophers’s performances are extraordinarily attractive. I would hesitate to say that either performance is better than the other, but they are certainly different.

Readers may have gathered by now that, much as I admire and respect Gardiner’s achievement, I do not find this recording entirely congenial. This is not the place for an exhaustive comparison of other recordings, but it is instructive to compare the present recording with one I reviewed very recently: by Hans-Christoph Rademann directing the Gächinger Kantorei and Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (Carus 83.314; Jan/Feb 2016). I declared that performance to be one of the most elegant and coherent I have ever heard. That was achieved in large part by Rademann’s painstaking attention to the music and flow of the vocal and instrumental parts. Details of phrasing and articulation are treated with a subtlety that places them at the service of the music as opposed to drawing undue attention to themselves.

In comparison, Gardiner’s gestures are more extreme. The phrasing and articulation in the fugue of Kyrie I sound exaggerated to me. Rapid tempos can be blisteringly fast. The violin obbligato in ‘Laudamus te’ from the Gloria sounds gouged. ‘Cum Sancto Spiritu’ could be the line of a frantic raucous abandon. Much the same can be said about ‘Et Expecto’ from the Credo. The singers and players have all the technique needed to bring them off, whatever the tempo, but that does not necessarily make the result artistically convincing. ‘Quoniam’ from the Gloria is more boisterous than jovial, giving it a certain youthfulness. The phrasing and articulation are treated with a subtlety that places them at the service of the music and flow of the music and to the interaction of the vocal and instrumental parts. Details of phrasing and articulation are treated with a subtlety that places them at the service of the music as opposed to drawing undue attention to themselves.

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In this recording, as in 1985, Gardiner draws his soloists from the choir. Eight soloists are listed: two each of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. This allows a closer matching of a particular voice with the line of the solo. David Shipley, for example, brings a deep and robust bass tone to ‘Quoniam,’ cutting
through the colorful horn and bassoon obbligato. In contrast, Alex Ashworth seems entirely at home in the higher lyrical baritone writing of ‘Et in Spiritum Sanctum.’ There are very few singers who can bring off both of these solos with equal effectiveness.

BACH: New Oboe Sonatas

Ramon Ortega Quero, Tamar Inbar; Luise Buchberger, vc; Peter Kofler, hpsi

Berlin 300648—54 minutes

These “new oboe sonatas” consist of arrangements of pieces originally written for viola da gamba, lute harpsichord, and transverse flute. This is less farfetched than it might seem at first. Bach and his contemporaries made numerous arrangements and transcriptions of their own works and works of others, and the oboe was a popular instrument in the Baroque era.

These transcriptions, done by oboist Ramon Ortega Quero himself, work very well. His subtle articulation, beautiful phrasing, and seamless, singing sound through the whole range of the instrument certainly add to this venture. He plays even the most technically difficult passages with charm and ease. He is joined in the G-major Trio Sonata by his wife, Tamar Inbar, also a fine oboist. Their sound quality and phrasing blend beautifully. One would almost guess that it was the same player on both parts. Kofler, Luise Buchberger and harpsichordist Peter Kofler put in fine performances as well, but Quero is very much the star of the show. Delightful playing.

BACH: Organ Pieces

Toccata & Fugue in D minor; Pastoral in F; Partita on O Gott du Frommer Gott; Fantasia in G; Prelude & Fugue in G minor; in E minor (Wedge); Variations on Vom Himmel Hoch.

Masaaki Suzuki—BIS 2111 [SACD] 79 minutes

Masaaki Suzuki is probably best known as founder (1990) and director of the Bach College for his many recordings with all of the cantatas. He is also an accomplished harpsichordist and organist. His past recordings have included organ works of Buxtehude and a celebrated set of Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier.

The present program gives a varied cross section of Bach’s organ works, beginning with the familiar Toccata & Fugue in D minor and concluding with the Prelude & Fugue in E minor (Wedge). Towards the middle of the program is the early Prelude & Fugue in G minor, a work of youth and this particular recording could serve as a lesson on how to record the organ to best advantage. I have suffered through many recordings of historic instruments that were so suffocatingly close that I felt blown out, and where the action noise was almost louder than the organ tone in quiet passages. Here the full organ sound has brilliance presence but is not brash. The quieter registers are heard to great advantage in the Pastoral, Partita, and Canonic Variations. The rich reverberation of the church is captured impressively, but not so as to obscure the musical textures. A fine job all around.

Rinaldo Alessandrini, hpsi—Naïve 30564—70:33

The program collects some stray bits from Bach’s workshop: 15 assorted preludes paired with 15 assorted fugues. Most are short and simple, except for the grander B-minor pair at the end of the program: S 923 and 951, which is one of two fugues by Bach on the same theme. Alessandrini has worked out a suitable realization of that B-minor prelude, where Bach wrote out only a sketch of harmonies for two of the sections and expected the player to improvise or compose the details. There is a C-minor pair here: Prelude S 999, usually played on lute, and the rarely-played Fugue, S 961. All of the rest of the music is in simpler keys of one sharp or flat or none. There are the early versions of the C-major and G-major music from WTC 2. The F-major fugue (1720) has been lengthened and transposed to A-flat for WTC 2. The authorship is uncertain for at least five of the other pieces, but Bach and his students used them in lessons.

Alessandrini’s touch tends to sound “hot” and aggressive, with a crisp staccato articulation. His playing is sometimes insecure at quiet dynamic levels, especially in tone clusters.

The notes and websites say that Leonardo Balada’s (b 1933 in Spain) College Wind Ensemble under Conductor for piano, winds, and percussion (1973), a work that is sometimes tonal and relatively consonant but more often very dissonant. Clarify makes the dissonance palatable, but the playing is sometimes insecure at quiet dynamic levels, especially in tone clusters.

Pittsburgh Symphony co-principal clarinet Thomas Thompson is the conductor, David Premru the soloist, in the Concerto for piano, winds, and percussion which has been taught since 1970. His music is dense and demands much from the players.

This recording was made in the 2010-11 academic year and involves four conductors. Denis Colwell, CM Wind Ensemble conductor from 1993-2011, leads the opening and closing works. The very intricate Guest concertos (Short Symphony for Band, 1971) is quite organized for a while but becomes increasing cacophonous. This reading is very good, though there are many intonation disagreements when individual melodic lines intersect in unisons. The Sonata for Ten Winds (1979) is pointillist and random.

Stephen Story, associate director of the CM wind ensemble, teams with the fine Uruguayan pianist Enrique Graf in the Concerto for piano, winds, and percussion, a work that is sometimes tonal and relatively consonant but more often very dissonant. Clarify makes the dissonance palatable, but the playing is sometimes insecure at quiet dynamic levels, especially in tone clusters.
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These transcriptions, done by oboist Ramon Ortega Quero himself, work very well. His subtle articulation, beautiful phrasing, and seamless, singing sound through the whole range of the oboe certainly add to this venture. He plays even the most technically difficult passages with charm and ease. He is joined in the G-major Trio Sonata by his wife, Tamar Inbar, also a fine oboist. Their sound quality and phrasing blend beautifully. One would almost guess that it was the same player on both parts. Kofler, Luise Buchberger and harpsichordist Peter Kofler put in fine performances as well, but Quero is very much the star of the show. Delightful playing.

**PFEIL**

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Masaaki Suzuki is probably best known as founder (1990) and director of the Bach-Collegium Japan and for his many recordings with the organ that was then in the church. The recording could serve as a lesson on how to record the organ to best advantage. I have suffered through many recordings of historic instruments that were so suffocatingly close that I felt bludgeoned, and where the action noise was almost louder than the organ tone in quiet passages. Here the full organ sound has brilliance presence but is not brash. The quieter registers are heard to great advantage in the Pastoral, Partita, and Canonic Variations. The rich reverberation of the church is captured impressively, but not so as to obscure the musical textures. A fine job all around.

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Alessandrini's touch tends to sound "hot" and aggressive, with a crisp staccato articulation, which may be a result of his change of instrument. The recording is pointillist and relentless. The Sonata for Ten Winds (1979) is pointillist and relentless.

Stephen Story, associate director of the CM wind ensemble, teams with the fine Uruguayan pianist Enrique Graf in the Concerto for piano, winds, and percussion (1973), a work that is sometimes tonal and relatively consonant but more often very dissonant. Clarity makes the dissonance palatable, but the playing is sometimes insecure at quiet dynamic levels, especially in tone clusters.

Pittsburgh Symphony co-principal clarinet Thomas Thompson is the conductor, David Premru the soloist, in the Concerto for cello and nine players (1962, rev 1967). Neoclassical in style and quite refined, Steibelt's work pits the soloist against winds (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon), brass (trumpet, horn,
trombone), and percussion. The students play well, but there is marked contrast between their youthful efforts and the assured playing by the Pittsburgh Symphony's assistant principal piccoloist.

And then there is the viola Concerto (2009-10), where PSO principal trumpet George Vosburgh conducts and English violist Ashan Pillai is soloist. Opening with several minutes of extremely high harmonics, the solo instrument sounds more like violin than viola. Eventually the soloist is allowed to make characteristically low, rich tones. As with all of Balada's works, this one is propelled by motor rhythms and jagged, harsh harmonies. I did not really warm to it, but at least the playing was generally strong.

KILPATRICK

BARAB: Songs
Mary Hubbell, s; Brent Funderburk, p; Jesse Mills, v; Jessica Troy, va; Dave Eggar, vc
Acis 47496—52 minutes

Seymour Barab (1921-2014) was an American composer of instrumental music, songs, and opera—particularly fairy tale operas for young audiences (e.g. Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood). Before turning to composing in 1950 he was a cellist with a series of orchestras including Indianapolis, Cleveland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Brooklyn. While playing with the Philadelphia Orchestra he studied cello with Piattogorsky. He was a longtime member of the Philip Glass Ensemble. With Noah Greenberg he founded the New York Pro Musica Antiqua and became its viola da gamba player. Barab played for both ABC and CBS, in addition to playing in the Galimir Quartet and helping to found the New Music Quartet of New York.

The four sets of songs heard here show his characteristically simple and tuneful musical style. The Rivals presents observations of nature in four settings of Theodore Dreiser texts. Bawd Ballads, 10 songs on mostly 17th Century texts, are adaptations of Eliza Williams’ folk dalliances. Particularly delightful is Parodies, settings of children's jump-rope rhymes in the styles of Handel, Donizetti, Wolf, Moussorgsky, Duparc, and Falla. The program concludes with The Song Maker, settings of three poems of Sara Teasdale.

The notes quote the NY Times description of Hebbel's voice as "a soprano with a sweetly focused tone". Her diction is crystal clear and her vocal tone is light and rather monochromatic with a rapid vibrato that presents a fluttery quality; it's a voice well suited to musical theater.

The songs are interesting enough and the performances are good enough to recommend this release. Funderburk and the string players supply attentive and nicely nuanced accompaniment for the entire program.

Notes and texts.

R. MOORE

BARTOK: Contrasts; see LIGETI Divertimento; see Collections

BECK: Symphonies, op 2
13 Strings/ Kevin Mallon
Naxos 573323—70 minutes

Franz Ignaz Beck (1734-1809) was born in Mannheim, Germany. He began his musical studies with his oboist father, but his most famous teacher was Johann Stamitz, founder of the Mannheim School of composition, whose tradition Beck continued. Beck was doing well in Mannheim when he left Germany allegedly because he was afraid to stay in a duel, though the history is murky and beyond the scope of this review. He continued his composition study in Venice with Baldassare Galuppi, a composer well aware of the French. They are closer to the style of Haydn than to Mozart, though they are not nearly as sophisticated, inventive, or complex. Four are for strings only. The First and Fifth include horns in their outer movements. All are in three movements (fast, slow, fast) with "duple and triple meter finales distributed evenly through the set", writes annotator Allen Bradley. There "is no internal repeat in the first movement of No. 1... and none of the first movements makes use of strongly differentiated secondary themes in the manner of Opuses 3 & 4."

All these works are available on Naxos, and a few are on CPO. Most performances are quite good, though Mr French did not care for the first three symphonies of Op. 4 (Mar/Apr 2015). The readings under review here are well done, bracing, quite refreshing, and played on modern instruments with no vibrato. The latter should please listeners who have enjoyed modern period and no-vibrato recordings from Beck's era, but I would like these performances more if the string players used vibrato. They are enjoyable, but that whine in the strings sometimes makes me wish to turn away from them and grab my earplugs. I don't expect to listen to them often. If you share my disdain for sans vibrato performances, proceed with caution. The sound is excellent, as are Bradley's notes. Some people might want more information about the works themselves, but I don't find that a problem.

HECHT

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto 3; Mass in C
Emmanuel Ax, p; Joelle Harvey, Kelley O'Connor, William Burden, Shenyang; San Francisco Symphony/ Michael Tilson Thomas
SFS 64 [SACD] 77 minutes

These performances come from concerts in September 2013 (concerto) and January 2014 (Mass), all recorded in Davies Symphony Hall. The concerto is a delight. Ax is particularly impressive in his even, graceful passage work; and with the delicacy and lightness of the Waldstein sonata set against the power of the Hammerklavier. He performs the Waldstein flawlessly and straightforwardly. His pacing in II is unrushed and employs the pedal sparingly. III has great clarity and momentum, with amazing precision on the runs. Scherzo III is magnificent, as Kim takes the highly intricate, complicated material with immense control.

KANG

BEETHOVEN: String Trio
Jacques Thibaud Trio
Audite 23.430 [2CD] 146 minutes

Beethoven's five works for string trio were all written before his Op. 18 Quartets, so many commentators have seen them as preparatory works for the great quartets to follow. Such a
trombone), and percussion. The students play well, but there is marked contrast between their youthful efforts and the assured playing by the Pittsburgh Symphony's assistant principal violist.

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Acuts 44796—52 minutes

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Beck’s most accomplished work may be the Stabat Mater, but he is also known for 24 symphonies—Opus 1 to 4, each opus a group of six. They were published in Paris from 1758 to 1766. After that, Beck seemed to lose interest in the form.

Opus 2 was published in 1760 (I have also seen 1758), around the time of Haydn’s first three or four symphonies. The works were advanced for their time, especially in harmony, counterpoint, and string writing. The later symphonies are more developed and varied. All are typical of the Mannheim school, yet urban and elegant enough to be welcomed by the French. They are closer to the style of Haydn than to Mozart, though they are not nearly as sophisticated, inventive, or complex. Four are for strings only. The First and Fifth include horns in their outer movements. All are in three movements (fast, slow, fast) with “duple and triple meter finales distributed evenly through the set”, writes annotator Allen Bradley. There “is no internal repeat in the first movement of No. 1... and none of the first movements makes use of strongly differentiated secondary themes in the manner of Opuses 3 & 4.”

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In the Mass the awards go to the chorus, which is fine with me. But singing of the soloists is often more than fine unanynimity and spirit. Their singing is strong and unfailingly alert, and sometimes they seem to anticipate the beat; the whole performance, in fact, feels urgent and gives a subtle sense of jumping ahead. Time and again details emerge a little sooner than I expect, and tempos are a bit quicker than I anticipate. This is a performance, then, with a spirit of excitement and a minimum of repose and warm lingering. Nonetheless, the choral work in fast passages (e.g. ‘Et vitam’) is especially impressive, and nothing sounds routine. (One suspects the chorus was trained with threats of cattle prods and instruments of torture!) The soloists, who operate more as a quartet than individual soloists, are all satisfactory, with none seeming special.

Two fine performances, recommended if you want a large chorus in the Mass and can tolerate what seems to be impatience with the music. It is a strange coupling in any case, mixing choral with concerto, so you may want to separate them out. In that case, Beecham, Gardiner, and Hickox all have fine recordings of the Mass; and the concerto has lots of worthy rivals, Ashkenazy/Solti and Perahia/Haitink, to pick two out of the many.

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonatas 21 & 29

Sunwook Kim—Antonus 303551 — 66 minutes

When Sunwook Kim won the 2006 Leeds competition, he was the youngest winner in 40 years, at age 18. Though listeners may wonder why this disc only contains two sonatas, these masterfully performances prove a worthwhile purchase. Programmed together, they make a good pairing, with the delicacy and lightness of the Waldstein sonata set against the power of the Hammerklavier. He performs the Waldstein flawlessly and straightforwardly. His pacing in II is unrested and employs the pedal sparingly. II has great clarity and momentum, with amazing precision on the runs. Hammerklavier is magnificent, as Kim takes the highly intricate, complicated material with immense control.

KANG

BEETHOVEN: String Trios

Jacques Thibaud Trio
Audite 23.430 [2CD] 146 minutes

Beethoven’s five works for string trio were all written before his Op. 18 Quartets, so many commentators have seen them as preparatory works for the great quartets to follow. Such a
judgement, though, doesn’t do justice to the charm and freshness of these pieces. No one will argue these works to be superior to mature Beethoven (Op. 59 and later); but Thayer, for one, favored the Op. 9 Trios over the Op. 18 Quartets. Furthermore the five works are not cast in the same mold. The first two (Opp. 3 & 8) have six movements and are similar to a divertimento (Op. 8 is titled Serenade), while the last three from Op. 9 are shorter works in the standard four-movement format that would characterize most of the later quartets. One can see why Beethoven (and others) have preferred the added flexibility of a fourth instrument, but these trios show a surprising richness and variety of texture and expressive qualities. In other words you may dismiss them if you prefer later Beethoven; but don’t dismiss them because they’re one instrument short of a quartet. Better yet: don’t dismiss them at all.

The Thibaud Trio, named for the leg-endary French violinist, was founded in 1994, though violinist Bogdan Jianu is the only original player still with the group. His colleagues are violist Hannah Strijbos and cellist Michael Volle; Bavarian Radio/ Mariss Jansons—BR 900139—63 minutes.

This comes from the Jansons set of the nine Beethoven symphonies released on CD and reviewed by Lawrence Hansen (M/A 2014). Hansen identified Jansons—correctly, I think—as a modernist whose music was “sleek, polished, and well-balanced, like a finely tuned modern luxury car.”

What strikes me first is how unvarying his tempos are. If we like this, we say the conductor tends to be metronomic. Here there are no real gains in strength, particularly in I and IV; and III is fine as well, though I am surprised, given his general approach, that it isn’t faster. I do miss attention to detail, though: to mention a little one, the move from B-flat to A at the end of the exposition in I does not seem to acknowledge that Beethoven in a sense was stuck in a foreign key and needed to get back to the dominant by sheepishly sliding down a half step. And in IV the turn to G major at “lieber Vater wohnen” does not register as anything special.

Otherwise, though, the whole slow movement sounds routine—nicely played, but with no suggestion that this music can be extraordinarily moving and profound. Timings will help explain: Jansons takes III in 12:39, Klemperer takes 14:57; Furtwängler takes 19:35 in Bayreuth, 19:49 in Lucerne. The finales do go well under Jansons. All the tempo changes in this fragmented movement are smooth and convincing, and the singers—soloists and the chorus—are very good.

All in all, not a bad Ninth, but you have to accept a slow movement in the shallows rather than the depths.

ALTHOUSE

**Beethoven: Symphony 9**

Christiane Karg, Mihoko Fujimura, Michael Schade, Michael Volle; Bavarian Radio/ Mariss Jansons—BR 900139—63 minutes.

HANSEN

**Beethoven: Symphony 5**

with Symphony 7

Pittsburgh Symphony/ Manfred Honeck Reference 718 [SACD] 71 minutes

with Coriolan Overture

London Philharmonic/ Klaus Tennstedt LPO 87—43 minutes

Here’s a Tale of Two Beethoven Fifths, very different, almost polar opposites of each other, but both very rewarding to hear.

Honeck’s Fifth is very “modern” in the sense that tempos are snappy, climaxes are explosive, and the articulation tends to be punchy. The music is always pressing forward, as on a life-or-death mission. It’s dramatic and exciting, but does not come off chaotic. Honeck manages it all extremely well; this is Beethoven driven by a carefully thought-out, masterly vision, but that’s brilliantly, actually, there’s an inner glow, a warmth, a quieter, more ecstatic intensity that’s entirely different. And of course, that’s exactly what Tennstedt was known for. The magic didn’t always work, especially in the years just before ill health forced his retirement from the podium in 1996. But it was working on August 30, 1990, at Royal Albert Hall, when this performance was broadcast over BBC Radio 3.

Also interesting is that Tennstedt’s interpretation seems more spacious, less aggressive than Honeck’s; but except in the slow movement, his tempos are actually pretty similar. Honeck builds plenty of excitement in the finale, and there’s no question that his orchestra’s playing is more precise than the LPO’s, but Tennstedt achieves a very different level of spiritual ecstasy.

After leaving East Germany in 1971 and making a spectacular debut with the Boston Symphony in 1974, Jansons’s international career was tragically short. His longest association was with the London Philharmonic, first as principal guest conductor, then as music director. A bout with throat cancer in 1986 slowed him down, and by the early 1990s the quality of his performances declined greatly, before his retirement in 1992. His catalog of commercial recordings is not extremely large. The good news is that the LPO has been culling their sound archives to fill the gaps.

While Tennstedt did record commercially a few of the Beethoven symphonies, but not among them, so this release is especially welcome. There is another concert recording, with the Kiel Philharmonic from 1980. That performance captures Tennstedt at the peak of his powers, with a little more Honeck-like fire. The sound is quite good—from a house tape or a radio broadcast tape, I assume—but the LPO sound is a bit warmer and fuller. It holds up well against commercial recordings, though of course it isn’t in the same league as what Reference has done for Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony. Still, it’s good, honest sound that does justice to Tennstedt’s artistry. A good recommendation.

The Coriolan Overture from February 23, 1992, in Royal Festival Hall, does not catch Tennstedt on a good day. Slack, leaden, and listless, it does no service to the conductor’s reputation and probably should not have been released. Better to have filled out the program with a better Tennstedt performance of a piece by a different composer.
judgement, though, doesn’t do justice to the charm and freshness of these pieces. No one will argue these works to be superior to mature Beethoven (Op. 59 and later); but Thayer, for one, favored the Op. 9 Trios over the Op. 18 Quartets. Furthermore the five works are not cast in the same mold. The first two (Opp. 3 & 8) have six movements and are similar to a divertimento (Op. 8 is titled Serenade), while the last three from Op. 9 are shorter works in the standard four-movement format that would characterize most of the later quartets. One can see why Beethoven (and others) have preferred the added flexibility of a fourth instrument, but these trios show a surprising richness and variety of texture and expressive qualities. In other words you may dismiss them if you prefer later Beethoven, but don’t dismiss them because they’re one instrument short of a quartet. Better yet: don’t dismiss them at all.

The Thibaud Trio, named for the legendary French violinist, was founded in 1994, though violinist Bogdan Jianu is the only original player still with the group. His colleagues are violist Hannah Strijbos and cellist Christiane Karg. An earlier Thibaud Trio (different violist) recorded the Op. 9 trios more than 20 years ago. The reference recording to have. Honeck (or Vanska or Dudamel) and even Tennstedt aren’t nearly as exciting as Honeck’s (or Vanska or Dudamel) and even seem to be pressing the music forward, ever forward, and show off the brilliant tone of his ensemble and its ability to follow him through the hairiest passages with both precision and expressiveness.

Honeck’s interpretation of the Sixth is cast in the same mold: Beethoven on a grand scale, with a big orchestral sound. I will not complain! He gives the long introduction to I the right tension of expectation, without dragging it out, and the rest of the movement is buoyant and exciting. It has the right funeral-march weight without ponderousness, III is bouncy and kinetic, and II is fine as well, though I do miss attention to detail, particularly in I and IV; and II is fine as well, though I must say the conductor tends to be metronomic. If we don’t, we say the conductor has firm rhythmic control; if we don’t, we blush, Tennstedt isn’t nearly as exciting as Honeck’s playing is more precise than the LPO’s, but Tennstedt achieves a very different level of spiritual ecstasy.

After leaving East Germany in 1971 and making a spectacular debut with the Boston Symphony in 1974, that put him on the map, Tennstedt’s international career was tragically short. His longest association was with the London Philharmonic, first as principal guest conductor, then as music director. A bout with throat cancer in 1986 slowed him down, and by the early 1990s the quality of his performance had greatly declined. His catalog of commercial recordings is not extremely large. The new news is that the LPO has been culling their sound archives to fill the gaps.

While Tennstedt did record commercially a few early symphonies, his Fifth isn’t among them, so this release is especially welcome. There is another concert recording, with the Kiel Philharmonic from 1980. That performance captures Tennstedt at the peak of his powers, with a little more Honeck-like fire. The sound is quite good—from a house tape or a radio broadcast tape, I assume—but the LPO sound is a bit warmer and fuller. It holds up well against commercial recordings, though of course it isn’t in the same league as what Reference has done for Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony. Still, it’s good, honest sound that does justice to Tennstedt’s artistry. A good record on both counts are.

The Coriolan Overture from February 23, 1992, in Royal Festival Hall, does not catch Tennstedt on a good day. Slack, leaden, and listless, it does no service to the conductor’s reputation and probably should not have been released. Better to have filled out the program with a better Tennstedt performance of a piece by a different composer.

HANSEN

B EETHOVEN: Symphony 9

Christiane Karg, Mihoko Fujimura, Michael Schade, Michael Volle/ Bamberger Radio/ Mariss Jansons—BR 900139—63 minutes

This comes from the Jansons set of the nine Beethoven symphonies released on CD and DVD and reviewed by Lawrence Hansens (M/A 2014). Hansen identified Jansons—correctly, I think—as a modernist whose music was “sleek, polished, and well-balanced, like a finely tuned modern luxury car.”

What strikes me first is how unvarying his tempos are. If we like this, we say the conductor tends to be metronomic. Here there are clear gains in strength, particularly in I and IV; and II is fine as well, though I am surprised, given his general approach, that it isn’t faster. I do miss attention to detail, though; to mention one example, the move from B-flat to A at the end of the exposition in I does not seem to acknowledge that Beethoven in a sense was stuck in a foreign key and needed to get back to the dominant by sheepishly sliding down a half step. And in IV the turn to G major at “lieber Vater wohnen” does not register as anything special. At a broader level, though, the whole slow movement sounds very routine—nicely played, but with no suggestion that this music can be extraordinarily moving and profound. Timings will help explain: Jansons takes III in 12:39, Klemerer takes 14:57; Furtwängler takes 19:35 in Bayreuth, 19:49 in Lucerne. The finale does go well under Jansons. All the tempo changes in this fragmented movement are smooth and convincing, and the singers—soloists and the chorus—are very good.

All in all, not a bad Ninth, but you have to accept a slow movement in the shallows rather than the depths.

ALTHOUSE

B EETHOVEN: Diabelli Variations; see BACH

March/April 2016

American Record Guide
The Bernstein is a full-scale symphonic piece about philosophies of love. The rest of this program consists of short pieces. To match the seven philosophers who inspired Sere
nade, Meyers commissioned seven arrangers to create ten violin-and-orchestra works about love from film and theater. She has worked many times with pops and cross-over material (including ‘Summertime’, which sounds particularly sultry here), and she tosses these off with ease and style. Michel Colombier’s ‘Emmanuel’ is just as schmaltzy as it needs to be; Ennio Morricone’s ‘Gabriel’s Oboe’ is soaring and swooning; Jacob Gade’s ‘Jealousie’ struts and swagger with skillful rubato; Sam
mie Fain’s ‘I’ll Be Seeing You’, which sounds so much like the slow theme in the Mahler Third, is full of irresistible portamento—gushy, but effective.

The arrangements work well for violin solo, and Keith Lockhart sounds like he’s hav
ing fun getting the London Symphony to schmaltz it up. The album ends as it began, with Bernstein: ‘Somewhere’, from West Side Story, full of Meyer’s teasing slides, double stops, and ornamentations—a far cry from the artful understatement in the Sere
nade.

BERNSTEIN: Symphony 3; Missa Brevis; Lark
Claire Bloom, narr; Kelley Nassief, s; Paule Mestre, ct; Maryland State Boychoir; Washington Chorus; Sao Paolo Symphony & Choir; Baltimore Symphony/ Marin Alsop
Naxos 559742—70 minutes

Bernstein’s Third, Kaddish, is strange, lumpy, and often awkward and dated, but not without power and meaning. Musically it is by no means a masterpiece. Together with its jazzy, cinematic, double pit and film stage, the work comes through in the score, and I find myself most moved by Bern
stein’s angst after the symphony has ended, not while it’s still playing. Bloom sounds like she’s narrating, but there’s no bitterness or sense of conviction. On Bernstein’s recording with the Israel Philharmonic, narr
ator Michael Wager prays at, wrestles with, and taunts God.

Alsop conducts the original version ‘for the most part’, though the notes don’t say what changes she made to the score. The narration is very origin
gal, and the piece contains the full spoken and sung texts in English and transliterated Hebrew and Aramaic.

The Missa Brevis (1988) and The Lark (1955, rev. 2008 by Nathaniel G. Lew and in 2012 by Marin Alsop) act as bookends for the program. The former is a reworking of the latter, which is incidental music for Lillian Hellman’s adaptation of Jean Anhouil’s Alou
ette, a play about Joan of Arc. The Lark contains parts of the Mass as well as sections sung in French and more narration in English. Nei
ther piece is anything special; the choral writ
ing in Missa Brevis is often shou	

BLISS: Morning Heroes; Hymn to Apollo
Samuel West, narr; BBC Symphony & Chorus/ Andrew Davis
Chandos 5159 [SACD] 65 minutes

The most lasting impression I have of Lon
don’s Imperial War Museum isn’t a Mark 1 tank, or a Spitfire hanging from the ceiling, or even their mock-up of trench warfare, complete with the sounds and smells of battle. It’s a photograph. A uniformed WWI recruit stands inside the window of the train that’s comple
ting its journey to the Western Front. A devil-may-care grin lights up his face as he contemplates the great adventures soon to be his coming day. On the platform, an old woman—most likely his grandmother—reaches up to the window to take him and his plucky comrades on a photograph for Orator, Chorus, and Orchestra, of

BERNSTEIN: Serenade
with pieces by Morricone, Rakis, Gershwin, Col
ombier, Gade, Piazzolla, Helfen, Fain
Anne Akiko Meyers, v; London Symphony/ Keith Lockhart
E-One 7992—74 minutes

No surprises here. The Bernstein Serenade is one of Anne Akiko Meyers’s signature pieces, and she plays it superbly, as one would expect, with equal parts delicacy and passion. Her sweet tone nicely counterpoints this strikingly austere early piece from Leonard Bernstein before her works like West Side Story and Mass. (His own performance with Isaac Stern is still available.)
The Bernstein is a full-scale symphonic piece about philosophies of love. The rest of this program consists of short pieces. To match the seven philosophers who inspired Sere- nade, Meyers commissioned seven arrangers to create ten violin-and-orchestra works about love from film and theater. She has worked many times with pops and cross-over material (including 'Summertime,' which sounds particularly sultry here), and she tosses these off with ease and style. Michel Colombier’s ‘Emmanuel’ is just as Schmalz as it needs to be; Ennio Marconic’s ‘Gabriel’s Oboe’ is soaring and swooning; Jacob Gade’s ‘Jealousie’ struts and swagger with skillful rubato; Sam- mie Fain’s ‘I’ll Be Seeing You,’ which sounds so much like the slow theme in the Mahler Third, is full of irresistible portamento—gushy, but effective.

The arrangements work well for violin solo, and Keith Lockhart sounds like he’s hav- ing fun getting the London Symphony to Schmalz it up. The album ends as it began, with Bernstein: ‘Somewhere,’ from West Side Story, full of Meyer’s teasing glide, double stops, and ornamentations—a far cry from the artful understatement in the Sere- nade.

SULLIVAN

BERNSTEIN: Symphony 3; Missa Brevis; Lark Claire Bloom, narr; Kelley Nassief, s; Paule Mestre, ct; Maryland State Boychoir; Washington Chorus; Sao Paulo Symphony & Choir; Baltimore Symphony/ Marin Alsop Naxos 559742—70 minutes

Bernstein’s Third, Kaddish, is strange, lumpy, and often awkward and dated, but not without power and meaning. Musically it is by no means a masterwork. Too often it seems like a film score writ- ten for a film that never was, with a story that never got off the ground, and then abandoned. But while these images of war across the centuries are depicted on a grand symphonic scale, the music is never bombastic, self-pity- ing, or out of control. Like Vaughan Williams, Strauss, and many of the composers of the early 20th century, Bernstein can be edgy when the mood darkens, but retain a sense of control and self-preservation. Like his own country, the music is never bombastic, self-pity- ing, or out of control. Like Vaughan Williams,

The Missa Brevis (1988) and The Lark (1955, rev. 2008 by Nathaniel G. Lew and in 2012 by Marin Alsop) act as bookends for the symphony. For the former, a reworking of the latter, which is incidental music for Lillian Hellman’s adaptation of Jean Anhouil’s Alou- ette, a play about Joan of Arc. The Lark con- tains parts of the Mass as well as sections sung in French and more narration in English. Nei- ther piece is anything special; the choral writ- ing in Missa Brevis is often shouy.

ESTEP

BLISS: Morning Heroes; Hymn to Apollo Samuel West, narr; BBC Symphony & Chorus/ Andrew Davis Chandos 5159 (SACD) 65 minutes

The most lasting impression I have of Lon- don’s Imperial War Museum isn’t a Mark 1 tank, or a Spitfire hanging from the ceiling, or even their mock-up of trench warfare, complete with the sounds and smells of battle. It’s a photograph. A uniformed WWII recruit stands inside the window of the train that’s about to take him and his plucky comrades on the first leg of their journey to the Western Front. A devil-may-care grin lights up his face as he contemplates the great adventures soon to be coming his way. On the platform, an old woman—most likely his grandmother—reaches up to the window to stroke his face before he departs. She is not smiling. Indeed, her heart is breaking because, deep down, she already knows. “In every part- ing,” says the caption quoting George Eliot, “there is an image of death.”

I thought of that picture as I listened to III of Morning Heroes, Sir Arthur Bliss’s 1930 Sym- phony for Orator, Chorus, and Orchestra, which is a reworking of the opera written by a composer who himself passed and wounded in combat—offered in memory of his brother, Francis Kennard Bliss, and other comrades killed in The Great War. A setting of 8th Century verse by Chinese poet Li Po, that interlude is Bliss’s magnificently sad choral portion. The narrator’s wife, convening her win- dow, tremulously awaiting her husband’s return. “Lower,” says the poem, “she bends over the cushion, and with a silver thread, embroiders the tears that have fallen about the reddened rose.” Like the grandmother in the picture, she already knows.

This is the moment I’m taking away from my encounter with Morning Heroes, so I’m going to let others fuss over whether the work is real- ly a symphony, or whether Bliss jumped the aesthetic gun by bringing the orchestra in for the last line of the penultimate poem rather than waiting for the final movement, whether the deeper voices of the oratorio in Charles Groves’s 1974 account makes for a more authentically British narration than the one intoned here. None of that matters to me as I process this.

What does matter is that Sir Arthur created a broad musical canvas full of poignant, affect- ing images, that he used remarkably evocative poetry to do it. The Iliad figures prominently in the libretto, especially when Hector’s “Farewell to Andromache” is declaim- ed by the narrator in l with the orchestra pro- viding gentle but insistent underscoring. Homer returns later in the work as Hector and Achilles have at it in the most violent episode of the score. There are images from Walt Whit- man, too, as he captures the manic intensity of war-giddy America rushing headlong into fra-ternal conflict. (“War! an armed race is advanc- ing!—the welcome for battle—no turn- ing away.”) The other extended narration is Wilfred Owen’s ‘Dawn’, which bathes the battlefield in the glow of sadness before the noble words of Robert Nichols’s ‘Dawn on the Somme’ carry the dead upward, “toward the risen god, whose brow burns the gold laurel of all victories”.

But while these images of war across the centuries are depicted on a grand symphonic scale, the music is never bombastic, self-pity- ing, or out of control. Like Vaughan Williams, Finzi, and his other contemporaries, Bliss favored lush, pastoral textures that churn and grow edgy when the mood darkens, but retain a measure of their delicacy nevertheless. The brass figures prominently in both the heroism and the horror of the war, but the moments of introspection offered by lyrical strings and woodwinds are generously offered and deeply felt. However raw the emotions, however cathartic the process of composition must have been, Sir Arthur preserves a lovely and respectful memorial to the fallen. That’s the tone of the work and the tone of this rever- ent performance, which is caught in splendid sound by the Chandos engineers.

The liner notes tell us that Bliss’s orchestral Hymn to Apollo also was composed to honor his brother’s memory, and that’s how it comes across in this performance. In an elegiac mood so quintessentially British, storm clouds gather
but dissipate as a measure of resolution is achieved.

This is estimable music by any standard.

But if you are haunted by the story of The Great War, you might find this effort surprising. Texts and their requisite appearances—gestures unusual and transcendent. Wagnerian death and fate make its occasional glimpses of obligatory insularity and resolutely unappealing, despite its occasional glimpses of obligatory transcendence. Wagnerian death and fate make it hard to tell if the second act makes for American taste toward the end, perhaps in honor of Mr Domingo. A little jazz pokes its way in for American taste toward the end, perhaps in honor of Mr Bolcom. They were likely on the fast side, but the sensitivity of the piano line to make its presence felt a bit more. The arrangements are totally accurate otherwise and give us a new slant on the music. As far as my tastes are concerned, Brahms does no wrong, and I could listen to him all day (and have). This seems to be how these gentlemen feel about him, too.

The tempos taken for the sonatas tend to be on the fast side, but the sensitivity of the piano players makes this work. Otherwise, their technique and musicianship are excellent and I can recommend this program highly. If it is the sonatas alone that interest you, check out the Cello Overview (March/April 2009) for the competition.

It is astonishing to realize that Brahms’s Sonata 3 is only Op. 5 and was written in the composer’s 20th year. He was notorious for destroying early manuscripts that failed to measure up to his perfectionist standards, and his earliest published compositions were all for the piano, save a few songs. Two other piano sonatas bear his first two opus numbers, and all date from the same year.

This is the first standard repertory recording by this Norwegian pianist to come my way. There is time left here for more solo Brahms. It’s also a pity that the strikingly artsy piano graph of the pianist walking away from us on a craggy, rocky surface was not replaced with something a little more appropriate. Artsy, meaningless design is a trend that has been on the rise in the last few decades.

Apart from the stingy timing, Mortensen enters a stylistic world where the music threatens to destroy early manuscripts that failed to measure up to his perfectionist standards, and his earliest published compositions were all for the piano, save a few songs. Two other piano sonatas bear his first two opus numbers, and all date from the same year.

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A听完 you apart with the Sonata, he begins the Ballade with quiet restraint. This is again short-lived as the volume rises precipitously and eventually explodes in a fit of high drama.

With an impressive recording and good notes I am inclined to give this one several more hearings before rendering final judgement. Could I be the one at fault for not fully appreciating the achievement? Could this be the wave of future Brahms interpretations? Whatever I finally decide, there can be no denying that Mortensen has done something that will prove controversial. I need some time—lots of it—before listening again.

The Scherzo is both light in texture (spare pedal use) and forward moving. The Intermezzi works reasonably well, despite those sharp contrasts. With the Finale Mortensen asserts his ability to do whatever he wants without fearing his fingers will not follow. That means introducing the sonatas and are representative of such styles. Expressive and thoughtful, they are like the poems, moving and communicative. Besides the Russian, it is astonishing to realize that Brahms’s Sonata 3 is only Op. 5 and was written in the composer’s 20th year. He was notorious for destroying early manuscripts that failed to measure up to his perfectionist standards, and his earliest published compositions were all for the piano, save a few songs. Two other piano sonatas bear his first two opus numbers, and all date from the same year.

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but dissipate as a measure of resolution is achieved.
This is estimable music by any standard.
But if you are haunted by the story of The Great Wall that has been even have walked the cratered terrain of the Somme and stared up at the great monument at Thiepval not far from where Kennard Bliss fell on 28 September, 1916, it’s a pilgrimage rite for the making.

GREENFIELD

BOLCOM: Lorca Songs; Prometheus Rene Barbera, t; Jeffrey Biegel, p; Pacific Chorale & Symphony/ Carl St Clair Naxos 559788—55 minutes

It should probably come as no surprise in our often absurdly eclectic times that William Bolcom would set a group of atmospheric poems in Spanish by Lorca and pair them with a suf- focatingly dark setting of Byron’s Prometheus. The first half of the program is seven Canciones de Lorca (2006), Iberian-tinged songs written for Domingo, and performed here with flair by Sr Barbera. They could have been written by a variety of contemporary Spanish composers, and are representative of such styles. Expressive and thoughtful, they are, like the poems, moving and communicative. Besides the Spanish ambience, Puccini lurks—perhaps in honor of Mr Domingo. A little jazz poke its way in for American taste toward the end, perhaps in honor of Mr Bolcom. They were likely an effective diversion for the great tenor.

The latter’s audience would likely be considerably less pleased with the sullen Prometheus (2009), an altogether more angular, turgid affair—more in line with contemporary academic practice, which seems forced and old-fashioned in this context. Its episodes of choral sprechstimme and dissonant fugal writing (OK, Promethius Bound) come across as more obvious than inspired. Set for piano and chorus (the piece was instigated by Mr Biegel), the work is an ode to the subject’s entrapment and resistance, a metaphor for our times and its requirements. As such, it is decid- edly insular and resolutely unappealing, despite its occasional glimpses of obligatory transcendence. Wagnerian death and fate make their requisite appearances—gestures unusual for the usually affable Mr Bolcom. Its half-hour length will try the patience of many listeners (it tried mine). Readers familiar with Bolcom’s music might find this effort surprising. Texts and translations.

GIMBEL

BRAHMS: Cello Sonatas: 6 Songs
Gabriel Schwabe, vc; Nicholas Rimmer, p
Naxos 573489 — 66 minutes

Here is an interesting way of staying with Brahms through an entire CD of cello music. Schwabe and Rimmer have transcribed a number of Brahms liedere for cello and piano and surrounded them with the two great sonatas. Also, the songs they have chosen were all written in between the sonatas and are played chronologically from Opus 43 to 97.

How does it work? Not badly at all. Brahms is almost never totally repetitive in his song writing, and on the only occasion that he actually repeats a verse, Schwabe plays the second verse an octave lower, thereby allowing the piano line to make its presence felt a bit more. The arrangements are totally accurate otherwise and give us a new slant on the music. As far as my tastes are concerned, Brahms does no wrong, and I could listen to him all day and have). This seems to be how these gentlemen feel about him, too.

The tempos taken for the sonatas tend to be on the fast side, but the flexibility of the players makes this work. Otherwise, their technique and musicianship are excellent and I can recommend this program highly. It is the sonatas alone that interest you, check out the Cello Overview (March/April 2009) for the competition.

D MOORE

BRAHMS: Paganini Variations; LISZT: Piano Pieces
Alexander Gavrylyuk Piano Classics 86—67 minutes

I consider myself fortunate to have heard this young Ukrainian pianist when he first appeared at the Miami International Piano Festival many years back. Since then he has established an impressive career for himself as a virtuoso, with special attention to the Russian romantics and to Franz Liszt.

Gavrylyuk’s includes both of the Brahms Variations and gives them the full virtuosic treatment. Brahms definitely did not write this music for sissies and players with flawed technical apparatus. There need be no fear of that here; digital mastery takes over from the very start as this pianist aims to impress. This does not play in one unified tempo. Rubato in extreme takes on a surrealistic tinge as if the player had wandered onto a milking stool while half asleep and proceeded to pull an udder in every direction the twilight zone would allow. There is no sweep to the playing, no forward motion—just a world of refined sensibilities where the music threatens to simply stop. None of this is meant to imply that Mortensen in any way lacks technical ability or plays without feeling. It’s just that he gives us more—lots more than what we are prepared to comfortably digest.

Brahms is given a significant treatment, though it’s more interesting. Contrasts are exaggerated, forward momentum is sacrificed in I, while lyrical expression achieves heights you may not want. The Andante (II) has some incredible sotto voce playing that will be dangerous for other pianists. It does work effectively here, and the piano speaks, though sometimes in a whisper.

The Scherzo is both light in texture (spare pedal use) and forward moving. The Intermez- zo works reasonably well, despite those sharp contrasts. With the Finale Mortensen asserts his ability to do whatever he wants without fearing his fingerprints will not follow. That means extending the introduction of some almost ghostly elements I had been previously unaware of. It all works for me, but I am not sure others would be as charitable over this dare-to-be-different approach. The final third of this movement is about as excitingly over the top as you will ever hear.

After tearing you apart with the Sonata, he begins the Ballade with quiet restraint. This is again short-lived as the volume rises precipi- tously and eventually explodes in a fit of high passion.

With an impressive recording and good notes I am inclined to give this one several more hearings before rendering final judgement. Could I be the one at fault for not fully appreciating the achievement? Could this be the wave of future Brahms interpretation? Whatever I finally decide, there can be no denying that Mortensen has done something that will prove controversial. I need some time—lots of it—before listening again.

BECKER

BRAHMS: Piano Sonata 3; Rhapsodies, op. 78, Ballade, op. 161 Nils Anders Mortensen LAWO 1084 [SACD] 58 minutes

It is astonishing to realize that Brahms’s Sonata 3 is only Op. 5 and was written in the composer’s 20th year. He was notorious for destroying early manuscripts that failed to measure up to his perfectionist standards, and his earliest published compositions were all for the piano, save a few songs. Two other piano sonatas bear his first two opus numbers, and all date from the same year.

This is the first standard repertory recording by this Norwegian pianist to come my way. There is time left here for more solo Brahms. It’s also a pity the strikingly artful plot graph of the pianist walking away from us on a craggy, rocky surface was not replaced with something a little more appropriate. Artsy, meaningless design is a trend that has been on the rise in the last few decades.

Apart from the stingy timing, Mortensen enters a world of genuine fabulous performers who not only give us excellent Brahms, but more of it to boot. These are some of the strongest Brahms performances I have heard.

The two Rhapsodies are given the romantically indulgent treatment with nary a second of phrasing played in one unified tempo. Rubato in extreme takes on a surrealistic tinge as if the player had wandered onto a

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BECKER

BRAHMS: Quartets 1+2
New Orleans Quartet—Bridge 9464—70 minutes

The original Orleans Quartet, one of Canada’s best-known ensembles, was formed in 1961 and disbanded in 1991, after giving more than 2000 concerts on six continents. This group

70

71
had its beginnings in 2009, made its debut album in 2011 (Beethoven & Schubert, N/D 2011), and continues here with Brahms.

What does this mean? I guess I’m very addicted to what Bruno Walter does with this symphony. Yet I cannot really find fault with the gorgeous playing and wonderful sound here. It is a joy to hear it so well played and recorded. But I will never replace the Walter with a recording like this, despite its sheer beauty. There is something truly romantic in Walter’s reading that is no longer heard—or doesn’t for me!—consider yourself urgently encouraged!

ALTHOUSE

The Quatuor Voce was founded in Paris in 2009, made its debut album in 2011 (Beethoven & Schubert, N/D 2011), and continues here with Brahms.

What does this mean? I guess I’m very addicted to what Bruno Walter does with this symphony. Yet I cannot really find fault with the gorgeous playing and wonderful sound here. It is a joy to hear it so well played and recorded. But I will never replace the Walter with a recording like this, despite its sheer beauty. There is something truly romantic in Walter’s reading that is no longer heard—or doesn’t for me!—consider yourself urgently encouraged!

ALTHOUSE

MOZART: String Quintet 2; see DVORAK String Quintet 3; see PROKOFIEFF

We do have several fine recordings of these pieces (and one, the Zukerman Chamber Players, with exactly the same coupling, M/A 2007), but I find this one special because of its excellent sonics. Often the strings are recorded too close and we hear scraping in the violins; or they are too distant and the recording is not vivid. Here, though, the sound is just terrific. So if this coupling makes sense for you (it doesn’t for me!), consider yourself urgently encouraged!

ALTHOUSE

This was recorded in concert on September 20-21, 2012 in the Concertgebouw. It is a fine effort all around, nicely paced with lyrical and dramatic moments well in balance. The choir, the largest professional group in the Netherlands, is well up to the difficulties of the piece (particularly the high writing in the final movement), though for a piece like this I would prefer a group somewhat larger than these 60 singers.

The soloists are both strong assets. Supranos Noël Kühmeier has the pure, chaste sound so necessary for her solo. (An opulent sound ruins the movement for me.) And Finley, one of the leading basses of these times, sings with strength and authority. Jansons maintains firm control of the piece and moves things along well, so the music never threatens to become sentimental or maudlin. His tempo relationships are similar to Klemperer’s, though almost every movement is a few seconds faster than that legendary recording (now 55 years old!). In a few instances (e.g., end of VI) I wished for a less insistent adherence to tempo, and the soprano movement is really better slower. On the whole, though, this is an excellent job, but I still feel more spiritual communication from Klemperer with Schwarzkopf and Fischer-Dieskau.

ALTHOUSE

Brahms’s German Requiem

Genia Kühmeier, s; Gerald Finley, b; Netherlands Radio Choir; Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Mariss Jansons—BGO 15903 [SACD] 68 minutes

This is an extremely beautiful orchestra with a very refined sound. I think they sound much like the Berlin Philharmonic. Ivan Fischer has molded their sound but is also a very refined conductor. Nothing is ever crude or awkward; everything flows just beautifully. His tempos are ideal as well. He is less expressive than the Bruno WALTERs and Leonard Bernstein’s of music history, but he has a wonderful natural flow that makes the music seem inevitable and so right. There are many moments here where I hear in my mind Walter’s fulness and warmth; at such moments I miss Bruno Wal- ter. The big cello theme in II is too subdued here, I think. The ecstatic climax about 9 minutes into II seems less ecstatic than I want it to be. Early in III I want longer pauses. In IV about 6 minutes in, I want the ecstasy prolonged. And I want longer pauses between movements. I thought Sachs did the editing, and I really respect his work, but I still want longer pauses. It spoils the music to rush from one movement to the next—and it is especially bad when there is essentially no pause between the symphony and the first Hungarian dance.

What does this mean? I guess I’m very much addicted to what Bruno Walter does with this symphony. Yet I cannot really find fault with the gorgeous playing and wonderful sound here. It is a joy to hear it so well played and recorded. But I will never replace the Walter with a recording like this, despite its sheer beauty. There is something truly romantic in Walter’s reading that is no longer heard—or even possible—these days.

Along with the three Hungarian Dances, which Fischer has always done better than anyone, he gives us the folk melody that is behind Dance No. 3. Interesting.

VROON

BRUCH: Motets; see BRUCKNER String Quintet 2; see DVORAK Violin & Cello Concerto; see PROKOFIEFF

Bristow: Symphony 2; Rip van Winkle & Winter’s Tale Overtures

Northern Sinfonia/ Rebecca Miller
New World 80768—62 minutes

George Friedrich Bristow (1825-98) was an important performer, teacher, and composer in 19th Century New York. His more than 120 compositions extended to all genres, including opera, though very little is available in perfor- mance today. Even though his dates are almost identical to Bruckner’s, Bristow’s work did not follow the European models of Liszt, Wagner, or indeed Bruckner. The pieces here, all from the 1850s, are conservative in style, most reminiscent of Mendelssohn. They are also quite pleasant works, well crafted with no missteps or awkward moments. His thematic material is characterized by fine melodic writing and a good sense for romantic turns of harmon- y. Less impressive is his technique at development, which isn’t particularly interest- ing, and his lack of counterpart to give his music a richer texture.

The symphony is in the standard four movements, and, despite its nickname, is absolute, with no programmatic subtext. The other works are overtures, one to Bristow’s opera Rip van Winkle, the other written as a curtain raiser for a Broadway production of Shakespeare’s Winter’s Tale. There seems to be only one other Bristow work in the catalog, his Symphony in F-sharp minor (N/D 1993); it is still available.

The symphony and overtures are all beau- tifully played by (ironically?) a British chamber orchestra, though conductor Miller is Ameri- can. The playing is crisp and light, with bigger moments nicely cold and urgent. One could hardly imagine such little-known music having a more sympathetic recording. A further bonus is the lengthy, informative liner note by Katherine K. Preston. If you are interested in American music from this period, the record- ing is urgently recommended; but the gener- ally curios will also find much to enjoy. A fine job.

ALTHOUSE

Brochaska: Pas de Basse; Double Bass Sonata & Concerto; Vainberg: Sonata

Katarzyna Brochaska, p
SACD 218—63 minutes

Here are first recordings of three works by the pianist—double bass. Brochaska’s idiom matches her friend Moisei Vainberg’s very well. Both are basically tonal, and both are taken care of with great warmth and technical ability by Kowal. He is ideal as well. One can hardly imagine such little-known music having a more sympathetic recording. A further bonus is the lengthy, informative liner note by Katherine K. Preston. If you are interested in American music from this period, the record- ing is urgently recommended; but the gener- ally curious will also find much to enjoy. A fine job.

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**ALTHOUSE**

**Brahms: German Requiem**
Genia Kühmeier, s; Gerald Finley, b; Netherlands Radio Choir; Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Mariss Jansons—RCO 150063 [SACD] 68 minutes

This was recorded in concert on September 20–21, 2012 in the Concertgebouw. It is a fine effort all around, nicely paced with lyrical and dramatic moments well in balance. The choir, the largest professional group in the Netherlands, is well up to the difficulties of the piece (particularly the high writing in the final movement), though for a piece like this I would prefer a group somewhat larger than these 60 singers.

The soloists are both strong assets. Soprano Kühmeier has the pure, chaste sound so necessary for her solo. (An opulent sound ruins the movement for me.) And Finley, one of the leading basses of these times, sings with strength and authority.

Jansons maintains firm control of the piece and moves things along well, so the music never threatens to become sentimental or maudlin. His tempo relationships are similar to Klemperer’s, though almost every movement is a few seconds faster than that legendary recording (now 55 years old). In a few instances (e.g., end of VI) I wished for a less insistent adherence to tempo, and the soprano movement is really better slower. On the whole, though, this is an excellent job, but I still feel more spiritual communication from Klemperer with Schwarzkopf and Fischer-Dieskau.

**Brahms: Symphony 4**
Hungarian Dances 3, 7, 11
Budapest Festival Orchestra/ Ivan Fischer
Channel 35315 [SACD] 51:26

This is an extremely beautiful orchestra with a very refined sound. I think they sound much like the Berlin Philharmonic. Ivan Fischer has molded their sound but is also a very refined conductor. Nothing is ever crude or awkward; everything flows just beautifully. His tempos are ideal as well. He is less expressive than the Bruno Walter and Leonard Bernsteins of music history, but he has a wonderful natural flow that makes the music seem inevitable and so right. There are many moments here where I hear in my mind Walter’s fulness and warmth; at such moments I miss Bruno Walter. The big cello theme in II is too subdued here, I think. The ecstatic climax about 9 minutes into II seems less ecstatic than I want it to be. Early in III I want longer pauses. In IV about 6 minutes in, I want the ecstasy prolonged. And I want longer pauses between movements. Jared Sachs did the editing, and I really respect his work, but I still want longer pauses. It spoils the music to rush from one movement to the next—and it is especially bad when there is essentially no pause between the symphony and the first Hungarian dance.

What does this mean? I guess I’m very much addicted to what Bruno Walter does with this symphony. Yet I cannot really find fault with the gorgeous playing and wonderful sound here. It is a joy to hear it so well played and recorded. But I will never replace the Walter with a recording like this, despite its sheer beauty. There is something truly romantic in Walter’s reading that is no longer heard—or even possible—these days.

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**Brahms: Motets; see BRUCKNER**

String Quintet 2; see DVORAK

Violin & Cello Concerto; see PROKOFIEFF

**Brochaska: Pas de Basse; Double Bass Sonata & Concerto; Vainberg: Sonata**

Karol Kowal; Katarzyna Brochaska, p

Accord 218—63 minutes

Here are first recordings of three works by the pianist—double-bass music. Brochaska’s idiom matches her friend Moisei Vainberg’s very well. Both are basically tonal, and both are taken care of with great warmth and technical ability by Kowal. Her tone is consistently consistent in his intonation, but then, I had the same complaint about his rival Joel Quarrington, who recorded the Vainberg Solo Sonata on his Garden Scene release (Analekta 9931, Jan/Feb 2010, p. 288). Quarrington got through it in 18 minutes; Kowal takes 20.

But the main thing here is the music of Brochaska. That is less tonal but just as full of feeling and events. If contemporary music
Sonata de los Viajeros

Campesina; Triptico; Per Suonare a Due; "durria and Guitar" and is not strictly duos. It

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enough repetition to make us think of mini-

is the most beautiful work on the recital, with

through Greece, Leipzig, and finally to Cuba. It

2009,

quote from Beethoven's

gressions—though III puckishly throws in a

Spanish music of Brouwer's heritage, with

an exploration of sonorities from the two

mental period. It is, as the title might indicate,

beyond the expected.

Sonata de Los Viajeros

BROUWER: Micro Piezas; Musica Incidental Campesina; Triptico; Per Suonare a Due; Sonata de los Viajeros

Brassil Guitar Duo—Naxos 57336—69 minutes with Jura Variations; Bandurria Sonata; Sonata del Caminante

Pedro Mateo Gonzalez, g; Pedro Chamorro, band-
durria—Naxos 573363—63 minutes

Recordings of Brouwer’s duo works are com-
paratively rare; I can’t find any past releases
devoted entirely to those works. Now we have
two at the same time, both quite well played.
To be sure, Brouwer’s duos are not his finest
works—he’s a very prolific composer, and not
only for guitar. While his greatest works are
gems of the modern repertory, he is not always
on that mountain peak. Still, each of these
works is worth knowing and at least enjoyable
and often rewarding.

The Brasil Duo—Joao Luiz and Douglas
Lora—is a very fine ensemble. The tech-

command and imagination are as strong as
Presti and Lagoya, the Great Duo of the mid-
20th Century. I reviewed their Castelnuovo-
Tesesco release (Mar/Apr 2009) and found it
superb. This is just as well played, though I
don’t like the music as much.

The first three works, Triptico, Micropiezas, and Musica Incidental Campesina, are all
nationalist, based on the Afro-Cuban and
Spanish music of Brouwer’s heritage, with
enough imaginative dissonance to take them
beyond the expected. Per Suonare a Due is

Scottish Fantasy

reading of Concerto 2 and

altogether

By odd contrast I found much

attention to flag. By odd contrast I found much

warmth but deprive the music of incisive ener-

Fitzwilliam’s use of gut strings, which supply

minute Intermezzo that Bruckner wrote as an

alternative to the Scherzo in the Quintet; it is

a nice little Intermezzo that I associate

for comparison purposes than the slow move-

tion of challenges, is superb. Balances are generally very
good, though the organ is too prominent
in Bruckner’s ‘Ecce Sacerdos’. The recording is
fairly reverberant, which makes for sound that
is impressive, but not always transparent. The
Brahms Fest- und Gedenksprüche (Op. 109),
which has lots of Gabrielli-like back-and-forth
between choruses, needs more stereo separa-

A fine recording, then, impressive in every
technical way. Their singing is so intense and
powerful, however, that I miss occasional
moments of tenderness and vulnerability.

They make it sound easy, like a BMW doing 90
on the Autobahn. The ending of Geistliches Lied
is a good example where less might have been
more.

I should mention also that a portion of the
revenues from this recording (a minimum of
two pounds) will be donated to charity:

Brouwer, is his only mature cham-
ber work; the Quartet, while a pleasant piece,
is early and reveals little of the greatness of his
later music. More to the point should be our
acknowledgement that once Bruckner hit his
stride and found his calling in symphonic writ-
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The Quintet has a very nice slow move-
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Fitzwilliam’s use of gut strings, which supply
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particular a nice vigorous Rondo as the last
movement.

The program is filled out with a nine-
minute Intermezzo that Bruckner wrote as an
alternative to the Scherzo in the Quintet; it is
an interesting, charming movement that
from Poland interests you, it is in good hands here. The recording is excellent in clarity and resonance.

**Brouwer:** *Micró Piezas; Musica Incidental Campesina; Triptico; Per Suonare a Due; Sonata de Los Viajeros.*

Brasil Guitar Duo—Naxos 573336—69 minutes with Jura Variationen; Bandurria Sonata; *Sonata del Caminante*.

Pedro Mateo Gonzalez, g; Pedro Chamorro, bandurria—Naxos 573363—63 minutes

Recordings of Brouwer’s duo works are comparatively rare; I can’t find any past releases devoted entirely to those works. Now we have two at the same time, both quite well played. To be sure, Brouwer’s duos are not his finest works—he’s a very prolific composer, and not only for guitar. While his greatest works are gems of the modern repertory, he is not always on that mountain peak. Still, each of these works is worth knowing and at least enjoyable and often rewarding.

The Brasil Duo—Joao Luis and Douglas Lora—is a very fine ensemble. The technical command and imagination are as strong as Presti and Lagoya, the Great Duo of the mid-20th Century. I reviewed their Castelnuovo-Tedesco release (Mar/Apr 2009) and found it superb. This is just as well played, though I don’t like the music as much.

The first three works, *Triptico, Micropiezas,* and *Musica Incidental Campesina,* are all nationalistic, based on the Afro-Cuban and Spanish music of Brouwer’s heritage, with enough imaginative dissonance to take them beyond the expected. *Per Suonare a Due* is from 1973, when Brouwer was in his experimental period. It is, as the title might indicate, an exploration of sonorities from the two instruments, without any particular concern for tonal center or traditional harmonic progressions—but III puckishly throws in a quote from Beethoven’s *Eroica.*

The most substantial work is the most recent, the *Sonata de Los Viajeros* from 2009, lasting nearly half an hour. It takes us on a journey from freezing northern regions of Poland to the warm tropical climate of Cuba. It is the most beautiful work on the recital, with enough repetition to make us think of minimalism—if only.

The second disc is titled “Music for Bandurria and Guitar” and is not strictly duos. It shares two pieces with the Brasilian Duo’s disc: *Micro Piezas* and *Musica Incidental Campesina.* The other two works are a sonata for banurria and another for guitar, with a set of variations for guitar.

The bandurria is a lute-like instrument, with five or six courses (double strings, tuned in unison). It has a higher range than a guitar, and is played with a plectrum. The sound is rather like mandolin and guitar, though the bandurria doesn’t use the mandolin’s ever present tremolo to sustain notes. It’s interesting to hear the new instrument, but I rather prefer the sounds of two guitars.

The bandurria doesn’t really lend itself to a solo sonata. Neither, of course, does violin or cello, but that didn’t stop Bach—though Brouwer is no Bach (who is?)! Still, I don’t find the work particularly interesting—perhaps if I played bandurria, I’d be ecstatic. The *Sonata del Caminante* (Voyager’s Sonata) was written for Odair Assad and takes advantage of his transcendent virtuosity. It’s always good to have a new work by Brouwer, but this one leaves little impression on me.

The playing of Chamorro and Gonzalez is quite fine. In the duos, ensemble is beautifully coordinated, and both have excellent technique and perceptive musicality. If you love Brouwer, you’ll enjoy both of these, especially at the Naxos price.

**Bruch:** *Violin Concerto 1; Serenade; In Memoriam*.

Antje Weithaas, NDR Philharmonic/ Hermann Baumer—CPO 777846—78 minutes

There are two NDR (North German Radio) orchestras: the NDR Symphony is in Hamburg, and the NDR Philharmonic is in Hanover (a city I have always liked very much—unlike Hamburg). I insist on noting that the excellent people at CPO (very near Hanover) play the city with only one N in the English notes. That is correct. In a false attempt to humor the Germans, many American writers spell it with two “Ns.”

Speaking of spelling, I misspelled the violinist’s name when I reviewed her fine CPO recording of Concerto 2 and *Scottish Fantasy* (Sept/Oct 2014). I guess “Weithaas” meant something to me—I thought it the equivalent of the Dutch “zute huis” (white house) my father spoke Dutch. German names usually mean something, but I don’t know what “haas” might mean. (I know that “haas” is hatred—which might explain why few Germans are named “Hass.”) I hope this amuses you, as it does me. Ralf Ehrhardt suggested a Flemish influence: white rabbit. Someone else suggested a Swedish influence: good white man (haas=good man).

Well, what I said about her in that review is still so. She is a local German talent, and local talents often have moments when you can compare them to the best international players. The music has a natural flow. Certainly she is wonderful at slow movements and music. It is not unfair to suggest that in the fast and virtuosic passages she doesn’t have quite the flair of some of the Great Names. But you may be tired of splash and bravado. Also, she was so impressive in Violin Concerto 2 that I can’t help but hear some of the same character here.

The trouble is that Concerto 1 has been recorded by everybody—really, the competition is huge and overwhelming. It starts with Heifetz, Suk, and Accardo—and there are three or four more that I consider top choices. What this violinist offers is a rather gentle approach that may be just what you are looking for.

In the Serenade there is much less competition, and I really like her playing—again the quiet portions are most persuasive. She lets the music speak; she doesn’t “goose” it. On the other hand, Salvatore Accardo is hard to beat in this music, as in *In Memoriam*—if you can find his recordings.

**Bruckner:** *9 Motets; Brahms: 5 Motets.*

Tenebrae/ Nigel Short—Signum 430—75 minutes

This recording includes nine of the more popular Bruckner motets (including Aequulis 1 & 2 for trombones), along with some Brahms motets and non-motets. The real motets are the great eight-part sets (Opp. 109 & 110); but there are also Ave Maria, the *Geistliches Lied* and ‘How Lovely are thy Dwellings’ from the *German Requiem,* all with accompaniment. I suppose one could argue the recital benefits from the variety of performing forces, but some wonderful legitimate Brahms motets were available.

The disc’s title, while technically fine, is a bit of a misnomer, really in its ensemble and intention. Tenebrae is a British group with maximum size of 24 (7, 5, 7); four of the five altos are women. The group’s rich, intense sound is more than adequate for the double chorus pieces; and their tuning in the Bruckner motets, which are full of challenges, is superb. Balance are generally very good, though the organ is too prominent in Bruckner’s ‘Ecce Sacerdos.’ The recording is fairly reverberant, which makes for sound that is impressive, but not always transparent. The *Brahms Fest- and Gedenkspräche* (Op. 109), which has lots of Gabrielli-like back-and-forth between choruses, needs more stereo separation.

A fine recording, then, impressive in every technical way. Their singing is so intense and powerful, however, that I miss occasional moments of tenderness and vulnerability. They make it sound easy, like a BMW doing 90 on the Autobahn. The ending of *Geistliches Lied* is a good example where less might have been more.

I should mention also that a portion of the revenues from this recording (a minimum of two pounds) will be donated to charity: Macmillan Cancer Support.

**Althouse:** *Bruckner: String Quintet & Quartet; Intermezzo.*

Fitzwilliam Quartet; James Boyd, va—Linn 402—76 minutes

Bruckner’s Quintet, written around the time of the Fifth Symphony, is his only mature chamber work; the Quartet, while a pleasant piece, is early and reveals little of the greatness of his later music. More to the point should be our acknowledgement that once Bruckner hit his stride and found his calling in symphonic writing he relegated other genres like chamber music to the back burner.

The Quintet has a very nice slow movement, but neither it nor the other movements rise to the level of the great symphonies. The situation is made worse here by the Fitzwilliam’s use of gut strings, which supply warmth but deprive the music of its drive energy; their generally relaxed tempos invite our attention to flag. By odd contrast I found much to enjoy in the usually maligned quartet—in particular a nice vigorous Rondo as the last movement.

The program is filled out with a nine-minute Intermezzo that Bruckner wrote as an alternative to the Scherzo in the Quintet; it is an interesting, charming movement that
stands well on its own. If I wanted the Quintet and Quartet (and, as you can tell, I’m not sure I do!), I would avoid gut strings and go with the Leipzig Quartet (S’O 2005).

**Althouse**

BRUCKNER: Symphony 0 In D minor
Philharmonica Festiva / Gerad Schaller
Profil 15035—43:29

Perfunctory. A Bruckner symphony is an event, a milestone, a great moment. This performance is not; it’s just routine. The music is polished off in 43-1/2 minutes. Nothing seems to make much difference, and we are left unchanged—unaffected. Why bother?

The most recent great performance was led by Simone Young on Oehms 685 (Nov/Dec 2013—SACD). This doesn’t come near it in depth and glory.

**Vroon**

BRUCKNER: Symphony 9
Hamburg Philharmonic / Simone Young
Oehms 893 [SACD] 59 minutes

Paul Althouse reviewed Young’s Bruckner 5 (1/1 2016) and noted her “special affinity for late 19th Century music” as well as her skill at “tying together long stretches of material such as we find in Wagner and Bruckner.” I agree and would add her acute sensitivity to tone color and its effect on mood in music.

Yet, Mr Althouse finally found that 5 disappointing as I do this 9. What’s missing?

It’s not the tempos. They flow, but are not abnormally swift: they’re no faster than many others, including Schuricht’s and Hausegger’s, and broader than the two Walter NY Philharmonic renditions.

It’s not the tone colors. The Hamburg Orchestra plays well enough; and, with this conductor, all kinds of detailing in the winds the inner string voices is tellingly present.

What’s absent is Bruckner’s striving for transcendence, of reaching for the place where the darkness and light of his music join into an all-encompassing whole.

Great Bruckner 9 interpreters: Karajan, Dohnanyi, Schuricht, Colin Davis, Haitink, Giulini, and Solti. They explored the music’s darkness, energy, and pain and attained (or in Dohnanyi’s case, expressed the infinite unbridgeable distance from) peace and resolution.

That journey’s not here. Instead of an epic voyage of the spirit, we have a fine, but not very consequential, performance of some well-made music.

Is this modern (or post-modern) skepticism of transcendence? A response to the supposed over-militancy of earlier Bruckner performances? A gesture toward historical performance practices? The notes don’t tell us anything about the thinking behind the performance. They spend much time comparing this work with Beethoven (and Mahler 9’s Adagio) and seem inconsistent with what we hear.

I wonder what the notes would have said if the author had written them after hearing the performance.

The sound, if you turn the volume up high enough, is lovely and natural.

**Chakhvin**

BUSCH: Clarinet Chamber Pieces
Bettina Beigelbeck; Antoine Cotetin, Petar Hris-tov, ob; Yasushi Ideue, v; Paula Valpola, vc; Manfred Krater, p—Toccata 293—76 minutes

The early 20th Century renouned German violinist Adolf Busch (1891-1952) was not well known as a composer in his lifetime. He preferred to write for private use, and the appearance of his oeuvre on his public concerts was newsworthy. His clarinetist wife Freida often inspired the direction and color of his scores, and several of his works call for her instrument.

In October 2013 German clarinetist Bettina Beigelbeck and the Busch Kollegium Karlsruhe released their first volume of the composer’s clarinet chamber music, a set of scores for solo clarinet; the Duet No. 2 for violin and clarinet; the Five Canons in Unison for three instruments, played here on clarinet, oboe, and English horn; and the German Dances for violin, clarinet, and cello.

As before, Beigelbeck and her colleagues deserve kudos for throwing a spotlight on Busch and his music. His style, with the smart and angular neo-classical counterpoint and wit celebrated in his better known contemporaries, yet they have a very distinct and personal voice.

While the Sonata and the Suite each boast the substance and depth that their titles suggest, the most consequential pieces, namely the Duet, the Divertimento, and the German Dances, have the most inventive and enjoyable material.

Although the Busch Kollegium Karlsruhe gives vigorous renditions, the individual playing is wildly uneven. Beigelbeck sports a too-free blowing and diffuse tone that easily spreads at loud volumes; the oboe playing is sometimes nice, sometimes monky; and the violin playing is rather gaunt and raspy. The cello and the piano are steady all through, but they won’t be enough to persuade critical listeners to stay. Once again, the composer deserves better.

**Handel**

BUSCH: Trios 1+2; Piano Quartet
Ravinia Trio; Ulrich Eichenauer, va
CPO 777 528 [2CD] 100 minutes

Adolf Busch (1891-1952) was the founder of the Busch Quartet. He left Germany to avoid the Nazis. In the US, along with Rudolf Serkin, he founded the Marlboro Music Festival. He greatly admired Max Reger—he once said if he were reborn, he’d want to be an organist—and his music shows Reger’s influence.

Trios 1 (1919) begins with a dolorous theme, well worked through. The second subject is a more upbeat, striving melody with some tart clashes. II is a subtly presented grandiose voicing to a coda of symphonic scope.

The trio has the charm of Schubert. The stern opening of IV soon gives way to a milder second theme, the more informal pieces, namely the Duet, the Divertimento, and the German Dances.

The recital includes the Divertimento for clarinet, oboe, and English horn; and the Five Canons in Unison for three instruments, played here on violin, oboe, and English horn; and the German Dances for violin, clarinet, and cello. In the deft scherzo some of the development is wildly uneven. Beigelbeck sports a too-free blowing and diffuse tone that easily spreads at loud volumes; the oboe playing is sometimes nice, sometimes monky; and the violin playing is rather gaunt and raspy. The cello and the piano are steady all through, but they won’t be enough to persuade critical listeners to stay. Once again, the composer deserves better.

**Cambine**

CAMELIE: 6 Flute Quartets, op 24
DuePiuDue Quartet
Brilliant 95081 [2CD] 88 minutes

Giuseppe Maria Cambini is believed to have grown up in Livorno, Italy, a port city in Tuscany a little south of Pisa. He was probably born in 1746 and moved to Paris early in the 1770s. This is where his entire career—or nearly all of it—would take place. Sources disagree on when and where he died: possibly by 1818 in Holland, or perhaps it was 1825 in Paris. His music was published and performed often beginning in the mid-1770s.

These quartets for flute and strings are a set of six published in 1785. All have two movements, but this writing is not the gentle—yet potentially monotonous—galant characteristic of the French from this time. It has a gravity that comes from effective bass lines, and harmonic turns and textures can be dense rather than simple owing to inner parts that match the best string quartets from the time, it comes close, and certainly aspires to more than satisfying the amateur market.

This performance on modern instruments or mood each of the other three, eventually reaching some impressive peaks. The work ends in a broad choral.

The Quartet (1945) came from Busch’s years in the US. Annotator Dominick Suckermann observes that it has “a certain proximity to the music of Schoenberg”. Some of its themes at first digress tonally. It has a noble piano melody on which the string players work some expressive variations. The scherzo has subtle, tangy harmonies. They’d be fun to ana-lyze, as long as anyone but me had to do it. The trio has the charm of Schubert. The stern opening of IV soon gives way to a milder second theme with clear part-writing. Like Trio 2, the music finishes with a spacious choral.

It must be noted that, for all their good construction, these have pages of elaborate passage-work as filler. The players plainly enjoy doing them, but for listeners they’re an aural boondoggle. The performances are uniformly fine. Their lucid articulation unravels some tightly knotted melodic strands. CPO’s recording has its normal clarity of sound.

**O’Connor**

CAMELIE: 6 Flute Quartets, op 24
DuePiuDue Quartet
Brilliant 95081 [2CD] 88 minutes

Giuseppe Maria Cambini is believed to have grown up in Livorno, Italy, a port city in Tuscany a little south of Pisa. He was probably born in 1746 and moved to Paris early in the 1770s. This is where his entire career—or nearly all of it—would take place. Sources disagree on when and where he died: possibly by 1818 in Holland, or perhaps it was 1825 in Paris. His music was published and performed often beginning in the mid-1770s.

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This performance on modern instruments
stands well on its own. If I wanted the Quintet and Quartet (and, as you can tell, I’m not sure I do!), I would avoid gut strings and go with the Leipzig Quartet (S/O 2005).

ALTHOUSE

BRUCKNER: Symphony 0 in D minor
Philharmonica Festiva / Gerd Schaller
Profil 15035—43:29

Perfunctory. A Bruckner symphony is an event, a milestone, a great moment. This performance is not; it’s just routine. The music is polished off in 43-1/2 minutes. Nothing seems to make much difference, and we are left unchanged—unaffected. Why bother?

The most recent great performance was led by Simone Young on Oehms 685 (Nov/Dec 2013—SACD). This doesn’t come near it in depth and glory.

VOOON

BRUCKNER: Symphony 9
Hamburg Philharmonic / Simone Young
Oehms 893 [SACD] 59 minutes

Paul Althouse reviewed Young’s Bruckner 5 (1/1/2010) and noted her “special affinity for late 19th Century music” as well as her skill at “tying together long stretches of material such as we find in Wagner and Bruckner”. I agree and would add her acute sensitivity to tone color and its effect on mood in music.

Yet, Mr. Althouse finally found that 5 disappointing as I do this 9.

What’s missing?

It’s not the tempos. They flow, but are not abnormally swift: they’re no faster than many others, including Schuricht’s and Hasegger’s, and broader than the two Walter NY Philharmonic renditions.

It’s not the tone colors. The Hamburg Orchestra plays well enough; and, with this conductor, all kinds of detailing in the winds the inner string voices is tellingly present.

What’s absent is Bruckner’s striving for transcendence, of reaching for the place where the darkness and light of his music join into an all-encompassing whole.

Great Bruckner 9 interpreters: Karajan, Dohnanyi, Schuricht, Colin Davis, Haitink, Giulini, and Kuijken. They explored the music’s darkness, energy, and pain and attained (or in Dohnanyi’s case, expressed the infinite unbridgeable distance from) peace and resolution.

That journey’s not here. Instead of an epic voyage of the spirit, we have a fine, but not very consequential, performance of some well-made music.

Is this modern (or post-modern) skepticism of transcendence? A response to the supposed over-militancy of earlier Bruckner performances? A gesture toward historical performance practices? The notes don’t tell us anything about the thinking behind the performance. They spend much time comparing this work with Beethoven (and Mahler’s Adagio) and seem inconsistent with what we hear. I wonder what the notes would have said if the author had written them after hearing the performance.

The sound, if you turn the volume up high enough, is lovely and natural.

BUSCH: Clarinet Chamber Pieces
Bettina Beigelbeck; Antoine Costet, Petar Hrisskov, ob; Yasushi Ideue, v; Paula Valpola, vc; Manfred Kratzer, p—Toccata 293—76 minutes

The early 20th Century renowned German violinist Adolf Busch (1891-1952) was not well known as a composer in his lifetime. He preferred to write for private use, and the appearance of his oeuvre on his public concerts was newsworthy. His clarinetist wife Freida often inspired the direction and color of his scores, and several of his works call for her instrument.

In October 2013 German clarinetist Bettina Beigelbeck and the Busch Kollegium Karlsruhe released their first volume of the composer’s clarinet chamber music, a set of scores for clarinet and strings (Nov/Dec 2013). Here is the second volume, a program that calls for strings, woodwinds, and piano.

The recital includes the Divertimento for clarinet, oboe, and English horn; the Sonata in A for clarinet and piano; the Suite in D minor for solo clarinet; the Duet No. 2 for violin and clarinet; the Five Canons in Unison for three instruments, played here on clarinet, oboe, and English horn; and the German Dances for violin, clarinet, and cello.

As before, Beigelbeck and her colleagues deserve kudos for throwing a spotlight on Busch and his music. They demonstrate the smart and angular neo-classical counterpoint and wit celebrated in his better known contemporaries, yet they have a very distinct and personal voice.

While the Sonata and the Suite each boast the substance and depth that their titles suggest, the other pieces, namely the Duet, the Divertimento, and the German Dances, have the most inventive and enjoyable material.

Although the Busch Kollegium Karlsruhe gives vigorous renditions, the individual playing is wildly uneven. Beigelbeck sports a too-free blowing and diffuse tone that easily spreads at loud volumes; the oboe playing is sometimes nice, sometimes honky; and the violin playing is rather gaunt and raspy. The cello and the piano are steady all through, but they won’t be enough to persuade critical listeners to stay. Once again, the composer deserves better.

BUSCH: Trios 1+2; Piano Quartet
Ravinia Trio; Ulrich Eichenauer, va
CPO 777 528 [2CD] 100 minutes

Adolf Busch (1891-1952) was the founder of the Busch Quartet. He left Germany to avoid the Nazis, but with Rudolf Serkin, he founded the Marlboro Music Festival. He greatly admired Max Reger—he once said if he were reborn, he’d want to be an organist—and his music shows Reger’s influence.

Trio 1 (1919) begins with a dolorous theme, well developed. The second subject is a more upbeat, striving melody with occasional tormented interjections. Even with all its contrasts, the movement sounds all of a piece. In the deft scherzo some of the developments have a fascinating spectral sound. The slow movement begins with an arching piano theme, then turns into a series of changing pedal notes (May/June 2014). Here, the second movement, a program that calls for strings, woodwinds, and piano.

The recital includes the Divertimento for clarinet, oboe, and English horn; the Sonata in A for clarinet and piano; the Suite in D minor for solo clarinet; the Duet No. 2 for violin and clarinet; the Five Canons in Unison for three instruments, played here on clarinet, oboe, and English horn; and the German Dances for violin, clarinet, and cello.

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CAMBINI: 6 flute Quartets, op 24
DuePiuDue Quartet
Brilliant 93081 [2CD] 88 minutes

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is satisfying, with variety, sensitivity in the phrasing, and good balance. Sometimes the playing gets a bit harsh at the most dramatic points, but only momentarily. Several movements end softly and simply, which comes across as extremely satisfying. If you’re inclined to like these, also try the chamber works of Delange from the Solstice Ensemble on Musica Ficta (May/June 2012) and don’t miss Flute Quartets of Krommer on Claves (July/Aug 2013) in resplendent sound.

GORMAN

CAPORALE: Cello Sonatas; see GAILLARD

CARR: Flute Pieces

American composer Daniel Carr (b 1972) tells us that he has close connections to three flutists: his wife, his sister, and his brother-in-law, who is heard here. He writes with great facility in a very accessible style, and the minor shortcomings indicate why Brahms at a similar age sat on pieces cross carding, sometimes rewriting them.

Most of these are short, but there is also a gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulges in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulges in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulges in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulge in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulge in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulge in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulge in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulge in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulge in a most delightful primativism. It works on this record—gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulge in a most delightful primativism. 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**GORMAN**

**CAPOREALE:** Cello Sonatas; see GAILLIARD

**CARR:** Flute Pieces

Francois Minaux; Mayumi Tayake, p

MSR 1579—50 minutes

American composer Daniel Carr (b 1972) tells us that he has close connections to three flutists: his wife, his sister, and his brother-in-law, who is heard here. He writes with great facility in a very accessible style, and the minor shortcomings indicate why Brahms at a similar age sat opposite, sometimes discarding, sometimes rewriting them.

Most of these are short, but there is also a gutsy 20-minute sonata that indulges in a most delightful primitivism. It works on this recordking, but I think in concert the piano part would overwhelm the flutist. Nevertheless, I can’t wait to try it myself! At the same time, I have reservations because on occasion there are primitive qualities of the less intended sort.

These deficiencies include, most conspicuously, the Orientalism of the opening, which is charming but too naive and cliched. Is part of the third movement too much like the first? In the final movement, a contrasting central section comes dangerously close to cliché, though I really love this music. And I’ve developed a conviction that it really needs to be done with the narrator. Segovia introduced the music as guitar solos, and they are, indeed, beautiful, and the pieces stand alone without the narration. But the poetry adds so much that I will never perform the pieces without a narrator, and I greatly prefer to hear them that way.

There are 28 pieces in the cycle, and a complete performance would run about an hour and 40 minutes—too long for a single CD, not really enough for a double set. So the other three recordings I know of have all been excerpts. Of those, only Frank Koonce with Don Doyle as narrator is still around (Jan/Feb 1996), and it is a fine performance. Koonce is a stronger guitarist, though Wynberg is more than adequate technically and still quite expressive.

The big difference in all these is that Fox performs a revised English translation of the poetry. This also works well—since the setting is narration rather than solo body, there is no need to do one of those appalling “singing translations”. Although I love the sound of the Spanish poetry, I always perform the works in English, since I have an English speaking audience, and I find that it’s a real advantage when a large portion of the cycle is performed. Both sets of performers shuffle the order of the poems, which does no damage. The original set is hardly a consistent narrative—Platero dies in XXI, but is alive for the next six poems, finally going to donkey heaven in the final poem.

What poetry as my clear favorite is the sound and sensitivity of Colin Fox’s narration. Fox is a distinguished actor with a 50-year career, and he has made a secondary specialty of narrating concert works. He’s done all the usual suspects—Histoire du Soldat, Carnival of the Animals, Peter and the Wolf—along with special performances that set the letters of the likes of Schumann and Dvorak to musical accompaniment. He really makes magic out of these pieces, and I’ll return to these performances often. If you love these pieces, you owe it to yourself to get this performance, and if you don’t know them with the narrator, this will make you a convert.

**KEATON**

**CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO:** Platero y Yo

Simon Wynberg, g; Colin Fox, narr

ATMA 2725—64 minutes

The soloist here, Mariana Flores, is an excellent singer: her clear and flexible voice leans more to plangency than richness, but she can create various moods and characters with sensitive skill and conviction. She is partnered in a few items by the mezzo-soprano, Harpsichordist and organist Alarcon directs various groupings of nine instrumentalists, mostly serving as continuo. They are all admirable, and the sound is close and realistic.

I have only two objections to this release. First, five of the selections—many of the only ones representing the opera in question—are given instrumentally, leaving out the voice and words and rather compromising the whole point of the venture. That problem might have been resolved by including more selections, to make sure that every opera was represented vocally. And the space was there to do just that: the first disc runs just slightly over an hour and the second one is a skimpy 49:21.

Otherwise, much praise for this fascinating release. It comes with extensive notes (some by Cavalli expert Ellen Rosand) plus full texts and translations, all in book-style album. It will offer much illumination and provocation if you would like to learn about opera’s first century and one of its supreme masters.

**BARKER**

**CHAPLIN:** Modern Times

NDR Philharmonic/ Timothy Brock

CPO 777286—80 minutes

This is a 2006 recording of the score to Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 film Modern Times. It was one of the last silent films produced by a Hollywood studio (Chaplin’s own). But it is not entirely silent. Chaplin was reluctant to venture into sound films, but he realized that a film scored to music would enhance the film. The film also includes the first Chaplin’s voice is heard in a film: he sings the song ‘Tintina’ by Leo Dandierf towards the end of the movie.

Chaplin was well versed in composing songs from his early vaudeville days and had already written the score for his 1931 silent film, City Lights. His Modern Times score is much more ambitious and original. There are a few primary themes used for the mechanical factory sequences, for the Charlie character, and for ‘Alumin’ (played by Paulette Goddard). The film also introduced Chaplin’s song, ‘Smile.’
Silent film composers face different problems than composers for sound films. As there are no dialog scenes which might have minimal or no music, the music score for silent film is constant throughout the film’s action. In *Modern Times*, Chaplin raised the ante by having the score mimic exactly what was on screen. This meant hundreds of cues that keep changing the score, sometimes with only a few seconds of a melody played before another melody is introduced or repeated. Chaplin, always a perfectionist, meticulously constructed the score with all these cues for the entire film.

His music is very accomplished and sometimes extremely complex. Although he could not notate music, he relied on experts Alfred Newman, Edward Powell, and the young David Raskin to do the notation and orchestrations and supply continuity under his wary oversight. Conductor Timothy Brock reconstructed the score from Chaplin’s archives so that a new recording in modern sound could be made.

The German and English booklet describes Chaplin’s film and music contributions and Brock’s efforts to reconstruct the score. The conducting, orchestral playing, and sound are all excellent.

The music is interesting, original, and often very inventive; but many sections are repetitive and broken up by constant changes in the original. There are very few long music sequences, and even ‘Smile’ is never played completely. You will marvel at Chaplin’s score, but hearing just the music more than once without the visuals might become tiresome.

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**FISCH**

**CHILCOTT:** *The Angry Planet; 5 Days That Changed the World, Miracle of the Spring*  
BBC Singers, Bach Choir, The Young Singers, Finchley Children’s Music Group  
David Hill  
Signum 422 [2CD] 80 minutes

I’m not sure I can recall affable, upbeat Bob Chilcott coping such an attitude. But in *The Angry Planet*, which was premiered at the BBC Proms in 2012, the former King’s Singer is as introspective and melancholy as the composer, his musical language reflecting the gravity of the subject matter.

It is reasonable to expect that every pianist of note will want to record standard repertoire when given the opportunity. While none of this music is lacking for recordings, pianistic conceit dictates that performers believe they can bring something new and special to the music to justify yet another recording. This is as it should be, and the market can always make room another if it transcends the merely good and can actually bring a smile to reviewers jaded with endless duplication.

Starting with the four magnificent Ballades, Ukrainian-born Agranovich chooses to emphasize Chopin’s lyrical side, rather than the dramatic. She has her own sound and is definitely different from most of the other recordings.

Ballade 1 is executed with a delicacy and poetic vision like no other I am aware of. Climates are refined, the line is often reduced to a bare wisp of a sound, and phrasing, articulated with great feeling, has its share of hesitations, awkwardness, and frequent disruption of the music’s natural flow. It is all very interesting, but repeated listening made me more angry than sympathetic.

Ballade 2 finds things a little more tradi-tional. The thematic material is gentle, and the secondary theme bursts in with stormy abandon, as it should. Apart from revealing a little bass heaviness in the recording, all goes very well.

Ballade 3 returns us to some of the strange maverick-isms of 1. I had to listen again before determining that despite some admirable things it was not my cup of tea. Yes, it brought a smile to my face, because it veered away from the traditional; but it was perhaps too unusual and non-conformist. Ballade 4, the longest, greatest, and most complex of the set, has its expression lathered on with a large trout and yet has its share of beautiful effects, they are a bit beyond my comfort level.

The Schubert can be a real blockbuster in the right hands. While it sounds far more difficult than it actually is, Agranovich manages to pick it apart mercilessly, and is far too self-consciously controlled. If there is such a thing as a mellower piece of music, this could serve as a good example. Her tone is lovely, her technique divine, but do we need to subject it to such fussiness? A third of the way through I began to feel itchy—definitely not a good sign for a reviewer.

**BECKER**

**CHOPIN:** *Ballades; SCHUBERT: Wanderer Fantasy*  
Sophia Agranovich, p  
Centaur 3427—56 minutes

The recordings from 2012 and 2013 also included Scherzos 1, 2, and 4, all new to Schliessmann’s recorded repertoire, plus his third recording of Ballade 1. Here I find the contrast between the fiery and lyrical sections to be emphasized. Especially notable is his handling of the transitions between these two elements: whether gentle or thunderous, they all make wonderful musical sense. With both the technique and intellect to do just about anything he wants, Schliessmann’s strength is in the lyrical, legato melodies that make Chopin’s music such a cornerstone of the piano repertoire. He has all the octaves, chords, and quick fingers called for by the music, and more as well. He does not achieve quite the edge-of-your-seat excitement of Horowitz or Argerich;
Silent film composers face different problems than composers for sound films. As there are no dialog scenes which might have minimal or no music, the music score for silent film is not a constant companion to the film’s action. In Modern Times, Chaplin raised the ante by having the score mimic exactly what was on screen. This meant hundreds of cues that keep changing the score, sometimes with only a few seconds of a melody played before another melody is introduced or repeated. Chaplin, always a perfectionist, meticulously constructed the score with all these cues for the entire film.

His music is very accomplished and sometimes extremely complex. Although he could not note music, he relied on experts Alfred Newman, Edward Powell, and the young David Raskin to do the notation and orchestrations and supply continuity under his heavy oversight. Conductor Timothy Brock reconstructed the score from Chaplin’s archives so that a new recording in modern sound could be made.

The German and English booklet describes Chaplin’s film and music contributions and Brock’s efforts to reconstruct the score. The conducting, orchestral playing, and sound are all excellent.

The music is interesting, original, and very often inventive; but many sections are repetitive and broken up by constant changes in the key. There are very few long music sequences, and even ‘Smile’ is never played completely. You will marvel at Chaplin’s score, but hearing just the music more than the film.

I think you’ll enjoy Five Days That Changed the World, Chilcott’s musical celebration of some of history’s most momentous events. A jumpy and ebullient “Quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog” pays tribute to Herr Gutenberg as he unsheathes the power of the printed word. Swirling musical figures help Orville and Wilbur get airborne, and there’s an introspective acknowledgement of the humbling truth that sometimes great ideas find us rather than the other way around. Think, for example, of Friday 28 September 1928 when Alexander Fleming saw mold devouring his cultures, and realized, articulated with great feeling, has its share of hesitations, awkwardness, and frequent disruption of the music’s natural flow. It is all very interesting, but repeated listening made me more angry than sympathetic.

Ballade 2 is things a little more traditional. The orchestral theme is gentle, and the second theme bursts in with stormy abandon, as it should. Apart from revealing a little bass heaviness in the recording, all goes very well.

Ballade 3 returns us to some of the strange mannerisms of 1. I had to listen again before determining that despite some admirable things it was not my cup of tea. Yes, it brought a smile to my face, because it veered away from the traditional; but it was perhaps too unusual and non-conformist. Ballade 4, the longest, greatest, and most complex of the set, has its expression lathered on with a large brush. It has its share of beautiful effects, they are a bit beyond my comfort level.

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his is a more controlled energy, well thought-out but still brilliant.

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So “Chronological Chopin” has far more strengths than weaknesses. I would go out of my way to hear Schlessmann play any group of these in concert. He has a way of bringing out all of the music is worthy of study and repays careful listening. The piano sound is spectacular and the booklet notes informative and comprehensive.

HARRINGTON

CHOPIN: Cello Sonata; Introduction & Polonaise; SCHUBERT: Arpeggione Sonata

Alexander Zagorszynski; Einar Steen-Nokleberg, p Melodiya 2356 — 63 minutes

This import from Russia gives us recent recordings of important early romantic cello works. Schubert’s sonata was originally written in 1824 for an instrument modeled on the guitar and is a beautifully lyrical three-movement sonata that we cellists have taken over. The Chopin pieces date from the beginning and end of his career, the Polonaise from 1829 and the Sonata from 1846. The Polonaise is entertaining and virtuosic, particularly for the piano, while the Sonata is great in all ways, a four-movement work lasting 31 minutes. It makes a satisfying close to a very pleasant program.

Zagorszynski and Steen-Nokleberg make fine partners, working together with polish (Oh, yes, that’s Chopin, isn’t it?) and generally accurate technique. Well, I have to take that back a little. Zagorszynski occasionally comes close to missing some of the most virtuosic moments in the Polonaise and the Schubert, both of which are technically demanding sometimes. Taken as a whole, these are satisfying performances with a certain Russian atmosphere about them that fits well with the music. There are other fine readings (Cello Overview, March/April 2009) but these are convincing interpretations, recorded with effective sound.

D MOORE

CHOPIN: Piano Concertos

Ewa Kupiec; Saarbrucken Radio/ Stanislaw Skrowaczewski—Brilliant 95106 — 72 minutes

Ewa Kupiec (whom I met once in Tucson) does not give us the very best piano playing in these concertos. She is very good, but her music-making is rather generalized and could be Beethoven. But the conductor is way ahead of most of the conductors who have recorded them. He likes and respects the music; he does not treat the orchestra as mere accompaniment. Nothing is vague or brushed over or aside; everything is clear. The bassoon solos are delicious, and he has thought about how to blend in the horn and trumpet solos. The strings are bright and energetic, not muddy and phlegmatic, as they are in so many recordings. I have been saying for years that the weakness in most concerto recordings is the orchestra, but I could never say that about this one.

The orchestra and conducting are consistently wonderful, but the pianist is mostly rather businesslike. I miss all the delicacy and cliff-hanging hesitations we hear from a number of other pianists. She just plows thru it— with great accuracy and bright tone, but little sweetness or passion. Can’t the hear that bassoon? Can’t she sense that she has to do more than just play the notes with such incredible accompaniment? I guess she wasn’t prepared for something so out-of-the-ordinary, so beyond routine. (Her best movement is the slow movement of No. 2, but she still misses bel canto phrasing and focus.) It’s too bad we can’t splice this orchestra onto another recording. This was made for Oehms in 2003; Brilliant has simply reissued it.

VROON

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Ekaterina Lintvintseva; Bonn Classical Philharmonic/ Heribert Beissel—Profil 15637 —78 minutes

Every issue we seem to review new recordings of the two Chopin concertos. This time there are two. There are obvious differences. The timings are very different; this one takes six minutes longer for the same music. Part of that traces to the sheer vigor of Skrowaczewski’s conducting in the other one, and part of it is certainly a more sensitive piano part here.

Another clear difference is the big German orchestra in the other recording and the small one at hand (27 strings, about 40 total). I do prefer the big orchestra, but the playing here is very sweet and moving. The all-important bassoon solos are fine. If rich string sound isn’t very important to you, this is an excellent recording.

