American Record Guide
independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

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Fort Worth Opera Festival
Sarasota Opera’s Complete Verdi
David Ludwig’s Violin Concerto
Indianapolis Goes Finnish & French
New Concertos for Yūja Wang
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July 1-17
Opera Saratoga presents the US premiere of *The Witches of Venice* by Philip Glass, plus *Il Postino* by Daniel Catan and *The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart at the Spa Little Theater in Saratoga Springs NY.

July 1-31
Chamber Music Northwest presents the Dover, Emerson, Miro, Orion, and Zora Quartets playing Beethoven’s complete string quartets, mostly one or two per concert mixed with other composers, plus world premieres by Richard Danielpour (Clarinet Quintet), Bryan Johanson, Andrew Hsu, and Andy Akiho at halls in Portland OR.

July 1-August 14
Mascagni’s *Iris*, concert performances of *Le Villi* by Puccini and *La Navarraise* by Massenet, Busoni’s *Turandot* and Act III of Puccini’s in one afternoon, and the new ballet *Fantasque* set to music by Respighi and Rossini are part of “Puccini and His World” at the Bard Music Festival’s Sosnoff Theater in Annandale-on-Hudson NY.

July 1-September 11
The Amernet, Arianna, Avalon, Enso, Harlem, St Petersburg, and Shanghai String Quartets join with Melvin Chen, Daniel Epstein, Alexander Feltsstein, Gilbert Kalish, Francine Kay, Soyeon Kate Lee, Pamela Mia Paul, Raman Ramakrishnan, and Jonathan Yates in concerts at “the summer shrine of the string quartet”, Music Mountain’s Gordon Hall near Falls Village CT.

July 8-August 27
*The Crucible* by Robert Ward, *The Thieving Magpie* by Rossini, *La Bohème* by Puccini, and Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd* can be seen in three or four consecutive days at the Glimmerglass Festival’s Busch Opera House near Cooperstown NY.

July 9-August 7
Colorado’s Central City Opera resurrects Douglas Moore’s *Ballad of Baby Doe*, premiered 60 years ago at the Central City Opera House. Also on the docket there, Puccini’s *Tosca*. A double-header of Mozart’s *Impressario* and John Musto’s *Later the Same Evening* tours to Denver, Colorado Springs, and Central City’s Foundry.

July 13-31
New York’s Lincoln Center Festival celebrates its 20th anniversary with Huang Ruo’s opera *Paradise Interrupted*, three nights of Steve Reich, who turns 80 this year, Moliere’s *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* with music by Lully, and the National Ballet of Canada in Christopher Wheeldon’s *Winter’s Tale* with music by Joby Talbot.

July 16
Andrew Owens, Georgia Jarman, and Tamara Mumford star in the US premiere of Rossini’s *Aureliano in Palmira*. Will Crutchfield conducts the Orchestra of St Luke’s at Caramoor in Katonah NY.

July 20-August 23
The Saratoga Performing Arts Center in Saratoga Springs NY celebrates its 50th anniversary with the New York City Ballet (July 20-30), Philadelphia Orchestra (Aug 3-20) including a Michael Torke world premiere, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (Aug 7-23).

July 29-August 20
The Britt Music Festival honors the National Park Service’s centennial with six performances of a world premiere by Michael Gordon inspired by and performed at Oregon’s Crater Lake National Park (July 29-30). Teddy Abrams also conducts big orchestral works by Mahler, Copland, Moussorgsky, Hindemith, Brahms, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, and Tchaikovsky at the Britt Pavilion in Jacksonville OR.

August 23-25
A late addition to Colorado’s Aspen Music Festival: Manfred Honeck conducts the Pittsburgh Symphony in Bruckner’s Symphony No. 4, Mahler’s Symphony No. 5, Suites from Strauss’s *Elektra* and Dvorak’s *Rusalka*, plus concertos by Bruch, Mozart, and Berg.

American Record Guide
Draining and Exhilarating
David Gordon Duke

We’ve all become familiar with the idea of binge watching. Binge listening? Well, having been an enthusiastic audience member for the Vancouver Recital Society’s Schubertiad, I feel freshly able to consider the plusses—and the occasional minusses—of the idea of a succession of major works by a single composer in a short time frame and at the same place.