The pianist is under 30 years old. She was born in Russia, inside the Arctic Circle. She spent her childhood looking at ice. Then she studied in Moscow and later in Germany, where I suppose she lives now. She has a lovely touch and sound. She is certainly preferable to Ewa Kupiec in this music. In fact, the whole recording is better, if you care a lot about sensitivity and delicate feeling. The sound is warm and not too close-up.

I’m sorry that I can’t rehear all the many recordings of this that I have reviewed in the last few years. I think you could easily come up with a nice list if you read those reviews. You will find some to avoid and some to explore further. I don’t think you will find anything that can replace the Gilels/Ormandy recording of No. 1, but you need that no matter how many others you have. And if you love this music, as I do, there is no reason not to have a number of recordings, each a little different from the others.

VROON

CHOPIN: Piano Pieces

Nocturnes, Ecossaises; Waltzes, Scherzo 2; Polonaise

David Wilde—Delphian 34159 — 64 minutes

Wilde delivers an extremely emotional Chopin that may not be to every listener’s taste. I prefer this music more restrained. While the Nocturne Op. 44:1 shows this interesting textural choice, it feels too slow and employs too much rubato. Etude 10:3 shows the same emphasis on emotion, with some lyrical moments that do tug on one’s heart, but its big swells may sound too overbearing to others. The same loud and direct sound appears in an extroverted Scherzo 2. Further diminishing the intimacy of miniatures such as Waltz, Op. 64:2, the acoustics ring out too much in the hall. Still, Wilde clearly displays a high level of comfort with this material, and his more unreserved, yet adept perspective on Chopin does sound fresh.

KANG

CHOPIN: Waltzes

Alessandro Deljavan—Brilliant 95208 — 59 minutes

This pianist has a Persian last name because he has an Iranian father. His mother is Italian. He teaches at the conservatory in Bari.

This was very pleasant to listen to. Nothing seems routine; he is always trying something that makes the music sound different. Most of the time the main thing is exaggerated rubato—to a nice change, since most pianists underplay the rubato. Sometimes a headlong passage sounds a little choppy or smeared. But there is plenty to enjoy, including beautiful tone.

I would not say he plays these better than anyone else, but he is different, and that has value in itself in music so often recorded. This may not become your main Chopin waltzes recording, but you may turn to it for a different take on the familiar music.

VROON

CHOPIN: Cello Pieces; see RACHMANINOFF

CIMAROSA: Overtures 4

Czech Chamber Philharmonic/ Michael Halasz—Naxos 573459—66 minutes

The intrepid producers at Naxos continue their series of Cimarosa Overtures in Volume 4. This magazine has reviewed the first three volumes, the latest entry last year (J/F 2014) after a gap of six years. Each volume in the series has used a different orchestra and conductor. This time it’s the Czech Chamber Philharmonic of Pardubice conducted by Michael Halasz. Each volume was praised for the re-discovery of the mostly unknown music and for the performances.

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Ewa Kupiec (whom I met once in Tucson) does not give us the very best piano playing in these concertos. She is very good, but her music-making is rather generalized and could be Beethoven. But the conductor is way ahead of most of the conductors who have recorded them. He likes and respects the music; he does not treat the orchestra as mere accompaniment. Nothing is vague or brushed over or aside; everything is clear. The bassoon solos are delicious, and he has thought about how to blend in the horn and trombone solos. The strings are bright and energetic, not muddy and phlegmatic, as they are in so many recordings. I have been saying for years that the weakness in most concerto recordings is the orchestra, but I could never say that about this one.

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Domenico Cimarosa wrote 65 known operas, and most were very successful. In some cases Cimarosa re-wrote parts of an
The performances are very good. The play-
sings with great style and grace. The moods of
the music vary from joy to sorrow. The
program opens with a delightful arioso,
followed by a lively dance. Then the
emotion is modulated into a more somber
tone, and the music continues to
build up to a climax. The finale is a
powerful and dramatic scene. Overall,
the performance is excellent. 

The overtures are very charming and
fascinating. They provide a good
introduction to the operas they
accompany. The music is always
beautifully sung and played. The
ensemble work is very well
conducted and directed. The
performances are consistently
high-quality. Overall, this is a
wonderful release. 

The seven cantigas de amigo attributed
to Martin Codax have certainly become
standard repertoire for any female singer specializing
in early music. There are a number of similarities
between this new release and the last record-
ing I reviewed (Jan/Feb 2012: 235). On both,
the singer and one other instrumentalist add
interludes between the songs to create a more
elaborate cycle. On the earlier release, the
cycle lasts about half an hour. Biffi and Hamon have
expanded the interludes and added as a
prologue and postlude two other medieval
cantigas de amigo, preserved only as texts, and
to the first of these additions they have added
a stylish new melody, so that the cycle now
fills almost 50 minutes.

I can assure you, that this is an evocative
performance, and the quality of the singing
and playing makes the time appear to pass too
quickly. Biffi either sings a cappella or accom-
panies herself on a vielle like a medieval
singing-songwriter. The preludes and inter-
ludes, improvised by Biffi and Hamon (using
different types of medieval or folk flutes) build
on the motifs of the songs themselves, fur-
ther integrating the whole recording.

If you are interested in just the seven
songs, I still recommend Sara Kiek’s Balkan-
style recording with Sinfonie (Sept/Oct
2006:260), but I do think that Biffi and Hamon if you can allow yourself the extra
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opera and restaged it using a new name. In other cases he re-packaged an overture from one opera to use in another. He also took some original three-act operas and split off one act to be produced as a separate one-act work, as dictated by the changing tastes and demands of his audience.

The booklet describes the history of each of the nine overtures on this recording. For example, the overture to La Finta Frascatana (The Fake Lady of Frascatan) went over in Naples, but not elsewhere, because the opera had a Neapolitan libretto, as dictated by the changing tastes and demands of his audience. The booklet describes the history of each of the nine overtures on this recording. For example, the overture to La Finta Frascatana (The Fake Lady of Frascatan) went over in Naples, but not elsewhere, because the opera had a Neapolitan libretto, as dictated by the changing tastes and demands of his audience.

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Another example of recycling is the overture to L’innamorato Battuto Da Donne Di Punto (The Lover Defeated by the Scheming Women) (1781). It originated as a three-act comic opera but reappeared as a two-act opera in 1805 with the title La Giardiniere Fortunato (The Lucky Gardener) with the same music and overture. Given this history, the number of known Cimarosa operas continues to expand, at least by title.

Volume 4 also includes overtures to some of Cimarosa’s biggest successes. Le Donne Rivali (The Rival Women) (1780) was so popular that in a few years it was staged all over Europe and into Russia. Il Pittor Pargiano (The Paris Painter) (1781) was one of the few Cimarosa operas with a successful, effective Matrimonio Segreto to continue to be staged into the 19th Century. In 1789 Haydn wrote and directed an adaptation of the opera for the Esterhazy court.

The overtures are very charming and undeniably attractive, which works against verisimilitude, the creation of an Allegro section, followed by an Andante section, concluding with an Allegro of various speeds (molto or assai), or Presto. The overtures in this latest volume sound pretty much like the ones in Volume 3, but it’s not the case that if you’ve heard one, you’ve heard them all. The music is always changing. Rossini would soon improve the overtures to include themes that made them individually memorable.

The performances are very good. The playing is fleet-footed or pensive when necessary, and the conductor maintains good control. The problem is the recording. The first violins have a quavering sound that makes them sound at a slightly different pitch than the rest of the orchestra. This is particularly noticeable in slow passages when notes are held for a few beats. It doesn’t destroy the overall effect, but it’s not pleasant to listen to. This might be owing to the recording technique or recording technology.

Naxos has a recorded version of the known Cimarosa overtures, so they will likely continue with the series. Perhaps the more mature overtures will have more individuality, but Cimarosa’s recycling and re-use of earlier overtures may not allow that.

The seven cantigas de amigo attributed to Martin Codax have certainly become standard repertoire for any female singer specializing in early music. There are a number of similarities between this new release and the last recording I reviewed (Jan/Feb 2012: 235). On both, the singer and one other instrumentalist add interludes between the songs to create a more elaborate cycle. On the earlier release, the cycle lasts about half an hour. Biffi and Hamon have expanded the interludes and added as a prologue and postlude two other medieval cantigas de amigo, preserved only as texts, and to the first of these additions they have added a stylish new melody, so that the cycle now fills almost 50 minutes.

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If you are interested in just the seven songs, I still recommend Mara Kieck’s Balkan-style recording with Sinfonie (Sept/Oct 2006: CD260), but I do hope Biffi and Hamon if you can allow yourself the extra time to be enveloped in these melancholy lyrics. The booklet for this new release includes a very informative note on the songs by Anna Laura Perugini and complete texts and translation.

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The remaining works are for other instruments. Transformations is a conglomeration of three clarinet pieces written from 1990 to 1993, arranged with chamber orchestra. They are slight, uninteresting, and have some unnecessary fluttertonguing to bring him “up-to-date” for his students and colleagues.

Reverie is a little piece for trombone and strings with blues tinges—certainly not a natural part of his style.

All told, Mr Constantinides is a hard-working academic with a good heart and solid technique, writing music that will ruffle no feathers and challenge no one. If you’re a fan or friend, you won’t neglect this. Others may pass.

GIMBEL
uring out that the booklet had the trackings for the two works reversed, I was really ready to pass.

But I stuck with it, and I’m glad I did because this is vivid and attractive fare. Puerto Rican composer and guitarist Ernesto Cordero (b 1946) is known for the Caribbean character he imparts to his music, and that’s certainly the case here. La Garita del Diablo (The Devil’s Sentry Box) mixes Creole folklore and the Old World spirit of Andalusia to depict the San Cristóbal Fortress in Old San Juan. It’s a colorful work animated by Senor Cordero’s evocation of the sea and a love story sung to the cadences of the flamenco style. In Estampas Criollas (Creole Portraits) the composer crafts a cradle song, a tale of forbidden love, an ode to island patriotism, and the juicy tale of las Criollas the cadences of the flamenco style. In evocation of the sea and a love story sung to and the Old World spirit of Andalusia to depict the character he imparts to his music, and that’s because this is vivacious and attractive fare.

Sonata in F minor, Op. 27:1, and La Gigue Sonata in G, Op. 39:3, continue to charm while generally eschewing the injection of anything weighty or emotionally challenging into the writing. Cramer’s choice of form adheres to basic sonata allegro and rondo; and, while I would not wish to spend an entire evening listening to such lightweight pieces, any recital program would be enhanced by including one or two of them. The Adagio first movement of La Gigue does attempt a bit more depth, and the opening of the F-minor Sonata—‘Patetico e lento’—more even as it anticipates Beethoven. The general feeling for all these pieces is optimism and cheer. This is wonderfully conveyed by Napoli, who is obviously enjoying himself with these uncomplicated works. The bow is excellent and the notes informative.

Davidson: Sacred Choral

Missa Universalia IV, V, VI, Ayejael Ne Yesu; Ayejael Choros; Ayejael Sufii; Amen

Matthew Dine, ob; Jo-Anne Sternberg, cl; Seth Baer, vn; New York Virtuoso Singers/ Harold Rosenbaum

Soundbrush 1034—64 minutes (455 Ocean Pkwy Apt 16A, Brooklyn NY 11218)

Roger Davidson is a composer with strong spiritual feelings that lie at the core of his music. Universalism and unconditional love are his prevailing themes, which is why three of these works are titled Missa Universalia. In Masses IV and V, references to Jesus as God have been stricken from the traditional liturgy. The Credos of both are four lines long, the Glorias also are truncated, and neither Mass has an Agnus Dei. Missa VI isn’t liturgical at all. Subtitled The Names of God, it pays homage by naming names—Dilohoma, and other designations for the deity. Jesus isn’t listed ed this time either, which seems a bit churlish, no? He does personify the presence of God for a couple of billion people, after all. Would a nod or two in his direction have upset the metaphysical apple cart that Dvorak wrote it? Set for choir and English horn, Missa IV is the snower of the group. The English horn helps, and there’s nothing wrong with the small choir; but there’s a lot of chattering in unison and not much impetus to go with it. Missa V also tends toward repetition, but is the best thing here because the kinks are worked out by the solo clarinet really spice up the prayers. An unusual feature of this release is that Mr Davidson has invented his own ‘language of light’. He calls it Yawaisil, and it offers the texts for the three ayejaels listed above. (I’m assuming that ayejael is Yawaisil for prayer.) One ayejael is a modified version of the Our Father, one comes to us from the Cherokee nation, and the Sufi prayer emanates, obviously, from mystical Islam.

Mr Davidson generously offers texts in both English and Yawaisil, which makes me wonder even more about record companies that can’t take the time to give us translations from languages that actually do exist in the real world. The 2-minute ‘Amen’ that closes the program may be an anti-climax linguistically, but it’s a pleasant take on a harpsichord melody by Rameau. If you’re up for something different, you’ve found it here.

Debussy, Ravel, Yang: Quartets

Amaryllis Quartet—Genuin 15373—72 minutes

The quartets of Debussy and Ravel together play for just more than 50 minutes—perfect for an LP but stingly for a CD—so a third work is usually included, often Faure’s quartet. It seems a natural choice, but really it’s too much of the same; the others; Ernest Chausson’s unfinished two-movement quartet steeped in languorous Francko-Wagnerian chromaticism, played between the Debussy and Ravel, is my dream coupling, but no one has done that yet. The Amaryllis Quartet here inserts Lin Yang’s Quartet 1 (2010), so we get the usual recitalists-sandwich program to hold the audience hostage in its collective seat. The Amaryllis likes this arrangement, apparently; they have done this twice before on CD, using quartets of Kurtag and Webern as the filler. Naming names is all melody-free squealing, scraping, scraping, and whining, along with nervous skittering pizzicato, rarely rising above mezzoforte, mercifully. I’m amazed anybody writes music like this since the 1970s; hasn’t this been done a thousand times already? The fresh, breezy opening phrase that follows the sweeter after Yang’s 18 minutes of meandering nihilism—I guess everything has its value if you look hard enough.

My only other recording of the two French quartets is the Kodalys (Naxos 550249), and that here because the klang is back without intermission. That is a mistake—just too much of the same. So, despite disliking Yang’s piece, I’m glad it’s there to unsettle the mood. The Kodalys, though superficially more beautiful than the Amaryllis, lazily skate the surface in a rather detached run-through. The Amaryllis fastidiously draws us with razor-sharp pizzicatos, icy tremolos full of menace, vertiginous crescendos and diminuendos, and a seamless, granitic ensemble blend that reminds me of the Emerson Quartet in its youth. There’s nothing offhand or slapdash about this, just meticulous and piercing attention lavished on every detail, every phrase, yet never losing sight of the works as a whole—that nothing that pokes out as effect for its own sake. Very intense. This is quartet playing at its best, simply riveting. My only complaint is the violins are a little bright, rubbing my ears the wrong way in fortissimo passages; maybe the microphones are too near the musicians.

Sound is close and clear, bass ample, and the booklet lush, with 11 photos of the musicians, if that’s your thing. Phenomenal performances, excellent recording. I hope to hear these remarkable musicians in concert one day.

Debussy: Cello Sonata

Amaryllis Quartet—see DUTILLEUX

Dett: Piano Pieces

Clipped Erickson

Navona 6013 (2CD) 148 minutes

A Nathaniel Dett (1882–1943) was born in Canada to an American father; the family moved to New York in 1893, and Nathaniel entered a conservatory there in 1901. He graduated from Oberlin College in 1907, the first black student to do so; he earned his Master’s from Eastman in 1921, well into his established career. His first compositions, from 1900 to 1904, which Erickson gives us at the end of the second disc for dessert, were light music—rags and marches.

The ragtime influence shows up now and then in his later pieces, but his direction changed when he heard the Amaryllis Quartet at Oberlin. They prompted him to begin using Negro spirituals in his music. Magnolia, a five-movement suite from 1912, is solid and enjoyable but not great. With In the Bottoms (1913), Dett began to find his style. This suite is still his most famous piece, and it was championed in his lifetime by no less than Percy Grainger.

Things really start to get interesting with American Record Guide

March/April 2016
uring out that the booklet had the trackings for the two works reversed, I was really ready to pass.

But I stuck with it, and I’m glad I did because this is vivacious and attractive fare. Puerto Rican composer and guitarist Ernesto Cordero (b 1946) is known for the Caribbean character he imparts to his music, and that’s certainly the case here. La Garita del Diablo (The Devil’s Sentry Box) mixes Creole folklore and the Old World spirit of Andalusia to depict the San Cristobal Fortress in Old San Juan. It’s a colorful work animated by Senor Cordero’s evocation of the sea and a love story sung to the cadences of the flamenco style. In Estampas Criollas (Creole Portraits) the composer crafts a cradle song, a tale of forbidden love, an ode to island patriotism, and the juicy tale of ‘Old Pancho’s Daughter’, which puts that narrator and rapper to work.

The tenor and bass are first-class, as are the guitarist and an unnamed violinist. The narrator and rapper add ethnic pizzazz to the proceedings, and everyone is caught in handsomely vibrant sound by the engineers. So while the folks at Artek may have flunked “Booklet 101”, this really is a nice job with everything else.

DAVIDSON: Sacred Choral Missa Universalia IV, V, VI; Ayejael Ne Yesu; Ayejael Cherokii; Ayejael Sufig; Amen

Roger Davidson is a composer with strong character he imparts to his music. Universalism and unconditioned love are his prevailing themes, which is why three of these works are titled Missa Universalia. In Masses IV and V, references to Jesus as God have been stricken from the traditional liturgy. The Credos of both are four lines long, the Gloria also are truncated, and neither Mass has an Agnus Dei. Missa VI isn’t liturgical at all. Subtitled The Names of God, it pays homage by naming names—Phohoma, and other designations for the devil. Jesus isn’t listed before this eden either, which seems a bit churlish, no? He does personify the presence of God for a couple of billion people, after all. Would a nod or two in his direction have uplifted the metaphysical apple cart that is the score?

Set for choir and English horn, Missa IV is the snower of the group. The English horn helps, and there’s nothing wrong with the small choir; but there’s a lot of chating in unison and not much impetus to go with it. Missa V also tends toward repetition, but is the best thing here because the klenrt back without interminable tremolos full of menace, vertiginous crescendos and diminuendos, and a seamless, granitic ensemble blend that reminds me of the Emerson Quartet in its youth. There’s nothing offhand or slapdash about this, just meticulous and piercing attention lavished on every detail, every phrase, yet never losing sight of the works as a whole—nothing that pokes out as effect for its own sake. Very intense. This is quartet playing at its best, simply riveting. My only complaint is the violins are a little bright, rubbing my ears the wrong way in fortissimo passages; maybe the microphones are too near the musicians.

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The ragtime influence shows up now and then in his later pieces, but his direction changes when he heads back to Toronto, first at St. James Church, and then at St. George’s. That prompted him to begin using Negro spirituals in his music. Magnolia, a five-movement suite from 1912, is solid and enjoyable but not great. With In the Bottoms (1913), Dett began to find his style. This suite is still his most famous piece, and it was championed in his lifetime by no less than Percy Grainger.

Things really start to get interesting with
1922’s four-movement suite Enchantment. Dett continued to grow as a composer, and his harmonies and textures got more experimental. At the same time, he kept his music grounded in the world around him. ‘Dance of Desire’, the third movement of Enchantment, is a romantic, virtuosic knuckle-buster where, just a few times, you scent an exotic ragtime influence. The following movement, ‘Beyond the Dream’, has wisps of Grieg and Schumann; but once again it’s unique. ‘Nepenthe and the Muse’ is a Liziran meditation with a striking atmosphere of mystery.

Cinammon Grove (1928), pieces on lines from the poetry of John Donne, Rabindranath Tagore, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and a spiritual, shows Dett’s style evolving, absorbing more dissonances, becoming more structurally creative. There are hints of quartal harmonies and flashes of humor. Tropic Winter, from 16 years later, has some ecstatic passages that wouldn’t sound out of place in Messiaen’s Vingt Regards. The chromaticism becomes even stranger, with lines that seem to hang at you doubtfully but curiously. Still, you should know that Dett rarely gets more dissonant than Ravel in any of his writing.

The Eight Bible Vignettes, from 1941 to 1943, is a very impressive set with the best aspects of Dett’s writing on display: the subtle use of spirituals, tender melodies, unusual harmonies, a love of thoughtfulness, and almost stream-of-consciousness texture changes. ‘I Am the True Vine’ is a three-voice fugue with a subject that wouldn’t sound out of place in Hokstaken.

This is some of the most enjoyable, stylistically varied, and individual music I’ve heard in a while. I can’t think of any music-loving friend I wouldn’t recommend it to. Erickson, a student of John Ogdon, is simply a fabulous pianist, the perfect guide to Dett. I’m rambling here, but the Ogdon connection made me wonder if Kaikhosru Sorabji knew of or appreciated Dett’s piano works. Ronald Stevenson has an affinity for Dett, Sorabji, and Grainger, I know. Anyone who likes the more off-the-beaten-path composer-pianists like Busoni, Alkan, and the afore-mentioned should put this album near the top of his buy list. Notes are in English; the sound is attractive.

DOHNANYI: Violin Sonata; see Collections

DU MING-XIN: 10 Xinjiang Dances Takako Nishizaki, v; Singapore Symphony/ Choo Hoey—Marco Polo 8225814—47 minutes

This is a re-release of an album recorded in 1985 when the Singapore Symphony, founded by Choo Hoey, was only six years old. The SSO here sounds like a professionally competent regional ensemble with no special luster—a far cry from its world-class status today. Perhaps the cliched less-than-mediocre music that has little to offer the orchestra has something to do with it.

Chinese composer Du (born 1928) based this “Xinjiang Music Tour” for violin and orchestra on Uyghur, Han, Kazakh, Hui, Mongolian, Kirgiz, Sibo, Tajik, Tartar, Daur, Mancu, Ozbek, Tibetan, and Russian tunes from the 14 nationalities that make up the immense Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in the far west of China. Sounds interesting, right? Until you hear the music. It sounds like now a samba-like beat with bongos, now some bad 19th Century-Century tune Verdi could have used in his younger years, now a touch of España, now a bit of Fiddler on the Roof, now a touch of Cuba, and, except for an occasional pentatonic tune, not a bit ethnic, let alone Chinese.

The notes say one tune describes a lover (whose maiden has disappeared) as he “wanders in melancholy over the grasslands”; another describes a lover saying, “You are like the sea, while I am the gull flying over infinity.” And so forth. This is unimaginative composing that’s as boring as old 1950s tunes that got a touch of Cuba, and, except for an occasional pentatonic, not a bit ethnic, let alone Chinese.

The recording is also a vehicle for Takako Nishizaki, who has become one of the greatest players of the instrument. She has made four recordings of Dett’s music, all of them very fine. The final track, Dett’s piano concerto, is a sublime creation, the equal of anything ever written for the instrument, and a wonderful close to the album.

Two bonuses accompany the concerto. One is the probing, spectral, fragmentary sound-collage, Three Strophes on the Name of Sacher for unaccompanied cello (written in tribute to the great Swiss composer and president of the modern music), another much-recorded Dutilleux work to have entered the performing repertoire—in this case an especially rarified sort of it. (The still-young Bertrand has already recorded it twice!) Placing Dutilleux in the grand line of French modernists, Harmonia Mundi adds Debussy’s Cello Sonata to this stellar release—a reminder also of Debussy’s position as the progenitor of so much new music to follow his “footsteps in the snow.”

LEHMANN

DVORAK: Quartet 13 with Quartet 10

Bennewitz Quartet Hanssler 93.340—71 minutes

with SCHULHOFF: 5 Pieces; SOK: St Wenceslaus Meditation

Signum Quartet—Capriccio 5257—56 minutes

The Bennewitz Quartet, founded in 1998, was named for violinist Antonin Bennewitz (1833-1926), who was an important figure in the development of Czech chamber music. The group, then, has a self-conscious connection with Czech music, and indeed, they promote this music through their choice of repertory, which includes little-known Czech composers like Dusik, Reicha, Haas, Ullmann, and Schulhoff. Their early recording of Janacek’s quintets (along with Bartok’s Fourth) was welcomed by Elaine Fine (S/O 2008), and this recording of Dvorak is just as satisfying.

It is clear from Quartet 10 (in E-flat, Op. 51) how well attuned they are to Dvorak’s style. The pieces are not for the light of heart. The group, then, has a self-conscious connection with Czech music, and indeed, they promote this music through their choice of repertory, which includes little-known Czech composers like Dusik, Reicha, Haas, Ullmann, and Schulhoff. Their early recording of Janacek’s quintets (along with Bartok’s Fourth) was welcomed by Elaine Fine (S/O 2008), and this recording of Dvorak is just as satisfying.

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The recording is also a vehicle for Takako Nishizaki, the wife of Klaus Heymann, the man whose maiden has disappeared named for violinist Antonin Bennewitz (1833-1926), who was an important figure in the development of Czech playing. The group, then, has a self-conscious connection with Czech music, and indeed, they promote this music through their choice of repertory, which includes little-known Czech composers like Dusik, Reicha, Haas, Ullmann, and Schulhoff. Their early recording of Janacek’s quartets (along with Bartok’s Fourth) was welcomed by Elaine Fine (S/O 2008), and this recording of Dvorak is just as satisfying.

It is clear from Quartet 10 (in E-flat, Op. 51) how well attuned they are to Dvorak’s style. The piece is as high as the lively finale, is exceptionally lyrical, often tender and genteel. They play beautifully, never too loud, and never force the music to try to make it more dramatic and exciting.

Quartet 13 (Op.106 in G) comes much later, after the New World Symphony and his American period. This is a very fine work, with inventive textures, unusual key relationships, and a wonderfully moving slow movement. Again, the Bennewitz players maintain their sensitivity to the music and let it flow unimpeded. So much of this disc is the wonderful sound: immediate, but never so close as to become harsh or “scrapey”.

The other disc, which has the title *Ala

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The other disc, which has the title *Ala*
**Dvorak:** String Quartet, op 77; Bagatelles; Terzetto
Scharoun Ensemble—Tudor 7187—70 minutes

One of these musicians is a product of the Villa Musica, but they are all members of Berlin orchestras—the Philharmonic and the Staatskapelle (Barenboim’s band). They are all Germans, and their sound has the German warmth and solidity that were missing in the Villa Musica recording (above). The Opus 77 Quartet is nowhere near as attractive a piece as the Opus 97, but it is played so well here that I was glad to hear it. Of course, it is only fair to point out that where Opus 97 adds another viola to the normal string quartet, Opus 77 adds a double bass instead, yielding a more “substantial” sound. (It is not just the players, but it is partly the players.)

I like this performance, but comparisons reveal that the 1992 Supraphon (1461, Sept/Oct 1993) by the Panocha Quartet sounds more Czech and even a little flitty; they never really dig in. I want the Dvo- rak to sound more Czech and even a little American (it was written in this country), and the Brahms should be tighter and warmer.

That leaves the Terzetto for two violins and viola. It takes around 18 minutes, and I have never grown to like it much, so you can’t count on my recommendation. This seems a fine performance, but it’s not finer than ones we’ve heard before (I had—Guarneri, July/Aug 2009; Alberni, May/June 1992—and the Alberni also includes excellent Bagatelles).

**Eggert:** Symphonies 1+3; Svante Sture
Gavle Symphony/ Gerard Korsten
Naxos 572457—66:20

Joachim Nikolaus Eggert was born in 1779 on an island in the German Baltic. A picture of it reminds me of Grand Island in Lake Superior. Eggert was on his way to Russia when he became ill in Stockholm and found himself a place in Swedish musical life, between Kraus and Berwald. His style is late Mozart-early Beethoven. Moments in the incidental music to Svante Sture sound like The Abduction from the Seragio, and moments in the First Symphony sound like Beethoven’s two early symphonies.

The orchestra is small but good—about 50 musicians. The program opens with a short overture (less than three minutes) that sounds promising but then just ends. I find the Third Symphony boring—unlike the note writer I am not charmed by the fugue that it ends with. Symphony 1 is the best music here, but it’s not terribly memorable, even if we enjoy it while it’s playing. I think I’ve said enough for you to know whether you would like this.

**Enesco:** Piano Pieces

- Suite Ancien; Prelude & Scherzo; Barcarolle; La Fileuse; Impromptus; Regrets; Prelude & Fugue; Des Cloches Sonores Suite; Impromptu Pieces; Nocturne; Sonata movement ‘Piece after Fauré; Sonatas 1+3

Racalac Stirbat
Hanssler 98060 [3CD] 201 minutes

Romanian composer Enesco’s forte is in masive, weighty works. Piano Suite 1, Dans le Style Ancien, should be programmed more often. Stirbat plays the Adagio movement with authority and presence, fluidly maneuvering the lower registers. The Finale is an exciting, non-stop display, full of arpeggiation and rapid scalar passages. The ‘Barcarolle’ is a beautiful, well-crafted piece of music. If you are used to Chopin’s nocturnes you may be pleasantly surprised by his 17-minute nocturne, more similar to Liszt’s ballades in scope, as it is full of wondrous harmonies and lush melodies. Piano Sonata 1 also calls for a heavy touch, and Stirbat does a wonderful job navigating its dense textures. Truly enjoyable.

**Fall:** Paroli
Anke Krabbe (Denise), Andreas Bonig (Mar- quis), Jorg Durnmuller (Jean), Ralf Lukas (Marquis); Cologne Radio/ Axel Kobert
CPO 777899—52 minutes

Paroli is Leo Fall’s first operetta. Originally titled Frau Denise, it premiered in 1902 as the middle opera of a triptych of dissimilar one-act operas and operettas, the others composed by George Courtline and Pierre Veber. The Berlin critics dismissed Frau Denise for its weak libretto and undistinguished music. Undeterred, Fall restructured and retitled the operetta Paroli, and it was published in 1903. Its performance and recording history are difficult to track down. Modern performances outside of German-speaking countries are rare.

Owing to the shortness of the operetta, a narrator is used to forward the plot line; the 11 scenes are musical interludes where the characters sing about the action. The plot involves the rocco period intrigue of a Marquis with his wife’s godchild, the beautiful miller’s widow, Denise. Denise is in love with Jean, a peasant who helps out in the mill. A number of comedic scenes occur as the Marquis attempts to woo Denise while his wife, the Marquise, knowingly pulls the plot strings to ensure his comeuppance. As there is no libretto it is difficult to tell what is going on except for the confusing and poorly translated German and English synopsis in the booklet. The booklet also explains Fall’s difficulties in writing his first operetta.

The plot is not difficult to follow. The Marquis, whose wife’s adultery ends in divorce, is in love with Denise. The Marquis is buffoonish like Baron Ochs in Der Rosenkavalier, and Denise is the standard operetta soubrette. The Marquise is somewhat like the Countess in Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro and is familiar with tracking down her husband’s indiscretions. Most important, everyone seems to be having fun and the performances are effervescent.

Fall’s music is very enjoyable in both the comic and romantic songs and deserves
Czech, has Quartet 13 in common with the Bennewitz recording. The readings are similar. Both capture the spirit of Czech music convincingly, and tempos are similar in every movement. The greatest difference is in the quality of the sound; because the Signum Quartet is recorded very close—too close for my taste—there is a loss of body and warmth. The Brahms should be thicker and warmer.

The Signum disc, though, is enriched by seldom-heard works by Schulhoff and Suk. Schulhoff (1894–1942) is an interesting figure—a Czech composer who served in WWI, studied and worked in Germany, became a communist and eventually a Russian citizen, only to die in a German concentration camp. His Five Pieces for String Quartet (1923) are short, averaging about 2-1/2 minutes each, and exploit dance rhythms. The music is spiky and exciting, a little like Bartok. They are in any case nice pieces, and quartets looking for unusual modern repertory should look them up.

Suk’s Meditation on St Wenceslaus, done in the original quartet version, is earlier, dating from 1914 and the beginning of the Great War. It is a late romantic work, dedicated in a sense to the Czech people, who held St Wenceslaus as their national patron saint. This Josef Suk (1874-1935), by the way, was the pupil and later son-in-law of Dvorak; the Josef Suk we remember is the composer, not the great-grandson of Dvorak.

Both discs have their merits, but in the Dvorak I certainly prefer the Bennewitz for their better sound.

**ALTHOUSE**

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Scharoun Ensemble—Tudor 7187—70 minutes

One of these musicians is a product of the Villa Musica, but they are all members of Berlin orchestras—the Philharmonic and the Staatskapelle (Barenboim’s band). They are all Germans, and their sound has the German warmth and solidity that were missing in the Villa Musica recording (above).

The Opus 77 Quintet is nowhere near as attractive a piece as the Opus 97, but it is played so well here that I was glad to hear it. Of course, it is only fair to point out that where Opus 97 adds another viola to the normal string quartet, Opus 77 adds a double bass instead, yielding a more “fruity” sound (it is not just the players, but it is partly the players.)

I like this performance, but comparisons reveal that the 1993 Supraphon (1461, Sept/Oct 1993) by the Panocha Quartet sounds more Czech and has a sweeter, slower Andante (II). Stephen Estep used the word “joy” to describe their playing in a reissue (Nov/Dec 2009; Alberni, RCA 2720) and is familiar with tracking down her Finnish operetta soubrette. The Marquise is somewhat comic and romantic songs and deserves a better performance, but not finer than ones I already own.

That leaves the Terzetto for two violins and viola. It takes around 18 minutes, and I have never grown to like it much, so you can’t count on my recommendation. This seems a fine performance, and I see no reason to select any of the others.

The Signum disc, though, is enriched by seldom-heard works by Schulhoff and Suk. Suk's Five Pieces for String Quartet (1923) are attractive pieces, and quartets looking for unusual modern repertory should look them up.

**VROON**

**Eggert: Symphonies 1+3; Svante Sture**

Gavle Symphony/ Gerard Korsten Naxos 572457—66:20

Joachim Nikolaus Eggert was born in 1779 on an island in the German Baltic. A picture of it reminds me of Grand Island in Lake Superior. Eggert was on his way to Russia when he became ill in Stockholm and found himself a place in Swedish musical life, between Kraus and Berwald. His style is late Mozart-early Beethoven. Moments in the incidential music to Svante Sture sound like The Abduction from the Seragio, and moments in the First Symphony sound like Beethoven’s two early symphonies.

The orchestra is small but good—about 50 musicians. The program opens with a short overture (less than three minutes) that sounds promising but then just ends. I find the Third Symphony boring—like the note writer I am not charmed by the fugue that it ends with. Symphony 1 is the best music here, but it’s not terribly memorable, even if we enjoy it while it’s playing.

I think I’ve said enough for you to know whether you would like this.

**KANG**

**Fall: Paroli**

Anke Krabbe (Denise), Andreas Bonig (Marquis), Jorg Durnmuller (Jean), Ralf Lukas (Marquis); Cologne Radio/ Axel Kobert CPO 777899—52 minutes

Paroli is Leo Fall’s first operetta. Originally titled Frau Denise, it premiered in 1902 as the middle opera of a triptych of dissimilar one-act operas and operettas, the others composed by George Courtiand and Pierre Veber. The Berlin critics dismissed Frau Denise for its weak libretto and undistinguished music. Undeterred, Fall restructured and retitled the operetta Paroli, and it was published in 1903. Its performance and recording history are difficult to track down. Modern performances outside of German-speaking countries are rare.

Owing to the shortness of the operetta, a narrator is used to forward the plot line; the 11 scenes are musical interludes where the characters sing about the action. The plot involves the rococo period intrigues of a Marquis with his wife’s godchild, the beautiful miller’s daughter, and is familiar with tracking down her English synopsis in the booklet. The booklet also explains Fall’s difficulties in writing his first operetta.

The plot is not difficult to follow. The Marquis attempts to woo Denise while his wife, the Marquise, knowingly pulls the plot strings to ensure the couple’s comeuppance. As there is no libretto it is difficult to tell what is going on except for the confusing and poorly translated German and English synopsis in the booklet. The booklet also explains Fall’s difficulties in writing his first operetta.

**Brahms: Quintet 2**

Boris Garlitsky, Jha Lee, Kyongmin Park, Georgy Kovalov, Philip Graham

Oehms 2890—60 minutes

Villa Musica is a foundation for chamber music with headquarters in a big palace on the Rhine River not far from Koblenz in Germany. They have sponsored and promoted about 1600 young musicians over the years, including this string quintet. This group has no name, and they are certainly multi-national: English, Korean, Polish.

They have a very refined sound—too refined, I think. I longed for more guts, more substance in both pieces. They are light and flitty; they never really dig in. I want the Dvorak to sound more Czech and even a little American (it was written in this country), and the Brahms should be thicker and warmer.

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I like this performance, but comparisons reveal that the 1993 Supraphon (1461, Sept/Oct 1993) by the Panocha Quartet sounds more Czech and has a sweeter, slower Andante (II). Stephen Estep used the word “joy” to describe their playing in a reissue (Nov/Dec 2009; Alberni, RCA 2720), more similar to Liszt’s ballades in scope, as it is full of wondrous harmonies and lush melodies. Piano Sonata I also calls for a heavy touch, and Stirbat does a wonderful job navigating its dense textures. Truly enjoyable.

**ALTHOUSE**

**Eggen: Piano Pieces**

Villa Musica—Tudor 8508—55 minutes

Romanian composer Enescos forte is in masses, weighty works. Piano Suite 1, Dans le Style Ancien, should be programmed more often. Stirbat plays the Adagio movement with authority and presence, fluidly maneuvering the lower registers. The Finale is an exciting, non-stop display, full of arpeggiation and rapid scalar passages. The ‘Barcarolle’ is a beautiful, well-crafted piece of music. If you are used to Chopin’s nocturnes you may be pleasantly surprised by his 17-minute nocturne, more similar to Liszt’s ballades in scope, as it is full of wondrous harmonies and lush melodies. Piano Sonata I also calls for a heavy touch, and Stirbat does a wonderful job navigating its dense textures. Truly enjoyable.

**KANG**
greater exposure. He does the roccoco style well and demonstrates in this early effort his style, which would later improve in full-length works like Madame Pompadour. This is not an essential work for the Fall canon, but it is enjoyable.

The performers are expert, and the sound is excellent.

**FALLA**: Piano Pieces
Juan Carlos Rodriguez
Paladino 62—74 minutes

The artwork claims that this is Falla's complete piano music, but it excludes the transcriptions of orchestral pieces like the ‘Ritual Fire Dance’ and the dances from La Vida Breve. Still it does include a transcription of the Debussy Homage, originally for guitar. The program also contains the Cuatro Piezas Española, Fantasia Bética, and several smaller pieces.

Rodriguez has a velvet touch in the quieter moments, but his tone gets pushy in the louder passages. His approach is very secco, and I want a little more pedal. His rubato at the barlines gets excessive, too, and he sounds as if he's constantly being pulled backwards. These things work against his general expressiveness, and the performers do a fine job with it. Leces and the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra play the Oboe Concertino beautifully, with excellent sensitivity, balance, and interplay. The chorale-like II is especially satisfying. Hungarian oboist Lajos Lencses blends virtuosity, sensitivity, and beauty, bringing in this flavor to music that otherwise could sound simply ordinary. This disc is enjoyable on its own, but it is definitely the 'Song of the Volga Boatmen' setting are positively sluggish.

Carl Bauman recommended the Colom and Heisser collections (Circe 87118 & Erato 45481, Mar/Apr 1991), and they both have many of the smaller pieces as well as selections from The Three-Cornered Hat and Love, the Sorcerer. I’d choose one of those. Notes are in English and Spanish; sonatas are a little on the dry side.

**FARKAS**: Orchestral Music 3
Old Hungarian Dances; Musica Serena; Piccola Musica di Concerto; Maschere; Oboe Concertina; Music for Zanka; Ricordanze; Aria & Hungarian Rondo

Lajos Lencses, ob; Janos Rolla, v; Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra/Janos Rolla
Toccata 217—72 minutes

This is the third volume of Toccata's recordings of orchestral music by Hungarian composer Ferenc Farkas. This one consists of pieces for oboe and strings, woodwind trio, and string orchestra. Farkas was known for his "old wine in new bottles" methods—both in using material from previous eras (as in the Old Hungari-
an Dances and Ricordanze) and for arranging his own music for different ensembles (Maschere, Music for Zanka, Aria and Rondo).

Several of the works here appeared on the previous two volumes of his music in different arrangements.

The Old Hungarian Dances are based on material from the 17th Century, and Farkas's presentation of them is reminiscent of Respighi's Ancient Airs and Dances (indeed, Farkas studied with Respighi). Piccola Musica di Concerto is an enlargement of the composer's 1961 string quartet, and has echoes of the music of Kodaly. On the other hand, Maschere, based on Commedia dell'arte characters, is performed as originally written, for oboe, clarinet, and bassoon. This little piece is delightful—by turns ironic, penitential, and on the brink of the extral. And the performers do a fine job with it. Leces and the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra play the Oboe Concertino beautifully, with excellent sensitivity, balance, and interplay. The chorale-like II is especially satisfying. Hungarian oboist Lajos Lencses blends virtuosity, sensitivity, and beauty, bringing in this flavor to music that otherwise could sound simply ordinary. This disc is enjoyable on its own, but it is definitely the 'Song of the Volga Boatmen' setting are positively sluggish.

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**FAURE**: Ballade; see RAVEL

**FORTMANN**: Symphony 2; NELSON: Capriccio; LIEUWEN: Astral Blue; GRAINGER: Lincolnshire Posy

Andrzej Grabieć, v; Mooses Symphony/ Franz Anton Krager—MSV 28554—70 minutes

The Moores School of Music Orchestra at the University of Houston presents four world premieres on this worthy recording—two by Americans, one by a Swiss, and one American orchestration of a Percy Grainger fantasy.

Thomas Fortmann, a Swiss composer living in Tuscany, has the longest work. His Symphonie 2, Etruria, is based on Etruscan musical philosophy and an earlier piece for two pianos and drums. It demonstrates her ability to combine the atonal gestures of New Viennese modernism with jazzier, more audience-friendly modernity. With Fortmann’s crystalline orchestration we can hear different layers, some dodecophonic, others flowingly lyrical. Please skip the composer’s pretentious program notes and let the music speak for itself. The first movement, full of mystery, alternates sighing violins with terse fanfares; the Animato has a jazzy snap and brio. In the slow movement a searching melody is enlivened by timpani, building to a brassy climax and organ. The finale, like the opening movement, moves on different layers and allows Fortmann’s obvious love of timpani—percuussion its full due before dying away in a surprise ending.

Robert Nelson’s Capriccio is a witty piece that alternates dreamlike fantasy and brittle fast music. Andrzej Grabieć, for whom it was written, plays it with loving precision.

As I wrote in a recent issue of ARG, Peter Lieuwen, Professor of Music and Composer in Residence at Texas A & M, writes music with clearly defined melody and jazz syncopation. His up-tempo, acrobatic harmonies, and the performers do a fine job with it. Leces and the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra play the Oboe Concertino beautifully, with excellent sensitivity, balance, and interplay. The chorale-like II is especially satisfying. Hungarian oboist Lajos Lencses blends virtuosity, sensitivity, and beauty, bringing in this flavor to music that otherwise could sound simply ordinary. This disc is enjoyable on its own, but it is definitely the ‘Song of the Volga Boatmen’ setting are positively sluggish.

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**FREITAS**: Chamber Pieces
Carlos Damas, v; Jill Lawson, p; Jian Hong, vc
Brilliant 94734—72 minutes

This is billed as the “complete music for violin” by Portuguese composer Frederico de Freitas (1902-80). The works span 1922 to 1964 and include a sonata for violin and cello, a violin-and-organ duet, and a solo for violin. The language is tonal with some modal (“pandiatonic” is his word), but full of current of feeling. His harmonies are basically bitonal Impressionist colorings and occasional chord (faux Celestini, 1605). Both instruments are no independent pedal stops. There is little manual. The organ’s bass is short, and there are improvisatory toccatas, variation sets, dances, and capriccios. Alessandrini has reshelved these for better variety, instead of keeping all the toccatas together. He chose to play nine of the pieces on organ (Meiarini, 1630) and the other 18 on harpsichord (Cavani, 1605). Both instruments have magnificent tone here and are tuned in quarter-comma meantone. They have single manuals. The organ’s bass is short, and there are no independent pedal stops. There is little for the feet to do in this music, anyway.

The recordings were made in September 1992, when Alessandrini was only 32. This appears to be its fourth issue, beginning in

**FRESCOBALDI**: Keyboard Pieces 1
Rinaldo Alessandrini, hps; organ
Arcana 388 [2CD] 146 minutes

Giorlamo Frescobaldi (1583-1634) first published this book of keyboard music in 1615, and reissued it with an appendix of many additional pieces in 1637. His brilliant music is a cornerstone of the keyboard repertoire, and it has inspired many generations of composers and players. There are improvisatory toccatas, variation sets, dances, and capriccios. Alessandrini has reshelved these for better variety, instead of keeping all the toccatas together. He chose to play nine of the pieces on organ (Meiarini, 1630) and the other 18 on harpsichord (Cavani, 1605). Both instruments have magnificent tone here and are tuned in quarter-comma meantone. They have single manuals. The organ’s bass is short, and there are no independent pedal stops. There is little for the feet to do in this music, anyway.

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greater exposure. He does the roccoco style well and demonstrates in this early effort his style, which would later improve in full-length works like Madame Pompadour. This is not an essential version of the Fall canon, but it is enjoyable. The performers are expert, and the sound is excellent.

**FALLA: Piano Pieces**
Juan Carlos Rodríguez
Paladino 62—74 minutes

The artwork claims that this is Falla’s complete piano music, but it excludes the transcriptions of orchestral pieces like the ‘Ritual Fire Dance’ and the dances from La Vida Breve. Still it does include a transcription of the Debussy Homage, originally for guitar. The program also contains the Cuatro Piezas Española, Fantasia Buettica, and several smaller pieces.

Rodriguez has a velvet touch in the quieter moments, but his tone gets pushy in the louder passages. His approach is very secco, and I want a little more pedal. His rubato at the bar is delightful—but turns ironic, perhaps even on purpose—and the performers do a fine job with it. Leces and the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra play the Oboe Concertino beautifully, with excellent sensitivity, balance, and interplay. The choral-like II is especially satisfying. Hungarian oboist Lajos Lencses blends virtuosity, sensitivity, and humor, bringing this flavor to music that otherwise could sound simply ordinary.

This disc is enjoyable on its own, but it is particularly recommended for people eager to collect Falla’s orchestral music.

**FAURE: Ballade; see RAVEL**

**FORTMANN: Symphony 2; NELSON: Capriccio; LIEUWEN: Astral Blue; GRAINGER: Lincolshire Posy**

Andrej Grabiec, v; Moores Symphony/ Franz Anton Krager—MSV 28554 70 minutes

The Moores School of Music Orchestra at the University of Houston presents four world premieres on this worthy recording: two by Americans, one by a Swiss, and one American orchestration of a Percy Grainger fantasy.

Thomas Fortmann, a Swiss composer living in Tuscany, has the longest work. His Symphonie 2, Etruria, is based on Etruscan musical philosophy and on an earlier piece for two pianos and drums. It demonstrates his ability to combine the atonal gestures of New Viennese modernism with jazzier, more audience-friendly modernity. With Fortmann’s crystalline orchestration we can hear different layers, some dodecaphonic, others flowingly lyrical. Please skip the composer’s pretentious program notes and let the music speak for itself. The first movement, full of mystery, alternates sighing violins with terse fanfares; the Animato has a jazzy snap and brio. In the slow movement a searching melody is enlivened by timpani, building to a brassy climax and on into the coda. The finale, like the opening movement, moves on different layers and allows Fortmann’s obvious love of timpani-percussion its full due before dying away in a surprise ending.

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As I wrote in a recent issue of ARG, Peter Lieuwen, Professor of Music and Composer in Residence at Texas A & M, writes music with clearly defined melody and jazz syncopation. His up-tempo, basically classical, with compact structures, but there is a romantic undercurrent of feeling. His harmonies are basically modal (“pandiatonic” is his word), but full of spice. Astral Blue is typical, a nature piece with a delicate evocation of an early morning sky and stars at twilight, full of rippling minimalist rhythm and lyrical interludes.

The Moores Symphony sounds terrific—lively and youthful, but also solid and rounded. Listen to the intricate detail in the Fortmann or the brass choir in ‘Lord Melbourne’ from Grainger’s Lincolnshire Posy, originally a wind piece, here newly transcribed by Merlin Patterson. It is smooth and theatrical. I prefer the spicier one from the Eastman Wind Ensemble on Mercury in the opening, but the later sections here profit from varied colors. The recording is full-bodied, as illustrated by the big bass drum in the finale.

**FREITAS: Chamber Pieces**

Carlos Damas, v; Jill Lawson, p; Jian Hong, vc
Brilliant 94734—72 minutes

This is billed as the “complete music for violin” by Portuguese composer Frederico de Freitas (1902-80). The works span 1922 to 1964 and include a sonata for violin and cello, a violin-and-drum duet, and a duet for violin and piano. The language is tonal with some biteral Impressionist colorings and occasional importations of local vernacular tunes and rhythms.

My response to Freitas is much the same as Lawrence Hansen’s, who reviewed a program of this composer’s orchestral works (Naxos 573095; Jan/Feb 2014). Reporting that Freitas is more persuasive in smaller-scale efforts: ‘Lost Serenade’, from Three Short Pieces (1954), all of two minutes long, has far more character and charm than the much longer (and too repetitive) sonatas; this is a gem that I’ll come back to. It also gets more engaged attention from violinist Carlos Damas, who, with his colleagues, offers respectable but hardly inspired renditions of the other works.

Sonics are serviceable but unflattering: a little too reverberant, with the (slightly out of tune) piano not coming through with enough clarity or strength. Collectors of Portuguese music will want the complete works, but most listeners may be interested for the same reason; but less devoted listeners will likely be happier with better recorded and more satisfying programs.

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Rinaldo Alessandrini, hpsi, organ
Arcana 380 [2CD] 146 minutes

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643) first published this book of keyboard music in 1615, and reissued it with an appendix of many additional pieces in 1637. His brilliant music is a cornerstone of the keyboard repertoire, and it has inspired many generations of composers and players. There are improvisatory toccatas, variation sets, dances, and capriccios. Alessandrini has reshuffled these for better variety, instead of keeping all the toccatas together. He chose to play nine of the pieces on organ (Meiariini, 1630) and the other 18 on harpsichord (Cresci, 1605). Both instruments have magnificent tone here and are tuned in quarter-comma meanote. They have single manuals. The organ’s bass is short, and there are no independent pedal stops. There is little for the feet to do in this music, anyway.

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I am very happy to find a conductor whose big Gabrieli moments express wonder and awe instead of sheer power. Even the instrumental canzonas (where Cleobury is organist) sound more mysterious than spectacular.

KILPATRICK

Gade: Trio; Langle-Muller: Trio; Langgaard: Mountain Flowers

Danish Piano Trio
DaCapo 8226119—75 minutes

This is called “Danish Romantic Piano Trios”. The Gade trios were recorded in 1991 by the Copenhagen Trio (Kontrapunkt 32077, March/April 1992), along with his Nocturnes for trio. That if it can be found, it is a richer, more expressive recording than this one. The Lange-Muller was recorded in 1991 by this same label (DaCapo 9310, Jan/Feb 1996, p 206), but the tempos are a lot faster on that recording. So is the reading of the Langgaard—7 minutes versus 9 minutes here. So, apart from the Gade trios, this is worth having—not that the Gades are bad, just that I prefer the other recording.

Conducting the Gade trio is beautifully fully played here by a well-balanced group that has a lovely, blended sound. And since the other Gade recording may be deleted, this is an attractive program of Danish romantic trios. None of it is brilliant or heavenly or greatly inspired; but it is all pleasant and enjoyable.

VOIRON

Gagnon: 4 Seasons; Turluteries Suites 1-2

Jean-Willy Kunz, hps; Orchestre de la Vallee-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent/ Daniel Constantineau
ATMA 2715,55:17

What a strange project this is! André Gagnon (b 1936) in his 30s capitalized on Joshua Rifkin’s “Baroque Book” fad of 1965, weaving popular tunes into fake-Baroque music; Gagnon’s music was for the French-speaking market in Quebec. The Turluteries suites 1 and 2, from 1972, are obviously based on Bach’s last two orchestral suites. Gagnon incorporated tunes of the Quebecois singer Mary Travers in La Bolduc from the 1930s. “My Four Seasons” from 1969 are little three-move- ment concertos built on 1960s pop tunes by four other Quebecois singers. I don’t recognize any of the melodies, song titles, or names. Both of these ventures were for Columbia LPS recorded in London and distributed in Quebec, and the composer was the pianist. He never wrote the piano parts down, and they had to be reconstructed for the present album with some help from him. Conductor Constantineau and another consultant recom- posed the piano and brass parts to be playable on harpsichord and valveless trumpets, with fewer changes for the strings, oboe, and timpani.

The textures sound OK, though there are some awkward modulations in the concertos, and the harpsichord solo part doesn’t use the left hand in the typical “French” manner. Kunz and the orchestra perform beautifully on Baroque-reconstruction instruments and with

American Record Guide
1993, according to allmusic.com. I already had the 1999 reissue by Arcana, and don’t hear any difference in the mastering of the 2015 set. The new one has the same essays by Alessandrini in the booklet, formatted differently. The text is harder to read here, set in a six-point font full of distracting ligatures. The booklet is now in English and French only, with the German and Italian versions available by download.

Alessandrini has excellent control of time and suspense: at pauses, it’s hard to guess which voice will move next or what mode we will be in. That is, he continually renouvel inter- est in the composer’s creativity, making it sound like in-the-moment inspiration. Other players (especially Baiano and Loreggian) make some of this music sound more auda- cious and flamboyant, but Alessandrini’s mod- erate approach here is satisfying. He sounds more cautious with such details as organ, playing more plainly than he does on harpsi- chord.

I am surprised that Alessandrini has not yet gone on to record Frescobaldi’s Book 2, a similar keyboard collection from 1627, as he is an expert at this and the related ensemble music. It will be welcome when he does.

FRIEDMAN: Quartets (3) Beethoven Quartet Musiques Suisses 6285 — 72 minutes

The composer here is Friedrich Theodor Fröh- lich (1803-1836). The liner notes say, “In fact, most of Fröhlich’s works have not even been published to this day.” After listening to his Quartet in G minor (1826), I believe it! The melodic lines even tries to imitate Haydn’s famous ‘God Save the Emperor’ (tune), the harmonic movement is adolescently ama- teur, and the four lines of music were clearly written at a keyboard as if for a men’s T-T-B-B chord; their spacing is exceedingly narrow and very close.

The Quartet in E (1828) is just as homopho- nically congested, though Fröhlich does offer modulations that are a bit more interest- ing, a Scherzo that is rather clever, and a final Allegro Agitato with (at last) a fugue. Still, the playing here, as in the earlier work, has some sour intonation, and the tuning often enough is not spot-on.

His last quartet, in C minor (1832), again has a lively and inventive Scherzo and a very original Finale, but the first violinist’s pitch is just shy of in tune with the other players. Still, the writing, despite occasional inti- mations of growing maturity, remains ama- teur; and the Beethoven Quartet’s flow is too often upright and foursquare. The players nei- ther project nor balance their lines; the second violin and viola usually just disappear into the background. The rather congested engineer- ing produces a slightly canned homogenous sound that isn’t at all transparent.

GABRIELLI: Choir & Brass

In Ecclesiis; Canzonas; Suscipe, Clementissime Deus; Hodie Complii Sunt Dies Pentecostes; Jubi- late Deo Omnes Terra; Quem Pastores; Sonata XXI; Exultavit Cor Meum in Domino; Sur- rexit Christus; Litaniae Beatae Mariæ Virginis; Magnificat a 14

King’s College Choir/ Stephen Cleobury; His Majesty’s Sagbutts & Cornets/ Jeremy West Kings 12 [SACD & Blu-Ray] 73 minutes

This Gabrieli recording by conductor Stephen Cleobury and the Choir of King’s College, Cambridge, has roots in a 1987 one by the same conductor, same choir (different singers, of course). The earlier one was made with the legendary Philip Jones Brass Ensemble on modern instruments, whereas this one has the esteemed early-music band His Majesty’s Sag- butts & Cornets.

Both albums offer beautiful readings of the splendid motet In Ecclesiis. These soloists—the very young treble Gabriel May and the fine alto Patrick Dunachie—sound excellent. The cor- nettos and sackbuts sound very good in their interlude. The best moment (5:31), where “Deus” is sung several times in a chromatically altered chord progressions, is magical. I must say, though, that I wish some- one, someday, would take more time with those chords.

This reading of Suscipe, Clementissime Deus avoids the bombast so often heard in Gabrieli performances. I like the ease of singing, the great layers of sound between 2:05 and 3:16. The glorious chord at 3:51, where some chords almost shout, stays warm here. That warmth lasts all the way to the quiet end- ing. The same feeling is felt again in the big motet Quam Vidistis Pastores? when, after a loud and silence (5:38), the text “O Willy num mysterium” (O great mystery) calls for just that.

I am very happy to find a conductor whose big Gabrieli moments express wonder and awe instead of sheer power. Even the instrumental canzonas (where Cleobury is organist) sound more mysterious than spectacular.

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GADJE: Violin Concerto; MENDELSOHN: Concerto

Thomas Imberger, Jerusalem Symphony/ Doron Salomon—Gramola 99075 — 52 minutes

In 2009 (Nov/Dec) I heralded the arrival of the first really good recording of the Gade Violin Concerto. There had been a dreadful record- ing on Danacord (Nov/Dec 1998, p 276). It was great to finally hear it played well (by Christina Astrand), and I pessimistically stated that it might be 40 years before we had another recording as good as that one. Well, here it is—and not only as good but better. The miing and the sound of the violin are better. The 30-year-old soloist is simply wonderful—just what the music needed to stand up next to the Mendelssohn. (Gade studied with Mendelssohn, so he knew his music.)

Both recordings have fine SACD sound, and the DaCapo has the Lange-Muller violin concerto as well—quite a rarity. But listening to them side by side, this is a much warmer, more winsome recording of the Gade.

It’s true that none of us need another recording of the Mendelssohn. This is very fast. The first movement is two minutes faster than Zukerman—and more than a minute faster than Stern and Oistrakh. It is only 7 minutes; Stern is 9, Zukerman 10. I don’t like it this fast, but the violinist is very good. Ill is very normal.

The Jerusalem Symphony is fine, and the sound is wonderful. Gramola is an Austrian label distributed in the USA by Naxos. The translation of the notes is not good. (It’s odd but true that Austrians don’t handle English as well as Germans.) The violinist, by the way, is also a singer (but not on this recording).

GAGNON: 4 Seasons; Turlerietes Suites 1-2 Jean-Willy Kunz, hps; Orchestre de la Vallee-du- Haut-Saint-Laurent/ Daniel Constantineau ATMA 2715 — 65/17

What a strange project this is! André Gagnon (b 1936) in his 30s capitalized on Joshua Rifkin’s “Baroque Beatles Book” fad of 1965, weaving popular tunes into fake-Baroque music; Gagnon’s music was for the French-speaking market in Quebec. The Turlerietes suites 1 and 2, from 1972, are obviously based on Bach’s last two orchestral suites. Gagnon incorporated tunes of the Quebecois singer Mary Travers in La Bolduc from the 1930s. “My Four Seasons” from 1969 are little three-move- ment concertos built on 1960s pop tunes by four other Quebecois singers. I don’t recognize any of the melodies, song titles, or names. Both of these ventures were for Columbia LPs recorded in London and distributed in Que- bec, and the composer was the pianist. He never wrote the piano parts down, and they had to be reconstructed for the present album with some help from him. Conductor Con- stantineau and another consultant recom- posed the piano and orchestra parts to be playable on harpsichord and valveless trump- ets, with fewer changes for the strings, oboe, and timpani.

The textures sound OK, though there are some awkward modulations in the concertos, and the harpsichord solo part doesn’t use the left hand (in typical Quebecois style). Jean- Willy Kunz and the orchestra perform beautifully on Baroque-reconstruction instruments and with
Currently fashionable playing style. Because Gagnon composed in 1960s notions of Baroque style, it’s a strangely reversed conceit to impose 21st-Century “historically-informed” performance standards onto his music. But he’s still active at age 79, and he blessed and helped with this neo-neo-reconstruction of whatever he would have meant, had he known more at the time. It does sound attractive on its surface, though I have not found much more in it beyond that, being ignorant of Quebecois pop music. Gagnon’s original LPs are long gone, unless you have some old friends or thrift-store connections in Quebec. Part of this is available on the harpsichordist’s YouTube channel, if you would like to sample it.

**B. Lehman**

**Galliard: Cello Sonatas (5); Caporale: Cello Sonatas (4)**

Kristin von der Golz; Andreas Kuppers, p

RaumKlang 3502—67:47

The release bears the subtitle “a tribute to GF Handel”, which may seem baffling at first. While the idea of a “tribute” is frivolous, the fact is that we are reduced to two composers of the first half of the 18th Century who were colleagues of Handel.

Johann Ernst Galliard (1666 or 1687-1747) was a Franco-German composer and performer (oboe, flute, organ) active in London from 1706. His repertoire comprises the four operas (some surviving incomplete; others totally lost) and a large number of other dramatic pieces—but he also wrote a lot of smaller vocal pieces, both sacred and secular, both in English and Italian, many of them also lost. What survive of his purely instrumental compositions are three different half-dozen of solo sonatas, one for recorder published as his Op. 1. Galliard played oboe in some of Handel’s performances, and the latter is reported as admiring his operatic work.

On the Italian-born Francisc0 (or Francis, or Andreas) Caporale (c.1700-46), biographical details are limited. He was probably a bigger one success in London in the early 1730s as a cellist and played in a number of Handel’s performances, to the great satisfaction of both that composer and the general public. His known compositions were all in the form of solo sonatas. He has sometimes been confused with another Caporale, possibly his son, who settled in Dublin in 1754 and died there a year or two later.

While not really joined at the hip as either musicians or contemporaries of Handel in London, they were brought together in 1746 in a volume published by one John Johnson, which presented six cello sonatas by each. That is one of the sources for the selections given here. But our players also draw on a set of six sonatas playable on either cello or bassoon published by Galliard in 1733. Hence the anomaly of duplicated numbers in the case of two pairs of the Galliard works here—unfortunately, no identification of the Galliard sources is made clear in the listing.

To be specific, we are given five sonatas by Galliard: in D minor, E minor, D, G, and A minor, all in four movements except for the last, which is in five. From Caporale we have four sonatas: in G, D minor, A, and B-flat, all in three movements. It might be convenient to suggest that these could be the cello sonatas that Handel might have written, but never did. Well, they are not up to the great master’s standards, but they are engaging and tuneful, with some virtuosic pretensions in the ones by Galliard. Von der Golz takes them all seriously and plays them with gusto. She is brightly informed, sometimes overshadowing the slightly repressive harpsichord contributions by Kuppers.

There remains one mystery here. Following the nine sonatas by our two composers, on a supplemental track 34 we have a single Grave movement identified only as a piece by Caporale. Von der Golz takes them all seriously and plays them with gusto. She is brightly recorded, sometimes overshadowing the slightly repressive harpsichord contributions by Kuppers.

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**Gottschalk: Piano Pieces**

Steven Mayer—Naxos 559693—65 minutes

‘The Banjo’ is too fast, ‘The Last Hope’ is way too slow (takes more than 8 minutes), and ‘Pasquinade’ is choppy and lacks flow. The rest of this is boring, with many repeated figurations and lots of delicate filigree but nothing to sink our teeth into. A movement from the orchestral Night in the Tropics is arranged for solo piano by Mr Mayer. Why? There are many better Gottschalk recordings.

**Vroon**

**Granados: Piano Quintet**

TURINA: Piano Quintet

Javier Perianes, Quiroga Quartet

HM 902226—51:20

This is certainly the most beautiful recording ever of the Granados piano quintet, which is also a beautiful piece with a gorgeous slow movement in the middle. The Turina is not quite on that level, but it’s still a good piece and worth hearing. Again, the playing and sound are simply magnificent.

**Vroon**

**March/April 2016**

American Record Guide
currently fashionable playing style. Because Gagnon composed in 1690s notions of Baroque style, it's a strangely reversed conceit to impose 21st-Century "historically-informed" performance standards onto his music. But he's still active at age 79, and he blessed and helped with this neo-neo-neo-reconstruction of whatever he would have meant, had he known more at the time. It does sound attractive on its surface, though I have not found much more in it beyond that, being ignorant of Quebecois pop music. Gagnon's original LPs are long gone, unless you have some old friends or thrift-store connections in Quebec. Part of this is available on the harpischordist's YouTube channel, if you would like to sample it.

B LEHMAN

GALLIARD: Cello Sonatas (5);
CAPORALE: Cello Sonatas (4)
Kristin von der Goetz; Andreas Kuppers, p
RaumKlang 3302—67:47

The release bears the subtitle "A tribute to GF Handel", which may seem baffling at first. While the idea of a "tribute" is frivolous, the fact is that we are introduced to two composers, Johann Ernst Galliard (1666 or 1687-1747) and Johann Ernst Caporale, who were colleagues of Handel. Galliard: in D minor, E minor, D, G, and A minor, in all four movements except for the last, which is in E. From Caporale we have four sonatas: in G, D minor, A, and B-flat, all in three movements. It might be convenient to suggest that these could be the cello sonatas that Handel might have written, but never did. Well, they are not up to the great master's standards, but they are engaging and tuneful, with some virtuoso pretensions in the ones by Galliard. Von der Golz takes them all seriously and plays them with gusto. She is briskly recorded, sometimes overshadowing the slightly recessive harschpichord contributions by Kuppers.

There remains one mystery here. Following the nine sonatas by our two composers, on a supplemental track 34 we have a single Grave movement identified only as a piece by one Alexis Magito (1711-73). Beyond the track listings, there is no reference to this composer or piece at all in the printed matter, and I can find no information about them anywhere else. Is this a joke?

B BARKER

GERSHWIN: Rhapsody in Blue; see RACHMANNOFF

GLAZOUNOV: Cello Pieces; see Collections

Word Police: methodology

Methodology for method: you read this all the time. It is simply another case of "never use a small word when a bigger one seems possible".

March/April 2016

American Record Guide

GODARD: Piano Pieces

Sonata 2; Sonata Fantastique; Promenade en Mer; Sur la mer; Aut Matin; Conte de Fée
Eliane Reyer—Grand Piano 683—70 minutes

When Benjamin Godard (1849-95) was born in Paris, nearby Chopin was in the last months of his short life, dying from tuberculosis. The same disease would claim Godard 45 years later. Chopin's life story and compositions are well known. Godard came from a wealthy family, who lavished him with unconditional support and admiration. He composed 7 operas, over 100 songs (many to his own poetry), 5 large symphonic works, 4 concertos, and many chamber and instrumental pieces. Violin was his primary instrument, yet he composed idiomatic and significant works for the piano. When he died Debussy and Ravel were already starting to revolutionize French music; Godard, sounding old-fashioned, almost disappeared from standard concert repertoire.

A year ago, Alessandro Deljavan's recording of Godard miniatures (Piano Classics 72, May/June 2015) left me with a good feeling, but not deeply touched by any profundity or genius. Jouni Somero's excellent disc of Godard's two piano sonatas and five other pieces (FC 9738, Nov/Dec 2012) showed more of a serious composer. The current disc is in direct competition with Somero. It duplicates the two big sonatas and the 'Promenade en Mer' as well (incorrectly listed as a world premiere).

Reyes, a professor of piano at the Brussels Conservatoire, plays with less overt virtuosity and more variety of touch and style than Somero. The sound is better, and the booklet notes are fabulous. Her disc is indicated as Volume 1, so this beginning bodes well for a series that will explore much well worth getting to know. I will keep an eye out for Volume 2.

HARRINGTON

GODARD: Quartets (3)

Elysee Quartet—Timpani 1221—69 minutes

Benjamin Godard is a French composer but sounds very un-French—more a hybrid of Schumann and Mendelssohn. His three quartets span most of his creative life and show no stylistic development. The last, of 1892, stubbornly adheres to the Austrian-German romantic style, in the four standard movements as always, untouched by Wagner or the less radical music of Fauré—and certainly not by Debussy.

Godard writes very stylishly for strings, as one would expect from an accomplished violinist, and just as idiomatically for quartet, mixing sections of theme-and-accompaniment, deft counterpoint, and thick orchestral passages—this is simply ideal post-Beethoven quartet composition. Godard's melodies aren't memorable, and this is music I admire more than love; but I'm glad to make his acquaintance and wouldn't mind hearing more from this prolific composer.

Recording quality is outstanding, with great clarity and strong bass. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's a quartet with weak bass—not a problem here. Every member of the Elysee is a master of his instrument— attractive in solos—yet there's a gorgeous ensemble blend. Highly recommended to fanciers of first-rate second-tier romantic composers.

WRIGHT

GOTTSCHALK: Piano Pieces

Steven Mayer—Naxos 559693—65 minutes

'The Banjo' is too fast, 'The Last Hope' is too slow (takes more than 8 minutes), and 'Pasquinade' is choppy and lacks flow. The rest of this is boring, with many repeated figurations and lots of delicate filigree but nothing to sink our teeth into. A movement from the orchestral Night in the Tropics is arranged for solo piano by Mr Mayer. Why?

There are many better Gottschalk recordings.

VROON

GRAINGER: Lincolnshire Posy; see FORTMANN

GRANADOS: Piano Quintet; TURINA: Piano Quintet

Javier Perianes, Quiroga Quartet—HM 902226—51:20

This is certainly the most beautiful recording ever of the Granados piano quintet, which is also a beautiful piece with a gorgeous slow movement in the middle. The Turina is not quite on that level, but it's still a good piece and worth hearing. Again, the playing and sound are simply magnificent.

VROON
GRIEG: Lyric Pieces, selected
Edward Rosser, p
Connoisseur Society 4276—78 minutes

I am quite fond of Grieg’s Lyric Pieces. He wrote 66 of them, in ten “books” or opus numbers. Naturally there are uneven; not every piece is great or beautiful.

My chief problem here is the selection. He includes 7 of the 8 pieces in the earliest set, Op. 12. I find them boring and undeveloped compared to the later sets. Everyone who records a selection of Lyric Pieces will include the Arietta from Opus 12, but why all the others? And this pianist spreads them around—does not play them together. Fialkowska (Nov/Dec) groups them by opus number, thinking that Grieg had a reason for grouping them that way. I agree that pieces in the same opus sound good together; but it doesn’t bother me that Fialkowska doesn’t play a single complete “book”.

I think Mr Rosser chose some of the duller pieces. I keep wanting to go on to the next piece rather than sit thru many of the ones he chose. (He does have some of my favorites, such as the Nocturne and ‘Wedding Day at Troldhaugen’.) I am also not happy with many of his mannerisms. He hesitates where I want the music to flow on. Some pieces are just too slow; this is not profound music. You could never accuse him of lack of expression, or merely playing the notes; but the ‘March of the Trolls’ is awkward and eccentric, as so much of the playing here is.

The piano sound is very good, as we expect from this label. But stick with Gilels or Fialkowska or the complete set by Roth.

GRIEG: Volume 5

2 Peer Gynt Pieces; 6 Orchestral Songs; Norwegian Dances; 2 Lyric Pieces, op 68; Mountain Thrall
Camilla Tilling, s; Tom Eric Lie, bar; Cologne Radio/ Eivind Aadland
Audite 92671 [SACD] 67 minutes

This series has been good except where there is formidable competition. This program is by that standard, mixed. Certainly the Norwegian Dances here can’t compete with Jarvi on DG (Gothenburg Symphony). Note also that Grieg never orchestrated these dances; they were written for orchestra and have a number of the composer’s most performed examples of lyric theater. This is the sixth recording.

Sergei Tilling, s, do we not think of Handel as a composer of comedies. Yet Agrippina is rich in comic material, with moments that rival French theatrical farce of later generations. That is balanced by romantic tensions, set in an historical context, rife with intrigues and conspiracies. There are finely developed personalities, offered in a score chock-full of powerful and beautiful melodious arias—many of them of first-class Handelian quality.

People who have been captivated by Motett, Agrippina, L’Orazione di Poppea, will find Handel’s work a fascinating theatrical “prequel” to it. Agrippina, the treacherous wife of Roman Emperor Claudius (Claudio), schemes to win the success for her son Nero (Nerone). Both the nasty Nerone and his stepfather, the dirty old man Claudius, have the hots for the young beauty Poppea, who herself is in love with the general Otho (Ottone), whom Claudius first prefers and then rejects as his successor. Agrippina cyclically plays up to both Narcissus (Narciso) and Pallas (Pallante), slippery courtiers; and Claudius has a pandering servant, Lesbo. It is quite a brew of swirling interactions, and eventually Claudius decides that Nero shall be his heir, to Agrippina’s rejoicing. Poppea and Otho are happily reconciled and united in marriage.

The five earlier recordings were of varied interest and merit. Three were of staged performances: two in an earlier Gottingen Festival in 1991 (Harmonia Mundi 907036: M/J 1992); under Christopher Hogwood in a 1983 production belatedly released by Mondo Musica (10810: M/A 2001); and under Jean-Claude Maggiorre in 2003 (Dynamic 431: S/O 2004). A 1991 concert performance merely labeled ‘Agrippina’ has been recorded on Philips (438 009: S/O 1997). And, most recently, Irene Jacobs made a studio recording for Harmonia Mundi (902 088: J/F 2012).

In varying degrees, the staged performances have dramatic reality, and Gardiner’s concert performance, though less theatrical, made it particularly outstanding vocally. Moreover, while there were various cuts in all of them (Malgor’s most heavily), Gardiner’s was the only one to retain all the arias given in the Handel Gesellschaft edition of the score.

All that, however, was put in different perspectives because though his is a studio performance, it is charged with the kind of articulacy and excitement he has become famous for. Further, Jacobs made his own edition of the score. Though Handel never revised this opera, which would have brought revisions to it, he made constant changes in the course of preparing the Venice production. The Venice version that Jacobs has made his own choices of what arias he thinks Handel might have cut or added, so that his edition has a putative “urtext” quality to it. Against that, Cummings now offers us the first full presentation of the new critical edition in the Hallische Handel-Ausgabe. All those factors must be juggling in making assessments.

Then there’s the gender-bending factor. Handel wrote the two roles of Nerone and Narciso for castratos, but the role of Ottone was given to a female mezzo who specialized in travesty characters. The earlier recordings dealt variably with this. Cummings assigns all three of these roles to countertenors.

It becomes tedious to compare each member of each cast. Readers may refer back to my earlier reviews of them, especially of the Jacobs set, for some of that. I will say that no one singer in this new recording eclipses the best counterpart in any of the others. Indeed, the “ideal” performance might involve cleverly picking individual singers from all of them. But the Cummings cast is a talented and balanced group of singers who all do their parts fine justice.

At the top of the list must be the two female antagonists, whose interactions and encounters can make for great singing. People who have lacked a recording of this wonderful opera before now, this new one is excellent.
GRIEG: Lyric Pieces, selected
Edward Rosser, p
Connoisseur Society 4276—78 minutes

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I think Mr Rosser chose some of the dullest pieces. I keep wanting to go on to the next piece rather than sit thru many of the ones he chose. (He does have some of my favorites, such as the Nocturne and “Wedding Day at Troldhaugen.”) I am also not happy with many of his mannerisms. He hesitates where I want the music to flow on. Some pieces are just too slow; this is not profound music. You could never accuse him of lack of expression, of slow; this is not profound music. You could

THREE orchestral songs. Three of them are familiar: the two Solveig songs from Peer Gynt and ‘The Last Spring’ To those are added ‘From Monte Pincio’, ‘A Swan’, and ‘Henrik Wergeland’. I know no better recording of the six songs, though of course there are better ones of the Solveig songs in sets of Peer Gynt. (Eileen Farrell did one of them with Fiedler.)

Tempos are slower than in any other recording I know. The singer never sounds “operatic” but has a sweet folk simplicity combined with a lovely, well-trained voice. There’s a Norwegian melancholy here that often fails to show up.

The six songs take 27 minutes (Inger Dam-Jensen on Naxos takes 24 minutes). Add the 8 minutes of the two Lyric Pieces, and there is 35 minutes of music here that can’t be beat elsewhere. Sound is excellent.

HANDEL: Agrippina
Ulrike Schneider (Agrippina), Ida Falk Wieland (Poppea), Jake Arditti (Nerone), Christopher Ainslie (Ottone), Joao Fernandes (Claudio), Owen Willetts (Narciso), Ross Ramgobin (Pallante), Gottingen Festival/ Laurence Cummings
Accent 26404 [3CD] 211:41

Produced in Venice in December 1709, Agrippina was the second of the operas that Handel composed in Italy. It was the crowning glory of his years there—his first genuine masterpiece in the genre of Italian opera. Long ignored, it has been taken up by conductors and opera houses in recent decades and has now become one of the composer’s most performed examples of lyric theater. This is the sixth recording. Serve aside, we do not often think of Handel as a composer of comedies. Yet Agrippina is rich in comic material, with moments that rival French theatrical farce of later generations. That is balanced by romantic tensions, set in an historical context, rife with intrigues and conspiracies. There are finely developed personalities, offered in a score chock-full of powerful and beautiful melodic arias—many of them of first-class Handelian quality.

People who have been captivated by Monteverdi’s Venetian masterpieces, L’incoronazione di Poppea, will find Handel’s work a fascinating theatrical “prequel” to it. Agrippina, the treacherous wife of Roman Emperor Claudio (Claudio), schemes to win the succession for her son Nero (Nerone). Both the nasty Nerone and his stepfather, the dirty old man Claudio, have the hots for the young beauty Poppea, who herself is in love with the general Ottone (Ottone), whom Claudio first prefers and then rejects as his successor. Agrippina cynically plays up to both Narcissus (Narciso) and Palas (Pallante), slippery courtiers; and Claudio has a pandering servant, Lesbo. It is quite a brew of swirling interactions, and eventually Claudio decides that Nero shall be his heir, to Agrippina’s rejoicing; Poppea and Otto are happily reconciled and united in marriage.


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It becomes tedious to compare each member of each cast. Readers may refer back to my earlier reviews of them, especially of the Jacobs, set for some of that. I will say that no one singer in this new recording eclipses the best counterpart in any of the others. Indeed, the “ideal” performance might involve cleverly picking individual singers from all of them. But the Cummings cast is a talented and balanced group of singers who all do their parts fine justice.

At the top of the list must be the two female antagonists, whose interactions and encounters can result in moments when they might have voices that sometimes sound confusingly alike, but mezzo Schneider can muster a more mature sound, often with a lot of edge. Her powerful Act II monologue ‘Pensieri’ is truly compelling. Soprano Winland has a lighter voice that suggests youth but also confidence. She has a much more oafish character than some of his predecessors have done: a kind of muddle-headed but nice old uncle.

There is, in sum, a genuine sense of dramatic ensemble here. This is a performance that brings the work to life in absorbing as well as entertaining terms. Much is doubtless owed to the crisp and precise leadership of Cummings. With this set, it is no longer possible to recommend a single recording as clearly the “best.” If you don’t already own Gardiner’s, it is worth trying to track down. Most of the others will be difficult to find, though the Jacobs has real value. Nevertheless, who have lacked a recording of this wonderful opera before now, this new one is excellent.
Admirable sound (with lively audience reactions included), and the booklet gives full libretto with translations.

**Handel: Early Italian Works**
Julia Lezhneva, s; Il Giardino Armonico/ Giovanni Antonini—Decca 478 6766—69:44

Rather than indulging in the usual cherry-picking of excerpts from the full span of Handel's operatic career, soprano Lzhezneva has chosen to concentrate on the music the composer wrote during his three years of residence in Italy in his early 20s.

Most of the selections are in Italian. We find one excerpt each from his operas for Italy, Rodrigo and Agrippina, one from the cantata Apollo e Dafne, one from the oratorio La Resurrezione, and five from the other oratorio, Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno. Then there are Latin selections: an aria from the Psalm Dixit Dominus, and, the longest item, the complete Salve Regina motet.

Lezhneva is certainly an extraordinary singer. Her voice is clear and strong through quick runs with aplomb or spin out ethereal legatos with the greatest delicacy. Her breath control is phenomenal, allowing her to hold notes at length with consistent strength.

But her approach to this literature is also mannered much of the way. She and Antonini like extremes of tempo: fast is really fast and slow is really slow. An example is 'Lascia la spina' from Il Trionfo, where she includes da capo embellishments of great inventiveness, but in a pacing so terribly slow and distended that the aria nearly breaks down. And worst of all is her diction—it barely exists at all. I am reminded of the mush-mouth Italian of Joan Sutherland. Lezhneva's Latin is not much better. Is the new generation of singers being trained to ignore words?

The orchestral accompaniments are brilliantly and beautifully brought off. And the booklet gives full texts and translations. But this is not a recording I want to keep or go back to. It just leaves one with a very muddled impression of Handel's astounding preciosity Italian years.

**Handel: New Organ Concertos**
Munich Bach Orchestra/ Martin Schmeling—Oehms 1921—79 minutes

Here are three ‘new’ organ concertos by Handel. The organist Hansjörg Albrecht has created the concertos from material in the oratorio Saul, as well as giving us the ‘Arrival of the Queen of Sheba’ and a suite from the Royal Fireworks. The projects are well done and are quite convincing as concertos.

Two organs are used, and this makes a noteworthy approach to this repertoire. The concertos are played on an organ that Handel knew—a small baroque instrument by George Rechel from 1663—with the great Munich Bach Orchestra accompanying, and the solo pieces are played on a large romantic Sauer instrument in the Marktkirche in Halle. The three suites of solo organ pieces from the oratorio Saul are played on the larger instrument. The performances are spirited and convincing. This would be enjoyable to fans of Handel—and the composer himself arranged his music for just about every conceivable possibility in his time.

**Handel: String Trios, op 40**
Anditi Trio—RBM 463 066 [2CD] 97 minutes

Peter Hänsel (1770-1831) was born the same year as Beethoven and outlived his more famous colleague by four years. Though we barely know him today, he achieved some fame in his time. A violinist, he wrote lots of chamber music, and his printed works include 55 or 58 string quartets (sources differ), four string quintets, and six string trios—these three are the last, written only a year before he died.

I can’t muster much enthusiasm for this music. The pieces are heavily violin-dominat-ed (perhaps because Hänsel was a violinist), but this suggests what Haydn was doing 50 years earlier. The style is very conservative for 1830. Nothing wrong with that of course, but the simplicity of the themes, the predictability of every phrase, and the thin counterpoint all point to music that is too weak to sustain interest.

Hänsel isn’t incompetent. The music sounds fine, and he observes the grammar and conventions of, say, 1780. I think they say, 1780, though, would be better rewarded by examining some minor works of Haydn (or Mozart or Beethoven). If you have some secret reason for wanting this, the performances are satisfactory, the sound is very good, and the notes make a better case for the composer than I do!

**Harrison: Harp Suites; Lyric Phrases; In Honor of the Divine Mr Handel; Adams, JI: Dances; Just Strings; American Gamelan**
Microfold 7—64 minutes

These two composers used just intonation not as their major interest, like Harrison’s colleague Harry Partch, but as a subsidiary tool for expressive purposes. Lou Harrison, who was always interested in different tunings, used the natural intonations for his two harp suites. The harp is easy to return, so it is a natural choice.

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**Haydn: The Creation**
Sarah Tynan, s; Jeremy Ovenden, t; Matthew Brook, b-bar; Handel & Haydn Society/ Harry Christophers—Coro 16135 [2CD] 98 minutes

I learned Die Schöpfung in German and never really cottoned to it in English. And while Karajan’s account with Janowitz, Wunderlich, and Berry has never lost its luster, the English versions I’ve come across (Shaw, Rattle, Hogwood) haven’t supplied much incentive to embrace the mother tongue. But this performance recorded in concert last spring at Boston’s Symphony Hall is special.

The storyline and all the attendant tone painting come through in bright, vivid colors; the soloists are attractive and enthusiastic, Haydn’s majestic choruses are as lush and exultant as you’d want, and the Coro engineers capture it all in resplendent Symphony Hall sound. True, Harry Christophers is a period performance practitioner; but even at that, the...
Admirable sound (with lively audience reactions included), and the booklet gives full libreto with translations.

**Handel: Early Italian Works**
Julia Lezhneva, s; Il Giardino Armonico/ Gianvino Antonini—Decca 478 6766—69:44

Rather than indulging in the usual cherry-picking of excerpts from the full span of Handel’s operatic career, soprano Lezhneva has chosen to concentrate on the music the composer wrote during his three years of residence in Italy in his 20s.

Most of the selections are in Italian. We find one excerpt each from his operas for Italy, Rodrigo and Agrippina, one from the cantata Apollo e Dafne, one from the oratorio La Resurrezione, and five from the other oratorio, Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno. Then there are Latin selections: an aria from the Psalm Dixit Dominus, and, the longest item, the complete Salvie Regina motet.

Lezhneva is certainly an extraordinary singer. Her voice is clear and strong through the range, and she can use it with flexibility of color and characterization. She can handle quick runs with aplomb or spin out ethereal legatos with the greatest delicacy. Her breath control is phenomenal, allowing her to hold notes at length with consistent strength.

But her approach to this literature is also mannered much of the way. She and Antonini like extremes of tempo: fast is really fast and slow is really slow. An example is ‘Lascia la spina’ from Il Trionfo, where she includes *da capo* embellishments of great inventiveness, but in a pacing so terribly slow and distended that the aria nearly breaks down. And worst of all is her diction—it barely exists at all. I am reminded of the mush-mouth Italian of Joan Sutherland. Lezhneva’s Latin is not much better. Is the new generation of singers being trained to ignore words?

The orchestral accompaniments are brilliantly and beautifully brought off. And the booklet gives full texts and translations. But this is not a recording I want to keep or go back to. It just leaves one with a very muddled impression of Handel’s astoundingly precocious Italian years.

**Handel: New Organ Concertos**
Munich Bach Orchestra/ Martin Schmeding—Oehms 2821—79 minutes

Here are three “new” organ concertos by Handel. The organist Hansjörg Albrecht has created the concertos from material in the oratorio Saul, as well as giving us the ‘Arrival of the Queen of Sheba’ and a suite from the Royal Fireworks. The projects are well done and are quite convincing as concertos.

Two organs are used, and this makes a noteworthy approach to this repertoire. The concertos are played on an organ that Handel knew—a small baroque instrument by George Rechel from 1663—with the great Munich Bach Orchestra accompanying, and the solo pieces are played on a large romantic Sauer instrument in the Marktkirche in Halle. The three suites of solo organ pieces from the oratorio Saul are played on the larger instrument. The performances are spirited and convincing. This would be enjoyable to fans of Handel—and the composer himself arranged his music for just about every conceivable possibility in his time.

**Handel: String Trios, op 40**
Anditi Trio—RBM 463 066 [2CD] 97 minutes

Peter Häsler (1770-1831) was born the same year as Beethoven and oulived his more famous colleague by four years. Though we barely know him today, he achieved some fame in his time. A violinist, he wrote lots of chamber music, and his printed works include 55 or 58 string quartets (sources differ), four string quintets, and six string trios—these three are the last, written only a year before he died.

I can’t muster much enthusiasm for this music. The pieces are heavily violin-dominat-
ed (perhaps because Hänsel was a violinist), but this suggests what Haydn was doing 50 years earlier. The style is very conservative for 1820. Nothing wrong with that of course, but the simplicity of the themes, the predictability of every phrase, and the thin counterpoint all point to music that is too weak to sustain interest.

Häsler isn’t incompetent. The music sounds fine, and he observes the grammar and conventions of, say, 1750. I think you’d say, 1750—though, would be better rewarded by examining some minor works of Haydn (or Mozart or Beethoven). If you have some secret reason for wanting this, the performances are satisfactory, the sound is very good, and the notes make a better case for the composer than I do!

**Harrison: Harp Suites; Lyric Phrases; In Honor of the Divine Mr Handel; Adams, JI: Dances**
Just Strings; American Gamelan Microconst 7—64 minutes

These two composers used just intonation not as their major interest, like Harrison’s colleague Harry Partch, but as a subsidiary tool for expressive purposes. Lou Harrison, who was always interested in different tunings, used the natural intonations for his two harp suites. The harp is easy to retune, so it is a natural choice.

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wish list for improvements is short. No period band has come close to Karajan in the 'Repre-

sentation of Chaos', and that trend continues here. God sounds like he's accompanied by a hurdy-gurdy while biddng mankind to "be fruitful and multiply", and the color scheme in Eden proves a mite drippy when antique flutes are painting the landscape. (Wasn't James Gal-

way playing 1st flute for Herr K on DG 449761? Enough said.)

Push me further and I'd wish for a more relaxed, affectionate tempo in the Adam and Eve 'By thee with bliss' duet. Everything else, though, is just grand—for more exciting than anything you'll hear from Hogwood or Shaw. Rattle does raise the roof, I'll grant you. But this bass-baritone out-sings Sir Simon's guy, and Christophers (a choral conductor first and foremost) handles the choir with more fines.

When Haydn left England to return to Austria, he constructed an eclectic mix of music ranging from the operatic works to the classical symphonies and had them given its American premiere by the Handel & Haydn Society in 1819. Judging by these results, their proprietary flair has not been lost.

Haydn: Nelson Mass; Symphony 102 (arr Salomon)

Christine Brandes, Danielle Reutter-Harrah, David Kunert, Jeffrey Fields; Taea O'Connor, fl; George Barth, fp; St Lawrence Quartet; Stanford Chamber Chorale & Strings/ Stephen Sano

It's worth noting that The Creation was given its American premiere by the Handel & Haydn Society in 1819. Judging by these results, their proprietary flair has not been lost.

When Haydn left England to return to Austria, the impresario JP Salomon bought the rights to the 12 London Symphonies and had them arranged for string quartet, flute, and fortepiano. It's this chamber version of Symphony 102 that performer(s) here. 2012, you may recall, is the quadricentennial of Haydn's 1845 birth, and this recording was recorded during the celebration.

The Radio Hour is described as a choral opera. The work depicts Nora, a frustrated middle-

aged woman who has a particularly bad day. While Nora is played by a silent actress, the surrounding chorus is divided into different sections to portray Nora's inner thoughts, as well as the sounds she hears in her apartment, the radio sounds, and even some pieces of her furniture. In the second of three short parts, Nora enters the radio (like Alice falling down a hole), and the chorus presents her with 12 notes of music and 12 words from which she constructs a hopeful message. In Part 3 she's back in her apartment, more ready to face the world.

For this little venture into the fantastic, Jake Heggie and his librettist Gene Sheer have created an eclectic mix of music ranging from swing, rap, and commercial jingles to a short section in 12-tone style (for the 12 words of Part 2). It's all very tuneful and enjoyable, and the John Alexander Singers perform it expertly. At 68 minutes, it often gets a bit dull, but this is an ideal piece for an enterprise.

The rest of the disc is devoted to Heggie's setting of two American poems: 'Patterns' by Amy Lowell and 'I Shall not Live in Vain' by Emily Dickinson, as well as the hymn 'Gather Us Around' from Dead Man Walking and the same selection expanded into a choral work. I very much like the choral setting of the hymn—even more than its original form in the opera. While the two poem settings are very well sung by Susan Graham, I find them less interesting musically than the instrumental works. I also think that 'Patterns'—a monolog of an angry young woman recently widowed by war—loses something when it includes the choral, since its main emotion is the crushing loneliness of the speaker.

All the participants—Ms Graham, the choir, the instrumentalists—perform cap-

ably. The booklet contains all the texts, good bios, and an introduction by the composer.

Hensel: Songs without Words;

see Mendelssohn

Herrmann: Haemusik; see Stravinsky

Hindemith: Mathis der Maler;

Symphony in E-Flat

NDR Symphony/ Christoph Eschenbach

Online 1275—67 minutes

This looks like an attractive program for the Hindemith fan: two important works played by a solid German orchestra and conductor recorded in concert on a label known for excellent sound. Tempos are generally slower than normal, sometimes much slower. One might expect such performances to be heavy and logy, but these sustain and move along fairly well, given their style. The overall ambience here is warm, but textures are not that well defined, partly because of a distant recording that is lacking in clarity, brilliance, power, and bass definition. The sound is lis-

tenable and even soothing in its way, but I have heard much better from on

There is a certain piety to Eschenbach's Mathis der Maler. The opening is gentle and laid back, with the trombone theme unusually reserved. The faster section is relaxed and sometimes held back slightly, with attacks broad, rhythms temperate rather than crisp, and textures never sharply defined. Hindemith's final movement often gets a bit dull in place rather than arrived at. These slow temps should excel in exposing the abundant counterpoint, but the recording limits that—

ment, marked very slowly. That 'very' seriously, resulting in a troubled dirge similar to Eschenbach's 'Grablegung.' III is straightforward and serious, picking up some speed toward the end. The finale is one of the most complex movements here, and lighter rhythmic execution would help a lot. The big second march could use more weight, but it works well enough. Eventually the three marches combine for an ending that is power-

ful and exciting but no match for the best of the competition.

To return to my introduction, when it comes to this release, all is not as it appears. Even so, it may be an interesting supplement if Eschenbach's disc said, we are fortunate to have several fine recordings of both works. For Mathis, you can look for Blomstedt, Sawallisch, Steinberg, Kegel, and Ormandy (despite a fast 1), among others. The E-Flat Symphony is trickier. I find its first recording, by Boullee on Everest assuming. Mr Cook liked it, too, but Mr McKelvey found it hard to make sense of. Bernstein is as exciting as Boullee, a little better played, and may be more convincing. Tortell was well received in ARG. I did not hear it on my regular system, but it seems to be another fine reading from the "exciting" camp. I would not think of recommend.

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wish list for improvements is short. No period band has come close to Karajan in the 'Repre-
sentation of Chaoes', and that trend continues here. God sounds like he's accompanied by a
burly, hurdy-gurdy while bidding mankind to "be fruitful and multiply", and the color scheme in
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my favorite, but it’s hard to find. McKelvey liked Kegel, but I find it too square.

Hindemith: Viola Sonatas
Geraldine Walther; David Korevaar, p
MSR 1953—58 minutes

This is the second solo disc by Takacs Quartet violin Geraldine Walther that I have had heard (the first was her Brahms Viola Sonatas, also for MSR), and I am as impressed this time as I was before. Like the earlier recording, this one is distinguished by MSR’s rich sound. Walther’s fine, Turin-period Guadagnini viola produces a sumptuous tone that is a pleasure to hear. Tempos are sensible, Walther’s technique is absolutely secure, and her intonation is flawless.

I compared this with Lawrence Power’s recording of the sonatas on Hyperion (Nov/Dec 2009) and noticed that he and his partner, Simon Crawford, have certain virtues that surpass Walther and her partner. Power’s tempos are often a bit brisker than Walther’s, so his performances are more energetic. The first minute and a half of the Op. 25:4 benefits from this a great deal. Crawford’s opening is tense and driven, and Power picks up this mood, leading to a shattering climax that is tense and driven, and Power picks up this mood, leading to a shattering climax that is...

Hoffmann: Piano Sonatas 2, 3, and 4, each containing a brisk melodic material tossed from hand to hand, point is evident in his Sonata 1, imitative recital of all his piano sonatas cured me of always been suspicious of his music, thinking known as an author, and because of that I’ve...
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There is another integrale of these sonatas on CPO played by Wolfgang Brunner on a fortepiano (not reviewed) in notably stodgy tempos that sap all zest from the fugues. Ms. Guembes-Buchanan is the best performance available, at least for now.

The second disc has only Schumann’s Kreisleriana, a work influenced by Hoffmann’s fictional character Johannes Kreisler and, apparently, not much by Hoffmann’s piano music, except for the blistering canons at the heart of VII, perhaps an homage to Hoffmann’s high-energy fugues. This is a decent Kreisleriana that misses some of the malevo- lence and explosive grandeur of my favorite performances, by Jeno Jando (Naxos 550783) and Murray Perahia (Sony 62786, M/A 1998). Ms. Guembes-Buchanan’s II is so slow that it loses coherence, the pervasive violent triplet figure of III lacks snap, and there’s not enough power in VIII or at the end of III.

No dates are given, though the booklet says these recordings were restored and re-issued, suggesting analog origins, and it’s obvious to any ear that the Hoffmann was recorded in the analog era—probably the late 1960s. The Schumann has much better sound and might be digital. Given the weak competi- tion on CPO, Guembes-Buchanan’s fiery performance of the sonatas is the one to have until someone outdoes her in modern sound. The liner notes have a useful short biography of Hoffmann, including a list of his works, by Dr Donald Stone.

Hoffmann: Piano Sonatas 3

Biliana Tzinlikova
Grand Piano 668—53 minutes

I was all set to dismiss this music, but then I thought, what if I pretend these sonatas were by Hoffmeister’s fellow contemporaries Haydn or Mozart? In that imaginary glow, I can see that Hoffmeister does have some captivating ideas, if inchoate and underdeveloped com- pared to either of those masters and with lesselan than Mozart.

Fast movements are the most attractive and complex in figuration, with a fair bit of imaginative detail. Particularly fetching is the zany, off-kilter phrase lengths in I and III of the C-major Sonata, the second on the pro- gram. The B-flat Sonata consumes over half the time but is not more profound than the others, just longer.

Alan Becker, reviewing Volume 1 of this three-volume series (M/A 2015), noted “Well, we can’t all be geniuses”, comparing Hoffmeis- ter to contemporary composer Jan Dussek, and I wholeheartedly agree—in fact my first response to Hoffmeister was “Well, not every- one can be Haydn or Mozart.” But Hoffmeister fills his sonatas, the best he can, with many imaginative details, if you give him your full attention—and I’ll be the first to admit that’s not easy.

This last volume of Grand Piano’s Hoffmeister series has excellent close sound and alert, committed performances by Ms. Tzinlikova.

Hoffmeister: Symphonies in C & D; The King’s Son from Ithaca Overture

Italian Swiss Orchestra / Howard Griffiths
CPO 777895—54 minutes

Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812) musical- ly was a contemporary of Haydn and Mozart, not Beethoven. His Symphony in D (num- bers 1 and 2 come from its first edition), first performed about 1802, is the spitting image of Haydn. In I Griffiths gives the three- quarter time melody a teasing, nuanced Haydn- nesque swing. The Andante Cantabile’s tune is the perfect setup for an inevitable theme and variations with the woodwinds dialoguing with the strings. Griffiths’s superb players keep the textures really transparent, the lyricism definitive, with quick strokes on the strings and finely articulated woodwinds. The Minuet is as twirl. The Andante Cantabile’s tune is the perfect setup for an inevitable theme and variations with the woodwinds dialoguing with the strings. Griffiths’s superb players keep the textures really transparent, the lyricism definitive, with quick strokes on the strings and finely articulated woodwinds. The Minuet is as

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quick-stroked and the trumpets really bit- ing. Balances again are superb, and accents are exceptionally pungent. And all this with modern instruments, played with minimal vibrato in strings and winds. Given the full orchestral sound, you’d never guess that this orchestra has only about 40 players. The most interesting movement here is III, an unusual Minuet where the gait is more folk-like with off-beat accents that turn it into a whirling dance. Even the trio, a mini-violin concerto, adds yet more twirl. It’s a shame the album opens with a four- minute overture that has dumb melodies and simple-minded harmonies that rival Kalliwo- da’s (see review below). Here Hoffmeister was clearly trying to imitate Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro Overture with utterly lame results. If you buy the album, just proceed immediately to two really clever symphonies, beautifully recorded and performed.

Holliger: Machaut Transcriptions

Geneviève Strosser, Jorg Dahlage, Muriel Cantoreg- gi, va; Hilliard Ensemble
ECM 24033—56 minutes

60s avant-garde oboist-composer Heinz Hol- linger weighs in to the postmodernist era with these transcriptions (2001) of music by Machaut for three violins and the glorious Hilliard Ensemble. Holliger deconstructs these works by dismantling them through micro- tones, barre mics, odd bowings, rhythmic expansion, and contrapuntal densities. Machaut’s music is nearly unrecognizable, of course. The overall effect is impenetrable in 60s avant-garde fashion. One piece is re- composed for the Hilliards from the vocal original: Holliger’s clotted counterpoint turns it into an unlistenable fuzz. As with all such things, the concept is “interesting” (a perennial insult) and will appeal to listeners still enthralled by this stuff. (“Hm. But how does it sound?” as two of my distinguished composition profes- sors would say.)

Texts not included, and given Machaut’s elevated status as a poet, that denies interpeter- ation of this modernist mess. Probably wise on the part of this crowd. Minimal notes by the composer.
Arthur Honegger was an interesting amalgam. He was born to Swiss parents, held Swiss citizenship, studied in Zurich, spent most of his life in France, and was the only member of Les Six to really admire German composers, especially Bach, Strauss, and Wagner. His music reflects this amalgam, combining French coloring andelan with Germanic counterpoint, weighty textures, squared-up rhythms, etc.

Most earlier recordings of Honegger’s symphonies lean to the French side of his work, with Karajan’s Second and Third the most notably notable too we have the German-style sets from Roman Brogli-Sacher and Dennis Russell Davies. Despite the presence of the Frenchman Deneve on the podium, this newcomer adds to that short list.

Deneve’s performance of the Third Symphony is powerful, detailed, and scrupulously balanced. The clarity is startling (e.g., the oboe near the beginning), creating a strikingly clear-cut landscape. “Everything in its place” can sound dull, but here it produces power born of concentration, phrasing, and sustained intensity. All of this occurs without diluting the stark militarism of the work, even if the thematic trombones are less forceful than in some performances. II is slow, steady, dignified, and heavenly as it defines the serenity that this movement is about. III returns to the militancy of I. Though it is more complex in terms of layered textures, the attention to detail, balances, and section playing allows you to hear deeply into the score without losing sight of the thematic ideas. The brass entry is broad and almost lyrical, though things get moving toward the end. Perhaps the balances are too even in this piece? I read somewhere that Honegger considered Pacific 231 a scherzo, and Deneve treats it that way in this moderate, but solid and controlled performance.

These recordings compare very well with the two other Germanic sets mentioned. It is stylistically between them. The Davies set is more tough-minded in both symphonies. Brogli-Sacher is more sad than tough in the Second, but his Third is weak. Deneve’s is the best orchestral version I have heard by Davies’s Basel Symphony. If you like the Germanic approach to Honegger, it is hard to resist those two. If you want only one, choose according to stylistic preference.

The excellent engineering puts up a great soundstage, top to bottom, with no obvious sound problems. The Decca recording led by Sir Charles Mackerras not only sounds more comfortable to Western ears. The Decca recording dry and slightly bass-deficient. Mr. Haller preferred the Conifer recording led by Gary Brain, but you may have trouble finding that, because the label is defunct.

Since you may not be able to find another recording of the main work, you might buy this at the reasonable price to round out your collection of Russian symphonies. It’s not a bad piece. But I would buy this for the Turkish Fragments, which I find delightful and (as far as I know) not now available elsewhere, though we have reviewed two other recordings. The Hungarian Brunn’s “Turkish March” take up about 20 minutes of the time here. The symphony is 36 minutes. 

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**HEIGHT**

**HVOSLEV:** Guitar Quintet; Seonveh; Double Concerto: 6 Pieces for 6 Strings

Stein-Erik Olsen, Egil Haugland, Njal Vindenes, g; Gro Sandvik, fl; Elise Barnes, Daniel Dalnoki, v; Ida Bryhn, va; Torunn Stavsvang, vc; Norwegian Chamber Orchestra; Christian Eggen

Simax 1399—78 minutes

I haven’t heard anything quite like this for a while. Ketil Hvoslev is a Norwegian composer, born in 1939. He has been concerned with guitar at various intervals, though he’s hardly a guitar specialist. The works here date from 1966 to 2011.

The most interesting thing about his music is his rhythmic invention. Each of the works is kinetic, even in the slow movements. He orchestrates his music in brief bursts of sound, gestural rather than melodic. It’s mostly tonal, though with enough chromaticism in parts to seem like there is no center—only to return as things are clarified. It’s quite attractive stuff.

And what a wealth of music! His 2004 quintet (guitar and string quartet) is five movements and almost half an hour long—very inventive and exciting. The Double Concerto for flute and guitar is an earlier work, from 1977. The sound comes in bursts, flute and guitar chasing each other for most of the piece. It’s not in separate movements, but there is a central slow section with cadena-like passages for each of the soloists. Like Rodrigo, his orchestration allows the guitar to be heard by placing it alone or with light accompaniment—I’ve heard too many new compositions of this kind made stronger by amplification to work in a concert hall.

The work for solo guitar, Six Pieces for Six Strings is earlier, from 1966, and is unfortunately the least interesting here. Perhaps Hvoslev was just getting to know the guitar at that point—his Op. 1 dates from 1964. Perhaps Hvoslev is very personal. SEON-VEH—the initials of the three players it was written for (when imagination fails, use initials). This is a masterly work. Like the other pieces, it is highly rhythmic, kinetic music, exciting and intense. The three players are all accomplished and quite inventive in their use of collective sonority. I don’t believe they perform regularly as a trio, and their sense of ensemble could be stronger. They are often not really locked in together—which can take years of rehearsal for music this demanding. But that’s a minor quibble in an otherwise excellent performance.

Stein-Erik Olsen is the primary performer here. I reviewed him recently in concertos by Villa-Lobos, Brouwer, and Koshkin (Mar/Apr 2015), and his performances here are just as fine. Thanks for introducing this fine composer. If he has any other works for guitar, I’d love to hear them.

**KEATON**

**IPOLITOV-IVANOV:** Symphony; Turkish Fragments; Turkish March

Singapore Symphony; Choo Hoey

Naxos 573508—56 minutes

This is a reissue; it was issued on the Hong Kong label, then on Marco Polo (R220217). John McKelvey reviewed it in November/December 1985. Steven Haller also covered it in a group review in the issue after that and referred to it later when he reviewed another recording of the symphony (Conifer; Jan/Feb 1999). Both of these reviewers rather liked the symphony; I find it less than thrilling. Both reviewers complained about orchestra and sound. Mr McKelvey said the orchestra “produce duces neither the volume nor quality of string tone required to do justice to this soundstage, top to bottom, with no obvious sound problems. The Decca recording led by Sir Charles Mackerras not only sounds more comfortable to Western ears. The Decca recording dry and slightly bass-deficient. Mr. Haller preferred the Conifer recording led by Gary Brain, but you may have trouble finding that, because the label is defunct.

Since you may not be able to find another recording of the main work, you might buy this at the reasonable price to round out your collection of Russian symphonies. It’s not a bad piece. But I would buy this for the Turkish Fragments, which I find delightful and (as far as I know) not now available elsewhere, though we have reviewed two other recordings. The Hungarian Brunn’s “Turkish March” take up about 20 minutes of the time here. The symphony is 36 minutes.

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Honegger: Symphonies 2+3; Rugby; Pacific 231
Stuttgart Radio/Stephane Denève
Hanssler 93343—70 minutes
Arthur Honegger was an interesting amalgam. He was born to Swiss parents, held Swiss citizenship, studied in Zurich, spent most of his life in France, and was the only member of Les Six to really admire German composers, especially Brahms, Strauss, and Wagner. His music reflects this amalgam, combining French coloring andelan with Germanic counterpoint, weighty textures, squared-up rhythms, etc.

Most earlier recordings of Honegger's symphonies lean to the French side of his work, with Karajan's Second and Third the most notable exceptions. We have a German-style set from Roman Brogli-Sacher and Denis Russell Davies. Despite the presence of the Frenchman Denève on the podium, this newcomer adds to that short list.

Denève's performance of the Third Symphony is powerful, detailed, and scrupulously balanced. The clarity is startling (e.g., the oboes near the beginning), creating a strikingly clear-cut landscape. "Everything in its place" can sound dull, but here it produces power born of concentration, phrasing, and sustained intensity. All of this occurs without diluting the stark militarism of the work, even if the thematic trombones are less forceful than in some performances. II is slow, steady, dignified, and heavenly as it defines the serenity that this movement is about. III returns to the militancy of I. Though it is more complex in terms of layered textures, the attention to detail, balances, and section playing allows you to hear deeply into the score without sounding clinical. The big slowdown near the end is effective because it is disciplined pacing, and the coda is striking in its-touching simplicity and concentration.

The performance of the Second Symphony is similar. Its opening is slow and eloquent, and the fast section remains stern, though with more variance in tempo than in the Third. String textures are dark and beautiful. Moodiness combines with the balance of textures and attacks that are less accented than usual to bring out the anger just beneath the surface. Everything is open sounding, consistent, and sustained. The result is raffled and cerebral in a way that is very powerful, though it may not suit all tastes. If presents the same balanced clarity, which in this movement takes on introspection. Note the steady, slow pacing in the lower strings, followed by an insistant buildup before a serene release that anticipates similar moments in the Third Symphony. Ill comes off as glib in many performances, but the lower tempo and rather stern tenor of this reading retain their presence. The singing violins, moving violas, and tramping in the low strings are attractive, and the trumpet adds glisten to the strings without dominating them.

Rugby maintains Denève's approach, though it may seem too light to some listeners. The brass entry is broad and almost lyrical, though things get moving toward the end. Perhaps the balances are too even in this piece? I read somewhere that Honegger considered Pacific 231 a scherzo, and Denève treats it that way in this moderate, but solid and controlled performance.

These recordings compare very well with the two other Germanic sets mentioned. It is stylistically between them. The Davies set is more tough-minded in both symphonies. Brogli-Sacher is more sad than tough in the Second, but his Third is weak. Denève's is the best orchestra of the three here, followed by Davies's Basel Symphony. If you like the Germanic approach to Honegger, it is hard to resist those two. If you want only one, choose according to stylistic preference.

The excellent engineering puts up a great soundstage, top to bottom, with no obvious hitches. Annotator Eckardt van den Hongen seems more fascinated with Rugby and Pacific 231 than the symphonies and seems to know quite a bit about rugby and railroads. He also discusses an interesting angle of "Les Six." Though Denève is the only director to have performed orchestra, the booklet continues this label's fascination with Roger Norrington's long—and from the evidence on records over the years—misbegotten tenure with the orchestra.

HVOSLEF: Guitar Quintet; Seonvæl; Double Concerto: 6 Pieces for 6 Strings
Stein-Erik Olsen, Egil Haugland, Njal Vindenes; Gro Sandvik, fl; Elise Barnes, Daniel Dalnoki, v; Ida Bryhn, va; Torunn Stavsvæng, vc; Norwegian Chamber Orchestra/Christian Eggen
Simax 1339—78 minutes
I haven't heard anything quite like this for a while. Ketil HVoslef is a Norwegian composer, born in 1939. He has been concerned with guitar at various intervals, though he's hardly a guitar specialist. The works here date from 1966 to 2011.

The most interesting thing about his music is his rhythmic invention. Each of the works is kinetic, even in the slow movements. He orchestrates his music in brief bursts of sound, gestural rather than melodic. It's mostly tonal, though with enough chromaticism in parts to seem like there is no center—only to return as things are clarified. It's quite attractive stuff.

And what a wealth of music! His 2004 quintet (guitar and string quartet) is five movements and almost half an hour long—very inventive and exciting. The Double Concerto for flute and guitar is an earlier work, from 1977. The sound comes in bursts, flute and guitar clashing each other for most of the piece. It's not in separate movements, but there is a central slow section with cadenza-like passages for each of the soloists. Like Rodrigo, his orchestration allows the guitar to be heard by placing it alone or with light accompaniment—I've heard too many new composers have a strong amplification to work in a concert hall.

The work for solo guitar, Six Pieces for Six Strings is earlier, from 1966, and is unfortunately the least interesting here. Perhaps HVoslef was just getting to know the guitar at that point—his Op. 1 dates from 1964. Perhaps. HVoslef is very smart, SEONVEH—the initials of the three players it was written for (when imagination fails, use initials). This is a masterly work. Like the other pieces, it is highly rhythmic, kinetic music, exciting and intense. The three players are all accomplished and quite inventive in their use of collective sonority. I don't believe they portray the music as you might expect from a solo ensemble could be stronger. They are often not really locked in together—which can take years of rehearsal for music this demanding. But that's a minor quibble in an otherwise excellent performance.

Stein-Erik Olsen is the primary performer here. I reviewed him recently in concertos by Villa-Lobos, Brouwer, and Koshih (Mar/Apr 2015), and his performances here are just as fine. Thanks for introducing this fine composer. If he has any other works for guitar, I'd love to hear them.

JANACEK: Jenufa
Gil James (Jenufa), Iris Vermillion (Kostelnicka), Dunja Vejzovic (Grandmother), Ales Brisecin (Laca), Tayan Reinharda (Steva), David Mcshane (Miller); Graz Opera/Dirk Kaftan
Oehms 962 [2CD] 122 minutes
Of all serious Czech operas Jenufa (1908) is the greatest and the most accessible to Western ears. Is has been very well served by recordings. There are several authentic Czech recordings (Supraphon) which offer the best in dramatic presentation of the text. But they are sometimes harsh to our ears. The Decca recording led by Sir Charles Mackerras not only sounds more comfortable to Western ears, but offers its own fair share of drama, all caught in superlative sound (studio). I have long thought it to be definitive.

But now we have this May 2014 performance from Graz. It is a stage performance, and
there is more excitement than on the Decca. From the very first notes of the orchestra there is an obvious difference. On Decca the obbligato xylophone (the ‘sound’ of the grist mill) has a mellow, almost caressing sound. At Graz the xylophone is glass-like, brittle, growing in intensity, a skeletal dance of death. Overall there is a buoyancy, an intensity, an excitement. Orchestral sound is clearly delineated. The singing is exquisite. There is plenty of vocal beauty even in the most dramatic moments. Gaž’s Jenufa is youthful and tragic. She floats the most gentle, delicate pianissimos, particularly in Jenůfa’s Act 2 prayer. For all his brutality Laca (Briscein) is a kind heart. This is expressed in the most lovely tenor vocalism. His voice would be welcome in any role. Reinhard’s tenor is quite opposed to Briscein—not that it is less beautiful, but that it carries a differentiating edge, a clarity of pronunciation, a character portrayal of a weak, careless man.

For many the pivotal role of Kostelnická (technically the sexton’s widow and foster-mother of Jenufa) is the main character of the opera. Corry Alonso’s most fully characterized, from angry protectress to the heart-breaking of doubt and almost insane determination in the murder of Jenůfa’s baby. Vermillion, rich and dark of voice, fulfills all the requirements. Kostelnická’s Act 2 monolog culminating in her decision to kill the child is hair-raising. As is the orchestra. But there is even more drama! At the end of the act when the winter wind blows open the window Vermillion takes the drama to screaming intensity with her cry ‘I saw Death staring in the window!’ All the terror, the heartbreak, the love for Jenufa. Her Act 3 confession and plea for forgiveness is ecstatic, leading into the overwhelming beauty and optimism of Jenůfa and Laca’s duet, soaring voices and strings, pulsating rhythm that ends the opera. Performance. Almost an oversight in the drama are strong performances by Vejzovic and McShane, along with superlative performances from Komstantin Sfiris (a gruff, resonant baritone) and Ivo Kahanek, a transrials music from Kostelnická.

The essence of Janácek’s operas is revealed in this beguiling assemblage of folk songs collected and arranged by the composer, accompanied by a colorful piano that often sounds like a cimbalom. These are mostly love songs, and love’s many aspects—rapture, seduction, disappointment, suspense, and melancholy—are the subjects. All of Janácek, including the instrumental works, is steeped in folk music, so much so that his musical phrasing is based on Moravian speech patterns. His music has an intense lyricism but also a daringly irregular musical syntax. As these songs show, melodies are distinct but emotionally structured, repeating and falling back on themselves, refusing to resolve on conventional cadences, often dropping down when we expect them to soar.

The conductor Joe Miller told me at Spoleto two years ago that Janácek’s music is a conversation, long and short phrases coming in unpredictable patterns, sometimes jerky, sometimes smooth; you never know where a piece is going. Soprano Martina Jankova and baritone Tomas Kral fully communicate this freshness and sense of surprise. They are earthy and bold, never fussy, full of feeling but not coarse. Kral has a haunting melancholy in songs like ‘Carnation’ and ‘Love’. Jankova is full of longing in ‘Love Herbs’ and exquisite tenderness in ‘Sweet Apple’. Ivo Kahanek is a full participant, not just an accompanist; the vivid recording clearly captures his flowing pianism. Supraphon’s production is first-class, with authoritative notes, full texts, and well-produced photographs. Not to be missed.

JANÁCEK: Moravian Folk Songs
Martina Jankova, s; Tomas Kral, bar; Ivo Kahanek, p
Supraphon 4183—83 minutes

The music of Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda (1801-66) is closest in style to Schubert’s orchestral music. Of the Overtures, 3 is the best, at least it’s made to seem that way with major key melodies, sharp rhythmic attacks, pungent kettle drums, and Willens’s effective use of the contrasts between pp and ff. 7 is pretty good too with its contrasts: major versus minor keys, chords versus scales. 10 is quite vivid—big on bluster and low on invention with many repeated patterns heard 100 times in Schubert’s orchestral music. The overtures conclude only 19 minutes of the album.

The concertin cino (1 is 16 minutes, 5 is 22 minutes) are the kind that make me say, ‘Why have I waited so long for them to play this garbage, let alone recording it?’ They’re what an 8-year-old Schubert might have written. Even looking at the printed page of 5 made me ask, ‘Is that all there is? Where’s the music?’ They’re both filled with cliché melodies, boring harmony, simple-minded harmonic progression, and practically no counterpoint. In fact, it’s so bad that, if it weren’t for elements of 19th-Century harmonies, I’d swear it was written by some amator in the mid-18th Century.

The Cologne Academy’s playing on period instruments ranges from spiky in Overture 3 to the very pretty, holding a beautiful pitch on held notes in Overture 7 to downward sour playing in Concertino 5. The closely recorded engineering gives the orchestra a somewhat hollow sound and makes the pianissimos a bit too quiet and the fortissimos raucous and some-what congested. I’m partial to period performance recordings, but not this one.

KALLIWODA: Violin Concertinos 1+5; Overtures 3, 7, 10
Ariadne Daskalakis; Cologne Academy/ Michael Alexander Willens—CDP 777692—58 minutes

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For many the pivotal role of Kostelnicka (technically the sexton’s widow and foster-mother of Jenufa) is the main character of the opera. Concerned, most fully characterized, from angry protectress to the mother of Jenufa, from the sexton’s appointment, suspension, and melancholy—are the subjects. All of Janáček, including the instrumental works, is steeped in folk music, so much so that his musical phrasing is based on Moravian speech patterns. His music has an intense lyricism but also a daringly irregular musical syntax. As these songs show, melodies are distinct but extremely structured, repeating and falling back on themselves, refusing to resolve on conventional cadences, often dropping down when we expect them to soar.

The conductor Joe Miller told me at Spoleto two years ago that Janáček’s music is a conversation, opera, long and short phrases coming in unpredictable patterns, sometimes jerky, sometimes smooth; you never know where a piece is going. Soprano Martina Jankova and baritone Tomas Kral fully communicate this freshness and sense of surprise. They are earthy and bold, never mannered or fussy, full of feeling but not coarse. Kral has a haunting melancholy in songs like ‘Carnation’ and ‘Love’. Jankova is full of longing in ‘Love Herbs’ and exquisite tenderness in ‘Sweet Apple’. Ivo Kahaneck is a full participant, not just an accompanist; the vivid recording clearly captures his flowing pianism. Supraphon’s production is first-class, with authoritative notes, full texts, and well-produced photographs. Not to be missed.

PARSONS

JANACEK: Moravian Folk Songs
Martina Jankova, s; Tomas Kral, bar; Ivo Kahaneck, p
Supraphon 4183—83 minutes

The essence of Janáček’s operas is revealed in this beguiling assemblage of folk songs collected and arranged by the composer, accompanied by a colorful piano that often sounds like a cimbalom. These are mostly love songs, and love’s many aspects—rapture, seduction, disappointment, suspense, and melancholy—are the subjects. All of Janáček, including the instrumental works, is steeped in folk music, so much so that his musical phrasing is based on Moravian speech patterns. His music has an intense lyricism but also a daringly irregular musical syntax. As these songs show, melodies are distinct but extremely structured, repeating and falling back on themselves, refusing to resolve on conventional cadences, often dropping down when we expect them to soar.

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SULLIVAN

JONES: Nybyggnan
Daniel Reid, sax; Jeanette Eriksson, Sergio Crisosto, v; Adrian Jones, va; Anna Wallgren, v
BIS 2119—54 minutes

In this fully Swedish production, saxophonist Daniel Reid and composer and string player Adrian Jones collaborate on a chamber concerto inspired by their love of folk music. The big piece is Nybyggnan—an extended multi-movement folk music concerto for saxophone and string quartet that takes almost 40 minutes. Later, Reid plays his own Ringar pa Vatten (Rings on Water), a wistful waltz written on a rainy day for his wife Emma; and Jones arranges Tingamarchen (District Court March), a tradition of the province of Dalecarlia in central Sweden.

The scores are sincere, straightforward, and enjoyable. In expected postmodernist fashion, Jones borrows from a variety of genres, either consciously or subconsciously; and his concerto has overtones of jazz, classical, and Celtic music. Reid has a talent for attractive melody, and while his light reed and free-blowing set up can make his sound diffuse, his phrasing is sensitive and thoughtful. The strings, though, comes across as too thin and gossamer, even for folk music.

KALLIWODA: Violin Concertinos 1+5; Overtures 3, 7, 10
Ariadne Daskalakis; Cologne Academy; Michael Alexander Willens—CDP 777962—58 minutes

The music of Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda (1801-1868) is closest in style to Schubert’s orchestral music. The overtures, 3 is the best, at least it’s made to seem that way with major key melodies, sharp rhythmic attacks, pungent kettledrums, and Willens’s effective use of the contrasts between pp and f. 7 is pretty good too with its contrasts: major versus minor keys, chords versus scales. 10 is quite vapid—big on bluster and low on invention with many repeated patterns heard 100 times in Schubert’s orchestral music. The overtures comprise only 19 minutes of the album.

The violin concertinos (1 is 16 minutes, 5 is 22 minutes) are the kind that make me say, “This isn’t worth hearing.” The rapidly developing lines sound and makes the pianissimos a bit too quiet and the fortissimos raucous and somewhat congested. I’m partial to period performance recordings, but not this one.

KANCHELI: Chiaroscuro; Twilight
Gidon Kremer, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, v; KammerkAPEL—ECM 24034—48 minutes

These are both typical Kancheli pieces—sullen, sprawling, and self-absorbed. Chiaroscuro (2010) was written for close collaborator Kremer with string orchestra. The light and dark subject is set forth with mystical spells interrupted by throbbing pounding. A gentle trill-laden classical motif acts as a refrain. It evaporates into nothingness. Twilight (2004) is more of the same plus a violin and quiet synthesizer keyboard. The atmosphere, as always, is of withdrawn sadness, mystery, and silence (the composer’s patented disruptive explosions are notably absent). The piece ends in major key paradise trailing off into the ozone. Performances are outstanding, and Kanchel fans need not hesitate. Notes by the composer.

GIMBEL

KLEIBERG: Chamber & Piano Pieces
Marianne Thorsen, Bard Mensen, v; Ole Wutudal, va; Oyvind Gimse, vc; Jorgen Larsen, p
2L 115 [SACD, Blu-Ray] 71 minutes

Norwegian composer Stale Kleiberg (born 1958) has a pretty good track record for writing well-made “modern romantic” music that listeners find inviting. His sumptuous 2005 Violin Concerto (2L 115 [SACD, Blu-Ray] 71 minutes) was well-reviewed. His 2010 Chamber Concertino (2L 115 [SACD, Blu-Ray] 71 minutes) was also praised from David Moore, Lindsay Koob was deeply moved by his Requiem for the Victims of Nazi Persecution on Simax 1257 (May/June 2005), and Stephen Estep liked his opera David and Bathsheba on 2L 84 (Mar/Apr 2013). It doesn’t hurt, of course, that his music is consistently given high-class performances and superb recorded sound.

Kleiberg’s gift for soaring melodies, volup- tuous harmonies, dazzling figurations, luxuri- ant scoring, and effusive warmth poured into fluid but shapeless musical structures comes through just as well in his chamber music. 2L’s generous collection here—a string quartet, piano trio, sonata for violin and cello, duo for violin and piano, and solo pieces for piano and
for violin—is a pleasure from beginning to end, gathering some of the most beautifully played and appealing contemporary chamber and piano pieces you’re likely to hear, all of them captured in 2L’s vivid, airy, creamy–chocolate-rich sound encoded on CD, SACD, and stereo-multichannel Blu-ray. Add this pristine sonic fidelity to Klechlin’s welcoming congenial sensitivity and the timbral and emotive variety of the works presented, and the result is a whole disc that you can to listen straight through without tiring of it—as I’ve done several times now. How many 70-minute discs of new chamber music can you say that about?

Partly, perhaps, this is because the works are for most part optimistic and life-affirming. True, one senses struggle in the violin’s brava–roulades of ‘Ashes,’ and even anguish in the passionate yearning of the string quartet’s opening slow movement—an intensified and more chromatic descendant of Barber’s Adagio. Still, meditative or exultant lyricism, energizing vitality, and consoling serenity predominate. Alluring, also, is the way Klechlin’s personal blend of romantic and modern, old and new, reveals submerged connections. Notice, for instance, the refuglent glow and plangent glittering of his lovely piano nocturnes, ‘Ruf’ und ‘Nachklang’. They sound for all the world like impossibly perfect jazz improvisations yet use much the same language as Debussy’s dreamlike Images.

KREISLER: Violin Pieces
Schlomo Mintz; Clifford Benson, p
Pentatone 5186228 [SACD] 54 minutes

No two selections of Fritz Kreisler’s violin pieces are the same. The piece I miss the most here is ‘The Old Refrain’. I especially miss it because Schlomo Mintz does all the other pieces so beautifully, and the sound of his viol-
in on this recording (from 1970; it was a quadrophonetic DG) is so sweet and refined. His style is laid-back and elegant; Kreisler’s miniatures aren’t the same.


VIBO

KUHLAU: Solo Flute Pieces
Stefano Parrino—Stradivarius 37007—78 minutes

Parrino is also the flutist heard on the Cambini quartets (above). He plays a modern flute made of wood. His playing is clear and largely free of bothersome mannerisms, though here and there I would prefer less liberty. He does tongue a lot of notes that might be slurred, and his articulation is crisp and accurate, as is the intonation. This recording places Parrino in a pleasant sonic space, not too close, but we do get the impression that he is performing just for us. The booklet has notes by the eminent flutist Gian-Luca Petrucci.

GORMAN

KURTAG: Kafka Fragments
Carolyn Melzer, s; Nurit Stark, v
BIS 2175 [SACD] 58 minutes

György Kurtág’s Kafka Fragments (1987), for soprano and violin, are 40 unspokenly manic visions just a couple minutes in length, sometimes considerably less than that. His language is suiately expressive—Schoenberg per-
haps on steroids. Some of the fragments are almost sickening, with a morbid humor surely unintentional. Examples are numerous: “Slept, woke, slept, woke, miserable life.” (11), “Once I broke my leg: it was the most wonderful expe-
rience of my life.” (13), “From a certain point on, there is no meaning in the world to reach.” (16). “I will not let myself get tired. I will dive into my story even if that should lac-

for violin—
KONDEL: Choral Pieces
Panis Angelicus; 3 Psalms; Epideidum Hau-mode; 2 Looks at Silence; Missa Brevis; Symbolum Apostolorum
Christina Haan, org; Cincinnati Conservatory Chorale/ Brett Scott—Ablaze 21—60 minutes

Douglas Knehan was once the Dean of Cincinnati’s College-Conservatory of Music and currently serves on its composition faculty. His sacred choral music is accessible and attractive, though perhaps a bit too heavy in that the sopranos seem to do most of the heavy lifting, with the other sections along for the ride. I especially like this short Mass and the Creed (Symbolum Apostolorum) that may or may not go well with it. (No performance notes are supplied, though I’d imagine they’d be fine.)

LIMINAL. In ‘June’ the music evokes hunting horns, their themes even harmonized in horn fifths. The waltz of ‘A Piano Lesson’ with its randomly held-back rhythms teases the hesitancy of a new student. Especially engaging is the serenity of the last part, ‘Youth Seen from the Viewpoint of Old Age’.

The Preludes were written in 1946, when the composer was nearly 80. They are mostly contrapuntal, often using canons and fugues. Even the individual voices have been pared down to the bone in a sort of proto-minimalism. Bach was, for Koechlin, a life-long beacon. It’s with fondness that we hear this great musical intellect in his late years once again paying tribute to the master whose example he so faithfully advanced, but on paths he blazed for himself.

O’CONNOR

KOECHLIN: Songs
Anka Morel, mz; Julien Behr, t; Calliope Voix de Femmes; Nicolas Jouve, p/ Regine Theodoresco Timpani 1234—68 minutes

These songs use soprano and tenor soloists and a small female choir in varying mixtures, all with piano accompaniment. Every one of them is an utter beauty, with long, floating melodies of perfect clarity. Sometimes, Koechlin’s humor shows, as in ‘Minuet’. It’s in triple time, but the phrases tie across the bar lines to create a ‘beatless’ pulse. ‘The Hummingbird’ has an agile vocal line with the piano particitpating in languidly. ‘The War’ has quasi-bugle calls in the accompaniment. Several of the songs are rondels, a French verse form of 13 lines, divided 4-4-4-1.

These performances would be hard to match. And Morel sings with beautiful tone quality, understanding of the texts, and clear diction. The Calliope female choir sings as with one voice—and that one a clear, bell-like peal. In ‘The Stars’ they must sustain a long drawn-out final chord, and they do it without loss of pitch, continuity, or dynamics.

The Calliope’s finger-perfect, with fluid phrasing and plenty of strength where called for. Theodoresco leads the choral pieces with precision and sympathy. One: as some of the poems set are a long way from French 101, we need English translations. Otherwise, the title of one of the songs—‘Jewels’—applies to this entire album.

O’CONNOR

KREISLER: Violin Pieces
Schlomo Mintz; Clifford Benson, p Pentatone 5186228 [SACD] 54 minutes

No two selections of Fritz Kreisler’s violin pieces are the same. The piece I miss the most here is ‘The Old Refrain’. I especially miss it because Schlomo Mintz does all the other pieces so beautifully, and the sound of his violin on this recording (from 1970; it was a quadraphonic DG) is so sweet and refined. His style is laid-back and elegant; Kreisler’s miniatures aren’t the same.

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O’CONNOR
erate my face” (17), “Coitus as punishment for being together” (22), “I am dirty, Milena, end-lessly dirty” (24)—and those are just my favorites. Obviously not for the squeamish or dainty pleasure seekers, these are nevertheless unforgettable in their way, and the performers’ virtuosity is staggering. This requires the right audience, but is immaculately produced and of considerable value.

GIMBEL

Kutavicius: The Seasons
DariusMeskauskas, narr; Vilnius Municipal Choir; St Christopher ChamberOrchestra/Donatas Kaktus—Toccata 200—78 minutes

Bronius Kutavicius (b. 1932) is one of Lithuania’s most honored composers. He has adopted a minimalist style, but his tranquil sequences of harmonies and rhythms are rooted in Lithuanian folk music and a brand of primitivism that’s very much of the earth. His libretto for this oratorio composed just a few years ago was supplied by Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714–80), a Lutheran clergyman and writer whose poetic call to virtue suggests the composer in attendance. It has the aura of a “special event gathering,” and honor was conferred on Haydn’s galumphing, good-natured oratorio of the same name.

The two suites (1901 and 1913) display some good musical landscaping and are well orchestrated. The ‘Rain in the Forest’ section could be a clinic for musical impressionism. In addition to studying under Jaernefelt, Kuula also went to Italy to work with Enrico Bossi—quite a contrast in mentors. The Prelude and Fugue was a result. The prelude is a lively syncopated dance. The fugue begins on the strings only, the rest of the orchestra entering gradually to good effect. In general, Segerstam’s approach to the music is more expansive and epic. Brabbins’s on the Dutton is more unified and controlled. It’s worth getting both, as the Brabbins has a lot of Kuula’s fine vocal music with orchestra. Segerstam’s PR photos have him with lank white hair and beard, looking like a genial Norse frost giant. He seems to enjoy the role.

Larsen: Trio; Shifting Through the Ruins; Viola Sonata; Up, Where the Air Gets Thin; On the Floor
Susanne Montzer, s; Curtis Macomber, v; James Dunham, va; Norman Fischer, vc; Deborah Dunham, db; CraigButenberg, p

Navona 6014—68 minutes

Five chamber works by Libby Larsen, the collection titled Circle of Friends, and these are the friends.

Opening with a Piano Trio (2001), Ms Larsen’s music is in a comfortable contemporary tonality executed with impeccable craftsmanship (she studied with Argento, whose positive influence may be felt in all these pieces). The trio opens with a romantic motive with a blues tinge that functions as the main subject of all three movements.

Shifting through the Ruins (2001) is a song cycle written after the bombing of the World Trade Center on texts collected by Ms Montzer. These are five appropriately mournful songs for mezzo-soprano, viola, and piano, built on a tearful motive running all through the work. In spite of Ms Montzer’s excellent diction, texts are irritatingly not included.

The Violin Sonata (2001), in the standard three movements, contrasts a three-part first movement with a dreamy, rather amorous slow movement, followed by an energetic rondo finale. The middle movement is a rare miscalculation that might prevent the piece from being more attractive to violinists seeking fresh repertoire.

Up, Where the Air Gets Thin (1985) will also appeal primarily to specialists. It is a set of not especially interesting gestures for cello and bass, intended to reflect the atmosphere at the top of Mount Everest. Back on earth, Four on the Floor (1983), described by the composer in a 2013 lecture as a “mad boogie”, is probably Ms Larsen’s most popular work, and for good reason. It’s a sizzling showstopper for violin, cello, bass, and piano—a thrilling encore sure to elicit standing ovations. It’s a good ending to this nice program. Notes by the composer.

Lassus: Biographie musicale, Vol V
Vox Luminus/ Lionel Meunier
Musique in Wallonie 1579—73 minutes

For several years now the Belgian label Musique in Wallonie (Music in Wallonia—that is, of the French-speaking Walloons) has been building one of its most impressive monu-
ments. It is a series of programs exploring phases of the career of the great Orlando Lus-
sus, or Roland or Orlando di Lassus (you choose among the various name forms he used). He was born about 1532 in the Franco-Flemish province of Hainaut, and died in Munich in 1594, the most prolific and respected composer of his day.

The first four single-disc releases (1158, 1268, 1369, 1474) actually covered the full span of his career. None of those have been reviewed in these pages, to the best of my knowledge. This final volume takes a supplemental and crowning viewpoint, examining “Lassus’ Europe,” the composer as internationalist, by way of his musical publications. This program thus gives us a sampling of the material he circulated through Europe via various publishers, whose industry entered its first surge in the 16th Century.

Lassus was amazingly prolific in a range of forms, using texts in many different languages. For each language, he seemed able to assume a different and appropriate musical personality.

Of the 20 selections presented, 9 have Latin texts, mostly psalms, but also secular words. Of the others, 4 are French chansons, and 3 have Italian texts, with only 2 in German. The vernacular pieces vary in character from sweetness to rowdiness, with frequent humor, even dirty: vulgar serenades opposing a hand-some German partnership of the Magnificat.

In terms of rich polyphonic formalism, some of the Latin items are quite striking: there are ones scored for 10, 11, 12, and 13 parts, there’s an 8-voice motet for double choir, and the final selection is a rich Psalm setting in 12 parts for triple choir. I could go on and on describing the variety of them all. Let’s just say that this is one of the most rewarding surveys of Lassus’s music in short forms I have encountered—and almost none of these selections have otherwise appeared in recordings.

Meunier draws on a pool of 17 singers (6 sopranos, 3 countertenors, 5 tenors, a baritone, and 2 basses)—one of them is even Erik Van Nevel, a leader of his own much-recorded ensemble. As variously combined, in groups from 3 to 13 singers, they blend beautifully; and the direction is always stylish, sensitive, and fresh. In two selections an organist is added.

The recording is a joy for its robust yet
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GIMBEL

KUTAVICIUS: The Seasons
Darius Meskauskas, narr; Vilnius Municipal Choir; St Christopher Chamber Orchestra/ Donatas Katkus—Toccata 200—78 minutes

Bronius Kutavicius (b 1932) is one of Lithuania’s most honored composers. He has adopted a minimalist style, but his trenchant sequences of harmonies and rhythms are root- ed in Lithuanian folk music and a brand of primitivism that’s very much of the earth. His libretto for this oratorio composed just a few years ago was supplied by Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714-80), a Lutheran clergyman and writer whose poetic call to virtue suggests that life is best lived by following the examples of plants, and emotional progressions of the natural world. I confess that when I saw the title, I wondered if I was in for a Baltic take on Haydn’s galumphing, good-natured orato- rio of the same name.

No. This Seasons is as dark, menacing, and unnervingly bleak a traversal of the natural cycle as I could ever imagine. The narrator intones the opening ‘Joys of Spring’ amially enough, but when the orchestra emerges, the minimalist patterns are (in the annotator’s words) “primordial, elemental, and more cos- mical than human”. Shades of (words) “primordial, elemental, and more cos- mical than human”. Despite a peasant celebration or two, Kutavicius summer becomes no trip to the beach. Despite a peasant celebration or two, Kutavicius summer becomes no trip to the beach. In the hotter months, we hear the mic than human”. Shades of (words) “primordial, elemental, and more cos- mical than human”. Despite a peasant celebration or two, Kutavicius summer becomes no trip to the beach. In the hotter months, we hear the

KUULA: Festive March; South Ostrobothnian Suites; Prelude & Fugue
Turku Philharmonic/ Leif Segerstam
Ondine 1270—72 minutes

Of the works here, the Prelude and Fugue and the Ostrobothnian Suite 2 are also on a Dutton album of Toivo Kuula’s work (Feb 2012). The Festive March (1910) and for that matter, all the works on the record are the sort of attractive light classics they used to play at pops concerts. The march is a Sibelian piece, well scored and with immediate appeal.

The two suites (1901 and 1913) display some good musical language and are well orchestrated. The ‘Rain in the Forest’ section could be a clinic for musical impressionism. In addition to studying under Jaenefelt, Kuula also went to Italy to work with Enrico Bossi—quite a contrast in mentors. The Pre- lude and Fugue was a result. The prelude is a lively symphonic dance. The fugue begins on the strings only, the rest of the orchestra entering gradually to good effect. In general, Segerstam’s approach to the music is more expansive and epic. Brabbins’s on the Dutton is more unified and controlled. It’s worth get- ting both, as the Brabbins has a bit of Kuula’s fine vocal music with orchestra. Segerstam’s PR photos has him with lank white hair and beard, looking like a genial Norse frost giant. He seems to enjoy the role.

LARSEN: Trio; Shifting Through the Ruins; Viola Sonata; Up, Where the Air Gets Thin; 4 on the Floor
Susanne Montzer, s; Curtis Macomber, v; James Dunham, va; Norman Fischer, vc; Deborah Dun- ham, db; Craig Butler, p
Navona 601—68 minutes
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LASSUS: Biographie musicale, Vol. V
Vox Luminus/ Lionel Meunier
Musique in Wallonie (Music in Wallonia—that phase of the career of the great Orlandus Lassus, or Roland or Orlando di Lassus (you choose among the various name forms he used). He was born about 1530 in the Franco-Flemish province of Hainaut, and died in Munich in 1594, the most prolific and respected composer of his day.

The first four single-disc releases (1158, 1268, 1369, 1474) actually covered the full span of his career. None of those have been reviewed in these pages, to the best of my knowledge. This final volume takes a supple- mentary and crowning viewpoint, examining “Lassus l’European”, the composer as interna- tionalist, by way of his musical publications. This program thus gives us a sampling of the material he circulated through Europe via vari- ous publishers, whose industry entered its first surge in the 16th Century.

Lassus was amazingly prolific in a range of forms, using texts in many different languages. For each language, he seemed able to assume a different and appropriate musical personali- ty. Of the 20 selections presented, 9 have Latin texts, mostly psalms, but also secular words. Of the others, 4 are French chansons, and 3 have Italian texts, with only 2 in German. The vernacular pieces vary in character from sweetness to rowdiness, with frequent humor, even dirty: vulgar serenades opposing a hand- some German parody of the Magnificat.

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Meunier draws on a pool of 17 singers (6 sopranos, 3 countertenors, 5 tenors, a baritone, and 2 basses)—one of them is even Erik Van Nevel, a leader of his own much-recorded ensemble. As variously combined, in groups from 3 to 13 singers, they blend beautifully; and the direction is always stylish, sensitive, and fresh. In two selections an organist is

LANGE-MULLER: Trio; see GADE

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The recording is a joy for its robust yet
clear sound, both analytic and beautiful. As with other releases by this label and in this series, the packaging is ample: extensive notes and full texts with translations, bound into a book-like album.

Whether as part of the full five-volume series, or just on its own, this is a release that every admirer of the great Lassus should have.

**LIGETI:** Piano Concerto; Cello Concerto; Violin Concerto; **BARTOK:** Contrasts; 2-Piano & Percussion Sonata

Jeanne-Marie Conquer, v; Pierre Strauch, vc; Ensemble Intercontemporain; Matthias Pinnusch—Alpha 217 [2CD] 1:48

A valuable pairing of two great 20th Century Hungarians. You will never hear a better performance of the two Bartok chamber works. There are any number of competent recordings of these great pieces, but you might not need any of them any more if you get this set. Bartok’s brilliant quasi-late Beethoven exercise (the sonata) gets a particularly eloquent and clearly articulated fine playing. The three Ligeti concertos span the century. The Cello Concerto (1966) is the most self-consciously “avant-garde” of the three. The first movement juxtaposes clusters with solo single pitches from the soloist; It continues the freely floating ambience with cosmic clouds and quiet scalings drifting along in space. The Piano Concerto (1986) has a more traditional outline, but is clearly “advanced” music of its time. Like all of this music, much of it has the atmosphere of tragedy. The work contrasts the tragic background of its displaced opening with a jazzy dance with wild polyrhythms moving into arid territory with dense clusters and scary noises. III is a polyrhythmic etude out of Bartok’s Mikrokosmos, IV is a chaotic recitative, and the finale is a dizzy conclusion ending with a defeated woodblock tap. It’s a great showpiece, brilliantly played by Hideki Nagano and her brave colleagues.

The Violin Concerto (1992), despite its microtones and dirty ocarinas, is also basically traditional in outline, but even more concentrated. There are plenty of wild Ligetian polyrhythms and busy textures, but there is also a gentle, highly moving aria for his brother who died in a concentration camp (Ligeti was Jewish and barely escaped the Nazism). The cotted lyricism of III and fuzzy passaggadia of IV are clearly expressively related. The finale is a lengthy coda, ending with a surprising flip off. Violinist Conquer is fully up to the formidable task.

An invaluable release for anyone interested in the music of last century. Excellent sound and production.

**GIMBEL**

**LISZT:** Piano Pieces

Valses Oubliees (4); Transcendental Etudes 4, 7, 8; Etude en 12 Exercices 9; Petite Valse Favorite; Marche au Supplice from Symphony Fantasique; Liebestraum 2; Apparitions 1; En revue; Schlaflos Frage und Antwort; Trauervorspiel und Trauermarsch; Bagatelle ohne Tonart; Little Piano Pieces 1-5

Olivia Sham—Ave 2355—78 minutes

I fear this was poorly marketed. The only mention that old restored Erard pianos—a Paris and a London model—were used here along with a modern Steinway is in the tiny print on the back of the booklet; the cover neither alludes to nor depicts 19th-Century instruments. So it would be easy to overlook this as just another Liszt recital and miss some revelatory performances thanks to the choice of instrument.

For instance, the ‘Petite Valse Favorite’, an otherwise vacuous ball of fluff, evokes the sound of a harp—I know, it’s not a very original treatment of the piano, but it’s so convincing on the feathery, silvery pianissimo high register of the old Erard pianos. The high notes of the Erards are the most ear-catching, though the bass is fuzzy and undernourished (especially the French model) and midrange a bit cloudy and rough.

The old instruments complement Ms Sham’s poise, dare I say feminine touch—the booklet photos show her to be a slender, waifish young woman. This is Liszt as I’d imagine played by Chopin, and even the pieces played on the Steinway—about half of them—are as delicate as any I’ve heard, Sham’s fingers dancing so light and frisky atop the keys, flicking out glittering handfuls of notes so calm and nonchalant, as if it’s all effortless child’s play. Still, she can thunder with the best of them, as in the ‘Trauervorspiel und Trauermarsch’, a lugubrious and dramatic rarity from Liszt’s last year. There are so many fantastic Liszt interpreters these days!

The old Erards sound beautifully restored, as good as any I’ve heard; and the recording, done at three different locales though you’d never know it, is gorgeous and refined. Altogether a lovely and fascinating recital.

**WRIGHT**

**LISZT:** Violin Pieces

Grand Duo Concertant; Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth; Ethelippedam; Hungarian Rhapsody 12; Elegy 2; Romance Oublee; La Luguire Gondola Uff Wallin; Roland Pontinen, p

BIS 2085 [SACD] 60 minutes

This is about half of Liszt’s violin music, and most of these pieces either started as or were later transcribed for solo piano by Liszt, except the Grand Duo Concertant and Ethelippedam, the former a virtuosic and rapid variation set calculated to lift an audience rapturously to its feet, the latter a plaintive and sorrowing piece written for the wedding of good friend and violinist, Ede Remenyi.

I’ve heard most of these works as piano solos and they’re even better with violin—especially the Hungarian Rhapsody 12, where the soulful and fiery violin heightens the gypsy flavor of Liszt’s original. Mr Wallin and Mr Pontinen have played as a duo for a quarter century, so their technical and expressive unification is no surprise—they truly breathe as one.

Sound quality is superior and typical of BIS, both instruments gorgeous, though I could hear no appreciable difference between the stereo and surround-sound layers of the SACD. I can’t imagine listening again to the Grand Duo except by accident because it’s the first track, but this recital is otherwise very satisfying and moving, and I hope these artists together a lovely and fascinating recital.

**WRIGHT**

**LISZT:** Petrarch Sonnets; see SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Pieces; see BRAHMS

**MAGNARD:** Trio; Violin Sonata

Maximilian Hornung, vc; Genevieve Laurenceau, v; Oliver Trifendi, p—CPO 777 765—79 minutes

Alberic Magnard (1865-1914) is in a fold with Vincent d’Indy and Charles Koechlin as one of France’s most underrated composers, not least by the French themselves. His music has a solidity of workmanship and a melodic elegance and dignity that gives it true distinction. If this is achieved at the expense of lightness, well, there are plenty of French lightweights— who shall here be nameless—to level the scales.

The Trio (1905) begins with some compact writing for the cello and piano in low register. They soon emerge from the basement to a passage with heavy use of dotted-note themes. The movement drives to a forceful conclusion with fierce determination. In character, if not specific sound, it’s like the first movement of Mahler’s Sixth.

It is more thoughtful and lyric. The parts are sometimes so softly voiced as to suggest a string orchestra. To adapt a Debussy line, the cello must sometimes be a super-cello. The scherzo may be “in the tempo of a waltz”, but with its oblique phrasing it’s definitely not one. The trio has a catchy tune, harmonized in thirds, suggesting French folk music. French folk music is the best in Europe—and the least availed of by its composers. The finale at first seems fragmentary—a rarity in Magnard. He develops the ensuing fugato to a passage of deep, ringing sonorities. The fugato returns under a hymn-like melody moving the music to a note of exaltation.

All 45 minutes when Magnard’s Violin Sonata first came out in 1901, some people called it a symphony for two players. I is an extended essay with complex ideas and ornamental lines for the violinist. The music has several mood changes, with peaks of stormy majesty leading to an incisive ending. It has a gentler violin tonal passage, but the former a virtuosic and vapid variation set calculated to lift an audience rapturously to its feet.

The relief theme has a calm piano part, the violin now acting as an agitated paniment. The theme has a calm piano part, the violin now acting as an agitated voice-over. The movement has a Brucknerian scope. Its emotion is contained, as in Ravel; and as in true life, it wears all the longer. Ill has sharply punctuated passages. The second theme, as is often the case with Magnard, is one of unadorned nobility. IV begins with what sounds like notes picked out at random. The main theme assembled them into a whole. After an extended dance passage, the music calms, helped by some of Magnard’s clearest part-writing. The closing leaves the impression of the music being recollected in tranquility.

The performances and sound are excellent with rich, clean tone and utter sympathy with Magnard’s uncompromising musical language.

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I fear this was poorly marketed. The only mention that old restored Erard pianos—a Paris and a London model—were used here along with a modern Steinway is in the tiny print on the back of the booklet; the cover neither alludes to nor depicts 19th-Century instruments. So it would be easy to overlook this as just another Liszt recital and miss some revelatory performances thanks to the choice of instruments.

For instance, the 'Petite Valse Favorite', an otherwise vacuous ball of fluff, evokes the sound of a harp—I know, it's not a very original treatment of the piano, but it's so convincing on the feathery, silvery pianissimo high register of the old Erard pianos. The high notes of the Erards are the most ear-catching, though the bass is fuzzy and undernourished of course.

The Trio (1905) begins with some compact enriched in the music of last century. Excellent bidding task.

**LISZT:** Violin Pieces; Grand Duo Concertant; Die Zelle in Nonnenwerth; Épithalam; Hungarian Rhapsody 12; Élegy 2; Romance Oubliée; La Lugubre Gondola; Hungarian Rhapsody 12; Waltz; Roland Poinfinet, p
BIS 2085 [SACD] 60 minutes

This is about half of Liszt's violin music, and most of these pieces either started as or were later transcribed for solo piano by Liszt, except the Grand Duo Concertant and Épithalam, the former a virtuosic and vivid variation set calculated to lift an audience rapturously to its feet, the latter a plaintive and soaring piece written for the wedding of good friend and violinist, Ede Reményi.

I've heard most of these works as piano solos and they're even better with violin—especially the Hungarian Rhapsody 12, where the soloist and violinist dovetail the gypsy flavor of Liszt's original. Mr Wallin and Mr Poinfinet have played as a duo for a quarter century, so their technical and expressive unambiguity is no surprise—they truly breathe as one.

Sound quality is superior and typical of SACD, both instruments gorgeous, though I could not appreciate the difference between the stereo and surround-sound layers of the SACD. I can't imagine listening again to the stereo version, except by accident because it's the first track, but this recital is otherwise very satisfying and moving, and I hope these recordings will rest the record of Liszt's violin music.

The Trio (1905) begins with some compact enriched in the music of last century. Excellent bidding task.

**LISZT:** Piano Pieces; see SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Pieces; see BRAHMS

**MAGNARD:** Trio; Violin Sonata
Maximilian Hormung, vc; Genevieve Laureanze, v; Oliver Triendl, p—CPO 777 765—79 minutes

Alberic Magnard (1865-1914) is in a fold with Vincent d'Indy and Charles Koechlin as one of France's most underrated composers, not least by the French themselves. His music has a specific sound, it's like the first movement of Mahler's Sixth.

It is more thoughtful and lyric. The parts are sometimes so fully voiced as to suggest a string orchestra. To adapt a Debussy line, the cello must sometimes be a super-cello. The scherzo may be "in the tempo of a waltz," but with its oblique phrasing it's definitely not one. The trio has a catchy tune, harmonized in thirds, suggesting French folk music. French folk music is the best in Europe—and the least availed of by its composers. The final at first seems fragmentary—a rarity in Magnard. He develops the ensuing fugato to a passage of deep, ringing sonorities. The fugato returns under a hymn-like melody moving the music to a note of exaltation.

All of this music, when Magnard's Violin Sonata first came out in 1901, some people called it a symphony for two players. I is an extended essay with complex ideas and ornamental lines for the violinist. The music has several mood changes, with peaks of stormy majesty leading to an incisive ending. It has a gentle violin tone and a slow, spacious tempo. The relief theme has a calm piano part, the violin now acting as an agitated voice-over. The movement has a Brucknerian scope. Its emotion is contained, as in Ravel; and as in true life, it wears all the longer. I is sharply punctuated passages. The second theme, as is often the case with Magnard, is one of unabridged nobility. IV begins with what sounds like notes picked out at random. The main theme assembly them into a whole. After an extended dance passage, the music calms, helped by some of Magnard's clearest part-writing. The closing leaves the impression of the music being recollected in tranquility.

The performances and sound are excellent with rich, clean tone and utter sympathy with Magnard's uncompromising musical language.

**MAGNARD:** Trio; Violin Sonata
Maximilian Hormung, vc; Genevieve Laureanze, v; Oliver Triendl, p—CPO 777 765—79 minutes

Alberic Magnard (1865-1914) is in a fold with Vincent d'Indy and Charles Koechlin as one of France's most underrated composers, not least by the French themselves. His music has a solidity of workmanship and a melodie elegance and dignity that gives it true distinction.

If this is achieved at the expense of lightness, well, there are plenty of French lightweights— who shall here be nameless—to level the scales.

The Trio (1905) begins with some compact writing for the cello and piano in low register. They soon emerge from the basement to a passage with heavy use of dotted-note themes. The movement drives to a forceful conclusion with fierce determination. In character, if not specific sound, it's like the first movement of Mahler's Sixth.

**O'CONNOR**
MAHLER: Symphony 4
Dorothea Roschmann, s; Concertgebouw/ Mariss Jansons—RCO 15004 [SACD] 60 minutes

This is my third review of a Mahler symphony with Mariss Jansons leading the Concertgebouw. Both of the earlier performances were quite romantic, and the powerful Sixth worked better than the Fifth. Mahler’s classic orientation Fourth Symphony stands to be a poor candidate for Jansons’s treatment, and for the most part proves to be the case. Certainly it has moments of romanticism that can be indulged, but this is not a work to wallow in. True, there are performances that challenge those contentions, but the Jansons is not one of them.

The problems are apparent from the first few phrases with their overcalculated surges. Jansons’s conducting is fussy, sometimes tense, with every note in its place, every entrance and block of music literally inserted into its spot, often while playing up solos at the expense of orchestral textures. The effect before the major climax, with the clipped trumpet presentment of the Fifth Symphony, borders on the mechanical. The entrance to the coda is very marked, beat to beat. The result is at once affectionate (good) and episodic (not so good) in a work that requires a Mozartean flow to work its magic. What we have, then, is a jewel-like movement with little real melodic flow. It might appeal to some listeners as a “modern” approach to this music, but most listeners will find it too episodic.

II is fast, forced, and somewhat on the harsh side. The violin solos tend to be pushy, similar to the opening of I. The phrasing in general is quite marked, and again the trumpet entrance is clipped.

The one movement that really works is III. There remains that tendency to push some phrases, and some listeners will find the final climax overblown, but for the most part this is fine romantic Mahler, contrasting relaxed and dark with the more frenetic and menial is a relief after the previous movement. Finally, we get some flow in this performance, though the langh melody near the end is a little flat.

The opening is ethereal, the wonderful string tone is a huge plus, and the dark climax is well built. If the climax is slightly overblown, the horn and oboe duet is exquisite in tone, phrasing, and balance.

The finale does not supply the peace one expects until the last section. Jansons pushes the early temps more than the performances I prefer, but he’s not alone in doing so, though the manner here touches on frenetic. This is a concert recording, and I believe that soprano Dorothea Roschmann was a substitute. She sounds pushed by the fastish tempo; and her dark soprano, fast vibrato, and some scooping do not seem right for music whose composer wrote, “To be sung with childlike and serene expression; absolutely without parody!” Only at her last section, with its slower tempo, does Roschmann seem to settle in. Then the effect is quite beautiful, dark sound and all.

The Concertgebouw plays exquisitely and seems to be giving Jansons exactly what he wants. The close, clear sound is very clean and reinforces his approach.

MAHLER: Symphonies 7-9
Sally Matthews, Alilsh Tynan, Sarah Tynan, Sarah Connolly, Anne Marie Owens, Stefan Vinke, Mark Stone, Stephen Gadd; Philharmonia/ Lorin Maazel—Signum 362 [GCD 430]

Maazel was no stranger to Mahler. He gave us the first Vienna Philharmonic integral recording, which included memorable performances of Symphonies 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, and the Adagio of 10, as well as some lovely movements along the way. There was also a strikingly good Die Meistersinger from Munich and a cycle with the NYPO that is widely available but not commercially releasable.

Here we have a series of concert performances in London in 2011. Signum is the distributor of the orchestra’s own recordings, which it sells for a relatively modest price.

Before I get into the (considerable) merits of these recordings, it’s worth it to take a moment to salute Maazel’s willingness to revisit and rethink his interpretations. And to take the music wherever he thought it should go. These are very different performances from his Viennese, American, and other Mahler recordings; and it’s a testament to him that in his 80s, he didn’t dish out a warmed-up version of what he had given us before or give us the same thing with some improved details.

7 is, I think we can all agree, the strangest and most tangential Mahler symphony. Here Mahler combines a seemingly random series of motives and ideas and throws a whole passel of them into the air, expecting them to create a kind of musical maze where the listener is constantly and unpredictably redirected. Good 7s are rare. Conductors who blast through create an incoherent mess. Ones who go quick and light wind up with something that is chaotic and annoying rather than enticing. Moderate tempos without careful attention to shape creates something rambling and incoherent and boring.

In a category of its own, Klemperer is slow and shambling, like some sort of half-dead thing shuffling along, with only occasional signs of life. Yet, I had a smart friend who insisted that only Klemperer got the piece. I thought he was insane until this performance came along.

Maazel takes very broad temps, like Klemperer. The big difference is that he is able to keep the orchestra together and fill the musical spaces created by those temps. And magic follows.

I is not extraordinarily broad in its shadowy introduction, but it doesn’t speed up and start nattering as most other performances do. Instead, Maazel takes seriously the “ma non troppo” (not too much) qualification to Mahler’s allegro and phrases breathe and grow. Accents that elsewhere sound like ridiculous point-making become strangely ambivalent Mahler cadences. There are phrase ends that are really beginnings—or Remington mansion stairways to nowhere. The moonlight B-major interlude (looking back to Symphony 3’s B-major finale) is a climactic moment. Maazel does it nicely brought out with vivid Philharmonia playing. The cow-bell interlude is appropriate—occasionally it seems to be giving Jansons exactly what he wants.

IV is tender and delicate. It looks forward to Das Lied and back to the earliest symphonies. Maazel lets it float gently along, with a few moments of intense passion surfacing as called for.

V is the hardest movement to play. It too often comes across as manic gabble or a drunken riff on the Prelude to Die Meistersinger. Not here. Maazel preserves the strangeness and builds a structure that the mind can make sense of. He also builds as he goes along, so that the end actually seems like an accumulation and discharge of the energy of the whole work.

This performance made me rethink my understanding of the symphony and see it as the masterpiece that it is. The music rang in my head for days after I heard it.

6 is a broader revisal of Maazel’s very good Vienna performance. The singers aren’t the international stars assembled for the earlier recording, but they blend better and are individually more than adequate. Tennstedt (concert video on EMI), Canals, Davis, and Mitsoukis (both notable performances of Orfeo) still own this piece on recordings and make it overwhelming. That said, I moves forward powerfully and II keeps tension building from beginning to end. This performance stands up very nicely.

9 is a performance astonishing than 7.

I is a revelation. I once read that Mengelberg’s performance of this work took 35 minutes in the first movement. I couldn’t imagine how that could be. It usually takes 23-28 minutes. A longer time than that is usually a warning that something like a shapeless, pulseless Levine performance awaits. Not here!”

Maazel (probably like Mengelberg), as in 7, gives the music extra room and lets it expand.
MAHLER: Symphony 4
Dorothea Roschmann; Bruckner Orchester Linz

This is my third review of a Mahler symphony with Bruckner Orchester Linz conducted by Christian Thielemann. The orchestra is one of the world’s great Mahler ensembles, and its musicians are used to performing Mahler’s music with the finesse and power that are required for the composer’s demanding works.

The opening of the symphony is a powerful statement, with the orchestra building to a dramatic climax that sets the tone for the entire work. The second movement, “Agnus Dei,” is a beautiful and serene piece that contrasts sharply with the opening movement. The orchestra’s performance of this movement is exquisite, with the strings playing with a smooth and even tone that is characteristic of Bruckner’s style.

The third movement, “Rondo,” is a more robust piece, with the orchestra playing with a great deal of energy and drive. The finale of the symphony is a powerful and moving piece, with the orchestra building to a dramatic climax that is both powerful and emotional.

Overall, the Bruckner Orchester Linz’s performance of Mahler’s Symphony 4 is a powerful and moving piece that is both technically and musically impressive. The orchestra’s musicians are clearly well-versed in Mahler’s music, and they play with a great deal of passion and conviction. This is a symphony that is well worth hearing, and I highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in Mahler’s music.
March/April 2016

American Record Guide

MALPIERO: Bazzarie Luminose; Impres- sioni; Armonia; La Siesta; Tarlo; Hortus Con- clusus; Variazione Sul Pantomima
Sabrina Alberti, p—Tactus 881302 — 65 minutes

As I had little knowledge about Malipiero, this recording interested me owing to his formal freedom and non-thematic passages. Beginning with his earliest piano compositions, this is a brief overview of his creativity. These works use archaic forms stretching into the medieval period, apparent in the ‘Madrigale’ movement of Impressioni. But none of the pieces particularly moved me. There is interesting harmony in Impressioni, and ‘La Siesta’ is a rambunctious work with fascinating thematic materials. Alberti advocates that work well, with a declamatory style.

KANG

MANCUSI: String Suite; Trumpet Concerto; Orchestra Concerto; Tonspiele; polkas
Joe Hofbauer, tpt; Orchestras/ Guido Mancusi
Paladin 66 [2CD] 85 minutes

Guido Mancusi was born in 1986 near Naples, sang in the Vienna Boys Choir, and earned degrees in Vienna. Since 1998 he has been principal conductor of the Schönbrunn Festi- val Orchestra, and he is conductor-in-resi- dence at the Vienna Volksoper. Here he con- ducts those orchestras and two others in a pro- gram of his own music.

His lush polka style is a pleasant com- bination of tuneful melodies with harmonies that are dissonant but not atonal. The album opens with a four-movement, 14-minute Suite (1988) for string orchestra. Based on the letters in Bach’s and Shostakovich’s initials, the move- ments (Overture, Rumba, Waltz I-II, Quick- step) actually include two movements. The soloist in Mancusi’s 2-movement, 12- minute Trumpet Concerto (1989). He has a full and warm tone, but he sounds much better in the fast, energetic II than in the slow, lyrical I. The PAN European Philharmonia gives both of these works vivid, committed readings.

One might think that the Budapest Con- cert Orchestra would be a good choice to play Mancusi’s attractive, 15-minute Concerto for Orchestra (1993)—a Hungarian orchestra for an homage to Bartok, after all—but the play- ing is often droopy or rigid. The Vienna Volksoper players sound much better in the 13-minute Tonspiele (2015), where the many solos are played with aplomb.

The rest of the program is light-hearted, with a galop, a waltz, and six polkas. The 9- minute ‘Kirschblüten’ (Cherry Blossoms, a ‘Waltz in the Old Style’) is by far the largest of these: it is a rambunctious work with exciting harmonies and funny titles like ‘Schrimspsalz’ and ‘Running Sushi.’

KILPATRICK

MARais: Suites for 2 Viols; Meliton; Tombeaux; Les Voix Humaines
Jonathan Dunford, Sylvia Abramowicz, gamba; Thomas Dunford, lute
Musica Ficta 8024 — 55 minutes

Marin Marais (1656-1728) is perhaps the great- est Baroque composer of music for the viola da gamba. He wrote five extensive collections of these suites are from Book 1, published in 1686 and a second, published in 1698. The Tombeau de Mr Meliton is a nine-minute movement from that book while Les Voix Humaines is from Book 2 of 1701, here played in a transcription for solo archlute by the per- former, Thomas Dunford.

As you may have realized, these are both a family affair. Jonathan Dunford and Sylvia Abramowicz are man and wife, and Thomas is their son. The liner notes are by Jonathan, presenting in French and English nicely detailed descriptions of the music and the instruments.

I have many recordings that have both of these suites and a third that covers the entire Book 1. Jordi Savall, Christoph Coin, Ton Koopman, and Hopkinson Smith have almost this exact program (Astree 7769; not in our index) omitting two gavottes from the G- major Suite and Les Voix Humaines. They also play it with string strength more than Dunford, and there is more interplay among the instruments.

The Dunfords play it with less youthful enthusiasm than the Dunfords and more improvised ornaments. Philippe Pierlot, Sophie Watillon, Rainer Zipperling,
The opening is poised and moves forward broadly, inexorably. The huge D-major climax seems to last forever (Solti made much of this moment, but Maazel is much more powerful), and the major-key music that follows basses in bright sunlight. The next big climax, which suddenly collapses into horn octaves on the opening syncopated rhythm with menacing (sardonic) timpani underneath, is doubly powerful. It’s a striking negation of the major-key power that preceded it. This is the scale of this movement; huge forces and counter-forces. Everything seems to be alive with meaning; the sudden depths of the water when the trombones and tuba appear after the horn syncopations, the eerie ascending figurations on the bass clarinet and the bassoons, the futile attempts to establish a stable D major and the repeated collapses into darkness. Maazel is among the best at capturing the ghostly transformation of the “farewell” call from the rich harmonies of the horns to the ghostly echoes of the stopped horns and finally the skeletal chorales of muted trombones. The build to the final huge climax and collapse has almost seismic impact. The sudden return of the opening syncopation on the trombones (Death marches into the room) is crushing but not overstated. The coda brings its eerie horn and flute cadenza and a last surge that freezes (melts?) into a kind of sweet resignation: full of yearning and tenderness. It’s sweet and desolate at the same time, but peaceful. You know that more is coming, but not what.

II is not as witty and nasty as the VPO Maazel or Karajan or Klempser. It’s a little heavier and more broadly aware. The caricatures in the three dances (including the pastoral trio) are interesting. They’re still devastating and, when appropriate, brutal—and maybe even more grim, since you’re looking at degraded humanity, not cartoon drawings. The coda is perfectly sinister and eerie. III is not the blazing comet of some other performances such as Solti or Karajan. Maazel makes it a slightly slower tempo so that the sheer nastiness and wrongness can sink in better and not get lost in the exciting shine of the playing. The pointless counterpoint and babbling commentaries sound as vapid and deadly as can be. The trio is an oasis of human feeling that is destroyed by the musical nonsense. Nonetheless, Maazel doesn’t take the accelerating tempos as an invitation to show off how fast his orchestra can go, the emphasis is on the music exhausting itself with meaningless speed, not the blaze of the playing. Seems right to me.

IV is again at the upper range limits of time. It takes 29 minutes and fills them perfectly. The movement is an attempt to establish peace and solidarity after the tragedy of I and the inanity and violence of II and III. Mahler gives us a chorale that sounds like the slow movement of Beethoven’s Op. 135 Quartet—a promising start—but gives it a bass line that keeps slipping ominously into harmonic instability. What kind of foundation does this chorale rest on? The movement is a battle between the hope and peace of the chorale and the quicksand bass. Maazel doesn’t have the strings to work with that Karajan (Berlin) or Giulini (Philadelphia) had, but he uses what he has superbly. The bass lines are powerful. The upper strings soar and sing. The two “lost” interludes are as bleak as can be. The final wave of chaos building to the giant climactic chord is overwhelming. Then comes that fiery bridge of string tone leading down to the glowing haven (heaven?) of the opening chorale, that magical music of the strings and winds with string descants soaring above and powerful affirmation from the finally stable basses. And then even heaven dissolves and the movement resolves into a dreamy shadow with cello song and the shadowy violas fading into eternity. Even the silence that follows is part of the music.

All in all, this is quite a set. It helps if you know this music already so that you can appreciate the boldness and power of 7 and 9 and the solidity of 8. 7 is probably the best available now. 9 joins the company of the Karajan and Giulini at the top. The Philharmonia plays beautifully. It’s not Berlin, Vienna, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, or Cleveland; but its strings are solid and warm and the winds and brass are world-class. Concert recordings bring smudges but they hardly matter here.

I would not want to be without 7 and 9, and the price is right.

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Joe Hofbauer, tp; Orchestras/ Guido Mancusi
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Guido Mancusi was born in 1986 near Naples, sang in the Vienna Boys Choir, and earned degrees in Vienna. Since 1998 he has been principal conductor of the Schonbrunn Festival Orchestra, and he is conductor-in-residence at the Vienna Volkskop. Here he conducts those orchestras and two others in a program of his own music. His music style is a pleasant combination of tuneful melodies with harmonies that are dissonant but not atonal. The album opens with a four-movement, 14-minute Suite (1988) for string orchestra. Based on the letters in Bach’s and Shostakovich’s initials, the movements (Overture, Rumba, Waltz I-II, Quickstep) are lively and interesting. Joe Hofbauer is the soloist in Mancusi’s 2-movement, 12-minute Trumpet Concerto (1989). He has a full and warm tone, but he sounds much better in the fast, energetic II than in the slow, lyrical I. The PAN European Philharmonia gives both of these works vivid, committed readings.

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The rest of the program is light-hearted, with a galop, a waltz, and six polkas. The 9-minute ‘Kirschkblüten’ (Cherry Blossoms, a ‘Waltz in the Old Style’) is by far the largest of these entertaining pieces. Dedicated to the children of the 2013 Fukushima nuclear disaster, the work very skillfully includes Japanese musical references. The excellent reading is by the Schonbrunn Festival Orchestra.

The other seven pieces are played with enthusiasm dittym the PAN European Philharmonia. ‘Schwiegermuttergallup’ is dedicated to Mancusi’s mother-in-law, who (he writes) “is not only witty but can also clean the house like nobody’s business”. ‘Ganz Neue Pizzicatopola’ (Entirely New Pizzicato Polka) is a ‘polka française’. The rest of these clever, skillfully crafted ditties bear the ‘polka schnell’ designation and have funny titles like ‘Schrimpssalat’ and ‘Running Sushi’.

KANG

MARAS: Suites for 2 Violas; Meliton Tombeau; Les Voix Humaines
Jonathan Dunford, Sylvia Abramowicz, gamba; Thomas Dunford, lute
Musica Ficta 8024 — 55 minutes

Marin Marais (1656-1728) is perhaps the great Baroque composer of music for the viola da gamba. He wrote five extensive collections of these suites are from Book 1, published in 1686 and a basso continuo line added in 1689. The Tombeau de Mr Meliton is a nine-minute movement from that book while Les Voix Humaines is from Book 2 of 1701, here played in a transcription for solo archlute by the performer, Thomas Dunford.

As you may have realized, these performances come as a family affair. Jonathan Dunford and Sylvia Abramowicz are man and wife, and Thomas is their son. The liner notes are by Jonathan, presenting in French and English nicely detailed descriptions of the music and the instruments.

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varano chetti. After a move to Rome, Marchetti's success, but enough to encourage the January 18, 1902; composed seven operas, of composition. Filippo Marchetti was born in Bolognola, in modern times. That's it! No libretto, no opera: three of them is the fifth. His first, Gentile da Austria (composed 1856-61, libretto by Checchetti), music. Marchetti's music sounds much like the weaker music from middle-period Verdi. There are some good melodies, but hardly up to the drama of the moment or memorable. Marchetti's music has been castigated as having "a few pleasant moments, but it reveals rather more shortcomings in its lack of variety and its weakness of invention and dramatic tension" (Andrea Lanza, New Grove Dictionary of Opera) and "long passages of explanatory material are set to nondescript vocal lines supported by tiresomely repeated little motifs. Some of the music seems to rarely attain genuine elevation... A sprawling work, reminiscent of Meyerbeer and replete with a jiggling divertissement (Act 3), it seriously overtaxed Marchetti's limited powers of inventiveness." (William Ashbrook, ibid).

Whoa! That's quite a condemnation! I must have lower tastes and expectations than these gentlemen. I rather enjoyed the music. Certainly it does not adequately reflect the depths of emotion or underscore the dramatic situations. It is hardly a long-lost masterpiece, but it's quite listenable.

Royal Opera House (London). Two acts, libretto by Giuseppe Checchetti. (London) the less said the better. They sound like Marchetti's limited powers of invention. Theodossiou catches the melancholy of the queen's music. Of the chorus (Coro Lirico Marchigiano) the less said the better. They sound like a pick-up chorus—pick-up from the street gutters. The orchestra (Filarmonica Marchigiana) plays well, with style under Lipton's loving care.

The recording claims to be the first performance in modern times, September 27 & 29, 1998 at the Teatro Pergolesi in Jesi. But the New York Times (May 28, 1984) published a review by Will Crutchfield of performances by the Bel Canto Opera Company. He praises the work, but not the performance. While the recording makes no claim to completeness, it is certainly not complete. Not only are some cuts entirely, but there are also internal cuts in individual items. It lacks the completeness of form common to the era.

George Jellinek in Opera Quarterly (Spring 1997, p. 302) states that a complete bilingual libretto is supplied by Bongiovanni. Missing passages in the recording are even indicated in the libretro! Could it be that this is a reissue (sans libretto)?

PARSONS

MARTUCCI: Trios 1+2

Trios 1+2

Naxos 573438—75 minutes

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909) was one of the few Italians of his time not interested in opera; he, Giovanni Sgambati, and Antonio Bazzini were "known...for establishing a connection between Italian instrumental music and Austrian-German romantic music," says the liner notes. Brahms's influence is notable, even blatant, especially in the Second Trio's opening Allegro. Martucci believed in melody, sonic beauty, and structural coherence; but every few seconds while listening I would think, "Yeah, but someone else has done this better." His ideas aren't inspired enough to live up to the sacred execution, let alone the length of these pieces—Trio 1 is nearly 34 minutes, and No. 2 is 41. I can imagine Max Reger's stereotype whispering, "See, I'm not so bad, am I?"

Gil French was the last to review these trios (Dynamic 132, Jan/Feb 1997), and the engineering was so bad that he really couldn't say anything about the music. The sound here is clean and clear. The Trio Vega is elegant and competent but rather anemic; the music needs flushed cheeks and warmer blood if it is to make an impression.

MAYR: Requiem

Soloists; Mayr Chorus & Ensemble; Franz Hauk

Naxos 573419 [2CD] 116 minutes

The music sounds awfully happy and content for a Requiem; the 'Day of Wrath' sound positively upbeat. Perhaps that is why some critics complain about 18th Century church music that the style lacks the 'gravitas' for the sacred genre. There is not a fugue in this whole piece. But there is much to enjoy in this work, and it could be thought of a discovery—a large unknown work by an almost unknown composer. He wrote about 70 operas and 600 sacred works, almost none of which are performed today. Such is the lot of the composer!

Although his ideas are perhaps not the most original, there is much competence in his working out of those ideas—probably why he was respected as a teacher of Donizetti, among others. Some of this music may be by Donizetti, as orchestrated by Mayr. The music does grow on you as you listen to it, though it seems like a fairly small world, and some movements are more interesting than others (the Kyrie and the Sanctus). No composer on earth can resist using brass for the Tuba mine! and structural coherence; but every few seconds while listening I would think, "Yeah, but some-
Vincent Dumestre, and Siebe Henstra (Ricer- car 205842, 3CD; March/April 1999) play the entire Book I with notable clarity and a natural feeling of moving along. Still, the Dunfords have an enthusiasm in their performances that makes their release rather special. The sound is clear and well balanced.

**D MOORE**

**MARAZZOLI: Combattimenti;** see MONTEVERDI

**Marchetti: Ruy Blas**

Mario Malagnini (Ruy Blas), Dimitra Theodosiou (Maria de Neubourg), Alberto Gazale (Salustio de Bazan), Sylvia Marini (Casilda); Jesi/ Daniel Lipton

Bongiovanni 2237 [2CD] 111 minutes

Bongiovanni offers the slightest information about this recording: cast list, track list (without timings), premiere date, first performance in modern times. That’s it! No libretto, no notes! This might be acceptable for a well-known opera, but not for such an obscure one. A little bit of libretto would be helpful. Filippo Marchetti was born in Bologna, Macerata, February 26, 1831; died in Rome, January 18, 1902; composed seven operas, of which *Ruy Blas* is the fifth. His first, *Gentile da Varano* (Turin, 1856, libretto by Raffaele Marchetti, brother of the composer) was a moderate success, but enough to encourage the impresario to ask for another opera from Marchetti. After a move to Rome, Marchetti became a teacher of singing and composition. His second opera, *Il Demone* (two acts, libretto by Giuseppe Czecchetti) repeated the former’s success; but his third opera, *II Pariar* (composed 1856-61, libretto by Czecchetti), was never produced. His 1856 setting of *Romeo e Giulietta* for Trieste (libretto by Marco Marcelliano Marcello) failed to make a good impression until it was produced at the Teatro Pergolesi in Jesi. But the New York Times (May 28, 1984) published a review by Will Crutchfield of performances by the Bel Canto Opera Company. He praises the work, but not the performance. While the recording makes no claim to completeness, it is certainly not complete. Not only are some scenes cut entirely, but there are also internal cuts in individual items. It lacks the completeness of form common to the era. George Jellinek in *Opera Quarterly* (Spring 2002, p. 302) states that a complete bilingual libretto is supplied by Bongiovanni. Missing passages in the recording are even indicated in the libretto! Could it be that this is a reissue (sans libretto)?

**PARSONS**

**Mayr: Requiem**

Soloists; Mayr Chorus & Ensemble; Franz Hauk

Naxos 573419 [2CD] 116 minutes

The music sounds awfully happy and content for a Requiem; the ‘Day of Wrath’ sound positively upbeat. Perhaps that is why some critics complain about 18th Century church music that the style lacks the “gravitas” for the sacred music genre. There is not a fugue in this whole piece. But there is much to enjoy in this work, and it could be thought of a discovery—a large unknown work by an almost unknown composer. He wrote about 70 operas and 600 sacred works, almost none of which are performed today. Such is the lot of the composer! Although his ideas are perhaps not the most original, there is much competence in his working out of those ideas—probably why he was respected as a teacher of Donizetti, among others. Some of this music may be by Donizetti, as orchestrated by Mayr. This music does grow on you as you listen to it, though it seems like a fairly small world, and some movements are more interesting than others (the Kyrie and the Sanctus). No composer on earth can resist using brass for the Tuba Mirum, which Mayr sets quite nicely. The performances are quite good, with good soloists. The liner notes are a profound exploration of the source material.

**ESTEP**

**Martucci: Trios I+2**

Trio Vega

Naxos 573438—75 minutes

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1900) was one of the few Italians of his time not interested in opera; he, Giovanni Sgambati, and Antonio Bazzini were “known...for establishing a connection between Italian instrumental music and Austro-German romanticism,” says the liner notes. Brahms’s influence is notable, even blatant, especially in the Second Trio’s opening Alle- gro. Martucci believed in melody, sonic beauty, and structural coherence; but every few seconds while listening I would think, “Yeah, but someone else has done this better.” His ideas aren’t inspired enough to live up to the sacred execution, let alone the length of these pieces—Trio I is nearly 34 minutes, and No. 2 is 41. I can imagine Max Reger’s stereotype whispering, “See, I’m not so bad, am I?”

Gill French was the last to review these trios (Dynamic 132, Jan/Feb 1997), and the engineering was so bad that he really couldn’t say anything about the music. The sound here is clean and clear. The Trio Vega is elegant and competent but rather anemic; the music needs flushed cheeks and warmer blood if it is to make an impression.

**HAMILTON**

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For that matter will Daniel Gortler, Daniel Barenboim, or Benjamin Frith. If you already have any of these there is really little reason to replace them. Several performers I have not mentioned also have considerable merit, with not a dub among them. If you want just a selection, there are also many to choose from, though that would take another review.

As to the 14 minutes of the six additional pieces, they may only be chips from the master's workshop, and not prime Mendelssohn, but they are worth having. Just don't expect any undiscovered masterpieces.

Now, as to Fanny's SWW's, Are they worth investing in an additional disc? Definitely. Fanny's music might initially sound a little like her brother's, but closer attention reveals some differences. Since Fanny was an outstanding pianist, some of her pieces are more technically difficult. They are also expressive and transcend any expected shallowness and lack of depth. Some of the pieces, especially later ones, also show a harmonic and melodic style more redolent of the later romantics.

Some collectors may already have these pieces in a once-available recording of Fanny's piano music with Liana Serbescu. If you do not, these performances are fully executed and a superb addendum to the pieces by brother Felix. The notes for both of these recordings are most informative, and I would have to give a special nod to Berlin Classics for including some wonderful early pictures of both Fanny and Felix.

Fortunately I do not have to choose which recordings to own, but you cannot go wrong no matter what the choice.

BECKER

MENDELSSOHN: Violin Concerto; see GADE

MILAN: El Maestro, Book 1
Jose Antonio Escobar, vihuela
Naxos 573305—66 minutes

Renaissance composer Luis Milán's magnum opus is Libro de Musica de Vihuela de Mano Intitulado El Maestro (Book of music for vihuela de mano, titled The Teacher). It is the earliest large collection of music for vihuela de mano, the Spanish version of the lute. It had the same tuning as the Renaissance Lute, but a figure-eight shape and a flat back like the modern guitar. The first book of the collection has 22 fantasias and a set of 6 pavanes, the latter the first Renaissance music many guitar students learn.

Milán's counterpart is graceful and melodic, and his fantasias are lovely. Escobar plays with a full (for vihuela, a notoriously delicate instrument) and varied sound, technical fluency, and grace. This, of course, is a recording most valuable for reference. No one would program 66 minutes of these pieces at one sitting.

KEATON

MONTVERDI; MARAZZOLI: Combattimenti
Le Poeme Harmonique; Vincent Dumestre
Alpha 306—72 minutes

Marco Marazzoli's Fiera Di Farfa (Fair at Farfa) is many things: a 34-minute theatrical depiction of street-market hubbub, a 17th-Century comic intermedio, a newly-discovered manuscript by the director of Le Poeme Harmonique, and a parody of Claudio Monteverdi's dramatic Book 8 madrigal, 'Il Combattimento di Tancred e Clorinda'.

La Fiera Di Farfa was first performed in 1637 at the Barberini palace in Rome as the second intermedio in the debut of the opera Chi Soffre, Speri, jointly composed by Marco Marazzoli and Virgilio Mazzocchi, itself considered to be the first-ever comic opera.

The very fine singers and musicians of Le Poeme Harmonique are well known for bringing to life compositions from past centuries. It's both clever and imaginative programming to put the Monteverdi battle depiction here too, along with two other well-known madrigals, 'Hor Che'l Ciel' and 'Lamento Della Ninfa'. The performances are expressive and very good: the ensemble is vigorous, lamenting, sultry, and heroic by turns. In the market scene stuttering, lisping, and animal noises create a cacophony sure to delight spectators.

Instrumentalists are full partners in the dramas, the laments, and the adventure. Recorded in 2009, this re-release includes a new (2015) and very good interview with conductor Vincent Dumestre as the booklet essay. The interview, aptly titled "The Urge to Unearth Buried Treasures", is detailed and very illuminating.

The texts and translations are on the label's website. I only found them after several dead-end tries using the Alpha label web address given in the booklet. Don't go to that address. Instead, go to the Outhere (parent label) website, then search by artist, then put this release in your shopping cart (you don't have to buy anything), then click on "booklet/literary". The issue comes up on a separate website where the texts and translations are hosted. At least that's where they were at the time I wrote this review. No one should have to do all this to read texts. Labels want to save money on printing, but online texts span three unacceptable problems: not everyone has online access, not everyone wants to read texts on a separate device while they listen, and labels are often not in a position to maintain the availability of texts on websites. Online is not permanent.

For this program in particular, having the text is especially crucial because the enjoyment of parody, subtlety, comedy, and language complexity rests with the nuance, color, and detail of the words. Even high-quality labels let us down time and time again in this respect.

C.MOORE

MOZART: Abduction from the Seraglio
Robin Johannsen (Konstanze), Mari Ericksen (Blonde), Maximilian Schmitt (Belmonte), Julian Pergaudien (Pedrillo), Dmitri Ivashchenko (Osmin); RIAS Chamber Choir, Berlin Academy/ Rene Jacobs
Harmonia Mundi 902214 [2CD] 160 minutes

Sandra Pastrana (Costanza), Tatiana Aguiar (Blonde), Francesco Marsiglia (Belmonte), Carlos Natale (Pedrillo), Filippo Morace (Osmin); Vicenza/ Giovanni Battista Rigon
Bongiovanni 2476 [2CD] 121 minutes

Jacob's recording of this delightful Mozart confection could rightly be said "to make a joyful noise!" The overture is raucous, dashing madly about, beautifully contrasted with the acidic period strings that accompany Belmonte's 'Hier soll ich dich denn sehen,' so delicately delivered. The basso buffo Osmin (Ivashchenko) doesn't rumble on like an out of control juggernaut; rather he is nimble, spry, and labels are often not in a position to maintain the availability of texts on websites. Online is not permanent.

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C.MOORE

American Record Guide
MENDELSSOHN: Songs Without Words, all
Michael Endres, p
Oehms 452 [2CD] 118 minutes
with HENSSEL: Songs Without Words, all
Matthias Kirschnereit, p
Berlin 300639 [3CD] 191 minutes

Felix Mendelssohn’s complete set consists of eight cycles with six pieces in each, takes two discs, and has lots of competitors. Before tackling his sister Fanny’s pieces I will discuss Felix’s in light of competing recordings. It is necessary to mention that Kirschnereit’s timing (discs 1-2) seems to indicate he is much slower than his rival. This is only partly true. His recording includes six additional pieces without opus numbers that were culled from the composer’s manuscripts after he died. They are not part of the original sets. Except for recordings of the composer’s complete piano music, I am unaware of their inclusion with any of the other currently available sets.

German pianist Michael Endres has already given us superlative recordings of Mozart and Bach. To these he now adds Mendelssohn and does so with great distinction. Of benefit to all is the flat piano sound supplied by the engineers. We are fairly close to the piano, but there remains many feet between us and the soundboard—at least enough to keep us from fatigue if we play everything at one hearing. There is variety, but I do not recommend that you do that.

endres, while supple and most sensitive in the slower pieces, brings more drama and tension than usual to the rapid ones. While expressive, he never favours the music, as is the tendency of some pianists. We can bask in the beauty without actually bathing in it.

Fellow Germain Kirschnereit plays sensitively and captures the spirit of each piece well. He is also beautifully recorded in a flat-ltering acoustic. He tends to be a little slower, but about the same in the faster pieces. While Kirschnereit is a little more emotional, it is never overdone. If your preference is for a slightly more straightforward, unaffected presentation Endres might be a better choice. Besides, you do not have to pay for an extra disc of Fanny’s pieces. Still, Kirschnereit does give you those six extra songs without opus numbers.

Choosing between these two pianists is difficult since either one will give considerable satisfaction for the SWW seekers among us. So, for that matter will Daniel Gortler, Daniel Barenboim, or Benjamin Frith. If you already have any of these there is really little reason to replace them. Several performers I have not mentioned also have considerable merit, with not a dust among them. If you have just a selection, there are also many to choose from, though that would take another review.

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The performances are expressive and very good, the ensemble is vigorous, lamenting, sultry, and heroic by turns. In the market scene stuttering, lisping, and animal noises create a cacophony sure to delight spectators in the theater. Instrumentalists are full partners in the dramas, the laments, and the adventure.

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C.MOORE

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Robin Johannsen (Konstanze), Mari Eriksmoen (Blonde), Maximilian Schmitt (Belmonte), Julian Pregardien (Pedrillo), Dmitri Ivashchenko (Osmiu); RIAS Chamber Choir, Berlin Academy/ Rene Jacobs

Harmonia Mundi 902214 [2CD] 160 minutes

Sandra Pastrana (Costanza), Tatiana Aguiar (Blonde), Francesco Marsiglia (Belmonte), Carlos Natale (Pedrillo), Filippo Morace (Osmiu); Vicenza/ Giovanni Battista Rigni

Bongiovanni 2476 [2CD] 121 minutes

Jacob’s recording of this delightful Mozart confection could rightly be said “to make a joyful noise”! The overture is raucous, dashing madly about, beautifully contrasted with the acidic period strings that accompany Belmonte’s ‘Herr soll ich dich denn sehen’, so delicately intoned by Schmitt. Then surprise! The basso buffo Osmin (Ivashchenko) doesn’t ramble on like an out of control juggernaut; rather he quite elegantly glides on singing his little ditty ‘Wer ein Liebchen hat gefunden’ with all the sensitivity of a lieder singer. Beautiful singing with a minimum of vocal buffo antics is the name of the game here. Even their spoken dialog fits in with the concept. I don’t think this style of dialog would come across in the theater, but here it comes across as an outstanding

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A clinging Turkish march by Michael Haydn is interpolated to give the Pasha a more extended entrance. Unfortunately the Haydn march is immediately overwhelmed by the brilliance of Mozart's march and chorus. And there is no harpsichord for the secco recitatives—rather an antique-sounding forte-piano which most mellifluously connects the arias.

An acid sound to a period instrument ensemble is all well and good, but not so much when it affects the voice. Johannsen has the ease and breath control and nails all the notes. Some of those notes are nailed a little too metallically. Act 2 is the true test of any Konstanze, with two almost back-to-back arias: the wistful recitative and aria "Traurigkeit" and the supreme difficulties of "Marten" and "Pascha". It is the King of all his six children, having given up his own musical aspirations, sought to revive his father's operas at La Scala in Milan. He was aided by Pietro Lichenthal (1780–1853), a Hungarian physician, music therapist, musician, and composer. In a short time, 1807–1816, all Mozart's major operas were staged at La Scala—except Idomeneo and Abduction from the Seraglio. Neither conformed with Italian musical tastes at the time. A massive rerecording of the German sinfonia was deemed necessary. Lichenthal commissioned and introduced two arias, simplifying the plot, transforming the Pascha into a major sung role (bass). Lichenthal oversaw the elimination of much of Mozart's music (including Konstanze's arias, Blonda's arias, one of Belmonte's, and the Osmin-Blonde duet). Instrumental music of Mozart was adapted, several other Mozart arias substituted, and music by Peter von Winter, Francesco Bianchi, and much by Lichenthal himself added. The overture is intact, though Mozart's clanging cymbals and booming drum are underplayed. To the Basha's entrance chorus evens is added using the transcription of Mozart's Turkish rondo of Piano Sonata 11 (K 331). The Act 1 finale is a hodge-podge of other Mozart instrumental music. Despite the overhaul, Ratto was not performed. The adaptation was not heard until May of 2012 at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza—this performance. Amos is in a state of near constipation, the performance is quite solid, though not exactly the best in Mozartean singing. Marzigna comes close to being a Mozartane, but is a bit heavy. Morace's Osmino is too light in voice, more an Italian basso buffo. He has a way with the text, but he's not the mighty bass usually heard in the role. Sagona's darker, richer bass would make a better Osmin. Pastrana could have handled the three eliminated arias of Konstanze. In compensation she gets Mozart's concert aria "Ch'io mi scordi di te" K 505. Natale and Aguiar have some good moments. The chorus sings more out of duty than enthusiasm. The orchestra is competent, straightforward.

**Mozart:** Church Sonatas

Vladimir Spivakov—Melodiya 2265—66 minutes

Clerics, archbishops, and the like seem to be always about attempting to limit the wild possi-
bilities of music, as it seemingly scares them and is difficult to control. Or perhaps musici-
ans are even more difficult to control. Hence, rubrics, rules, and the like, which even a genius like Mozart was subject to. The Archbishop of Salzburg now is completely forgotten, except for the fact that he imposed the "45-minute rule" on Mozart: the Mass was not to be longer than 45 minutes. It takes a great composer like Mozart to overcome even these restrictions, and Mozart created these short but beautifully crafted "sonatas" for the reading of the Gospel at Salzburg Cathedral. The ideas are miniature, to be sure, but the skill and beauty of the way the ideas are carried out is significant—and a portent of grand things to come.

The works are played with sensitivity and precision, making this very delightful. The thoughtful liner notes are written by the noted musicologist Simon Volkov (Shostakovich Tes-
tament).

**Mozart:** Piano Sonatas 2, 9, 12, 16

William Youn—Oehms 1824—75 minutes

Fellow writer Sang Won Kang reviewed Vol-
ume 1 of this series (M/I/2014) and gave it high praise. Here is Volume 2, and I am pleased to report that I share his enthusiasm for this pianist. As Kang mentions, Youn strictly observes all embellishments and is most care-
ful about dynamics. While this can sometimes produce an uptight sound, it is definitely not the case here. He breathes life into his phrasing and manages to make all sound natu-
ral and spontaneous.

Youn is also a forceful pianist, and this is not retiring or timid Mozart. His strong fingers and quick tempos make certain the listener pays attention. As with most piano recordings these days, the microphone placement is fairly close; it is best to take the volume down a notch or two. Slow movements are notable for their expression, and pedal is kept at a mini-
um.

When completed this should be fully com-
petitive with the best the catalog has to offer in Mozart playing.
ing radio broadcast interpretation. But it is not just the singers who excel here, but the almost magical accompaniments from the orchestra with precision, slashing chords, clarity of articulation. It is as if the orchestra is a part of a summer breeze. And so it continues with Schmitt’s virile Belmonte skipping gracefully through the musical ornaments.

The role of Pedrillo is often undercart—after all, he doesn’t have graceful romantic arias like Belmonte. In the terzett concluding Act I he generally sings in unison with Belmonte and is usually covered up by Osmin’s music. When he does get his first aria, ‘Frisch zum Kampfe’, Pregardien cuts loose with power and comedy. He saves plenty of comedy for Pedrillo’s duet with Osmin, ‘Vivat Bacchus’.

Ivashchenko nimbly in the patter notes. Ivashchenko nimblly tracks his way through Osmin’s big, boastful arias. But now holds back on the overt power to sing for Pedrillo’s duet with Osmin, ‘Vivat Bacchus’; but now holds back on the overt power to sing for Pedrillo’s duet with Osmin, ‘Vivat Bacchus’.

His ‘Where Wonne, Where Lust’ sparkles with personality. Almost as an afterthought Otonya’s Pasha is a delicate fellow, not so much demanding Konstanze’s love as pleading for it. Nothing to fear from him.

Harmonia Mundi includes 227 pages of trilingual notes and libretto

Billed as ‘Prima Esecuzione Assoluta’, Bongiovanni has published not just an Italian translation of Mozart’s singspiel. Calisto Bassi also ‘adapted it for the Italian opera in 1786’ mostly with music by Mozart’. The Italian-English libretto and notes go into details of the adaptation, scrupulously indicating in each of the 27 tracks who composed or adapted that particular section of music.

During his lifetime Mozart was regarded as just one of many composers, actually less famous, less performed than his contemporaries Salieri, Jommelli, Sarti, and Paisiello. After his premature death (1791) Mozart’s music quickly disappeared from stage, concert hall, and salon. In the early years of the 1800s, Carl Thomas Mozart, the King of Würtemberg, learned of his six children, having given up his own musical aspirations, sought to revive his father’s operas at La Scala in Milan. He was aided by Pietro Lichenthal (1780-1853), a Hungarian physician, music therapist, musicologist, and composer. In a short time, 1807-1816, all Mozart’s major operas were staged at La Scala—except Idomeneo and Abduction from the Seraglio. Neither conformed with Italian musical tastes at the time. A massive reworking of the German singspiel was deemed necessary. Lichenthal commissioned an Italian treatment, recasting and doubling acts, simplifying the plot, transforming the Pascha into a major sung role (bass). Lichenthal oversaw the elimination of much of Mozart’s music (including Konstanze’s arias, Blonda’s arias, one of Belmonte’s, and the Osmin-Blonda duet). Instrumental music of Mozart was adapted, several other Mozart arias substituted, and music by Peter von Winter, Francesco Bianchi, and much by Lichenthal himself added. The overture is intact, though Mozart’s clangy cymbals and booming drum are underplayed. To the Bassa’s entrance chorus is added an instrumental imitation from Mozart’s Turkish rondo of Piano Sonata 11 (K 331). The Act I finale is a hodge-podge of other Mozart instrumental music. Despite the overhaul, Ratto was not performed. The adaptation was not heard until May of 2012 at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza—this performance.

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The works are played with sensitivity and precision, making this very delightful. The thoughtful liner notes are written by the noted musicologist Simon Volkov (Shostakovich Tes-

tament).
with the Stradivarius Quartet, which operates out of Dallas-Fort Worth.

MOZART: Il Re Pastore

Sarah Fox (Aminta), Allish Tynan (Elisia), Anna Devin (Tamiri), John Mark Ainsley (Alexander), Benjamin Hulett (Agonore); Orchestra of Classical Opera/ Ian Page

Signum 433 [2CD] 117 minutes

This early Mozart opera seria has all the traits of his later, more mature works in this genre (Idomeneo and La Clemenza di Tito), except that this work has no villain—not even any character of ill will. The benevolent Alexander (the Great) unwittingly almost destroys the happiness of two loving couples, but he sets things right in time for a happy ending. All five characters display great nobility, probably because the opera was commissioned to celebrate the visit of the Archduke to Salzburg, and only a libretto glorifying royalty would be satisfactory. For modern audiences, the characters seem a little too good to be true, but if one likes noble characters singing florid arias surrounded by yards of recitative, this opera fills the bill.

This performance, recorded in July of 2014, should satisfy any lover of this kind of opera. The three sopranos impress the most. Sarah Fox, in the title role, has a lovely voice plus the range and agility for this heroic role, originally done by a castrato. As the two women, sopranos Allish Tynan and Anna Devin match Ms Fox with their vocal beauty and technique. In the role of Alexander, John Mark Ainsley displays a tenor of average vocal quality but exceptional ability to master the rapid coloratura Mozart created for this character’s arias. Benjamin Hulett does well with the smaller but still important role of Agonore. Ian Page leads his Orchestra of Classical Opera properly in the music they were apparently created to play.

The booklet contains good background information on the opera and a complete Italian-English libretto. There is also the addition of a concert version of the recitative and aria ‘Aer tranquillo e di seren’ included at the end of Act I. I would only wish for some bios of these fine singers.

SININGER: String Quintet 3; see BRAHMS

NIKOLADEV: Songs; Piano Pieces; Orchestral Dances

Svetlana Zlobina, mz; Mikhail Mordvinov, p; Moscow Symphony/ Filip Chizhevsky

Toccata 324—82 minutes

Matvey Nikolaevsky (1882-1942) was well known as a composer of light music, quite popular in Russia in the 1920s and 30s. He was an accomplished pianist and repetiteur, and he seems to have avoided any serious clashes with his government. Most of his manuscripts were lost in a flood in the 1990s; this release has most of his extant music.

The opening piano pieces, a nocturne and a fantasia on a Russian folk song, sound a lot like Chopin and Liszt. The songs, in the Russian Gypsy or folk idioms sung—Zlobina has a rich, expressive voice. Mordvinov seems more musically at ease in the songs and lighter pieces; his phrasing in the Nocturne is slightly uncertain.

About half the pieces are truly stereotypical light music—tonal, pleasant, and easily digested. The orchestra only plays two, ‘Czar das’ and ‘Gypsy Dance’; the rest are for piano. There are marches, sketches, and dances—a tango, Charleston, fox trot, and two-step. The writing is of good quality, the melodies are appealing, and a few of the pieces stand out, but Nikolaevsky falls just short of having the sparkle and charm to best of light music offers.

OSWALD: Piano Pieces

Sergio Monteiro—Grand Piano 682—61 minutes

Henrique Oswald (1852-1931) was born in Rio de Janeiro to a Swiss-German father and an Italian mother. His mother took him to Florence when he was 14, and he studied there with an Italian student of Hans von Bulow’s. Saint-Saens and Fauré praised his solidly romantic music. Oswald moved back to Brazil in 1903, but his writing remained cosmopolitan. His lack of national attack by some composers, though Villa-Lobos later said that he was Brazil’s most admirable composser.

His piano style reminds me most of Chopin, somewhat of Fauré, a little of Schumann, and of Liszt the least. All these miniatures are beautiful and easy versions, from 1903 to 2006 for the composer’s 80th birthday celebration. He deserves better.

ESTEP

PAGANINI: Moses Sonata & Prayer; 3 Ritor- nellos; 6 Preludes; Rondo; Capriccio; Grand Concerto

Luca Fanfoni, Daniele Fanfoni, v; Luca Simoncini, vc; Fabrizio Guidice, g; Luca Ballerini, p

Dynamic 7672—65 minutes

The big news here is the use of a newly discovered manuscript of the Moses Sonata and Prayer. Although not in Paganini’s hand, it is apparently by a violinist, Romeo Franzoni, who was close to Paganini’s. The music may be based on the autograph. It contains the missing piano introduction, which is finally performed here.

The rest of the program is probably early works. These are often very short and lack the character of the composer’s later works. Aside from the Moses Sonata and Prayer, the major work here is the Grand Concerto for violin and guitar.

I reviewed Luca Fanfoni’s disc of music by Bazzini (Nov/Dec 2015) and noted his technical limitations in ‘Dance of the Goblins’. The same limitations are apparent here. Sometimes you can see that Fanfoni is straining. Fanfoni plays Paganini’s own favorite violin, the ‘Cannon’ Guarnerius del Gesu, probably built in 1743. Fanfoni’s son, Daniele, plays a copy of this instrument made in 1834 by the great French violinmaker Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, which had belonged to Paganini’s only pupil, Camillo Sivori.

ESTEP

PART: Passacaglia

Anne Akiko Meyers, v; Leipzig Radio/ Kristjan Jarvi—Naive 5425—75 minutes

This impossibly disorganized production from Kristjan Jarvi’s Sound Project collects 8 Pärt pieces and 4 early versions, from 1968 to 2006 for the composer’s 80th birthday celebration. He deserves better.

American Record Guide

March/April 2016

The program opens with Credo (1968), a nasty protest against the occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union for chorus and orchestra, moving from a quote from Bach WTC 1’s C minor Prelude to a Stabat Mater-like setting with the words “eye for an eye” and “resist an evil person.” The authorities were not pleased, and it was immediately banned.

The famous Fratres (1977), given here in a version for violin and strings (the original is incongruously added as the last piece here), alternates solemn and soul with etereal string chorales and distant timekeeping. It is scrappily played by the usually reliable Ms Meyers.

Moving to the 80s, Festina Lente (1988), for string orchestra and harp, is a sorrowful plaint intended as the central panel of a violin concerto-like series for Menuhin.

The 90s marked the return to independence for Estonia. The earliest of the three pieces of the 90s is Summa (1991), for strings, a gente assuming lullaby, in severe contrast to much of the previous work on this program. ‘Darf ich’ (1995/1999), for violin, bells, and strings, is a brief nationalist plea also written for Menuhin. Mein Weg (1999), for strings and bell, is a quietly seething march through a troubled mankind.

Entering the present century, the bizarre Passacaglia (2003), is a brief progression of some sort for violin and strings. Finally chronologically, La Sindone (2006), for orchestra and percussion, is meant to invoke the shroud with the face of Jesus apparently imprinted. Tchaikovsky Pathetique-like angst sets the tragic stage, gloomy with occasional bells. A glaring climax with fanfares heralds Christ’s entry into heaven. This is a 2015 revi- sion recorded here for the first time. It’s not the composer’s most convincing work.

All of these have been recorded before. Check indexes. If you’re looking for a Pärt sampler I would look elsewhere.

GIMBEL

PHILDOR: 6 Suites; MONTECLAIR: Brunnettes

Marie-Celine Labbe, Marion Treupel-Franck, fl

Ramee 1405—78 minutes

Pierre Danicik Philidor (1868-1731) published three sets of suites in 1717 and 1718; they were his first three opus numbers. Some of them were for two flutes, and all of those are here, numbered 1-3 and 7-9. Between these suites
with the Stradivarius Quartet, which operates out of Dallas-Fort Worth.

**MOZART:** Il Re Pastore
Sarah Fox (Aminta), Ailish Tynan (Elisa), Anna Devin (Tamiri), John Mark Ainsley (Alexander), Benjamin Hulett (Agonore); Orchestra of Classical Opera / Ian Page
Signum 433 [2CD] 117 minutes

This early Mozart opera seria has all the traits of its later, more mature works in this genre (Idomeneo and La Clemenza di Tito), except that this work has no villain—not even any character of ill will. The benevolent Alexander (the Great) unwittingly almost destroys the happiness of two loving couples, but he sets things right in time for a happy ending. All five characters display great nobility, probably because the opera was commissioned to celebrate the visit of the Archduke to Salzburg, and only a libretto glorifying royalty would be satisfactory. For modern audiences, the characters seem a little too good to be true, but if one likes noble characters singing florid arias surrounded by yards of recitative, this opera fills the bill.

This performance, recorded in July of 2014, should satisfy any lover of this kind of opera. The three sopranos impress the most. Sarah Fox, in the title role, has a lovely voice plus the range and agility for this heroic role, originally written for a character of lower voice. Ailish Tynan, in Aminta, a tenor of average vocal quality but exceptional ability to master the rapid coloratura Mozart created for this character’s part, is rounded by yards of recitative, this opera fills the bill.

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Marie-Celine Labbe, Marion Treupel-Franck, fl

The program opens with Credo (1968), a nasty protest against the occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union for chorus and orchestra, moving from a quote from Bach WTC 1’s C-major Prelude and the melody of the “eye for an eye” and “resist an evil person.” The authorities were not pleased, and it was immediately banned.

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are popular songs called brunettes from a collection published in 1695 by Michel Pignol de Montcelair (1667-1737). Texts of the brunettes are given in French only at the back of the booklet, though they are played on two flutes and not sung.

Marie-Celine Labbe and Marion Treuelp-Franck play modern copies of flutes made in Brussels around 1730. They have studied with some of the most important European flute teachers, including Barthold Kuijken. We hear them playing without vibrato but with a splendidly room ambiance. Together they have the simplicity and sweetness of fresh golden straw.

Ponce's four sonatas are real gems of the guitar repertory. Despite Segovia's preference for shorter works, his Mexican friend crafted several large scale works—these, suites, and sets of variations including the magnificent Folias variations. Ponce wrote several works that are in an older style, and many were presented to the public as rediscovered works of other composers (though anyone with much of an ear would know that, say, that suite is no more by Weiss than by Lady Gaga). The two sonatas were presented as by Ponce, but as homages: the Sonata Classica to Sor, the Sonata Romantica to Schubert. The Sonata Mexicana is pure and delightful nationalism, sparkling and charming. The remaining work, simply designated Sonata III is the most chromatic and complex of the three—and the most interesting.

Piskorski's performance is quite fine. This is the third in Naxos's survey of Ponce's guitar works, and his teacher Adam Holzman did the first two. His performances are delightful—expressive, strong, with a strong grasp of the architecture of each work. Indeed, his Sonata Mexicana is the finest I've ever heard—sparkling with pure delight. While his Sonata Romantica is strong, Gerard Abiton's performance in his set of the complete works is even stronger (Mar/Apr 2015). He captures the Schubert in each of the movements better than anyone I've heard. Competition for Sonata III is fierce. Tisboiulski is fine, but my favorite remains Irina Kulikova's recording performed in French only at the back of the booklet, though they are played on two flutes and not sung.

Ponce: Guitar Sonatas
Alexandr Tsiboulski—Naxos 573284—69 minutes

This has always been one of my favorite composers. I like his attitude: tongue in cheek, light of heart, yet warm with his style. It seems to be in his element here, drawing every last bit of a French flavor out of these works. It would be nice to have a beret on, sitting at a small curbside table drinking café au lait when listening to this.

Poulecn: Violin Sonata; Flute Sonata; 2 Pianos
Kolja Lessing, v; Henrik Wiese, fl; Eva-Maria May & Alexander Wienand, p
Paladino 49—69 minutes

Sonatas for a solo instrument and piano in the first half of the 20th Century had two standout composers, both in terms of quality and quantity: Hindemith and Poulen. Many composers wrote one or two great sonatas that have become staples of the repertoire, but these two were, in my opinion, the most popular. The first duosanta I recall hearing was the Poulen flute sonata. I was quite impressed at the time, and it has remained a favorite. This is my favorite kind of chamber program: two excellent pianists working with each other and accomplished instrumentalists. They even throw in a few solo piano works.

Les Soirées de Nazelles; 3 Movements; 2 Improvisations; 8 Nocturnes

This is titled "Le comble de la distinction" (The Height of the Distinction). The main work is the 11-movement Soirées de Nazelles, one of Poulen's works that bears resemblance to the piano suites by Ravel and Debussy. Of course the eight Nocturnes owe much to Chopin, so we hear a side of Poulen here that is not typical. The inclusion of the brief Movement Perpétuels and the Improvisations gives us more of what is generally considered idiomatic to Poulen's style.

Canadian pianist Jalbert, a professor at the University of Ottawa, is new to me despite having a number of solo and chamber discs to his credit. He is a master of touch and finesse and seems to have the perfect temperament for these challenging works.

Satie's inclusion on this program is a little bit of a mystery. The music selected here tends to be very simple: a nice melody over a straightforward accompaniment figure. It is certainly distinct from Poulen. The booklet essay goes to great length to describe the influence Satie had on later French composers, especially "Les Six." We get the well-known Gymnopedies, played on the slow side. The Three Waltzes are only about three minutes total length. They are titled "Trois valses distinguées du prece derogue" and individually titled "Sa taille," "Son binocle," and "Ses jambes." Another well-known piece, the solo piano version of Satie's song 'Je te veux' brings Edith Piaf to mind. The work is not typical. The inclusion of a Satie song 'Je te veux' brings Edith Piaf to mind. The work is not typical. The inclusion of the brief Movement Perpétuels and the Improvisations gives us more of what is generally considered idiomatic to Poulen's style.

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Investigate quartets (for flute & oboe) by the other Phidilir on CPO (Sept/Oct 2013).

PIORKOWSKI: Guitar Pieces

James Piorkowski is a Distinguished Professor at SUNY Fredonia. His music has been widely published, and he was a member of the Buffalo Guitar Quartet until 2000. He presents an interesting and varied program here, with works for solo guitar, guitar and chorus, guitar and baritone, guitar and cello, and a work for the ANA Trio—soprano, cello, and piano. The instrumental works are all programmatic—inspired by individuals (Roland Dyens, Jim Hendrix, his first grandson), places, or concepts. Two vocal texts are bibli-cal, and the other is a poem.

The good will here is intense—I just wish I warmed to the music more. I find it rather predictable, particularly his writing for guitar. He never seems to struggle with any passages—they were, all after, written by him and for him. His sound is pleasant, if a touch twangy. The chord writing reminds me of several modern choral composers like Rene Clausen, with just enough dissonance to create some tension, but still quite tonal. The Fredonia Chamber Singers have a lovely sound and a very muscular diction.

The best writing here is his piece for the ANA Trio (Haas, Forny, and Harper, the name from their first initials). The text is a lament for people lost in an airplane crash in 2009. It was the only moment I felt truly moved. This is for people interested in guitar in unusual combinations.

POULENC: Les Soirées de Nazelles; 3 Movements Perpétuels; 2 Improvisations; 8 Nocturnes

This is titled “Le comble de la distinction” (The Height of the Distinction). The main work is the 11-movement Soirées de Nazelles, one of Poulenc’s works that bears resemblance to the piano suites of Ravel and Debussy. Of course the eight Nocturnes owe much to Chopin, so we hear a side of Poulenc here that is not typical. The inclusion of the brief Movements Perpétuels and the Improvisations give us more of what is generally considered idiomatic to Poulenc’s style.

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HARRINGTON

POULENC: Violin Sonata; Flute Sonata; 2 Piano Sonatas; 6 Improvisations

Kolja Lessing, v; Henrik Wiese, fl; Eva-Maria May & Alexander Weignon, p

Paladino 49—69 minutes

Sonatas for a solo instrument and piano in the first half of the 20th Century had two standout composers, both in terms of quality and quantity: Hindemith and Poulenc. Many composers wrote one or two great sonatas that have become staples of the repertoire, but these two wrote 10 or 20 duo sonatas each, many of them regularly performed. The first duo sonata I recall hearing was the Poulenc flute sonata. I was quite impressed at the time, and it has remained a favorite. This is my favorite kind of chamber program: two excellent pianists working with each other and accomplished instrumentalists. They even throw in a few solo piano works.

Lessing digs in and attacks the opening Allegro con fuoco movement of the Violin Sonata, fully supported by May. This work originated in the war years (1942-43) and was dedicated to the memory of Federico Lorca. In the beautiful Intermezzo movement I am impressed by gorgeous tone and perfect double stops. The grand romantic sweep at the climax from both artists. The final Presto trágico is mostly Poulenc’s trademark busy writing, always tuneful and rhythmically engaging, but here in a minor mode, tinged with some melancholy as well. The music comes to a very dramatic change about 3-1/2 minutes in and turns to a very slow and sad work for its final minute.

Wiese and Weignon capture the sophistication of the flute sonata as well as anyone, and that includes my favorite, Rampal and Veyron-Lacroix. Rampal played the premiere of this work with Poulenc at the piano in 1957. It is charming, beautiful, witty, and the epitome of the best of French flute music in the 20th Century. The purity of the flute in the high long phrases of II is just right, and the exuberance of the Presto giocoso Finale will keep this disc on my active listening stack for some time to come.

Each pianist gets to shine in three Improvisations before they join together for the mag-
nificent Sonata for 2 Pianos (1952-53). At 25 minutes, it is the longest work on this program. Like the violin sonata, it can be stark, harsh and dissonant, but these attributes are alwayscontrasted with delicate passages. It has far fewer moments of the busy, jaunty Poulenc found in the other works here. The performance by the teacher-student duo (Wienand studied with May) is remarkable for its dynamic range and variety of touch along with perfect ensemble. Excellent sound is complemented by an in-depth booklet essay by violinist Lessing.

Poulenc: Songs 5
Sarah Fox, s; Ann Murray, Catherine Wyn-Rogers, mz; Joshua Elliott, tt; Thomas Allen, Thomas Olie-mans, bar; Malcolm Martineau, p; Badke Quartet; David Cowley, ob; Julian Bliss, cl; Lisa Friend; Jiří Augustiňak, bn; Simon Desbruslais, tp; Phil White, trb; Tasmin Waley-Cohen, v; Gemma Rosenberg, vc; David Corkhill, Andrew Barnard, Gary Lovevcest, perc

Signum 333—61 minutes

With this fifth volume of Poulenc’s songs, Signum has completed its survey of the composer’s 150 or more songs with Martineau as the anchor of the project. Hyperion issued its 4CD set of all the songs in 2013 with Graham Johnson as the pianist and author of the terrific program notes (J/F 2014). The performances in both surveys are excellent, and the differences between them make both sets worth owning.

Where the Hyperion project presented the songs written for piano accompaniment, this final Signum volume includes works written for piano and a vocal-ensemble ensemble. Though 10 of the 31 songs here are written for piano accompaniment, what makes this volume especially important is the inclusion of works not found in the Hyperion set: Rapsodie Négre; Le Bestiaire (the version for piano accompaniment was included in Signum’s volume 4); Les Maures de Max Jacob; and Le Bal Masqué. Not included in any of the five Signum volumes is L’histoire de Babar, which Hyperion included, recorded in 1977 and narrated by Pierre Bernac when he was 78.

Some of the same singers are heard in both projects, usually singing different songs. Having this valuable opportunity for comparative listening. It was especially instructive to hear Sarah Fox’s relaxed and lyrical approach to ‘Vocalise’ here at 5:09 compared to Geraldine McGreevy’s performance with Johnson at a rushed 3:17. Rapsodie Négre (1917), Poulenc’s earliest surviving work, is a hoot. One song, ‘Hon- oloulou’ is a setting of a nonsense text allegedly written by Liberian poet Makoko Kangourou, sung with mock seriousness by Olie-mans. Le Bal Masqué, a ‘Secular Cantata on Poems by Max Jacob’, is a madcap adventure full of Poulenc’s wit, delivered with tongue-in-cheek panache by Thomas Allen, a welcome new addition to the project for this volume. Also heard for the first time in this project is tenor Joshua Elliott, who delivers Quatre Poems de Max Jacob elegantly.

This final volume strikes me as an encore to the previous volumes, and it is a thorough delight. As in the previous volume (N 11/1 2012), all the singers are excellent. The instrumentalists here all play commendably. The ambience makes them sound (appropriately) like a pit band for a cabaret. Bravo to Martineau and his musicians for bringing this project to its conclusion. Perhaps Signum someday will rerelease these volumes as a complete set and with more comprehensive notes.

Texts and translations. R. Moore

Prokofieff: Flute Sonata; Hebrew Overture; Vainberg: Clarinet Sonata
Annelien Van Wauwe, fl; Shlery Laub, Samuel Nemtuan, v; Marc Sabbah, va; Bruno Philippe, vc; Lucas Blondeel, p

Genuin 15372—55 minutes

The young prize-winning Belgian clarinetist Mark Sabbah and the versatile Belgian pianist Lucas Blondeel travel to the war-ravaged Soviet Union of the early 1940s in two works with radically different emotional responses.

The Prokofieff Flute Sonata (1943), appearing here in the popular 1984 transcription by American composer David Moss, is a tour de force. The music is a working through of the Overture, creating several poignant moments, but even so, the score unfolds slowly and with some hesitation, and it requires more from everyone.

HANDELM

Prokofieff: Symphony-Concerto; Brahms: Double Concerto
Oleg Kagan, v; Natalia Gutman, vc; USSR Symphony/Alexander Lazarev; Evgeny Svetlanov
Melodiya 2380—73 minutes

These are performances from 1981 and quite remarkable ones. The program starts with Gutman playing Prokofieff’s details and clipped rhythm are wonderful. A transition comes from the pen of a young Polish expatriate whose family perished in the Holocaust, and all through the work the sadness and suffering is deep and personal. In the final work, Van Wauwe and Blondeel turn the clock back a quarter century to another uncertainty. World War II several ethnic groups strived to maintain their identity amid economic and political upheaval, and some of these groups came to the United States with their distinct culture. In 1919, the Ensemble Zimro, a group of touring Jewish musicians from St Petersburg, visited New York, where their klezmer scores spoke to Ashkenazi Jews escaping persecution and hardship in Eastern Europe.

At one point the musicians of Ensemble Zimro ran across a young and rising Sergei Prokofieff seeking his fortune in the West while his native land remained in the grip of a bloody civil war. Zimro requested a piece, and Prokofieff obliged with a quick patchwork of two Jewish tunes into his Overture on Hebrew Themes for clarinet, string quartet, and piano. Belgian violinist Shlery Laub, French violinist Samuel Nemtuan, American-born Brussels violinist Marc Sabbah, and French cellist Bruno Philippe join Van Wauwe and Blondeel on stage.

The recital has promise but never takes flight. Van Wauwe has poise, control, and a good lyrical sense, but her sound is persistent-ly cloudy, and her high register sometimes has an uncertain time. In World War I several eth-nic and religious communities in Eastern Europe—Russian Jews, Roman Catholic Poles, and Jews from the Ukraine crossed as pedestrian. The strings are solid in their involvement in the music, and he often comes across as pedestrian. The strings are solid in their involvement in the music, and he often comes across as pedestrian. The strings are solid in their involvement in the music, and he often comes across as pedestrian.

Bondeel is an excellent pianist, handling every obstacle ably, but he refrains from active involvement in the music, and he often comes across as pedestrian. The strings are solid in their involvement in the music, and he often comes across as pedestrian.

HANDELM

Prokofieff: Violin Sonata 1; Shostakovich: Violin Sonata
Igor Malinovsky; Itamar Golan
Genuin 15347—61 minutes
Russian-born Igor Malinovsky studied with Zakhar Bron in Cologne and Zurich. He became concertmaster of the Bavarian State Orchestra at age 24 and held that position until 2005. He went on to become concertmaster of the Brussels Philharmonic and Concertino Orchestra of Valenciana. He has taught at the Carl Maria von Weber Conservatory in Dresden since 2009. Malinovsky is a very good violinist, and he does a fine job in both sonatas.

He is fortunate to have Itamar Golan as his partner. Golan is fully in control of these performances. He was already familiar with the Prokofieff Sonata having recorded it long ago with Shlomo Mintz (July/Aug 1989). His long familiarity with the work pays off. You can sense his confidence. Unlike many pianists who are sonata partners, he is not afraid to stand up to the music and demands it, and he brings out the oppressive atmosphere of I as few other pianists have. The Shostakovich also benefits from Golan’s presence.

My only complaint is about Malinovsky’s violin. Its often sounds gritty. It is too bad that he doesn’t have a warmer, more nuanced instrument. This is one of the better recordings of both works and would be a fine choice if you play with amazing flair and accuracy. In the slower passages one may question her intonation sometimes, though it improves as the performance continues.

The theme Golan gets together with his famed husband, Kagan, for the Brahms Double Concerto. They play the grand opening movement a little more slowly than I’m used to and make it a marvelous conversation between the two soloists. I am also impressed by how well Brahms’s harmonies stand up to the Prokofieff we have just left.

This program works very well. It is also lovely to hear these two string players working together, both expressing all they can. The orchestra plays with vigor and sensitivity in both performances. The recording is well balanced, though the Brahms seems a bit softer than the Prokofieff in volume. Altogether, this is a fine program; and the audience is only evi-dent when applauding.

D. Moore
nificent Sonata for 2 Pianos (1952-53). At 25 minutes, it is the longest work on this program. Like the violin sonata, it can be stark, harsh and dissonant, but these attributes are always contrasted with delicate passages. It has far fewer moments of the busy, jaunty Poulsen found in the other works here. The performance by the teacher-student duo (Wienand studied with May) is remarkable for its dynam-ic range and variety of touch along with per-fect ensemble. Excellent sound is comple-mented by an in-depth booklet essay by violin-ist Lessing.

HARRINGTON

POULSEN: Songs 5
Sarah Fox, s; Ann Murray, Catherine Wyn-Rogers, mz; Joshua Elliott, t; Thomas Allen, Thomas Olie-mans, bar; Malcolm Martineau, p; Badke Quar-tet; David Cowley, ob; Julian Bliss, cl; Lisa Friend, fl; Jake Augustinik, hn; Simon Desbruslais, tpt; Phil White, trb; Tasmin Waley-Cohen, v; Gemma Rosenfield, vc; David Corkhill, Andrew Barnard, Gary Loveness, perc

Signum 333—61 minutes

With this fifth volume of Poulsen’s songs, Signum has completed its survey of the com-poser’s 150 or more songs with Martineau as the anchor of the project. Hyperion issued its 4CD set of all the songs in 2013 with Graham Johnson as the pianist and author of the terrif-ic program notes (J/F 2014). The performances in both surveys are excellent, and the differ-ences between them make both sets worth owning.

Where the Hyperion project presented the songs written for piano accompaniment, this final Signum volume includes works written for piano and choral ensemble. Though 10 of the 31 songs here are written for piano accompaniment, what makes this volume especially important is the inclusion of works not found in the Hyperion set: Rapsodie Negre; Le Bestiaire (the version for piano and orchestra I have); and Le Bal Masqué, which has not been recorded before. Not included in any of the five Signum volumes is L’histoire de Babar, which Hyperion included, recorded in 1977 and narrated by Pierre Bernac when he was 78.

Some of the same singers are heard in both projects, usually singing different songs. Havin-ging a valuable opportunity for com-parative listening. It was especially instructive to hear Sarah Fox’s relaxed and lyrical approach to ‘Vocalise’ here at 5:09 com-pared to Geraldine McGreevy’s performance with Johnson at a rushed 3:17. Rapsodie Negre (1917), Poulsen’s earliest surviving work, is a hoot. One song, ‘Hon-oloulou’, is a setting of a nonsense text alleged-ly written by Liberian poet Makoko Kangourou, sung with mock seriousness by Olie-mans. Le Bal Masqué, a “Secular Cantata on Poems by Max Jacob”, is a madcap adventure full of Poulsen’s wit, delivered with tongue-in-cheek panache by Thomas Allen, a welcome new addition to the project for this volume. Also heard for the first time in this project is tenor Joshua Elliott, who delivers Quatre Poems de Max Jacob elegantly.

This final volume strikes me as an encore to the previous volumes, and it is a thorough delight. As in the previous volume (N/D 2011, J/F 2012), all the singers are excellent. The instrumentalists here all play commendably. The ambience makes them sound (appropri-ately) like a pit band for a cabaret. Bravo to Martineau and his musicians for bringing this project to its conclusion. Perhaps Signum someday will reissue these volumes as a complete set and with more comprehensive notes.

Texts and translations. R MOORE

PROKOFIEFF: Flute Sonata; Hebrew Overture; VAINBERG: Clarinet Sonata
Annelien Van Wauwe, fl; Shirley Laub, Samuel Nemtanu, v; Marc Sabbah, va; Bruno Philippe, vc; Lucas Blondeel, p

Genuin 15372—55 minutes

The young prize-winning Belgian clarinetist Emmanuel Van Wauwe and the versatile Dutch pianist Lucas Blondeel travel to the war-ravaged Soviet Union of the early 1940s in two works with radically different emotional responses. The Prokofieff Flute Sonata (1943), appearing here in the popular 1984 transcription by American composer David M. Jacobson, is the product of an internationally famous composer living comfortably on government involve-ment sometimes, though it improves as the per-formance continues. Then Gutman gets together with her famed husband, Kagan, for the Brahms Double Concerto. They play the grand opening movement a little more slowly than I’m used to and make it a marvelous conversation between the two soloists. I am also impressed by how well Brahms’s harmonies stand up to the Prokofieff we have just left.

This program works very well. It is also lovely to hear these two string players working together, both expressing all they can. The orchestra plays with vigor and sensitivity in both performances. The recording is well bal-anced, though the Brahms seems a bit softer than the Prokofieff in volume. Altogether, this is a fine program; and the audience is only evi-dent when applauding.

PROKOFIEFF: Violin Sonata 1; SHOSTAKOVICH: Violin Sonata
Igor Malinovsky; Itamar Golan, p

Genuin 15347—61 minutes

Russian-born Igor Malinovsky studied with Zakhar Bron in Cologne and Zurich. He became concertmaster of the Bavarian State Orchestra at age 24 and held that position until 2005. He went on to become concertmaster of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of Valencia. He has taught at the Carl Maria von Weber Conservatory in Dres-den since 2009. Malinovsky is a very good vi-olinist, and he does a fine job in both sonatas.

He is fortunate to have Itamar Golan as his partner. Golan is full of life in these performances. He was already familiar with the Prokofieff Sonata having recorded it long ago with Shlomo Mintz (July/Aug 1989). His long familiarity with the work pays off. You can sense his confidence. Unlike many pianists who are sonata partners, he is not afraid to thunder when the music demands it, and he brings out the oppressive atmosphere of I as few other pianists have. The Shostakovich also benefits from Golan’s presence.

My only complaint is about Malinovsky’s violin. Its often sounds gritty. It is too bad that he doesn’t have a more refined instrument. This is one of the better recordings of both works and would be a fine choice if you

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D MOORE

PROKOFIEFF: Symphony-Concerto; BRAHMS: Double Concerto
Oleg Kagan, v; Natalia Gutman, vc; USSR Sym-phony/Alexander Lazarev; Evgeny Svetlanov
Melodiya 2380—73 minutes

These are performances from 1981 and quite remarkable ones. The program starts with Gut-man playing Prokofieff’s details for his 1938 Cello Concerto. It is basically most impressive in the rapid passages, which she

plays with amazing flair and accuracy. In the slower passages one may question her intona-tion sometimes, though it improves as the per-formance continues.

American Record Guide
want them together on one disc. Two other very fine recordings of the Prokofieff are by Kai Gleusteen and Catherine Odoneonne (May/June 2004) and David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter (Jan/Feb 1999). Sergey and Lusine Khachatryan reign supreme in the noble audience would have missed the reference and frame the vocal pieces, but also supplement and frame the instrumentalists in Echo du Danube are most prominent in the almost demonic writing. Rabotkina has all of his trademarks. Perhaps they reveal themselves a little more slowly than the others, but they are definitely there in the almost demonic writing. Rabotkina does very well and is able to compete with many other major contenders. If I continue to prefer Michelangeli, it is probably for the RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto 4; RAVEL: Concerto in G; GERSHWIN: Rhapsody in Blue Daria Rabotkina; Tatarstan Symphony/ Alexander Stadikovs—CAG 114-66 minutes This is yet another Concert Artists Guild recording sponsored by The Victor Elmaleh Collection. To that end, there is a colorful Elmaleh collage on the booklet cover and on the back of the album. As further enhancement there is an attractive photograph of the young pianist in front of what appears to be a view of Manhattan. While born in Kazan Russia, Rabotkina has been particularly active in the United States, having appeared both in solo recitals at the Kennedy Center and with many orchestras. She is also winner of the 2007 Concert Artists Guild Competition and has come to expect a lot from Russian-trained pianists her technique is well able to handle these difficult works, and her temperament has that almost indefinable electricity to bring the music to life. Rachmaninoff’s Concerto 4 may be his least known, but it has all of his trademarks. Perhaps they reveal themselves a little more slowly than the others, but they are definitely there in the almost demonic writing. Rabotkina does very well and is able to compete with many other major contenders. If I continue to prefer Michelangeli, it is probably for the added classical poise he brings to the music. The Tatarstan Orchestra (about 500 miles east of Moscow) plays with vigor and authority. Ravel’s jaunty concerto has become a favorite in the past few decades and requires an unbuttoned soloist and orchestra willing to exploit its jazzy elements. This it has clearly found here. Long gone are the once definable features that separated world orchestras from each other. Some, such as braying Russian brass, will not be missed; but orchestras these days tend to sound alike and have reached an admirable standard of performing excellence.
want them together on one disc. Two other very fine recordings of the Prokofiev are by Kai Gleusteen and Catherine Odronneau (May/June 2004) and David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter (Jan/Feb 1999). Sergey and Lusine Khachatryan reign supreme in the Stoshkovich (July/Aug 2008).

**MAGIL**

**PROVENZALE: Lamenti & Cantatas**

Echo du Danube/ Christian Zincke

**CPO** 7777834 [SACD] 60 minutes

It’s an entertaining guessing game. Is this music sweet? Is it sad? Sour? Mocking? In the courtly setting for which these “laments” were written—and wherein sophisticated listeners would relish artful ambiguity—composers cleverly invented new things.

As demonstrated by the three vocal pieces here, and described in the fine booklet essay by scholar Dinko Fabris, Francesco Provenzale (1624-1704) catered to the entertainment of the Neapolitan nobility—his Viceroys of Naples—with “feste a ballo” (which I casually translate here as “party celebrations with dances”). For example, Provenzale’s *Squarciato Appena Havea* is a lament parody that includes the mocking use of children’s tunes and an “ironic counterfactum” of the composer Luigi Rossi’s well-known and celebrated *Lamento Della Ninfa*. And in *Sopraoni*, there is a lament parody that includes the mocking use of children’s tunes and an “ironic counterfactum” of the composer Luigi Rossi’s well-known and celebrated *Lamento Della Ninfa*. Alisa Wellerstein; Inon Barnatan, p Decca 478 8416—81 minutes

We have here a very musical performance, particularly of the gorgeous Rachmaninoff sonata, written when he was recovering gradually from the mental illness caused by the failure of his First Symphony. Written just after the great Piano Concerto 2, it is sometimes criticized for favoring the piano. In this reading, the relation between the two instruments is remarkably friendly, partly owing to unusual sensitivity between the players and partly because Decca’s balance and recorded sound are excellent—warm and clear. Wellerstein is a fine cellist. Barnatan is previously unknown to me but is highly sensitive, allowing Wellerstein to whisper some of her passages but never losing his own clarity. This is a remarkable recording of this great work. It is followed by the lovely Vocalise, Op.34:14, also played with beauty.

Chopin’s just-as-great sonata is played with passion here, though I am not as impressed with some of the clarity or balances here, and the first movement lacks its exposition repeat.

Then we have August Franchomme’s transcriptions of the Etude in C-sharp minor, Op. 25:2, a relaxed and unaffectedly poetic and poetic. Franchomme was the dedicatee of the sonata. We cellists know him well as a composer of etudes. Finally we have the fine Polonaise, Op. 3, Chopin’s first work for cello and an entertaining one.

Altogether, this is quite outstanding. I wish I could have felt as positive about the Chopin sonata as I am about the rest, but considering the surprising duration of the CD you won’t go far wrong with it. It gets better after the first movement and nothing is really wrong even with that, just a certain lack of detail.

**RACHMANINOFF: Cello Sonata; Vocalise**

Chopin: Cello Sonata; Etude; Introduction & Polonaise Brillante

Alisa Wellerstein; Inon Barnatan, p Decca 478 8416—81 minutes

The sound is very fine: full, open, and spacious with the piano and orchestra distinct from each other but still integrated into the overall sound. If I’m less than effusive about it, that may be owing to listening to several SACDs around the same time I was auditioning this set. There is a bit of “digital stress” in Rachmaninoff’s largest orchestral climaxes.

**RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concertos; Paganini Rhapsody**

Lise de la Salle; Philharmonia Zurich/ Fabio Luisi

Philharmonia 104 [3CD] 2 hours

These are very fine, polished, state-of-the-art performances. It’s hard to find anything specific to complain about, except that these concertos have had so many outstanding recordings—even the First and Fourth—that it’s difficult for yet another to offer much that’s new. One thing I will say up front: this set is far more satisfying than the harshy, slap-dash, rather boring set by Valentina Lisitsa (July/Aug 2013) for which Lisitsa fans (I am one) had such high hopes. But I don’t think the present set pleases just because my expectations were limited.

I wasn’t previously familiar with Miss de la Salle’s playing, but I’m pleased to have become acquainted with it. Nothing jumps out at me as unique, but she plays the Rachmaninoff’s solo parts with all the technical proficiency and expressive strength one expects from a young (b 1988), present-day performer. Luisi and Luisi work together to present each concerto as an integrated whole, yet related to the other concertos. There’s even a photo in the album booklet of them sitting next to each other on the piano bench, which is a good symbol of these interpretations.

Conductor Luisi has been a very useful man at the Met in New York, serving as “principal conductor” in James Levine’s absence, but he also has a great deal of orchestral conducting experience under his belt. He supports his soloist ably without short-changing the orchestra’s role (unlike Michael Francis in the Lisitsa set). Luisi’s principal interest seems to be the role of dutifully following his soloist). The Philharmonia Zurich acquits itself like a world-class ensemble. Its “day job” is as the pit orchestra of the Zurich Opera, but it also gives a symphonic concert series.

If there’s any problem with this set, it’s finding a pianist with distinguishing characteristics that justify its existence. I’m having a hard time. With first-rate Rachmaninoff concerto sets by Earl Wild, Vladimir Ashkenazy (Decca, with Haitink), Abbey Simon (Vox), and the composer himself (RCA), not to mention one-offs of “loose” concertos like 2 with Weisz, Carter, and Van Cliburn (EMI), or 2 and 3 with Byron Janis (Mercury & RCA), it’s not like we have a shortage.

**RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto 4; RAVEL: Concerto in G; GERSHWIN: Rhapsody in Blue**

Daria Rabotkina; Tatarstan Symphony/ Alexander Stadikov—CAG 114—66 minutes

This is yet another Concert Artists Guild recording sponsored by The Victor Elmaleh Collection. To that end, there is a colorful Elmaleh collage on the booklet cover and on the back of the album. As further enhancement there is an attractive photograph of the young pianist in front of what appears to be a view of Manhattan.

While born in Kazan Russia, Rabotkina has been particularly active in the United States, having appeared both in solo recitals at the Kennedy Center and with many orchestras. She is also winner of the 2007 Concert Artists Guild Competition. If I continue to prefer Michelangeli, it is probably for the added classical poise he brings to the music. The Tatarstan Orchestra (about 500 miles east of Moscow) plays with vigor and authority.

Ravel’s jaunty concerto has become a favorite in the past few decades and requires an unbuttoned soloist and orchestra willing to exploit its jazzy elements. This it has clearly done. There are still many other major contenders. If I continue to prefer Michelangeli, it is probably for the added classical poise he brings to the music. The Tatarstan Orchestra (about 500 miles east of Moscow) plays with vigor and authority.

Gershwin’s jaunty concerto has become a favorite in the past few decades and requires an unbuttoned soloist and orchestra willing to exploit its jazzy elements. This it has clearly done. There are still many other major contenders. If I continue to prefer Michelangeli, it is probably for the added classical poise he brings to the music. The Tatarstan Orchestra (about 500 miles east of Moscow) plays with vigor and authority.

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The ensemble is well forward in sound and is an effective protagonist with the piano. Rabotkin performs the Adagio exquisitely and lets loose her unbridled expression totally in keeping with the outer movements. She is greeted with warm applause from an audience that initially does not quite know what to make of the music, but her program continues with Rhapsody in Blue, moving further down the path of lady jazz—tamed and domesticated. The Ravel and ever popular Rhapsody show the orchestra’s soloists to good advantage—and their willingness to get down and dirty in jazz expression. The recording is a good one and the notes respectable. I liked this one a lot, and suspect others will as well.

**RACHMANINOFF: Preludes**

Lucas Genusas, p

Piano Classics 78—76 minutes

It seems unfair to me that a 24-year-old can perform all 24 Rachmaninoff Preludes in one concert as well as we have here. From that most familiar opening of the Prelude in C-sharp minor to its grand echoes in the final one in D-flat composed 18 years later, Geniusas is spot-on interpretively and technically. He also has hands large enough to play most of the huge chords and spread out counterpoint the way he is. His interpretations are solid and I hear no dirty in jazz expression. The recording is a good one and the notes respectable. I liked this one a lot, and suspect others will as well.

**BECKER**

**RAMEAU: Harpsichord Pieces**

Blandine Rannou

Alpha 309 [2CD] 138 minutes

The complete set of Rameau’s harpsichord music was Blandine Rannou’s first solo recording, made in the summer of 2000 and issued as Zig Zag 10301, a 4-CD set. The solo music was on the fourth. The present set by Alpha occupies the first three discs, and the ensemble version of the *Pieces de clavecin en concerts* was on the fourth. The present set by Alpha is a budget-priced reissue of only discs 2 and 3. The album’s title implies that we’ll get all of Rameau’s harpsichord music in this convenient two-disc set (as we do from almost every other player) but we don’t get all of the first book (1705-6), which is the suite of nine pieces in A minor that were on Zig Zag’s originally short disc 1, and there is no explanation here. Since there is nothing newly recorded, we also do not get *Les Petits Merveilleux* and the solo versions of the four pieces that Rameau extracted and arranged from *Pieces de clavecin en concerts*. The set does include the isolated piece ‘La Dauphine’ from 1747, but the packaging doesn’t tell us anything about that provenance; it advertises only the 1724 and 1728 music, and puts it at the end of the 1728 music.

The book of pieces from 1728 occupies 74 minutes here, while other players typically get through the same music in 53 to 56 minutes, with all repeats. Rannou’s interpretation is that much more expansive. She does sometimes find interesting details to bring out, but too much here seems like a slow-motion trance. ‘Les soupirs,’ ‘Le rappel des oiseaux,’ ‘Entretien des muses,’ the A-minor Allemande, ‘La poule,’ and ‘L’Enharmonique’ are all still, eccentrically slow, and boring. ‘Les niais de Sologne’ is more exciting, but one of its doubles sounds out of place—it’s much faster than the rest of the piece. ‘Les trois mains’ goes brilliantly. ‘L’Egyptienne’ wraps up the album with some fire, but too much time in the previous two hours went to cautious plodding through individual notes, without much momentum or character.

The booklet notes are largely an interview with Rannou looking back on the past 15 years of her career. She says she’d interpret a few things differently now. There are two harpsichord chords here, both by Marc Ducornet and having similar tone. The sound is fine. With no plastic in the packaging, the cardboard folder offers little protection for the discs.

I see no compelling reason to buy this incompletely reissued set. Among recent Rameau harpsichord recordings that have especially moved me, I’d urge the reader to hear the sets by Keti Haugsand and Bertrand Cuiller.

**HARRINGTON**

**RAUZ:**

Julian Pregardien (Zaïs), Sandrine Piau (Zélide), Benoît Arnold (Cindor), Aimery Lefèvre (Oromazes), Hasnaa Bennani (Amour), Namur Chamber Choir, Les Talens Lyriques/Christophe Rousset

Aparate 109 [3CD] 157 minutes

Zaïs is given the designation pastoral heroïque and uses a libretto by one of the composer’s favorite collaborators, Louis de Cahusac. It was first presented in 1748, during a peak period in the court of Marie Antoinette, where a very noisy Chaos (quite out-doing Haydn’s later evocation of same) is brought into order by the king of the Genies, Oromazes (perhaps the Persian death god, Ahuramazda), so that the world can be prepared for the blessings of human love. In the story, Zaïs is a shepherd disguised as a shepherd, has wooed and won the shepherdess Zelidie. (Where would Baroque music have been without amorous shepherds and shepherdesses?). He wishes to be sure that she loves him for himself and not for his high standing. Accordingly, he has his friend Cindor put her through a series of tests. She proves to be ringingly steadfast; and he, ready to share life with her on equal terms, is willing to renounce his immortality. Oromazes reappears to resolve the issue by making both the lovers immortal, so that they might live happily forever after (literally) in mutual joy and devotion.

Cahusac used this story, as the album’s excellent annotator suggests, as a means for examining the ideas and ideals of Freemasonry, a movement still somewhat suspect and misunderstood at the time: the quest for order, affirmativeness, the ways of human perception, with its establishment through testing by trials, and the place of women on equal terms with men. If you sense the subtexts of Mozart’s Magic Flute down the road ahead, so be it.

For Rameau the libretto gave him a chance to explore human character, with a particular panoply of emotions through which Zelidie is put. Furthermore, Rameau not only has plenty of opportunities to ring in the essential dimensions of the dance, but can also use choral resources to splendid effect. While this may not be one of his most memorable scores, by comparison with others, it is rich in beauties and fascinations.

As one would expect of Rousset, everything is done to stylistic perfection here, by singers who have this idiom in their bones. Pau is the best-known singer, and she gives a winning performance as the much-tryed heroine, Pregardien has an ideal light tenor for his role, and his interaction with Piau is simply divine. The other singers are quite beautiful. The other singers are all wonderful in their parts, large or small. The chorus is sonorous—by now the best of its kind in such literature. The period orchestra sounds rich and colorful. The recording, made in actual performances in November 2014, is hard to beat.

The book-like album contains the full libretto with English translation. A superlative
The ensemble is well forward in sound and is an effective protagonist with the piano.

Ratkotka performs the Adagio exquisitely and lets loose her unbridled expression totally in keeping with the outer movements. She is greeted with warm applause from an audience that initially does not quite know what to make of the music, but her program continues with Rhapsody in Blue, moving further down the path of lady jazz—tamed and domesticated.

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Lucas Genusus, p.

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It seems unfair to me that a 24-year-old can perform all 24 Rachmaninoff Preludes in one concert as well as we have here. From that most familiar opening of the Prelude in C-sharp minor to its grand echoes in the final one in E-flat major, and later, Genusus is spot-on interpretively and technically. He also has hands large enough to play most of the huge chords and spread out counterpart the Russian was noted for. The recorded sound is good, and the audience on March 25, 2013 in the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory was very quiet and unobtrusive.

I have a dozen or more recordings of these works and have performed a few myself. I like everything here. There is nothing outside the normal realm as far as tempos or dynamics go. His interpretations are solid and I hear no wrong notes.

**Rameau**: Harpsichord Pieces

Blandine Rannou

Alpha 309 [2CD] 138 minutes

The complete set of Rameau’s harpsichord music was Blandine Rannou’s first solo recording, made in the summer of 2000 and issued as Zig Zag 10301, a 4-CD set. The solo music occupied the first three discs, and the ensemble version of the Pieces de clavecin en concerts was on the fourth. The present set by Alpha is a budget-priced reissue of only discs 2 and 3. The album’s title implies that we’ll get all of Rameau’s harpsichord music in this convenient two-disc set (as we do from almost every other player, but we don’t get all of the first book (1705-6), which is the suite of nine pieces in A minor that were on Zig Zag’s originally short disc 1, and there is no explanation here. Since there is nothing newly recorded, we also do not get Les Petits Maitreux and the solo versions of the four pieces that Rameau extracted and arranged from Pieces de clavecin en concerts. The set does include the isolated piece ‘La Dauphine’ from 1747, but the packaging doesn’t tell us anything about that provenance; it advertises only the 1724 and 1728 music, and puts it at the end of the 1724 piece.

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The booklet notes are largely an interview with Rannou looking back on the past 15 years of her career. She says she’d interpret a few things differently now. There are two harpsichord here, both by Marc Ducornet and having similar tone. The sound is fine. With no plastic in the packaging, the cardboard folder offers little protection for the discs.

I see no compelling reason to buy this incompletely reissued set. Among recent Rameau harpsichord recordings that have especially moved me, I’d urge the reader to hear the sets by Keti Haugsand and Bertrand Cuiller.
production in every way, and a wonderful addition to the swelling Rameau discography.

**RAVEL:** Piano Concertos; **FAURE:** Ballade
Yuja Wang; Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra/ Lionel Bringuier
DG 23931—50 minutes

Let’s begin by clearly stating that in terms of fill value, this assembly comes up woefully short—30 minutes short. That gives it a noticeable negative right at the starting gate. Still, let’s cast this aside for the moment. We expect a display of artistry from one of today’s most notable pianists. It’s sad to report that Wang and company are a bit of a disappointment.

Both Ravel piano concertos are bold statements, rhythmically vital and endlessly colorful. Here they are ultra-refined, with an emotional subtlety that often fits their character. While the jazz elements are glossed over instead of played in bold relief, the music’s wit is often repressed as well. One is inclined to shout for Wang to stop the indulgences and get on with it. Partial redemption occurs in the Adagio of the Concerto in G, though even here the music relaxes a little too much and affects threaten to move in. What a sharp contrast to the Barenboim recording reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

The Left Hand Concerto is a better fit for these players, while still not rising to the heights others have achieved. I like the murk of the opening, and the piano entry is powerful enough, if not really grand. Some fussy refinement does begin to creep in where it is not really wanted, and the music seems slightly held back, as if waiting for a shot of adrenalin to achieve maximum flow.

Fauré’s lovely Ballade is presented in its solo piano version. It works just as well without orchestra, and the notes mention that this was Wang’s choice. It’s the best thing on the program. Sound and notes are OK, but Wang has done better.

**REICHARDT:** Songs
Reinaldo Dopp, t; Albrecht Hartmann, fp
Klangloko 1510—40 minutes

German composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752-1814) wrote some 1500 songs; yet is largely forgotten. It’s a shame; the songs are nice. The piano doesn’t have as much to do as with later song composers, but they’re still enjoyable.

It’s hard not to compare settings of Reichardt’s with the more famous pieces by Schubert, so I’ll indulge a bit. Reichardt’s ‘Rastlose Liebe,’ like the Schubert, is driven and exciting. His ‘Erklönig’ is completely different from Schubert (Goethe preferred Loewe’s setting, in any case), the piano and voice moving together with rhythmic, if not melodic, intensity. His ‘Heidenroslein’ reminded me of the Schubert, less playful but still effective; the same can be said of ‘Der Musensohn.’

This short program is delightful—a terrific introduction to Reichardt or addition to a song library. Yet it isn’t the best because of later song composers, but the performance is more generic, less exciting. I love Dopp’s voice and crystal-clear diction. Hartmann does a great job finding opportunities to tell a story through some of the sparser, less involved accompaniments. I don’t like the sound of the fortepiano but was able to appreciate it here. Notes and texts but no translations.

**RENIE:** Harp Concerto; see Collections

**RESPIGHI:** Metamorphoseon; Ballad of the Gnomes; Belkis Suite
Ligeti Philharmonic/ John Neschling
BIS 2130 [SACD] 72 minutes

I played the Belkis Suite first. I’ve loved it ever since the first time I heard it at a Lake Forest (Illinois) Symphony concert under Paul Anthony McRae about 25 years ago. It’s had a few recordings, one of best-known probably the one with Geoffrey Simon and the Philharmonia Orchestra (Chandos), which also includes Metamorphoseon in its program. Simon serves the music well, but my favorite of these days is the Minnesota Orchestra under Eiji Oue (Reference). Neschling and his players give a decent, solid performance but they don’t surpass the Minnesotans. Oue’s interpretation is more atmospheric and sensuous in the first two movements, ‘Solomon’s Dream’ and ‘Belkis at Dawn;’ while he first up for more punch in the later ‘War Dance’ and ‘Oriagistic Dance,’ making a heyday of the wild percussion passages. Neschling & Co. are not slackers, but the performance is more generic, less colorful, tamer. This is not music for the faint of heart who shudder at the idea of Respighi’s overripe, effusive, late-romantic orchestral Orientalism.

Minnesota/Oue also have the Ballad of the Gnomes tone poem on their program; and again, where they let loose and show off the orchestra’s brilliant, glowering tone. Neschling and his players seem more concerned about just getting through the score. The problem is that this colorful, vibrant, unsuable music does not really respond well to a low-key approach. That’s not to say the performance is sub-par: I wouldn’t be disappointed if my local orchestra gave them these performances. But the harsh reality of the record collecting world is that the collector can select the very best recording and congratulate the OK one to oblivion.

While Gnomes was written in 1920, between The Fountains of Rome and The Pines of Rome, Metamorphoseon dates from 1930 and was written on a commission from Serge Koussevitzky for the Boston Symphony’s 50th Anniversary. The same anniversary brought the commissioning of Stravinsky’s Symphony of Psalms, Roussel’s Symphony 3, and Prokofiev’s Fourth, so Respighi’s work was premiéred with some memorable company. According to Jean-Pascal Vachon’s informative album notes, Respighi had reservations about the commission passages. Neschling and his colleagues do a great job finding opportunities to tell a story through some of the sparser, less involved accompaniments. I don’t like the sound of the fortepiano but was able to appreciate it here. Notes and texts but no translations.

**RAVEL:** Piano Concerto; see RACHMANNINOFF
Quartet; see DEBUSSY

In the 2012 the Spanish National Research Council recorded a complete set and thus a fuller picture of the record collecting world is that the collector can select the very best recording and congratulate the OK one to oblivion.

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production in every way, and a wonderful addition to the swelling Rameau discography.

RAVEL: Piano Concertos; SINFONIA: Ballade
Yuja Wang; Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra/ Lionel Bringuier
DG 23931—50 minutes

Let’s begin by clearly stating that in terms of fill value, this assembly comes up woefully short—30 minutes short. That gives it a noticeable negative right at the starting gate. Still, let’s cast this aside for the moment. We expect a display of artistry from one of today’s most notable pianists. It’s sad to report that Wang and company are a bit of a disappointment.

Both Ravel piano concertos are bold statements, rhythmically vital and endlessly colorful. Here they are ultra-refined, with an emotional subtlety that often ill fits their character. While the jazz elements are glossed over instead of played in bold relief, the music’s wit is often repressed as well. One is inclined to shout for Wang to stop the indulgences and get on with it. Partial redemption occurs in the Adagio of the Concerto in G, though even here the music relaxes a little too much and affects a stilted character. What a sharp contrast to the Rabotkina recording reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

The Left Hand Concerto is a better fit for these players, while still not rising to the heights others have achieved. I like the murk of the opening, and the piano entry is powerful enough, if not really grand. Some fancy refinement does begin to creep in where it is not really wanted, and the music seems slightly held back, as if waiting for a shot of adrenalin to achieve maximum flow.

Fauré’s lovely Ballade is presented in its solo piano version. It works just as well without orchestra, and the notes mention that this was Wang’s choice. It’s the best thing on the program. Sound and notes are OK, but Wang has done better.

RAVEL: Piano Pieces
Serenade Grotesque; Menuet Antique; Pavane; Jeux d’eau; Sonatine; Miroirs; Gaspard de la Nuit; Menuet sur le Nom d’Haydn; Valses Nobles et Sentimentales; Prelude; A la Maniere de Borodine; Chabrier; Le Tombeau de Couperin; Minuet in C-sharp minor; La Valse
Hinrich Alpers
Honens 21277 [2CD] 152 minutes

Gaspard de la Nuit; Jeux d’eau; Sonatine; Pavane; A la Maniere de Borodine; Chabrier
Stefan Vladar
Capriccio 5260—49 minutes

Vladar presents a smaller selection of Ravel’s better-known works. While Vladar’s playing of the homages to Borodin and Chabrier is beautiful and sensitive, his Sonatine sounds more like Liszt. The first movement is too aggressive, and II has too much rubato. A more straightforward approach would capture the spirit of the piece. His approach works best in the virtuosic III. I would also prefer more nuance with Ondine. Though his technical skills are on display here, as in III of the Sonatine, his playing is again too aggressive. Scarbo also lacks mystery, though his technique is undeniably impressive; it loses steam and isn’t really involved accompaniments. I don’t like the sound of the fortepiano but was able to appreciate it here. Notes and texts but no translations.

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BIS’s high-definition SACD sound is very impressive. The disc comes in the stack company with the Minnesota/Oue disc revealed that Reference’s standard CD sound is actually on
par if not somewhat more vibrant. I wonder what that would sound like in SACD!

HANSEN

RODE: Violin Concertos 2-8; Variations

Friedemann Eichhorn; Jena Philharmonic/ Nicolas Pasquet—Naxos 573054—73 minutes

Pierre Rode was a pupil of Viotti and a great star of the French school of violin. Paganini, who seldom played anything by anyone other than himself, did play Rode concertos. And Rode does sound a lot like Paganini but without the sheer inspiration and elan. Other copiers of Paganini are Beriot and Lipinski. I like Beriot the best. I could live without Rode, as long as I have Paganini. If you don’t like Paganini, you are not likely to respond to Rode. Violinists will like this music, I think, because it is full of challenges to technique and amazing feats. Steven Haller reviewed two earlier recordings in this series; you should read those reviews if you think you might like this music (May/June 2009; Jan/Feb 2012).

The two sets of variations are on the Paisiello aria ‘Non so Piu’ and “on a Tyrolean Air”.

VROON

RODRIGO: Concerto de Aranjuez: Fantasia para un Gentilhombre; Concierto Madrigal

Narciso Yepes, Godelievie Monden, English Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra/ Garcia Navarro

Pentatone 5186 209—76 minutes

I review a reissue of Yepes’s solo recordings from the early 60s in Archives—not a kind review. This release is an entirely different matter. I don’t know what made the difference—he’s 20 years older, he’s playing with fine orchestras with a skilled conductor, he’s playing in a situation where rhythmic eccentricity is essentially impossible—but these are some of the finest recordings of the Rodrigo solo concertos I’ve ever encountered.

One absolute requirement for these concertos, especially the Aranjuez and the Madrigal, is a world-class, virtuosic technique, and that Yepes has always possessed. While he doesn’t always use that transcendent mastery for the most expressive ends, he always has command of the notes.

Rogers has seemed to try not to be expressive, to avoid a true, singing line. Not here. Both the Aranjuez and the Fantasia are given expert and expressive performance. It’s still Yepes, and he can’t match the conviction and sheer beauty of Pepe Romero on Philips or the sheer passion of Xeifei Yang on EMI (May/June 2011), but it helps that the Philharmonia (in the Aranjuez) and the English Chamber Orchestra (Fantasia) sound absolutely terrific.

The Concierto Madrigal is a fascinating work, with considerable beauties (how many pieces are there that quote both the Aranjuez and the overture to Monteverdi’s Orfeo?) It is even more technically terrifying than the Aranjuez. It was written for Pepe and Angel Romero, and their recording with the ASMF (on Philips, with various couplings) is still without equal. Yepes is, indeed, a match for Pepe on the first page of this part, Godelievie Monden, is not. The moto perpetuo ‘Girardilla’ must be distinctly slower than the Romero; nor can the ‘Zapatado’ match their excitement.

These recordings may not be at the absolute top of the very crowded list, but they are quite fine, and if you want a document of Yepes at his best, this is it.

KEATON

ROGERS: Magna Mysteria

Martha Guth, s; Trinity Chamber Orchestra & Cathedral Choir of Men/ Jared Johnson

Innova 924—45 minutes

This 2010 work by the American composer John Fitz Rogers is a large scale composition for choirs and chamber orchestra. It deals with themes of “mystery,” “homelessness,” and “big questions”, hence the title Magna Mysteria. Rogers is Professor of Composition at the University of South Carolina and a widely performed composer whose music is distinctly tonal and solidly in the realm of “English Cathedral” Choral Music, and has that kind of redolent English romantic 20th Century longing that sometimes brings Howells to mind. The Latin texts from Boethius, the Psalms, and Revelation were not a sign of the composer. The sweep of the music is grand and often ravishing in its harmonic beauty. Most notable is track 5, ‘Truth’s Paradox,’ where the large swath of the composers’ vision is unleashed. The soprano, Martha Guth, brings a fine musicianship and awareness of the color of the words. But the end of this section is certainly a significant release in this genre, and fans of 20th Century sacred music will want to investigate it. The performance is beautifully pulled together by the Director of Music at the Cathedral, Jared Johnson.

HAMPTON

OREM: Flute Trio; Prayers; see Collections

ROSSINI: Otello

Gregory Kunde (Othello), Carmen Romeu (Desdemona), Maxim Mironov (Rodrigo), Robert McPherson (Iago), Maarten Heirman (Doge), Josef Wagner (Elmiro); Flanders Opera/ Alberto Zedda—Dynamic 7711 [3CD] 158 minutes

Before Verdi’s Otello (1887) there was Rossini’s (1816). Both operas are based on Shakespeare’s Othello. Arrigo Boito wrote a strong libretto for Verdi, but he strayed little from Shakespeare. He eliminated Shakespeare’s first act entirely, placing that information in conversation, tightening up the drama. He also justified Iago’s villainy by adding an aria (‘Credo in un dio crudel’). It’s one of the best librettos ever.

Rossini’s libretto by Francisco Maria Berio di Salis deviates radically from Shakespeare. The entire opera takes place in Venice—no mention of Cyprus. The role of Iago is reduced in its villainy. The minor role of Rodrigo is expanded as a principal tenor role. He gets the most difficult and brilliant music—a chance for a good tenor to display his virtuosity. As one tenor shows it’s not enough, Otello, Iago, and the Doge of Venice are also tenors. In what Charles Osborne calls “an absolutely ludicrous adaptation of Shakespeare”; Otello interrupts the wedding of Desdemona and Rodrigo (a conflation of Shakespeare and Cas- sio). He challenges Rodrigo to a duel, is sent inside, but secretly returns to Venice and kills Desdemona in a fit of jealous rage. Although Iago has had little to do with plot, he commits suicide out of remorse!

At the time of the opera’s premiere (Naples: Teatro del Fondo by the San Carlo, whose regular theater had just burned down, December 4, 1816) tragic opera was not the norm. Happy endings were practically a requirement. The Neapolitans accepted Otel- lo’s tragic ending. For another production elsewhere, Rossini had to compose a new happy version, as an appendix. Among his serious operas, this was long lasting, seen on stage, though less and less, up to the end of the 19th Century, when it was replaced by the Verdi.

Mr Osborne does think somewhat highly of Rossini’s music, describing it as “amiable enough in the first two acts though not always dramatically apt”. In Act 3 Rossini is more care- ful with the drama, composing more suitable music. The andante overture begins as a copy of the overture to Il Turco in Italia (1814) then proceeds to borrow generously from the overture to Sigismundo (1814). The opera is off to a buoyant start with a chorus of Venetian citi- zens hailing Otello. The hero enters accompanied by lago and Rodrigo to the sound of a jolly march. Otello has only one aria, ‘Ah! Sì per voi gia sento’. It is a three-part aria, with a strong opening cavatina, a slower andante where he thinks of Desdemona, and a cabale- ta for virtuoso display. After a weak duet for lago and Rodrigo, Desdemona and Emilia sing one of the score’s best sections. Rossini bor- rowed it from Aureliano in Palmira (1813). The Act 1 finale contains a beautiful central trio recycled from L’Equivoco Stravagante (1811). The oddest piece of self-borrowing appears in Rodrigo’s Act 2 aria, ‘Ah! Come mai non senti pietà’ It is most disconcerting to hear the final section of the ‘Cat Duet’ as the aria’s cabaletta.

A few more oddities show up: Desdemona plays the harp to accompany her ‘V’iero Song’. A final bit of incongruity appears in the jolly orchestral accompaniment to Otello’s murder-intent entrance. Osborne concludes: “Rossini’s Otello is enjoyable and still stage- worthy, but it is almost impossible to listen to it today without Verdi’scontestably great work in one’s mind and memory. "

Rossini’s four tenors enter en masse and it’s easy to distinguish who is singing what. Heirman’s Doge is the least distinguished. He is weak even as a comprimario. Think Alessio De Paolis on a bad day. McPherson’s lago isn’t much better. Is it possible to sing nasally and strongly at the same time? McPherson does. Mironov upholds the tenor’s honor. He is a sweet-voiced singer with the goods to get through the coloratura hurdles. Kunde is the darkest voice of the four. There is solidity and flexibilty to his voice. The ladies blend dul- cely, making their Act 1 duet a highlight of the performance. The two gossipy couples seem to gato that introduces the duet. Wagner’s Elmiro is a nondescript fellow, adequate enough. The
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HAMILTON

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At the time of the opera’s première (Naples: Teatro del Fondo by the San Carlo, December 4, 1816) tragic opera was not the norm. Happy endings were practically a norm. Happy endings were practically a Happy ending! Now Otello believes his wife is faithful to him, he proceeds to borrow generously from the opera’s libretto for virtuoso display. After a weak duet for Iago and Rodrigo, Desdemona and Emilia sing one of the score’s best sections. Rossini borrowed it from Aureliano in Palmira (1813). The Act 1 finale contains a beautiful central trio rescued from L’Equivoco Stravagante (1811). The oddest piece of self-borrowing appears in Rodrigo’s Act 2 aria, ‘Ah! Come mai non senti pieta’. It is most disconcerting to hear the final section of the ‘Cat Duet’ as the aria’s cadetta. A few more oddities show up: Desdemona plays the harp to accompany her ‘Willow Song’. A final bit of incongruity appears in the jolly orchestral accompaniment to Otello’s murder-intent entrance. Osborne concludes: “Rossini’s Otello is enjoyable and still stage-worthy, but it is almost impossible to listen to it today without Verdi’s contestably great work in one’s mind and heart.”

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Arnold Bax’s Fourth Symphony, or have heard in other sea-themed compositions, as the Sea Symphony (La Mer) and Moby Dick (Le Palais Hante). These are painting-like scenes, with the orchestral colors giving rise to a sense of space that are startling and gripping. The bass, coronavirus, and buffalos in all these areas. For a more specific example, Falletta’s handling of the French music. In the Elopement Scene, the orchestra plays with enthusiasm and precision. After the film’s release, a soundtrack album was released by RCA, and Sainton also wrote a Symphonic Suite, which was recorded. These have long been deleted. The booklet also offers a scene-by-scene explanation of the cut music brings cohesiveness to the score, allowing for a better assessment of the music. SATIE: Piano Pieces; see POULENC

SCHMITT: Anthony and Cleopatra; Le Palais Hante

Florent Schmitt wrote Anthony and Cleopatra for a presentation of Andre Gide’s French translation of Shakespeare’s play. These are the two suites the composer drew from that music. Their subtitle is Six Episodes Symphoniques d’apres le Drame de Shakespeare. The music is spiked with the Ravel of Daphnis et Chloe, the Debussy of Martyrdom of St Sebastian (mainly the brass fanfare), and the exoticism of Rimsky-Korsakov. This is the third recording of these suites that I am aware of, after Leif Segerstam (May/June 1989) and Jacques Mercier. I discussed Schmitt’s Etude pour Le Palais Hante in my review of the Mercier (Jan/Feb 2009). The Buffalo Philharmonic’s playing of this difficult music is accomplished, but neither the orchestra nor Falletta’s conducting suits the idiom. The string tone wants for the color that French music requires, and the orchestra’s slightly soft rhythms and lack of thought lead to a lack of spring and propulsion. Nor do lines move forward enough. The whole thing sounds a little under-rehearsed, but that could be a byproduct of playing music that is not in the bailiwick of its performers. The Nasos engineering is distant and boxy in a way that dilutes immediacy and compresses the frequency extremes, especially the highs. I wouldn’t recommend it for any music, but it is fatal in French music of this type. All that said, if this newcomer were the only recording of Anthony available, we should be grateful. I have a decent, serviceable performance, for it is that.

The Mercier is much more to be desired. With it, it is far more dramatic and colorful. Rhythms snap off, lines move, phrases exude elan; and the string color and shimmer are perfect for French music. The brass play the brass-only movements with commanding presence and sense of space that are startling and gripping. In the battle scene, the Lorraine orchestra darts back and forth with spirit and celerity. And Mercier’s orchestra outpaces and outflanks Buffalo in all these areas. For a more subjective comparison, there is the English horn solo in ‘Night at the Palais de la Reine’ (Night in the Queen’s Palace). The Buffalo player is excellent, the tone beautiful, the phrasing romantic, sometimes holding back just slightly. The Lorraine soloist is appropriately more sleek and liquid. The way the two players handle the decorative triplets is instructive. The Buffalo English horn player (or Falletta) holds them back very slightly. In Lorraine, the triplets roll along in light decorative fashion that fits the music better. Topping everything off is the violin entrance in the middle of the solo. What is very good in Buffalo gleams magically in Lorraine. Timpani’s open, immediate, and colorful high landing suits this music. The strings snap off, lines move, phrases exude elan; and the Nasos engineering does not. I have not heard the Segerstam.

Schmitt’s Etude pour le Palais Hante d’Edgar Poe (The Haunted Palace, 1904) is based on an Edgar Allen Poe poem and may be better known from work based on Poe. It is an early work, one of the envoi compositions that Schmitt wrote as required of winners of the Prix de Rome, which he was awarded in 1900. The action follows the text pretty closely and is essentially a darkly romantic and sometimes exciting tone poem. It is closer to 19th Century French romanticism as well as less exotic and refined than Anthony and Cleopatra. Falletta’s broad approach is better suited to Palais than to Anthony, but the problem remains that she seems to forget that the music’s composer is French. Torselier with the Sao Paolo Symphony and Andre Caplet’s Shanghai with the Sao Paolo Symphony is weaker than Sao Paolo or Buffalo. The main attraction of the Pretre is the inclusion of Juan Allende Blin’s “completion” of Debussy’s Fall from the House of Usher and Andre Caplet’s Conte Fantastique (from The Masque of the Red Death), both interesting but not essential curiosities. Based strictly on Palais, I would lean to Falletta over Pretre.

It is hard to conclude without pointing out some oddities. Falletta cannot be said to be weak with French music. Her La Mer with the Long Beach Symphony is very good. Even better is the somewhat similar The Sea by Frank Bridge on the same disc (Mar/Apr 1999). Falletta and the BPO also gave us an excellent Copland program: same label, engineer, and hall, but far more exciting and gripping performances and stunningly better sound (Mar/Apr 2007).

SCHOENBERG: Pelleas and Melisande; Violin Concerto

Kolja Blacher; Guttenstein Orchestra / Markus Stenz.—Oehms 445—69 minutes

Arnold Schoenberg wrote Pelleas and Melisande in response to Richard Strauss’s suggestion that Maurice Maeterlinck’s eponymous play was a good subject for an opera. Claude Debussy obviously felt the same way and finished his opera around the same time (1902). Schoenberg completed his Pelleas a year later, but instead of an opera he wrote a tone poem that covers six scenes from the play. The work is in powerful but dreamlike fashion. He completed the work in 1903, placing it between Mahler’s Fifth and Sixth Symphonies—a point worth noting because Pelleas’s push on tonality and expression is as much a transition to 20th Century music as Mahler’s works were. The premiere of Pelleas shared the same concert with Schoenberg’s then brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky’s Die Seejungfrau (The Mermaid).

I discussed Pelleas at some length in my review of the Christian Thielemann recording (Mar/Apr 2001). I have since found that Schoenberg’s performance—the third that appealed to me most at the time. As Don O’Connor noted in his review of the Sarastre Pelleas, most recordings tend either to be romantic or “lean and reserved”. My “big three” fall into the romantic category—Barbirolli’s, the Pretre is the inclusion of Juan Allende Blin’s “completion” of Debussy’s Fall from the House of Usher and Andre Caplet’s Conte Fantastique (from The Masque of the Red Death), both interesting but not essential curiosities. Based strictly on Palais, I would lean to Falletta over Pretre.

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orchestra plays with enthusiasm and precision under Rossini-expert Zedda. An Italian-English libretto can be found on-line at dynamic.it

PARSONS

SAINTON: Moby Dick
Moscow Symphony/William Stromberg
Naxos 573367—68 minutes

This is a re-release of a 1998 (J/F 1999) Marco Polo recording of the complete music score from John Huston’s 1956 film version of Moby Dick. Written by Philip Sainton, the score is highly regarded by many film music critics as one of the most evocative scores of sea-faring life ever written. I agree with them wholeheartedly. This is a magnificent score that sounds more like a concert piece with many themes and variations rather than the usual highlights from a film score. Sainton writes in the idiom. The string tone wants for the color and articulation that would fit this music better. Topping everything off is the violin entrance in the middle of the solo. What is very good in Buffalo gleams magically in Lorraine. Timpani’s open, immediate, and colorful high严厉打击s suit this music in every way that the Naxos engineering does not. I have not heard the Sestroterm.

SCHMITT: Anthony and Cleopatra;
Le Palais Hante
Buffalo Philharmonic/JoAnn Falletta
Naxos 573521—60 minutes

Florent Schmitt wrote Anthony and Cleopatra for a presentation of Andre Gide’s French translation of Shakespeare’s play. These are the two suites the composer drew from that music. Their subtitle is Six Episodes Symphoniques d’apres le Drame de Shakespeare. The music is spiked with the Ravel of Debussy’s Pelleas and Melisande; the Debussy of Daphnis et Chloe, the Debussy of Martyrdom of St Sebastian (mainly the brass fanfare), and the exoticism of Rimsky-Korsakov. This is the third recording of these suites that I am aware of; after Leif Segerstam (May/June 1989) and Jacques Mercier. I discuss this music in my review of the Mercier (Jan/Feb 2009).

The Buffalo Philharmonic’s playing of this difficult music is accomplished, but neither the orchestra nor Falletta’s conducting suits the idiom. The string tone wants for the color that French music requires, and the orchestra’s slightly soft rhythms and lack of punchiness and bite lead to a lack of spring and propulsion. Nor do lines move forward enough. The whole thing sounds a little under-rehearsed, but that could be a byproduct of playing music that is not in the bailiwick of its performers.

The Naxos engineering is distant and boxy in a way that dilutes immediacy and compresses the frequency extremes, especially the highs. I wouldn’t recommend it for any music, but it is fatal in French music of this type.

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March/April 2016

SCHOENBERG: Transfigured Night; BERG: Lyric Suite; WEBERN: Slow Movement; 5 Movements
Nicolas Bone, va; Antonio Meneses, vc; Belcea Quartet—Alpha 209—81 minutes

The pieces here are available in a total of over 175 performances. Transfigured Night of course leads the pack with 90. These readings are accurate in pitch and phrasing, with good balances. The latter is especially important in music that's densely polyphonic. They largely play the notes as written. In Transfigured Night that's an asset. The piece is already so crammed with emotionally wrought, not to say overwrought, passages that any added interpretation crosses over into hysteria. Ditto the Lyric Suite, which is already prodding the envelope in that department. Rather than the three or four movements sometimes recorded—the Lyric Suite Suite, as I call it—this performance is complete—al six. Webern's works also benefit from cooler heads prevailing.

O'CONNOR

SCHUBERT: Songs
Christian Elsner, t; Berlin Radio/ Marek Janowski
Pentatone 5186394—63 minutes

I was first introduced to the orchestration of Schubert songs by Max Reger and Anton Webern last year (Gramola 99035, Nov/Dec 2014). Here is a whole program of them. It's endlessly interesting. Some are better than others; for example, Reger's take on 'Erlkönig' adds low strings ominously in the accompaniment, but I don't get the same urgency from the violins as I do from the piano. Like Reger's 'Prometheus', the drama is enhanced by the orchestration, but some of the intimacy is lost and I'm not sure that's a good thing.

From the Gramola recording I knew I liked Webern's orchestration of the intimate 'Du bist die Ruh'; I liked it even more on this, in no small part owing to Elsner's sweet, even tone. Webern's 'Der Wegweiser' sounds even more lonesome here. There's nothing more solitary than feeling alone while surrounded by people, and that's exactly what happens with the orchestration; in a sense, the wanderer's solitude is all the more shocking when surrounded by a full orchestra.

Lest it seem as though I'm partial to the Webern orchestrations (though I must admit that Webern is a hero of mine), I must mention Reger's tendency, if busy, 'Litanei Auf das Fest Aller Seelen'.

The program offers an interesting opportunity to revisit favorite Schubert songs in a new way. It's worth picking up, if only for the sake of curiosity. Elsner is a great singer and the orchestra plays well. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL
weight. Craft seems aimless and unsure. I have not heard Saraste (Nov/Dec 2012), Baudo (Sept/Oct 2007), and Glišen (May/June 1991). Like several labels, Oehms presents Pelléas on a single track. That is too bad, it would be a huge plus to be able to identify the scenes as the music plays. Berg believed the work’s structure suggested a four-movement symphony. Some recordings present it that way with four entry points, but that does not help us understand what is going on. Thielemann and Karajan offer 11 and 9 tracks with tempo markings, but the problem remains. I am not sure what the Barbirolli CD does. (I have the LP) The solution may be the excellent Dover score. For what it is worth, below is what I included in my Thielemann review. The numbers relate to his tracks.

1. Berg I (in “sonata form”). Forest; Melisande; Golaud (horn)
2. Principal theme (violins); “Wedding” (violins); Fate (trombones, horns)
3. Pelleas (trumpet)
4. Berg’s II. A Scherzo-like movement in three parts. 1) Fountain in Park; 2) Castle Tower; Golaud’s Jealousy; 3) Vault (trombone glissandos)
5. Transition
8. Berg IV; Recapitulation of I; Aftermath of murder. Pelleas (trumpet)
9. Recap of principal theme; more aftermath
10. Melisande’s sick room (obvious impressionism in upper winds)

11. Berg Epilogue

That brings us to the violin concerto. I was leery of reviewing this, because I disliked the work as I do all of Schoenberg’s atonal works with the possible exception of the piano concerto. The violin concerto is not among his thorniest efforts. It is athletic and entertaining in its way, but it gets tiresome after a while. What I can say is that Kolja Blacher is a terrific violinist with excellent technique and a beautiful sound; and the orchestra, conducting, and recording are as good as they are in Pelléas. If a Schoenberg aficionado told me it was one of the best if not the best performance of the concerto, I would not be surprised.

These three pieces (from Schubert’s last year of life) are impromptus in all but name and belong in a program with the impromptus, as here. The third in the set was originally separate, but they were not published before 1868, edited by Brahm. Maybe he decided that they were a good set, like the two sets of impromptus.

Anselm Hutterbrenner was a friend of Schubert, and the theme of these variations is from a quartet by him. Schubert wrote this the same year the quartet was published: 1817. This is not a well-known piece by Schubert, and it was nice to hear it; but I am not sure I need it in my collection.

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O’CONNOR

SCHUBERT: Songs Christian Elsner, t; Berlin Radio/ Marek Janowski Pentatone 5186394—63 minutes

I went through those comparisons because going over other recordings, Zinman’s fine Pelleas, was a candidate for one of the best if not the best performance of this new recording from Markus Stenz combines many qualities of the three (Thielemann the least), while straddling the dichotomy between absolute and dramatic music. Its timing of 38 minutes indicates fastish tempos, but the performance seems always to be in the right place musically and dramatically. Schoenberg may not have written an opera, but he did create passages that sound like discussions between instruments—something I’ve not heard so clearly before.

Mr O’Connor criticized the wandering opening of the opera, but he might be impressed with Stenz’s menacing urgency. The performance is in a way symbolized by a single horn chord in the first section that is beautifully placed and balanced rather than just appearing. The love music between Melisande and Pelleas is at once rapturous and controlled, before the wedding is portentously dark before yielding to joy. In what Alban Berg called a scherzo, the music flows flawlessly through a graceful scene at the fountain, an imposing one at the tower, and a creepy one in the vaults. Pelleas’s murder is shockingly, and the powerful sections sound at once big, ethereal, and controlled. Melisande’s room is suitably eerie and otherworldly, and the ending is the softest and most funereal that I know. The orchestra may be the best I’ve heard in this work, and the sound is excellent. If you are going to have only one recording of Pelléas, the Stenz is a candidate and worth having even if you own a different one or all of the “big three”.

Going over other recordings, Zinman’s fine Rotterdam issue is effectively dark but lacking the last word in string opulence. Bamert (July/Aug 2005) and Boulez (Sept/Oct 1993) are of the lean and reserved variety and on a level below. Barenboim (Nov/Dec 1989) and Mehta (May/June 1991) are pretty but light.
A few years ago I heard Tynan and Burnside give a fine Schumann recital in London. I wish I felt as positive about how she sounds in this program of 17 Schubert songs about women pursuing love of different sorts. Tynan’s voice here is gratng, not as I remember it from the front row of the recital hall; it is continually strident and edgy, especially in the songs that require a lighter and gentler approach. This is most noticeable in ‘Du Bist die Ruh’, where she fails to convey tely’s very message: “You are stillness, peace, desire, and their release.” Her relentless vibrato negates any sense of rest. ‘Nacht und Träume’ presents the same problem; it fails to express the mystery and stillness of the night. ‘Ave Maria’ needs to employ a more moping tone to convey the experience of a young girl praying to the Virgin Mary. Tynan seems unable to spin out a soft and gentle sound—needed at the conclusion of ‘Wanders Nachtlied’ (D 768). She is at her best in the more straightforward songs like ‘Sei Mir Gegräst’ and ‘Die Forelle’. This is the first volume of Burnside’s survey of Schubert’s songs, each volume to be recorded with a different singer. Burnside’s playing is up to his usual high standards, but Tynan’s singing lacks the right tone and approach to make this release one I want to hear again.

Notes, texts, translations

R MOORE

SCHEMAT: abandoned; 3; singer Burnside, p

Delphian 34165—63 minutes

SCHELTHOFF: 5 pieces; see DVORAK

SCUMANN: Liederkreis; Frauenliebe und -leben; BERG: 7 Early Songs Dorothea Roschmann, s; Mitsuko Uchida, p Decca 4788439—69 minutes

The pairing of Schumann and Berg isn’t intuitive but it does make sense. Both composers spent portions of their lives dedicated to songs, and both were avidly interested in literature and its content. Musically, the combination makes for a great program, here, Schumann’s Liederkreis and Frauenliebe und -leben as bookends to Berg’s Sieben Frühe Lieder. I’m glad to hear the latter again with piano, after what I considered an ineffective arrangement for chamber ensemble earlier this year (Zig zag 345, March/April 2015).

Roschmann has a rich, dark voice that blooms in the Berg (‘Die Nachtigal’ is spectacular) and works nicely in the Schumann, too, though better in the Liederkreis. I didn’t care for her Frauenliebe as much; it lacks youthful excitement in the early songs, sounding sometimes a little stiff and too dark to be convincing. Still, the voice is beautiful. I only know Uchida as a soloist. The playing is excellent, as expected, and it was nice to hear her as a supportive partner in this program. Notes, texts, and translations.

kscHELTHOFF: 5 pieces; see DVORAK

PHON: 95076—73 minutes

This is one of the better recordings that I have heard of these sonatas. Andrea Cortesi and Marco Venturi get all of the temps just right and know just where and how to stretch things out. Aside from that, what they lack is enthusiasm. The white-hot passion of Gidon Kremer and Martha Argerich is utterly lacking here. The main value of this disc would be to demonstrate to students the right temps for these works. I know no other music that depends so much on the interpreters for an effective realization. Sonata 3 is included, but it is obvious that Schumann had run out of inspiration by the time he wrote it. Stick with Kremer and Argerich (Nov/Dec 1987) or Nicholas DiEugenio and Chi-Chen Wu (Sept/Oct 2015) for more enthusiastic performances.

SCUMANN: Kreisleriana; see HOFFMANN

SCHTZ: Funeral Music Schutz-Akademie/ Howard Arman Brilliant 95123—61 minutes

This is the fourth recordings of Schütz’s Musikalische Exequien I have reviewed, and it is every bit as good as the other three. Cordes’s recording with Weser-Renaissance (CP 0777410; July/Aug 2010) and Rademann’s 2012 recording with the Dresden Chamber Choir (Curus 83.238) use generally faster tempos in all three movements. Gardner evokes a slightly more somber tone with slower temps in his 1988 recording with the Monteverdi Choir (DG 423405). The Schutz-Akademie fits well into this group. In fact there is little separating the German ensembles. Their tone is beautifully balanced, the phrasing and tempos always push the music forward in anticipation of the next solo or choral part. The soloists are brilliant. The Monteverdi Choir sounds like the larger group and, therefore, perhaps lacks some of the Germans’ subtlety in tutti passages. Herrewegh’s Cappella Gedanica (Harmonie-Fund 501261; Sept/Oct 2009) is the outlier—very lugubrious, particularly in the first movement.

Each of these programs also includes motets by Schütz. But unlike the others, which perform all three movements of the Exequien in sequence, Howard Arman intersperses motets by various contemporary composers between its movements. Schein’s ‘Threnus’ offers a wonderful display of strange, often dissonant, harmonic effects following the stile moderno. The other motets are Michael Praetorius’s ‘Herzlich Lieb hab ich Diet,’ ‘Mitt Fried und Freud Ich Fahr Dahin,’ and ‘Hört auf mit Weinen und Klagen’; ‘Quis Dabit Oculum’ by Johannes Christoph Demantius; and Schütz’s own ‘Die mit Tränen Säen’ and ‘Das ist je Gewisslich Wahr.’ It is an extremely fine recording. My only disappointment is the lack of texts.

SCHWANTNER: Looking Back; Soaring; Silver Halo; Black Anemones Jennie Oh Brown, Karin Ursin, Janice MacDonnald, Susan Saylor, fl; Jeffrey Panko, p Innova 919—43 minutes

‘Black Anemones’ is a short, popular, pretty piece for flute and piano. Looking Back is a longer work that makes minimalism’s influence even more apparent. Schwantner’s faster movements tend to be busy and cluttered, and they’re filled with piano ripples, New Age-ish harmonies and heavy doses of Lydian mode. The slow movement of Looking Back uses a lot of extended techniques, but they’re not done abrasively.

Silver Halo, for flute quartet, is tonal and minimalist-influenced, but the writing sounds aggressive and argumentative. I’ve had to take it in sections—which is fine, it annoys me too much to listen to it all at once.

The musicians care about the music, and they put a lot of energy and expression into it. In the piano-accompanied pieces, the sound is murky and the flute too recessed; the quartet is better. Notes are in English.

SCOTT: Violin Sonatas 1+4 Andrew Kirkman; Clipper Erickson, p Affetto 1501—56 minutes

Cyril Scott (1879-1970), famous for the lovely Lotus Land, began his career as a symbolist. His Violin Sonata 1 of 1910, presented here in its original, unabridged version and magnificently performed in 40 minutes long, meanders endlessly like so much of the symbolist music of its time. I sup-
Solo Violin and the two accompanied sonatas are wonderful pieces.

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Each of these programs also includes motets by Schütz. But unlike the others, which perform all three movements of the Exequien in sequence, Howard Arman intersperses motets by various contemporary composers between its movements. Schein’s ‘Threnus’ offers a wonderful display of strange, often dissonant, harmonic effects following the stile moderno. The other motets are Michael Praetorius’s ‘Herzlich Lieb hab ich Dicht,’ ‘Mit Fried und Freud Ich Fahr Dahin,’ and ‘Hört auf mit Weinen und Klagen’; ‘Quis Dabit Oculum’ by Johannes Christoph Demantius; and Schütz’s own ‘Die mit Tränen Säen’ and ‘Das ist je Gewisslich Wahr.’ It is an extremely fine recording. My only disappointment is the lack of texts.

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Silver Halo, for flute quartet, is tonal and minimalist-influenced, but the writing sounds aggressive and argumentative. I’ve had to take it in sections—shortly after that, it annoys me too much to listen to it all at once.

The musicians care about the music, and they put a lot of energy and expression into it. In the piano-accompanied pieces, the sound is murky and the flute too recessed; the quartet is better. Notes are in English.

pose the idea was that the journey was more important than arriving at the destination. His harmonies are subtle and sophisticated.

Violin Sonata 4, written in 1956, shows a strong family resemblance to the earlier works, but its structure is taut and it is less than half the length. I like it better because I like firm structure (not necessarily short: I like Mahler), but I do not find the thematic material engaging.

Andrew Kirkman is a workman violinist, and Cliphord Erickson is a good pianist. I wish Kirkman’s intonation were more precise. Good sound.

SCRIABIN: Etudes (all); 3 Pieces, op 2; 2 Preludes, op 22; Quasi-waltz, op 47; 2 Poems, op 69

After Chopin, Scriabin’s are the most-recorded etudes—even more than Liszt’s Transcendental Etudes. It’s easy to understand why; like Chopin’s etudes, they combine winning musicality, attractive melodies, and exciting technical display.

Mr Alexeev emphasizes the latter quality, never letting us forget just how hard it is to play these pieces. His performances are dazzling, thrilling, monumental—even when that means rapid accomplishment figures drown out the embryonic melodies buried in the relentless passagework.

As often as these etudes are recorded, I regret that I’ve heard just one previous recording, by Alexander Paley, on Naxos (S/O 1997), who downplays the immense technical challenges and instead emphasizes the obscured melodic structure of especially the fast, busy etudes; he makes these pieces sound almost too easy. I wonder if, were I not so familiar with Paley’s recording, I might have been a bit lost in the awesome welter of Alexeev’s performance.

Alexeev plays simpler pieces—preludes, poems, and a waltz—between each set of etudes. It’s a welcome respite before the next onslaught of intensity. Excellent recording with big, resonant bass, perfect complement to Alexeev’s commanding style. His breathing is audible in the handful of quiet pieces.

SCRIABIN: Piano Pieces

Waltz, op 1; Prelude & Impromptu, op 2; Prelude & Nocturne, op 9; Etudes, opp 8/12: 65.2+32: Impromptus, op 14; Allegro de Concert, op 18; Polonaise, op 21; Poems, opp 41+59:1; Scherzo, op 46

Valentina Lisitsa—Decca 478 8435—77 minutes

A most unusual Scriabin recital including just one popular piece, about half an hour of unpublished pieces, and every other piece rarely performed or recorded. Mixed in with the unpublished juvenilia are some published juvenilia Scriabin bestowed with opus numbers, proving that even as a teenager he had excellent judgement. The unpublished pieces—Chopinian scherzos, mazurkas, even a couple of fugues—are always of doubtful worth. The one popular piece, the last of the Op. 8 etudes, is a gentle take on the soaring and extravagant final published version. Ms Lisitsa also programs the Concert Allegro and Polonaise back-to-back, both in B-flat minor, mirroring note-writer Hugh Macdonald’s speculation that these were perhaps first and last movements of a sonata never completed.

Lisitsa is a wonderful interpreter, her touch incandescent, sensitively teasing out and connecting Scriabin’s long, often disjointed melodies while giving due to the subtle harmonic shifts in even the thickest, busiest textures. Her devotion to the derivative and less-than-fresh inspirations, as admirable—really more than they deserve. Beautiful piano, beautiful sound, a most useful collection celebrating the centenary of Scriabin’s early death in 1915.

SCRIABIN: Symphony 1; Poem of Ecstasy

Mikhail Gubsky, t; Vladimir Lavrik, tpt; Svetlana Shilova, s; Moscow Conservatory Chamber Choir, Russian National Orchestra/ Mikhail Pletnev

Pentatone 5186 514 [SACD] 77 minutes

SCRIABIN’s Symphony 1 is coming into its own with no less than 13 recordings now available. It’s a terrific orchestral showpiece, its alleged source of beauty is the excesses of a young man’s exuberance. Even the much-abused choral finale now seems increasingly a fitting cap for a luminous structure. Scriabin’s orchestration uses a conventional size of orchestra, but with sonorous effect.

The Poem of Ecstasy (Symphony 4) has been a classic for over a century. It’s the greatest Russian tone poem, despite terrific competition. From the outset the harmonies, especially Scriabin’s delicately tart ninth chords, immediately place the music in a new world. The transcendent C-major climax holds its own with anything the concertgoer knows.

The interpretation of both works here is expansive in stride and epic in mood—the symphony especially. It runs four or five minutes longer than usual, but never drags. To the contrary, it’s so well proportioned that the final chorus, rather than sounding tacked on to sounds more the logical resolution of pent-up emotions. The singers are fine and in both pieces the orchestra sounds opulent and vigorous. Pletnev is in command of both works’ formal structure, so they don’t droop. Add Pentatone’s superb SACD sound and this goes to the top of the stack.

SCRIABIN: Symphony 3; Poem of Ecstasy

Valery Gergiev

London Symphony/ Valery Gergiev

LSO 771 [SACD] 65 minutes

O’CONNOR

SGAMBATI: Quartets 1+2; Piano Quintets 1+2

Ricardo Piano, p; Norfeneri Quartet

Brilliant 94813 [2CD] 141 minutes

Having read one review of this album that was not enthusiastic either for the music or the performers, and having never heard a note of Giovanni SGambati (1841-1914), I decided to hear the works in the order they were written—to listen to the composer’s writing progressively.

Quartet 1 (1864) made me immediately ask, “What’s missing?” Is it a bizarre spacing of the four lines of music? No. Is it a harmonic emptiness, as if one player stayed home? Yes, that’s part of it. Is it the projection of the four voices by the players and by the engineers? Absolutely.

The music itself is quite anemic, though there are clever modulations—SGambati is not a copycat. But try as I might, I just couldn’t warm up to this work. Whether that’s the fault of the composer or the recordings, I don’t know.

What I do know is that the players are all siblings who hold orchestral or teaching positions in Italy; the ensemble is named after their deceased father, who was director of the Milan Conservatory. Though their tuning is not exact, and the lead violinist and cellist both can be annoyingly sour sometimes. Nor do their instruments sound first-rate, what I can hear of them—balances practically bury the second violin and viola. Neither the players nor the engineers have a good ear for projecting the sound, and as it becomes quieter it recedes into a barely audible two-dimensional...
pose the idea was that the journey was more important than arriving at the destination. His harmonies are subtle and sophisticated.

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Waltz, op 1; Prelude & Impromptu, op 2; Prelude & Nocturne, op 9; Etudes, opp 8:12; 65:2+32; Impromptu, op 14; Allegro de Concert, op 18; Polonaise, op 21; Poems, opp 41+59:1; Scherzo, op 46

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Mikhail Gubsky, t; Vladimir Lavrik, tpt; Svetlana Shilova, s; Moscow Conservatory Chamber Choir, Russian National Orchestra/ Mikhail Pletnev

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The Poem of Ecstasy (Symphony 4) has been a classic for over a century. It’s the greatest Russian tone poem, despite terrific compe-
distance. The overall sound quality is some-what canned and wiry, like inferior early stereo European Vox recordings in the 1950s. Despite the players’ faults, though, two qualities they do have are plenty of expression and excellent musical flow—wasted here on inferior music poorly recorded.

In Quintet 1 (1866) the piano sounds like it's piped in electronically from another room, while the four strings sound like the microphones were placed four inches away—recording so close that there is no ambience whatsoever to enhance them. The harmonic movement in I sounds worse than in bad Italian village tunes like the ones Verdi used early in his career. There are some good ideas here but no structure—the movement feels like noodling, all 12 minutes of it. The work feels like it's going to be a very long 46 minutes until a rather clever Scherzo in 5/8 time arrives. (1866 was before Borodin and Tchaikovsky.

A rather clever Scherzo in 5/8 time arrives. While the four strings sound like the microphones were placed four inches away—and the four strings sound like the microphones were placed four inches away—it's piped in electronically from another room, it's piped in electronically from another room, and excellent musical flow—wasted here on inferior music poorly recorded.

Andante Sostenuto movement that follows the...
SIBELIUS: Scaramouche
Turku Philharmonic/ Leif Segerstam
Naxos 573511—71 minutes

Scaramouche (or Scaramuccia, meaning little skirmer) is basically a clown character from the Italian commedia dell’arte, though the name has been used in other endeavors. One was an eponymous pantomime by Paul Knudsen with music by Jean Sibelius. Sibelius took the assignment expecting to write music for a few dance movements but soon learned he was to compose the whole pantomime. The next unpleasant surprise was the receipt of a new libretto that added spoken dialog—unusual for a pantomime. Adding to the composer’s irritation was the discovery that Knudsen’s libretto had more or less plagiarized Arthur Schnitzler’s novel, The Veil of Pierrette, which was the basis for a one of that title with music by Dohnanyi. By that time, the distressed composer believed he had been trapped and said so to the publisher. Nevertheless, he completed the work in 1913. It turned out to be a success, though he had to wait for the premiere in 1922 to find out. Scaramouche has 21 mostly short sections and is scored for a small orchestra. The music is mostly quiet and contemplative at moderate or slow tempos, though there are moments of passion and excitement. Touches of the Third Symphony and anticipations of the Sixth and Tapiola are here and there, and Segerstam lends a hint of the Spanish. I do not know if Stravinsky heard the music, but precursors of his Apollo are present, especially in Scaramouche’s black-and-white coloring. Annotator Dominic Wills wrote that “except his only opera, [the 1896] Maiden in the Tower, [Scaramouche] is Sibelius’s only continuous dramatic score, causing one to speculate how an opera from the mature composer might have sounded. That is an interesting thought, though Maiden and Scaramouche are very different works.

Scaramouche begins at a festival hosted by Leilon, where his wife, Blondelaine, is the star dancer. A bolero starts, and she continues dancing. The hunchback Scaramouche (solva viola) enters. Leilon learns he is a musician and asks him to play. Scaramouche continues the bolero but turns up the intensity, and Blondelaine responds to the point of delirium. The jealous Leilon orders Scaramouche to leave. After dinner begins, the entranced Blondelaine slips out to follow him. When Leilon notices her missing, he orders a search, but she is still gone when Act II begins. A friend visiting Leilon heads for home after an evening of wine drinking, but forgets the dagger he left on Leilon’s table. Later, Blondelaine returns, completely disheveled and unable to recall where she was. In a later scene, she looks in a mirror and sees Scaramouche approaching. He seizes her, and the desperate Blondelaine grabs the dagger Leilon’s friend left behind and kills him. Later, all seems happy between Blondelaine as she dances while her husband accompanies her on the piano. Out of nowhere, she hears Scaramouche calling her and asks her husband, who cannot hear the calls, to play faster. She becomes frantic. Suddenly, the body of Scaramouche appears before her, and Blondelaine collapses to the floor.

The other performance of the entire thing is from Neemi Jarvi and the Gothenburg Philharmonic (BIS; positively reviewed by Mr Baumann, Jan/Feb 1992). Having listened to the two on different systems, they seem similar in quality—Jarvi is generally far overall, allowing his performance to move along more than Segerstam’s and to produce a bit more excitement. Segerstam compensates with more eerie atmosphere. Choice becomes a matter of style preference and perhaps Jarvi’s worthy inclusion of Wedding March, which sounds more like a short tone poem than a wedding march. If you have the Jarvi, you don’t need Segerstam unless his approach interests you.

There is also a 20-minute suite. The only recording I know is with the Hungarian State Orchestra led by Sibelius’s son-in-law, Jussi Jalas. It is very good and more bloodthirsty than the concert performance. I suspect our Editor was right when he wrote that the suite is sufficient for...
SIMPSON: Ayres & Divisions
Chelys Consort of Viols; Dan Tidhar, org., hp;
James Akers, theorbo, g
BIS 2153 [SACD] 60 minutes

Christopher Simpson (c1605-69) was one of the leading English authorities on the viol and its music. He was a composer, performer, and author of the treatises The Division Viol and A Compendium of Practical Music. Little is known with certainty about his life. He was a Royalist and a Roman Catholic who served as quartermaster to the Earl of Newcastle. It is possible that he was with the court of Charles I when they fled London for Oxford in 1642.

This is claimed as the first recording of Simpson’s 20 Ayres for Two Trebles and Two Bases, transcribed and edited by Alex Parker and published in 2010 by the Viola da Gamba Society of Great Britain. As Parker points out in the notes, there are four manuscript sources for this music, none of them autograph. The most complete is a set of parobooks dating from the 1650s in the collection of the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The music consists of characteristic dance genres and pieces of comparable length and character designated “Ayre.” Although the pieces are not explicitly divided into suites in the sources, they are grouped according to key. The first piece of each group is a Pavin (or Pavane), and there are motivic links between the pieces of a given key. There are continuous parts in the sources, so the present performances are accompanied by varied combinations of harpsichord, chamber organ, theorbo, and baroque guitar. In Simpson’s music one may not find the daringly eccentric gestures of a William Lawes, but the Ayres are elegant and shapely examples of the dance genres of the day.

In addition to the 20 Ayres, this recording includes four of Simpson’s divisions for pairs of parts. Divisions were preciously the improvisation of variations over a ground bass. Simpson left several written-out specimens. He was highly respected by his contemporaries as a master of the genre.

The London-based viol consort Chelys consists of young graduates of Trinity College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music. They have performed at the principal early music festivals in Britain, and several new works have been written especially for them. Their performances here leave nothing to be desired in technical polish and formal coherence. The recorded sound is warm and clear, setting off the hazy luscious tone of the instruments. It is an auspicious first recording of this rare music. Connoisseurs of consort music of this period will not want to be without it.

GATENS

SIVELOV: Piano Pieces
Niklas Sivelov—Toccata 271—66 minutes

Here are a 50-minute cycle of 24 Preludes and some shorter items—Two Nocturnes, Two Impromptus, Toccata Feroce, and Jeux de Cordes—by Swedish composer-pianist Niklas Sivelov (born 1968). All are quite recent except for the 1989 Nocturnes.

So, how does Sivelov fare in the long shadow cast by JS Bach and the many who have followed in his footsteps? Before asking “where are the fugues?”, I should point out that several of these so-called preludes are fairly contrapuntal in texture. The others vary quite a bit in texture and mood, ranging from snowstorms of fleecy arpeggios and spiky toccatina to slowly bluesy ruminative andantes, playful scherzos, quick marches, misty nocturnes, bright fanfares, solemn chorales, giddy Waltzes, and cryptic oddities. That there’s plenty that’s variegated, unpredictable, and indeed “ludic” (playful) about these “preludes” is clearly in the master’s plan. Harmonically the numbers are more-or-less tonal—certainly nothing here seems to have forsaken triads entirely and switched to acerbic postminimalism, though some push a little in that direction. As for influences, I’d say Sivelov is intimately familiar with many modern-era composers including Debussy, Prokofiev, and Shostakovitch as well as his many distinguished Nordic predecessors and a wide variety of more up-to-date figures.

On the whole I found Sivelov’s 50-minute cycle interesting and diverting, though I don’t think he tried to go much outside of his Dmitri Ashkenazy believes in them, calling the scores “inventive”, “elegant”, and “honest”.

In this March 2001 recording, Ashkenazy enlists British maestro David Curtis and the Hamburg Symphony to bring attention to Stark and some of his music. The program includes the first four Concertos in F and D minor, the “Waltz-Caprice” from Opus 49. The pieces are good representatives of the era—personal, mysterious, joyful, and highly virtuosic.

Stark saves his best writing for when the clarinet is front and center. His themes here have the kind of thoughtfulness and charm that one finds in the neglected minor masters of the time. The orchestral transitions don’t fare as well. The material is very cliched, and the scoring is straight out of the Teutonic textbook—weighty and intese, but restrained in color.

Ashkenazy gives decent renditions of what Stark has to offer, but his shortcomings as a player hold the music back. His tone is hollow and tubby, and his pitch is dubious; soloist and orchestra are rarely in agreement. His fingers are excellent in the composer’s technical acrobatics, yet the lyrical power of the sea itself.

STARK: Clarinet Concertos
Dmitri Ashkenazy; Hamburg Symphony/ David Curtis—Paladin 64–53 minutes

The 19th Century German clarinetist-pedagogue Robert Stark (1847–1917) is known for his landmark 1892 publication Great Theoretical and Practical Method for the Clarinet, Op. 49. Yet he also left behind significant works for clarinet and orchestra; while they may be rarer than the vast repertory of the Englishman. That the “Oratorio Latinum”, the old form of sacred drama, the oratorio. His first work in the form—score lost, title and subject unknown—was in the tradition of Carissimi’s oratorium latum. But the remaining six he composed were in the idiom of the “oratorio cantorum”, the secular cantata.

Of those, two of them (La Susanna, Ester) told Old Testament stories. One, S. Giovanni Battista celebrates a New Testament saint. S. Pelagia deals with a Third Century Christian maiden who killed herself rather than submit to arrest and rape by persecutors. S. Edita is the 10th Century St. Edith, illegitimate daughter of the 10th Century St. Edith, illegitimate daughter of the 10th Century. HANIDEL

STRADELLE: San Giovanni Crisostomo
Matteo Bellotto (Crisostomo), Arianna Venditteli (Eudosia), Filippo Minacchi (Inviato di Roma), Luca Cervoni (Testo, Teofilo), Nora Tabbushi (Consigliere), Ensemble Mare Nostrum/ Andrea De Carlo—Arcana 889—69–31

Coming neatly between Giacomo Carissimi and Alessandro Scarlatti, Alessandro Stradella (1644-62) was a key figure in the declamatory style of the Italian form of sacred drama, the oratorio. His first work in the form—the score lost, title and subject unknown—was in the tradition of Carissimi’s oratorium latum. But the remaining six he composed were in the idiom of the oratorio cantorum, the secular cantata.

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SIVELOV: Piano Pieces

S. Edita Sivelov—Toccata 271—66 minutes

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So, how does Sivelov fare in the long shadow cast by JS Bach and the many who have followed in his footsteps? Before asking “where are the fugues?”, I should point out that several of these so-called preludes are fairly contrapuntal in texture. The others vary quite a bit in texture and mood, ranging from snowstorms of fleecy arpeggios and spiky toccatinas to slow-bluesy ruminative andantes, playful scherzos, quick marches, misty nocturnes, bright fanfares, solemn chorales, giddy waltzes, and cryptic oddities. That there’s plenty that’s varied, unpredictable, and indeed “judic” (playful) about these “preludes” is clearly not a problem. Harmonically the numbers are more-or-less tonal—certainly nothing here seems to have forsaken triads entirely and switched to acerbic pointillism, though some push a little in that direction. As for influences, I’d say Sivelov is intimately familiar with many modern-era composers including Debussy, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich as well as his many distinguished Nordic predecessors and a wide variety of more up-to-date figures.

On the whole I found Sivelov’s 50-minute cycle interesting and diverting, though I don’t think he tried to go much out of his comfort zone in writing it, and perhaps as result there’s a certain emotional detachment in most of the numbers. To some extent I suppose this is the nature of the genre. But the examples intended to be more intimate or serious—such as Prelude 5, (Adagio con dolore), Prelude 10 (Adagio mesto), and Prelude 20 (Andante maestoso)—aren’t what I’d call deeply felt, though that’s apparently the composer’s intention. At any rate I’d look more for wit and virtuosity than expressive power in Sivelov’s 24. The remaining short items are similar in style and range, but only the sweedly dreaming early nocturnes have an uncalculat ed innocence likely to grant them a place in your heart.

Sivelov’s plays his music with flair and authority, and Toccata’s sonics are clear and clean. Still I can’t help feeling that the label’s producers may want to listen carefully to 2L’s recent recording of Stale Kleiberg’s chamber and piano pieces (reviewed this issue) to hear how timbrally rich and immediate a piano or string ensemble can sound when captured with truly state-of-the-art recording techniques. The difference between listening to a “generic organist” and to one that sounds like a piano is right there in the room with you, is akin to the difference between looking at a painting of the sea and looking at the sea itself.

Listeners like me who are always curious about unusual composers of prelude cycles, or better, prelude-and-fugue cycles, should investigate Norwegian composer Frank Nordensten on Hemera 2941. The level of contrapuntal skill and invention in his set is flat-out astonishing: Nordensten comes up with the most recalcitrant fugue subjects imaginable and the composition builds rhythmically intricate but entirely convincing polyphonic edifices out of them, one after another. Johann Sebastian would approve.

STARK: Clarinet Concertos

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Ashkenazy gives decent renditions of what Stark has to offer, but his shortcomings as a player hold the music back. His tone is hollow and tubby, and his pitch is dubious; soloist and orchestra are rarely in agreement. His fingers are excellent in the composer’s technical acrobatics, yet his lyrical passages are mundane and monochromatic. The Hamburg Symphony is fully professional, providing Stark a superb platform for his craft, even when his inspiration is not always there.

SIMPSON: Ayres & Divisions

Chelys Consort of Viols; Dan Tidhar, org., hrs.; James Akers, theorbo, g.

BIS 2153 [SACD] 60 minutes

Ayres & Divisions

BIS 2153 [SACD] 60 minutes

March/April 2016
at the throne. And, finally, there is this work. Of them all, S. Giovanni has been given several recordings, and Susanna likewise. The remain-
der have not appeared on records.

When I first heard the present work it is that deals with a saint quite “on the fringe” St John, nicknamed Chirisostomos or “golden-mouthe” for his eloquent preaching, was one of the four great Greek Fathers of the Fourth Century who were founders of Christian theol-
ogy but are celebrated specifically in the Orthodox churches. Stradella’s oratorio deals only with the final episode of his career, his struggle with the East Roman Empress Eudox-
ia. Repelled by her vanity and self-indulgence, John, as Patriarch of Constantinople, harshly denounced her in his homilies, and she perse-
cuted him in return. The struggle between them obviously attracted Stradella as a fine dramatic theme. The empress managed to have John sent into distant and harsh exile in 404 AD, but she herself died in childbirth later the same year.

This work survives only in a minimal score, without any separate libretto. A lot of conjec-
ture has been made about this modern perform-
ing edition, especially in figuring out some of the characters the singers are meant to represent. There are, of course, the two protagonists, Eudoxia, a soprano, and Chrisostomo, a bass-baritone. One other his-
torical character is Teofilo (Theophilus), Patri-
arch of Alexandria, sung by a tenor who also slips in to perform the waning function of Teosto (Narrator). Entirely invented is the Inviato di Roma (Envoy from Rome), an important advocate of virtue and restraint—and of creating a spurrous role for the Pappato to satisfy Roman Catholic sensitivity. Beyond these are figures who appear as conven-
tione: consiglieri (councillors), Eudoxia’s corti-
giani (courtiers), and assorted seguiti (followers) of Teofilo and the Inviato. These pop in variably on to comment on the moral issues of the story, curiously anticipating how Handel would later use his chorus in his English orato-
rios.

The score is made up of recitatives, arias, and ensembles, all brief, but conveying the story and the characters’ thinking quite sharply. The oratorio ends with assurances that the two enemies are rewarded appropri-
ately and the characters’ thinking quite clearly: Chrisostomos sings it handsomely. Countertenor Miniccia sounds awfully feminine in the alto role of the Inviato, but avoids unctuousness. Tenor Cer-
roni is strongly assertive in his two functions, and the additional singers blend quite attrac-
tively. The surviving score gives only a contin-
uous part for instrumentation, and here a crew of seven players offers a strong but flexible accompaniment. The sound is clear and unmannered. The booklet gives very illuminat-
ing notes and—blessings be on ye!—the full libretto and translations. Be warned, though, that the print is almost microscopic, so bring your magnifying glass.

In sum, this is an enjoyable recording debut for this work, and lovers of Baroque music will find this a welcome event.

The singers here are really good in their roles. Venditelli makes a very lively villainess, with a lot of strong musical characterization. It’s hard to make much out of the cardboard persona of Chirisostomo shaped that it’s too strong. Fortunately, she can’t stop wobbling. At the end of Act 2, she’s almost unbearable, and she pretty much ruins the “Barak, mein Mann” duet in Act 3. Wilson’s Empress brings plenty of intensity to her melo-
drama and solos in Act 3, and her bright voice is sizable enough to flesh out her music. Some of her highest notes are screams, so she’s cast in the shade by the sopranos who actually sing them: Studer, Varady, above all Rysanek. Fritz’s beefy Emperor sounds half-stragonulted much of the time, and though he has some ring and volume, he has no finesse at all. Sawallisch has a stronger royal pair (Studer and Kollo), and So
tt’s “two cast is still the best overall (Varady, Domingo, Behrens, Van Dam).

The booklet has notes, synopses, and a handsomely printed libretto (without transla-

STRAUSS: Die Frau Ohne Schatten
Tamar Wilson (Empress), Sabine Hogrefe (Barak’s Wife), Tanja Ariane Baumgartner (Nurse), Terje Stensvold (Barak), Burkhard Fritz (Emperor); Frankfurt Opera/ Sebastian Weigle Oehms 964 [SCD] 193 minutes

We haven’t had a new Frau Ohne Schatten on CD since the Sawallisch and Solti recordings were issued 25 years ago. This was taken from staged performances in Frankfurt in 2014, is quite good, despite the absence of big names in the cast. Conductor Weigle steers his forces confidently through the complexi-
ties of the music, never neglecting its lyricism. Though I wished once or twice for richer string sound, the Frankfurt Opera can produce thrilling volume—just listen to the tremendous explosion of sound before the Empress’s melodrama in Act 3. The lines in the final ensemble are kept remarkably clear, and the little splashes of color that abound in the score are always given their due.

The outstanding singers are Baumgartner’s Nurse and Stensvold’s Barak. Her smooth, absolutely steady mezzo easily rides the ups and downs of her lengthy part, and she makes the difficult written sound natural and conver-
sational. Stensvold has the warmth of voice and personality. When the Dyer sings, the music always calms down. The chatter and din disappear and the spotlight falls on the baritone, who must be ready for it. When Stensvold sings, our ears perk up and we listen raptly. As his wife, Hogrefe has the dramatic measure of her role, and she knows how her phrases should be shaped. Unfortunately, she can’t stop wobbling. At the end of Act 2, she’s almost unbearable, and she pretty much ruins the “Barak, mein Mann” duet in Act 3. Wilson’s Empress brings plenty of intensity to her melo-
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STRAUSS & WAGNER: Songs
Adrienne Pieczonka, s; Brian Zeger, p Delos 3474—52 minutes

A fine recording of songs by Strauss and Wagn-
er by the golden soprano Adrienne Pieczonka and excellent pianist Brian Zeger. There’s very little to say here simply because the perform-
ances are so good. Pieczonka has a milky smooth vibrate in every piece, and Zeger’s playing is full of color. The songs are great, mainly the most popular songs of Richard Strauss with Wagner’s lush Wesendonck-
Lieder. If I have any complaints, it’s that some of the tempos are a little slower than I’m used to—but I heard new ideas here and I like that. It’s a glowing, Old World reading that is more Viennese than German, thanks partly to the excellent Tokyo Metropolitan strings. Only the strings of the Bavarians match them, though their tone is different, with Tokyo’s again more Viennese than the Bavarian—isto, with its more Anglican—partly because of the Scottish National Orches-
stra’s sleek strings and brighter, more forward brass, but also because of Jarvi’s more Eastern European approach.

This brings us to this newcomer with something of a Teutonic, muscular, and heroic performance—“big” German Strauss. Sometimes it is almost raw, but never too much so. Tempos are often on the fast side. The music surges and thrusts in the fast moments and is very powerful in the loud sec-
tions. Lyricism is not lacking, but this is a songful reading. It looks more like an aggres-
tive approach to Bruckner than an autumnal one to Schumann or Brahms. The Scherzo maintains that overt style. There is no striving for Mendelssohn here. Weigle’s introduction is dark and attacks are strong. Note how the sec-
ond and most of the final measures of the low strings, and later how menacing that themes sound when taken up by the brass. The
The singers here are really good in their roles. Venditelli makes a very lively villaness, with a lot of strong musical characterization. It’s hard to make much out of the cardboard personality of Pinuzzo, but Crisostomo sings it handsomely. Counter tenor Minecca sounds awfully feminine in the alto role of the Inviato, but avoids ungainliness. Tenor Cerconi is strongly assertive in his two functions, and the additional singers blend quite attractively. The surviving score gives only a continuo part for instrumentation, and here a crew of seven players offers a strong but flexible accompaniment. The sound is clear and unhampered. The booklet gives very illuminating notes and — blessings be on ye! — the full libretto and translations. Be warned, though, that the print is almost microscopic, so bring your magnifying glass.

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**STRAUSS: Die Frau Ohne Schatten**

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**BARKER**
slow movement is an amazingly deep and beautiful movement for a 19-year-old composer. Weigle is as rich and warm here as any of the women on earth, whom he cannot as individuals possess. Unable to find that woman and disgusted with his unending lust, the Don allows himself to be slain in a final duel. Weigle presents his hero as young, strapping, vigorous, and virile. Roth’s treatment is warmer, broader, and more subdued, casting a little more tourist and wiser Don looking back on his adventures. Both orchestras play well. Freiburg has warmer strings, and Frankfurt has more consistent winds and brass. The recordings are both good in Don Juan, with Freiburg a little more distant.

In 2016 the SWR Symphony Freiburg Baden-Baden will combine with the SWR Symphony Stuttgart, taking the former off the symphonic map. The given explanation is financial.

STRAVINSKY: The Rite of Spring with Petrichoika
Sivan Silver & Gil Garburg, p
Berlin 300588—68 minutes

with 5 Easy Pieces; 3 Pieces for 3 Hands; 3 Pieces for Quartet; Tango; Piano-Rag-Music
Evgeni Koroliov & Ljupka Hadzigeorgieva, p
Tacet 216—59 minutes

Performance by this young duo. The amount of excitement they build at the climactic points in the performance is outstanding. The booklet notes complement a stunning performance. The sound is noticeably different between the concert and studio recordings; the composer’s personal sound is there and there is nary a smudged note. Nuances in tempo are always dead-on together and there is nary a smudged note.

Duo Koroliov (another husband-wife team) surrounds its in-concert recording of Rite of Spring with two sets of Easy Pieces for piano 3 and 4-hands, two solo piano pieces (‘Tango’ and ‘Piano-Rag-Music’) and a curiosity that has never come my way before, three pieces for string quartet arranged for piano 4-hands by the composer. The sound is noticeably different between the concert and studio recordings; the studio is brighter and more to my liking for this music. The two sets of easy pieces are played with disarming verve and panache—far more than would normally be expected in little trifles like this. They come off as legitimate, fully worked out short ideas that remind one of Petrichoika or other more significant works. The two solo works by Koroliov with great style, and the odd string quartet arrangements are certainly worth a few hearings. The Rite of Spring has more gusto and better balance than Silver-Garburg, but suffers from being a little too careful (slower) sometimes.

Duo Takahashi-Lehmann (no indication of a husband-wife team, but they have been performing together since 2009) are the best of the current lot. Audite’s sound and excellent booklet notes complement a stunning performance by this young duo. The amount of excitement they build at the climactic points in The Rite of Spring can leave you breathless. I also found a fascinating video clip on line of the two interviewed and playing excerpts (at one piano). The Concerto for 2 Pianos is a large four-movement work not heard often enough and rarely in as strong a performance as here. Conlon Nancarrow wrote his sonatina for player piano, but it was arranged for piano 4 hands by Yvar Mikhoshoff—explicitly approved by the composer. Arnulf Herrmann wrote his three-volume Hausmusik in deference to the styles and traditions of playing piano duets at home back in the 19th Century, but in a decided modern harmonic language. For variety, performance, sound, booklet, and uncovering new works, my choice this time around is Duo Takahashi-Lehmann.

HARRINGTON
Slow movement is an amazingly deep and beautiful movement for a 19-year-old composer. Weigle is as rich and warm here as any of the German masters. The performance is quite a bit, so the wonderment created is more apparent than usual. The mood is relaxed, introspectively and changes moods and tempi with great ease. The lower part, especially the bass drum thumps. Those criticisms aside, Duo Silver-Garburg make a great ensemble as I’ve ever heard. Nuances in tempo are always dead-on together and there is nary a smudged note.

Duo Kolotov (another husband-wife team) surrounds its in-concert recording of Rite of Spring with two sets of Easy Pieces for piano 3- and 4-hands, two solo piano pieces (‘The Two stadts – 5th Piano Sonata’ and ‘Piano-Rag-Music’) and a curiosity that has never come my way before, three pieces for string quartet arranged for piano 4-hands by the composer. The sound is noticeably different between the concert and studio recordings; the studio is brighter and more to my liking for this music. The two sets of easy pieces are played with disarming verve and panache—far more than would normally be expected in little trifles like this. They come off as legitimate, fully worked out short ideas that remind one of Petrouchka or other more significant works. The two solo works arranged by Kolotov with great style, and the odd string quartet arrangements are certainly worth a few hearings. The Rite of Spring has more gusto and better balance than Silver-Garburg, but suffers from being a little too careful (slower) sometimes.

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**STRAVINSKY: Suite Italien; see Collections**

**SUUK: Serenade Meditation**

Dvorak Chamber Orchestra / Kypros Markou

Fleur de Son 58025 — 71 minutes

The Serenade for strings is the nicest thing Josef Suk wrote. It’s from the 1890s, and he was in his late teens. Suk appears to be one of those composers whose inspiration faded as they matured. It’s very common. Maybe Mozart and Schubert were lucky to die young. I have heard many recordings of this, and I always like it, but no two recordings are the same. I would characterize this one as a little bit faster than most, but that yields greater coherence. The phrasing is clear. The sound is very beautiful: bright blue rather than the dark brown of so many recordings (such as the Naxos, which is from the same part of the world and is otherwise fine). I think I have to keep this for the sweetness of the string sound.

The Meditation is on the St Wenceslas chorale from way back in Czech history. Suk wrote it in 1914, and it simply doesn’t have the freshness of the serenade. It’s heavier and almost funereal; it was actually played at the funeral of Vaclav Havel in 2011. (I think Vaclav was Wenceslas—the same name.)

The short Tchaikovsky piece comes before his serenade. It was written in 1884, after the serenade, which is from 1880. The short piece was called ‘Grateful Greeting’ by the composer, but the publisher renamed it ‘Elegy.’ It’s a better piece than Suk’s.

I would not buy this for the Tchaikovsky serenade, because I like that piece to sound bigger and bubblegum. and this group is simply too small. I will keep listening to Ormandy, Slatkin, and Svetlanov.

**TARTINI: Solo Violin Sonatas, Vol 3**

Peter Sheppard Skærved

Toccata 297 — 74 minutes

I almost hate to write this, but aside from the Devil’s Trill Sonata, I haven’t heard any music by Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) that I care for, and that includes these sonatas. The present volume contains sonatas 13 through 18. I sense no inspiration on the composer’s part, no striking individuality. These works are competent and not too formulaic, and I suppose they would have been welcome in a situation where new music was constantly demanded. Peter Sheppard Skærved is a good but not great violinist, and he doesn’t contribute any charisma to these performances. I imagine this will mainly appeal to completists.

**TCHAIKOVSKY: The Queen of Spades**

Misha Didyk (Herman), Tatiana Serjan (Lisa), Larissa Diadkova (Countess), Alexey Shishlyayev (Tomsky), Alexey Markov (Yeletsky), Oksana Volkova (Polina); Bavarian Opera / Marius Jansons—BR 200129 [3CD] 168 minutes

In July/August 2014 I praised the reissue of a 1967 recording from the Bolshoi. It was first issued as a joint publication by Melodiya and EMI. It was greeted with well-deserved ecstatic praise.

Russian singers, particularly sopranos and tenors, were a trial to Western ears in the 1940s and 50s, but not here. The leading tenor role, Herman (Zurab Andzhaparidze), is a terrible challenge to any tenor. It’s long, it’s high, it’s loud, it’s dramatic. Andzhaparidze has no trouble with it. He simply soars through it. His colleagues are just as strong and immersed in the drama. This is a definitive recording.

This is from stage performances in Munich in April of 2014. The cast appears to be all Slavs, if not all Russian. Didyk is even better than Andzhaparidze! His tenor is most melodious even while expressing the rather over-the-top insanity of Herman. It’s a brilliant performance. There is a thinness to Serjan’s voice with an edginess that is not appealing. Diadkova was a major powerhouse mezzo taking on the biggest vocal challenges. Now, even with a voice in decline, she remains a major force, taking on some of the great, shorter character roles.

All the printed materials call the opera Pique Dame. In much of the 20th Century Russian Opera Program, as well as in programs performed in Western venues, it was called Tchaikovsky’s Queen of Spades.

**Szymansowska: Piano Pieces**

18 Dances; 24 Mazurkas; 6 Mazurkas; Polonaise; Dance Polonaise; Cotillon ou Valse Figuree

Alexander Kostritsa

Grand Piano 685 — 74 minutes

Polish composer Maria Szymansowska (1789-1831) may not be well known, but in her day she was active in the Warsaw salons and traveled to Paris, where her music impressed Chopin. Her dances for piano are light, sometimes pieces that would also be appropriate for students. The works themselves are not very substantial, compared to Chopin’s piano sonatas and ballades of the same period, but Kostritsa’s work in collecting these dances is commendable, as is his approach. In the Polonaises his straightforward playing captures well the simple phrases, form, and rather nondescript melody. Though not as memorable, these works are pleasing.

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**Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker**

Stewart Goodyear, p

Steinway 30040 [SACD] 82 minutes

Pianist Stewart Goodyear has made a transcription of Tchaikovsky’s complete ballet, a work he has grown up with and has loved from his earliest years. A question arises as to why anyone would want to listen to this colorful piece in piano transcription rather than in its orchestral garb. That is quickly answered when one embarks on the journey. Soon you forget about the orchestra and begin to succumb to this magical experience.

There is something almost totally satisfying about this arrangement, though the piano is incapable of substituting for boys’ voices in the Waltz of the Snowflakes. Goodyear makes no attempt to demonstrate his vocal prowess. The piano is also incapable of reproducing the flutter-tonguing flutes in Scene 11, ‘Clara and the Prince,’ but the NRB will be pleased to know that the gunshot is still there in the Battle with the Mouse King. No doubt the moment of silence allowed for Goodyear to reach for his cap gun or whatever.

This arrangement is truly amazing. The art of the transcriber remains true to the original, yet astonishes in its brilliance and color. The writing is virtuosic in the manner of Liszt, yet there is nothing extraneous to draw the attention away from the music. Yes, things are a little too speedy sometimes, and the close miking allows for precious few moments of real repose, but if your heart can stand a thrill a second, this is not to be missed. Come to think of it, it’s also a hell of a way to check out the world.

**Tchaikovsky: Serenade; see SUK**

**TELEMANN: Recorder Sonatas & Fantasias**

Pamela Thorby, rec; Peter Whelan, bn; Alisson Mc Gillivray, vc; Elizabeth Kenny, archlute; g

Marcin Swiatkiewicz, hps; org

Linn 476 [2CD] 110 minutes

The program includes recorder sonatas from Telemann’s Essercizzi Musici, and Getreue Music-Meister, a music periodical edited by Telemann, where music was published in serial form over several issues. Each sonata is between three and four movements long, exhibiting virtuosic passage work and counterpoint in the fast movements and lyrical writing in slow movements. Some have programmatic titles that evoke feeling. For example, the first movement of the F-minor Sonata, marked ‘Triste,’ useschromaticism to evoke feelings of despair. The C-major sonata begins with a songlike movement titled ‘Cantabile.’

Disc 2 includes the unaccompanied 12 Fantasias a Travers, Sans Basse. Steven Zohn notes that it was common practice, in the 18th century, for recorder players to transpose flute pieces. Hence, all but one (no. 11) of the 12 Fantasias is performed in keys better suited to the recorder. To accomplish the task, Pamela Thorby uses variously pitched alto recorders and voice flutes pitched in D and E-flat.

The performances are excellent overall—tastefully phrased and lightly ornamented to bring out the genius of Telemann’s writing.

**THALBERG: Moses Fantasy; Don Juan; Amandine from Lucida de Lammermoor; Sonata Capriccio; Andante from Lucida de Lammermoor; Sonata**

Mark Vine, p—Piano Classics 92—67 minutes

I have two discs of Thalberg’s piano fantasias on operas of Bellini and Rossini (Naxos, 1/F 1992; M/J 1995) played by Francesco Nicolosi, who was said by one reviewer to play with awesome brio. I agree with that assessment and would say Mr Viner here plays with effortless brio, in tempos palpably lighter in virtuoso sections, to exhilarating effect. And Piano Classics presents Viner in better sound, with a massive and rich low end so important to the grandeur of these splashy pieces.

Anyone familiar with Liszt’s fantasies and reminiscences of contemporary operas—in this case opera seria, Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini—knows what to expect: essentially medleys of tunes from the operas, surrounded...
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Misha Dyadyuk (Herman), Tatiana Serjan (Lisa), Larissa Diadkova (Countess), Alexey Shishlyav (Tomsky), Alexey Markov (Yeletsky). Oksana Volkova (Polina); Bavarian Opera/ Mariansons—BR 200129 [3CD] 168 minutes

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This is from an earlier visit to the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich in April of 2014. The cast appears to be all Slavs, if not all Russian. Dyadyuk is even better than Andjaparidze! His tenor is most melifluous even while expressing the rather over-the-top insanity of Herman. It’s a brilliant performance. There is a thinnness to Serjan’s voice with an edginess that is not appealing. Diadkova was a major powerhouse mezzo taking on the biggest vocal challenges. Now, even with a voice in decline, she remains a major character role.

All the printed materials call the opera Pique Dame. In much of the 20th Century Russian Operas were given French titles in the West. They were rarely performed in Russian. Libretto in transliterated Russian, German, and English.
by and encrusted with ornate passagework. It's interesting to compare the composers; Thalberg and Liszt were quite skilled at this stuff, really as good as Liszt; and often the passagework is very similar between the composers, except Liszt's harmonies are stranger, more chromatic than Thalberg's.

This is a superlative recital; Viner's rubato-suffused and spontaneous interpretations are ideal for these delectable confections.

Though prominent in the years of the Weimar Republic, Heinz Tiessen (1887-1971) was shunned by the Nazi regime—too forward-looking in his art, too liberal in his politics—and fell into obscurity. To this day there are but few recordings, the most notable his Seventh and Eighth symphonies. Toccata now does its bit to mitigate the neglect with this very-well-played and clearly recorded survey of Tiessen's piano works—all of them first recordings—stretching over three decades of his career.

Tiessen's language and aesthetic are rooted in the Germanic late-romanticism of Wagner, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic forms and technical devices as well as expanding his harmonic resources. The starting point of his evolution is represented here by the Four Minutes Long Fantasia-Pieces (written in homage to Schumann). Textures are thick but idiomatic (Tiessen was an expert pianist), tonality wandering and chromatically-enriched, emotion mostly somber and moody. They sound more like Busoni than anyone else I can think of—serious, often not always interesting, but too long and too heavily draped in thick chordal sonorities for my taste.

Apparantly Tiessen himself agreed with my assessment, for his later piano pieces are considerably leaner and shorter (as well as more contrapuntal)—and, with his growing interest in Hindemith and (to a much lesser extent) Schoenberg—more tonally ambiguous, dissonant, and chromatic. Six Piano Pieces Opus 37, from 1928, Five Piano Pieces Opus 52, from 1944, and Three Dance Caprices, Opus 61 (date of the later style). Their saucy modernist neoclassicism, with its insouciant allusions to ragtime and popular dances, is illustrated in some of the movement titles from the Six Pieces: Fughetta, Scherzino, Fox Trot. On the other hand some of the slower numbers, like the 4-minute Notturno from Opus 52, show a very nicely judged harmonic shadings improved, surely, from contemporaneous jazz.

I wish I could say that this music—all of it skilfully crafted, honoroble, much of it tuneful and lively—is memorable. But the truth is that, like a lot (but not all) of the many piano pieces tossed off by such of Tiessen's not dissimilar contemporaries as Erwin Schulhoff or Bohuslav Martinu, most of Tiessen's piano compositions go easily in one ear and out the other. He simply lacks the instantly identifiable personality of Hindemith or Weill or Prokofiev or Stravinsky or Gershwin, and comparison to those giants makes clear why he'll remain obscure. The magic just isn't there.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
Effur Wyn (Alice), James Cleverton (Rabbit), Robert Burt (Dad, Queen of Hearts), Victoria Simmonds (Mum, Mad Hatter), Magid El-Bushra (Cheshire Cat), Keel Watson (Caterpillar); Opera Holland Park/ Matthew Waldren
Signum 420—69 minutes

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is composer Will Todd's version of the Lewis Carroll stories. Todd has written other operas, musicals, and choral music that have been well received and performed in several countries. The English-only booklet explains the difficulties in adapting the Alice tales for the stage. The main problem is the non-linear structure of the book; it is basically a succession of episodes that are not necessarily related. Alice is in Wonderland fast and furious, and is what it seems to be, the characters act strangely, and much of the action is apparently imagined by Alice. Adapting the book has been troublesome for playwrights, screenwriters, and even Walt Disney.

composer Todd and librettist Maggie Gottlieb faced similar problems in adapting the book into "A Family Opera," which has been popular in presentations at London's Holland Park Opera. Except for the peculiar characters and the rabbit hole, most of Carroll's book is considerably changed. The creators often turn to a grotesque child's perspective on Alice, including animals in a pet shop, a depressed White Rabbit, and the Queen of Hearts (Alice's father in drag) who makes the other characters slaves in her kitchen making teatime treats. I was only able to follow the action by reading the brief synopsis. My some it plays better if you see it. Bright, colorful sets placed on various stages around the park, and unusual costumes might keep children's interest; but with the disjointed scenario and mix of musical styles, I lost interest long before the recording finished. Todd's music is a mish-mash of jazz, bluesy ballads, swing, and a pattered song, a few melodic songs, and short dialog scenes. Each character has a different song style. For example, the caterpillar is given a blues song sung in a bastard style that verges on the embarrassing. Gottlieb's text is sometimes simplistic, sometimes too sophisticated for many children. Gottlieb uses words such as "nutter" and "layabout", which might prove confusing to someone not familiar with those terms.

Based on the recording I was hard pressed to understand the opera's popularity. As a stage presentation it might be interesting, but this recording is not.

Concerto for Orchestra;
Circle; Bliss; Iphigenia
Camarena NY/ Richard Owen; University of Kansas Wind Ensemble/ Paul W Popiel; Quad City Symphony/ Mark Russell Smith; Liverpool Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko
Ecstatic 92261—64 minutes

Michael Torke's music continues to elicit pleasure and joy. These recent pieces are filled with vibrant life and technical brilliance. They're hard not to like.

Todd's Concerto for Orchestra (2014) is in seven movements, all entirely based on the simple three-note motive of a fourth down and major second up. This offers enough material for an absorbing set of continuous variations inspired in their fertility: there is some jazz, some fantasy, an expressive slow movement, a cheerful pastiche, and a vibrant and licentious concerto omen coda (with unfortunate pop-style ellipses). Orchestration is colorful and varied. It sounds like great fun for the lucky performers, too.

Oracle (2013) is an attractive extended fanfare. Bliss (2005) is for winds; it layers snazzy Passage and a pattered song, a few melodic songs, and short dialog scenes. Each character has a different song style. For example, the caterpillar is given a blues song sung in a bastard style that verges on the embarrassing. Gottlieb's text is sometimes simplistic, sometimes too sophisticated for many children. Gottlieb uses words such as "nutter" and "layabout", which might prove confusing to someone not familiar with those terms.

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This is a superlative recital; Viner’s rubato-suffused and spontaneous interpretations are ideal for these delectable confections.

TIessen: Piano Pieces
Matthew Rubenstein—Toccata 291—69 minutes

Though prominent in the years of the Weimar Republic, Heinz Tiessen (1887-1971) was shunned by the Nazi regime—too forward-thinking in his art, too liberal in his politics—and fell into obscurity. To this day there are but few recordings, the most notable his Second Symphony on Koch 31490 (Sept/Oct 2001). Toccata now does its bit to mitigate the neglect with this very-well-played and clearly recorded survey of Tiessen’s piano works—all of them first recordings—stretching over three decades of his career.

Tiessen’s language and aesthetic are rooted in the Germanic late-romanticism of Wagner, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic eras, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic eras, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic eras, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic eras, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic eras, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic eras, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler, though fairly early on he began exploring more neoclassic eras, Brahms, Strauss, and Mahler.

The starting point of his evolution is represented here by the 30-minute-long 1913 Nature Trilogy and Two Fantasypieces (written in homage to Schumann). Textures are thick but idiomatic (Tiessen was an expert pianist), tonality wandering and chromatically-enriched, emotion mostly somber and moody. They sound more like Busoni than anyone else I can think of—serious, often but not always interesting, but too long and too heavily draped in thick chordal sonorities for my taste.

Apparently Tiessen himself agreed with my assessment, for his later piano pieces are considerably leaner and shorter (as more contrapuntal)—and, with his growing interest in Hindemith and (to a much lesser extent) Schoenberg—more tonally ambiguous, dissonant, and chromatic. Six Piano Pieces Opus 37, from 1928, Five Piano Pieces Opus 52, from 1944, and Three Dance Caprices, Opus 61 (date of this later style). Their saucy modernist neoclassicism, with its insouciant allusions to ragtime and popular dances, is illustrated in some of the movement titles from the Six Pieces: Fughetta, Scherzino, Furtro. On the other hand some of the slower numbers, like the 4-minute Notturno from Opus 52, shy of a very nicely judged harmonic shadings improved, surely, from contemporaneous jazz.

I wish I could say that this music—all of it skillfully crafted, honorable, much of it tuneful and lively—is memorable. But the truth is that, like a lot (but not all!) of the many piano pieces tossed off by such of Tiessen’s not dissimilar contemporaries as Erwin Schulhoff or Bohuslav Martinu, most of Tiessen’s piano compositions go easily in one ear and out the other. He simply lacks the instantly identifiable personality of Hindemith or Weill or Prokofiev or Stravinsky or Gershwin, and comparison to those giants makes clear why he’ll remain obscure. The magic just isn’t there.

TODD: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland
Fflur Wyn (Alice), James Cleverton (Rabbit), Robert Burt (Dad, Queen of Hearts), Victoria Simmonds (Mum, Mad Hatter), Magid El-Bushra (Cheshire Cat), Keel Watson (Caterpillar); Opera Holland Park/ Matthew Waldren—Siguldn 420—69 minutes

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is composer Will Todd’s version of the Lewis Carroll stories. Todd has written other operas, musicals, and choral music that have been well received and performed in several countries. The English-only booklet explains the difficulties in adapting the Alice tales for the stage. The main problem is the non-linear structure of the book; it is basically a succession of episodes that are not necessarily related. Alice is in Wonderland, but nowhere is it clear why the reader is supposed to be interested in what is going on, or why the events have any meaning or purpose. Todd’s version is a complete operatic version of the story, with all the characters and events from the book. The music is bright, cheerful, and full of surprises, with many references to the original text. The opera is a great success, and Todd has gone on to write several other operas, including The King of Hammers and The Last Emperor. 

Torkj: Concerto for Orchestra; Circle; Bliss; Iphigenia
Camarena NY/ Richard Owen; University of Kansas Wind Ensemble/ Paul W Popiel; Quad City Symphony/ Mark Russell Smith; Liverpool Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko—Eccstatic 92261—64 minutes

Michael Torke’s music continues to elicit pleasure and joy. These recent pieces are filled with vibrant life and technical brilliance. They’re hard not to like. Concerto for Orchestra (2014) is in seven movements, all entirely based on the simple three-note motive of a fourth down and major second up. This offers enough material for an absorbing set of continuous variations inspired in its fertility: there is some jazz, some fantasy, an expressive slow movement, a characteristic and a vividly scored overture conca (with unfortunate pop-style ellipses). Orchestration is colorful and varied. It sounds like great fun for the lucky performers, too.

Oracle (2013) is an attractive extended fanfare. Bliss (2003) is for winds; it layers snazzy polyphonic passages: a few melodious songs, and short dialog scenes. Each character has a different song style. For example, the caterpillar is given a blues song sung in a bad-assy style that verges on the embarrassing. Gottlieb’s text is sometimes simplistic, sometimes too sophisticated for many children. Gottlieb uses words such as “mutter” and “layabout”, which might prove confusing to someone not familiar with those terms.

Based on the recording I was hard pressed to understand the opera’s popularity. As a stage presentation it might be interesting, but this recording is not.

TORKE: Concerto for Orchestra; Circle; Bliss; Iphigenia
Camarena NY/ Richard Owen; University of Kansas Wind Ensemble/ Paul W Popiel; Quad City Symphony/ Mark Russell Smith; Liverpool Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko—Eccstatic 92261—64 minutes

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ing blend of aerodynamic uplift and charisma. If there's a weakness here it's that the music doesn't feel particularly distinctive or original; it's too suave, too smooth, too glossy and reassuring. Piano Concerto; Cryptic Essay; Jargon; Accolade light. This album includes a 14-minute interview with the composer in 1991 by Andrew Yates. KILPATRICK

VAINBERG: Violin Concerto; Moldavian Rhapsody; Symphony 10

Ewelina Nowicka, v; Amadeus Chamber Orchestra/ Agnieszka Dzczulam; Anna Dzuczmal-Mroz CPO 777887—69 minutes

This isn’t the most attractive disc of Vainberg I’ve heard, but it is probably the best introduction to his multifarious output, starting with the very digerent neoclassical Concertino (complete with exposition repeat), ratcheting up the heat a bit with the Rhapsody, and ending with the intense, sometimes wildly modernistic Symphony 10.

I was disappointed by the little concerto for violin and string orchestra, first recorded by Mr Ostrovsky on Naxos (M/A 2012). I attributed my dislike to the composition itself, but this performance changed my mind. Nowicka’s relaxed tempo in I—a full minute slower than Ostrovsky and 2/1-2/2 minutes slower than Gidon Kremer on ECM—makes all the difference between an attractive wistful yearning and the blandly calculated insouciance of the latter two violinists in II are about the same, but Nowicka loses her advantage in III where she’s too slow and prickly, like someone who over-enunciates words. Kremer’s desultory rush best conveys the bitter menace of this finale; but he’s too frivolous in I. Complaints aside, Nowicka’s is now my favorite recording of this piece.

The Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes is lustier, spicier, more dissontant than the concerto, yet not really abrasive or modernist. This is the violinist’s orchestration, for strings alone, of the piano-violin original. She was aided by Vainberg’s alternate version of this piece for flute and orchestra sans violin. Everyone’s tempos in II are about the same, but Nowicka loses her advantage in III where she’s too slow and prickly, like someone who over-enunciates words. Kremer’s desultory rush best conveys the bitter menace of this finale; but he’s too frivolous in I. Complaints aside, Nowicka’s is now my favorite recording of this piece.

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ing blend of aerodynamic uplift and charisma. If there’s a weakness here it’s that the music doesn’t feel particularly distinctive or original; it’s too suave, too smooth, too glossy and re- sumeration Piano Concerto is clear that one can easily imagine parts of the concerto as a contemporary film score. But if you enjoy very pretty music that skates over the surface without probing any depths or exploring any unknown territory, you’ll like this.

The two sets of two-piano pieces and solo piano preludes are cleverly done on the same hand, but with sharply contrasting movements more various in tempo and closer to their specific inspirations, whether jazz or minimalism (or some combination thereof). I liked them too, with the same reservations mentioned above about the concerto.

Have I mentioned that the performances and sound are especially good? Yes, so I have, but it won’t hurt to remind you, for this is really an outstanding recording from beginning to end that presents the music in the best possible light.

LEHMANN.

TULL: Terpsichore; Prelude & Double Fugue; Piano Concerto; Cryptic Essay; Jargon; Acco- lade; Sketches on a Tudor Psalm

Keystone Wind Ensemble/ Jack Stamp
Klavier 11207—80 minutes

Fishfer Tull (1934-94) taught and administered at Sam Houston University for many years. But to thousands of band musicians past and present, Tull was a band-music composer. In every review I have written of a recording that includes a Tull piece or two, I invariably say that I’m not a fan of his boisterous Op. 59. My prejudice has been softened by a number of works that show his introspective side. Perhaps most moving was the University of Houston’s reversion reading of A Passing Fantasy (March/April 1998: 262). I enjoyed the Concerto Grosso for brass quintet & band (Jan/Feb 2001: 244), and both 262). I enjoyed the Concerto Grosso for brass quintet & band (Jan/Feb 2001: 244), and both. I enjoyed the Concerto Grosso for brass quintet & band (Jan/Feb 2001: 244), and both.

Moisei Vainberg (or Weinberg as the Germans spell it) lived from 1919 to 1996. He was one of my favorite Russian composers of the 20th Century. These three concertos were recorded back in the 1980s and were available on Russian Disc CDs. Now Melodiya has taken them over and has improved the recorded quality by a little and changed the tracks. Russian Disc gave it two tracks; Melodiya gives it four. They have done the same for the Flute Concerto, giving it three where Russian Disc gave it two. I have the Violin Concerto on a 10” Melodiya LP.

The recorded quality of the new release is an improvement, and it is nice to have all three concertos on one disc. I can also report that these classic recordings are of good quality and beautifully played. Most important, Vainberg is a composer with imagination and warmth of character. It feels great to hear him again, particularly when played by these great musicians.Piano Concerto is also a recording by Ilya Grubert with Dmitri Yablonsky conducting (Naxos 557194) but he takes a bit longer and is not as exciting as Kogan. The Cello Concerto also has a recording by Mark Drobinsky that was fine, though not ugly. The near end are solos for violin and cello, a harbiner of the numerous solos to come. II, a ‘Pastorale’, isn’t tranquil in the least, the lifting triplets of shepherd’s music here echo the landscape of flowers through the flutes and harp, flourished with wailing string solos. The following ‘Canzona’ offers no comfort, starting with a glum dance that leads to another bleak stretch of slow solos accompanying moping solos. Here the composer may have miscalcuated, running two similar slow pieces together; it tests my patience. ‘Burlesque’, is a vio- lent, virtuosic scherzo, the most superficially attractive section and also most reminiscent of Shostakovich. Without break, a solo violin launches into the finale, soon joined by everyone else in a wildly atonal and unstructured organissimo freak-out that climaxes in a steep uni- son glissando rocketing to the heavens, then returning, cyclically, to close out the sympho- ny with the chorale from I. This work demands a lot from both performers and listeners—it’s not easy to love—yet it is fascinating and rewarding, given a little time and effort.

If you think Vainberg is more than an epigone of Shostakovich, I urge you hear this; it will challenge your perceptions. Exemplary sound, committed performances all around, and the first recording, perhaps first performance ever, of the Rhapsody for violin and orchestra.

WRIGT.

VAINBERG: Violin Sonatas 4+5; Sonatina

Moishe Vainberg (or Mieczyslaw Weinberg, as his name is now more often transliterated) appeared on CPO 777845—69 minutes

Nearly the same program of violin pieces by Moishe Vainberg (or Mieczyslaw Weinberg, as his name is now more often transliterated) appeared on CPO 777845—69 minutes six years ago (Mar/Apr 2010). Both that earlier release and this new one on Accord paired Vainberg’s Fourth and Fifth Violin Sonatas; CPO added Three Pieces for Violin and Piano; Accord adds the winsome Sonatina for Violin and Piano. At last, this great composer, born and raised in Poland but resident for most of his adult life, is getting much-deserved second and even third recordings of his works.

Vainberg was a close friend of Shostakovich and shares many affinities with him, including his tonal idiom, Slavic inflections, and distinct for drama. The influence ran both ways, as over the years both men turned out more and more sonatas, quartets,
concertos, and symphonies. But Vainberg doesn’t really sound like Shostakovich. His temperament is more hopeful, warmer, even sweet at times, though also stoic—laughing through his tears, perhaps. There is pain in his music, but seldom despair or bitterness; he was a survivor, despite great hardship and persecution by both the Nazis and the Stalinist regime.

And what a splendid composer Vainberg is at his (not-seldom) best—a seemingly endlessly found of wonderous melodies, pianist harmonies, inventive accompaniments, textural ingenuity, and large-scale architectural logic. All these traits are displayed to the full in the violin music here, which includes the dark, often introspective but sometimes violent Sonatas 4 and the magnificent 23-minute Sonata 5 of 1953, which is quite simply one of the great tonal violin sonatas of the last century. Listening to the long melodic unfolding that begins this work’s opening 6-minute andante, one might ask what forerunner does its sad, angelic calm warmed by luminous harpischord and organ (R 554a), and the unusual Sonata 2 of 1938 to 1847, and they have only been re-discovered in the last few decades. These songs of unhappy love were used as salon pieces that would introduce Verdi to the influential Milan society that he hoped would support his longer works. As with other salon music, these songs are not too complicated to allow modestly trained voices to sing them. This long program of 29 pieces is written in various styles including a Brindisi (two versions), a Gypsy song, and a Barcarole.

I suppose these songs could be very effectively performed, but this new recording is a mess. The two singers, Nuzzoli and Hernández—purportedly experts in this music—should stick with research and not performance. They define what could be generously called modest voices. Listening to them is a trial. Nuzzoli has an annoying beat in her voice which, when she manages to hit a note, quickly goes sour. Hernandez has a little voice that strains to make the notes and can hardly hold a note long enough without fading out to breathlessness. None of the singing is helped by the carefully selected Conrad Graf piano (1836-1841), which may be authentic to the period but has a hollow sound. Rossi, the pianist, at least plays well. This seems to be the only recording. Notes in Italian and English.

No texts.

LEHMAN

VILLA-LOBOS: Tarantela; 12 Etudes; 14 Folk Song Arrangements; O Papagaio do Moleque

Muza Rubackyte, p—Brilliant 95154—73 minutes

This is the third version of Bissolli’s Villa-Lobos restoration project—neglected works, original versions, and newly discovered music. The major offering here is the original version of the 12 Etudes from 1928. There are many differences between the original manuscript and the final publication, almost all of which make the familiar version stronger. I won’t give a full catalog of the differences, but just cite a few to give you an idea. 1 and 2 don’t have each measure repeated, and both change the chord progressions subtly. 3 includes the repeats, but omits them on the da capo, and also changes the progression. 10 adds an entirely new section after the piano, repeats the beginning, and then goes to the expected slurs. 11 adds a strange flourish in the middle of the B section, but only the first time.

It’s interesting to hear these, but this isn’t the first time it was recorded. David Leisner released it in 2000. It was re-released on Naxos and makes it now available. If you can find it, Leisner’s performance is far better than Bissolli’s. His technical command is a bit shaky—rushed slurs, uneven arpeggios—hardly listenable, but Leisner is stronger. This will do for now if you want to hear the original etudes.

The folk song arrangements are simple and charming. Villa-Lobos arranged them for guitar and chamber ensemble from their piano original. The music is hardly indispensable, but it’s pleasant enough. O Papagaio do Moleque is a 15-minute tone poem without guitar. I’ve often found Villa-Lobos’s orchestration rather muddy, and that’s the case here; but if you like his orchestral works, you’ll enjoy this. If you’re looking for the original version of the etudes, this may be your best opportunity.

KEATON

VERDI: Romanceza della Camera

Daniela Nuzzoli, mz; Raul Hernandez, t; Marcello Ross, p—Tactus 812025—79 minutes

Verdi wrote most of his Romanceza della Camera (Chamber Arias) during his first creative stage, 1836 to 1847, and they have only been re-discovered in the last few decades. These songs of unhappy love were used as salon pieces that would introduce Verdi to the influential Milan society that he hoped would support his longer works. As with other salon music, these songs are not too complicated to allow modestly trained voices to sing them. This long program of 29 pieces is written in various styles including a Brindisi (two versions), a Gypsy song, and a Barcarole.

The recorded sound is big and realistic, capturing Rubackyte’s rich colors: the final quiet chord in ‘Adieu,’ for example, sounds like an organ tone. Rubackyte supplies her own notes, a frequent practice with Brilliant Classics, and includes the story of Vierne’s demise: he was in the middle of his 1750th organ recital when he collapsed with his foot on the E pedal, ‘which sounded a long mournful note through the cathedral as his life ebbed away’. What a way for an organist to go!

SULLIVAN

VIVIALDI: Arias; 2 Trumpet Concertos; Concerto, R 354a; Sonata; R 777

Francesca Cassignari, s; Marta Fumagalli, mz; Roberto Balconi, ct; Mauro Borgioni, b; Ensemble Piano & Forte/ Francesco Fanna

Dynamic 7710—60 minutes

This is a mixed collection with arias from Vivaldi’s operas and arias from the operas of his contemporaries, such as when, in Sarabande 17 in G from the 1682 collection, with a bass recorder on melody, the viola da gamba only plays the few measures where Visée indicated a third voice.

These are enticing pieces, and this is an acceptable recording, but it is still surprising that no one has recorded them using Visée’s preferred ensemble of harpsichord, viola da gamba, and violin.

BREWER

American Record Guide
concertos, and symphonies. But Vainberg doesn’t really sound like Shostakovich. His temperament is more hopeful, warmer, even sweet at times, though also stio—laughing through his tears, perhaps. There is pain in his music, but seldom despair or bitterness; he was a survivor, despite great hardship and persecution by both the Nazis and the Stalinist regime.

And what a splendid composer Vainberg is at his (not-seldom) best—a seemingly endlessly found fount of wonderful melodies, piquant harmonies, inventive accompaniments, textural ingenuity, and large-scale architectural logic. All these traits are displayed to the full in the violin music here, which includes the dark, often introspective but sometimes violent Sonata 4 and the magnificent 23-minute Sonata 5 of 1953, which is quite simply one of the great tonal violin sonatas of the last century. Listening to the long melodic unfolding that begins this work’s opening 6-minute andante, one might ask what forerunner does its sad, angelic calm warm by luminous harmonic changes recall. Not Shostakovich, not Prokofieff; no, the avatar is Schubert. Even the sonatas should hear the two offered on these fine releases. Sonata 5 in particular is the stronger impression overall, but both recordings are quite compelling. Sonatas 5 and 4 have a more dramatic and intense, with richer, fuller, darker string tone and sonics. It makes a more dramatic and intense, with richer, fuller, darker string tone and sonics. It makes a

VERDI: Romanze da Camera
Daniela Nuzzoli, mz; Raul Hernandez, t; Marcello Rossi, p—Tactus 812205—79 minutes

Verdi wrote most of his Romanze da Camera (Chamber Arias) during his first creative stage, 1838 to 1847, and they have only been re-discovered in the last few decades. These songs of unhappy love were used as salon pieces that would introduce Verdi to the influential Milan society that he hoped would support his longer works. As with other salon music, these songs are not too complicated to allow modestly trained voices to sing. This long program of 29 pieces is written in various styles including a Brindisi (two versions), a Gypsy song, and a Barcarole.

I suppose these songs could be very effectively performed, but this new recording is a mess. The two singers, Nuzzoli and Hernandez—purportedly experts in this music—should stick with research and not performance. They define what could be generously called modest voices. Listening to them is a trial. Nuzzoli has an annoying beat in his voice which, when she manages to hit a note, quickly goes sour. Hernandez has a little voice that strains to make the notes sound full. Less than ten years ago they hold a note long enough without fading out to breathlessness. None of the singing is helped by the carefully selected Conrad Graf piano (1836-1841), which may be authentic to the period but has a hollow sound. Rossi, the pianist, at least plays well. This seems to be the only recording. Notes in Italian and English. No texts.

VIENNE: 12 Preludes; Solitude; Nocturne
Muza Rubackyte, p—Brilliant 95154—73 minutes

Vienne is indelibly associated with organ music. It is hard to hear his name without imagining lush, Franckian organ sonorities. Yet he also wrote songs, orchestral works, chamber music, and piano music. A sampling of the latter appears here. The Preludes, from 1914, have rich, thick sonorities, impressionist spice, and virtuosic runs and octaves. Lithuanian pianist Muza Rubackyte, who has made a name recording Fräck, Vienne’s mentor, accepts this offer-ripe music on its own terms and makes a strong case for it. The Prologue bursts out of the gate with Lizstian aggressiveness. ‘Tendress’, which follows, displays Vienne’s lyrical side. ‘Nostalgie’ is strikingly simple and tender. ‘Seul’, the finale, is full of repeated notes and bombastic gestures.

The pieces in the later set called Solitude, written in the shadow of World War I, are much leaner and starker. Vienne had suffered terrible personal losses, and the mournful feeling comes through eloquently. ‘Hantisse’ is a series of dark chromatic chords, haunting and restless. ‘Nuitte Blanche’ is shadowy and sinister. The album closes with a delicate Nocturne that fully displays Rubackyte’s lovely tone and lucid voicing.

The recorded sound is big and realistic, capturing Rubackyte’s rich colors: the final quiet chord in ‘Adieu’, for example, sounds like an organ tone. Rubackyte supplies her own notes, a frequent practice with Brilliant Classics, and includes the story of Vienne’s demise: he was in the middle of his 1750th organ recital when he collapsed with his foot on the E pedal, “which sounded a long mournful note through the cathedral as his life ebbed away”. What a way for an organist to go!

SULLIVAN
VILLA-LOBOS: Tarantella; 12 Etudes; 14 Folk Song Arrangements; O Papagaio do Moleque

This is the third volume of Bissolli’s Villa-Lobos restoration project—neglected works, original versions, and newly discovered music. The major offering here is the original version of the 12 Etudes from 1928. There are many differences between the original manuscript and the final publication, almost all of which make the familiar version stronger. I won’t give a full catalog of the differences, but just cite a few to give you an idea. 1 and 2 don’t have each other’s. 9 and 10 have different progressions subtly. 3 includes the repeats, but 1 and 2 don’t have each other’s. 1 and 2 don’t have each other’s. 9 and 10 have different progressions subtly. 3 includes the repeats, but 10 adds an entirely new section after the final repeat, and 11 adds a strange flourish in the middle of the B section, but only the first time.

It’s interesting to hear these, but this isn’t the first time it was recorded. David Leisner released it in 2000. It was re-released on Naxos Live-Recordings, but is now deleted. If you can find it, Leisner’s performance is far better than Bissolli’s. His technical command is a bit shaky—rushed slurs, uneven arpeggios—hardly untenable, but Leisner is stronger. This will do for now if you want to hear the original etudes.

The folk song arrangements are simple and charming. It’s all arranged for guitar and chamber ensemble from their piano origi-

ALESSANDRO VIVALDI: Arias; 2 Trumpet Concerto; Concerto, R 524a; Sonata; R 779 Francesco Cinnasini, s; Marta Fumagalli, mz; Roberto Balconi, ct; Mauro Borgioni, b; Ensem-

BREWER
for violin, oboe, organ, and chalumeau (R 779).

Gabriele Cassone and Matteo Fricke play to the highest standards of intonation and virtuosity on their period instruments. They are joined by the four vocal soloists in trumpet arias from Tito Manlio (R 738), Montezuma (R 723), Il Teuzzone (R 736) (all for soprano), Catone in Utica (R 705, mz), Scanderbeg (R 732, countertenor), and La Fida Ninfa (R 714, bass), though Balconi’s countertenor lacks the resonance of the other voices. While all the arias are acceptable performances, I found that the complete recordings of Tito Manlio (Ottavio Dantone, May/June 2006) and Montezuma (Alan Curtis, Sept/Oct 2006) were more dramatic and were better served by larger supporting ensembles.

The instrumental works are not as good. The Sonata for violin, oboe, and organ is an odd piece with its ad libitum part for the chalumeau (a single-reed ancestor of the clarinet) doubling the left hand of the organ. There are also problems in discerning Vivaldi’s intentions in the unique manuscript for this work, and there are two other record- ings that have more probable interpretations of those ambiguous passages (recorded with Vivaldi’s oboe sonatas, Harmonia Mundi 907104, and with Vivaldi’s concertos with organ, Jan/Feb 2011), and Luca Luchetta’s chalumeau on the organ concertos release is nicely prominent in the ensemble while it is very hard to hear Ugo Galasso on the Dynamic recording. The same organ concertos recording reviewed in 2011 also includes a better recording of the Concerto for violin, cello, and organ, though the use of an actual baroque organ by Musica ad Rhenum (Vanguard 99029) is a plus, even if the organ seems to explode the myth of Vivaldi’s lack of interest in the trumpet. While there are better recordings for most of the repertoire, if you just want to hear Vivaldi in a martial mood, this is an enjoyable collection. —BREWER

**VIVALDI:** 6 Cello Sonatas
Bruno Cocset; Les Basses Reunis
Alpha 313 — 72 minutes

When I was growing up we had a Schirmer edition of six Vivaldi cello sonatas. Many more have come to light by now. This recording includes three that I know from the Schirmer edition and three more that I do not know well. The R numbers of the concertos are 39, 40, 42-44 and 47. 39, 42 and 44 are the ones outside the Schirmer realm. These may be found recorded together on Christophe Coin’s more tasteful readings that are, however, also a little less lively, though I am happier with the greater prominence given to the bass continuo line on Coin’s CD (Oiseau-Lyre 433 0522—it also contains several of Vivaldi’s cello concer- tos). The other sonatas were on Oiseau-Lyre 421 060. For more detail, consult the Cello Outline (March/April 2009).

Cocset’s recording was made back in 1998, so it has also been around for a while. His readings are lively and well played. Les Basses Reunis accompanies him well (Blandine Ran- nou, hps, org; Pascal Montelthet, theorbo; gr; Richard Myron, db), though I would be happier if the double-bass could be distinguished from the keyboard sound. Sonatas R 42 and 47 are accompanied by organ and theorbo, the rest by harpsichord. Repetes are observed with a certain amount of ornamentation. The general sound is thicker than on Coin’s recordings and sounds more joyful but less baroque. It is a matter of taste. You might find it more convincing than I do. For me, the thickness and vibrato are less satisfying than Coin in this material. The liner notes consist of an interview with Cocset that tells me much more about him than about Vivaldi. —D MOORE

**VIVALDI:** Flute Concertos, op 10
Mario Folena; Art of the Bow
Brilliant 95047 — 50 minutes

In May/June 2015, Folena gave us Bach Trio Sonatas that were very satisfying. The tendency toward fast tempos is here, too, as well as the excellence. The Italian baroque ensemble L’Arte dell’Arco plays with one person on a part, and they use organ, harpsichord, theorbo, and guitar but no wind instruments. The harpsichordists like skeletons in the middle movement of Concerto 2, recalling the unsa- vory quip from Thomas Beecham. There are so many recordings of this set that people should have more than one approach to the music, and this is another I can recommend (on period instruments). For one quite different, hear William Bennett and the English Chamber Orchestra. —GORMAN

**VIVALDI:** 4 Seasons
Nigel Kennedy, v; Orchestra of Life
Sony 76722 — 61 minutes

The album cover calls this “Kennedy-Vivaldi: The New Four Seasons”. Editor Don Vroon has described more than once in his Critical Con- victions column how the major recording labels no longer have their own identifiable sound qualities because they outsource the engineering to private concerns. They’re no longer in the recording business, only in the distribution business. Well, they’ve lost their way in another major sense as well: behold this album. As Nigel Kennedy says in the liner notes when asked why he has re-recorded The Four Seasons 25 years after his EMI recording, “I have escaped the classical ghetto. We are well into the 21st Century, so I want to present a new interpretation which [sic] is relevant to the modern day.”

I thought being “relevant” went out about two decades ago.

If you want your Vivaldi introduced with movement titles like ‘Melodious Incantation; The Goatherd Sleeps with His Trusty Dog Beside Him; His Fears Are Only Too True; Horns, Guns, and Dogs; and Walk on the Ice,’ and the solo, played here with both acoustic and electric violins, en cascaded in modes rhythms with night club backup and transitions before, between, and after each movement of each concerto, then this is for you.

And that’s the other problem with the major labels: they put out disoriented stuff like this that they think will earn them a profit (1 wonder) but does absolutely nothing in terms of classical music. [Another 4 Seasons is reviewed below. —Ed]

**VIVALDI:** 12 Concertos, op 7
Federico Guglielmo, v; Pier Luigi Fabretti, ob; L’Arte dell’Arco
Brilliant 95044 [2CD] 90 minutes

Issued in 1720, the collection is among the Vivaldi publications made by Estienne Roger of Amsterdam that have been viewed with a lot of skepticism. It was apparently brought out without Vivaldi’s own participation or knowledge. Musicologists have cast doubt on the authenticity of some of its contents. Printed in two parts of six concertos each, half-dozen was initiated by concertos that were designated in two solo concertos; the other six were regarded as ‘doubtful’. They are placed at the end of this set, as supple- ments rather than accepted compositions.

The remaining ten concertos are given in a scrambling of the published order. But the use of the new Critical Edition of the set allows for the first time a reasonably reliable presenta- tion of this opus.

Given its shady character, Op. 7 has been given minimal attention on records. The only two earlier recordings I can trace were played on modern instruments, somewhat lacking in period feeling. Salvatore Accardo, with I Musi- ci, was particularly romanticized. It offered only eight of the concertos on a single disc from Philips, issued as a part of the label’s comprehensive concerto omnibus, and then reissued alone by Pentatone (5186130: M/A 2005). The other, made by I Soloist Italiani (Denon 75498: M/J 1994) contained all 12 con- certos on a single disc. Hansjorg Schellenburg- ger played the two oboe concertos; in the others the solo roles are distributed among the group’s violinists. Both of these earlier recordings are now almost impossible to find.

This new set accordingly fills a gap in the discography, with raised standards. Of course, some more leisurely tempos mean that the entire opus is spread out rather thinly over two discs, though at a reasonable price. Fortunately, the performances are excel- lent. Guglielmo, an experienced Vivaldian, plays as if he fully believes in the authenticity of all ten of the violin concertos. His fast move- ments are springy and propulsive, and the slow movements are quite expressive, but not sentimentalized. As for the concertos—whichever they are—they are treated deft- ly by Pier Luigi Fabretti, whose period oboe
for violin, oboe, organ, and chalumeau (R 779).

Gabriele Cassone and Matteo Fruge play to the highest standards of intonation and virtuosity on their period instruments. They are matched by the four vocal soloists in trumpet arias from Tito Manlio (R 738), Montezuma (R 723), Il Teuzzone (R 736) (all for soprano), Catone in Utica (R 705, mz), Scanderbeg (R 732, countertenor), and La Fida Ninfa (R 714, bass), though Balconi’s countertenor lacks the resonance of the other voices. While all the arias are acceptable performances, I found that the complete recordings of Tito Manlio (Otavio Dantone, May/June 2006) and Montezuma (Alan Curtis, Sept/Oct 2006) were more dramatic and were better served by larger supporting ensembles.

The instrumental works are not as good. The Sonata for violin, oboe, and organ is an odd piece with its ad libitum part for the chalumeau (an early single-reed ancestor of the clarinet) doubling the left hand of the organ. There are also problems in discerning Vivaldi’s intentions in the unique manuscript for this work, and there are other recordings that have more probable interpretations of those ambiguous passages (recorded with Vivaldi’s oboe sonatas, Harmonia Mundi 907104, and with Vivaldi’s concertos with organ, Jan/Feb 2011), and Luca Luchetta’s chalumeau on the organ concertos release is nicely prominent in the ensemble while it is very hard to hear Ugo Galasso on the Dynamic recording. The same organ concertos recording reviewed in 2011 also includes a better recording of the Concerto for violin, cello, and organ, though the use of an actual baroque organ by Musica Antiqua (Vanguard 99029) is a plus, even if the organ seems to play only the right-hand solo parts. And, finally, while the trumpet playing is very nice in the Concerto for two trumpets, of the other recordings using period instruments I would more highly recommend Niklas Eklund and Jeffrey Segal (July/Aug 2002: 200), again, most likely owing to the larger accompanying ensemble and its more effective phrasing.

The booklet also has its problems, most prominent among them the lack of texts and translations for the arias. The track listing on the case and in the booklet is also incorrect: the melodic ornamentation in Utica is actually track 13. These are not significant problems, and this remains a very interesting recording that explodes the myth of Vivaldi’s lack of interest in the trumpet. While there are better recordings for most of the repertoire, if you just want to hear Vivaldi in a martial mood, this is an enjoyable collection.

VIVALDI: 6 Cello Sonatas
Bruno Cocset; Les Basses Reunis
Alpha 313 — 72 minutes

When I was growing up we had a Schirmer edition of six Vivaldi cello sonatas. Many more have come to light by now. This recording includes three that I know from the Schirmer edition and three more that I do not know well. The R numbers of the collection are 39, 40, 42-44 and 47. 39, 42 and 44 are the ones outside the Schirmer realm. These may be found recorded together on Christophe Coin’s more tasteful readings that are, however, also a little less lively, though I am happier with the greater prominence given to the basso continuo line on Coin’s CD (Oiseau-Lyre 433 0522— it also contains several of Vivaldi’s cello concertos). The other sonatas were on Oiseau-Lyre 421 060. For more detail, consult the Cello Overview (March/April 2009).

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VIVALDI: Flute Concertos, op 10
Mario Folena; Art of the Bow
Brilliant 95047 — 50 minutes

In May/June 2015, Folena gave us Bach Trio Sonatas that were very satisfying. The tendency toward fast tempos is here, too, as well as the excellence. The Italian baroque ensemble L’Arte dell’Arco plays with one person on a part, and they use organ, harpsichord, theorbo, and guitar but no wind instruments. The harpsichord paraphrases the flute in the middle movement of Concerto 2, recalling the unsavory quip from Thomas Beecham.

There are so many recordings of this set that people should have more than one approach to the music, and this is another I can recommend (on period instruments). For one quite different, hear William Bennett and the English Chamber Orchestra.

VIVALDI: 12 Concertos, op 7
Nigel Kennedy, v; Orchestra of Life
Sony 76772—61 minutes

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victions column how the major recording labels no longer have their own identifiable sound qualities because they outsource the engineering to private concerns. They’re no longer in the recording business, only in the distribution business. Well, they’ve lost their way in another major sense as well: behold this album. As Nigel Kennedy says in the liner notes when asked why he has re-recorded The Four Seasons 25 years after his EMI recording, “I have escaped the classical ghetto. We are well into the 21st Century, so I want to present a new interpretation which [sic] is relevant to the modern day.”

I thought being “relevant” went out about two decades ago.

If you want your Vivaldi introduced with movement titles like ‘Melodious Incantation; The Goatherd Sleeps with His Trusty Dog Beside Him; His Fears Are Only Too True; Horns, Guns, and Dogs; and Walk on the Ice’, and the solo, played here with both acoustic and electric violins, encased in mod rhythms with night club backup and transitions before, between, and after each movement of each concerto, then this is for you.

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FRENCH

VIVALDI: 12 Concertos, op 7
Federico Guglielmo, v; Pier Luigi Fabretti, ob; L’Arte dell’Arco
Brilliant 95044 [2CD] 90 minutes

Issued in 1720, the collection is among the Vivaldi publications made by Estienne Roger of Amsterdam that have been viewed with a lot of skepticism. It was apparently brought out without Vivaldi’s own participation or knowledge. Musicologists have cast doubt on the authenticity of some of its contents. Printed in two parts of six concertos each, each half-dozen was initiated by concertos that were designed for solo obbligato, not violin. These concertos are now regarded as “doubtful”. They are placed at the very end of this set, as supplements rather than as accepted compositions.

The remaining ten concertos are given in a scrambling of the published order. But the use of the new Critical Edition of the set allows for the first time a reasonably reliable presentation of this opus.

Given its shady character, Op. 7 has been given minimal attention on records. The only two earlier recordings I can trace were played on modern instruments, somewhat lacking in period feeling. Salvatore Accardo, with I Musici, was particularly romanticized. It offered only eight of the concertos on a single disc from Philips, issued as a part of the label’s comprehensive concerto omnibus, and then reissued alone by Pentatone (5186130: M/A 2005). The other, made by I Soloist Italiani (Denon 75498: M/ 1994) contained all 12 concerto on a single disc. Hansjorg Schellenburg played the two obbligatos; in the others the solo roles are distributed among the group’s violinists. Both of these earlier recordings are now almost impossible to find.

This new set accordingly fills a gap in the discography, with raised standards. Of course, some more leisurely tempos mean that the entire opus is spread out rather thinly over two discs, though at a reasonable price.

Fortunately, the performances are excellent. Guglielmi, an experienced Vivaldian, plays as if he fully believes in the authenticity of all ten of the violin concertos. His fast movements are springy and propulsive, and the slow movements are quite expressive, but not sentimentalized. As for the concertos—whomever they are—they are treated deftly by Pier Luigi Fabretti, whose period oboe
has a nicely mellow sound that avoids the bite of a modern instrument.

Besides the two soloists, the ensemble consists of only eight musicians, the strings all one per part, so there is a vivacious feeling of chamber-music-making that matches the soloists’ enthusiasm. Choices among the continuo instruments allow clever varieties of color.

Close, nicely analytic sound. Good booklet notes. This should win the unloved Op. 7 set some attention and respectability at last.

BARKER

VIVALDI: 4 Seasons; Concertos (3)
Gili Incogniti/ Amanda Beyer
Alpha 312—70:54
Concertos for 4 Violas (5)
Ensemble 415/ Chiara Banchini
Alpha 311—53:49

These are two separate recordings, released on the Zig Zag label in 2008 and 2006. Neither was reviewed here, so far as I can find.

Every violinist, apparently, wants to record the Four Seasons. There is certainly room in the crowd for Amandine Beyer, whom I have come to regard as one of one of the most exciting soloists and ensemble leaders in the period-instrument pack today. Her approach here is bracing but balanced. She is certainly quite alert to the sound effects Vivaldi wrote into his music: the barking dogs, the fierce storm, the boisterous hunt, the shivering cold, ice skating, and inviting fire.

Yet, these effects are vivid rather than overdone, and there is a lot of good-sense stability through the cycle. Adding better value than so many disc pairs for the four seasons is that three more violin concertos, two of which are proclaimed as recorded premieres. Unfortunately, in Alpha’s “Collection” series, of which this reissue is a part, the practice is to use the booklet entirely for interviews with the performer(s), and so here we have Beyer’s retrospective thoughts but no information at all about the recording itself. As it happens, a modern Chiara is the violinist for the Four Seasons. Banchini is the oboist, and so here we have Beyer’s retrospective thoughts but no information at all about the recording itself.

This is one Vivaldi recording to return to. As it happens, a modern Chiara is the prominent violin personality of our other reissue. For a good many years, Banchini has led her chamber group in fine recordings of Baroque concertos and chamber works. This one, made in 2006, is a novel assemblage of six concertos where Vivaldi gave four violinists opportunities for constantly shifting dialogs and exchanges, against a full ripieno. Four of the six are familiar from recordings of Vivaldi’s Op. 3 publication (Lestro Armonico): Nos. 1, 4, 7, 10. The last of those is doubly familiar, since it is the one that Bach arranged for four harpsichords. The other two are R 553 and R 551—the latter, in fact, is for three violins.

Banchini mustered here an ensemble of 11 string players, plus harpsichord and theorbo, of which 6 are violinists. She generously distributed solo assignments among her fiddlers, and in each case they stepped from solo roles into ripieno participation. The period-style playing is rich and colorful, and Banchini keeps the pacing lively and vivacious. The sound is quite up-close, so details—the shifting solo parts—can be readily followed.

The only disappointment, again, is the decision for this reissue series to bypass notes on the music in favor of a rather unhelpful interview with Banchini.

WAGNER: Das Rheingold
Michael Volle (Wotan), Elisabeth Kulman (Fricka), Burkhard Ulrich (Loge), Tomasz Konieczny (Alberich); Bavarian Radio/ Simon Rattle
BR 900133 [2CD] 143 minutes
Mathias Goerne (Wotan), Michelle DeYoung (Fricka), Kim Begley (Loge), Peter Sidhom (Alberich); Hong Kong Philharmonic/ Jaap van Zweeden—Naxos 669374 [2CD] 154 minutes

There’s enough raw material here for one good recording of Rheingold, with a Wotan to spare. Van Zweeden has the great disadvantage of an orchestra that doesn’t sound at home in Wagner and has little depth or richness. You can barely hear the low contrabass E-flat as it begins to sound at the beginning of the opera, and there’s no flow or build-up as the music proceeds. (The engineers may be partly at fault, but you can’t blame their foremost, the Elektronik Orchestra and its equipment and ancillaries.) When the Rhinemaidens enter, they sing, with such stiff rhythmic precision they might be saying nothing in particular.

Rattle is much better. His orchestra has a fuller sound, and the bottom lines are far clearer and more expressive. So are his Rheinmäderchen, who are on the shrill side but personable. Zweeden has almost every opportunity to make the music colorful and vivid. When Alberich curses love, or when he turns himself into a dragon, the music just lumbers along, as if nothing were happening. He doesn’t even ramp himself up for the opera’s final bars. Rattle, on the other hand, reveals in Wagner’s pictorial writing, and the far broader dynamic range of his orchestra makes the music expressive and exciting.

The vocal honors are about evenly divided. DeYoung is a decent, if abrasive, Fricka, but Kulman is better, the voice plumper and the words more tellingly inflected. Zweeden’s Fröhn and Donner are shaky gods indeed. Rattle’s pair is steadier, though not particularly appealing in timbre.

Both Loges are good. Begley has the better voice—Ulrich sounds too much like a second-rate Spieltenor Mime—but both are good with the words. Zweeden’s Alberich, Kim Begley, has some honey in his voice but also plenty of malice; Rattle’s Burkhard Ulrich just bellows in a coarse, unimaginative manner. The two giants are excellent in both performances (Kwangchul Youn and Stephen Milling for Zweeden, Peter Ross and Eric Halfvarson), and the Erdaes are at least adequate. Rattle has in Annette Dasch (a major singer) the Freia. It’s difficult to choose between the Wotans. Goerne has the more beautiful voice. His first long solo, ‘Vollendet das ewige Werk’, is just gorgeous (if a wee bit thin on top). His plump baritone has a solid bass underpinning, and he brings all his skill as a lieder singer to his vocal act. Volle also started as a lieder singer, and he too has a handsome (if less strikingly beautiful) voice. I’m eager to hear how each of them is going to rise to the greater demands of the Walküre Wotan. Goerne and Volle need not blush in the company of their predecessors on records, and you can’t say that about any of the others, except possibly the giants.

Both recordings have good sound, though the BR is superior. BR also supplies a libretto and translation; Naxos does not.

WAGNER: Songs; see STRAUSS

WAGSTAFF: Breathe Freely, A Persistent Illusion
Laura Margaret Smith (Dr Miller), Paul Curievici (Dr Hempel), Phil Gaul (Dr Kendall); Pete Furriss, cl; Mark Bailey, vc; Andrew Johnston, p/ Derek Clark—Linn 535—54 minutes

Julian Wagstaff’s 2013 two-act opera Breathe Freely is based on real people and places though the plot is fictional. Wagstaff centered his story on a book by Professor James Kendall (a character also in the opera) about people’s fears of chemical warfare and secret research done in Edinburgh during WW II. Act I takes place in 1943 as a new Polish chemist is brought to Edinburgh to do research; he discusses with Kendall and Dr Chrissie Miller their work on detecting gas emissions. Act II happens two years later on the day the war is over and the gas research is necessarily ended. How the opera ends is left to the listener’s decision whether the research has really ended or not.

The included booklet has explanations by Wagstaff about the book and his chemical warfare concerns, which are further explained by the director, Omar Shahyar. The booklet notes are in English with a complete English and German libretto. The opera itself is musically interesting. It is tonal, but there are no specific melodies, and most of the vocal line does not follow the music. The music does emphasize certain key actions. The vocal line forces the characters to move the words into unusual cadences, emphasizing syllables or breaking up words into abnormal patterns.

The orchestral accompaniment is a trio consisting of a clarinet, cello, and piano. Although the text and music are quite interesting, if you like operas with lots of melodies this is not for you.

A Persistent Illusion is a three-part piano trio commissioned by the Edinburgh Royal School of Chemistry to celebrate the 2011 International Year of Chemistry. Wagstaff’s notes indicate that the three parts represent the past, present, and future of chemistry, citing Einstein’s observation that the difference between them is merely a “stomnberg persistent illusion”. The piece was the inspiration for Breathe Freely, and both pieces are written in a similar non-melodic but tonal style.

The first movement is complex, II very simple, and III is based on the music of Vivaldi with Edinburgh students to produce note patterns inspired by their knowledge of chemical
VIVALDI: 4 Seasons; Concertos (3)
Gli Incogniti/ Amandine Beyer
Alpha 311—53:49
Concertos for 4 Violins (5)
Ensemble 415/ Chiara Banchini
Alpha 311—53:49

These are two separate recordings, released on the Zig Zag label in 2008 and 2006. Neither was reviewed here, so far as I can find.

Every violinist, apparently, wants to record the Four Seasons. There is certainly room in the crowd for Amandine Beyer, whom I have come to regard as one of the most exciting soloists and ensemble leaders in the period instrument pack today. Her approach here is bracing but balanced. She is certainly quite up-close, so details—the shifting solo parts—can be readily followed.

The only disappointment, again, is the decision for this reissue series to bypass notes on the music in favor of a rather unhelpful interview with Banchini.

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There’s enough raw material here for one good recording of Rheingold, with a Wotan to admire. Van Zweden has the great disadvantage of an orchestra that doesn’t sound at home in Wagner and has little depth or richness. You can barely hear the low contrabass E-flat as it begins to sound at the beginning of the opera, and there’s no flow or build-up as the music proceeds. (The engineers may be partly at fault, but you can’t blame the performance for it.)

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WAGNER: Songs; see STRAUSS

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The first movement is complex, II very similar to III is based on a Vivaldi concerto with Edinburgh students to produce note patterns inspired by their knowledge of chemical
structures and formulas. The music is interesting with many unusual note patterns, and the finale is particularly rhythmic. The performances and sound of both the opera and the trio are very good.

Another "early" composer not well known. The Austrian violinist and composer Romanus Weichlein (1652-1706) was born Andreas Franz, but took the monastic name of Romanus and spent most of his life at the Jesuitically lively Lambach Monastery. He came from a musical family to begin with, and his studies of the violin were encouraged by Franz von Biber, who was only eight years his senior. Weichlein had an active musical career in his short life. Presumably a good many of his compositions have been lost, too. An early (1686) Canon über das Post-Horn (on the post-horn call), for four violins and continuo, survives on its own, and at least one violin sonata is known but not preserved. Otherwise, his entire output is represented in two formal publications. His Op. 2, titled Parnassus Ecclesiastico-musices (1702) is a collection of Latin compositions for church functions. Addressed here, however, is his first musical opus. It bears the title Encænia Musices, the first word of which is a pretentious Latin adaptation of an ancient Greek word for celebrations of civic events. (One annotator here suggests that title is an anticipation of Bach's Musical Offering, but the comparison is not valid.) The publication's contents were obviously intended for the widest possible use for either secular or ecclesiastical occasions.

The Latin subtitle describes the contents: duodecim sonatas cum quinque pluribus instrumentis per thonos selectiores (12 sonatas for 5 or more instruments in selected keys). Of the 12, 9 call for a 5-part ensemble of 2 violins, 2 violas (da braccio), and continuo. Three other sonatas (including the first and last) add a pair of clarino trumpets to the mix. But the composer suggested that variations of scoring could be followed, including the use of violas da gamba. In addition, Weichlein attached to the clarino parts-a book supplements a group of 24 trumpet duets.

Most of these sonatas follow Biber's in style and form: usually with brief movements before, after, or surrounding an extended variations movement, usually ciascuna or passacaglia—reminiscent in particular of Biber's famous Mystery Sonatas.

The Alpha program offers only five of the five-voice string sonatas (Nos. 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11). The Ensemble Masques consists here of two violins, one viola, one bass viola, one violone, and either harpsichord or clavichord (played by Fortin): in other words, a strict chamber consort but leavened with just a bit of Weichlein's indulgence in instrumentation, always one player per line.

But they add supplemental music, beyond Weichlein's. Since these sonatas are built around variations movements, they alternate them with examples of such writing by other composers: Georg Böhm, George Muffat, Johann Kuhnau, Johann Pachelbel, and Johann Kaspar Kerll. The selections by the first two are played on harpsichord, those by the latter three in two-harpichord transcriptions, for which Fortin is joined by no less than Skip Sempe.

By contrast, the Raumklang program is all-Weichlein (Nov/Dec 2015). They play six of the string-consort sonatas (Nos. 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11), plus two that add trumpets (1+12). For further variety, three of the trumpet duets are included, as is a prestissimo Canon. Beyond that, the Raumklang group exercises a good deal more flexibility in scoring, using different violas and often adding bassoon to the continuo. So the sonorities lean a bit more to the quasi-orchestral—a suggestive feature of these works. On the other hand, they have a rather sweet and gentle quality in their playing, whereas Fortin's group is much more aggressive in its string, especially violin, playing. Since three of the sonatas (Nos. 3, 6, 11) are duplicated between the two recordings, it is easy to make direct comparisons.

This release may, then, be taken as either competitive or complementary. I like the playing in both, but Fortin's group has an assertive freshness that seems much more in the appropriate Biber spirit. On the other hand, the Raumklang program does give you a lot more Weichlein.

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WEIGL: Left-Hand Piano Concerto; Violin Concerto
Florian Kumpreck, p; David Fruhvirt, v; Ros- tock Philharmonic/ Manfred Lehner, Florian Kumpreck
Capriccio 5232—71 minutes

Two until-now-unheard concertos by Viennese Karl Weigl (1881-1949) make their debut on this welcome Capriccio release. Like so many others, Weigl fled the Third Reich and moved to America where, undaunted, he continued to compose quartets, concertos, and symphonies. A staunch follower of the hallowed Germanic tradition of Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms, and their later-romantic descendants including (among others) Bruckner, Mahler, Schumann, and Pfitzner, and his teacher Zemlinsky, Weigl remained an unconstructed throwback through all his long career. A fair number of his works have been recorded going back to the LP era and forward into the digital age (see our indexes). All of them—besides the 1924 Concerto for Piano Left-Hand and 1928 Violin Concerto here, are old-fashioned, well-crafted works that wouldn't have discomfited and might well have impressed Schumann or Bruch. All adopt expansive but easily-recognized classical formal outlines and firmly tonal harmonic procedures. Assertive ideas are passionate and forward-moving, the lyrical subjects dolce and singing or elegiac and melancholy. Emotions range from celebratory to fervent and sometimes, as in Elgar (whom Weigl somewhat resembles), seem touched by the autumnal poignancy of a grand lineage coming to an end. But unlike the so-called ‘neo-romantics’ of that period, we are no longer being led to doubt Weigl's integrity or his commitment to his stylistic heritage. He wasn't adopting a trendy style as a shortcut to success; he wrote in the only way that was right—or indeed possible—for him.

The Left-Hand Concerto—another of those left-hand in this concerto is, I think, turned to advantage here, keeping the piano part more drawn with melodic lines than cluttered with heavy choral textures or shorted fusillades, as so many romantic piano concertos are. Still, it's a full 35 minutes long: music built to help fill the concerts of an audience concert with no radios, no televisions, no Internet, and plenty of servants to do the housework. The also ample and richly melodic Violin Concerto follows the same in-the-tradition pattern, except that its central slow movement exchanges the pain and protest of the Left-Hand Concerto's adagio for a warm, sensual tranquility evoking a scene of moonlit, amorous tenderness.

The sound is well polished and sensitive, with the versatile Florian Kumpreck as both soloist in the Left-Hand Concerto and conductor in the Violin Concerto. Capriccio's sonics are outstanding. This will be an unexpected delight for music lovers seeking lost treasures of late-blooming romanticism—without a capital-R.

LEHMAN: Songs
Sophie Klussmann, s; Sebastian Noack, bar; Olivier Freriendi, p; German Symphony of Berlin members—Capriccio 5259—68 minutes

Karl Weigl continued the late-romantic song-writing tradition of Mahler, Strauss, Wolf, and his teacher Zemlinsky. Many of his songs have a dreamy quality. The program includes five sets of songs and three single songs. Most of these are accompanied by piano. Five Songs from Phantasus with texts by Arno Holz create a serene sense of wonder at the beauties of nature. A young woman's love is the subject of Three Children Songs. Six Children's Songs are playful and simple—and in English (‘The Easter Bunny'; ‘To Santa Claus'; ‘The Snowman'). Klussmann and Noack join in Five Duets about love, written around the time Weigl met the woman who was to become his first wife.

Two works are accompanied by strings: Five Songs for Soprano and Spring Quartet, quite often performed, and ‘Ein Stelldeichein', a lush work for high voice and string sextet with text by Richard Dehmel. (The similarities to Schoenberg's Verklärte Nacht suggest that it may have been the model for Weigl's piece.

Klussmann has a rich and creamy voice that casts a smuppous spell when she is not
singing at full voice. At louder dynamics her voice tends to boom and lose its steadiness. Fortunately the best music here is quieter. The varied accompaniment and the inclusion of the duets enhance the program. Triendl offers sensitive collaboration.

Notes in German and English but texts in original languages only.

R Moore

WELLESZ: Browning Sonnets; see BERG

Wolf: Anthracite Fields

Bang on a Can All-Stars, Trinity Wall Street Choir, Cantaloupe 21111—60 minutes

Julia Wolfe, a composer associated with Bang on a Can, won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for music for this fascinating, heartbreaking choral work. The Pulitzer jury called Anthracite Fields "a powerful oratorio for chorus and sextet evoking Pennsylvania coal-mining life around the turn of the 20th Century". David Lang, also associated with Bang on a Can, won in 2008 for the poignant choral piece, The Little Match Girl Passion, which has achieved an unusual popularity for a contemporary work, as I imagine this one will. Like Lang, Wolfe has discovered that choral music with clear, open intervals is one way to objectify potentially melodramatic or sentimental material and make it accessible to an audience. Wolfe told NPR that while talking to one daughter and granddaughter about miners’ lives in Pennsylvania, where she grew up, she discovered that women brightened their dark, impoverished existences with gardens and flowers. That image and those flowers became one section of the piece.

Wolfe tells the story of the miners from different perspectives. The first movement is a list of injured miners’ names, full of deep pedals and eerie whoistles. (The composer found a depressingly long index of injuries in the Pennsylvania coal mines.) ‘The Breaker Boys’ has children’s rhymes and vibrant energy, depicting the grim lives of boys who worked in the mines. Ashley Bathgate is the lead voice here as well as the life of boys who worked in the mines. Wolfe says she “didn’t want to hammer audiences over the head and say, ‘Listen to this. This is a big political issue.’ it really was, ‘Here’s what happened this life a and who are we in relationship to that?’ We’re them. They’re us. And, basically, these people, working underground under very dangerous conditions, fueled the nation. That’s fascinating and very important to understand.” This open-endedness and lack of political rhetoric make the piece the all the more effective.

Zaimont: Symphony 4; Trio 1

Peter Winograd, v; Peter Wyrick, vc; Joanne Polk, p; Janacek Philharmonic/ Nicole Brisch

Sorel 3—58 minutes

Judith Lang Zaimont was born in Memphis but grew up in New York. She studied on the Lawrence Welk show at age 11 and studied with Rosina Lhevinne and Leland Thompson in Juilliard’s preparatory division. She studied orchestration with Andre Jolivet in Paris. Her music is tonally based and uncomplicated—very direct and very American. She likes big gestures, and they suit the symphony well. Its nickname is Pure, Cool (Water), and the movements portray a river, ice, a rain shower, the tarn, and the ocean. A two-note theme, an aural representation of the word “water”, unites the piece; it rocks gently but firmly in “In a Current (The River)” and is brittle and piercing in ‘As a Solid (Ice)’. Tempos are generally on the slow side, but I never felt bored or impatient. ‘In Waves and Storms (Ocean)’ could have been more turbulent in the development sections, but the calm ending is convincing.

The trio, Russian Summer, has two seven-minute movements. ‘Nocturne’ is meditative, but Zaimont works a little too hard at writing disjunct lines. ‘Romp’ is—obviously—more upbeat. The musicians don’t quite sell it, though; they need more powerful dynamics, and their intonation and tone can be sketchy. The trio could do a lot better if he said about the orchestra. They aren’t amateurs, but neither are they world-class. Nothing they play is unlistenable, but it’s not the last word in polish, either. Notes are in English.

Zehavi: Songs

Claire Meghnagi, s; Irena Friedland, p

Israel Music Institute 52—57 minutes

This album, Lonely Bird, is a collection of songs by Oded Zehavi, who was born in Jerusalem in 1961. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania with George Crumb and at SUNY Stony Brook with Sheila Silver. He’s been on the music faculty of the University of Haifa since 1995.

Zehavi’s writing is tonal or tonally based, straightforward, and easy to follow. There’s an aridity to the sound that doesn’t sound out of place in the lineage of Paul Ben-Haim’s Mediterranean School. The mood is usually melancholy, the tempos prominently slow. Judging from the accompaniments, he is not entirely comfortable with the piano. In some songs, like the ethnic-sounding ‘My Lover Stepped Into His Garden,’ the writing is unusual but effective, and Zehavi seems to be arguing against our preconceptions of the piano. Elsewhere, it sounds as if he shies away from writing anything he reasonably could. The melodic doubling, arpeggios, and repeated chords in ‘The Bird of Paradise’ sound dated; I think Zehavi can do better—he often does. Zehavi’s voice is clear, expressive voice, but she can be harsh in her higher range. The songs are very dry. Notes are in English and Hebrew, and where the Hebrew section of the booklet has the full sung texts, the English only has synopses. There are some fine songs here, and I can recommend this for the more dedicated followers of Israeli composers.

American Record Guide

Word Police: respectively

“The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which feeds sectarianism between Sunnis and Shiites respectively.” (The Economist in April) The word is not only unnecessary but inappropriately and simply wrong in that sentence. Since almost no one knows how to use it, and since we know what it means realize it is almost always unnecessary, we recommend that you avoid the word.
The purity of the Trinity Wall Street Choir is breathtaking, and Bang on a Can contributes beguiling, imaginative, sometimes disturbing sounds from strings, percussion, clarinets and keyboard. Wolfe says she “didn’t want to hammer [audiences] over the head and say, ‘Listen to this. This is a big political issue.’ It really was, ‘Here’s what happened. Here’s this life’s story and who are we in relationship to that?’ We’re them. They’re us. And, basically, these people, working underground under very dangerous conditions, fueled the nation. That’s fascinating and very important to understand.” This open-endedness and lack of political hectoring make the piece all the more effective.

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Critical Convictions—from page 53

(Was it Henry Ford or Thomas Edison who said he would never hire someone who salted his food before tasting it? Well, I will never hire a writer who talks and writes the same garbage as everyone else in our benighted society.)

It is obvious to anyone who remembers the past that what was promoted as “democracy” has turned out to be bureaucracy. We are ruled by bureaucrats—legions of them in government and business—and they try to foist on us the illusion that because we can vote we live in a democracy. Don’t believe it! Think critically!

We are patronizing to blacks. I can’t imagine why blacks put up with it. We baby them and treat them like children who don’t know what to do with themselves. It started in the 60s, in reaction to gruff mistreatment of blacks (which was certainly deplorable). I remember in 1965 or 66 a black fellow student told me he liked the way I treated blacks. “But I don’t treat negroes any different than I treat anyone else.” He said, “That’s my point. You don’t baby me, protect me, or hold the door for me. You treat me like I can take care of myself.” Are we determined to turn black men into wimps too?

I edited this in winter, and it’s hard to resist mocking all the white people who are afraid of snow. Everything closes and everyone goes home because a half inch of snow is threatened. That’s Cincinnati, where snow is pretty rare. I wonder if people in places like Buffalo are as wimpy? They weren’t when I lived there, but that was more than 30 years ago. (Buffalo gets 100 inches a year!) I guess it is naive of me to expect a country governed by fear to raise up real men and women instead of timid caricatures. Our masters certainly prefer us wimpy.

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Peter and the Wolf in Hollywood
Alice Cooper, narr; German Youth Orchestra/ Alexander Shelley—DG 24038—50 minutes
This is a children’s album that begins with “Peter arriving and settling in Los Angeles” to the tune of the prelude to Act I of Lohengrin. At his birthday party he gets to hear parts of the funeral music movement from Mahler’s Symphony 1, the Enigma Variations, the prelude to Tristan and Isolde, the ‘Battle of the Unhatched Chicks’ from Pictures at an Exhibition, and tunes from La Boheme and Tosca (and that’s just the second cut). And there’s some Zemlinsky, non-Peter Prokofieff, Grieg, Satie, and Smetana in four more cuts before finally getting to Prokofieff’s Peter and the Wolf itself. Ah, but there’s the hitch. All of these selections, including the main act itself, come with constant background noise—space ships landing, nature sounds, etc., and Alice Cooper himself (yes, you read that correctly) narrates with a very sane and beautiful, comforting voice.

What I can’t understand is why this is released in this format. As a CD for himself (yes, you read that correctly) narrates, the selections don’t seem to support those claims.

The concert opens with Alfred Newman’s 20th Century Fox fanfare (the Cinemascopic version from 1953), which is still used by the studio. Unlike the other selections, all recorded at London’s Royal Festival Hall, this one has so much reverberation it sounds like it was recorded at the end of a long railway tunnel. There are much better recordings available of this 24-second piece.

Although it does have its supporters, I found Alex North’s score for Cleopatra the biggest minus of the 4-hour film. Except for the exotic sounding ‘Love Theme’ and the growing ‘Cleopatra’s Entrance into Rome’ music, the rest of the film’s modernist score detracts from the narrative. North’s somewhat atonal jazzy style was best suited to contemporary period films. Cleopatra needed a healthy dose of Miklos Rozsa’s monumental style to propel the narrative. The ‘Cleopatra Symphony’ on this recording is made up of probably the best themes used in the film and at 24 minutes is about all you need. It’s all played slower than in the movie. The sound is very good and much clearer than the ‘Fox Fanfare.’

Nino Rota’s score for The Godfather, here in a “Symphonic Portrait,” again uses the best themes from the film. Rota’s score is well suited to the period of the film, and the playing and sound are very good. Franz Waxman’s ‘Ride of the Cossacks’ from Taras Bulba is an enjoyable gallop in the Khachaturian modernist style. If you like bombast, you’ll love it.

The second disc begins with Mauceri’s excellent Narrative for String Orchestra based on Bernard Herrmann’s score for Psycho. What’s interesting about the ‘Narrative’ is that it can be a stand-alone concert piece without any reference to the film. I reviewed it on Toccat 241 (1/1/2015) where Mauceri conducted the Danish National Symphony—no match for the London Philharmonic. Bronislav Kaper’s score for Mutiny on the Bounty is more in the Rossa monumental style. This is probably Kaper’s most ambitious score, and there is some atonalism used to show jarring conflict whether with humans or the sea. There is an uncredited choir in Mauceri’s judicious selections.

I was fortunate enough to see Jerry Goldsmith in 2001 conducting the London Philharmonic at the Royal Albert Hall in selections from his film scores, including music from Star Trek. Mauceri’s selections from the film, titled ‘The New Enterprise,’ are appropriately celestial. Goldsmith wrote in many different styles, and for Star Trek the music sounds very much like John Williams in Star Wars—probably what the audience expected. It is well played. ‘Deborah’s Theme,’ is from Ennio Morricone’s score for Once Upon A Time in America. This very understated music is purposely slow and romantic, and Mauceri does it very well. ‘Lawrence and the Desert,’ which closes the concert, is from Maurice Jarre’s score for Lawrence of Arabia. It is the shortest track (a little over 2 minutes) and only gives a whiff of that film’s score. I didn’t care for Mauceri’s arrangement of the several themes used in this very short selection, and the recording again has too much echo, which creates a muddy sound.

Some of this music is still available on original soundtrack recordings and some better played and recorded on composer collection discs with various labels. The Mutiny on the Bounty and Taras Bulba music has been unavailable for many years. Check Screen Archives Entertainment’s website for what might be available (www.screenarchives.com).

The Butterfly Lovers
CHEN & HO: Butterfly Lover’s Concerto; KREISLER: Chinese Tambourine; WIENIAWSKI: Legend; SARASATE: Gypsy Airs; TCHAIKOVSKY: Melody; MA: Nostalgia; TRAD: Sunshine on Tskorgan; Lu Sicong, v; Taipei Chinese Orchestra/ Chung Yiu-Kwong—BIS 2104 [SACD] 63 minutes
This review follows the order of the works on the album. The main work comes at the end of the album. The Butterfly Lovers Concerto (1959) strikes me as pure pentatonic innocence and endless—four-quarter meter with mini-cadenzas thrown in. (PT-109 jaundiced me forever: pea-soup fog, pentatonic swells, you just know the Japanese are coming for JFK’s boat. Gahhh!) But I must add that the solo here is beautifully played, and Chung’s style is finally unleashed. The violin line here is flexible, flowing, and truly lovely, with Chung’s arrangement bringing out Tchaikovsky’s very clever counter-lines, which I never before paid attention to.

Chung’s seven-minute piece on a traditional Tajik folk song from northwestern China is the album’s high point, and not in some authentic Chinese sense either! It’s a sort of Indian-Turkish-Lawrence of Arabian-Hungarian rava that mixes 2-2-3 beats with 2-2 gypsy style, all played with full panache by both Lu and the orchestra. ‘Nostalgia’ from Ma Sicong’s Mongolian Suite (1937) by comparison sounds like music for some cowboy movie with a sappy violin line, parallel orchestral violin style, a third apart, and swelling timpani rolls.

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The Genius of Film Music

Hollywood Blockbusters 1960s to 1980s
London Philharmonic/John Mauceri
LPO 86 [2CD] 89 minutes

This new recording is from a 2013 concert of film music from what were known as “blockbusters”—usually movies shown in exclusive engagements in large movie theaters. Each selection is written by a different composer. John Mauceri arranged most of the selections. His comments in the booklet on the changes in film music in the period covered to a more

Collections

Collections are in the usual order: orchestral, chamber ensembles, brass ensembles, bassoon, cello & double bass, clarinet and saxophone, flute, guitar, harp, harpsichord, miscellaneous, oboe, organ, piano, trumpet & brass solos, viola, violin, wind ensembles, early, choral, vocal.

Peter and the Wolf in Hollywood

Alice Cooper, narr; German Youth Orchestra/ Alexander Shelley—DG 24038—50 minutes

This is a children’s album that begins with “Peter arriving and settling in Los Angeles” to the tune of the prelude to Act I of Lohengrin. At his birthday party he gets to hear parts of the funeral music movement from Mahler’s Symphony 1, the Enigma Variations, the prelude to Tristan and Isolde, the ‘Battle of the Unhatched Chicks’ from Pictures at an Exhibition, and tunes from La Boheme and Tosca (and that’s just the second cut). And there’s some Zemlinsky, non-Peter Prokofieff, Grieg, Satie, and Smetana in four more cuts before finally getting to Prokofieff’s Peter and the Wolf itself.

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Lu Sicong, v; Taipei Chinese Orchestra/ Chung Yiu-Kwong—BIS 2104 [SACD] 63 minutes

This review follows the order of the works on the album.

What kind of sound to expect from a Chi-

nese orchestra? Here, quite traditionally west-

ern with none of the non-tonal clangorous

sounds of authentic Chinese opera. (I can’t

vouch for authentic Chinese opera playing

with plenty of expression and contrasts)—no auto-
pilot here as the Taipei Chinese Orchestra

very soft-edged winds in the accompaniment.

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All the works here are arranged or adapted for Chinese orchestra. The engineering is superbly balanced and warm.

**ENSEMBLE ALLEGRIA**

**BARTOK: Divertimento**

**HAYDN: Cello Concerto in C**

**SHOSTAKOVICH: Chamber Symphony, on 110a**

Frida Fredrikke Waaler Vaerwagen, vc

LAWO 1082 — 74 minutes

No, there’s no conductor. All of the players in this Norwegian chamber orchestra are under 25 years old, it would seem. So how do they stay together? Very well. Their dynamics are a bit greater in contrast than conductors usually allow, making the opening of the slow movement of the Bartok Divertimento almost inaudible. Interesting and moving! The early Haydn Concerto is played with sensitivity and virtuosity, particularly evident in the fast tempo of the Finale. Rudolph Barshai’s dramatic and colorful string orchestra version of Shostakovich’s Eighth String Quartet is played with such drama and tonal contrasts as to sound quite unlike its original source.

These performances are quite unusual and give us a fresh approach to each of these pieces. They make playing without a conductor an educational experience and are well worth hearing. The Shostakovich, in particular, gives a feeling of tragedy to the score that I have never heard before. The recording is excellent as well.

**SCRAPYARD EXOTICA**

Mason Bates, Ken Ueno, Mohammed Fairouz

Del Sol Quartet

Sono Luminus 92193—64 minutes

The Del Sol String Quartet here gathers three new pieces (two written for them) by three young but already widely recognized American composers on this well-played-and-recorded program. The liner notes tout the usual claps about how music crosses boundaries, running “the gamut from club beats to throat singing to middle eastern dance rhythms, from the melodic beauty of Schubert to swinging jazzy grooves to the world of science fiction, yet each voice is firmly rooted in the hear and now, sharing [the composers’] experiences of life in the 21st Century” — as if modern eclecticism were an automatic guarantee of musical quality. If you believe that I’ve got some Enron stock I’ll let go at a bargain price.

Mason Bates’s contribution is a set of four Bagatelles for string quartet and electronics. Each number adopts a steady, loud, and continuous drum-beat that overlays the more conventional string music, though the drums are in fact simulated by distorted “samples” of the quartet slapping or knocking on the instruments. The beat is vaguely “exotic” though regular enough to (bellow?) dance to, but unless you’re doing that, it quickly becomes annoying. The result is 16 minutes of third-rate electronic dance beat on top of third-rate string quartet music, devoid of the fantasy or wit that, for example, John Adams found when writing in a similar vein. It’s also an all-too-typical instance of the now-pervasive strategy of trying to gin up excitement by putting a pounding beat on top of conventional string-background music, film, television commercial, political attack-ad.

Bates is guilty of debasing his harmonic music with that intrusive amplified pounding, as in his *Mothership* just released (with several other of his works) on the BMOP (review to come). It utterly ruins the music, despite his evident flair for splashy orchestral color and striking gestures. (See our index for several recent reviews that find more of value than I do in Bates’s music.)

*Peradam*, by Ken Ueno, also shows its composer’s unwillingness to write “mere” string quartet music. Instead he has the players drone and drawl out some of the nastiest scrawkings and scrapings I’ve heard in a while (all of them invented decades ago back when the old “new music” was already assiduously alienating audiences. Nothing dates like the newest new thing.)

Ueno’s personal twist is to superimpose wordless vocalizations (using ancient or esoteric techniques including Asian “throat” singing, and so on) intoned by the overworked quartet members. I’ll say this for Ueno: he hasn’t (unlike Bates) the slightest interest in slick, easy appeal. In 1972 describing in standard ad copy a sunlit scene on the shore of Lake Muskoka near Toronto with people apparently swimming in the lake. This takes me back to my childhood on the shore of Lake Cayuga and the beautiful sunny days there with my two brothers swimming about McKinney’s Point. It is a pity that begins quietly that one wonders if it is going to be minimalist, but it grows around one expressively.

Then Andrew Stanisland (b. 1977) describes the passage of the solstices and equinoxes in a three-movement suite that starts slowly and ends with vigor, not unlike the progression in Current’s work. These are also quite thoughtful and attractive pieces. Michael Oesterle (b. 1968) continues with another three-movement work memorializing three well-known people who would have been 100 years old in 2012: Julia Child, Conlon Nancarrow, and Jackson Pollock. It is another fine and lyrical work.

The oldest member on deck is James K. Wright (b. 1959), a professor of music theory, composition, and performance studies at Carleton University in Ottawa. His work is a three-song cycle inspired by the mysterious letters written by Beatnik legend Lou Reed to his on-off lover, Nan Goldin. The performances are polished and played with feeling and recorded in fine sound. If you are interested in what is going on north of the border, here is some meat for your pleasure. The idioms are expressive and you will not find these your young folk boring.

**FROM A TENDER AGE**

Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff, Mahler, L. Boulander, Ireland

Daniel Rowland, va; Monte Trio

Genuin 15369—65 minutes

A finely played program of youthful music—Shostakovich’s Trio No. 1, Rachmaninoff’s First Trio, Mahler’s Piano Quartet, Lili Boulanger’s 2 Pieces, and Ireland’s Phantasie Trio. Three of the composers were still in their teenage years when they wrote their pieces, and each of the works is interesting and melodically strong. Shostakovich’s has one of his catchiest tunes and some spikiness that prefigures his later styles.

Lili Boulanger’s ditty—“D’un Soir Triste’
gives its special character to Chung’s own arrangement.
Above all, this album is yet further testimony to the superb level of musical training in Taiwan. (See my article on the Taiwan Philharmonic in this issue.)
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FRENCH

Ensemble Allegria
BARTOK: Divertimento. HAYDN: Cello Concerto in C; SHOSTAKOVICH: Chamber Symphony, op 110a
Frida Fredrikke Waaler Vaerwangen, vc
LAWO 1082 — 74 minutes

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Ueno’s personal twist is to superimpose wordless vocalisms (using ancient or esoteric techniques including Asian “throat” singing, and so on) intoned by the overworked quartet members. I’ll say this for Ueno: he hasn’t (unlike Bates) the slightest interest in slick, easy appeal. In 1972 describing in seven minutes 20 minutes of butt-ugly. Other critics, it’s true, have lauded Ueno’s music, and one recently announced that he’s likely to become “an extremely important American composer”. Who cares? If his music offers no pleasure to my ears nor solace to my soul I have no use for him.

Haydn Concerto is played with sensitivity and virtuosity, particularly evident in the fast tempo of the Finale. Rudolph Barshai’s dramatic and colorful string orchestra version of Shostakovich’s Eighth String Quartet is played with such drama and tonal contrasts as to sound quite unlike its original source.

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Lili Boulanger’s diptych—“D’un Soir Triste’
Shunned pyrotechnics in favor of melodic tar and violin, Op. 61:2, is a treat. The virtuoso is particularly fetching.

Two violins and piano. The short numbers are 'March/April', 'Hail, Columbia', and a little America. The recordings were made in the studio; they're not from a live performance.

This charming program comes courtesy of Rudens Turku and friends—they performed these pieces at music festivals in Germany and Austria over the last several years. Their playing is professional and engaging. The recordings were made in the studio; they’re not from festival concerts.

Franz Doppler's Duettino sur des Motifs Americanins is a fantasy for flute, violin, and piano; it uses 'Yankee Doodle Dandy', 'Boatman Dance', 'Hail, Columbia', and a little obscurity called 'Tuo Kuo Siao Liao'. It’s as if the composer wrote the piece in a car. The result holds up better than you might think; I’ve listened to it several times now and I still enjoy it. Lev Atovmiann arranged five pieces from Shostakovich’s film score for two violins and piano. The short numbers are tuneful and light, and the Elegy’s melody is parrally fetching.

Paganini’s Sonata Concertata in A for guitar and violin, Op. 61:2, is a treat. The virtuoso shunned pyrotechnics in favor of melodic craft, and it paid off. There are challenges, of course, and it’s a small thrill when guitarist Franz Halas does the lightening scale in III. The Duetto Concertante No. 3 for violin and bassoon isn’t as interesting, partly because I is nearly nine minutes long, and partly because the themes aren’t as good as in the Sonata Concertata. Mendelssohn’s tuneful Trio in D minor, Op. 49, is arranged here for flute, cello, and piano.

Other than the violin-and-bassoon piece, this release has everything to recommend it, including beautiful sound. Notes are in English and German.
and ‘D’un Matin de Printemps’—was written nearly on her deathbed. Both movements use the same thematic material, and they’re atmospheric and positively mystical. Her use of eerie impressionist harmonies and subtle dissonance is very mature. The trio’s placement in the program—after the romantically turbulent Mahler and before the Ireland—is most effective. Ireland’s piece is often pleasantly drowsy but not without its busier moments. It has a bit of the British pastoral feel to it, but it’s more sensual and less bovine than some of the cud-chewers by other English pastoralists.

The Mahler and Boulanger seem to inspire the Monte Trio the most; in the other three pieces, I want just a little more intensity when it’s appropriate. But they play quite well together and their intonation is solid. The sonics are good. Notes are in English and German.

Souvenirs

Doppler, Paganini, Shostakovich, Mendelssohn, Rudens Turku, Lena Neudauer, v; Wen-Sinn Yang, vc; Andreas Adorjan, fl; Malte Refardt, bn; Franz Halasz, g; Adrian Oetiker, Yuimko Urabe, p

Oehms 1832—72 minutes

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Vox Balaenae

ROREM, MARTINU: Flute Trios; SAARIHAHO: Cendres; CRUMB: Vox Balaenae

Trios for flute, cello, and piano are not common. The sound is beautiful, but the instruments come from different worlds and don’t really speak the same language. Ned Rorem makes a point of the contrast but also of the happy joining of forces to accomplish affection and chase up and down the fields and in the woods. His is a highly attractive four-movement exploration that Trio Wieck clearly enjoys.

Kaja Saarialho gives us a different picture. Hers is a ten-minute movement using the alto flute to help explore a pile of ashes that one breathes and fears. What can be the contents of this strange pile? Saarialho relates it to her Double Concerto for alto flute, cello, and orchestra a la fume (into smoke). Whatever the subject, this is an unusual and pleasant piece.

Suddenly, in comes Bohuslav Martinu with a totally different world to show us—dancing, happy, and thoughtful by turns, bringing us to semi-tonality in a highly attractive way.

All of this is meant to prepare us for the major musical event, George Crumb’s Vox Bal-aenae (Voice of the Whale). This is an impro-vised-sounding work inspired by the songs of humpbacked whales and the thoughts they suggested to the composer. This is also expressed through the use of electronic amplification, strange playing modes, and the black masks the players are asked to wear. So why isn’t this a video? The music is indeed thought-provoking and pleasant, though it makes me want to go back to Rorem and company to hear real notes and melodies.

This is a nicely varied and beautifully played recording. Christina Fassbender, flute, Justin Grimm, cello, and Florian Wiek, piano are fine and imaginative musicians and I am glad to have their unusual and highly attrac-tive program. Take off your masks now, so we can see you in person!

Flourishes, Tales, & Symphonies

Sharpe, Verdi, White, Marllt, Weinberger, Saint-Saens, Meechan

Chicago Gargoyle Brass & Organ Ensemble

Rodeney Holmes—MSR 1598—68 minutes

The colorfully named Chicago Gargoyle Brass & Organ Ensemble hails from the University of Chicago, where gargoyles are found on buildings. Brass and organ is an often heard combination, but I don’t know of many ensembles that are committed specifically to this genre. The recording was made in two Chicago-area churches: Arcangel Catholic in Wheaton and First United in Oak Park. Their organs are quite different.

Arcangel has a Rogers 1038 with 39 pipe ranks and 230 stops. It is heard at a bit of a distance, so the effect is something like a theater organ. Three pieces were recorded there. Two are new ones by Carlyle Sharpe—the splashy ‘Flourishes’ (2005) and the longer, serious Prelude, Elegy & Scherzo (2012). One is a transcription of the familiar Polka and Fugue from Weinberger’s Schwanda, the Bagpiper (1922).

First United’s organ is a 1982 Cassavetes Frederes (Opus 3544) with 88 ranks and 73 stops. Perhaps it is owing to acoustic properties of the church itself, or to the microphone setup, but I like the sound of this organ and the overall sonics better than the other. It is heard in a general reading of Verdi’s very familiar ‘Libiamo’ (La Traviata), a quiet-then-pompous account of II and III from Saint-Saens’s Symphonic 3, and several original works. William White’s Dwarf Planets (2012) comes along at a former reading and considers the spectacular images of Pluto and Ceres we have been seeing recently. He patterned his piece after Holst’s Planets, portraying mythological crea-tures rather than objects. ‘Haumea’ is angular and assertive, ‘Pluto’ quiet and reflective with a somber ending. ‘Ceres’ a folk dance, ‘Eris’ (for solo organ) alternately consonant and very dissonant, and ‘Makemake’ lively and exciting. David Marlatt’s four-minute ‘Earth-scape’ (2011), inspired by the view of Earth from space, is serene.

The program ends with Peter Meechan’s six-minute ‘Velvet Blue’ (2012), a rather ton-gue-in-cheek piece in rock style. Jared Stell-macher is the fine organist, and these are good brass players. Nice mix of transcriptions and new works.

L’Arte Della Trombetta

Biber, Donninger, Starzer, Fixmiller, Mozart, Salieri, Weber, Schiedermayr

Schwanthaler Trumpet Consort

Gramola 99679—54 minutes

The Schwanthaler Trumpet Consort hails from the Anton Bruckner Private University in Linz, Austria. This program consists mainly of 18th-Century fanfares for eight or more trumpets plus timpani. Most interesting are Heinrich Biber’s relatively long (4:24) and lyrical ‘Sonata Sancti Polycarii’, a 7-minute attempt by Ferdinand Donninger to depict a naval battle; Joseph Starzer’s galant, five-move Musica da Camera for 5 trumpets, 2 chalumeaux (early clarinets), and 4 timpani; and Mozart’s Divertimento 6, k 180, for 2 clarinets, 5 trumpets, and 4 timpani. It is surprising to hear clarinets in these pieces. Although they are easily overwhelmed when the trumpeters let loose, as they so often do, they can be heard the rest of the time.

The notes say the Consort ‘solely plays on ancient baroque trumpets’, but these instruments—with tone added for the sake of intonation—are modernized versions of the old ones. I don’t mind: I would much rather hear in-tune chords than out-of-tune chords. And it should be noted that the trumpeters play quite musically and the ensemble is excellent.

Brilliant Brass

Gansch, Ewald, Lanner, Arnold, Pitchner

Vienna-Brass Quintet

Tudor 7201—57 minutes

Seeing the name Gabor Tarko on this group’s roster was enough to get my attention. He is principal trumpeter of the Berlin Philharmonic, and he has made some superb solo recordings (Nov/Dec 2009: 214, Sept/Oct 2014: 206). Trumpeter Guillaume Jehl and tuba player Alexander Puttkamer are also Berlin Philharmonic members. Horn player Thomas Jobstl and trombonist Dietmar Kublbock are from the Vienna Philharmonic.

The program includes one transcription (Joseph Lanner’s so-familiar ‘Styrian Dances’), two staples of the brass quintet repertory.
(Ewald and Arnold quintets), and two newer works (Gansch and Pirchner). The Lanner is tosses off with Viennese ease and style.

This reading of Victor Ewald’s Quintet 1 is now my favorite, for several reasons. First, trombonist Kubbock plays euphonium instead of trombone, making it an all-valves and very dark-sounding ensemble. Second, the tempos in I and III are the fastest I have heard, and they sound great. And third, it all sounds (again) easy and simple, yet still quite expressive.

For as the Arnold: I is fairly standard, though there is always a sense of forward propulsion and urgency. The Chaconne (II) is icy calm, and III is very fast and amazingly precise and cohesive. The final two-trumpet flurry is the best I have heard—again, because of the combination of ease and precision.

The new pieces open and close the program. Thomas Gansch’s eight-minute “Flotter Ser” is a virtuosic showpiece of the highest order, one that would make an audience roar. Everyone has solos, and the technical skills are incredible. Werner Pirchner’s piece has a remarkable title: The Man with a Hammer in his Pocket and other practical applications. The seven whimsically named movements are varied in style, witty, and demanding.

Spectacular album by a superb brass quintet.

**Elements**

**Ciancaglini:** Seikilos Quartet; Brandon: Colored Stones; Farney: Fire and Ice; Steinke: Suspended

Susan Nelson, bn; Nermis Miseses, ob; Jeffrey Barudin, perc; Solungga Fang-Tzu Liu, p; Jennifer Goode, s; Stephen Mishyk, Christina McCann, v; Matthew Daline, va; Jaqueline Black, vc

MSR 1477—45 minutes

This is a group of the winning works of the 2012 and 2014 Bassoon Chamber Music Competition, which was founded in 2009. Susan Nelson, the bassoonist performing these works, is the current director of the program. She does a fine job in this recording, with good dynamic contrasts and ensemble work. In the Ciancaglini piece, the four players mix and contrast the sounds of the disparate instruments, using the shared mellowness of the marimba and bassoon to balance the percussiveness of the piano and the piquant tone of the oboe. The piece is mostly pentatonic and accessible.

**Colored Stones** is an evocative, tonal piece supposedly describing the different healing qualities of three semi-precious stones (smoky quartz, lapis lazuli, and tiger’s eye). Nelson does a good job with the characterizations, capturing the improvisatory and declamatory effects with fluency and enthusiasm. In the loudest passages her tone can get a bit spread and forced. But her intonation, articulation, and phrasing are excellent. The song “Fire and Ice” by Devin Farney is a setting of Robert Frost’s poem. The performers do a fine job holding this static work together, though it still falls a bit flat. Greg Steinke’s “Seikilos All” is a piece for bassoon and string quartet dedicated to the victims of Hurricane Katrina and borrows much from the tonal language of Bartok. The ensemble work is excellent, combining clarity, sensitivity, and zeal.

If your collection of ARGs is missing one or two issues, you might ask us about them; we have one or two copies of many issues that we list as sold out (or fail to list at all) – all the way back to 1987. For these rarities we only charge $5 each.

**Solitude**

**SAUNDERS:** Solitude; Lanza: La Bataille de Carenes et de Charnage; D dầu: Parjurya-Vata; limb: Invisibility; Bla
deon: Blackbird

Suspended: Mark Knopp, p

Aeon 1647 — 69 minutes

Oh, we’re in trouble now. Solitude begins with a fog of roars in the cello that becomes a bark and a twitter and a terrifying growl, then comes and hits you with the bow, screams, and retreats. The low C string is tuned down an entire octave, making it a triple bass. Oh, you’re hurting the cello! Or is it actually a cello? Perhaps 17 minutes seems a bit much for this kind of thing—no tunes, no notes even, just effects. Can this girl actually play music? Is this actually written down on a staff? Oh, there’s a note! But only one.

Mauro Lanza’s Bataille includes piano and percussive effects, but the cello C string is still tuned down, this time to F-sharp, and the notes are as distorted and distracting as in the Saunders “composition.” Someone gets to sing, someone gets to squeak, breathe, click. Finally they whistle off stage.

So far we have been in 2012 and 2013, but now we go back to 1981 for a piece by James Dillon. This contains a few actual notes, though it is the shortest piece played. And a few notes are actually very few. We are introduced to wind and rain and dance around a bit in mid-air but get nowhere in particular.

Liza Lim wrote the earliest of the pieces written for Ballon herself in 2009. What is invisible about it? Well, let’s see. One uses two bows, one with the hair twisted around the wood so that one gets a shimming grunty sound. The cello is tuned from top to bottom to D-sharp, D, F-sharp, and B. That should help. But does it?

The last piece is by Thierry Blondeau. It begins with a sort of quiet roaring that recalls the opening of the Saunders piece, except that this one turns into snoring. Also it gradually produces actual pitches, as snoring is wont to do. The snoring effect continues until I have to ask my wife to turn over. But she won’t in this piece. After all, she’s carrying a baby crying. Oh, is that the blackbird? More animals appear, also some real birds. And just as I am feeling the relief of reality, the piece ends suddenly.

I wonder if this cellist can actually play music. I suspect she can, but why won’t she? If the idea of all this cellonioso interests you, go for it. But leave me on the doorstep!

This is a family affair where the cellist is accompanied by her mother. The program is built in the form of a circle surrounded by Schumann, the second from both ends Fauré, etc. The music includes some of the most popular cello pieces played with love. I have heard a great deal of rendition elsewhere, but one can hardly expect a cellist as young as Devich appears to be to have a mature depth of expression. As it is, his tone is lovely and his intonation excellent. If you wish to hear all of these popular romantic cello pieces pulled together in a circle, by all means come in and sit down.

Simca Heled II

**SCHUBERT:** Arpeggione Sonata; Boccherini: Adagio; Couperin: Pieces en Concert; Ailenberg: Leloro; Stravinsky: Suite Italienne

Simca Heled, vc; Jonathan Zak, p; Israel Philharmonic/ Sidney Harth; Israel Sinfonietta/ Mendy Rohan—Centaur 3377 — 64 minutes

This program doesn’t sound like what you might expect from the listing above. The only piece with piano accompaniment is the Stravinsky! The Schubert sonata is played with a string orchestra, as are the Couperin pieces. The Boccherini is the only piece with full orchestra. The work by Leib Allenberg (Heled’s grandfather) is for cello solo.

The variety of this program is less evident to the ears than to the mind. The Arpeggione Sonata is a relatively light work, followed by the lovely slow movement of Boccherini’s Concerto in B-flat. The Couperin pieces are played as scored by Paul Bazeiaire and are short and sweet. Allenberg’s solo piece is an arrangement of an improvised vocal work that Heled explains in his liner notes, and the Stravinsky consists of excerpts from his ballet Pulcinella, based on music by Pergolesi.

These were all previous years; the dates are not given. The sound is excellent. Heled is a fine player, and the polish of his
This is a group of the winning works of the 2012 and 2014 Bassoon Chamber Music Composition Competition, which was founded in 2009. Susan Nelson, the bassoonist performing these works, is the current director of the program. She does a fine job in this recording, with good dynamic contrasts and ensemble work. In the Ciacagnilli piece, the four players mix and contrast the sounds of the disparate instruments, using the shared mellowness of the marimba and bassoon to balance the percussiveness of the piano and the piquant tone of the oboe. The piece is mostly pentatonic and accessible.

Colored Stones is an evocative, tonal piece supposedly describing the different healing qualities of three semi-precious stones (smoky quartz, lapis lazuli, and tiger’s eye). Nelson does a good job with the characterizations, capturing the improvisatory and declamatory effects with fluency and enthusiasm. In the loudest passages her tone can get a bit spread and forced. But her intonation, articulation, and phrasing are excellent. The song ‘Fire and Ice’ by Devin Farney is a setting of Robert Frost’s poem. The performers do a fine job in this recording, with good dynamic contrasts and ensemble work. In the Ciacagnilli piece, the four players mix and contrast the sounds of the disparate instruments, using the shared mellowness of the marimba and bassoon to balance the percussiveness of the piano and the piquant tone of the oboe. The piece is mostly pentatonic and accessible.

The Saunders piece is by Thierry Blondeau. It begins with a sort of quiet cooing that recalls the opening of the Saunders piece, except that this one turns into snoring. Also it gradually produces actual pitches, as snoring is wont to do. The snoring effect continues until I have to ask my wife to turn off. But she won’t in this piece. I keep singing ‘Fire and Ice’ for a baby crying. Oh, is that the blackbird? More animals appear, also some real birds. And just as I am feeling the relief of reality, the piece ends suddenly.

I wonder if this cellist can actually play music. I suspect she can, but why won’t she? If the idea of all this cellonioso interests you, go for it. But leave me on the doorstep!

This is a family affair where the cellist is accompanied by his mother. The program is built in the form of a circle surrounded by Schumann, the second from both ends Fauré, etc. The music includes some of the most popular cello pieces; I have among other things a ‘Changed Song’ by Parjanya, a few songs by Ballon herself in 2009. What is invisible here, however, is the current director of the program, who appears to have a mature depth of expression. As it is, his tone is lovely and his intonation excellent. If you wish to hear all of these popular romantic cello pieces pulled together in a circle, by all means come in and sit down.

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technique is not affected adversely by the presence of an audience. I can recommend this release to your attention with no reservations. It is a lovely program of relatively light cello music, played with affection and polish. The audience is only in evidence when they clap.

D MOORE

Cello Effect

Prokofieff, Puccini; Rachmaninoff, Jobim, Handy, Brubeck, Anderson, Timmons, Desmond, Tchaikovsky
Rastrelli Cello Quartet
Genuin 15366 — 54 minutes

The Rastrelli Cello Quartet is made up of Kira Kraftzoff, Sergio Drabkin, Mischa Geltgajeff, and Kirill Timofeev. This program is made up of arrangements by Drabkin covering a considerable variety of material, including 14 minutes of excerpts from Prokofieff’s Romeo & Juliet, Rachmaninoff’s Vocalise, ‘Valse Sentimentale’ by Tchaikovsky, and Puccini’s aria ‘E lucevan le stelle’ from Tosca. The rest of the program goes with Jobim’s ‘Desafinado’ and ‘One Note Samba’; Handy’s ‘St Louis Blues’, Brubeck’s ‘Blue Rondo a la Turk’, Anderson’s ‘Symopated Clock’, Bobby Timmons ‘Moanin’, and Paul Desmond’s ‘Take Five’ and an anonymous ‘Bublichki’.

So what does all this sound like? Well, the only piece I’m not entirely convinced by is the opening Prokofieff that includes a number of short excerpts, not all of which fit together. But I like hearing them all played by a cello quartet as polished as these players are. The other serious numbers are fine, and the jouj-rods in the rest of the program are handled with rhythmic conviction and sensitivity. An American group would do it differently, but they haven’t tried it yet and might not do it better. This Russian group is highly enjoyable and recorded with clarity and resonance.

D MOORE

Russian Cello

GLAZOUNOV: Concerto Ballata; Chant du Menestrel; Melodie; PROKOFIEFF: Concertino; TCHAIKOVSKY: Nocturne; Roccoco Variations
Jamie Walton; Royal Philharmonic/Okku Kamu
Signum 407 — 74 minutes

Though it is not evident from the titles, all of these are Russian pieces for cello and orchestra. Except for the Tchaikovsky Roccoco Variations, they are seldom recorded. All are thoughtful, basically romantic music that sounds particularly suitable in quiet, overcast weather like what we have been having lately on the Hudson River.

Rostropovich recorded the Glazounov Concerto Ballata and Chant du Menestrel twice—probably difficult to find today. Boris Pergamenschikov recorded them more recently in 1986 (Schawn 11191) with the ‘Melodie’ and its mate, a Serenade Espagnole. These are all lovely works, as one expects from Glazounov. The late Prokofieff Concertino is a little more modern in effect, though not as much as you might expect. Rostropovich is again the main contender with recordings from 1964. Tchaikovsky is the only one to have made the Cello Overview (March/April 2009) with his Roccoco Variations.

So how does Walton stack up? Not badly, I would say. He doesn’t play with the Russian atmosphere and is rather less assertive than Rostropovich, but he plays with a satisfying involvement that is quite lovely, as does the orchestra. This is a relatively low-keyed program with an emphasis on the lyrical side of things. My only cavil with Walton is that his vibrato has a tendency to be a little unchanging—speed—enough to set off, but a little less intense than Rostropovich, for instance. The recorded sound is very natural and clear. It is an unusual collection of pieces that I am glad to have, played with polish and general feeling for the idiom.

D MOORE

Shepherd on the Rock

Brahms, Chopin, Schubert, Schumann, Strauss
Julian Bliss, cl; Allish Tynan, s; Christopher Glynn, p—Signum 429—68 minutes

Young British clarinetist Julian Bliss teams up with Irish soprano Allish Tynan and Grammy award winning pianist and Royal College of Music professor Christopher Glynn for a recital of romantic favorites and transcriptions.

Clarinetists will be drawn to The Shepherd on the Rock (Schubert) and the well-known Schuman Fantasy Pieces, but the broad classical listener may find interest in the Schubert ‘Ave Maria’ from the composer’s song cycle on Sir Walter Scott’s poem The Lady of the Lake; the Chopin Introduction and Polonaise and contemplative Nocturne in E-flat, both arranged for clarinet and piano by Bliss; the early Brahms Scherzo in C minor from the collaborative F-A-E Sonata; and a handful of songs by Brahms and Richard Strauss.

The performances are solid. Tynan steals the show with her deep and powerful voice, gorgeous phrasing, and complete commitment to the music; and Bliss contributes his trademark clarity, excellent technique, and nicely shaped lines. Glynn is a fine pianist, and he complements well the abilities of the soloists. At the same time, Bliss and Glynn are odds on conservative. The former rarely takes emotional risks, and the latter relaxes too often in the back of the texture instead fully participating in it. Some chamber music fans will simply appreciate the polished renditions, but a fair number will yearn for more.

HANUDEL

Aurora

Brandon, Deemer, Pinkham, Rheinberger, Thomas
Andrew Seigel, cl; Ji Hyun Woo, org
Eumeris 20113 — 53 minutes

In this May 2011 recording, SUNY Fredonia clarinet professor Andrew Seigel and organist Ji Hyun Woo present a recital with the CB Fisk Organ at the University of Buffalo Lippes Concert Hall.

The program includes Arizona composer Sy Brandon’s Affirmations (1989) and Meditation and Festive Celebration (2011); SUNY Fredonia composition professor Rob Deemer’s ‘Smoke’ (2011), based on a 14th Century French Rondeau; the ‘Cantilene’ from Rheinberger’s Organ Sonata No. 11 (1887); University of Chicago professor Augusta Read Thomas’s Angel Tears and Earth Prayers (2006), written for the American Guild of Organists; and Mississippi composer James Sclater’s stirring arrangement of ‘Amazing Grace’ from his Five Old American Songs (2008).

Longtime Boston composer-organist and New England Conservatory professor Daniel Pinkham (1923-2006) wrote the title piece, Aurora (2000), a three-movement work inspired by the morning prayers in monasteries.

Music for clarinet and organ is a delight and all too rare. The cylindrical bore of the former and the cylindrical pipes of the latter form a natural and beautiful marriage, and performers and composers need to explore it more often. The repertoire here is a good start, too, a thoughtful and enjoyable merging of the intellectual, best epitomized by the Pinkham, and the directly expressive, best embodied in the Brandon compositions and Sclater’s ‘Amazing Grace’.

Still, this endeavor falls short. Seigel and Woo offer reliable technique and some nice hues and shades, yet their blend and tuning are wildly uneven, and their phrasing is often bland and dry. Seigel, in particular, regularly succumbs to the limitations of his set-up. His soft reeds produce a diffuse sound that restricts his color palette, creates balance problems, and sometimes makes his legato clumsy. He seems most at home in the Sclater, where he indulges in some wonderful jazz and sometimes succumbs to the limitations of his set-up. His soft reeds produce a diffuse sound that restricts his color palette, creates balance problems, and sometimes makes his legato clumsy. He seems most at home in the Sclater, where he indulges in some wonderful jazz and emotional risks, and the latter relaxes too often in the back of the texture instead fully participating in it. Some chamber music fans will simply appreciate the polished renditions, but a fair number will yearn for more.

HANUDEL

British Clarinet Quintets

Somervell, Coleridge-Taylor, Walthew

Stefan Siegenthaler; Alban Arzberger, Tilmann Buning, v; Ivo Bauer, va; Matthias Moosdorf, vc
CPO 777 905—73 minutes

At the close of the 19th Century German clarinetist Richard Muhlfeld played several times, leaving a deep impression on modern-day British clarinet playing and British

Buning, v; Ivo Bauer, va; Matthias Moosdorf, vc
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Find more information in the American Record Guide.

American Record Guide

March/April 2016
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**Cello Effect**

Prokofieff, Puccini; Rachmaninoff, Jobim, Handy, Brubeck, Anderson, Timmonos, Desmond, Tchaikovsky

Rastrelli Cello Quartet

Genuin 15364 — 54 minutes

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So what does all this sound like? Well, the only piece I’m not entirely convinced by is the opening Prokofieff that includes a number of short excerpts, not all of which fit together. But I like hearing them all played by a cello quartet as polished as these players are. The other serious numbers are fine, and the jazz idioms as polished as these players are. The other muc Clemens ‘Bublichki’.

**Russian Cello**

GLAZOUNOV: Concerto Balatata, Chant du Menestral, Melodie; PROKOFIEFF: Concertino; TCHAIKOVSKY: Nocturne; Rococo Variations

Jamie Walton; Royal Philharmonic/Okku Kamu Signum 407 — 74 minutes

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How does Walton stack up? Not badly, I would say. He doesn’t play with the Russian atmosphere and is rather less assertive than Rostropovich, but he plays with a satisfying involvement that is quite lovely, as does the orchestra. This is a relatively low-keyed program with an emphasis on the lyrical side of things. My only cavil with Walton is that his vibrato has a tendency to be a little unchanging—at speed—though not enough, but a little less intense than Rostropovich, for instance. The recorded sound is very natural and clear. It is an unusual collection of pieces that I am glad to have, played with polish and general feeling for the idiom.

**Shepherd on the Rock**

Brahms, Chopin, Schubert, Schumann, Straus

Julian Bliss, cl; Aliss Tynan, s; Christopher Glynn, p—Signum 429 — 68 minutes

Young British clarinetist Julian Bliss teams up with Irish soprano Aliss Tynan and Grammy award winning pianist and Royal College of Music professor Christopher Glynn for a recital of romantic favorites and transcriptions.

Clarinetists will be drawn to The Shepherd on the Rock (Schubert) and the well-known Schumann Fantasy Pieces, but the broad classical listener may find interest in the Schubert ‘Ave Maria’ from the composer’s song cycle on Sir Walter Scott’s poem The Lady of the Lake; the Chopin Introduction and Polonaise and contemplative Nocturne in E-flat, both arranged for clarinet and piano by Bliss; the early Brahms Scherzo in C minor from the collaborative F-A-E Sonata; and a handful of songs by Brahms and Richard Strauss.

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**Singing Cello**

MENDELSSOHN: Albumblatt; SUK: Serenade in A; RACHMANINOFF: 2 Pieces; FALLA: Spanish Folk Suite; LISZT: Romance Oubliee; FAURE: Apres un Reve; KREISLER: Liebestod; SCHUMANN: 4 Songs; MAHLER: 2 Songs

Istvan Vardai; Julien Quentin, p

Hungaroton 32741 — 60 minutes

Not a note here is actually sung, but there is a feeling of vocality. The Mendelssohn ‘Albumblatt;’ the Suk Serenade, Op. 3-2, and the two Rachmaninoff Pieces, Op. 2 were actually written for the cello. Most of the other pieces are transcriptions from songs, the Schumann from his Liederkreis, Op. 39, the Mahler from Songs of Wayfarers.

All of this music is pleasant to hear and supports the reputation of the cello as a singing instrument. Vardai is a young and talented player who puts the music across with enthusiasm, joined by the just as polished Quentin. The sound is on Hungaroton’s usual high level, so if a program of this nature agrees with you, by all means sing along.

**Shepherd on the Rock**

Brahms, Chopin, Schubert, Schumann, Strauss

Julian Bliss, cl; Aliss Tynan, s; Christopher Glynn, p—Signum 429 — 68 minutes

Young British clarinetist Julian Bliss teams up with Irish soprano Aliss Tynan and Grammy award winning pianist and Royal College of Music professor Christopher Glynn for a recital of romantic favorites and transcriptions.

Clarinetists will be drawn to The Shepherd on the Rock (Schubert) and the well-known Schumann Fantasy Pieces, but the broad classical listener may find interest in the Schubert ‘Ave Maria’ from the composer’s song cycle on Sir Walter Scott’s poem The Lady of the Lake; the Chopin Introduction and Polonaise and contemplative Nocturne in E-flat, both arranged for clarinet and piano by Bliss; the early Brahms Scherzo in C minor from the collaboratively F-A-E Sonata; and a handful of songs by Brahms and Richard Strauss.

The performances are solid. Tynan steals the show with her deep and powerful voice, gorgeous phrasing, and complete commitment to the music; and Bliss contributes his trademark clarity, excellent technique, and nicely shaped lines. Glynn is a fine pianist, and he complements well the abilities of the soloists. At the same time, Bliss and Glynn are often a bit too smooth, the former rarely taking emotional risks, and the latter relaxes too often in the back of the texture instead fully participating in it. Some chamber music fans will simply appreciate the polished renditions, but a fair number will yearn for more.

**British Clarinet Quintets**

Somerville, Coleridge-Taylor, Walther

Stephan Siegenthaler; Stefan Arzberger, Tilmann Buning, v; Ivo Bauer, va; Matthias Moosdorf, vc

CPO 777 905—73 minutes

At the close of the 19th Century German clarinetist Richard Muhlfeld recorded several times, leaving a deep impression on modern-day British clarinet playing and British
Most of these pieces were written in or after 1990. Nearly all of them employ extended techniques, and she uses them with as much authority as those of her teachers. Jennifer Borkowski is now a flute professor at Wright State University in Ohio. Joshua Nemith also attended Eastman and the Cincinnati CCM, with the University of Texas at Austin in between.

Gaurdet’s first flute sonata is a piece that Chaffee ranks with the great romantic sonatas; it was written in the early years of the 20th Century. He and Nemith take fairly fast tempos that emphasize the forward motion and structure on a large scale rather than wallowing or luxuriating in the detail.

Marc Faris describes Social Movements (2005-6) “as the musical embodiment of a spirited, late-night conversation among three lifelong friends—sometimes in agreement, sometimes argumentative, often meandering and unpredictable”. Much of the piece amounts to busy musical chatter that has become trendy but offers no deeper meaning to most listeners.

There are several meanings to this title since some of the music is improvised. “Composed” here also means emotionally settled, the way one feels after walking on the beach. Borkows-ki, who was born in Philadelphia, says, “After a decade in Vienna, immersed in the arts and surrounded by mountains, I spent four years in New England near the wide open shore. The ocean on the north shore (of Boston) had become medicinal for me. I never tired of it. I could never grasp its size or power. It was always different, yet always calming. When it was time to leave New England and move back to Vienna, I made this recording as a way of bringing the ocean with me and giving it to you.”

Jennifer Borkowski spent ten years freelancing around Philadelphia and New York before getting a PhD in instrumental and vocal pedagogy at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz. She is a superb, accomplished flute player and knows these pieces well. The improvisations involve dissonance and bending pitches, but the effect is predomi-nantly tonal and contemplative, even haunting. If you are sympathetic to the concept behind this program, you’ll probably enjoy it.

The case offers notes contributed by two of the composers and a hilarious picture of the flutist at rest during a break in a recording ses-sion, emphasizing the very human reality behind the perfect results we often hear on recordings and tend to take for granted.

The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety), by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary. --HL Mencken

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contribute to the clarinet chamber music. In an April 1892 London concert he introduced the Brahms Clarinet Quintet, which was written for—him—a work so powerful that Irish-born composer and Brahms admirer Sir Charles Stanford declared that no one from that point forward could write a clarinet quintet without betraying a Brahms influence.

In this December 2013 recording Swiss clarinetist Stephan Siegenthaler and the Leipzig Quartet give three British composers of the late romantic period a chance to speak for themselves in the clarinet quintet genre: Sir Arthur Somervell (1863-1937) and his four-movement Clarinet Quintet in G (1913); Samuel Coleridge Taylor (1875-1912) and his four-movement Clarinet Quintet in F-sharp minor (1895); written when he was a student at the Royal College of Music; and Richard Henry Walthew (1872-1951) and his Short Quintet in E-flat (1918), a single movement that takes about 17 minutes.

The recital is earnest and spirited, but also somewhat shaky. Last year, Siegenthaler issued a superbly played album of classical-era clarinet quartets (March/April 2015). Here, though, he reverts back to the dubious sonic betting that he can do no wrong. If you are sympathetic to the concept of the late romantic period a chance to speak for themselves in the clarinet quintet genre: Sir Arthur Somervell (1863-1937) and his four-movement Clarinet Quintet in G (1913); Samuel Coleridge Taylor (1875-1912) and his four-movement Clarinet Quintet in F-sharp minor (1895); written when he was a student at the Royal College of Music; and Richard Henry Walthew (1872-1951) and his Short Quintet in E-flat (1918), a single movement that takes about 17 minutes.

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like, though the playing is quite fine. All the interpretation and phrasing is tasteful, exuberant, and shows that the two musicians are presenting these little-known pieces with as much commitment as anyone could.

People who like to hear British composers should also consider Michala Peterson’s collection of recorder concertos (OUR 6220606; Sept/Oct 2012: 214) and possibly Emily Benyon’s recording of British flute concertos (Chandos 10718; Sept/Oct 2012: 212). The 2-disc set of recorder concertos by John Turner on Metier (BURGESS, May/June 2014) also offers a great overview of British composers in that medium. I should also point out the effort dedicated to Australian Miriam Hyde (1913-2005) by Bridget Bollinger and Andrew West on Cala (last issue). Flutists should not hesitate to add anything by Kenneth Smith to their collections—and might also enjoy these others.

**GORMAN**

**Freedom**

**DANIELPOUR:** Remembering Neda; **FINKO:** Flute Sonata; **VAINBERG:** 5 Pieces

Mimi Stillman, fl; Yumi Kendall, vc; Charles Abramovic, p—Innova 935—53 minutes

I last heard from Mimi Stillman and Charles Abramovic in March/April 2012 (p 196), where I praised their playing of new American works. Here are they in three substantial works that differ yet cohere in political theme: two from our own time and another from 1947. Our musicians have been living with these pieces for a while and play them to the hilt.

Vainberg’s postwar set of pieces opens with a movement somewhat incoherently based on Debussy’s ‘Girl with the Flaxen Hair’—perhaps a deconstruction of it—followed by a dance that could be by Shostakovich and another with only a little Shostakovich in it. A dramatic and distinctly Soviet song that has its moments follows, and the set concludes with a march-like jig or tarantella again with touches of Shostakovich. Although the suite stands on its own and deserves to be heard, I would encourage any collector to also get Abramovic’s commitment to new and unfamiliar music; but as a critic I can only recommend one of the three selections. Fink and Danielpour have contributed descriptions of their pieces.

**Baroque Moments**

**HANDEL:** Chaconne; **VIVALDI:** Concerto in D; **BACH-BUSONI:** Chaconne; **FRANCK:** Prelude, Fugue, & Variation; **BACH:** Italian Concerto

**HASSLER:** Mein Geist ist mir Verwirret

Amadeus Guitar Duo

Naxos 573449—58 minutes

Another delightful recital by the Amadeus Duo (Dale Kavenoff, chile Thomas Kirkhoff). The opening Handel Chaconne in G is the one Presti and Lagoya did back in the day—and I must say, I still prefer that classic recording for the sheer beauty and range of tone, which that great duo was known for. But it’s quite difficult to find—it’s not on the massive 6-disc set of Lagoya’s work on French Philips, nor (yet) on their DOS recordings. But it’s well performed, fine, and even share many of the P-L tempo choices, so I’m quite happy with their performance, especially their sparkling ornamentation, even nicer than P-L.

The Vivaldi is the one that’s been played to death. Since the ripieno is only two violins and a couple of bassoons, I am not certain that one needs the performance still so full of vibrato. Unfortunately, this performance is marred by one of my pet peev: the opening rhythm is changed from dotted-eighth to 32nds and to two and two 16ths. Then in II they double dot the melody—which is far preferable to the usual lazy guitarists who turn it into triplets. But the performance still sparkles with joy, so if you’re not as much of a musical grammar policeman as I, you’ll enjoy it.

Next up, a transcription of the Bach-Busoni Chaconne, to which I would normally say, “don’t…just don’t.” But this works, largely because the transcriber (unnamed…one of the duo?) takes the huge passages Busoni extrapolated for the piano and make no attempt to duplicate them. They do duplicate, more or less, the octave transpositions, added harmonies, counterlines, and the like; and the results are quite wonderful—an arrangement of an arrangement, if you will, and played magnificently.

The most purely beautiful work here is their transcription of the organ version of Franck’s Prelude, Fugue, & Variation. It’s not really Baroque, but inspired by the Baroque—and in any case, organists often seem to be on their own time line. And it is simply gorgeous in its guitar arrangement. The subtle affections that are impossible on the piano, or even the organ, make this a memorable performance.

A transcription of Bach’s Italian Concerto might seem another case of flying too close to the sun; but, again, this works. The first movement is a bit slower than I’m used to on guitar, but it’s not sluggish; and II is simply divine. And the closing arrangement of Hassler is inspired. His Lied, with the lyrics “my peace of mind is shattered by a tender maiden’s charms” is hardly the sort of thing that might inspire the Passion Chorale in Bach’s St Matthew Passion. But this is a case to prove that the melody, once divorced from the text, is neither sacred nor secular. For most of us, it will always suggest the aching devotion of Bach’s chorale, set as ‘O Sacred Head’ in English hymnals. Besides, as Luther himself commented, why should the devil have all the good tunes?

**KEATON**

**American Record Guide**

**David Harenstam, guitar**

**DYENS:** Fuoco; OURKOUZOUNOU: Folk Song Variations; **FALLA:** Romance del Pescador; **GIULIANI:** Grand Overture; **PAGANINI:** Romance; **MURCIA:** Suite; **PAGANINI:** Cello Variations; **BARRIOS:** Preludio; **VENDRELL:** Danza de la Plata; **GARCIA: El Dorado**

Mr Harenstam studied in the UK with John Mills. He has a strong professional record of performances and recordings, as soloist and with a variety of artists. This is my first encounter with him, and I’ve enjoyed it.

I began listening to this after hearing Rowshan Mamedkulliev’s disc, reviewed below, with its dark and brooding set of slow works. This hit me with a start! The first two pieces, the finale from Roland Dyens’s L’Esprit Surnaturel and Atanas Ourkouzounov’s Folk Song Variations, are both wild and rauccous. I could hear some of the passages were a bit uneven, but in such music excitement trumps absolute accuracy. That is not the case with Giuliani’s Grand Overture, which is plagued by too many uneven scales, rhythms, and arpeggios to be competitive.

But Harenstam is not tied to showy works. Indeed, the simple Murcia suite is simply gorgeous—beautifully paced, with expressive subtlety. I also found the rarely-heard Ponce Cello Concerto variants quite affecting. He even throws in a couple of world premiere recordings, Staffan Storm’s ‘Lost Summers’ and Maria Lobberg’s ‘Dreaming Dance,’ both interesting and effective pieces.

This recital is uneven, but interesting; and at his best Harenstam can be a moving artist.

**KEATON**

**New Strings Attached**

**SOLBERG:** Baroque Romance; **COHEN:** Romance

COHEN: The Rushing Camel; KLARTAG: Nothing to Express; KAREN: 3 Ladino Songs; BARASH: Talkback III; RESHEF: 4 Baladik Children’s Songs; LEV: Shomeret Layla

David Cohen’s ‘Rushing Camel’ is full of sonic effects and a deeply personal story. It’s a case to prove that the devil has all the good tunes.
like, though the playing is quite fine. All the interpretation and phrasing is tasteful, exuberant, and shows that the two musicians are presenting these little-known pieces with as much commitment as anyone could.

People who like to hear British composers should also consider Michala Petri’s collection of recorder concertos (OUR 6220606; Sept/Oct 2012: 214) and possibly Emily Benyon’s recording of British flute concertos (Chandos 10718; Sept/Oct 2012: 212). The 2-disc set of recorder concertos by John Turner on Metier (BURGESS, May/June 2014) also offers a great overview of British composers in that medium. I should also point out the effort dedicated to Australian Miriam Hyde (1913-2005) by Bridget Bollinger and Andrew West on Cala (last issue). Flutists should not hesitate to add anything by Kenneth Smith to their collections—and might also enjoy these others.

GORMAN

Freedom

DANIELPOUR: Remembering Neda; FINKO: Flute Sonata; VAINBERG: 5 Pieces
Mimi Stillman, fl; Yumi Kendall, vc; Charles Abramovic, p—Innova 935—53 minutes

I last heard from Mimi Stillman and Charles Abramovic in March/April 2012 (p 196), where I praised their playing of new American works. Here they are in three substantial works that differ yet cohere in political theme: two from our own time and another from 1947. Our musicians have been living with these pieces for a while and play them to the hilt.

Vainberg’s postwar set of pieces opens with a movement somewhat incoherently based on Debussy’s ‘Girl with the Flaxen Hair’—perhaps a deconstruction of it—followed by a dance that could be by Shostakovich and another with only a little Shostakovich in it. A dramatic and distinctly Soviet song that has its moments follows, and the set concludes with a march-like jig or tarantella again with touches of Shostakovich. Although the suite stands on its own and deserves to be heard, it focuses on personality and artistic conviction—or, to put it another way, reason for being.

David Finko’s sonata (2012) is in four movements, beginning with a dark, mysterious Largo. It is characterized by harmonies with secondary themes, which are nothing about the structure of this piece that justifies calling it a sonata, though there is greater unity and coherence to the four movements than in a suite. I lost patience with it toward the end. For a better journey from darkness to light that involves the flute, try Jolivet’s Song of Linos, the Quartet for piano and winds by Alberic Magnard with the first movement taken slowly enough, or the Trio by Weber.

These examples indicate why Finko’s ending doesn’t work: too much of the piece has already been in emotional pastels. Daniel Carr wrote a flute sonata with a similar end, yet his piece is far more effective despite a certain lack of refinement (this issue).

Like many composers of the past, Danielpour uses an augmented second to evoke the Middle East. Recitatives by flute and cello constitute a ‘Lamentation’. Insistent repeated notes may not amount to ‘Desecration’ without more dissonance, but the second movement does make a lively and effective contrast with the first. A moving ‘ Benediction’ larger than the first two put together finishes the work. The Neda who is remembered is Neda Agha-Soltan, who was shot and killed during protests in Tehran after the election in June 2009.

As a flutist I applaud Stillman, Kendall, and Abramovic’s commitment to new and unfamiliar music; but as a critic I can only recommend one of the three selections. Finko and Danielpour have contributed descriptions of their pieces.

GORMAN

Baroque Moments

HANDEL: Chaconne; VIVALDI: Concerto in D; BACH-BUSONI: Chaconne; FRANCK: Prelude, Fugue, & Variation; BACH: Italian Concerto;
HASSLER: Mein Geist ist mir Verwirret
Amadeus Guitar Duo—Naxos 573440—58 minutes

Another delightful recital by the Amadeus Duo, Dale Kavanagh and Thomas Kirkhoff. The opening Handel Chaconne in G is the one Presti and Lagoya did back in the day—and I must say, I still prefer that classic recording for the sheer beauty and range of tone, which that great duo was known for. But it’s quite difficult to find—it’s not on the massive 6-disc set of Lagoya’s work on French Philips, nor (yet) on their BIS recordings. But it’s fine, and even share many of the P-L tempo choices, so I’m quite happy with their performance, especially their sparkling ornamentation, even nicer than P-L.

The Vivaldi is the one that’s been played to death. Since the ripieno is only two violins and a cello, the performance still sparkles with joy. Unfortunately, this performance is marred by one of my pet peeves: the opening rhythm is changed from dotted eighth-twos to dents and two 16ths. Then in II they double dot the melody—which is far preferable to the usual lazy guitarists who turn it into triplets. But the performance still sparkles with joy, so if you’re not as much of a musical grammar policeman as I, you’ll enjoy it.

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The most purely beautiful work here is their transcription of the organ version of Franck’s Prelude, Fugue, & Variation. It’s not really Baroque, but inspired by the Baroque—and in any case, organists often seem to be on their own time line. And it is simply gorgeous in the two-guitar arrangement. The subtle affections that are impossible on the piano, or even the organ, make this a memorable performance.

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DYENS: Fuoco; OURKOZOUNOV: Folk Song Variations; FALLA: Romance del Pescador; GIULIANI: Grand Overture; PAGANINI: Romance; MURCIJA: Suite; PACCHINETTI: Violin Variations; BARBIOSI: Preludio; Villancico de Navidad; Ora- cion para Todos; BROUWER: Paisaje Cabano con Campanas; STORM: Lost Summers; LOFBERG: Dreaming Dance

Daphne 1053—67 minutes

Mr Harenstam studied in the UK with John Mills. He has a strong professional record of performance and recordings, as soloist and with a variety of artists. This is my first encounter with him, and I’ve enjoyed it.

I began listening to this after hearing Rowshan Mamedkuliev’s disc, reviewed below, with its dark and brooding set of slow works. This hit me with a start! The first two pieces, the finale from Roland Dyens’ Libra Sonatine and Atanas Ourkouzounov’s Folk Song Variations, are both wild and raucous. I could hear some of the passages were a bit uneven, but in such music excitement trumps absolute accuracy. That is not the case with Giuliani’s Grand Overture, which is plagued by too many uneven scales, rhythms, and arpeggios to be competitive.

But Harenstam is not tied to showy works. Indeed, the simple Murcia suite is simply gorgeous—beautifully paced, with expressive subtext. I also found the rarely-heard Ponce Cabanoss variations quite affecting. He even throws in a couple of world premiere recordings, Stattmann Storm’s ‘Lost Summers’ and Maria Lobberg’s ‘Dreaming Dance’, both interesting and effective pieces.

This recital is uneven, but interesting; and at his best Harenstam can be a moving artist. KEATON

New Strings Attached

COHEN: The Rushing Camel; KLATAG: Nothing to Express; KAREN: 3 Ladino Songs; BARASH: Talkback III; RESHEF: 4 Biakid Children’s Songs; LEV: Shomeret Layla
Nadav Lev, g; Mivos Quartet; Miranda Cuckson, v; Rinat Shaham, Re’ut Ben Ze’ev, mz; Tehila Nini-Goldstein, s; Guy Barash, electronics
Delos 3488—62 minutes

A mixed bag, as one might expect from a collection of music for classical and/or electric guitar by young composers. Gilad Cohen’s ‘Rushing Camel’ is full of sonic effects to portray a galloping camel, coming eventual-
ly to rest and conversing with the rider. I sup-
pose you had to be there. Yair Klar- tag’s ‘Noth-
ing to Express,’ for string quartet and electric
guitar, is aptly named. It’s a hideous collection of
frenetic scratching and scraping from the
strings, with the electric guitar doing, well,
electric guitar things, like feedback effects.
I was happy for it to end. Guy Barash’s ‘Talk
Back’ is for classical guitar and computer.
The guitar does something, and the computer
responds—for about ten wasted minutes.
The notes present this as a metaphor for social
media, such as tweets and posts. I think I’ll
wait for the movie.
Jonathan Keren’s Ladino Songs, on the
other hand, are both beautiful and moving.
They are passionate love songs (Ladino is to
Spanish what Yiddish is to German), and the
settings for voice, violin, and guitar are truly
haunting. Renat Shaham’s voice is perfect for
them. Ballik Children’s Songs, for guitar and
soprano are also affecting, and Tehila Nini-
Goldstein’s voice combines innocence and a
mature sound that works beautifully for these
settings.
The longest and most effective work is by
Lev himself, Shomeret Layla, for soprano,
computer, and electric guitar. The Shomeret
Layla is the woman, different each week, who
oversees the communal nursery in a kibbutz.
The sounds are nightmarish—indeed, chil-
dren’s nightmares are part of it. Soprano Re’ut
Ben Ze’ev sings, speaks, screams. The comput-
er, unlike in ‘Talk Back,’ creates a halo of sounds
that evokes the tension and childish fears of
the setting. The text is from an actual
night log for a Shomeret Layla, from the Psalms,
and from Israeli poet Natan Alterman.
It’s chilling, but music need not be pleasing
to be moving; and Lev’s piece will haunt me for
a long time.

Americas North to South
DUFOS: Chansons pour 2; BEASER: Mountain
Songs; HANDLER: SER: MARCHELIE:
Gemenos-Tango; MACHADO: Brazilian Folk
Music; PUJOL: Nubes de Buenos Aires; PIAZZOL-
LA: Café 1930; Nightclub 1960; ABREU: Tico-Tico
no Fuba

The Galant Lute
HAYDN: Sonata in C; KOHAUIT: Sonata in D;
MOZART: Divertimentos; SCHEIDLER: Mozart
Variations
Vinicis Perez—Klanglogo 1515—62 minutes

I enjoyed this more than I’d expected. Gener-
ally, if most of the pre-classical galant music
disappeared tomorrow, I would mourn its loss
for about half an hour. But this includes some
really delightful stuff.
The lute was fading from view at the time.
While there were a few who continued to write
for it—Scheidler, who outlived Beethoven, was
perhaps the last one—there is a limited reper-
tory, and there’s always the possibility of trans-
scription. The Haydn is an early work, present-
ed here as a sonata, though originally it was a
divertimento. It’s not the most charming piece
from his pen, but still has considerable charm.
Karl Kohaut was known in his day as a diplo-
mat, though also as a composer and per-
fomer, with eight masses to his credit, along
with considerable instrumental music. His
sonata is the only truly galant piece here.
The Mozart is actually a later work, origi-
nally for three bassett horns. Mozart prepared
several different instrumentations of the work,
and I recently played it as a guitar duo. The
solo lute arrangement is by Perez, and it is the
best thing here. It may not be Mozart at his
finest, but it’s still Mozart, and there’s a bit
of heaven in it. Scheidler’s variations (on ‘Fin
c’han dal Vino’ from Don Giovanni) is a witty
work, cleverly done, once you get over the fact
that the theme must be played at half the origi-
nal tempo.

This is Brazilian Vinicis Perez’s debut
recording. He plays beautifully, elegantly, and
tastefully, and his arrangements are quite
effective. It gave me much pleasure.

Semi-awake, Semi-dream
SOR: Sonata 1; TARREGA: Adelita; Marietta;
Maria; RAK: Tarrega Homage; BORODIN: Little
Suite; LIADOY: 3 Preludes; RUDEV: Old Lime
Tree

Rovshan Mamedkuliev, g
Contrastes 201501—62 minutes
Mr Mamedkuliev’s latest laurel is the first prize
in the Francisco Tarrega Competition—he has
many others. He has high artistic values—the
notes quote Roland Dyens, pro-
claiming him to be “a real musician,” not just a

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4 Spanish Guitars
AGUADO: Fandango Variado; Minute; GIU-
LIAN: Larghetto; SCHUMANN: Erste Verlust;
DIABELLI: Minuet; MERTZ: An die Ernteter-
Variazioni Mignonette; BATER’S Dance; TARREGA: Adelita; Mareaita; Capricho
Arabe; FALLA: Omenaja; WALLACE: Delib el
Alba; Suite in B minor

Frank Wallace, g—Gyre 10182—55 minutes

I reviewed a disc of Mr Wallace’s composi-
tions, with him as performer and was much
impressed (July/Aug 2014). In this recital of
traditional music, I am again.

The title, “Four Spanish Guitars,” refers to
four instruments, each influ-
ced by the first modern maker, Antonio Tor-
res Jurado: an 1854 Manuel Gutierrez, an 1875
Manuel de Soto y Solares, a 1910 Manuel
Ramirez, and a 1964 Ignacio Fletas. From his
bold and bright sound, I assume he is using
modern strings rather than gut. The repertory
is paired appropriately—the 19th Century
instrumentals with the 20th-century composers,
Tarrega and Falla on the Ramirez, and his own
works on the Fletas.
Wallace is a strong and sensitive player—
his sound is remarkably consistent across the
instruments. He has a huge range of dynamics,
but never overplays, and an also wide timbral
range. His readings are always tasteful (or
nearly so—a quibble below), and he brings a
welcome drama to the music. The pieces, none
particularly familiar except for the
Tarrega and Falla, are the sort of works I would
give to my intermediate students. But his play-
ing shows what they can sound like in the
hands (and mind) of a real artist. I particularly
enjoyed the Diabelli and the Mertz. My only
interpretive objection is that he overuses ruba-
to on the Tarrega—like most other guitarists.
For me, this makes the works sound cheap; it
robs them of their purity and simplicity and
reduces them to parlor music.
In the earlier disc his music was mostly
tonally based, and his playing is quite tone-
indeed, his Suite in B minor brings to mind
some of Ponce’s neo-Baroque compositions.
ly to rest and conversing with the reader. I suppose you had to be there. Yair Klartag’s “Noting to Express,” for string quartet and electric guitar, is aptly named. It’s a hideous collection of frenetic scratching and scraping from the strings, with the electric guitar doing, well, electric guitar things, like feedback effects. I was happy for it to end. Guy Barash’s ‘Talk Back’ is for classical guitar and computer. The guitar does something, and the computer responds—for about ten wasted minutes. The notes present this as a metaphor for social media, such as tweets and posts. I think I’ll wait for the movie.

Jonathan Keren’s Laddino Songs, on the other hand, are both beautiful and moving. They are passionate love songs (Laddino is to Spanish what Yiddish is to German), and the settings for voice, violin, and guitar are truly haunting. Renat Shaham’s voice is perfect for them. Baalik Children’s Songs, for guitar and soprano are also affecting, and Tehila Nino-Goldstein’s voice combines innocence and a mature sound that works beautifully for these texts.

The longest and most effective work is by Lev himself, Shomeret Layla, for soprano, computer, and electric guitar. The Shomeret Layla is the woman, different each week, who oversees the communal nursery in a kibbutz. The sounds are nightmarish—indeed, children’s nightmares are made of it. Soprano Re’ut Ben Ze’ev sings, speaks, screams. The computer, unlike in ‘Talk Back,’ creates a halo of sounds that evokes the tension and childish fears of the setting. The text is from an actual night log for a Shomeret Layla, from the fears of the setting. The text is from an actual night log for a Shomeret Layla, from the nighttime overseer of the communal nursery in a kibbutz.

Of course, with decent playback equipment, one can make any program one wishes—I just prefer to play the disc as presented. So let’s get this quibble keep you from enjoying some very fine performances and discoveries—the Sor and the Borodin are both fantastic. They are not the biggest disc, but rather an early piece with as much Tarrega as Rak, but well worth knowing.

The Galant Lute

The title, “Four Spanish Guitars” refers to four instruments with the 19th Century composers, Tarrega and Falla on the Fleta, and Beasert and Aguado on the Tico-Tico. They are paired appropriately—the 19th Century composers with the 20th century composer, and the 20th Century composers with the 19th Century composers. I was impressed (July/Aug 2014). In this recital of the most attractive work on the program. And the Pujol ‘Nubes de Buenos Aires’ was a delight.

I enjoyed Beasert’s Mountain Songs even more than the old Fisk and Robinson performance, and I was glad to get to know Handler’s Suite—the most attractive work on the program. And the Pujol ‘Nubes de Buenos Aires’ was a delight.

4 Spanish Guitars

AGUADO: Fantando Variado; Minute; GIULIANI: Larghetto; SCHUMANN: Erste Verlust; DIABELLI: Minuet; MERTZ: An die Entfernte; Variations Mignonette; BATER: The Dance; TARREGA: Adelita; Mareiatta; Capricho Arab; FALLA: Omenaje; WALLACE: Debil del Alba; Suite in B minor

Frank Wallace, g.—Crye 1018—55 minutes

I reviewed a disc of Mr Wallace’s composition, with him as performer and was much impressed (July/Aug 2014). In this recital of traditional music, I am again.


Wallace is a strong and sensitive player—his sound is remarkably consistent across the instruments. He has a huge range of dynamics, but never overplays, and an also wide timbral range. His renditions of the works are always tasteful (or nearly so—a quibble below), and he brings a welcome drama to the music. The pieces, none particularly familiar except for the Tarrega and Falla, are the sort of works I would give to my intermediate students. But his playing shows what they can sound like in the hands of a real artist. I particularly enjoyed the Diabelli and the Mertz. My only interpretive objection is that he overuses rubato on the Tarrega—like most other guitarists.

In the earlier disc his music was mostly not atonal and quite tonal—indeed, his Suite in B minor brings to mind some of Ponce’s neo-Baroque compositions.
**Belle Époque**

**RENE: Harp Concerto; DUBOIS: Fantasy; PIERRE: Concertstuck; SAINT-SAENS: Morceau Emmanuel Ceysson, hp; Avignon Orchestra/Samuel Jean**

Naive 5419—66 minutes

Writing a harp concerto isn’t easy. It’s tough enough writing properly for the instrument itself—for example, harps read the key of C-flat better than B. Plus a composer needs to avoid something that sounds like just another symphonic piece with a too-busy harp part.

Henriette Rene (1875-1956) was a harp prodigy, playing the instrument as a child as soon as her feet could reach the pedals. Her 1901 concerto is a melodic work, the tunes reflecting Schumannesque romanticism. The orchestration is well calculated to complement the solo part. The slow movement, a reserved intermezzo, makes expressive use of the harp’s lower register. In general, Rene minimizes the glitz and uses the colors—arpeggios, glissando etc—to reinforce the structure of the piece rather than simply for show. At 24 minutes, the work doesn’t outstay its welcome.

In the Dubois Fantasy (1903), the themes have an identity that’s engaging. Its construction of three linked movements reflects the composer’s affinity for his colleague, Cesar Franck. The final section has a stately tune, the harp furnishing intelligent commentary. Gabriel Pierné’s Concertstuck, also premiered in 1903, has the advantage of the composer being born a generation later (1863-1937) and 0thus more open to more modern instrumental techniques. The structural line under the solo part is always perceptible. Pierné realizes that even the slowest necklace needs a sturdy chain.

The Morceau (1918) is one of Saint-Saens’s last works. Unlike the other pieces on this record that intermingle the soloist and orchestra at will, his piece tends to let them have their say in turn. Its themes have the flavor of French folk tunes—always healthy material to work from. The harp parts here mostly summarize 19th Century usage. There’s very little exploitation of, bispiigliando techniques, harmonics, or mediator tones associated with the writing of Mahler, Strauss and beyond.

M. Ceysson’s playing is superb. He has a deft touch, with firm rhythm and sensitive dynamics. The orchestra ably fulfills its role of interacting with the soloist, and Jean consistently paces the music well. The liner notes are a bit thin, especially about Rene. Outside France, she’s not a household word. She was an interesting woman of strong character—not to mention physical courage—and deeply religious, holding to her convictions in the face of, if not persecution, then certainly scorn. Clearly a person worth knowing.

**O’CONNOR**

**Bay Area Composers for Harp**

**HARRISON: Cello & Harp Suite; Harp & Percussion; PETERSON: Colloquy for Flute & Harp; CAGE: In a Landscape; REITER: Flute & Harp Sonata**

Karen Gottlieb, hp; Tod Brody, fl; Dan Reiter, vc; William Winitz, Daniel Kennedy, perc

Innova 927 — 62 minutes

This program was prepared by harpist Gottlieb as a tribute to the four composers, particularly Lou Harrison (1917-2003), whose compositions are played at the beginning and end. His 1949 Suite for cello & harp is a lovely piece beginning and ending with a chorele and presenting a variety of colors and shapes in between. The blend of cello and harp is highly effective.

William Peterson (b. 1927) gives us a 12-minute Colloquy for flute and harp that continues the lyrical trend. John Cage (1912-92) writes a lovely linear solo harp piece, In a Landscape (1949), that takes us for a pleasant walk. Dan Reiter (b. 1951) brings back the flute with a sonata. Why does everything that uses the harp sound so lovely?

Then it’s back to Harrison for a series of six pieces blending the harp with various percussion instruments, beginning with a Serenade that Gottlieb likes so much that she plays it again at the end of the series, just as the Chorale began and concluded the suite that opened the program. The other Harrison pieces alternate scoring: Jhala, Beverly’s Troubador Music and Avalokiteshvara use mild percussion, and Sonata in Ishartum, Music for Bill and Me and the Serenade are for harp alone.

This is an attractive program played with variety and an edge. There are some places where the harp sounds as if it is playing too close to a paper curtain. At first I thought I might be wearing out one of my speakers, but it is not consistent for all tracks and most notable in the Harrison Serenade. Otherwise, this is a very pleasant recording of very listenable harp music.

D. MOORE

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**Kontraste**

**MOZART: 4 Pieces; SOR: Mozart Variations; CARULLI: Sonatina in C; VILLA-LOBOS: 5 Preludes; GRANADOS: Spanish Dance; ALBENIZ: Asturias**

Friedemann Wutke, g

Profil 15038—57 minutes

Wutke is a strong player, but not a particularly subtle one. All the pieces here are well played, but without a great deal of imagination, and dynamics tend to be mostly forte. I wish he’d said where the Mozart comes from—there are no K numbers, and I believe I recognize some as quite early keyboard works, though he describes them as mature. They are presented as a sonata, with each movement in the same key.

The Carulli confirms my experience that his solos are breathtakingly bong (though some of his chamber music can be quite charming). It doesn’t help that Wutke’s triptets are quite uneven.

In the SOr, he at least recognizes that this music has a relationship to Mozart—too many guitarists imitate Segovia without understanding him and tear the piece up with indulgent motivic, or mediator tones associated with the exploitation of, bispiigliando techniques, harmonics, or mediator tones associated with the writing of Mahler, Strauss and beyond.

The oboe brings a more plaintive color to the place to get some of this delightful music. It is a collection of music by Central European composers of the 20th Century. The Janacek is a transcription of the Violin Sonata. The oboe brings a more plaintive color to the

**20th Century Harpsichord**

Poulsen, Francaix, Martinu, Durey

Christopher D Lewis

Naxos 573364 — 60 minutes

Christopher D Lewis is a specialist in modern harpsichord repertoire and a researcher into the instrument’s use in pop music. This is his second recording for Naxos. The most substantial piece is first in the program: Poulsen’s clever Suite Francaise, based on much older music by Claude Gervaise. It exists as both a piano solo and an ensemble piece for winds, harpsichord, and percussion. Lewis plays his own solo-harpsichord arrangement from the piano edition.

The ten short Inventions by Louis Durey are from 1924-27, and this is their premiere recording. They don’t stay in my memory firmly after they end, but the sounds are sweet while they are happening. The other premiere here is the pair of pieces from 1977 by Jean Francaix: one solemn, the other making me think of an ungraft bird walking around. Interspersed among these are pieces by Martinu: a sonata, two impromptus, and two untitled pieces from 1935. These have surprising harmonies and irregular rhythms.

The spirit of Wanda Landowska is strong in this program, both in her influence on Poulsen and in her pioneering design of modern Pleyel harpsichords before 1912. Lewis plays one of these original Pleyel instruments from around 1930, recorded in the home of the project’s sponsor. He plays brilliantly, bringing out the color and humor of the music. He doesn’t change the stops as often as some earlier 20th Century players did, but makes plenty of contrasts through timing and touch. His enthusiasm is infectious, and this album is the only place to get some of this delightful music. It is a treat to hear this classic instrument in good sound.

B. LEHMAN

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**In Memoriam Pavel Haas**

**JANACEK: Sonata; HAAS: Suite; GINER: 3 Silences Dechires; LUTOULAWSKI: Epitaph; DORATI: Duo Concertant**

Fabrice Perez, ob; Marc Pantillon, p

Gallo 1426—61 minutes

This is a collection of music by Central European composers of the 20th Century. The Janacek is a transcription of the Violin Sonata. The oboe brings a more plaintive color to the
enjoyed meeting this part of his musical personality.
It’s an interesting program performed with real artistry, whether you’re interested in the sounds of the older instruments or not.

KEATON

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Henriette Renie (1875-1956) was a harp prodigy, playing the instrument as a child as soon as her feet could reach the pedals. Her 1901 concerto is a melodic work, the tunes reflecting Schumannesque romanticism. The orchestration is well calculated to complement the solo part. The slow movement, a reserved intermezzo, makes expressive use of the harp’s lower register. In general, Renie minimizes the glitz and uses the colors—arpeggios, glissando etc—to reinforce the structure of the piece rather than simply for show. At 24 minutes, the work doesn’t outstay its welcome.

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This is an attractive program played with warm enjoyment and energy. There are some places where the harp sounds as if it is playing too close to a paper curtain. At first I thought I might be wearing out one of my speakers, but it is not consistent for all tracks and most notable in the Harrison Serenade. Otherwise, this is a very pleasant recording of every listenable harp music.

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B LEHMAN

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Fabricio Perez, oh; Marc Pantillon, p
Gallo 1426—61 minutes

This is a collection of music by Central European composers of the 20th Century. The Janacek is a transcription of the Violin Sonata. The oboe brings a more plaintive color to the
piece than the violin does and emphasizes the sounds of birds and nature nicely. The challenge with any transcription is to persuade the listener to forget the original version for a time. It would take more dramatic phrasing, dynamic contrasts, and subtleties of tone color to achieve that here. Fabrice Ferez doesn’t take full advantage of the sound palette of the instrument, sometimes playing with a blunt, reedy sound, and the performance seems musically restrained.

Pavel Haas was a Czech composer who died at the age of 45 in Auschwitz. The Suite for oboe and piano was written in 1939 in response to the Nazi invasion of his homeland and is filled with angst and defiance. Ferez seems more comfortable in this piece, playing with soaring lines and dramatic statements. There are still moments where the intonation gets a little sketchy, and whenever he leaves out vibrato the sound becomes spread and a little flat.

The Giner is another matter entirely. Giner based this solo oboe work on the Haas suite and has worked musical ideas of the name “Haas” (B-A-E-flat) into the music. It was written for Ferez, and it shows. In this difficult, atonal piece he is confident and convincing. His easy navigation of extended techniques is truly impressive, and he passes into and out of flutter-tongued passages with remarkable fluency. The phrasing and nuances are spot on.

The Lutoslawski and Dorati are also quite good, and Marc Pantillon proves to be an excellent collaborator, playing with sensitivity and verve.

Romantic Oboe Trios

Schumann, Loeffler, Khugardt, Kahn

Thomas Gallant, ob; Steve Larson, va; Sally Pinkas, p—MSR 142—45 minutes

This recording of trios for oboe, viola, and piano includes only one transcription, the Schumann. The only time this doesn’t work well is in the sonatas, where the timbre of the clarinet, particularly in the low register, is so much warmer and richer than the oboe. Otherwise the transcription is effective, and the ensemble does a fine job with this meaty work.

This reading of the Loeffler is very good, if not on par with the wonderful Gomberg-Katims-Mitropoulos recording. It is artistically satisfying, though, and the improvisatory sections are especially convincing. The Khugardt is perhaps the high point of the program—a big piece with a great deal of character and musical substance. It also shows off violist Steve Larson’s lovely playing to good effect. The Kahn Serenade is beautifully played, shifting between passionate and contemplative lines with fluency and ease.

 Despite similar musical influences and periods of composition, the program is interesting and musically balanced, and the pieces complement each other nicely.

All the members of this group are excellent players, with flawless technique and intonation and nice subtlety of articulation. They also play extremely well together, and their musical ideas are cohesive and beautiful. The phrasing and musical gestures flow seamlessly and naturally. They make ensemble playing sound easy.

The Singing Oboe

BEETHOVEN: Du bist die Ruhe; SCHUBERT: Die Forelle; Frühlingsspiele; Gretchen am Spinnrade; Nacht und Träume; Adelaide; SCHUMANN: Dichterliebe

Andrew Parker; Alan Huckleberry, p

MSR 1514—56 minutes

This is transcriptions of German lieder for oboe and piano. Transcriptions can be treacherous territory, perhaps more with songs than any other form. In the style of Schubert and Schumann, the words play such a key role that to perform them as instrumental pieces is particularly risky. Oboist Andrew Parker, however, does a creditable job; and his sweet, singing sound is especially appropriate for this endeavor. He compensates for the lack of text with beautiful phrasing, tasteful use of vibrato, and a nice dynamic range.

Pianist Alan Huckleberry plays beautifully and sensitively, and his work in ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade’ is particularly effective.

Without the illumination of the text, the grouping of Bach and Buxtehude in the first period can become a little monotonous. Including songs of Strauss, Wolf, or Mahler might have added some contrast—or songs of composers from different periods and countries. But this recording is charming and enjoyable, and will please who prefer oboe music without words. PFEIL

Eclat Encore

MENDELSSOHN: Prelude & Fugue in C minor; DE GRIGNY: Ave Maris Stella; FRANCK: Prelude, Fugue, & Variation; WILD: Embraceable You; HANCOCK: Meditation on Draw us in the Spirit's Tether; REGER: Wachet auf

Thomas Baugh, org—Raven 963—61 minutes

The organ is the 2004 CB Fisk Organ in Christ Episcopal Church, Roanoke, Virginia. The ecletic program displays the versatility of the large 2-manual instrument. Baugh is the organist of the church and plays with a clean, clear musicality. Most of the pieces have been recorded numerous times, but the program does make sense as it is organized around three 19th Century works, which sound the best on the French-inspired tonal palette of the organ. The lovely Earl Wild transcription and the Hancock piece supply welcome contrast. The Reger really needs a bigger instrument with a wider range of color and power, but Baugh manages it convincingly. I wanted a bit more urgency in certain passages and especially in the fugue, which tends to sound too careful. The recorded sound is excellent, but the room acoustic is dry.

The booklet offers notes on the music and the organ as well as photos of the installation. One of the things that continue to annoy me about Raven and other companies is the practice of not listing the program in the booklet.

Jerusalem Church of the Redeemer

Buxtehude, Bach, Mendelssohn, Franck, Goetsche, Zimmermann

Gunther Martin Goetsche, org

Antes 312979—60 minutes

The Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem was built at the request of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898. The organ was installed in 1971 by the Berlin organ builders, Karl Schuke. It is firmly in the North German tradition, with clear principals and upper work (bright sounding pipes called mixtures) and generous reed sounds. The organ serves Bach and Buxtehude beautifully and Mendelssohn as well. Modern music is effective, as evidenced in ‘In Tenebrae’ by the organist; this work is worth hearing again. Although the program does not seem to have a theme, it is no matter: no excuse is needed to hear a fine instrument and player presenting great music.

Parthenia Nova

Phillips, Swithinick, Böhm, Martinson, Sanger, Moore

James Brawn Recital 2

MSR 1502 [2CD] 107 minutes

These recordings were taken down on five different dates in Potton Hall, Suffolk, United Kingdom. 13 different composers are represented so there is plenty of variety to satisfy most listeners and to show what the pianist can do. The brevity of the selections shows a willingness to build a program almost entirely on popular encores. As reluctant as I am to say, it actually works. I did find myself wishing that Brawn had scheduled some more extended musical essays. While many of my colleagues have offered lavish praise, I tend to be skeptical, owing to the populist nature of much of the program. But there is some extremely fine pianism here, and that is always worthy of attention.

Opening with two well known Scarlatti

March/April 2016

American Record Guide
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**Parthenia Nova**

Phillips, Swellinck, Böhm, Martinson, Sanger, Moore

Simon Thomas Jacobs, org

Fugue State 9—77 minutes

It is good to know that beautiful organs are still being built in this disturbed world. They are some of the great cultural achievements of the western world. And indeed, this is the premiere recording of a fine new organ in the church of St George, Hanover Square, London, by the Richard Fowlkes & Co (Opus 18). The organ is the first American instrument to be installed in a church in London, and one of only a handful in the UK.

The instrument is all new, but built into a handsome existing 18th Century case. Although inspired by German Baroque models, it has a wide palette of sounds, which are evident on this recording. All but three of the works are from the Renaissance or Baroque periods. The three modern works—‘Out of the Depths’ by Joel Martinson and ‘Nocturne’ and ‘Sinfonietta’ by David Sanger—are very substantial. The organ gives a fine voice to the older works; especially beautiful are the flutes. The modern works are nicely realized also, and especially notable is the Martinson—a finely woven and beautiful addition to the repertoire. The organ sounds ravishing. Performances by Simon Jacobs are musical and exemplary.
sonatas (K 159+380) Brawn uses limited pedal and plays detached much of the time. There is much spirit and crisp control of embellishment. Five preludes from Bach’s Well Tempered Clavier I draw from the most popular among them and avoid their less popular fugues. That’s not my favorite way of hearing these pieces, but I can’t complain about the quality of the playing.

Mozart is represented by the ‘Rondo all Turca’ from Sonata 11 and the Fantasy K 397. Once again Brawn is right on target and plays without condescending or vulgarizing or over-emphasizing their most attractive exteriors. The Fantasy, in particular, is about as good as it gets.

Beethoven’s Fur Elise and two very popular Schubert pieces continue to delight, and several Chopin Etudes attest to the pianist’s formidable technique. An unusual surprise is Chopin’s little known Prelude Op. 45 in C-sharp minor. Liszt, Brahms, Grieg, and Scriabin follow; but with Rachmaninoff we have a grouping of five Preludes (yes, the C-sharp minor is here), all impressively performed.

Closing with Gershwin’s ‘I Got Rhythm’ in a transcription by Jon Kimura Parker leaves us with a thoroughly upbeat mood and you can’t beat that in today’s world. The recording is a good one, and there are notes for all of the selections. Under the circumstances I can forgive a few pages of pure Brawn puff.

Bruce Hungerford Last Recital

MOZART: Sonata 11; March in C minor; SCHUBERT: Waltzes & Landler; Impromptu D 935; BEETHOVEN: Sonatas 5+32; BACH: Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring

Kang

Horowitz: Return to Chicago

SCARLATTI: Sonatas; MOZART: Adagio; Bono; Sonata 10; SCHUMANN; Arabeske; Traumerei; LISZT: Sonett 104; Soirée de Vienne; CHOPIN: Mazurkas; Scherzo 1; MOSZKOWSKI: Etinéelles

Vioon

American Intersections

BARBER: Souvenirs; BOLCOM: Recuerdos; COPLAND: El Salon Mexico; RZEWSKI: Winsbora Cotton Mill Blues; ADAMS: Hallelujah Junction

The composers here all hail from the United States, and this is a great representation of American music, in many styles, from the 20th Century. We are currently reminded of our nation’s roots and growth being attributable to the melting pot nature of the people. Our music is here described as an intersection of a variety of styles and influences. Schumann and Magalhaes are one of the premiere piano duos today, not only because of their fantastic piano skills, but for their adventure-some and varied repertoire. They have consistently supplied releases that touch on both familiar and relatively unknown music, often presented in rare arrangements. The label TwoPianists is theirs and has expanded over the past several years into a reliable source of great artists and repertoire, with state of the art sound and consistently high quality booklet essays. This music takes us to Mexico and South America, a cotton mill in the old south, a ballet of American music in an exaggerated and extended version of the word “Hallelujah” and some of its musical history. In the excellent, substantial

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MOZART: Sonata 11; March in C minor; SCHUBERT: Waltzes & Landler; Impromptu D 935; BEETHOVEN: Sonatas 5+32; BACH: Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring; Kasp 57761 [2CD] 92 minutes

Bruce Hungerford’s recital for DG 4794649 [2CD] 120 minutes

This is Horowitz’s final recital in Chicago. The program is similar to many Horowitz performed—a selection of standards. It includes two works new to Horowitz’s discography: Schumann’s Arabeske and Chopin’s Mazurka, Op. 63:3. The playing is as expected from Horowitz: there are few surprises. The Scarlatti sonatas, both in E, show his fine touch and expressive range. He has a unique take on the first, emphasizing articulations and embellishments. Mozart’s Rondo also has ingenious tempos and grace notes, though it veers towards eccentricity. The Scherzo I is controlled yet majestic.

Lee’s playing is marked by great attention to detail. He plays the miniatures, such as the Song Without Words and Lia dov’s Prelude, with great expression and a lush sound. His full sound works very well for the Schiaban Fantasy, full of explosive intensity and an amazing range of expression. The melody is clearly stated, emerging clearly from the dense textures.

Sometimes this attention to detail seems to backfire. Lee’s playing spells out every note. In Impromptu 142:2, this is not necessarily a positive thing: his attention to each individual note could be so exacting as to put melody in the background. His tone here is too expressive. Though not a bad quality to have, his playing sometimes conveys too much intensity and exaggerates the percussiveness. In Impromptu 142:2, Lee’s delivery is a bit exaggerated for my taste—he takes too much liberty with the tempo. Once more can be seen in a fairly sweeping. His tone here is too expressive.

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The last two tracks are two radio interviews from 1974 and 1986, that were originally intended for the intermission period of the radio broadcast. The latter, about 30 minutes long, is a real treat, as it is not only informative but also entertaining. In response to interviewer Thomas Willis’s charge that Horowitz was a very private person, Horowitz responds, “I’m not very private. I like people.”

Yo-Yo Ma

Handel’s ‘Water Music’


Yo-Yo Ma’s recital for Import CD 3218 [2CD] 120 minutes

Handel’s ‘Water Music’ Suite K 324 is a beautiful work, and it was well presented on this release. The placement of the Suite after the Fantasia in G major BWV 1060, which is a much more difficult piece, follows a logical progression. The Autumn, with its clear articulation and energetic movement, is a fitting conclusion to the recital.

The arrangement of the Fantasia in G major BWV 1060 by Yo-Yo Ma is a faithful and beautiful one. The piece is played with great attention to detail, and the expression is well captured. The arrangement is divided into eight movements, each with its own character. The first movement, Allegro, is a lively and energetic piece, with a strong sense of rhythm. The second movement, Adagio, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody. The third movement, Vivace, is a fast and lively piece, with a strong sense of movement. The fourth movement, Andante, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody. The fifth movement, Allegro, is a lively and energetic piece, with a strong sense of rhythm. The sixth movement, Adagio, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody. The seventh movement, Vivace, is a fast and lively piece, with a strong sense of movement. The eighth movement, Andante, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody.

The recital ends with a beautiful arrangement of the Fantasia in G major BWV 1060 by Yo-Yo Ma. The piece is played with great attention to detail, and the expression is well captured. The arrangement is divided into eight movements, each with its own character. The first movement, Allegro, is a lively and energetic piece, with a strong sense of rhythm. The second movement, Adagio, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody. The third movement, Vivace, is a fast and lively piece, with a strong sense of movement. The fourth movement, Andante, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody. The fifth movement, Allegro, is a lively and energetic piece, with a strong sense of rhythm. The sixth movement, Adagio, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody. The seventh movement, Vivace, is a fast and lively piece, with a strong sense of movement. The eighth movement, Andante, is a slower and more reflective piece, with a sense of melody.
William Bolcom, despite a wide variety of compositions in many styles, is perhaps best known for his raptim piano playing. While exploring Latin dance styles for his Recuerdos, he was able to relate to the widespread piano music trend in the second decade of the 20th Century. In the 1930s Copland visited a dance hall in Mexico called El Salon Mexico, which supplied him with the inspiration and title of his next orchestral work. The arrangement played here is by no less than Leonard Bernstein. Last year I reviewed a disc called "Powerhouse Pianists" (AMR 1039, July/Aug 2015) that introduced me to the Rzewski and Adams piano pieces also found on the current release. The arrangement played here is by no less than Leonard Bernstein.

The big, 25-minute Dutilleux Sonata is a clear fore-runner of the more famous Suites for 2 Pianos by his student Messiaen. There is much brash and brilliant music, and even the vast reaches of the stars to be imagined in his music. The harmonic style is unique, and the work unfolds with stately assurance. Messiaen wrote in his preface, "I have sought here a mystical language of love, at once varied, powerful and tender, sometimes brutal in its colorful form." Stott brings out all of these aspects. This is a very special piano recital that will be returned to often.

**HARRINGTON**

**Troika**

**ARENSKY: Suite 2; SHOSTAKOVICH: Concertino; GAVRILIN: 10 Sketches**

Irina Shishkina & Maya Berdieva, p

Utext 218—50 minutes

This is an unusual disc, manufactured in Mexico with two Russian pianists in a Russian program; and the primary language on the disc and booklet is Spanish. The production values are a notch below what I usually see—picture and artwork, the two ladies are definitely from a traditional Russian school of piano playing. There is an emphasis on brilliance and strength, with a few forays into quieter, lyrical passages.

The Arensky Suite is a clear fore-runner of the more famous Suites for 2 Pianos by his student, Rachmaninoff. We get a real in-your-face kind of performance here, with a beautiful respite in IV, "The Drifters." The first tape recording of this work is by the Primakov-Lavrova duo (LP Classics 1001, Mar/Apr 2012). They have less brilliance, but much more finesse and musicality. The current performance is notable for its brilliant and exciting conclusion.

After a heavy, demonstrative opening alternating with a quiet Russian theme, Shostakovich's Concertino has a kind of sneaky transition into the main brilliant section, which is a real blast. It is reminiscent of Piano Concerto 1 and has some pretty direct quotes from it. There are also interesting, technical display that it would be easy to allow to come to the listener's ear with a few forays into quieter, lyrical passages.

Valery Gavrylin (1939-1999) wrote three books of Sketches, and 10 of the 18 are recorded here. They are new works to me and a real find. Heavily influenced by Shostakovich, they are unmistakably Russian in character. They are mostly short dances (only the Waltz is more than 3 minutes long), beginning with a Troika and ending with a Tarantella. This is a well selected and ordered group that would certainly be an audience pleaser in concert.

**HARRINGTON**

**Solitaires**

**ALAIN: Prelude & Fugue; DUTILLEUX: Piano Sonata; RAVEL: Tombeau de Couperin; MESSIAEN: Le Baiser de l'Enfant-Jesus**

Kathryn Stott, p

BIS 2148 (SACD) 69 minutes

Stott has put together a recital of 20th Century French piano music that is interesting, varied, and more than a little off the beaten track. Only the Ravel would be considered part of the standard piano repertoire, and even then I see more recordings of Miroirs, Gaspard de la Nuit, and Valses Nobles et Sentimentales than Tombeau. It is my favorite Ravel, and I have spent hundreds of hours working on it.

The Alain here is Jehan (1911-40). Born into a musical family, his life was cut short by the Germans. His father, Albert, was a noted organist, composer and organ builder; and his sister was the famous organist Marie-Claire. This short Prelude and Fugue (1935) is one of about 140 compositions he wrote. A student of Dukas, his style is in the line of Saint-Saëns and Franck more than Debussy and Ravel.

The big, 25-minute Dutilleux Sonata (1984) is played and also the only work by Ravel that I consider a big role in this piece, but its most unique feature is the two pianos moving in and out of synchronicity with each other. It is soft and loud; fast, slow, and even faster, building to an exciting conclusion. It does seem very well suited to the dynamism of this exceptional duo.
booklet essay we are told how all the European musical traditions came to the United States. That is, the mammoth piano-ensemble version.

Of course with all of this thought and planning, we have to be presented with exceptional performances—and we are. Each work has come my way at least once before, but Schumann and Magalhaes go immediately to the top of my list as best available.

Salon Mexico

Samuel Barber’s Souvenirs was given a memorable piano 4-hands performance by John Browning and Leonard Slatkin some years back in New York. The arrangement here is for two pianos by Gold and Fitzgerald, and the six dance movements are wonderful neo-romantic music. Originally for piano duet, it was soon orchestrated by the composer for use as a ballet. Barber also made a solo piano version.

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HARRINGTON

Profundum

SCARLATTI: Sonatas; MOZART: Sonata 12; BEETHOVEN: Sonata 14; MEDIT: Fairy Tales 1-3; SCRIBAIB: Preludes 2, 6, 11, 14, 22

Maria Walzer, p
Orlando 17 — 62 minutes

Walzer’s performance of Medtner and Scriabin shows immense precision. One gets the sense that she is a pianist who adheres to the score accurately. The sound is well articulated and effortlessly played. The slower Sonata in F minor is straightforward,
with little to no pedaling, and is not too nuanced. Mozart’s Piano Sonata 12 is a good performance, as Walser adheres to the phras- ing marks that other performers often pedal through. III is especially controlled, with a deft use of dynamic shading. Her left hand is exquisite.

It is also nice to hear Metner’s Fairy Tales, which are rarely programmed. But because there are no liner notes, beyond Walser’s biogra- phy, it is unclear why this release is called Profundum, or what the rationale for including these works is. Though her playing is excellent, I am not sure whether the program itself is cohesive.

Bruce Bonnell is horn professor at Central Michigan University. Their program consists of violin-horn-piano trios that are not by Brahms. The two by Frederic Duvernay (1765-1818) were composed for a horn with no valves. Bonnell writes about that in the notes, but he plays the pieces on a modern horn. They are pleasant though not especially mem- orable, but they would have been quite challenging for an early 19th-Century horn player.

Lennox Berkeley (1907-89) composed his 3-movement, 25-minute Trio (1952) for a group that included legendary horn player Dennis Brain. I is bold, assertive, stried. It is quiet, melancholy. III is a 14-minute theme-and-variations (10 of them) that runs the gamut of emotions and speeds. Few record- ings exist of this major work.

People familiar with the music of Eric Ewazen (b 1954) will readily identify him as the composer of the program’s final work. His 4-movement, 21-minute Trio (2012) opens with a somber but restless Andante Tenera- mente, takes us on a fast horse ride in II, becomes positive in III, then drives relentlessly through IV with syncopated rhythms, intricate counterpoint, and dramatic chord progres- sions.

The music is excellent and the playing good, but violinist Wu often sounds rather faint. That seems more like a recording prob- lems than a matter of too-gentle playing.

Bonis, Viardot, Boulanger, Chrystal Marchand, Cecile Chaminade, Taillifere

Sara Chenal, v; Jean-Pierre Ferey, p

Skarbo 4150—72 minutes

This is music by French female composers. The oldest is Pauline Viardot (1821-1910), and the youngest is Chrystal Marchand (b 1958). The music is uniformly light, frothy, and femi- nine. No thunderring pronouncements from Mount Sinai here. It is also quite uniform in quality with no standouts. This is ideal if you would like a program like this. Sara Chenal is a fine violinist, and Jean-Pierre Ferey is a fine partner.

KANG

Piano for Children

BEETHOVEN: Fur Elise; SCHUMANN: Kinder- szenen; TCHAIKOVSKY: Album for the Young;
DEBUSSY: Children’s Corner; MOZART: Rondo alla Turca; Sonata Facile; Piano Concerto 21;
BARTOK: For Children, selection

Klaara Wurtz, p
Brilliant 95316 — 76 minutes

Wurtz adheres to the score and play these short works matter-of-factly. This straightfor- ward approach is well for burgeoning young pianists. I have seen students eschew good technique for emotion. She plays ‘Fur Elise’ with a moderate tempo, drama-free. The Kinderzonen is sensitive and sensible and solid, even if it is not moving. No. 3 is well articulated, and the left hand has a strong presence. Because of the “liveness” of the acoustics, though, the sharpness of the notes does not carry in a slightly blurry No. 6.

Her straightforward approach is not as good in Debussy, though ‘Jimbo’s Lullaby’ seems over-articulated. Although the ‘Sere- nade for the Dolls’ is played quite expressively, I wish the sound was softer. Recommended for beginner to intermediate piano students—this will be an excellent teaching resource for teachers.

KANG

Horn, Violin, & Piano

Berkeley, Duvernay, Ewazen
Bruce Bonnell; Hai-Xin Wu; Zhihua Tang

Bruce Bonnell is horn professor at Central Michigan University. Hai-Xin Wu assistant concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony, Zhi-hua Tang director of collaborative piano at Michigan State University. Their program consists of violin-horn-piano trios that are not by Brahms. The two by Frederic Duvernay (1765-1818) were composed for a horn with no valves. Bonnell writes about that in the notes, but he plays the pieces on a modern horn. They are pleasant though not especially mem- orable, but they would have been quite challenging for an early 19th-Century horn player.

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KILPATRICK

Russian Concert

SHOSTAKOVICH: Viola Sonata; RACHMANINOFF: Sonata; PROKOFIEFF: Romeo & Juliet Selections

Rivka Golani, Douglas Perry, va; John Lenehan, p
Hungaroton 32743 [2CD] 112 minutes

This program was recorded in concert at the CBC’s Glenn Gould Studio on March 28, 2006. It opens and closes with selections from Prokofieff’s great ballet Romeo and Juliet arranged by the great Soviet violinist Vadim Borisovsky. In between we hear the Shostakovich Viola Sonata and the arrangement of Rachmaninoff’s Cello Sonata for viola, again by Borisovsky. There are 11 of the origi- nal 13 Prokofieff selections here, and they are effective, as is the Rachmaninoff.

The only problem with this recital is Gorshkov’s method of playing the valve. Born in 1946, she had just turned 60 when this was recorded. Part of her problem may be the huge viola by her ex-husband Otto Erdesz. As violists age, they tend to switch to smaller and smaller instruments to place less of a strain on their left hands. Golani’s Erdesz viola has a large, noble tone, but she probably would have played better with a smaller instrument.

AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

March/April 2016

American Record Guide

Humphreys plays an 18th Century violin made by the circle of Peter Guarnerius of Venice. MAGIL

My Armenia

KOMITAS: The Crane; The Apricot Tree; 7 Folk Dances; It is Spring; BAGDASARUAN: Rhapsody; Nocturne; MIROZOVAN: Introduction & Perpetu- um Mobile; KHACHARATURIAN: Poem Song; 2 Dances From Gayne; RACHMANINIAN: 6 Pictures

Sergey Khachatryan, v; Lusine Khachatryan, p
Naive 5414—80 minutes

The great brother-sister duo of Sergey and Lusine Khachatryan have assembled a pro- gram to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. They have chosen works by several of Armenia’s most important composers. While most will be familiar with Aram Khachaturian, the first important Armenian composer, Komitas Vardapet (1889-1935—he used mainly his first name) is repre- sented here by The Crane, The Apricot Tree, Seven Folk Dances, and It Is Spring. He was the first to combine the Oriental Armenian folk idioms with classical forms. Khachaturian was one of the most important Soviet composers, and his ballet Spartacus had a revolutionary theme that would have appealed to the regime. The best-known work of his here is the Saber Dance from his ballet Gayaneh, in the familiar arrangement by Jascha Hefetz. Eduard Bagdasaryan’s (1922-87) Rachapsody and Nocturne are written in a modern idiom like Khachaturian’s. Edvard Mirzoyan’s (1921-2012) Introduction & Perpetuum Mobile is in a more traditional mode. Arno Babadjanian’s Six Pictures are written for solo piano, like the Komitas Seven Folk Dances and It Is Spring. He departs a bit from the other composers represented here because of the influence of Central European expressionism. Hints of Schoenberg pop up here and there in this music.

I have to comment on a couple of deci- sions by the booklet’s art director. The pro- gram is printed in pale gray microtype. Why? Must the reader’s eyesight be strained for some reason? On top of this, the tracks are not numbered. Whenever I wanted to identify the title of any track or its composer, I had to start with the first track and count down until I reached the track that was relevant. The per- earthly purpose is served by forcing the listen- er to do that? What has happened to modern
with little to no pedaling, and is not too nuanced. Mozart's Piano Sonata 12 is a good performance, as Walzer adheres to the phrasing marks that other performers often pendulum through. III is especially controlled, with a deft use of dynamic shading. Her left hand is exquisite.

It is also nice to hear Medner's Fairy Tales, which are rarely programmed. But because there are no liner notes, beyond Walzer's biography, it is unclear why this release is called Profandum, or what the rationale for including these works is. Though her playing is excellent, I am not sure whether the program itself is cohesive.

KANG

Piano for Children

Bruce Bonnell

Horn professor at Central Michigan University. Hai-Xin Wu assistant concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony, Zhihua Tang director of collaborative piano at Michigan State University. Their program consists of violin-horn-piano trios that are not by Brahms. The two by Frederic Duvernay (1765-1818) were composed for a horn with no valves. Bonnell writes about that in the notes, but he plays the pieces on a modern horn. They are pleasant though not especially memorable, but they would have been quite challenging for an early 19th-Century horn player.

Lennox Berkeley (1907-89) composed his 3-movement, 25-minute Trio (1952) for a group that included legendary horn player Dennis Brain. I is bold, assertive, strident. II is quiet, melancholy. III is a 14-minute themo-and-variations (10 of them) that runs the gamut of emotions and speeds. Few recordings exist of this major work.

People familiar with the music of Eric Ewazen (b 1954) will readily identify him as the composer of the program's final work. His 4-movement, 21-minute Trio (2012) opens with a somber but restless Andante Teneramente, takes us on a fast horse ride in II, becomes pensive in III, then drives relentlessly through IV with syncopated rhythms, intricate counterpoint, and dramatic chord progressions.

The music is excellent and the playing good, but violinist Wu often sounds rather faint. That seems more like a recording problem than a matter of too-gentle playing.

KILPATRICK

Russian Concert

SHOSTAKOVICH: Viola Sonata; RACHMANINOFF: Sonata; PROKOFIEFF: Romeo & Juliet Selections

Rivka Golani, Douglas Perry, va; John Lenehan, p

Hungaroton 32743 [2CD] 112 minutes

This program was recorded in concert at the CBC's Glenn Gould Studio on March 28, 2006. It opens and closes with selections from Prokofieff's great ballet Romeo and Juliet arranged by the great Soviet violinist Vadim Borisovskiy. In between we hear the Shostakovich Viola Sonata and the arrangement of Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata for viola, again by Borisovskiy. There are 11 of the original 13 Prokofieff selections here, and they are effective, as is the Rachmaninoff.

The only problem with this recital is Golani's Viola. She is a wonderful partner. Born in 1946, she had just turned 60 when this was recorded. Part of her problem may be the huge viola by her ex-husband Otto Erdesz. As violists age, they tend to switch to smaller and smaller instruments to place less of a strain on their left hands. Golani’s Erdesz viola has a large, noble tone, but she probably would have played better with a smaller instrument.

AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

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My Armenia

KOMITAS: The Crane; The Apricot Tree; 7 Folk Dances; It is Spring; BAGDASARUAN: Rhapsody; Nocturne; MIROZOV: Introduction & Perpetuum Mobile; KHACHATURIAN: Poem Song; 2 Dances From Gayane; RACHMANINOFF: 6 Pictures

Sergey Khachatryan, v; Lusine Khachatryan, p

Naive 5414—80 minutes

The great brother-sister duo of Sergey and Lusine Khachatryan have assembled a program to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. They have chosen works by several of Armenia's most important composers. While most will be familiar with Aram Khachaturian, the first important Armenian composer, Komitas Vardapet (1889-1935—he used mainly his first name) is represented here by The Crane, The Apricot Tree, Seven Folk Dances, and It Is Spring. He was the first to combine the Oriental Armenian folk idiom with classical forms. Khachaturian was one of the most important Soviet composers, and his ballet Spartacus had a revolutionary theme that would have appealed to the regime. The best-known work of his here is the Saber Dance from his ballet Gayaneh, in the familiar arrangement by Jascha Hefetz. Eduard Bagdasaryan's (1922-87) Rhapsody and Nocturne are written in a modern idiom like Khachaturian's. Edvard Mirzoyan's (1921-2012) Introduction & Perpetuum Mobile is in a more traditional mode. Arno Babadjanian's Six Pictures are written for solo piano, like the Komitas Seven Folk Dances and It Is Spring. He departs a bit from the other composers represented here because of the influence of Central European expressionism. Hints of Schoenberg pop up here and there in this music.

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Humphreys plays an 18th Century violin made by the circle of Peter Guarnerius of Venice.

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The ensemble is most comfortable in customary band scores and transcriptions, notably the Hanson, the Maki, the Reed, and the Strauss—here the students usually transcend their current capabilities and deliver effective performances. In more serious repertoire, difficult transcriptions, and modernist selections—the Adams, the Creston, the Mackey, and the Rogers—their weaknesses are laid bare, and they often struggle to the finish line. In this vein, some of the programming could use more care and thought; while students deserve a challenge, they also need literature that allows for meaningful achievement.

The FGCU faculty soloists are uneven as well. Bernardo boasts excellent fingers, but his soft reed creates an extremely thin tone, and his phrasing is rather dull. Darnell sings with nice clarity and nuance, yet her English diction is somewhat murky.\n
\section*{Take 2}

Patricia Kopatchinskaja, v; Jorge Sanchez-Chiong, electronics & turntables; Anthony Rama-nui, hpsi, toy p; Reto Bieri, cl, v, ocarina; Laure- rence Dreyfus, viol; Matthias Würsch, darbuka; Pablo Marquez, g; Ernesto Estrella, voice; Alpha 211—77 minutes

This is a post-modern anthology of music for single violin with another accompanying instrument or media (electronics, turntable). The musical styles range from adaptations of a medieval opera from the Winchester Trop-er (early 11th Century) and a ballade by Guil- laume de Machaut, through renaissance and baroque repertoire, with pieces by Orlando Gibbons, Giuseppe Giamberti, Heinrich Biber (the attributed Sonatas Representativa with its imitations of animal sounds), JS Bach’s Chaconne (with improvised harpsichord accompaniment), to 20th Century pieces from the more traditional by Manuel de Falla and Darius Milhaud to the more experimental by John Cage and Heinz Holliger.

The "tuning" recording is clear from the opening piece, ‘Overclockers 5’ by Jorge Sanchez-Chiong, which mixes vocal sounds from Kopatchinskaja and Sanchez-Chiong with electronic sounds and turntable effects from the world of Hip-Hop. Kopatchinskaja clearly has an interest in this eclectic reper- toire, but even when she attempts to include the Bach, she and her accompanist stray beyond the boundaries of good taste.
art directors? Are the art departments of our colleges failing the designers who possess common sense and passing only people with hare-brained ideas?

MAGIL

Hungarian Masterpieces

DOHNANYI: Sonata; HUBAY: Nocturne; Hungarian Fantasy; BARTOK: Romanian Folk Dances; KODALY: Adagio; GOLDMARK: Ballade; WEINER: Pergi Verbunk; AUER: Hungarian Rhapsody Key; Thomas Märkl, v; Angelika Merkle, p

Atlantic Crossings 9978–65 minutes

Here are two very good players with solid flawless technique, plenty of sensitive nuance, and a grasp of structure enhanced by a gift for flexibility and flow that wraps each piece into a united whole. American-trained Key-Thomass Märkl, who turns 53 this year, has been a member of the Bavarian Radio Symphony since 1990. Angelika Merkle (her age remains top secret [she’s European!], but she’s pushing 50) is a professor at Frankfurt’s Academy of Music.

In the major work here, Ernst von Dohnanyi’s Violin Sonata, Op. 21, they betray their only weakness, which I call the “sensible shoes” syndrome: perfect for extensive walking, but not good-looking or stylish. All that perfection, yet Märkl and Merkle never let loose, never go over the top—they lead us on. Or, to put it another way, they never “sell” the piece; they don’t make us want to hear it again. Like so many Dohnanyi, despite the abundant skill and exciting work though, and no surprise coming from a major interpreter of Scott Joplin.

Next to the piece by Guastavino, the best music here is the miniatures by Manual Ponce (1882-1948), ‘Cancion de Otono’ and ‘Estrellas;’ the works by Astor Piazzolla are brief and typical.

Mark Schuppener is an excellent altoist. Comparing his performance of ‘Estrella;’ with Heifetz’s shows what he lacks in style. Oscar Macchioni is a good pianist.

FRENCH

Latin-American Duos

GUASTAVINO: Rosita Iglesias; UGARTE: Violin Sonata; BOLCOM: Graceful Ghost Rag; PONCE: Cancion de Otono; Estrellitas; PIAZZOLLA: Ave Maria; Milonga del Angel; Libertango

Mark Schuppener, v; Oscar Macchioni, p

Centauro 3423—57 minutes

The program opens with Argentine Carlos Guastavino’s (1912-2000) Rosita Iglesias. There is a certain resemblance at points between Ugarте’s style and Astor Piazzolla’s, his countryman. Perhaps this is the Argentine style. Floro Ugarte’s (1884-1975) Violin Sonata of 1928 is more conservative in style and not as interesting. What William Bolcom’s (b 1938) ‘Graceful Ghost Rag’ is doing in a collection of Latin-American music beats me. It is a charming work though, and no surprise coming from a major interpreter of Scott Joplin.

In this vein, some of the programming could use more care and thought; while students deserve a challenge, they also need literature that allows for meaningful achievement.

The FGCU faculty soloists are uneven as well. Bernardo boasts excellent fingers, but his soft reed creates an extremely thin tone, and his phrasing is rather dull. Darnell sings with nice clarity and nuance, yet her English diction is somewhat murky.

The ensemble is most comfortable in customary band scores and transcriptions, notably the Hanson, the Maki, the Reed, and the Strauss—here the students usually transcend their current capabilities and deliver effective performances. In more serious repertoire, difficult transcriptions, and modernist selections—the Adams, the Creston, the Mackey, and the Rogers—their weaknesses are laid bare, and they often struggle to the finish line. In this vein, some of the programming could use more care and thought; while students deserve a challenge, they also need literature that allows for meaningful achievement.

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BOLCOM: Introductions

Adams, Creston, Hanson, Mackey, Maki, Reed, Rogers, Strauss

Jeanie Darnell, s; Mario Bernardo, sax; Florida Gulf Coast University Wind Orchestra/ Rod Chesnut—Mark 50916—59 minutes

In August 1997, Florida Gulf Coast University opened its doors in Fort Myers as a public college to serve the growing south Florida population. In 1997, the FGCU Bower School of Music began to offer degrees in music performance, education, and therapy. Dr. Rod Chesnut, the Head of Instrumental Studies and a founding faculty member, leads the FGCU Wind Orchestra in an “introduction” to the school, its faculty, and its students.

The program includes the John Adams’s Short Ride in a Fast Machine, two movements from the Paul Creston Saxophone Concerto, the Albanian Dance of Minneapolis composer Shelley Hanson, a recent John Mackey work titled ‘Redacted;’ the Second Wind Gallop of young Brazilian composer Takahumi Maki, and the ’Gallop from the Alfred Reed First Suite for Band, the Bernard Rogers Three Japanese Dances, and the overture to the Strauss operetta Die Fledermaus. FGCU voice professor Jeannie Darnell sings in II of the Rogers, and FGCU saxophone professor Mario Bernardo is the performer in the Creston selections.

The FGCU Wind Orchestra has remarkable gusto for a relatively new group, but their playing is still not ready for a wide audience. Like most music majors at a small state school, the FGCU students are still working on timbre, intonation, rhythm, and technical execution; while some sections have a decent uniform sound, more refinement is required.

The recording is clear from the opening piece, ‘Overclockers’ by Jorge Sanchez-Chiong, which mixes vocal sounds from Kopatchinskaja and Sanchez-Chiong with electronic sounds and turntable effects from the world of Hip-Hop. Kopatchinskaja clearly has an interest in this eclectic repertoire, but even her singing tone, including the Bach, she and her accompanist stray beyond the boundaries of good taste.

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Some listeners to this recording might respond as Charles Ives did when an audience began to boo at a performance of Carl Ruggles’s *Men and Mountains*, “Why can’t you stand up before the strong music like this and use your ears like a man?” Others just might ask, “Why?”

- **BREWER**

**Mynsteeles with Strange Sounds**

Clare Wilkinson, mz; Rose Consort of Viols

Delphian 34169—67:20

This anthology of renaissance music for viols with and without voice extends from music associated with the courts of Ferrara and Bologna, through Spain, and ends with a book of music associated with the court of Henry VIII in England. The booklet notes speculate that the concept of a viols consort may have originated in Italy, spread to the Spanish courts, and may have arrived in England along with Catherine of Aragon, since a Tudor inventory listed four instruments “caulled Spanishe Vialles”.

On this recording the Rose Consort uses a set of viols model on ones depicted in an Italian altarpiece dated 1497 from Bologna, which are much more nasal in sound than the later viols typically used for English consort music. The polyphony is always very clearly articulated, and the sound of these instruments contrasts nicely with Wilkinson’s voice.

There are some “hit” tunes, such as Josquin’s ‘In te Domine speravi’; Juan del Encina’s ‘Triste España’, and Henry VIII’s ‘Helas caulled Spanishe Vialles’. The polyphony is especially adept at the style of elaborate ornamentation found in some sources for these airs.

“Why?”

**BREWER**

**Loquebantur—Baldwin Partbooks**

Parsons, Tallis, Mundy, Byrd, Aston, Gerarde, Bevin, Ferrabosco, Lassus, Hollander, Taverner, Baldwin, Sheppard

Marian Consort/ Rory McCleery; Rose Consort of Viols—Delphian 34160—66 minutes

John Baldwin (c1560-1615) was appointed lay clerk at St George’s Chapel, Windsor in 1575 and became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1598. Little more is known about his life, but his importance lies chiefly in his work as a compiler and copyist. The Baldwin Partbooks were produced between 1575 and 1581. They are currently in the library of Christ Church, Oxford. It would appear that Baldwin’s primary purpose was to preserves outstanding works that had become liturgically obsolete after the English Reformation. His collection reaches back to the generation of John Taverner (c1490-1545) and Hugh Aston (c1485-1538) and continues to the works of living composers like Thomas Tallis and William Byrd. Bound with the manuscript partbooks is the printed edition of *Cantiones Sacrae* (1575) by Byrd and Tallis. Towards the end of the manuscript are pieces by the generation’s greatest music.

The text of the book is now lost, so reconstruction is necessary for the 60 pieces that do not survive in other sources. The collection consists of nearly 170 works.

**BREWER**

This recording has 16 pieces from the collection. The title comes from Tallis’s ‘Loquebantur Variis Linguis’, an office responsory for Pentecost. 7 of the 16 pieces are performed by the Rose Consort of Viols. Some of these are untexted pieces from the manuscript, but others are instrumental performances of vocal pieces, a common practice of the time. These instrumental performances are serenely understated.

The vocal works are performed by the Marian Consort, a group of young British singers with one voice to a part. Their ensemble is like clockwork, but with a fine sense of phrase and effective projection of the character of the music, whether exuberant like Tallis’s ‘Loquebantur’ or penitential like Mundy’s ‘Adolescentus Sum Ego’.

Recently I reviewed a recording of music from the Baldwin Partbooks performed by the vocal ensemble Contra punctus under the direction of Owain Park (Signum 408; July/Aug 2015). That recording is the first of a series of music from the partbooks. The plan for that
Some listeners to this recording might respond as Charles Ives did when an audience began to boo at a performance of Carl Ruggles's *Men and Mountains*, "Why can't you stand up before the strong music like this and use your ears like a man?" Others might just ask, "Why?"

**Mynstrelles with Strange Sounds**

Clare Wilkinson, mz; Rose Consort of Viols

Delphian 34169—66 minutes

This anthology of renaissance music for viols with and without voice extends from music associated with the courts of Ferrara and Bologna, through Spain, and ends with a book of music associated with the court of Henry VIII in England. The booklet notes speculate that the concept of a viol consort may have originated in Italy, spread to the Spanish courts, and may have arrived in England along with Caterina of Aragon, since a Tudor inventory listed four instruments 'caulse Spanish Vialles'. On this recording the Rose Consort uses a set of viols model on ones depicted in an Italian altarpiece dated 1497 from Bologna, which are much more nasal in sound than the later viols typically used for English consort music. The polyphony is always very clearly articulated, and the sound of these instruments contrasts nicely with Wilkinson's voice. There are some "hit" tunes, such as Josquin's 'In te Domine speravi'; Juan del Encina's 'Triste España', and Henry VIII's 'Helas et Tristemente'. The booklet contains the complete texts and translations, making this a very useful recording of a richly-represented repertoire.

**Loquebantur—Baldwin Partbooks**

Parsons, Tallis, Mundy, Byrd, Aston, Gerarde, Bevin, Ferrabosco, Lassus, Holander, Taverner, Ballard, Shepherd, Marian Consort/Rory McCleery; Rose Consort of Viols—Delphian 34160—66 minutes

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**Airs de Cour Français**

Le Poeme Harmonique/ Vincent Dumestre

Alpha 213—64:16

The repertoire of airs de cour (court airs) was written in humanistic circles of late 16th Century France. Compared with the contemporary Italian madrigals by Marenzio and Gesualdo, the French airs sound much more reserved, especially in their predominantly homophonic style and diction, and in their reference to a valet consort music. This collection includes airs especially associated with two noble families, the Guises and the Gondis, and it contains works by Girard de Beaulieu, Jean Boyer, Didier Le Blanc, Fabrice-Marin Caietain, Guillaume Costeley, Adrian Le Roy, and, especially, Pierre Guedron. There have been other earlier anthologies of this repertoire (Guedron, Sept/Oct 1998, collections Nov/Dec 1999: 271; Sept/Oct 2006, see Praetorius). I found this new release particularly effective both in repertoire and in performance choices, ranging form voice and instrument to a four-part vocal ensemble. The vocalists of Le Poeme Harmonique are particularly adept at the style of elaborate ornamentation found in some sources for these airs. The instrumentalists among these rarified airs are dances by Pierre-Franciscus Carroubel (arranged by Michael Praetorius) and a contrapuntal 'Fantasie' by a composer known only as Lorenzini. The booklet is very informative and contains the complete texts and translations, making this a very useful recording of a poorly-represented repertoire.
It is difficult to figure this out. It is a release from a group active in Atlanta, Georgia that has apparently produced a series of recordings. This one was recorded in 2002 and released the following year. It contains no notes or commentary whatsoever, only pictures. And its lilliputian length hardly adds up to a substantial program.

So, is this something to be taken seriously, or is it just a quickie promotional item? Hard to tell.

What it does offer, to be sure, is appealing. The 12 selections give a tiny overview of the trio sonata form, with emphasis on ones containing ciaconas. There are examples of early Italian exploration of these idioms: two pieces from a 1629 publication by Dario Castello (1590-1658) and one each from publications of 1637 by Tarquino Merula (1594-1665) and of 1641 by Biagio Marini (1594-1663). But I miss representation of the true father of the trio sonata, Salomone Rossi. Rossellini. There is the No. 6 'Chacony' from the posthumous publication of Purcell's Sonatas. The most substantial item is the No. 6 representation of the true father of the trio sonata, Salomone Rossi. (Chominciamento di Gioia). There is the No. 6 collection. The theme for that first recording is outstanding.

The suites are full of enjoyable music, especially in dance forms, with colorful instrumentation, notably in Rameau's case. All three suites end in impressive chaconnes, and Marais's evocation of a tempest is a landmark in pictorial music.

Tafelmusik's fruity period sound is an established quality by now, and Lamon's stylistic leadership is surefire. The Mondonville motet, the longest single item here, is a vivid representative of the French Baroque's Grand Siècle style in sacred writing. It has at least one chorus with fascinating instrumentation and a long, beautiful soprano aria. The four vocal soloists sound just a bit lightweight, but soprano Ann Monoyios is a sensitive and pleasing singer, as always. Ivars Taurins, director of the choir, conducts this Mondonville performance.

The sound, despite different dates, is quite fine. Unfortunately, this release is an example of the practice so many labels follow in reissuing older recordings: absolutely no notes on the music, much less any vocal texts. Still, this is a very generous program, and altogether satisfying in its own right.
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The performances are two violinists, gambist, and harpsichordist. The violin playing is not quite polished as we have come to expect from period musicians, but all four players present intelligent and well-paced performances. The sound could be a little brighter, but it is quite acceptable.

Good writing is based on clear and alert thinking.

**Best of French Baroque**
Tafelmusik/ Jeanne Lamon, Ivans Taurins
Tafelmusik 1029—73:26

The renowned Canadian ensemble seems to be taking stock now of its recording work and reissuing a good deal of it in “Best of” packages.

The one at hand certainly presents an attractive program of mostly orchestral works. There are three suites of excerpts from as many French operas: Jean-Baptiste Lully’s *Phaeton* (1683), Marin Marais’s *Alcyone* (1706), and Jean-Philippe Rameau’s *Dardanus* (1739). The remaining space is accorded the Grand Motet *Domine Regnavit* by Jean-Joseph de Mondeville (1711-72).

The suites are full of enjoyable music, especially in dance forms, with colorful instrumentation, notably in Rameau’s case. All three suites end in impressive chaconnes, and Marais’s evocation of a tempest is a landmark in pictorial music.

Tafelmusik’s fruity period sound is an established quality by now, and Lamon’s stylistic leadership is surefire. The Mondeville motet, the longest single item here, is a vivacious representative of the French Baroque’s *Grand Siecle* style in sacred writing. It has at least one chorus with fancy instrumentation and a long, beautiful soprano aria. The four vocal soloists sound just a bit lightweight, but soprano Ann Monoyios is a sensitive and pleasing singer, as always. Ivans Taurins, director of the choir, conducts this Mondeville performance.

These recordings range in date from 2001 to 2012. The Rameau and Mondeville performances have appeared before in CBC releases, and the other two have appeared on the ensemble’s own label.

The sound, despite different dates, is quite fine. Unfortunately, this release is an example of the practice so many labels follow in reissuing older recordings: absolutely no notes on the music, much less any vocal texts. Still, this is a very generous program, and altogether satisfying in its own right.

**Amaryllis**
Nina Stern, recorders; Glen Velez, perc
MSR 1577—54:20

Nina Stern is an excellent performer on the recorder, and this is a collection of solo works for the instrument with improvised drum patterns by Glen Velez. The selections include her own arrangements of traditional Armenian songs, medieval monophonic dances (‘Lamento di Tristano’ and ‘Chominciamento di Gioia’), four selections from Jacob van Eyck’s solo recorder collection of 1644, a Telemann solo “flute” fantasy, and a 17th Century arrangement of ‘Greensleeves’.

The similarity of timbres of both the recorders and drums can be a bit tiring in longer pieces, such as the seven-minute ‘Chominciamento di Gioia’, but the course of whole recording variety is created through Stern’s use of seven different instruments (two pieces are played on the alto chalumeau, an early type of clarinet) and Velez’s use of seven different drums and a “Sruti Box” to supply an occasional drone on two tracks. One of the most effective follows ‘Greensleeves’.

His De Profundis Clamavi, a setting of Vulgate Psalm 129, is notable for its contrast of mournful sections with poignant chromatic harmony and more lively writing. The program concludes with *Da mihi, Domine* by Franz Tunder. All of these pieces are customary 17th-Century procedure of setting the text as a succession of brief sections that express the character of the successive verses as opposed to fully developed movements such as we find in the mature Bach church cantatas.

The program is filled out with two instrumental pieces. Johann Philipp Krieger (1649-1725) studied with Rosenmüller in Venice and Pasquini in Rome among others. The Italian influence is clearly present in the Trio Sonatas in D minor heard here. The five-part Paduana in D minor by Johann Schop (d 1667) is an earlier 17th-Century style: paired dance pieces, one slow in tempo and the other quick.

The performances are highly creditable, but they do not have quite the polish and finesse of the best early music ensembles. Baritone Mauro Borgioni, who has extensive experience in early baroque opera, has a substantial, even heroic voice in the mid to upper range, yet lithe enough to deliver the often florid passages heard here. He tends to fade in the lower register, and much of the time he is overbalanced by the instruments. The instrumental ensemble Accademia Hermans was founded in 2000 by organist Fabio Ciofini. Most of the vocal music here calls for an accompaniment of one or two violins, one or two gambas, and continuo.

**Abendmusik—Bass Cantatas**
J C Bach, Weckmann, Krieger, Rosenm & Krieger, Schnop, Buhns, Tunder
Mauro Borgioni, bar; Accademia Hermans/ Fabio Ciofini—Brilliant 95033—63 minutes

Abendmusik was the name given to sacred concerts presented at St Mary’s Church in Lübeck on the last two Sundays of the Trinity season and in the following Sundays of Advent. They began under Franz Tunder (1614-67), who was the church’s organist from 1641 to 1667. They started out as morning organ recitals, but were moved to the evening as early as 1646. Tunder later introduced vocal works in these concerts. Under Dietrich Buxtehude, Tunder’s successor, the concerts became more ambitious, with works for chorus and orchestra. The present recording contains seven modestly scored pieces by German composers of the later 17th Century, probably typical of the kind of music that might have been heard at these concerts.

5 of the 7 pieces are vocal works for a solo bass voice and strings with continuo. 2 have German texts, and the program begins with the lament *Wie bist du denn, O Gott* by JS Bach’s elder second cousin, Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703). This is followed by the cantata *Kommst her zu mir* (“Come unto me, all ye who labor...”) by Matthias Weckmann (1607-74), a work that dates from 1664.

Johann Rosenmüller (c1619-1684) began his career in Leipzig, but spent the greater part of it in Italy, where he held positions at St Mark’s in Venice and other institutions of that city. His De Lamentatione is a liturgical setting of verses from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, complete with settings of the Hebrew initials. Nicolas Bruhns (1665-1697) in his short life left a small but fine body of organ and sacred vocal works. His *De Profundis Clamavi*, a setting of Vulgate Psalm 129, is notable for its contrast of mournful sections with poignant chromatic harmony and more lively writing. The program concludes with *Da mihi, Domine* by Franz Tunder.

The performances are two violinists, gambist, and harpsichordist. The violin playing is not quite polished as we have come to expect from period musicians, but all four players present intelligent and well-paced performances. The sound could be a little brighter, but it is quite acceptable.

Well then, take this for what it is.
Baroque Bass Cantatas
Klaus Mertens, bar; Accademia Daniel/ Shalev Ah-Di—CPO 777 646—74 minutes
Ute Poetsch paints a quaint picture of musical life in Mügeln and other small towns in 17th
and 18th Century Germany. Lacking the pro-
fessional institutions of larger cities, it was the
musical associations made up of amateur
musicians and ordinary citizens that support-
ed the essential cultural tradition. In the
Saxon town of Mügeln participation in church
services, performed at weddings and funerals, and gathered four times a year for an
evening of art music and libation.

The program culled here from the Mügeln
archive yields Johann Theodor Römühl's
cantatas each by Georg Philipp Telemann,
Christian Wolff, and a Thuringian composer
known only as Liebhold. The combination
shows off the high quality of lesser-known
composers' works compared to Telemann's.
In fact, the Arcos Altri with Ensemble Masques's
recording (ATMA 2660; Sept/Oct 2013) I would say that, here again, while the tone of Ars Lyrica is nuanced, Ensemble Masques plays with wider dynamic
range. Ars Lyrica's tempo is slower, too, but
this time it does not yield quite the degree of
affect it does in the Bach aria. The tempo in
Christoph Bernhard's 'Was Betrübst du Dich,
Meine Seele' is also a bit slow, which creates
more opportunity for ornamentation in the
violins; but one sometimes loses the tension,
which causes the piece to drag a bit.

Krieger's 'Du Mein Leben' is lovely, as is
Erlebach's 'Trocknet Euch Ihr Heissen Zähren.'
Erlebach's aria is enough to console the
tormented heart. Angel's voice is very sub-
tle, and Ars Lyrica simply follows suit, espe-
cially to support his execution of the exquisite
sequences on 'Zähren'—tears. What beauty!
Yet Mertens's keyboard playing is out-
standing, too. Buxtehude's settings of Nun
Mein Seel den Herren, on the organ, and 'Auf
Meinen Lieben Gott,' on the harpsichord,
are lovely. His performance of Scheidt's monu-
mental chorale variation 'Warrum Betrübst du
Dich, Meine Seele' in 12 versets, is full of
expression. Texts and notes are in
English.

Heart & Soul: German Baroque
Ronan Weltez, dir; Michael Chance (Chandos
675, Nov/Dec 2001)
This collection by Cencic of Neapolitan opera
arias, some of which are rarities, is not what
I had expected to hear. Before, follows his earlier collections by Han-
der (Mar/Apr 2011) and Hasse (July/Aug 2014).
All the well-known composers of the
Neapolitan school are represented: Alessandro
Scarlatti (4), Leonardo Leo (3), Nicola Porpora
(2), Leonardo Vinci (1), and Giovanni Pergole-
si (1). The range of emotion from tender expres-
sion to impetuous rage is wide, and these com-
posers developed a very effective musical lan-
guage to represent these different affects.

A great deal depends on the singer and
musicians to communicate these passions in a
way that is not mere repetition. Where the
opportunity to find this recording disappointing, Cencic has
gained positive notices in the reviews noted
The recording was made at the Collegiate Church of St Maria Maggiore in Collescopio. The single-manual organ there dates from 1678, built by the Flemish builder Wilhelm Hermans, who worked mainly in Italy, where he is estimated to have built around 90 instruments. Only two survive. As heard here, the organ has a beautiful refined tone, but Ciofini’s continuo playing seems somewhat aggressive by modern standards. Where a continuous harmonic instrument most often supplies a relatively unobtrusive harmonic support to the obbligato writing, here the organ tone is quite prominent, sometimes dominating the ensemble sound. Ciofini often makes changes of registration in a piece or even in a movement. This is especially so in Rosenmüller’s ‘De Lamentatione’. In spite of these peculiarities, I can recommend this recording to listeners curious to hear these rarities of sacred music from the generation before JS Bach.

In the past I have often complained about the shortcomings of the printed material that comes with many of the recordings from Brilliant. The present instance is among the worst I have ever seen. The program notes (in translation) are barely coherent. Some statements are sheer nonsense, like the opening assertion that this late 17th-Century music is “sandwiched between the Reformation (c1519) and the beginning of the War [1618]”. Texts and translations are not given. Sometimes they can be obtained from the label’s website, but I could not find them there.

Baroque Bass Cantatas
Klaus Mertens, bar; Accademia Daniel/ Shalev Ad-El—CPO 777646—74 minutes
Ute Poetzsch paints a quaint picture of musical life in Mügeln and other small towns in 17th- and 18th Century Germany. Lacking the professional institutions of larger cities, it was the musical associations made up of amateur musicians and ordinary citizens that supported the essential cultural tradition. In the Saxon town of Mügeln participation was widespread. Church services, performed at weddings and funerals, and gathered four times a year for an evening of art music and libation.

The program culled here from the Mügeln archive yields Johann Theodor Römhart’s cantata on the death of vermilion, and Johann Christian Wolff, and a Thurinian composer known only as Liebhold. The combination shows off the high quality of lesser-known composers’ works compared to Telemann’s. In fact, in the Arcs of Wolff and Liebhold are quite a revelation.

This is Klaus Mertens’s second recording of Baroque Bass Cantatas with the Accademia Daniel (CPO 777 298; 2010), and Mertens’s voice is as rich, just as full of subtlety and vigor as ever. Liebhold’s ‘Des Menschen Sohn ist Kommen’ and Telemann’s ‘Der Herr ist König’ are particularly striking for their vocal display passages. In the aria ‘Also Können Fromme Seelen liebhold, Liebhold pairs passage work in the voice with obbligato violin. Every movement of Telemann’s cantata is replete with fioritura. The aria ‘Von dem an Stehet dein Stuhl Feste’ has contrasted between the Reformation (c1519) and the beginning of the War [1618]. Sometimes they can be obtained from the label’s website, but I could not find them there.

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above, and his voice is typical for countertenors who have followed the path to baroque opera and its vast repertoire of arias written for castrati. But here I find it difficult to follow his choices and I believe his control of baroque ornamentation, especially in the many trills indicated in the original manuscripts (a few of which he omits) is not very clear. I do not know what entered into the decisions concerning the recording of the "rage" aria from Porpora's Germanico in Germania, 'Qual turbine che scende', but its slow tempo lacked any real tempestuous qualities to match its text. Cencic apparently has many of the qualities desired in today's opera world, but still lacks some of the virtuosic and musical qualities that were taught in those famous Neapolitan conservatories.

The recording ends not with a flashy aria but rather a light-weight concerted harpsichord by Domenico Auletta (d.1747); I would have preferred some sinfonias from the unrecorded operas. The short booklet essay is informative, and full texts and translations are included. I would recommend Cecilia Bartoli's collection of similar arias (Jan/Feb 2010: 286) for a more effective representation of the virtuosity and passion in this repertoire.

**BREWER**

**Letztes Gluck**

**BRAHMS:** Letztes Gluck; Nachtwaehle I; SCHU-MANN,C; Abendfeier in Venedig; Gondoliera; REINECKE: Morgenlied; Fruehlingsdrang; DIET-RICH: Fruehlingsdrang; Jagdlied; JENNER: Die Zeit Geht Schnell; Herz Mich ein Wenig; DAVIDSON: Allesende Nacht; WUNDERER: Atemlos Nacht; Es Fällt ein Stern; Einsamkeit; RICHTER: Hab zur Letzten Guten Nacht; Wanderer Nachtlied; Gute Nacht; HERZOGENBERG: In der Nacht; REINTHILLER: Komm, Nachtigall; Gute Nacht

Berlin Chamber Choir/ Stefan Rauh

Rondeau 6103—56 minutes

Everyone here (besides Brahms himself, obviously) was an FO—A friend of Johannes, which is why this recording is subtitled Brahms und seine Freunde. ‘Letztes Gluck’ (Final Bliss), from Brahms’s Op. 104 songs, gives the release its main title.

This is of interest for a couple of reasons. First, most of us have never encountered the music, and the pleasant songs here. Clara Schumann’s ‘Evening Banquet in Venice’ is actually a juicy Ave Maria that gets

**Poetry in Music**

**HARRIS:** Faire is the Heaven; Bring us, O Lord God; TIPPETT: Dance; Clarion Air; WELKES: When David Heard; MACMILLAN: The Gallant Weaver; GURNEY: Since I Believe in God the Father Almighty; RAMSEY: When David Heard; BRITTEN: Hymn to St Cecilia; RUBBRA: There is a Spirit; ETERNITIE: EAST: When David Heard; HOWELLS: Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing; PEARSSL: Lay a Garland; TOMKINS: When David Heard

The Sixteen/ Harry Christophers

Coro 16134—71 minutes

This program of unaccompanied choral works was chosen in large part because of the literary distinction of their texts and the brilliance of the composers’ response to them. Among the authors are Edmund Spenser, Christopher Fry, Robert Burns, Robert Bridges, WH Auden, Beaumont & Fletcher, Robert Herrick, and John Donne. To these may be added Helen Waddell’s moving and elegant translation of Prudentius (348-413) in Howell’s ‘Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing; and the Quaker preacher John Nisbet’s (1616-66) secunda voce, which Ms Waddell represents by his eight settings of medieval texts that jump back and forth between this world and the next. They’re performed beautifully, by the way, with a rich, supple sound placed at the service of the mercurial sentiments of the score. The most affecting interlude of the entire program is ‘Ye that pasen by’; Jesus’ heartrending commentary on his own death.

Of the four longer a cappella works, the stunner is the oddly titled Corpus Christi with Cat and Mouse; by Peter Maxwell Davies. What a nutty tour de force this is! It’s the lullaby from the ‘Corpus Christi Carol’ that gives structure to the 19-minute piece. But the 16th Century manuscript that inspired the composer is a potpourri of poetry, food recipes, bath problems, treatises on orthopedics and ink-making, and insights into right living. The cleverness of the music makes for brilliant story-telling, but what the storyline is is anybody’s guess! I had never heard a note of it before, and I look forward to many happy sessions trying to figure it all out.

Another attention-getter is the ‘Alleluia’ James MacMillan composed in honor of HelmutBilling’s distinguished tenure as director of the Oregon Bach Festival. Quotations from Bach, Dufay and Gesualdo are inserted into the music, and MacMillan’s juxtapositions of tonal and nearly atonal elements create a sense of spiritual uplift that’s quite moving. If you admire the composer, you won’t want to miss this. If you don’t, it would be a good opportunity to give him another chance.

John Taverner’s Hymnen celebrates the Virgin Mary and sounds like the spirits of the Song of Songs and the Sufis of Islam. The choral hymn comes back numerous times over the work’s 14 minutes, but so does a shimmering mantra that tinges with spiritual intention in all its variations.

Rounding out the set is the late Jonathan Harvey’s metaphysical jaunt that has the soul gliding through a busy, unruly universe echoing with whistles, hisses, glissandos, clicks, bird calls, and heaven knows what else. I found it more of a chore than these other works but not because of the performance, which is spectacular.

The engineering is beyond reproach, and
above, and his voice is typical for countertenors who have followed the path to baroque opera and its vast repertoire of arias written for castratos. But here I find it difficult to follow his voice and I believe his control of baroque ornamentation, especially in the many trills indicated in the original manuscripts, is not very clear. I do not know what entered into the decisions concerning the recording of the "rage" aria from Porpora's Germanico in Germania, 'Quel turbine che scende', but its slow tempo lacked any real tempestuous qualities to match its text. Cencic apparently has many of the qualities desired in today's opera world, but still lacks some of the virtuosic and musical qualities that were taught in those famous Neapolitan conservatories.

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Berlin Chamber Choir/ Stefan Rauch

Rondeau 6193—56 minutes

Everyone here (besides Brahms himself, obvi- ously) was an FÖ—a friend of Johannes, which is why this chapter is subtitled Brahms und seine Freunde. ‘Letztes Gluck’ (Final Bliss), from Brahms’s Op. 104 songs, gives the release its main title.

This is of interest for a couple of reasons. First, most of us have never encountered the music, and the pleasant songs here. Clara Schumann’s ‘Evening Banquet in Venice’ is actually a juicy Ave Maria that gets the bells tolling along the Adriatic. Two of the zippiest songs on the program (the only two zippy songs on the program, come to think of it) are by Albert Dietrich (1829-1908), a stud- ent of Robert Schumann who was coached by both Brahms and that great violinist, Joseph Joachim. I also suspect you’ll have fun listen- ing to the music of the unknowns, then reading the biographical notes to find out who they were and how they were connected to Brahms.

That said, I wouldn’t call any of this “edge of your chair” fare. You can tell from the song titles that if you removed spring, morning, and night from the musical discussion, the rest of the program would be virtual silence. That sameness of subject matter and the placid mood of most of the songs had me checking my watch more than once. The choir is good but not as warmly expressive as the best, espe- cially in the soprano department. So when you get tired of exploring Brahms’s rolodex, you could find yourself getting a bite as you exotil spring and await sunrise for the unptneth time. Translations and informative mini-bios are there to help you pass the time.

GREENFIELD

Poetry in Music

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The predominant but by no means exclu- sive mood of the program is elegiac. The book- ends are Stygian settings of ‘A Pleasure’ by Tippett and ‘Bring us, O Lord God’ (Donne). Each is a contemplation of heaven. The pillars of the program are four Jacobean settings of ‘When David Heard’, the king’s lamentation for his son Absalom from 2 Samuel 18:33. The text is not exactly as it appears in the King James Ver- sion, yet as program annotator Andrew Stew- art points out, there are more than a dozen set- tings of it from that period. This leads to the plausible conjecture that these pieces were intended as compositions for the untimely death in 1612 of Henry Frederick Stuart, Prince of Wales and heir to the throne of James I. The four settings here are by Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623), Robert Ramsey (c1590-1644), Michael East (c1580-1648), and Thomas Tomkins (1572-1656).

Readers of my reviews will know that I have long admired Harry Christophers and The Sixteen. The present recording fully sus- tains my high regard. Apart from one unfortu- nate solo countertenor moment in Britten’s ‘Hymn to St Cecilia—a line that verges on the unmeasurable, at least for a countertenor—these performances are the best models of vocal refinement, choral discipline, and interpretive sensitivity. I would be hard pressed to name better per- formances of any of these works, and that includes the Britten. I would not describe the recorded sound as warm, but it is clear and, in its way, quite radiant.

GATENS

British Choral

DAVIES: Corpus Christi with Cat and Mouse; MACMILLAN: Alleluia, HAREY: How Could the Soul Not Take Flight; TAVENER: Schoun Hym- nes; BRITTEN: Sacred & Profane

Stuttgart Radio Vocal Ensemble/ Marcus Creed

Hanssler 93342—77 minutes

The Vokalensemble has been taking us on a potpourri of poetry, food recipes, math prob- lems, treatises on orthopedics and ink-making, and insights into right living. The cleverness of the music makes for brilliant story-telling, but what the storyline is is anybody’s guess! I had never heard a note of this before, and I look forward to many happy sessions trying to fig- ure it all out.

Another attention-getter is the ‘Alleluia’ James MacMillan composed in honor of Hel- mut Billing’s distinguished tenure as director of the Oregon Bach Festival. Quotations from Bach’s choral and organ music, and MacMillan’s juxtapositions of tonal and nearly atonal elements create a sense of spiritual uplift that’s quite moving. If you admire the composer, you won’t want to miss this. If you don’t, it would be a good opportunity to give him another chance.

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Rounding out the set is the late Jonathan Harvey’s metaphysical jaunt that has the soul gliding through a busy, unruly universe echo- ing with whispers, hisses, glissandos, clicks, bird calls, and heaven knows what else. I found it more of a choral than these other works, but not because of the performance, which is spectacular.

The engineering is beyond reproach, and
the booklet is full of thoughts about the music. The text supplied for Harvey’s Flight is helpful. Hymnen, on the other hand, is posted only in German, while for Britten and Davies the archetext is hard to understand. MacMillan—like America’s Randall Thompson—requires only the world Alleluia to make his point.

GREENFIELD

Through Darkness to the Light

SCHNEIDER: Fire of Innocence in the Darkness of the World; CADARIO: La Rosa de los Vientos; CONSOLACION: Misa Firense

Die Singphoniker; Taipei Male Choir/ Nieh Yen-Hsiang—CP0 55005—79 minutes

When not warbling lieder by Mendelssohn and Schubert, the male sextet Singphoniker has been known to let its hair down on the pop side of the repertoire. I can remember them crooning lovely bits of Lennon & McCartney, and in our last issue I was pleased to report on their feisty way with the satiric songs of George Kreisler (Oehms 1807).

But this program performed in tandem with an excellent choir’s choice from Taiwan is anything but a walk on the lighter side. True, there are some lush, embracing sonorities in the Mass composed by Filipino composer Alejandro Consolacion (b 1980). The rest of the songs bring the engine to down front. Everything is proceeding handsomely; then all of a sudden you get a couple of minutes that sound like they were recorded at your kid’s middle school concert. Weird. Excellent notes are supplied. Blake’s poem is given in English, but La Rosa comes in Spanish and German only. There’s no English for the Mass either, but who cares?

GREENFIELD

Transcendent Glory III

GORDON: Every Stop on the F Train; VOON: Semaphore Conductus; MONK: Things Heaven & Hell; RILEY: Another Secret Equation; CORIGLIANO: One Sweet Morning D’RIVERA: Tembandamba

Kronos Quartet; NY Young People’s Chorus/ Francis J. Nunez—Cantaloupe 21113—50 minutes

There are plenty of children’s choirs you can dial up if you fancy a bit of Rutter, Chilcott, or perhaps a suite of Folksongs from Around the World. The Young People’s Chorus of New York is not one of them. These kids take their thorny, highly rhythmic contemporary fare straight. And the more ethnically-charged it is, the better they like it. You can hear that ethnic flair on display in Paquito D’Rivera’s “Tembanduma”—a jaunty, jumpy salute to the main character of the poem ‘Majestad Negra’ by the Puerto Rican poet Luis Pales Matos. Another New York state of mind is induced by Michael Gordon’s ‘Every Stop on the F Train’, which has the singers intoning the names of the 45 stops as the subway car makes its way through Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. Sometimes the stations are sung in unison, sometimes canonically. I’m not sure how many more times I’ll need to board and ride, mind you, but clever is clever. The strangest thing here is Bora Voön’s ‘Semaphore Conductus’, an ode to communication through the sounds of conch shells, walkie-talkies, gramophones, cell phones, and other devices of synthetic noise. It, too, is clever, but a doubtful candidate for repeated listening.

What I do admire is Terry Riley’s 16-minute commentary on clever nonsense as an antidote to the fatuous nonsense that attends our 21st Century lives. In three sections—each of them aided and abetted by the Kronos Quartet—it’s an engaging piece that runs the gamut from despair to a cathartic release of tension. The singers do amazing things with it. As with other Young People’s releases I reviewed a couple of years back, the singing is recorded in a cold, super-close acoustic that doesn’t flatten anybody. Bravo to the kids; boo to the engineers.

GREENFIELD

Open Your Heart

Blitzstein, Debussy, Falla, Selber, Villa-Lobos, Walton, Bizet; Laura Claycomb, s; Marc Teicholz, g

Delos 3483—52 minutes

This program of music for guitar and voice has some interesting moments, but I’m not sure I’m sold. The pieces originally written for guitar and voice—the Four French Folk Songs by Hungarian composer Matyas Gyorgy Seiber (1905-60), the Villa-Lobos ‘Modinha’ and the aria from Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5, and the cycle Anon in Love, written by William Walton for Peter Pears and Julian Bream—work nicely. Teicholz plays with sensitivity and Claycomb has an interesting voice, but it’s not warm and her “ah” vowel is too dark and slightly swallowed.

But the other transcriptions, for all their good intent (notes claim that Debussy “surely had strumming on his mind” in his ‘Mandolin’ and ‘En Sourdine’), fall short. The ‘Mandolin’ is acceptable, but ‘En Sourdine’, one of the most intimate of his songs, lacks any warmth; the guitar sounds percussive and empty. Some of the Falla songs (Falla songs again! I’m tired of them!) are OK—‘Asturiana’, for example—but ‘Nana’ doesn’t work at all.

The Selber pieces are the best part of the program, light and emotive. The instrument. The Walton songs are difficult but effective, and performed well here. Claycomb is at her best in the faster pieces, the voice brighter and more energized.

To put it simply, the pieces on the program originally for guitar are the best part of the program; but the transcriptions, for the most part, aren’t great. When you think about it, it’s not surprising. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

Duo Schumann, Mendelssohn, Cornelius

Lucy Crowe, s; William Berger, b; Iain Burnside, p—Delphian 34167—60 minutes

As the title suggests, this a program of (mainly) duets by Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, and German composer Peter Cornelius (1824-74). The Cornelius duets are particularly rich, both in the sometimes surprising harmonic and the close writing of the two vocal lines. Mendelssohn’s ‘Herbststift’ is the first duet with real independence of the two voices. It’s a nice contrast to the closer writing of the other duets and made me appreciate all the more the occasional solo songs included here.

Another favorite moment of mine is Schumann’s sweet and intimate ‘Cradle-Song—At the Bedside of a Sick Child’, a delicate ending to a great program.

The singers are both excellent. Berger has a warm tone and Crowe’s voice is both rich and full. The solos—Berger’s performance of Schumann’s ‘Dein Angesicht’ and Crowe’s ‘Frühling im Sommer’—are lovely. The voices are wonderful together, too, and Burnside is (as usual) another terrific voice of sorts in his warm, supportive playing. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

Lenoriana

Boyle, Altman, Hagen, Hennessey

Elen Eley, bar; JI Penna, p

Affetto 1501—67 minutes

This album of songs by contemporary composers is the set of nine songs by Benjamin CS Boyle on poems of Edgar Allan Poe; Two Songs from Mountain Interval, settings by Laurie Altman of Robert Frost poems; Larkin Songs by Daron Aric Hagen; and TThree Emily Dickinson Songs by Martin Hennessy. The Altman songs and one of the Hennessy songs were written for Eley. All the songs are recorded here for the first time.

Stephen Estep praised an earlier recording
the booklet is full of thoughts about the music. The text supplied for Harvey's _Flight_ is helpful. _Hymnen_, on the other hand, is posted only in German, while for Britten and Davies the archivist's task is hard to understand. MacMillan—like America's Randall Thompson—requires only the world Alleluia to make his point.

GREENFIELD

**Through Darkness to the Light**

**SCHNEIDER: Fire of Innocence in the Darkness of the World; CADARIO: La Rosa de los Vientos; CONSOLACION: Misa Firenze**

Die Singphoniker; Taipei Male Choir/ Nieh Yen-Hsiang—CPO 555005—79 minutes

When not warbling _lieder_ by Mendelssohn and Schubert, the male sextet Singphoniker has been known to let its hair down on the pop side of the repertoire. I can remember them crooning lovely bits of Lennon & McCartney, at your kid's middle school concert. Weird. But this program performed in tandem with an excellent _lieder_ by Mendelssohn and Schubert, the male sextet Singphoniker has been known to let its hair down on the pop side of the repertoire. I can remember them crooning lovely bits of Lennon & McCartney, at your kid's middle school concert. Weird. But this program performed in tandem with an excellent _lieder_ by Mendelssohn and Schubert.

But this program performed in tandem with an excellent _lieder_ by Mendelssohn and Schubert. It is a spiritual journey grounded in Christian and Buddhist principles. Musical numerology is involved, with the triune God in nine sections by composer Enjott Schneider. The Young People's Chorus of New York is not one of them. These kids take their art seriously. As with the other Young People's release I reviewed a couple of years back, the singing is recorded in a cold, super-close acoustic that doesn't flatten anybody. Bravo to the kids; too bad for the engineers.

GREENFIELD

**Transcendent Glory II**

**GORDON: Every Stop on the F Train; VOON: Semaphore Conductus; MONK: Things Heaven & Hell; RILEY: Another Secret Equation; CORIGLIANO: One Sweet Morning D'RIVERA: Tembandamba**

Kronos Quartet; NY Young People's Chorus/ Francisco J. Nunez—Cantaloupe 21113—50 minutes

There are plenty of children's choirs you can dial up if you fancy a bit of Rutter, Chilcott, or perhaps a suite of Folksongs from Around the World. The Young People's Chorus of New York is not one of them. These kids take their art seriously. As with the other Young People's release I reviewed a couple of years back, the singing is recorded in a cold, super-close acoustic that doesn't flatten anybody. Bravo to the kids; too bad for the engineers.

GREENFIELD

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Blitzstein, Debussy, Falla, Seiber, Villa-Lobos, Walton, Bizet

Laura Claycomb, s; Marc Teicholz, g

Delos 3483—52 minutes

This program of music for guitar and voice has some interesting moments, but I'm not sure I'm sold. The pieces originally written for guitar and voice—the *Four French Folk Songs* by Hungarian composer Matyas Gyorgy Seiber (1905-60), the Villa-Lobos 'Modinha' and the aria from *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*, and the cycle *Anon in Love*, written by William Walton for Peter Pears and Julian Bream—work nicely. Teicholz plays with sensitivity and Claycomb has a nice voice, but it's not warm and her "ah" vowel is too dark and slightly swallowed.

But the other transcriptions, for all their good intent (notes claim that Debussy "surely had strumming on his mind in" his 'Mandolin' and 'En Sourdine'), fall short. The 'Mandolin' is acceptable, but 'En Sourdine', one of the most intimate of his songs, lacks any warmth; and the guitar sounds percussive and empty. Some of the Falla songs (Falla songs again! I'm tired of them!) are OK—'Asturiana', for example—but 'Nana' doesn't work at all.

The Seiber pieces are the best part of the program, but the transcriptions of the Falla songs are not a good fit for the instrument. The Walton songs are difficult, effective, and performed well here. Claycomb is at her best in the faster pieces, the voice brighter and more energized.

To put it simply, the pieces on the program originally for guitar are the best part of the program; but the transcriptions of the Falla songs are not a good fit for the instrument. The Walton songs are difficult, effective, and performed well here.

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Schumann, Mendelssohn, Cornelius

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As the title suggests, this a program of (mainly) duets by Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, and German composer Peter Cornelius (1824-74). The Cornelius duets are particularly rich, both in the sometimes surprising harmony and the close writing of the two vocal lines. Mendelssohn's 'Herbstlied' is the first duet with real independence of the two voices. It's a nice contrast to the closer writing of the other duets and made me appreciate all the more the occasional solo songs included here. Another favorite moment of mine is Schumann's sweet and intimate 'Cradle-Song—at The Bedshe of a Sick Child', a delicate ending to a great program.

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HEISEL

**Lenoriana**

Boyle, Altman, Hagen, Hennessy

Elen Eley, bar; JJ Penna, p

Affetto 1501—67 minutes

This album of songs by contemporary composers is available in English and in a set of nine songs by Benjamin CS Boyle on poems of Edgar Allan Poe; _Two Songs from Mountain Interval_, settings by Laurie Altman of Robert Frost poems; _Larkin Songs_ by Daron Aric Hagen; and _Three Emily Dickinson Songs_ by Martin Hennessy. The Altman songs and one of the Hennessy songs were written for Eley. All the songs are recorded here for the first time.

Stephen Estep praised an earlier recording

GREENFIELD

*March/April 2016*
by Eley and Penna of songs by Hagen, Hennessy, and other American composers (J/F 2009). He liked Eley’s clarity of diction and called him “one of the best singers of English I’ve ever heard.” He appreciated the shaping of the text is always clear, which is fortunate since no printed texts are supplied here for Hagen’s songs.

Eley and Penna do a satisfactory job of presenting these songs. Penna is able to capture both the drama and the gentleness of these songs, but I don’t find Eley’s voice imbued with the lovely or compelling, especially in his upper range. At louder dynamics and when he pushes it, his voice sounds wooly; he’s at his best when he sings softly.

The chief reason to obtain this release is to hear songs of these current composers. Hagen’s Larkin Songs show a great economy of style and are especially gripping as they supply, in the composer’s words, “a portrait of a man looking back over the course of his life.”

The recorded sound is fine. Brief notes and some texts.

R MOORE

Neere

Hahn, Chausson, Duparc
Veronique Gens, s; Susan Manoff, p
Alpha 215—66 minutes

The melodie, the French counterpart to the German lied, emerged around 1830 as the successor to the romance. Where the romance was lighter in nature, it maintained its delicacy but added new depth and complexity prompted largely by the texts available to composers by leading Parmarians and Symbolists of the time (Leconte de Lisle, Armand Silvestre, Theodore de Banville, Paul Verlaine, Paul Bourget, Maurice Rupin).

The golden age of the melodie was the last three decades of the 19th Century. This program presents 24 selections in alternating groups by three of the leading composers of melodies at the time: the charmer Reynaldo Hahn, the melancholic Henri Duparc, and the elegiac Ernse Ariend (as the notes aptly characterize them).

The 10 songs of Hahn here show why his music is characterized by what Nicolas Southon in his program notes calls “charm tempered by a classical spirit.” The program opens with ‘Néere’, a work Southon describe as “limpid, flowing, time suspended, imbued with nostalgia”—a description that applies to most of the program. That is followed by ‘Trois Jours de Vendange’, which is striking in the way its initial jauntness gradually gives way to mourning as the piano inne the enunciates its loneliness. The program ends with his the sprightly ‘Printemps’.

Five Duparc songs are the most intense of the program. Southon calls attention to their somber atmospheres, opulent harmonies, and orchestral accompaniments so readily evident in ‘Phidylé’. ‘L’invitation au Voyage’ with its rippling accompaniment suggests the call of the water to wander and “seek the land that resembles you.”

Chausson’s Sept Melodies, Op. 2 and two other songs show his gift for descriptive settings of texts. You hear the butterflies fluttering by in ‘Les Papillons’. ‘Le Temps des Lilas’ is the final section of Poeme de L’Amour et de la Mer and is the only part of Chausson’s large-scale cantata to be published separately.

These performances exquisitely express the nostalgia, the somberness, the introspective quality of the songs; they are discreet without missing the intensity or the ambivalence of the texts. Gens has an intoxicatingly lovely voice that is perfectly suited to this music. The darker tones of her luxuriously creamy voice get put to wonderful use here and reveal the richness and depth of her singing.

I heard Mark Bradly as “a genuine recital with Sandrine Piau and realized then what a superb accompanist she is. Her excellence irritates the program (as in the way she expertly conveys the shimmering coloristic effects in the accompaniment). Together their pacing and unity of approach is magical. These performances capture the expressive nuances of the music marvelously. It will be hard to find a recording that does these songs more exquisitely than here.

The booklet deserves praise. Many CDs come with notes in minuscule print, but these are eminently readable. The notes describing the music are concise and cogent. Best of all, the texts are printed side-by-side over two pages in French, English, and German.

In every way this is a triumph. If you have not yet been won over to French melodies, this will do it.

R MOORE

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--ScienceDaily.com

The best thing is simply to listen to this music. The texts are about love, homesickness, separation, and longing to regain what has been lost. Some of these texts include finely veiled reference to the anguished history of Albania and Kosovo. The program of 11 songs includes traditional folk songs and works more recently composed. You can hear the musical heritage of the Ottoman Empire in this music. Some songs have a gypsy quality and others include rhythmic plucking, slapping of strings, overtone playing, and coloristic touches that may be ancient but sound very modern.

Goranci has a dark and Slavic sound and does an effective job of conveying the plaintive quality of this music. She is particularly good in the overtones playing, and coloristic touches that may be ancient but sound very modern.

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Here’s an opportunity to hear music from a composer. Where the accompaniment is technically complex. The notes rightly describe ‘Die Loreley’ as “a genuine recital with a prelude, a recitative, and an aria” and Immler brings the best in these songs, but with Schumann’s superior Dichterliebe settings of ‘Im Wunderschönen Monat Mai’ and ‘Ich Hab’ im Traum Geweinet’ so well known, Franz’s settings are not likely to emerge from the musical heights.

The SACD sound is excellent. Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

Lost Generation

Stephan, Butterworth, Coles
Barbara Krieger, s; Horenstein Ensemble
Acousence 455—51 minutes

Berlin-based photographer Martin Lengemann has a keen personal interest in the horrors of the First World War and has been committed for decades to promoting reconciliation and understanding between Germans and Britons through his project “Die Narbe/The Scar.” His great love of classical music led him
by Eley and Penna of songs by Hagen, Hennessy, and other American composers (J/F 2009). He liked Eley’s clarity of diction and called him “one of the best singers of English I’ve ever heard and his shaping of the text is always clear, which is fortunate since no printed texts are supplied here for Hagen’s songs.

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The recorded sound is fine. Brief notes and some texts.

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I heard Mark Padmore recital with Sandrine Piau and realized then what a superb accompanist she is. Her excellence irradiates the program (as in the way she expertly conveys the shimmering coloristic effects in the accompaniment). Together their pacing and unity of approach is magical. These performances capture the expressive nuances of the music marvellously. It will be hard to find a recording that does these songs more exquisitely than here.

The booklet deserves praise. Many CDs come with notes in minuteuscule print, but these are eminently readable. The notes describing the music are concise and cogent. Best of all, the texts are printed side-by-side over two pages in French, English, and German.

In every way this is a triumph. If you have not yet been won over to French melodies, this will do it.

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---Science Daily.com

Heine Lieder

Schumann, Franz, Liszt

Christian Immler, bar; Georges Stobinski, p

BIS 2143 (SACD) 68 minutes

In 1840 Robert Schumann, Robert Franz, and Franz Liszt—three composers of the same generation who knew and supported each other as colleagues—published their first lieder collections. Each was drawn to the poems of Heinrich Heine. This program presents a sampling of their Heine songs and offers a chance to compare how they set some of the same texts.

Schumann’s Liederkreis (Op. 24) is the main work here. Immler is a singer who sounds like he really understands what he is singing. He clearly captures the sadness of saying farewell not only in ‘Schöne Wiege Meiner Lieder’ but through the whole cycle. He/spits out venom in ‘Warte, Warte, Wilder Schiffmann’ and expresses clearly the struggle of a man trying to come to grips with grief and loss.

Franz was a miniaturist who limited himself to writing lieder; only two of these 32 songs are longer than two minutes; 18 of them are 90 seconds or less. Schumann and Liszt both championed his music, and Liszt made piano transcriptions of some of his songs. Though his songs are well constructed and tuneful, they are seldom heard. As Paul Alt commented (S/O 2005), Franz “sought a folk-like simplicity in his songs and rarely strayed from strophic form”. He “goes blandly on, every phrase going just where you expect and leaving nothing really memorable”. Immler brings out the best in these songs, but with Schumann’s superior Dichterliebe settings of ‘Im Wunderschönen Monat Mai’ and ‘Ich Hab’ im Traum Geweinet’ so well known, Franz’s settings are not likely to emerge from the musical shadows. Few recordings of his songs are available, so if you’re interested in sampling them this is a chance to hear them performed well.

Liszt’s approach to songs was grandiose, especially in his early songs, where the accompaniment is technically complex. The notes rightly describe him as a “genius scenico” with a prelude, a recitative, and an aria” and Immler does a fine job eliciting its drama. Immler shows a strong affinity for this music. His use of dynamics and vocal coloring, clear enunciation, and a strong feeling for the texts makes this a fine survey of Heine songs. Starkl comments “as colleagues—published their first lieder collections. Each was drawn to the poems of Heinrich Heine. This program presents a sampling of their Heine songs and offers a chance to compare how they set some of the same texts.

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Albanian Flowers

Flaka Goranci, mz; Mennan Berveniku, p; Adela Frasineanu, v; Edison Pashko, vc

Gramola 99066—42 minutes

Here’s an opportunity to hear music from a part of the world slowly emerging from the shadows of political repression and turmoil. The accompanying notes in un graceful English translation shed little light on what listeners might want to know about the musical traditions presented here.

The best thing is simply to listen to this music. The texts are about love, homesickness, separation, and longing to regain what has been lost. Some of these texts include thinly veiled references to the残酷历程 history of Albania and Kosovo. The program of 11 songs includes traditional folk songs and works more recently composed. You can hear the musical heritage of the Ottoman Empire in this music. Some songs have a gypsy quality and others include rhythmic plucking, slapping of strings, overtone playing, and coloristic touches that may be ancient but sound very modern.

Goranci has a dark and Slavic sound and does an effective job of conveying the plaintive quality of this music. She is particularly good is expressing the lamentation of the unaccompanied songs of Dichterliebe with its words “Nothing has been left for me. Love and happiness have disappeared for me.” The accompanying musicians employ a wide range of techniques. These performances are terrific. It’s unfortunate that the program is so brief.

The booklet deserves praise. Many CDs come with notes in minuteuscule print, but these are eminently readable. The notes describing the music are concise and cogent. Best of all, the texts are printed side-by-side over two pages in French, English, and German.

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American Record Guide

Lost Generation

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Barbara Krieger, s; Horenstein Ensemble

Acousence 455—51 minutes

Berlin-based photographer Martin Lenge mann has a keen personal interest in the horrors of the First World War and has been committed for decades to promoting reconciliation and understanding between Germans and Britons through his project “Die Narbe/The Scar”. His great love of classical music led him
to identify three composers who "stand out in their generation" and who perished in the war: Rudi Stephan, George Butterworth, and Cecil Coles, who belong to what this album calls the "Lost Generation." It is not likely to find an appreciative audience with Krieger’s terrible phrasing by the ensemble.

The liner notes have lots of Lengemann’s photos but give very little information about the music.

**Preludios**
Mompou, Falla, Loeca, Sanjuan, Granados, Montsalvatge
Isabel Leonard, s; Brian Zeger, p
Delos 36486—52 minutes

Another recording with the Falla songs! Will it ever be enough? (Romeo 7302, July/Aug 2014, Naive 5365, Nov/Dec 2014, MSR 1476, May/June 2015, Capriccio 5193, Nov/Dec 2015). At least this program includes some other songs and is not likely to find an appreciative audience with Krieger’s terrible phrasing by the ensemble.

I wasn’t familiar with Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924). He was a founder of the Royal College of Music and taught composition there. The settings of Thomas Moore are rich, gentle pieces; ‘It Is Not the Tear’ and ‘O

**Music When Soft Voices Die**
Elgar, Bridge, Vaughan Williams, Stanford, Moeran, Parry
Quink—Brilliant 95216—67 minutes

This is a nice program by Dutch a cappella ensemble Quink (Marjon Strijk, Elsbeth Gerrie Geritsen, Harry van Berne, Kees Jan de Koning). The music is interesting and the performances excellent, for the most part. The few moments where the group doesn’t achieve perfect blend stick out only because most of the time it’s so good.

I don’t normally associate Elgar with vocal music, and I’m not sure I will after hearing this, but I learned something anyway. The vocal music of English composer Frank Bridge (1879-1941) is great; I like ‘The Bee’—charming and clever. We expect warmth from Vaughan Williams, and the selections are on point, in small part owing to the exquisite color and phrasing by the ensemble.

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to identify three composers who "stand out in their generation" and who perished in the war: Rudi Stephan, George Butterworth, and Cecil Coles, who belong to what this album calls the "Lost Generation." An extensive liner note by the producer where the release...

Stephan's Music for Seven String Instruments in two movements very effectively sets a somber and elegiac mood. The Banks of Green Willow (Butterworth; arranged for the Horenstein Ensemble) and his Suite for String Quartet present tone paintings of a classic pastoral English landscape. Four Verlaine Songs by Cecil Coles (arranged for this recording by Julien Salemkour) supply a poetic character and the dramatic 'Olás Gigantes' surround two songs on themes of motherhood, 'Preludios: Madre, Todas las Noches' and 'Oracion De las Madres que Tienen A sus Hijos en Brazos.' It makes for a nice group, followed by the cycle I'm tired of hearing, no matter how well performed (and quite well here).

The program also includes folk songs collected from Federico Garcia Lorca (Brilliant 95905, Nov/Dec 2015) and also includes some of these, a piece by zarzuela composer Joaquín Valverde Sanjuan (1875-1918), a romantic 'Gracias Mia' from Granados's Canciones Anamoros, and Xavier Montsalvatge's Cinco Canciones Negras. The latter I heard recently (Capriccio 5193, Nov/Dec 2015). This performance is brighter than the other, but not better.

Leonard has a bright voice with some real depth. There's more vibrato than you may be used to, but I like the tone very much. She takes a risk with a brief, unaccompanied encore and I think it's terrific. Brian Zeger is, as usual, excellent.

Not as usual, excellent.

Her radiant and luxurious voice brings them to life brilliantly. Huang's collaboration is especially inspiring.

The extended piano introductions and conclusions of the Strauss songs sometimes take more playing time than the vocal line. That is especially true of two of the songs that include music from the final scene of Capriccio. Dobnar does a splendid job with the often virtuosic demands of Strauss's piano score.

The notes give a brief account of what the songs are about, but it is a big disappointment that texts are not included.

Breathe Not His Name' take a few satisfying unexpected harmonic turns. 'Shall We Go Dance the Hay, the Hay?', a setting of English poet Nicholas Breton, has an Elizabethan maritime feel to it, with its sprightly rhythm and "fa las." The English composer John Ernest Moeran (1894-1950) was a student of Stanford (along with Holst and Vaughan Williams). His Songs of Springtime has some wonderfully rich, gently ambiguous harmonies. Six Modern Lyrics by English composer Hubert Parry (1848-1918) ends the program; the songs are short and sweet.

The only complaint I can muster up about this program is that much of the music sounds similar despite some occasionally more interesting harmonic language. But what the program lacks in variety it makes up in warmth and artistry. Notes and texts.

Innocence/Experience

The title of the program refers not only to...
The performances are classic; thoughtful, clean, everything you expect from a world class singer.

Three gentle pieces by Robert Schumann are found in Samuel Barab’s edition of Richard Strauss songs, mainly his most popular ones, including the Ophelia songs. Her ‘Einerlei’ is exactly the way I like it—litling, light, and sweet. I hear the Ophelia songs with some regularity (LAW 1067, Sept/Oct 2015, Aparte 54 & Profil 134, July/Aug 2014, Berlin 566, Nov/Dec 2014). This is a more simple interpretation, but no less effective. If anything, that Ophelia appears to be more together on the surface is all the more disturbing.

The program ends with a group of Hugo Wolf songs, including a few of my favorites: ‘Et ist’s?’, ‘Verschwende Liebe’, and ‘Das Vergessene Mädglein’. ‘Mausfallsprüchlein’ is a charming way to end a lovely program. The pianists are all terrific, as is Harold Wright. If you’re a Valente fan (as I am), don’t miss this.

Brief notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

Treasures of Bel Canto
Rolando Villazon, t; Florence May Festival/ Marco Armitage—DG 479 4959—65 minutes

Most are familiar with treasures of the bel canto opera repertoire. But how about treasures of the bel canto song repertoire? Villazon sings five songs each by Bellini, Donizetti, and Rossini; four by Verdi. Only one is familiar (‘La Danza’). This is a more suited vocal piece, here they are performed in new arrangements for orchestra. Robert Sadin has arranged 9 songs, Daniel Barnidge 5, Efrain Oscher 2. All are quite appropriate and tasteful. Appropriate and tasteful are also the words to describe Villazon’s singing—also, exquisite, attractive, full-voiced, and enthusiastic.

The other Rossini songs (‘L’esule’, ‘La lon-tananza’) are taken from his Peches de Viellesse collection. For the duet ‘Tirana’ Villazon is joined by mezzo Cecilia Bartoli. Hers is a breathy, heavy-weight performance. The four Bellini songs are all gentle, slow, melancholy melodies dripping with morbidezza. Donizetti’s ‘Amor Funesto’ could just as well be from his Lucia di Lammermoor, melancholy with a prominent harp in the orchestra. There is the feeling of strength in ‘I l’Sospiro’. The French text of ‘La Mare et l’en-fant’ brings a more solid, more adventurous melody. Its few very low notes are swallowed rather than projected by the singer. Verdi’s songs are more hearty, rhythmically more propulsive, more in a popular vein.

Texts in Italian, German, and English

PARSONS

This Other Eden
English Poetry & Song
Kitty Whately, mz; Joseph Middleton, p; Navarra Quartet; Kevin Whately, Madeleine Newton, narr

From Champs Hill 94—82 minutes

For her debut recital disc, Kitty Whately has selected songs by John Ireland, Peter Warlock, Roger Quilter, Ivor Gurney, Herbert Howells, Charles Villiers Stanford, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Michael Head, Joseph Horowitz, James MacMillan, and Samuel Barber. There are also two solo piano pieces (by Ireland and Benjamin Britten) and readings from William Shakespeare, Walter de la Mare, John Clare, John Updike, Ophelia. The singer’s website gives a nice account of the production of this album, with samples of the music and interviews with the artists.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

From the Archives

BERLIOZ: Les Troyens
Mario del Monaco (Aeneas), Nell Rankin (Cassandra), Giulietta Simionato (Dido)
La Scala 1960/Rafael Kubelik
Walhall 347 [3 CD]

Nobody will be surprised to learn that Del Monaco is stupendous as Aeneas. His vocal color and the sheer freedom and ringing sound of his singing is like a force of nature. There’s nothing matching it in the catalog, and probably nothing like it in the history of the role. Vickers is a variation on this theme, but his voice wasn’t as bright or as powerfully instrumented as Del Monaco’s (and I say this as someone who has heard Vickers in performance and felt the power of his voice in the huge Metropolitan Opera House). Of course, Vickers had the advantage of being able to sing softly as well.

Rankin was a (justly) famous mezzo who never made it onto the recordings she deserved. Her sole commercial release from what I can find is Suzuki in the Tebaldi Madama Butterfly on Decca. (There are also concert recordings of her singing in the Verdi Requiem and Rossini’s Semiramide.) She is a very charismatic Cassandra, catching the terrible fear of the character depicted in Berlioz’s music. Simionato’s Dido is majestic and vulnerable (both)—and internally vivid.

Kubelik is an experienced and skilled opera conductor. His work here, though, has less character than I expect from him. (Short rehearsal time?)

The performance is in Italian. There are stage noises and minor performance mishaps. The major drawback is that the sound is very bad. It’s hard—even with very good head-phones—to get the sound of Berlioz’s music. The orchestra and voices are constricted.

If you have a good modern performance—perhaps one of the Davis recordings with his rather stern approach to the music—this could be a supplement. You will have Berlioz’s sound in your ears from them and enjoy what you can hear of the outstanding singing of Del Monaco, Rankin, and Simionato.

No libretto, no useful notes. The Del Monaco “recital” has some compelling singing in mediuim sound. Back in the 1950s and 1960s he was an exclusive Decca artist. He sang Lohengrin, Siegmund, Samson, and (of course) Aeneas in performance. He never got the chance to record them in the studio. So this is a document for dedicated fans of the singers.
The performances are classic; thoughtful, clean, everything you expect from a world class singer.

Three gentle pieces by Robert Schumann are found in Samuel Barber’s translation of Richard Strauss songs, mainly his most popular ones, including the Ophelia songs. Her ‘Einerlei’ is exactly the way I like it—litling, light, and sweet. I hear the Ophelia songs with some regularity (Lalo 1067, Sept/Oct 2015, Aparate 54 & Profil 135800, July/Aug 2014, Berlin 566, Nov/Dec 2014). This is more a styled interpretation, but no less effective. If anything, that Ophelia appears to be more together on the surface is all the more disturbing.

The program ends with a group of Hugo Wolf songs, including a few of my favorites: ‘Er ist’s’, ‘Versehwungene Liebe’, and ‘Das Verlassene Mädelgen’. ‘MausfalsenSprüchelein’ is a charming way to end a lovely program. The pianists are all terrific, as is Harold Wright. If you’re a Valente fan (as I am), don’t miss this.

Brief notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

Treasures of Bel Canto
Rolando Villazon, t; Florence May Festival/
Marko Armiliotis—DG 479 4995—65 minutes

Most are familiar with treasures of the bel canto opera repertoire. But how about treasures of the bel canto song repertoire? Villazon sings five songs each by Bellini, Donizetti, and Rossini; four by Verdi. Only one is familiar (‘La Danza’). This is a more varied collection with piano accompaniment, here they are performed in new arrangements for orchestra. Robert Sadin has arranged 9 songs, Daniel Barnidge 5, and is reminiscent of a child’s song. As it progresses, especially, the sparse piano accompaniment offers a more threatening contrast to the song’s basic innocence and tranquillity.”

The contrast between the silence and serenity of the sky and the bombs that fell on innocent children is unsettling. A quiet and simple vocal line alternates with chilling silences and explosive piano dissonances that may represent the drone of engines or the horror it evokes. It is a deeply moving performance of this brilliantly harrowing work.

‘Dover Beach’ concludes the program, with the Navarra Quartet providing atmospheric accompaniment. You could not hope for a better performance of this great work.

Midleton’s partnership is exemplary in the entire program. He performs two short solo pieces, Ireland’s impressionist ‘Spring Will Not Wait’ and Britten’s rollicking ‘Early Morning Bathé’, which suggests the invigoration of a cold dip.

The singer’s website gives a nice account of the production of this album, with samples of the music and interviews with the artists.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

From the Archives

BERLIOZ: Les Troyens
Mario del Monaco (Aeneas), Nell Rankin (Cas- sandra), Giulietta Simionato (Dido)
Opera Arias: Mario del Monaco
La Scala 1960/Rafael Kubelik
Wallhalla 347 [3 CD]

Nobody will be surprised to learn that Del Monaco is stupendous as Aeneas. His vocal color and the sheer freedom and ringing sound of his singing is like a force of nature. There’s nothing matching it in the catalog, and probably nothing like it in the history of the role. Vickers a variation on this theme, but his voice wasn’t as bright or as powerfully instrumental as Del Monaco’s (and I say this as someone who has heard Vickers in performance and felt the power of his voice in the huge Metropolitan Opera House). Of course, Vickers had the advantage of being able to sing softly as well.

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So this is a document for dedicated fans of the singers.
Yepeş was always controversial. He had a superb technique, but he used it erratically. He was capable of exquisitely beautiful playing, but often chosen to play coldly, even cruelly in his phrasing. These were recorded when he was in his mid-30s, hardly a youthful artist—certainly nothing I’d expect from a fin-
ished artist.

If you’re already a Yepeş fan, and my complaints don’t bother you, stroll down memory lane and enjoy. If you’re not, this collection will not convince you—though his later recording of three Rodrigo concertos, reviewed in this issue under composers, may well do so.

KEATON

Newest Music

3 by 3

THOMAS: In the Blue Glen; DAVIS: No Exit; BROUGHTON: There Is Always Something to Do—Debussy Trio—Klavier 1206—57 minutes

SMITH: Bones; Winter; ERICKSON: 9-1/2 for Henry; Pacific Sirens; BRUN: Plot; BROWN: December 1952; BEYER: Percussion; TENNEY: Percussion Responses; COREY: Merenda; BUOMI: Ko; P: Chris Herman, Stewart Saunders Smith, Percussa Susanna Hancock, Jon; DAVID: 6; FL: Nicole Wendl, M; McCormick Percussion Group; ROBERT: McCormick

Ravello 7196 [2CD] 119 minutes

HIGDON: Zones; MORRATOS-MATOS: Capture; Little Rhumba; Conversations (Pablo Meets Rolando)…; ALSTON: Praise Song I; LIUZZI: Seoul Spirit; GAUDIOS: Gainsborough Philadelphia Percussion

Equilibrium 128—72 minutes

TRANFADOLOFF: Arc-En-Ciel; Magnets, Lava, Crystals; (S)pacing; Ripple Effect; CHETIRI: Peter Sheppard Skaeved, Milhao Transfadoloff, V; NEIL: Heyde, Eve Heyde, R; ROGER: Heaton, R; BARKER: Chadwick; P: Kreutzer Quartet; New London Chamber Choir/Alain Oliver

Innova 914—72 minutes

RAUH: Innocent Speller; New England Plains Drifter; Ryan; Leavitt: Reception; It Is Such A Splendid Sunny Day, and I Have to Go—Charlie Rauch, Robin Rauch, t; Jake Thoro, v; P Composers Concordance 24—17 minutes

DOYLE: Time Machine; Hexeye 17—72 minutes

PELLMAN: Peculiar Galaxies; Spiral Galaxies; Eliptical Galaxies: Selected Cosmos; Ravello 7192—73 minutes

I tend to conceptualize music as sounds in the world that we hear and are translated by our brain. The objects I hear, of course, are the results of some sort of action or interaction somewhere in that world, air blown through an opening, against a mouthpiece, or an object hitting another, for instance. Juraj Kojs’s compositions are based more on the actions required to create sounds than the sounds themselves. The fact that the program is released as a DVD is incredibly helpful because the performances can be more visual in importance than otherwise. The real question becomes whether or not Kojs’s action-based compositions are worthwhile beyond mere concept, where a pianist performs eight miniatures based on actions, is more Fluxus event than anything else. Making hand gestures without touching the keys, dragging fingernails across the keys while only making clicking sounds, and the frantic polishing of the entire piano are three of the instructions. ‘Concealed’ is a barely audible collection of flute noises including alternate fingerings and key pressings. Electronics are present in ‘Concealed’ and the similar Guiding Night, with the violin actions in Guiding Night creating more interactive and apparent electronics. While VIII naturally creates an audience to extend the audience’s understanding of the world before them, like Fluxus events, pieces like ‘Concealed’ and Guiding Night simply don’t translate well from concept to implementation. Lorry Polansky’s 10 Strings (9 Events) is a process piece with such an undeniably cool hook, it really doesn’t matter what the 9 events are. The raw, driving ostinato on the resonator guitar grabbed my attention with the bluegrass-meets-rock sound and carried me through to the eventual addition of the 9 events that are slowly, and sporadically, used to transform the piece. Paula Arthusen’s ‘In Absentia’ is a foil to Polansky’s piece, using repetition and intersections to approximate earlier remembered moments. An electronic drone steadily rises, and the violin and guitar emit pieces and fragments of melodies and harmonies. The gruff and raw aspects of 10 Strings (9 Events) are more deceptively difficult to the mind’s ear. ‘Deafening Irrelevance’. Pointed, forceful dyads punctuate the opening but slowly give way to forceful harmonies and extremely high violin. ‘Deafening Irrelevance’ earns the name the hard way over the first two thirds of the piece and surviving that leaves you without commensurate reward for the remainder. The release as a whole takes a seldom-heard instrument, the resonator guitar, pairs it with one of the world’s most used instruments, the violin, and tears down convention anywhere it can. While the raw feeling of many pieces may push some away, the compositional ideas create a genuinely enjoyable and interesting pairing.

Being different for the sake of being different can be a double-edged sword. Done correctly an ensemble can carve a path to new sonic worlds for exploration. If you form a quartet with a baritone voice, bass clarinet, trombone, and trumpet, then parade your anti-establishment sentiments as deserving of the utmost praise in your liner notes because you are so anti-establishment, you might be chipping off your own nose. The kind of daring it takes to form a group like this also means daring to fail—and, in their defense, without musical failures the 21st Century may never find its voice. Loading your program is all these things. It dares, it pushes boundaries, and sometimes it falls flat on its face where it once had a nose. Alexandre Lunsqui’s Guttural keeps the baritone voice from being heard as a singer and instead forces it to be an instrument. The voice impersonates the other instruments in ways you generally only see on experimental, vocal-only programs. The blend is fantastic but sounds fresh. ‘Longitudinal Study I’ by David Brynjar Franzson, in contrast, is nearly 10 minutes of blowing air that could be better spent. The title of William Lang’s ‘Theo’ and ‘Be One More’ captures the fear a listener may have while listening to the droning, high-pitched, harmonica pedal that is passed between the players. It is interesting how many harmonics end up interpreted as feedback by the brain.

We all have biases, and one of mine is the kind of violin music ‘in Absentia’ by Masatora Goya. The hopeful, yet mournful, tone combines with rough attacks, motives

American Record Guide

March/April 2016

KOS: VIII; Concealed; To Where He Waited; Adventures of An Annihilated Mirror; Guiding Night; All Forgotten; Ensemble Pamplemousse Pink Pamphlet 23 [DVD] 67 minutes

Gertrudes

POLANSKY: 10 Strings (9 Events); MATT-HUSEN: In Absentia; MOORE: Squeaks; Look Like; A Wish; THOMSON: Deafening Irrelevance; FEFFERMAN: Fiddle Tune; ASHLEY: For Andie Springer Showing the Form of A Melody, Standing in the Shadows

James Moore, g; Andie Springer, v; Lainie Fefferman, v; Jascha Narveson, wineglasses

New World 8071—51 minutes

LUNSQUI: Guttural I-II; WORTHINGTON: Infinitive I-IV; MINECK: Number May Be Defined; FRANZSON: Longitudinal Study I; FUTING: Land of Silence; LANG: There Might Be One More

Loadbang—New Focus 163—56 minutes

GOYA: Distance; Dream of Sailing; Inner Voice; Where It Begins, Where It All Ends; Sound of Life; Sunset on The Hudson

Carlos Boltes, Conway Kuo, v; Melanie Chargrin, fl; Scott Hill, v; Oren Fader, g; Duo Anova Ravello 7914—70 minutes

216

217
Yepes was always controversial. He had a superb technique, but he used it erratically. He was capable of exquisite beautiful playing, but often chose to play coldly, even cruelly in his phrasing. These were recorded when he was in his mid-30s, hardly a youthful musician. Yet some of his interpretive choices are simply immature.

Two things I find particularly objectionable. He often seems to be trying to avoid a singing tone. Notes are hammered out, not able. He often seems to be trying to avoid expressiveness and warmth. I often complain about indulgent rubato, but Yepes too often plays without any sense of breath, of the rhetoric of the music. In other pieces his grasp of rhythm is episodic—this is most evident in Torroba’s ‘Madronos’ and Turina’s ‘Rafaga’, where he sometimes changes tempo almost measure to measure. It’s the sort of approach I get in students—certainly nothing I’d expect from a finished artist.

If you’re already a Yepes fan, and my complaints don’t bother you, stroll down memory lane and enjoy. If you’re not, this collection will not convince you—though his later recording of three Rodrigo concertos, reviewed in this issue under composers, may well do so.

KEATON

News newest music

KOJS: VIII; Concealed; To Where He Waited

POLANSKY: 10 Strings (9 Events); MATT-HUSEN: In Absentia; MOORE: Suspicions; Look Like; A Wish; THOMSON: Deafening Irrelevance; FEFFERMAN: Fiddly Tune; ASHLEY: For Andie Springer Showing the Form Of A Melody, Standing in the Shadows

SMITH: Bones; Winter; ERICKSON: 9-1/2 for Henry; Pacific Sirens; BRUN: Plot; BROWN: December 1952; BEYER: Percussion; TENNEY: Percussion Responses

HIDGON: Zones; MORALES-MATOS: Capture; Little Rhumba; Conversations (Pablo Meets Rolando...); ALSTON: Praise Song I; LUZZI: Seoul Spirit; GAUDER: Gainsborough Philadelphia Percussion

PRAVDA: Ark-En-Ciel; Magnets, Lava, Crystals; (S)pacings; Ripple Effect; Chettri (4)

RAUH: Innocent Spellers; New England Plains Drifter; Ryan; Leaving; Reception; It Is Such A Splendid Sunny Day, and I Have to Go

DOYLE: Time Machine

PULLMAN: Peculiar Galaxies; Spiral Galaxies; Elliptical Galaxies; Selected Cosmos

LUNSQUI: Guttural I-III; DE LA MAZA: Harshly but without any real shape—even in singing tone. Notes are hammered out, not able. He often seems to be trying to avoid a lane and enjoy. If you’re not, this collection will not convince you—though his later recording of three Rodrigo concertos, reviewed in this issue under composers, may well do so.

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KEATON
separated by octaves, and lots of warm double stops. It’s the type of sound that grabs you but gives you the task of introspection as well. Goya’s program, spurred by the loss of his marine engineer father, who was only ever home for a few weeks a year, wants to tell a tale of the composer’s thoughts and make the listener reflect on his own life. Dream of Sailing is a pleasant duet for flute and guitar that rolls along with ease. Where It Begins, Where It All Ends, a duet for cello and guitar, traces our existence from nothing to consciousness and back again. It contains some of the program’s wildest moments, with cello scarpes and slides; but the guitar maintains a steady, march-like meter that offers balance.

With a straightforward, harmonically subversive opening, David Evan Thomas’s In The Blue Glen reaches ahead and pushes aside rough brambles. It reveals a lush area decorated with flutter-tonguing flute, warm viola, and idyllic strands of harp. Imitation is used mainly between the viola and flute across the four movements. With a medium tempo and pleasing tonalities, In The Blue Glen is the sound of quiet and still. It seems awkward against the others. Don Davis’s No Exit has the trio frantically flitting and bouncing with repeated intervals, even in slower movements. The harmonic language is darker, with the harp much less than ethereal in III, and there are some stronger articulations in development sections.

The McCormick Percussion Group puts out a steady stream of percussion-centric releases. Many of them contain interesting instrumentation, techniques, and musicality. Unfortunately, this release, Plot: Music for Unspecified Instrumentation, is boring. The pieces work for the program as an area of exploration for the group that I’ve yet to hear them take on, but it’s an area best to avoid for percussion ensembles. Chris Hermann’s Plot is an example of where the score itself, graphically notated, is probably more exciting than the soundscapes chosen by the performer. Johanna Beyer’s Percussion is five movements that are historically important for the genre but a chore for the modern listener.

Volume 2 of the Philadelphia Percussion Project is the opposite of the McCormick release. More traditional ground is covered: the botanical Galaxies of Jennifer Higdon’s Zones and the infectious rhythms of Rolando Morales-Matos’s Little Rhumba. Don Liuzzi’s ‘Seoul Spirit’ spends I building clumsily to the swift II, which has a battle between the Korean bukh and Chinese tom-toms. Tom Gauger’s Gainsborough, named for the street in Bournemouth where he was born, has moments of tonal keyboard percussion. I sounds like a march for toy soldiers; II wanders off in a vibraphone haze. The presto finale is rousing, with the requisite snare line and quick-spirited, falling marimba lines.

Mihailo Trandafilovski’s program, frankly, is to be avoided if you want melody or anything but the shortest musical events irrevocably tied to extended techniques. Magnets, Lava, Crystals is a harsh amalgam of wailing clarinet, ceterawauling clarinet, and shredded strings. (S)paring is slightly more musical and could potentially work well as instructional material for strange cellists bowing any musical sounds, but the material is too detached. The four movements of Ripple Effect employs space to an even larger degree and involve the piano noodling with the sustain pedal down.

The pedal steel and medium to slow tempo makes Charlie Ray’s Represtal music that was left out of David Lynch’s Twin Peaks mixed with Bill Frisell. The melancholy, guitar-driven program is 17 minutes long. It’s a sound space few people venture into, but with two pieces under a minute and only two others over three minutes there just isn’t enough substance to hold my interest.

What happens when you put answering machine messages from the late 1980s together with computerized instruments and sounds? You get Time Machine by Roger Doyle. It’s often difficult to make out the messages, and the electronic instruments range from sweeping strings to Voices of Parmac into a strange mid-2000s club scene in It’s Very Serious. Harmonically the release is mostly tonal and bright as in ‘Salome at the Gate’ and the saccharine ‘Back From Hospital. Piano and other keyboard instruments are the main voices, and most melody has a nostalgic tone.

On another entirely electronic program, Samuel Pullman’s works take the shape of galaxies as inspiration. In brief, Peculiar Galaxies is a bit like the score to Blade Runner, Spiral Galaxies reminds me of the old electronic organ I played at my grandparents’ home, and the botanical Galaxies of Jennifer Higdon’s Zones and the infectious rhythms of Rolando Morales-Matos’s Little Rhumba. Don Liuzzi’s ‘Seoul Spirit’ spends I

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separated by octaves, and lots of warm double stops. It's the type of sound that grabs you but gives you the task of introspection as well. Goya's program, spurred by the loss of his marquis with whom he spent his entire life, was only ever home for a few weeks a year, wants to tell a tale of the composer's thoughts and make the listener reflect on his own life. *Dream of Sailing* is a pleasant duet for flute and guitar that rolls along with ease. *Where It Begins, Where It All Ends*, a duet for cello and guitar, traces our existence from nothing to consciousness and back again. It contains some of the program's wildest moments, with cello scrapes and slides; but the guitar maintains a steady, march-like meter that offers balance. With a straightforward, harmonically subversive opening, David Evan Thomas's *In The Blue Glen* reaches ahead and pushes aside rough brambles. It reveals a lush area decorated with flutter-tonguing flute, warm viola, and idyllic strands of harp. Impression is used mainly between the viola and flute across the four movements. With a medium tempo and pleasing tonalities, *In The Blue Glen* is the sound of quiet and delicate restraint. It seems awkward against the others. Don Davis's *No Exit* has the trio frantically flitting and bouncing with repeated intervals, even in slower movements. The harmonic language is darker, with the harp much more than ethereal in III, and there are some stronger articulations in development sections.

The McCormick Percussion Group puts out a steady stream of percussion-centric releases. Many of them contain interesting instrumentation, techniques, and musicality. Unfortunately, this release, *Plot: Music for Unspaciation*, is boring. The pieces work for the program as an area of exploration for the group that I've yet to hear them take on, but it's an area best to be avoided for percussion ensembles. Chris Hermann's *Plot* is an example of where the score itself, graphically notated, is probably more exciting for percussion ensembles. Chris Hermann's *them take on, but it's an area best to be avoid-exploration for the group that I've yet to hear against the others. Don Davis's *quiet repose, though III seems awkward the booming energy and electronics of Jen-Ends*, a duet for cello and guitar, traces our existence from nothing to consciousness and back again. It contains some of the program's wildest moments, with cello scrapes and slides; but the guitar maintains a steady, march-like meter that offers balance. With a straightforward, harmonically subversive opening, David Evan Thomas's *In The Blue Glen* reaches ahead and pushes aside rough brambles. It reveals a lush area decorated with flutter-tonguing flute, warm viola, and idyllic strands of harp. Impression is used mainly between the viola and flute across the four movements. With a medium tempo and pleasing tonalities, *In The Blue Glen* is the sound of quiet and delicate restraint. It seems awkward against the others. Don Davis's *No Exit* has the trio frantically flitting and bouncing with repeated intervals, even in slower movements. The harmonic language is darker, with the harp much more than ethereal in III, and there are some stronger articulations in development sections.

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**Rhumba.** Don Liuzzi's 'Seoul Spirit' spends I building clumsily to the swift II, which has a battle between the Korean bukh and Chinese tom-toms. Tom Gauger's *Gainsborough* namely the sounds of drumming, the feeling that there were moments of tonal keyboard percussion. I sounds like a march for toy soldiers; II wanders off in a vibraphone haze. The presto finale is rousing, with the requisite snare line and quick-spirit-ed, falling marimba lines.

Mihailo Trandafilovski's program, frankly, is to be avoided if you want melody or anything but the shortest musical events irrevoca-

bly tied to extended techniques. *Magnets, Lava, Crystals* is a harsh amalgam of wailing clarinet, caterwauling clarinet, and shredded strings. *Spacing* is slightly more musical and could potentially work as instructional material for strange cello bowings and arco, but the material is too detached. The four movements of *Ripple Effect* employs space to an even larger degree and involve the piano noodling with the sustain pedal down.

The pedal steel and medium to slow tem-

po make Clare Harrow's *Rapunzel* an amus-

tal music that was left out of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* mixed with Bill Frisell. The melancholy, guitar-driven program is 17 minutes long. It's a sound space few people venture into, but with two pieces under a minute and only two oth-

ers over three minutes there just isn't enough substance to render a verdict. What happens when you put answering machine messages from the late 1980s togeth-

er with computerized instruments and sounds? You get *Time Machine* by Roger Doyle. It's often difficult to make out the mes-

sages, and the electronic sounds range from sweep-

ing strings *to Voices of Pandemonium* in a strange mid-2000s club scene in *It's Very Serious*. Harmonically the release is mostly tonal and bright as in 'Salome at the Gate' and the sac-

charine 'Back From Hospital'. Piano and other keyboard instruments are the main voices, and most motifs hint at a nostalgic tone.

On another entirely electronic program, Samuel Pullman's works take the shape of galaxies as inspiration. In brief, *Peculiar Galaxies* is a bit like the score to *Blade Runner*, *Spiral Galaxies* reminds me of the old electronic organ I played at my grandparents' house, and a bottleneck blues hook had a drum track, would be like Disasterpeace's fantastic music for the 80s horror homage *It Follows,*

Drones and just intonation dominate the sonic landscape in each of the pieces; and, while there are some shared aspects, they are differ-

entiated by modal scales and sounds. Given the inspiration for each work the content hits the mark. Pullman uses modern technology to bring his vision of galaxies to fruition, but the technology of today only gets Pullman to a 1980s idea of what music about things in space should sound like.

**LAMPER**

**CARROt: Mythology Symphony**

**CCPA Symphony & Chamber Orchestra/ Alonda de la Parra, Markand Thakar**

*Cedille 160—61 minutes*

**GUINJOAN: Obra Simfonica (1-2)**

Peter Zazofsky, v; Miguel Ituarte, p; Barcelona Symphony; Liege Philharmonic; Bruckner Orches-

tra Linz/ Edmon Colomer. Pierre Bartholome, Ernest Martinez-Izquierdo, Dennis Russell Davies—*Columna 262+278—72+63 minutes*

**KAUFMAN: Stars & Distances**

Richard Stoltzman, cl; Warsaw Philharmonic, Czech Symphony, Florida Grand Opera/ Carlos Piantini, Richard Hein, Andrew Bisantz *Navona 6011—68 minutes*

**LEMEUX: Ti Amo**

Eric Lemeniv, g. electroacoustics, perc, p. voices; Natasha Mair *Mountaintop, voices* *Contour 3425—55 minutes*

**SHARP: The Boreal**

Jack Vix; Kevin Lin, p; Orchestra Carbon; Janacek Philharmonic/ David Bloom, Peter Run-

del—*Klammstadt 222—78 minutes*

**DOOLITTLE: All Spring**

Seattle Chamber Players *Composers Concordance 25—57 minutes*

**FENNIMORE: 24 Romances**

Jeffrey Middleton, p *Albany 1587 [2CD] 145 minutes*

**FIELDS: Double Cluster & Space Sciences**

Gloria Chuan, p; Moravian Philharmonic/ Jan Kucera—*Centaur 3433—63 minutes*

**JOUBERT: The Instant Moment**

Herbert Freret, bar; English String Orchestra/ William Boughton—*Naxos 571368—63 minutes*

**MATTHEUSEN: Pieces for People**

Manta Percussion; Jamie Jordan, s; Andrew Staniland, electronics *Naxos 573428—64 minutes*

Stacy Garrop's record is her "major orchestral output from 1999 to 2013". The five movements of the *Mythology Symphony* were written inde-

pendently over the span of those 14 years, but cohere neatly into a single 40-minute piece. While the character of each movement is dif-

ferent, the general language and composition-

al attitude is very similar. Garrop seeks to use musical themes and motifs in dramatic tension to relay imagery and narratives from Greek mythology. She achieves this represent-

ation through largely consonant, triadic har-

mony and fairly traditional orchestral schemes. For me, these connections weren’t apparent enough to pick up on without con-

sulting her notes. And once I knew what I was listening for—the mapping of Medusa’s trans-

formation, for instance—it then lacked the subtlety that would hold my interest for repeated listening. The other music on the record, *Thunderwalker* and *Shadow*, is similar in its strategies, though the subject matter is different. Ultimately, this comes across as vaguely dramatic, mostly unremarkable orchestral work in a nove.

Joan Guinjoan's orchestral music is char-

acterized by constant activity and energy. There is rarely a lull in the busy sonic web of strings, brass, woodwind, and percussion. Each instrumental family usually works as one in a rapidly developing theme that climaxes before ceding to another. Their interactions are less a comparison than a spontaneous and sporadic bubbling to the musical surface. Har-

monies range from triadic to mildly dissonant, though there are no truly tonal schemes to be found. There is evidence of Guinjoan’s appetite for rapidly developing theme that climaxes but one work tends to bleed into the next and they sound rather indifferent-

**QUAYLE: Songs Without Words**

Matthew Quayle, p *Albany 1575—62 minutes*

**RIGLER: Rarefactions**

Jane Rigler, fl, voice, electronics; Shoko Nagai, accordion, p, farfisa organ, Nintendo DS, key-

boards; Janet Feder, g, banjo; Satoshi Takeishi, perc, electronics *Neuma 450113—47 minutes*

**STANILAND: Talking Down the Tiger**

Ryan Scott, perc; Rob MacDonald, g; Camille Watts, fl; Frances Marie Uitti, vc; Wallace Halla, sax; Andrew Staniland, electronics *Naxos 573428—64 minutes*
ed. The exception is the violin concerto (Vol.1), which necessitates a more nuanced orchestral balance to accommodate the soloist. Here there is more intrigue, more variation, and a more tight-knit experience of the work. Unlike some of the other works, the violin concerto demands a more nuanced orchestral balance to accommodate the soloist. Here there is more intrigue, more variation, and a more tight-knit experience of the work.

Fredrick Kaufman seems to prefer texture and ambience to melody and phrasing. There are very few moments of homophony in any of the works on Stars and Distances. Instead, much of the music consists of scattered, fragmented contributions to a coherent overall affect—especially the title work. This technique yields a very different kind of expression, one that feels less mediated by form, harmony, counterpoint, and structure. In reality, all of these boundaries are accounted for very carefully in the writing, balanced and executed carefully. In Stars and Distances an ambient, drone-like texture includes a wordless chamber choir and is accompanied by spoken fac- tacts about outer space. The composer’s inspiration for the work, looking up at the night sky, matches the impressionistic experience of the piece as an opportunity to wonder about the distant stars. Other pieces like the Second Symphony for strings and percussion are far more straightforward and thematically oriented. In the notes for the record, Kaufman’s output is divided into four categories: Neo-classical, Experimental, Indeterminacy, and Eclectic. I would guess that the two apparently repre- sented here are Neo-Classicism and Eclecticism. I wish the record included some Indeterminacy and Experimental music. Kaufman’s compositional vocabulary in the works included here is interesting, but not enough to compel me to listen further.

Eric Lemieux’s record Ti Amo is a collection of short fragments of film music written from 2004 to 2013. As such, there is a lack of continuity in terms of instrumentation and timbre, production, and affect. Taken individually, some of these pieces are striking, with tense rhythms, edgy harmonies, and bold, dramatic gestures. Lemieux is a talented guitarist and allows his abilities to take center stage in these snippets of film score. A few of the works are more typical orchestral cinematic music, begging for an image to accompany the music, while others are more of a formal contour to the music. In Ti Amo, the pieces are more typical orchestral cinematic music, begging for an image to accompany the music, while others are more of a formal contour to the music. In Ti Amo, the pieces are more idiomatic. Rising whole-tone scales, shimmering tremolos, and groundless thematic progression give a dull sense of otherworldliness. This is disrupted occasionally by questionable intonation from the Moravian Philharmonic, though I don’t think the performance has much to do with the music or the recording itself. I look forward to hearing more of Lemieux’s output in the future.

John Joubert’s record is a collection of music for string orchestra with a few wind instruments and a singer mixed in. The British composer, born in 1927, has an ear for colorful harmony that is put on full display in the three works. He manages to sound unlike most British composers of his generation, owing as much to composers like Mahler and Debussy as to Elgar and Britten. There is an engaging restlessness to everything that keeps my ear leaning just ahead of the music, anticipating the next turn. Lively passages are character- istic of the English School and other British works, with more muted subtleties tending toward Debussy-esque “planning” between sonorities. The song cycle for baritone and strings, The Instant Moment, is not my favorite; but this is more a matter of the text than the musical accompaniment. Joubert’s record is worth listening to, though it’s still far from a MOTION: an instrumentalist plays while Matthusen accompanies with electronic sounds. It’s unclear whether the electro half of the electroacoustic combination is always a manipulation on the spot of the instrumentalist’s sounds or pre-recorded and/or synthesized effects, or both. Either way, Matthusen complements the sound and character of each instrument tastefully. The writing for the solo instruments is also interesting. In Limerence the banjo sounds both uncanny and right at home in the midst of electronic distorted chaos. Traditional plucking patterns and cre- ative uses of the banjo’s upper range both con- tribute to the strange and exciting soundscape. Other works like AEG make use of more sound sources like voice and piano, but the general balance is the same: electronics create a texture out of which the other instruments can emerge. I look forward to hearing more of Matthusen’s work in the future.

Matthew Quayle puts his formidable skills as a pianist to work in his collection of solo piano compositions titled Songs Without Words. This collection by Felix Mendelssohn sets a rather high bar that Quayle cannot reach, though his effort is impressive. His harmonies are often more interesting than the melodies, direct modulations and applied chords that belong to the 21st Century. Thematic develop- ment is nuanced and tasteful, even if the melodies themselves aren’t particularly mem- orable. I get more out of Quayle’s technical ability as a player than I do out of the pieces themselves, despite some goofy passages like the ‘Brooklyn Hoe-Down’ from the first set of Songs Without Words are redeemed by the virtuosity on display. This is fine in short stretches and on first hearing, but this charm doesn’t last for long. I can’t imagine coming back to this.

Jane Rigler’s Rarefactions are “composi- tions via improvisations’. That is, every sound heard on the record was originally part of a free improvisation. Later, some of these were “modified” into compositions, which I imagine means edited and spliced into a fixed work. This is no time for this sounds scattered, a mix of various sounds in a nondescript atonal blend. The scheme for
ed. The exception is the violin concerto (Vol.1), which necessitates a more nuanced orchestral balance to accommodate the soloist. Here there is more intrigue, more variety and some of these short pieces are striking, with all “new” music, I am looking for something new that I can’t get from other composers and works—or, sometimes, something old that has been improved on. This is a tall order that much decent music falls short of, including Doolittle’s.

Joseph Fenningmore is a 75-year-old American pianist who has been writing and publishing since the 1960s. These 24 short romances for piano were written from 1983 to 2013, over which time it seems his compositional style didn’t change one bit. There are a few other works mixed in, like a ‘Passacaille’ and a ‘Sonatina’; but everything here is brief, vivid, and clear. This is not so much a song curve, but some sort of tension between tightly-knit cells of activity. In *Proof of Erdos*, rapid, heavy, percussive bowing of massive, dissonant chords suddenly turns to incomprehensible noodling in the highest register of the violins. Next, intricate rhythms are merrily executed to create a web of counterpoint that never quite descends into total disorder. Individual instruments may contribute to these cells differently, but their purposes are always unified and coordinated. One gets the impression that there is a supremely ordered structure lying beneath the musical surface that dictates every detail. Indeed, Sharp explains in his notes for the record that “fractal geometry, chaos theory, Fibonacci numbers, and biological/genetic concepts” all inform his composition. His systematic approach is complemented by an openness to extended techniques and materials, like using sticks fitted with ball chains as bows in *The Book of Beasts*. They make for a rather odd and dedicated performance of such difficult music. On *Oligosono*, Sharp and pianist Jenny Lin use the piano as a “stringed resonator”, with motive rhythms and careful manipulation of the strings leading to the reverberation of undertones and overtones. I implore him to perform live in concert, not just be recorded; but for now the record will have to do.

Emily Doolittle’s music is pleasant, approachable, and mostly simple. Melodies tend to be short and sweet, harmonies are largely tonal, and instrumentations are traditional. While I don’t hold any of this against the music, there is also a lack of creativity that makes listening not very satisfying. I also have an aversion to over-enunciated, theatrical narration of cute poetry, which plays a major role in ‘Why the Parrot Repeats Human Words’. As with much of this music, I am looking for something new that I can’t get from other composers and works—or, sometimes, something old that has been improved on. This is a tall order that much decent music falls short of, including Doolittle’s.

Matthew Fields’s music is colorful, active, dexterous, and entirely unsurprising. Meaning that much of the banjo’s upper range are contributed to the strange and exciting soundscape. Other works like AEG make use of more sound sources like voice and piano, but the general balance is the same: electronics create a texture out of which the other instruments can emerge. I look forward to hearing more of Matthew’s work in the future.

Matthew Quayle puts his formidable skills as a pianist to work in his collection of solo piano compositions titled *Songs Without Words*. This collection of Felix Mendelssohn sets a rather high bar that Quayle cannot reach, though his effort is impressive. His harmonies are excellent, his technique is spot on, and the direct modulations and applied chords that belong to the 21st Century. Thematic development is nuanced and tasteful, even if the melodies themselves aren’t particularly memorable. I get more out of Quayle’s technical ability as a player than I do of the pieces themselves. With Quayle’s technical prowess, I can’t imagine coming back to this.

Jane Rigler’s *Rarefactions* are ‘compositions via improvisations’. That is, every sound heard on the record was originally part of a free improvisation. Later, some of these were “modified” into compositions, which I imagine means edited and spliced into a fixed work. This is no problem for me; I like how the sounds scattered, a mix of various sounds in a nondescript atonal blend. The scheme for
seated in a wheelchair. The dark red gown of the Foreign Princess catches her sensuality, but the Prince’s hunting and formal attire are mundane. The three water sprites wear white sleeveless dresses, like the Russian Rusalka. The comic characters are blinding in their white.

The nursery is glorious and simple. The scenes at the Prince’s palace are set in a huge turnedtable glass-walled cube rather like a display vitrine. The light glares for the comic scenes, takes on a pale blue cast for the outdoor scenes, finally the shimmering blue of the water sprite’s home, complete with a real water pool gleaming from under the floorboards.

The performance is outstanding. Under Elder’s direction the orchestra latches out in dramatic fashion as needed, then settles into romantic lyricism. Hamann’s touching Rusalka is all quiet, unforced beauty, shimmering, floating with ease. As Jezibaba Howard is a force to be reckoned with. Clad in solemn black, looking like a domineering school marm, she pours out her dire warnings and reproaches. Cannan’s Foreign Princess is a fiendish and sexual siren. Televend looks like a romantic hero. He is rather saucy; but he has the voice: big, burly, unforced. As the Forester, Byles is a comic delight, along with Kimm’s spirited, championing Spirit Boy.

Mahler: Das Lied von der Erde
Kenneth Riegel, Doris Soffel, Bavarian Radio/ Colin Davis
Arthaus 109114 [Blu-ray] 74 minutes

Davis didn’t have a reputation as a major Mahler interpreter, but his few ventures in that direction were all first-class. There were lovely performances of Symphonies 4 and 6 from the Bavarian Radio, and there was a dark and brooding Das Lied sung by no less than Jon Vickers and Jesse Norman with the LSO from Philips. The LSO recording was from 1981. This performance is from 1988.

We know from the outstanding Kubelik (1970) and Maazel (1999-2000) recordings how much they can play this music, and they give Davis their best. The solo woodwinds are lovely: a cool but expressive flute, a tangy oboe close to the angelic Hansjorg Schellenberger in Giulini’s Berlin recording, a clarinet who can go from edgy to hauntingly dark, richly wooly bassoons. The brass players are also good: bright trumpets, mellow German horns, Starkly powerful trombones. The violins sing as compellingly as they did for Kubelik and shine as brightly in the high notes. But there are more of them now and it tells. The violas and cellos are rich and vocal. The bassoons are almost a character in their own right, powerful as Berlin’s and every bit as expressive.

Davis was a great opera conductor, best known for his Mozart: exuberant, open to that composer’s shadowy moments and to the light of love that Mozart could shine onto his characters—their love for one another and Mozart’s love for them. Davis’s Berlioz was warm but held in a stark, neoclassical, Jacques-Louis David aesthetic world. His Britten was almost as dark as the composer’s performances and much more humane. And who brought more life and expression to Tippett’s strange music than Davis?

Das Lied is a perfect piece for him. It is full of darkness, extraordinary orchestral timbres (someone could write a thesis someday about Mahler’s use of drones and gongs in this work) and humanity.

The three tenor songs come from a spirit with heroic aspirations but one that can’t endure life’s evanescence: a grim drinking song about death, a picture of life as a fragile illusion, rightside-up/upside-down reflections in the water; and finally, drunken futility.

The three alto songs are from a deeper place: facing loneliness and its pain; the longing for romantic connection; the heartbreak of the end of a human connection and the bitter sweet consolation of the eternity of nature and (I think) of memory.

So, a male voice tormented by transitory life and fleeing into self-medicated oblivion and a female voice longing for connection and finding consolation when it is (inevitably) sev-

Sounds like an opera to me.

All of Davis’s strengths are here. He understands the fragility and fear behind the tenor songs, the loneliness and yearning for connection, and the deep strength and true heroism of the alto songs (swung the horns and sax lines of the first tenor song—that’s an empty attempt at heroism). He captures the brittle-ness of the tenor songs (death) and the luscious resilience of the alto songs (life) superbly. The opening and closing of the first song leap and crash magnificently. The dreamscape of the second of a whole orphan in mourning is broken back and forth. The third song is tragically fragile. The fourth is also desolate but still

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Boito: Mefistofele
Samuel Ramey (Mefistofele), Gabriela Benackova (Margherita, Helen), Dennis O’Neill (Faust) San Francisco Opera/ Maurizio Arena
Arthaus 109148 [BluRay] 160 minutes

In March/April 2015 I reviewed a video of a 2013 SFO Mefistofele with Ildar Abdrazakov, Ramon Vargas, and Patricia Racette. I liked it, but mentioned there was competition from a 1989 recording of the same production. I sug-

gested it was slightly better than the newer one and of course it is, in almost every way. As Margherita, Racette was a good actress but a bland singer. Benackova is much more striking. Her low notes are on the weak side, but her upper voice is ravishing, and she does more justice to the character’s lyric flights. She acts well, and she even has a good trill for her Act 3 aria. Ramey’s Mephisto is not better than

Abdrazakov’s (who has the more imposing voice), but it’s good to hear him sound so sleek and steady—a far cry from the wobbly singer of today. He also has more sinister charm than his Russian Rusalka. The comic characters are blinding in their white.

Neither Faust is completely satisfactory. O’Neill has the more powerful voice and he tries hard to be stylish, but he never quite gets either the Italian or the legato right. Vargas is the smoother, steadier vocalist, with a nice Latin flow and a more ingratiating tone. He does more justice to the lyric rather than the heroic moments.

Both conductors are good: Nicola Luisotti in 2013, Arena in 1989. Mefistofele is a tricky opera to bring off. I’m glad to have both these performances and much more humane. And who brought more life and expression to Tippett’s strange music than Davis?

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DVORAK: Rusalka
Eileen Hannan (Rusalka), Ann Howard (Jezibaba), John Pritchard (Prince), Phyllis Cahalan (Foreign Princess), Fiona Kimm (Kitchen Boy), Edward Byles (Forester); English National Opera/ Mark Elder—ArtHaus 109150—159 minutes

Dvorak’s 1901 opera, libretto by Jaroslav Kvapil, is an effective combination of elements from Fouque’s fairytale Undine, Hans Christian Andersen’s Little Mermaid, and Gerhart Hauptmann’s Sunken Bell. His opera is the antithesis of lush romanticism, with some jar-

ring moments of heartily comic, it calls for a production that takes these elements into con-

sideration. This 1986 David Pountney produc-

tion from English National Opera pretty well does. Since Czech is not exactly congenial or even known by Western singers, this produc-

tion is sung in English, and there was a dark and brooding Das Lied sung by no less than Jon Vickers and Jesse Norman with the LSO from Philips. The LSO recording was from 1981. This performance is from 1988.

We know from the outstanding Kubelik (1970) and Maazel (1999-2000) recordings how much they can play this music, and they give Davis their best. The solo woodwinds are lovely: a cool but expressive flute, a tangy oboe close to the angelic Hansjorg Schellenberger in Giulini’s Berlin recording, a clarinet who can go from edgy to hauntingly dark, richly wooly bassoons. The brass players are also good: bright trumpets, mellow German horns, starkly powerful trombones. The
each piece seems very similar, so there isn't a lot of variation aside from instrumentation. Perhaps improvisations like these would be more compelling in real time and in person. There has been plenty of improvised music that has been a success in the age of recording technology. But this particular brand of improvisation offers very little interest.

Andrew Staniland's music for electronics and other instruments is on the bizarre side. As with most new music that involves "electronics", the devices or software involved and their effects aren't really specified. Staniland writes some music for an instrumentalist and then accompanies them by manipulating their sounds with his electronic setup.

In Talking Down the Tiger, there is an electronically created creation and echo that turns each stroke of the marimba into a consistent, rapid tremolo that shifts in pitch. In Dreaded Sea Voyage he applies more echo effects to create an eerie, piercing response to the guitar's insistent plucking. Elsewhere, he shifts the pitch of a whole swath of recorded playing, adds breathing sounds behind the acoustic instruments, and creates extended loops of a cellist's harmonics and high-register noisiness. There are occasional moments that catch my ear, but for the most part this is what now-generic electroacoustic music sounds like.

DAVORAK: Rusalka
Eilene Haman (Rusalka), Ann Howard (Jezibaba), John Atkinson (Prince), Phyllis Cairney (Foreign Princess), Fiona Kimm (Kitchen Boy), Edward Byles (Forester); English National Opera/Mark Elder—ArtHaus 109150—159 minutes

Dvorak's 1901 opera, libretto by Jaroslav Kvapil, is an effective combination of elements from Shakespeare's Undine, Hans Christian Andersen's Little Mermaid, and Gerhart Hauptmann's Sunken Bell. It is the opera of luscious romanticism, with some jarring moments of heartiness. It calls for a production that takes these elements into consideration. This 1986 David Pountney production from English National Opera pretty well does. Since Czech is not exactly congenial or even known by Western singers, this production is sung in English, and there was a dark and brooding Das Lied sung by no less than Jon Vickers and Jesse Norman with the LSO. The LSO recording was from 1981. This performance is from 1988.

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alive: the maiden is calling from inside herself to the riders and feels a response in her heart. The fifth song is from a voice no longer in this world; it might as well be sung by the howling ape from the jungle. The sixth is farewell, an orchestral interlude that is a journey through Hell into a kind of equanimity, and the capture and release of peace through identification with the larger universe.

Vickers and Norman were giants. Their intensity and vocal power are thrilling, and Davis responded with a starkly splendid playing from the LSO. But the more human scale here may suit the work better.

Riegel has a bright tenor that rings on top—not the golden, heroic ring that Vickers had to offer, but a kind of urgency. It’s beautiful, but it isn’t comfortable. He knows what his grim music is about and is brave enough to convey it.

Soffel, fine though her voice is, doesn’t have Norman’s depth of tone. (Nobody has since Flagstad.) But she is a very expressive singer. It’s not the lieder-singer expressiveness of Fassbaender for Giulini, with each note counting, but a wide expression built on phrases and arcs of melody and very powerful in its own way. Her part is the harder one: to convey aliveness that can outlast loneliness, yearning, and desolation but still reach down to the deep roots of humanity and find peace. And she does this. She conveys the moods of the last song. It’s not the lieder-singer expressiveness of Flagstad. But she is a very expressive singer. It’s not the lieder-singer expressiveness of Fassbaender for Giulini, with each note counting, but a wide expression built on phrases and arcs of melody and very powerful in its own way. Her part is the harder one: to convey aliveness that can outlast loneliness, yearning, and desolation but still reach down to the deep roots of humanity and find peace.

There’s nothing to complain about in these 1983 (3) and 1986 (4) performances apparently from the famous Concertgebouw Christmas concerts (Arthaus is not very explicit about this.) The playing (the slow movements here are examples) but there’s nothing blatant, nothing that sounds tacked-on. His performances are never about making you watch him experience the music. They’re about showing the music to you so you can experience it. The defect of his virtues is that sometimes he’s so modest that the music becomes inert. The second movement in his Chicago 3 just sat there—lyrically, delicately, but just sitting.

Video sometimes tells a story that a sound alone can’t. In the end of the big interlude in the last song, Soffel is sitting in the midst of the orchestra and it’s playing the funeral march music with the strings doing their mini-crescendos on their descending notes. If you look carefully, you can see her breathing with the violin notes. That’s how far inside the music the soloist is. But her part is the harder one: to convey aliveness that can outlast loneliness, yearning, and desolation but still reach down to the deep roots of humanity and find peace. And she does this. She conveys the moods of her character. That’s what life is about. That’s what life is about. That’s what life is about. That’s what life is about.

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alive: the maiden is calling from inside herself to the riders and feels a response in her heart. The fifth song is from a voice no longer in this world; it might as well be sung by the howling winds in a special traction sand. On to this vast stage are placed the horses and riders from the Académie Equestre de Versailles. The riders, women and men, are all identified by name, but listed as a group as “horsemen”. The hallmarks of his interpretations are a kind of lyric sanctity. He can create huge climaxes and deep intensity (the slow movements here are examples) but there’s nothing blatant, nothing that sounds tacked-on. His performances are never about making you watch him experience the music. They’re about showing the music to you so you can experience it. The defect of his virtues is that sometimes he’s so modest that the music becomes inert. The second movement in his Chicago 3 just sat there—lyrically, delicately, but just sitting. There’s nothing to complain about in these 1983 (3) and 1986 (4) performances apparently from the famous Concertgebouw Christmas concerts (Arthaus is not very explicit about this.) The sonority (the slow movements here are examples) but there’s nothing blatant, nothing that sounds tacked-on. His performances are never about making you watch him experience the music. They’re about showing the music to you so you can experience it. The defect of his virtues is that sometimes he’s so modest that the music becomes inert. The second movement in his Chicago 3 just sat there—lyrically, delicately, but just sitting.

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These discs are probably the best overall recommendations for these works on video, though the Järvi 3 (J/A 2015) is a powerful competitor, as was a surprisingly good performance by Glenn Cortese with a student orchestra (S/O 2004).

The Blu-ray recording faithfully reproduces the very good sound.

**MAHLER:** Symphonies 3+4
Maria Ewing, s; Carolyn Watkinson, mz; Concertgebouw/ Bernard Haitink
3: Arthaus 109120 [Blu-ray] 103 minutes
4: Arthaus 109109 [Blu-ray] 62 minutes

Haitink’s way with Mahler is no secret. He has recorded these symphonies a number of times from 1966 (his first recording of 3) and 1967 (his first 4) to 2006 (his most recent of both). The hallmarks of his interpretations are a kind of lyric sanctity. He can create huge climaxes and deep intensity (the slow movements here are examples) but there’s nothing blatant, nothing that sounds tacked-on. His performances are never about making you watch him experience the music. They’re about showing the music to you so you can experience it. The defect of his virtues is that sometimes he’s so modest that the music becomes inert. The second movement in his Chicago 3 just sat there—lyrically, delicately, but just sitting.

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**MOZART:** Davide Penitente
Christiane Karg, s; Marianne Crebassa, mz; Stanislas De Barbeyrac, t; Salzburg Bach Choir, Musiciens du Louvre/ Marc Minkowski
C Major 73 1704—73 + 66 + 17 minutes

Just what to call this video from the 2015 Mozart Week in Salzburg? The Mozart Week occurs around the date of Mozart’s birth, January 27. The operas are left to the summer festival. Concerts are the norm. For 2015 the show was most unusual. It’s not an opera either in musical form, text, or production. The production could better be described as a horse ballet. Minkowski has restored the Salzburg Felsenreitschule (Stone Riding School) to its original function. The Musiciens du Louvre, the Salzburg Bach Choir, and three soloists are positioned in the three tiers of stone arcades at the back of the stage, re-enforced and covered with a special traction sand. On to this vast stage are placed the horses and riders from the Académie Equestre de Versailles. The riders, women and men, are all identified by name, but listed as a group as ‘horsemen’. The 12 horses, carefully identified by type, are “Crottinata”, cream-colored Lusitanos, and Le Caravage, the horse ridden by (horse choreographer) Bartabas”. It’s quite lovely how the noble steeds and their movements reflect the grace and style of the music.

A short listing of credits is superimposed on scenes of the arrival of the horses. The music proper begins with the ‘March of the Priest’ (Magic Flute) and the Masonic Funeral Music. Soloists and choir are added for the cantata Davide Penitente, one of Mozart’s latest performed choral pieces. Soloists, choir, orchestra, and horses blend to lovely effect. Crebassa is lovely and beautifully sings the middle range of the mezze soloist. She is joined in duet with the bright-toned coloratura effusions of Karg. Tenor De Barbeyrac is joined by the wooden wind instruments for a delicate aria. The Salzburgers are a hearty lot. The Louviers play their period instruments with their usual virtuosity and style.

There is a nice bonus in Mozart’s Adagio and Fugue in C minor, K 546, performed as a concert piece as horses and riders pass in silhouette. Was this an introductory piece or an encore? First viewing is of an attractive program. But how well will it age? I can’t help but think this performance would have been more effective in attendance—the video is a kind of tourist souvenir.

Previews of five other videos round out the program: the ballets The Little Mermaid (Auerbach), Romeo and Juliet (Tchkalovsky), the Verdi Requiem (Dudamel), The Coloss Compact Wagner Ring (an insult to the intelligence), and a John Williams Celebration (his film music in concert with costumed supernumeraries and Izhak Perlman).

**PROKOFIEFF:** Cinderella
Mariinsky Ballet/ Valery Gergiev
Mariinsky 555 [Blu-ray & DVD] 1:50

The Maryinsky’s string of outstanding ballet productions on Blu-ray continues unbroken with this brilliantly danced, visually vibrant production of Prokofiev’s Cinderella. It doesn’t pack the graphic punch of Romeo and Juliet. It’s a lighter, simpler piece with more humor; and Alexei Ratmansky’s choreography emphasizes the work’s often gentle humor (even the nasty stepmother and stepisters are funny, rather than evil).

It’s dangerous to call any performance “definitive”, but Diana Vishneva’s Cinderella comes about as close as one can get. She has the right balance of innocence and mischief and dances like...well, maybe a serious ballerina can spot an error or two in her performance but I sure cannot. Shklyarov’s athletic yet graceful Prince is also great. I hit the repeat button at least once during their pas de deux in Act II.

This production needs a strong Cinderella and Prince because Kondaurova, Frolova, and Ivanivkova—stepmother and stepisters—would steal the show. In some ways, it’s probably harder to dance awkwardly and off-kilter. The deft comic timing and nearly acrobatic flexibility of these three is irresistible. One does not want to look away from the screen even for a second for fear of missing something.

Aside from the dancers, the other visual star of the production is color: electric blue, bright red, orange, and vibrant green. It’s in the brightly colored costumes of the Four Seasons, the fairies who help the Fairy Godmother with Cinderella’s transformation into ball costume. And it’s in the costumes of the guests at the ball, even the outrageous magenta tights of one of the stepisters. It certainly plays to the strength of the Blu-ray format, too.

The rest of the production is sparse. The
backdrops are suggestive of each locale, and there are industrial metal stairs on the sides of the stage. But it’s ballet, so most of one’s attention is where it should be on the dancers.

The Maryinsky orchestra deftly though Prokofiev’s score. It’s an alert, lively performance that does get a bit overshadowed by everything that’s going on the stage. (I probably should have shut off the TV and listened to the audio track like a CD.) I’ve sometimes found the Cinderella music rather watered down compared to Romeo and Juliet, but I was not thinking that while I watched this. Gergiev gave the Act II waltz and the Mid-night music weight and an edge of menace without overloading it. And in the lighter portions of the score he avoids his occasional tendency to be heavy handed.

One small curiosity: the opening credits and the outside of the box all refer to the performance as in the Mariinsky Theater. But you won’t see the lavish 1860 theater of imperial Russia. Instead, it’s in the "Mariinsky Second Stage", part of the Mariinsky complex but a totally separate theater that opened in 2013. Since the theater is quite inexpensive to produce, the Mariinsky label deals with the whole Blu-ray vs DVD business by including both in the box. I can enjoy the ballet in full 1080i high-def video on my Sharp Aquos HDTV, and I can also share it with my girlfriend, who has only a DVD player, without having to play with the Blu-ray player to her place. DVD video quality depends a lot on the quality of the original; the result here is that the difference between the DVD and Blu-ray pictures is small. The Blu-ray has greater definition of detail and more clarity in the colors, but I can happily live with either.

**Puccini: Turandot**

Daniela Dessi (Turandot), Guanqun Yu (Liu), Roberta Canzian (Liu), Marco Arturo Marelli (Calaf), Aleksandr Rybalkin (Ping), Andrea Gonzolo (Pong) and the 250 singers and dancers of the Mariinsky Theatre

**Dynamic 33764—120 minutes**

Mlada Khudoley (Turandot), Bregenz Festival/ Paolo Carignani

**Mlada Khudoley (Turandot), Guanqun Yu (Liu), Roberta Canzian (Liu), Marco Arturo Marelli (Calaf)**

**Dynamic 33764—120 minutes**

These two productions of Turandot were both in Europe in the summer of 2015, yet they could hardly be more different. One, from the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa, is basically a traditional staging with less spectacle than in most Turandot productions. Instead of long processions of extras and lots of movement, the chorus stands on either side of a central unit set and “Gergiev with dorma” backgroundation or involvement. A group of acrobatic sword dancers adds a bit of excitement, but generally this is visually a rather dull production. When Calaf sees Turandot, he stares off into space, as if watching the moon. Liu basically stands and sings, except in Act II, when she makes a badly-directed run at Calaf for her one line. During Liu’s agony in Act III, we can see Timur looking bored as he stands upstage. Indeed, only Daniela Dessi, the Turandot, acts. She reacts in fear when Calaf answers the first riddle correctly, and she moves closer to him as she asks the last two, showing her attraction and fascination with this man. This production needs more work from the stage director.

No such problem exists in the other production, from the Bregenz Festival, where some operas are performed on a huge floating stage in Lake Constance while the audience watches from seats on shore. The director, Marco Arturo Marelli, who also designed the set, places his action on several platforms in front of the Great Wall of China. The actual chorus is offshore somewhere, while the onstage extras range from a large group of Chinese military men to a group of people in formal dress and masks. During much of the orchestral interludes, the audience views fire jugglers, and other assorted dancers. Marelli also has Calaf dressed as Puccini. At the beginning, this character sits on a downstage platform at a piano, then turns to a music box where he hears one of the Chinesse tunes from the opera, whereupon he rushes offstage. The Turandot character as the orchestra plays the opening music and the opera begins.

During the music between scenes 1 and 2 of Act II I felt that I was watching one of the spectacular Olympic openings or closings rather than a part of an opera. The scene of Act II finds Ping, Pang, and Pong in some kind of laboratory or library where they are doing something with (preserving?) the Prince of Persia’s severed head. For the riddle scene, Turandot enters with a contrapuntal ensemble that resembles a mummy’s head atop a coat rack. She refers to it as she tells of Lo-ulu-ing and then puts on the mummy’s coat and tiara. After Calaf’s answers, Turandot produces a dagger with which she threatens suicide. Calaf takes it away, and Liu picks it up, giving her the weapon she needs for her suicide to come, since there are no traditional soldiers. In Act III Calaf-Puccini sings ‘Nessun dorma’ back to back with his downstage platform while Liu watches nearby. He is then tied up until Turandot unites him in the final duet. Oh yes, Liu comes to Calaf and kisses him before she kills herself.

All this adds up to a production that neither tells the original story well nor presents a specific, clear directional point of view. It is a rather typical 19th Century operatic treatment of the story, complete with love potions and Russian peasants in awe of the tsar. In this production, from Berlin in 2013, the director Dmitri Tcherniakov chooses to update the setting to the present. Since there is no tsar, he imagines that a group of political leaders have decided that the people need a tsar, so a virtual tsar is created by combining various physical traits of former Russian and Soviet leaders. We see this computer-generated tsar take shape during the overture. Of course, one point the group apparently begins to laugh at themselves and their costumes. The stage setting includes a TV studio complete with cameras and lights and a control room with technical-looking machinery and furniture.

I’m sorry, but I just don’t get it. The whole story may be a bit far-fetched, but set in the 19th century it seems more plausible than this attempt to make the words and events of the libretto fit into a modern setting. I’m struck by the expense of such a complex setting, where to my mind the story could be much more effective and much more believable. There are some effective visual moments, especially in the second act when we see both the inside and outside of a house and the meeting of the heroine and her enemy, the jealous Lyubasha. But I believe the effectiveness comes from the excellence of the singing actresses as much as the cleverness of the setting.

Musically, the performance has no prob-
backdrops are suggestive of each locale, and there are industrial metal stairs on the sides of the stage. But it’s ballet, so most of one’s attention is where it should be on the dancers. The Maryinsky orchestra deftly though Prokofieff’s score. It’s an alert, lively performance that does get a bit overshadowed by everything that’s going on at the stage. (I probably should have shut off the TV and listened to the audio track like a CD.) I’ve sometimes found the Cinderella music rather watered down compared to Romeo and Juliet, but I was not thinking that while I watched this. Gergiev gave the Act II waltz and the Mid-night music weight and an edge of menace without overloading it. And in the lighter portions of the score he avoids his occasional tendency to be heavy handed.

The small curiosity: the opening credits and the outside of the box all refer to the performance as in the Mariinsky Theater. But you won’t see the lavish 1860 theater of imperial Russia. Instead, it’s in the “Mariinsky Second Stage”, part of the Mariinsky complex but a totally separate theater that opened in 2013. Since the place is quite inexpensive to produce, the Mariinsky label deals with the whole Blu-ray vs DVD business by including both in the box. I can enjoy the ballet in full 1080 high-def video on my Sharp Aquos HDTV, and I can also share it with my girlfriend, who has only a DVD player, without having to schlep the Blu-ray player to her place. DVD video quality depends a lot on the quality of the original; the result here is that the difference between the DVD and Blu-ray pictures is small. The Blu-ray has greater definition of detail and more clarity in the colors, but I can readily live with either.

**Puccini: Turandot**

Daniela Dessi (Turandot), Roberta Canzian (Liu), Mario Malagnini (Calaf), Ramaz Chikviladze (Gong), Bregenz Festival/ Paolo Carignani

During the music between scenes 1 and 2 of Act II I felt that I was watching one of the spectacular Olympic openings or closings rather than a part of an opera. The scene of Act II finds Ping, Pang, and Pong in some kind of laboratory or library where they are doing something with (preserving?) the Prince of Persia’s severed head. For the riddle scene, Turandot enters with a contrapuntal theme that resembles a mummy’s head atop a coat rack. She refers to it as she tells of Lu-u-ling and then puts on the mummy’s coat and tiara. After Calaf’s answers, Turandot produces a dagger with which she threatens suicide. Calaf takes it away, and Liu picks it up, giving her the weapon she needs for her suicide to come, since there are no traditional soldiers. In Act III Calaf/Puccini sings “Nessun dorma” backed by his downstage platform while Liu watches nearby. He is then tied up until Turandot unites him in the final duet. Oh yes, Liu comes to Calaf and kisses him before she kills herself.

All this adds up to a production that neither tells the original story well nor presents a specific, clear directional point of view. It might be partly acceptable if the musical performances were excellent. Alas, they are not. The Turandot, Madla Khudoley, has the physical beauty that many Turandots lack, but not the voice. She manages all the notes, but the sound is not beautiful, and often there is a constellable wobble. In the riddle scene her voice often sounds harsh. Her Calaf, Riccardo Massi, sings acceptably but tends to scoop when approaching high notes. Only Guangn Yu, the Liu, makes one forget the bizarre staging. Hers is a lovely, colorful lyric voice used to great effect. She outsings everyone else in both the riddles and the dramatic finale. As a whole, the Genoa performance fares much better musically. Daniela Dessi’s voice shows the years a bit with a somewhat wide vibrato, but her voice is a solid one to start with, and her experience and technique enable her to portray a convincing Turandot. The tenor of the opera is Calaf’s music. The Liu, Roberta Canzian, has a fine lyric voice, but she ignores the pianissimos in Liu’s arias. Both Ping, Pang, and Pong trios are excellent, and both Timurs are adequate. Both productions are well supported by good orchestral and chorus work. The Genoa production, from Berlin in 2013, the director Dmitri Tcherniakov chooses to update the setting to the present. Since there is no tsar, he imagines that a group of political leaders have decided that the people need a tsar, so a virtual tsar is created by combining various physical traits of former Russian and Soviet leaders. We see this computer-generated tsar take shape during the overture. The additional point of view is to care that no one in his right mind would believe today in the existence of a love potion, so the potion stands as an anachronistic element in this production.

The beginning of Act II is a pleasant chorus. Instead of cutting this chorus to fit the modern setting, the director shows a group of peasants being filmed or telecast; at one point the group apparently begins to laugh at themselves and their costumes. The stage setting includes a TV studio complete with cameras and lights and a control room with technical-looking machinery and furniture. I’ve been following it, but I don’t get it. The whole story may be a bit far-fetched, but set in the 19th century it seems more plausible than this attempt to make the words and events of the libretto fit into a modern setting. I’m struck by the expense of such a complex setting, where to me the opera’s orchestral sound might be more effective and much more believable. There are some effective visual moments, especially in the second act when we see both the inside and outside of a house and the meeting of the heroine and her enemy, the jealous Lyubasha. But I believe the effectiveness comes from the excellence of the two singing actresses as much as the cleverness of the setting.

Musically, the performance has no prob...
Iems. Under Daniel Barenboim the orchestra, chorus, and soloists make the most of the music. The title role is stunningly sung and acted by Olga Peretyatko, whose personal beauty and soprano fit perfectly. As good or maybe even better is the exciting mezzo Anita Rachvelishvili as the obsessed Lyybasha. This lady completely throws herself into the part of the sad character bent on revenge against an innocent victim, her powerful dramatic mezzo perfect for the role. One can judge her effectiveness by the huge ovation she is given at her curtain call.

Johannes Martin Kränzle sings well and gives a rather frightening portrayal of the unhappy, obsessed Gnyavon. Pavel Cernoch reveals a pleasant tenor in the role of Marfa’s true love, Lykov. His voice, looks, and acting make him the perfect young lover. Other effective performances come from Anatoli Kotscherga as Marfa’s father, Stephan Régamer as the sleazy German purveyor of potions and poisons, Anna Lapkovskaya as Marfa’s friend Dunyasha, and the veteran Anna Tomowa-Sintow, who at 72 still sounds quite acceptable as Dunyasha’s mother.

The booklet has a decent synopsis, but no essay explaining the rationale for this production, if there is one.

**SATIE: Satiesfictions**
A film by Anne-Kathrin Peitz & Youlian Tabakov
Accentus 20312—56 minutes

This is an extremely well-done documentary on Satie that captures his quirikiness, offers some fascinating thoughts about his life and times, and gives a number of great musical performances. Mostly in French (with good English subtitles), a lot of it is drawn from Satie’s own writings and drawn drawings—and the latter are animated, jumping to life. These are interspersed with unusual performances: a young girl at the piano, an older man playing with faux snow falling, a very large man with a painted face in drag singing in falsetto, interviews with people who are musical experts on Satie and his times. It’s hard to describe this, but I believe I could guarantee that Satie himself would fully approve of the approach, and anyone with a liking for his music and reputation will not be disappointed with this brilliantly conceived and constructed hour.

**Teatro alla Scala: the Golden Years**
Enzo Biagi, interviewer
Dynamic 37728—30—87, 80, 81 minutes

This trio of DVDs contains a six-part (two parts per DVD) documentary about Milan’s La Scala Opera. It is not a history; rather, the Italian journalist Enzo Biagi interviews several important singers and conductors of the era from 1950 to 1981, besides giving us a behind-the-scenes look at the opera’s ballet school and its tour to Tokyo in 1981.

The film begins with some statistics about the size and complexity of the company and includes some snippets of rehearsals, neither of which is particularly interesting. Part II includes a lengthy section about the “Friends of the Gallery”, a group of La Scala fans who meet to discuss their reactions to the operas; they simply sound like any group of opera lovers arguing about their favorite singers, operas, and productions, whether in Milan, New York, or anywhere opera lovers happen to meet. The coverage of the Tokyo tour could be shortened, but the section about La Scala’s ballet school is interesting. I wonder if the school still exists today, 35 years after this film was made.

For most current opera lovers, the best parts are the unusual excerpts and the long interviews. I especially enjoyed footage of a rehearsal of the Cavalleria duet with Giulietta Simionato and Franco Corelli, Maria Callas singing ‘Vissi d’Arte’, a young (much thinner) Luciano Pavarotti singing ‘Di quella pira’, and a small section of the Butterfly love duet with Carlo Bergonzi and an unidentified Renata Scotto. The Japan part includes painfully small selections from Otello, Simon Boccanegra, and the Verdi Requiem. Enzo Biagi was an excellent interviewer. His manner recalls Edward R. Murrow and, in our day, Charlie Rose. By far the best parts of this film are these conversations, especially with Mario del Monaco, Renata Tebaldi, Giulietta Simionato, Claudio Abbado, Placido Domingo, and Mirella Freni.

Each disc comes with a small booklet. The set is worth having, but I wish all the excerpts and interviews were available in one package.

**SIBELIUS: Symphonies 1, 2, 5, 7**
Vienna Philharmonic / Leonard Bernstein
C Major 732404 [Blu-ray] 2:46 minutes

These were released on DVD about 6 years ago. I have always assumed they are the same, or essentially the same performances that DG issued on CD in the late 1980s. Even if they are not identical, they were made at the same time, and Bernstein’s interpretations had emerged into his final, Mahlerian style for Sibelius. Unite! filmed them at about yearly intervals in the four years before the conductor died in October 1990. They were recorded on film, rather than video tape, which could actually offer considerable justification for transfer to Blu-ray. Videotape images fade over time and can lose what crispness, color saturation, and definition they had when new. Film stock carefully restored and transferred to digital video with equal care, can result in a true high-definition product, with images of remarkable clarity and vibrancy. I’m not sure much, if any, restoration of originals was done here—the booklet is mum on the subject. The tech data does promise 1080i resolution, and the picture quality is quite good, the audio track excellent, and the performances themselves out of this world.

Sibelius’s symphonies are a mix of frantic fury, angst, and serene resignation, which seemed to perfectly synchronize with Bernstein’s interpretations in the last 20 years of his life. By this stage in the conductor’s career, every performance has an end-of-the-world intensity, which is not surprising, given that we now know Bernstein was nearing the end of his life. Some reviewers found his interpretations from this period idiosyncratic, mannered, self-indulgent—all with a very tegcentric conductor imposing his own vision on top of the composer’s. To this I say balderdash! If Bernstein had passed away at age 50, thus depriving the world of his last 20 years of performances and recordings, he would have been remembered as a talented composer and effective symphony conductor, but by no means one of the podium greats. Instead he proved himself one of the greatest conductors or all time, or at least among the greatest who have been documented on recordings.

It’s been a while since I’ve watched the DVDs or listened to the DG CDs, and to a degree, re-acquaintance was a bit jarring. Much of my Sibelius listening these days has been with the recordings and concert performances by the Minnesota Orchestra and Osmo Vanska. Vanska’s take on Sibelius is entirely different—stark, astringent, unemotional, and expressing in the last movements at least) to the point of being punchy. Bernstein doesn’t round off the craggy edges, but his approach is far more deeply imbued with tinges of Mahler. Each performance has an almost agonizingly personal edge to it. The sorrow, as in Symphony 1 is palpable—and pain, too. The latter is probably litera-l: looking at Bernstein in this performance, filmed only 7 or 8 months before he died, he appears to be in physical pain. The clenching at his chest with his left hand may have been more than an expressive gesture to the orchestra. And yet, unlike other conductors—Maazel and Ashkenazy come to mind—Bernstein does not round off the craggy edges of Sibelius’s sound world or smooth it to a Tchaikovskyan sheen. It always retains the composer’s stark, elemental quality. And Bernstein’s interpretations do not entirely wear their hearts on their sleeves; Vanska’s Symphony 1 (especially IV) is even less intuitively expressive.

Bernstein did not hurry through Symphony 2 in his earlier Columbia recording, and by 1986 when this account was recorded, he had slowed down even more, as if he couldn’t bear to let go of a single note before he absolutely had to. And not a single second is anything less than electric. In the few years since I’ve heard this performance; and nobody, not even Vanska, whips the “whirlpool” music in the finale to such a nearly unbearable level of tension. It never gets old. Bernstein’s interpretation of the Fifth differs mostly from the earlier black-and-white Blu-ray video with the London Symphony (Sept/Oct 2013) in greater depth and weight, but as in the earlier video, he does not short-change the work’s cheerful, playful moments, including the five crazy, spaced-out, tension-building chords that end the finale.

Some conductors make the Seventh a long, l-o-n-g-s-t-o-m-a-t-e performance where many varied moods from the score aided by the engineers strategically placing chapter breaks to logical points in the narrative. Despite the canard that Bernstein favored glacial tempos in his final year, this performance clocks in at about the same pace as any recent one, including Vanska. Yet one can click around and get a feel for just how deftly Sibelius hid a formal structure underneath the work’s seem-

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**March/April 2016**

American Record Guide

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228

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229
Teatro alla Scala: the Golden Years
Enzo Biagi, interviewer
Dynamic 37728-30—87, 80, 81 minutes

This trio of DVDs contains a six-part (two parts per DVD) documentary about Milan’s La Scala Opera. It is not a history; rather, the Italian journalist Enzo Biagi interviews several important singers and conductors of the era from 1950 to 1981, besides giving us a behind-the-scenes look at the opera’s ballet school and its tour to Tokyo in 1981.

The film begins with some statistics about the size and complexity of the company and includes some snippets of rehearsals, neither of which is particularly interesting. Part II includes a lengthy section about the “Friends of the Gallery”, a group of La Scala fans who meet to discuss their reactions to the opera; they simply sound like any group of opera lovers arguing about their favorite singers, operas, and productions, whether in Milan, New York, or anywhere opera lovers happen to meet. The coverage of the Tokyo tour could be shortened, but the section about La Scala’s ballet school is interesting. I wonder if the school still exists today, 35 years after this film was made.

For most current opera lovers, the best parts are the unusual excerpts and the long interviews. I especially enjoyed footage of a rehearsal of the Cavalleria Rusticana duet with Giulietta Simionato and Franco Corelli, Maria Callas singing ‘Vissi d’arte’, a young (much thinner) Luciano Pavarotti singing ‘Di quella pira’, and a small section of the Butterfly love duet with Carlo Bergonzi and an unidentified Renata Scotto. The Japan part includes painfully small selections from Otello, Simon Boccanegra, and the Verdi Requiem. Enzo Biagi was an excellent interviewer. His manner recalls Edward R. Murrow and, in our day, Charlie Rose. By far the best parts of this film are these conversations, especially with Mario del Monaco, Renato Tebaldi, Giulietta Simionato, Claudio Abbado, Placido Domingo, and Mirella Freni.

Each disc comes with a small booklet. The set is worth having, but I wish all the excerpts and interviews were available in one package.

SININGER

HARRINGTON

SIBELIUS: Symphonies 1, 2, 3, 5, 7
Vienna Philharmonic / Leonard Bernstein
C Major 732404 [Blu-ray] 2:46 minutes

These were released on DVD about 6 years ago. I have always assumed they are the same, or essentially the same performances that DG issued on CD in the late 1980s. Even if they are not identical, they were made at the same time, and Bernstein’s interpretations had emerged into his final, Mahlerian style for Sibelius. Unfelt filmed them at about yearly intervals in the four years before the conductor died in October 1990. They were recorded on film, rather than video tape, which could actually offer considerable justification for transfer to Blu-ray. Videotape images fade over time and can lose what crispness, color saturation, and definition they had when new. Film stock carefully restored and transferred to digital video with equal care, can result in a true high-definition product, with images of remarkable clarity and vibrancy. I’m not sure much, if any, restoration of originals was done here—the booklet is mum on the subject. The tech data does promise 1080i resolution, and the picture quality is quite good, the audio track excellent, and the performances themselves out of this world.

Sibelius’s symphonies are a mix of frantic fury, angst, and serene resignation, which seemed to perfectly synchronize with Bernstein’s interpretations in the final 20 years of his life. By this stage in the conductor’s career, every performance has an end-of-the-world intensity, which is not surprising, given that we now know Bernstein was nearing the end of his life. Some reviewers found his interpretations from this period idiosyncratic, mannered, self-indulgent, and lacking in centripetal force, conductor imposing his own vision on top of the composer’s. To this I say balderdash! If Bernstein had passed away at age 50, thus depriving the world of his last 20 years of performances and recordings, he would have been remembered as a talented composer and effective symphony conductor, but by no means one of the podium greats. Instead he proved himself one of the greatest conductors or all time, or at least among the greatest who have been documented on recordings.

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Bernstein did not hurry through Symphony 2 in his earlier Columbia recording, and by 1986 when this account was recorded, he had slowed down even more, as if he couldn’t bear to let go of a single note before he absolutely had to. And not a single second is anything less than engrossing. In fact, fewer than a few minutes since I’ve heard this performance; and nobody, not even Vanska, whips the “whirlpool” music in the finale to such a nearly unbearable level of tension. It never gets old. Bernstein’s interpretations of the Fifth differs mostly from the earlier black-and-white Blu-ray video with the London Symphony (Sept/Oct 2013) in greater depth and weight, but as in the earlier video, he does not short-change the work’s cheerful, playful moments, including the five crazy, spaced-out, tension-building chords that end the finale.

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INGLY OPEN, UNRESTRICTED FORMAT. BERNSTEIN BUILDs A STRONG CASE FOR THE SEVENTH; IT SEEMS AS TIGHTLY AND ECONOMICALLY CONSTRUCTED AS ANY OF THE EARLIER SYMPHONIES.

MY ONLY REGRET ABOUT THIS ALBUM IS THAT BERNSTEIN HAD TO MAKE EXCUSES TO EACH OF HIS LADY LOVES.

A DURABLE PERFORMANCE, SERVING AS A MODERATELY CONVENTIONAL BROADWAY BILLET D’OEUVRE.

THE VISUAL SIDE OF THE PRODUCTION IS DIRECTED BY THE REDOUTABLE HUMPHREY BURTON. CAMERA WORK IS PRETTY STRAIGHTFORWARD, THOUGH THE TENDENCY TO CONCENTRATE THE PICTURE ON EITHER BERNSTEIN OR WHATEVER SECTION OF THE ORCHESTRA IS PLAYING AT THE MOMENT IS MORE LIKE A BAREFOOT KID THAN A TERRAPIN CREEK.
The visual side of the production is directed by the redoubtable Humphrey Burton. Camera work is mostly pretty straightforward, although the tendency to concentrate on the picture on either Bernstein or whatever section of the orchestra is playing at the moment is more than a little redolent of Karajan’s final video series (released eventually on Sony). But where the Karajan series is actually distracting in its rigid refusal to show players” faces, Burton is more sensible to the challenge. So, I would prefer the camera sometimes spent time farther back in the theater. I also thought the annoying tendency to jump around every few seconds to whichever section of the orchestra is playing was something that arose more in the late 1980s. But here’s evidence that the mannerism already had a solid foothold in the 1980s.

Some technical housekeeping. The earlier DVD release spread the four symphonies across two discs; the Blu-ray gets them all on one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. You can hear the audio track in one. Symphony 2 is in the old, broadcast TV widescreen. 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traditional Firebird choreography, but everything we see is fully in tune with Stravinsky's score. Kaschtei comes off as a genuinely menacing character, and Hodgkinson's Firebird expresses the mysterious supernatural quality of the mythical creature. Antonijevic's prince is a man of action, expressed through dancing that's full of masculine energy yet not ungraceful.

The basic unit of leafless trees makes no pretense toward photorealism, and that's fine. The Prince gets a nice blue costume, Kaschtei a dress, black lipstick, and black nail polish—and of course the Firebird is in striking red. Camera work is straightforward and free of gimmicks.

There are a lot of good Firebirds on video, and this is one of them. The Kirov-Marinsky has made at least three. I must still give the edge to the most recent Mariinsky Ballet video production (Mar/Apr 2010), but perhaps we should not think so much in terms of "better". Although I can't say the dancing is on the same level of athletic intensity, I'd never want to part with the old Royal Ballet film from around 1959-60 with Margot Fonteyn.

One small detail I like about EuroArts's production is that even though it was filmed under controlled studio conditions with a canned soundtrack, the thumps of the dancers' feet are not edited out. It's always odd hearing a filmed ballet with the dancers' feet not included. The unusual production, wondering what the director's ideas were. We hear the ideas behind the giant head and the three-level set of Act II, as well as Pappano's helpful comments about the music. There are also separate items dealing with the sets, the music, and the background of the opera, as well as a helpful essay in the booklet.

All this would be merely academic if the musical performance were not of high quality, but it is. Mariusz Kwiecien has made the performance of this opera something of a personal cause. He has sung it several times in Europe and as Santa Fe, so a production is supposedly slated for Chicago. He is a formidable Rogers, with his excellent baritone and his fine acting. From the opening moments one can see that all is not well with this king. His conflicted reactions to the shepherd and to his own wife show him as an inner soul, only relieved in the final moments of the opera. I was lucky enough to see his performance in Santa Fe; both that production and this one show this Polish baritone as the ideal Rogers.

Kwiecien is ably supported by tenor Saimir Pirgu as the shepherd and American soprano Georgiana Răzvan as Roxana. Both are fine singers, and the two together have an outstanding set of voices that complement each other well.

In terms of the music, the production pays homage to the original Firebird, and this is another excellent production of the Royal Opera and its musical director. SINGINER

VAININGER: The Passenger

Michelle Breedt (Lisa), Elena Kelessidi (Marta), Svetlana Doneva (Katja), Roberto Sacca (Walter), Artur Rucinski (Tadeusz); Bregenz Festival/Teodor Currentzis

ArtHaus 180979 [2DVD] 161+21 minutes

Mieczyslaw Weinberg wrote this opera in the late 1960s, but it was not staged until 2010 at the Bregenz Festival, 14 years after the composer's death. It concerns a chance meeting on an ocean liner, long after World War II, of Marta, a Holocaust survivor, and Lisa, the former SS guard who knew Marta at Auschwitz. The setting shifts between the present, on the ship, and flashbacks to the concentration camp. Through seven scenes we see Lisa's fear of returning as a former prisoner, then witness the life of the camp among a group of female prisoners who attempt at friendship and hope, their comforting of each other, both their faith and loss of faith, their defiance, and a horrible scene when several are dragged away to their deaths. The tightly-constructed libretto moves toward its inevitable climax the confrontation of the two women in the present and the camp "concert" where Marta's fiancé defies the authorities and is killed. In an ingenuously, the opera contains an epilogue—a short solo by Marta now in modern dress where she remembers and promises never to forget. At the end of the opera, the stunned audience does not applaud until the lights come up on the two excellent female leads.

The music fits the libretto perfectly. Vainberg, a protégé of Shostakovich, offers an astonishing variety of musical styles to accompany the rapidly changing moods of the drama. There is jazzy dance music for the shipboard scenes. Three SS soldiers sing a rather macabre trio showing their loyalty to the Nazi ideal, closely followed by a haunting hymn of the prisoners, which reappears at various critical moments in the opera. Most of the music sung by the women in the two barracks scenes is quiet, typical of people afraid to call attention to themselves. At one point a woman sings a Russian folk song a cappella. I have no idea if it is an authentic folk song or Vainberg's composition, but it is quite effective. The music seems always to enhance the action, to make sense visually and emotionally.

The performance, filmed at the world premiere of performances at Bregenz, could not be better. In the two central female roles of Lisa and Marta Michelle Breedt and Elena Kelessidi set a standard that will be hard to follow. Breedt makes us sympathize with Lisa in the first scene when she discovers the "passenger", then makes us nearly hate her as we see her in her role as concentration camp guard. Kelessidi shows the great strength of Marta as she endures the prison life but keeps her own spirit alive, becoming almost a mother figure to the other women. Her solo epilogue is heart-breaking.

The many female supporting roles are well sung and beautifully acted. Among the male characters, Roberto Sacca conveys the shrewdness of Lisa's ambitious husband and Artur Rucinski the depth and courage of Marta's lover. Tadeusz. The Vienna Symphony and Prague Philharmonic Choir perform ably under Teodor Currentzis. There is simply nothing wrong with this production.

The DVD contains a short documentary with good background information on the opera and the production, as well as a booklet with background and a statement written by Shostakovich.

At one point in Act I, a prisoner wonders, "Will people in the future think of us?" If they see The Passenger, they will. SINGINER

VERDI: Aida

Kristin Lewis (Aida), Fabio Sartori (Radames), Anita Rachvelishvili (Amneris), George Gagnidze (Amonasro), Matti Salminen (Ramfis); La Scala/ Zubin Mehta

C Major 732208—151 minutes

To judge from two productions I've seen on DVD, the director Peter Sellars seems to have an aversion to the kind of directoral interpretation of the early Verdi operas I've seen. In this production of Aida, the opera is set on an ocean liner, long after World War II, of Marta, a Holocaust survivor, and Lisa, the former SS guard who knew Marta at Auschwitz. The setting shifts between the present, on the ship, and flashbacks to the concentration camp. Through seven scenes we see Lisa's fear of returning as a former prisoner, then witness the life of the camp among a group of female prisoners who attempt at friendship and hope, their comforting of each other, both their faith and loss of faith, their defiance, and a horrible scene when several are dragged away to their deaths. The tightly-constructed libretto moves toward its inevitable climax the confrontation of the two women in the present and the camp "concert" where Marta's fiancé defies the authorities and is killed. In an ingenuously, the opera contains an epilogue—a short solo by Marta now in modern dress where she remembers and promises never to forget. At the end of the opera, the stunned audience does not applaud until the lights come up on the two excellent female leads.

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Szendy

King Roger

Mariusz Kwiecien (Rogier), Georgia Jarman (Roxana), Saimir Pirgu (Shepherd), Kim Begley (Edrisi), Royal Opera/ Antonio Pappano

Opus Arte 1161—86+104 minutes

Karol Szymansowski's King Roger tells of a king (based on an actual medieval king) and his conflicted personality. He begins as a absolutely an authority ruler in total command of his realm but not of himself. When a mysterious shepherd appears, preaching a philosophy of living for pleasure, Roger realizes that his life is incomplete—too full of traditional power and lacking sensuality even in his relationship with his wife. As he is more and more influenced by the teachings of the shepherd, as are his people, he gradually loses the power of the king. In an ambiguous ending, he may gain more balance in his life between the logical and the emotional, between law and freedom, between the old and the new.

Since Roger and the shepherd are really both symbolic characters, this opera is particularly open to the kind of directoral interpretation found so often today in opera production, especially in Europe. This 2015 Royal Opera production by director Kasper Holten is no exception. The difference with this production is that for one of the "edrisi" roles used in the DVD, the full opera is played with dramatic and musical commentary by Holten and conductor Antonio Pappano. I played the commentary before I watched the opera with English titles, and I feel that I understand and appreciate the production much more completely. So many times I have watched an opera and musical commentary by Holten and conductor Antonio Pappano. I played the commentary before I watched the opera with English titles, and I feel that I understand and appreciate the production much more completely. So many times I have watched an opera and musical commentary by Holten and conductor Antonio Pappano. I played the commentary before I watched the opera with English titles, and I feel that I understand and appreciate the production much more completely.
traditional Firebird choreography, but everything we see is fully in tune with Stravinsky’s score. Kastchiei comes off as a genuinely menacing character, and Hodgkinson’s Firebird expresses the mysterious, otherworldly quality of the mythical creature. Antonevich’s prince is a man of action, expressed through dancing that’s full of masculine energy yet not ungraceful.

The basic unit of leafless trees makes no pretense toward photorealism, and that’s fine. The Prince gets a nice blue costume, Kastchiei a dress, black lipstick, and black nail polish—and of course the Firebird in is striking red. Camera work is straightforward and free of gimmicks.

There are a lot of good Firebirds on video, and this is one of them. The Kirov-Mariinsky has made at least three. I must still give the edge to the most recent Mariinsky Ballet video production (Mar/Apr 2010), but perhaps we should not think so much in terms of “better”: Although I can’t say the dancing is on the same level of athletic intensity, I’d never want to part with the old Royal Ballet film from around 1955—Fomyn and Tatton.

One small detail I like about EuroArts’s production is that even though it was filmed under controlled studio conditions with a canned soundtrack, the thumps of the dancers’ feet are not edited out. It’s always odd to watch filmed ballets that lack the sound anywhere. Whether this added a staged ballet performance expects to hear. Too loud, and they can certainly be a distraction, but a small thud when a dancer lands a spectacular leap helps anchor the performance as a real event going on in real space.

There are no extras or “Making of” documen-
taries, just the ballet in 1080i resolution HD with a clean PCM stereo soundtrack. It’s rather short measure for a Blu-ray disc, but sometimes value has to be measured in quality rather than quantity.

Szymanski: King Roger
Mariusz Kwiecien (King Roger), Georgia Jarman (Roxana), Saimir Pirgu (Shepherd), Kim Begley (Edrisi); Royal Opera/ Antonio Pappano
Arts Festival/ Teodor Currentzis
ArtHaus 199079 [2DVD] 161+21 minutes

Mieczyslaw Weinberg wrote this opera in the late 1960s, but it was not staged until 2010 at the Bregenz Festival, 14 years after the composer’s death. It concerns a chance meeting on an ocean liner, long after World War II, of Marta, a Holocaust survivor, and Lisa, the former SS guard who knew Marta at Auschwitz. The setting shifts between the present, on the ship, and flashbacks to the concentration camp. Through seven scenes we see Lisa’s fear for her former prisoner, then witness the life of the camp among a group of female prisoners their attempts at friendship and hope, their comforting of each other, both their faith and loss of faith, their defiance, and a horrible scene when several are dragged away to their deaths. The tightly-constructed libreto moves toward its inexorable climax the confrontation of the two women in the present and the camp “concert” where Marta’s fiancé defies the authorities and is killed. In an ingenuous stroke, the opera contains an epilogue—a short solo by Marta now in modern dress where she remembers and promises never to forget. At the conclusion of the performance, the stunned audience does not applaud until the lights come up on the two excellent female leads.

The music fits the libreto perfectly. Vainberg, a protege of Shostakovich, offers an astonishing variety of musical styles to accompany the rapidly changing moods of the drama. There is jazzy dance music for the shipboard scenes. Three SS soldiers sing a rather macabre trio showing their loyalty to the Nazi ideal, closely followed by a haunting hymn of the prisoners, which reappears at various critical moments in the opera. Most of the music sung by the women in the two barracks scenes is quiet, typical of people afraid to call attention to themselves. At one point a woman sings a Russian folk song a cappella. I have no idea if it is an authentic folk song or Vainberg’s composition, but it is quite effective. The music seems always to enhance the action, to make it all the more believable.

The performance, filmed at the world premiere of performances at Bregenz, could not be better. In the two central female roles of Lisa and Marta Michelle Breedt and Elena Kelessidi set a standard that will be hard to follow. Breedt makes us sympathetic with Lisa in the first scene when she discovers the “passenger”, then makes us nearly hate her as we see her in her role as concentration camp guard. Kelessidi shows the great strength of Marta as she endures the prison life but keeps her own spirit alive, becoming almost a mother figure to the other women. Her solo epilogue is heart-breaking.

The many female supporting roles are well sung and beautifully acted. Among the male characters, Roberto Sacca conveys the shrewdness of Lisa’s ambitious husband and Artur Rucinski the depth and courage of Marta’s lover, Tadeusz. The Vienna Symphony and Prague Philharmonic Choir perform ably under Teodor Currentzis. There is simply nothing wrong with this production.

The DVD contains a short documentary with good background information on the opera and the production, as well as a booklet with his background and a statement written by Shostakovich.

At one point in Act I, a prisoner wonders, “Will people in the future think of us?” If they see The Passenger, they will.

Verdi: Aida
Kristin Lewis (Aida), Fabio Sartori (Radames), Anita Rachvelishvili (Amneris), George Gagnidze (Amonasro), Matti Salminen (Ramfis); La Scala/ Zubin Mehta
C Major 732208—151 minutes

To judge from two productions I’ve seen on DVD, the director Peter Sellars seems to take the antithesis of the current Eurotrash movement in directing opera. As with his Salzburg Don Carlo, which I reviewed (N/D 2014), this La Scala Aida does not indulge in symbolism, updating, or strange concepts. It simply tells the story in a traditional manner, as Verdi and his librettist had planned. It is an unadulterated, unabridged gem. I have no idea if it is an authentic folk song or Vainberg’s composition, but it is quite effective. The music seems always to enhance the action, to make it all the more believable.

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Arlen was not a good promoter. The book describes Arlen as the guy who only wanted to write the songs and not get involved with how the songs were used in shows or movies. Often in that period the Broadway producers or movie studios controlled how the final product was used. Arlen may have been annoyed, but when conflicts arose he usually left the room. Composers like Rodgers and Hart disliked Hollywood and left to return to Broadway where they were successful partly because they had greater creative control. Rodgers and Hammerstein effectively changed Broadway to tightly scripted and controlled shows; and revues, which introduced individual songs, were replaced by television variety shows.

Finally, Arlen’s and most of the period’s composers’ influence on popular music was changing by the mid-1950s with the introduction of Rock and Roll and later by the Beatles and Bob Dylan. Arlen, Irving Berlin, and even Richard Rodgers had a difficult time adjusting to the changes and couldn’t compete with a Rocker’s single performance on The Ed Sullivan Show. The new music appealed to a new audience.

Arlen is mostly known today for two films scores, The Wizard of Oz (1939) and the 1954 version of A Star Is Born. Both films starred Judy Garland, one of his most ardent followers. The Wizard of Oz used a very tight script with songs written for plot development and some specifically for a star’s stage or film persona. A Star Is Born is also tightly scripted, and the songs mostly support the progression of the story. As an example of the lack of control Arlen had with the film’s final look, the famous ‘Born in a Trunk’ sequence was inserted into the film using music by seven composers, but not Arlen. ‘The Man That Got Away’ is another famous song from that film and the book’s prophetic title.

Rimler has written an interesting, well-researched book that has many references to published and unpublished Arlen music and even controversial; but they proved weak and the production quickly fell, dimming Arlen’s star. Only Broadway mavens have heard of Saratoga (1959), Jamaica (1957), and House of Flowers (1954). Only Blossom Girl (1944) had moderate success, but it has been rarely revived.
**Madrigal History Tour**

*The King's Singers*

Arthaus 109124 [Blu-ray] 205 minutes

Followers of The King’s Singers on this side of the “Pond” might remember a release from 1984 titled “Madrigal History Tour” (EMI 69837). I've had it for years, and it is an excellent selection of madrigals (and balletti, chansons, lieder, and villancicos). There is nothing in the booklet that would indicate it was a tie-in with a television series of the same title produced by the BBC and RM Arts. This new Blu-ray release contains the entire original five-part series, with the then much younger King’s Singers introducing the episodes and lip-syncing performances in appropriate locations. Also included is the introduction to the “madrigal” concept, which includes a number of excerpts performed by the Consort of Musicike, since Anthony Rooley was an artistic advisor for the whole series.

Watching this now, after three decades, the visual and sound quality of the original tapes does not seem up to current standards, and the scripts are sometimes more quaint than informative (sometimes they didn’t even mention the composer’s name for a piece that was to be performed). Arthaus also missed the opportunity to add English subtitles for the performances; the synopses are often rather sketchy or non-existent (when subtitles do occur, they are only in the original languages). I am not really certain of the market for a Blu-ray release of these dated programs, but if someone is a fan of The King’s Singers or renaissance secular music, this could supply one or two evenings of enjoyable nostalgia.

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**The Man That Got Away**

*The Life and Songs of Harold Arlen*

By Walter Rinder

University of Illinois Press, 209 pp, $29.95

Harold Arlen wrote some of the most famous songs written by an American composer. ‘Stormy Weather’, ‘Get Happy’, ‘Blues in the Night’, ‘One For My Baby’, and ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, are just a few of the many that became standards. Composers and performers appreciate his songs, and they are still regularly performed. The general public, however, doesn’t know who wrote them. The author discusses why this occurred and informs us about the songs and Arlen’s life.

Walter Rinder presents Arlen’s life chronologically, explains the milieu of the Broadway and Hollywood composing scenes in the 1930s and 1940s and the personalities that affected his life and output. He also discusses some of the reasons Arlen isn’t better known: his temperament, his use of several collaborators, how his songs were used in shows and movies, and his inability to select good scripts.

Arlen wrote more of his famous songs from the late 1920s through the 1940s. They were mostly written for nightclubs (primarily the Cotton Club), revues, or movies, where they could be used with little relationship to the show or script. The songs often became associated with the singer rather than composer. For example, “Stormy Weather” became associated first with Ethel Waters, who introduced it, and later with Lena Horne, who sang it in the movie. ‘One For My Baby’ was introduced by Fred Astaire in the film The Sky’s the Limit but whereas it was纽带 and became linked with Frank Sinatra. ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ became Judy Garland’s theme song. Few people, even today, know who wrote it. Arlen also used many different lyricists, rather than being “teamed” with a particular one, like Rodgers with Hart or Hammerstein, or George and Ira Gershwin. Arlen’s lyricists were mostly Ted Koehler, the politically charged Yip Harburg, and Johnny Mercer; but other writers were also used when a song was needed by a producer or film.

Arlen was not adept at selecting good scripts for his shows. Initially these may have been thought to be innovative (he wrote three shows for black performers) or even controversial; but they proved weak and the productions quickly failed, dimming Arlen’s star. Only Broadway mavens have heard of Saratoga (1959), Jamaica (1957), and House of Flowers (1954). Only Bloomer Girl (1944) had moderate success, but it has been rarely revived.

Arlen was not a good promoter. The book describes Arlen as the guy who only wanted to write the songs and not get involved with how the songs were used in shows or movies. Often in that period the Broadway producers or movie studios controlled how the final product was used. Arlen may have been annoyed, but when conflicts arose he usually left the room. Composers like Rodgers and Hart disliked Hollywood and left to return to Broadway where they were successful partly because they had greater creative control. Rodgers and Hammerstein effectively changed Broadway to tightly scripted and controlled shows; and revues, which introduced individual songs, were replaced by television variety shows.

Finally, Arlen’s and most of the period’s composers’ influence on popular music was changing by the mid-1950s with the introduction of Rock and Roll and later by the Beatles and Bob Dylan. Arlen, Irving Berlin, and even Richard Rodgers had a difficult time adjusting to the changes, which he could not compete with a Rocker’s single performance on The Ed Sulli-van Show. The new music appealed to a new audience.

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Rinder has written an interesting, well-researched book that has many references to published and unpublished Arlen music and...
many quotations from other composers’ biographies. There is also a lot of name dropping of well known and lesser-known composers that Arlen met or worked with. Earlier on, Edward Jablonski wrote two books about Arlen (one before and one after Arlen’s wife’s death). Jablonski was Arlen’s close friend for many years; this author implies that that may have influenced those books.

Felix Apirahamian, he says, are artists; English organists, he loved the instrument all his life—especially four-part harmony imagine they have license to break all the natural physical laws governing sound.

Ravel was apparently a terrible conductor. Ansermet, whose French conductor but ignored Ravel. He was one of the best music critics around. He was named Concert Director of the London Philharmonic in the early 1940s and spent many years as assistant to Sir Thomas Beecham, whom he calls in this book “our greatest conductor and one of the greatest of all time”. Beecham could make even the weakest passages in Delius sound good (said a man who all his life championed the music of Delius). “What a discovery it was when Beecham found Sibelius”, whose music was unknown in England. Beecham’s Haydn and Mozart were lively and sparkling. He ignored modern musicology and conducted them with love and in the spirit in which they were conceived. He was a great Debussy conductor but ignored Ravel.

The greatest Debussy conductor, though, was Ansermet, whose La Mer and Pelléas remain unbeatable.

He also liked very much the music of Poulenc. Few composers have his extraordinary enthusiasm for the music of their contemporaries, and few are so little influenced by it.” Ravel was apparently a terrible conductor. “Schonberg has contributed little to the sum of my musical happiness… He sins against the natural physical laws governing sound. He never supplied the satisfactory link between the old and the new… (possibly chance-determined) lengths from finally published, they or the compositors neglected the commas in Cage’s sentences immediately next to the words that precede them—instead, they too appear at various post-WW II German landscape. Even simply reading about it, one senses the head-work that went into the production. Other essays examine Meier’s acceptance in the GDR—slower than one would imagine—and the efforts of the composer Friedrich Schnker to forge a more modern idiom. Apparently some of his works were hated, but the printed excerpts from his symphony dedicated to Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. were well received. The translations seem competent and the footnoteing is excellent. We tend to look down on the music of a totalitarian state, but nowadays we shouldn’t be smug. Free speech is under attack here, not from an oppressive state, but from the people you’d most expect to defend it. Intellectuals, especially some in academe, seem hell-bent on smothering free speech, the better to grovel before the POC—Perpetually Offended Class, ever vigilant against a nip in the air or a chink in their armor. At least music itself is so far proof against such idiocy. Hans Eicher once remarked that he didn’t know how to write a socialist flute sonata.

Felix Apirahamian lived from 1914 to 2005 and was one of the best music critics around. He was in England what Harold Schonberg and Irving Kolodin were here. His music reviews in the Sunday Times of London 1948 to 1989 were required reading for music lovers. He was Concert Director of the London Philharmonic in the early 1940s and spent many years as assistant to Sir Thomas Beecham, whom he calls in this book “our greatest conductor and one of the greatest of all time”. Beecham could make even the weakest passages in Delius sound good (said a man who all his life championed the music of Delius). “What a discovery it was when Beecham found Sibelius”, whose music was unknown in England. Beecham’s Haydn and Mozart were lively and sparkling. He ignored modern musicology and conducted them with love and in the spirit in which they were conceived. He was a great Debussy conductor but ignored Ravel.

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For the benefit of younger readers, the now-defunct German Democratic Republic (DDR in German) was better known as East Germany or the East Zone. Of its three names, the latter two were lies. At the same time, if only for PR, the regime allowed, even encouraged, a cultural life of some merit. A friend of mine who regularly visited the DDR regarded it as a failed Potemkin state, but always excepted their opera and theater productions as worth seeing. The regime used serious music to connect itself with the best of German culture, but they paid a price both from the past and the future. They had to include Wagner, but the Nazi ties with his work inevitably raised memories of the Third Reich. Then, as time went on, the government’s support for classical music in the eyes of the younger generation misidentified it as the “official” music of an increasingly discredited regime. Drs Frackman and Powell have picked more or less readable essays—after all, the publisher specializes in “uncomfortable reading”. They were contro-varying but mentions others as well, including the Ring. They were contro-versial and roughly received. I looked up several, and came away impressed. They often contained excellent, cogent pictures. Even then I didn’t care for were at least driven by ideas and concepts perceptible in the operas themselves. They were light years from, say, some Eurotwit director’s staging Tristan in Passaic NJ and having Isolde balance a ball on her nose in the Liebestod because that would most insult the audience. Berghaus was less interested in shocking the bourgeoisie—already a stale notion in 1850—and more in making them think.

Jessica Payette’s The Embodiment of Collective Memory in A New Odyssey, a ballet, made me wonder about the production. Composer Viktor Brns and choreographer Tom Schilling combined to span Homer’s tale of Odysseus’s return in an epic journey across a shattered post-WW II German landscape. Even simply reading about it, one senses the head-work that went into the production. Other essays examine Mahler’s acceptance in the GDR—slower than one would imagine—and the efforts of the composer Friedrich Schenker to forge a more modern idiom. Apparently some of his works were hated, but the printed excerpts from his symphony dedicated to Dr Martin Luther King were fascinating.

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Why is Mozart’s music so pure, so perfect, so joyous, so poetic, so light and gracefully beautiful? Rather than lapse into generalities that merely pile up more such adjectives,
Scott Burnham examines 61 passages from Mozart's works (including piano pieces, chamber works, concertos and symphonies, operatic and choral compositions) to tease out exactly how the maestro's high-sensitive, precise, and enlightening as these detailed analyses are, they not only leave the reader with a clear understanding of how the music achieves its supreme expressive power, they also deepen our sense of the ineffable mystery behind it. How could Mozart have so consistently balanced and perfected so many different elements in so many different genres? The more one understands how he did it, the more miraculous it seems.

Burnham's execution of his purpose is superlative. His writing, sentence by sentence, is as clear as air with revelatory understanding of the effects that Mozart's music makes on the listener, illustrating and supporting his discoveries with penetrating and meticulous explication of details in the musical examples. In doing so he offers some of the most perceptive, nuanced, penetrating and eloquent commentary about music (of any kind) I've read.

Some short excerpts can give at least a hint of this. Describing the opening of the Adagio of the Clarinet Concerto as it sets the stage for the more animated developments to follow, he writes that "The rhythmic relation between pulsing accompaniment and slower moving melody creates an animated stillness with the exquisite tension of keeping things in suspension—expectant yet relaxed". Mozart's astonishing use of dissonance (prevalent in his music) yields many examples that are "strange and yet exquisite. They can all be explained as the result of linear gestures, but they maintain a stubbornly haunting presence [that] leaves us brushed with awe inviting another dimension to the experience." As for the moment when the musical structure recapitulates its themes and character, he writes that "When the musical structure recapitulates its themes and character; second, how his forms grow and intensify through development (including surprising and striking modulations of both key and mood); and three, how they effect their thematic returns. These are followed by a brief coda, suggestively titled "Knowing Innocence," that summarizes and extends Burnham's exegesis into the wider sphere of cultural history. He sees Mozart as a bridge between the Enlightenment's reverence for "reason" and "objectivity" and the Romantic era's more inclusive vision that encompasses the elegiac, the uncanny, and the numinous—eloquently exemplified by Mozart's unique synthesis of unprecedentedly wide-ranging, limitless invention, and supreme mastery, in which (as Karl Barth puts it) "Joy over-takes sorrow without extinguishing it".

"Mozart's Grace" is a such a marvelous book that I recommend it to anyone who cares about music or who wishes to decipher the many printed musical examples—many of them quite long. All readers will go away with a much-heightened sensitivity to Mozart's astounding genius and return (as I did) to his music noticing all sorts of wondrous things that before barely registered.

Still, whether musically trained or not, everyone will benefit from actually listening to the passages that Burnham examines. You can, like me, find and play some of these passages from your record collection, but it would be simpler and more helpful if the Princeton Press would post all the excerpts (as audible music files) on its Web site. This could be easily done, with the notated excerpts available on -screen configured with a moving vertical line coordinated with the sound of the music. (This is a now-common feature of music-writing software, often used for classical works on sites like YouTube.) I've written to the publisher with this suggestion; readers of this review who'd like to reinforce it should e-mail Juliana Fidler at webmaster@press.princeton.edu.

One of the obvious differences between the sexes is that when men are very happy they laugh, but when women are very happy they cry. Another is that as women get older they talk more, but as men get older they talk less.
Scott Burnham examines 61 passages from Mozart's works (including piano pieces, chamber works, concertos and symphonies, operatic and choral compositions) to tease out exactly how the music achieves its mysterious powers, as well as the delicate balance of elements in so many different genres. The more one understands how he did it, the more miraculous it seems.

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