Chamber music “intensives” are not exactly new to Vancouver. Last season Friends of Chamber Music hosted the Borodin String Quartet performing all of Shostakovich’s quartets (Sept/Oct 2015). This year the VRS plan harkened back to its effective but discontinued Vancouver Chamber Music Festival, which assembled a core of musicians to create mix-and-match groupings in the service of a varied repertoire. What was novel this April was the tight concentration on eight late works of Schubert.

The enterprise, which ran April 12, 14, and 15 in the intimate 650-seat Vancouver Playhouse, was planned by pianist Inon Barnatan, currently artist-in-association with the New York Philharmonic. He determined the repertoire and assembled like-minded artists—most young—who shared a fairly consistent approach to Schubert.

Even so, the results were quite unpredictable. On each of the three evenings a different pianist essayed one of the late sonatas: same hall, same Hamburg Steinway, and compositions completed in weeks of each other. Yet the performances were strikingly different.

It began with the Sonata in C minor, D 958, in an elegant performance by pianist Kuok-Wai Lio. Lio doesn’t wear his heart on his sleeve: he lets the music speak with great care, understands the overall trajectory, and avoids overt editorializing in the name of so-called interpretation.

On the closing evening Jonathan Biss’s reading of the Sonata in A, D 959, was extraordinarily personal, dreamy, almost hallucinogenic. Biss’s tone was full and sensual; niceties of architecture were less important than the fluid stream-of-consciousness exploration. It was a controversial reading, but one with single-minded integrity.

In between came Barnatan’s powerful rendition of the Sonata in B-flat, D 960. Many in the audience had recently heard Andras Schiff present the same work in a magisterial interpretation, treating the piece as a poignant, graceful farewell. Barnatan’s performance conveyed emotion and elegance, but was a far more volatile, even angry, proposition.

On the docket for the first two programs were the fantasies for violin and piano, D 934, and for piano four-hands, D 940. For the former Lio was joined by excellent young violinist Benjamin Beilman. I think of this fantasy as something of a program killer: what can you possibly want to hear after you’ve been through the whirlwind of this astonishing work? Beilman and Lio played the multi-stage single-movement piece with clarity and intensity but no overdone effects or pandering.

Continued on page 9
When the leaders of Fort Worth Opera were looking ahead to the company’s 70th anniversary and 10th season as a festival, a world premiere seemed a good idea. Perhaps it could have had something to do with the city’s rich history. After brief consideration, General Director Darren K Woods ruled out anything having to do with cowboys, which are already everywhere in the local culture. Somehow attention shifted to the forgotten day before November 22, 1963, when President and Mrs. Kennedy were in Fort Worth. Neighboring Dallas long struggled with the vast shadow of Kennedy’s assassination, but the couple’s time in “Cowtown” could speak of the final glory of Camelot. The problem was that not that much actually happened: they arrived quietly and stayed the night in downtown’s historic Texas Hotel; there was a breakfast and a rally the next morning, and then they were gone.

Maybe that explains why the name of the new opera is JFK, not “JFK in DFW.” Composer David T Little and librettist Royce Vavrek, whose previous collaboration, Dog Days, played in Fort Worth last year (Sept/Oct 2015), decided to fill out the two acts with fantasy and flashbacks. The result succeeds on many levels. The opera has grandeur, politics, patriotism, and Texas kitsch plus romance and nostalgia. The integration and balanced presentation of these many strands owes plenty to the vision of Thaddeus Strasberger, who functioned as both director and scenic designer. Steven Osgood conducted.

We first see the couple in their hotel suite, which is four rooms on a rotating platform. The entire stage is framed in strings of golden light bulbs—a trademark of the Fort Worth skyline that was also outlined on the back wall (as a native of Fort Worth, I’m probably extra-attuned to such details). Jackie sings an opening aria as she’s looking out the window and chain smoking. Jack is in the bathtub, drowsy and in pain. After Jackie gives him an injection of some sort, he’s transported to having a lively exchange with his sister Rosemary, followed by a confrontation on the moon with Nikita Khrushchev and the Red Army. Next, the lunar surface becomes the beach, and the young and barefoot Jack and Jackie are getting acquainted. When he bends down to propose, film clips of their wedding day fill the huge proscenium. The sound of the strings surges and recedes like gentle waves. It’s a brilliant few minutes to experience the Kennedys as both real people and legends for the ages.

In another fantasy sequence, Jack gets into some roughhousing with a buffoonish Lyndon Johnson, who arrives with a stripper and a band of drunken and randy Texas politicians. Squelching LBJ’s grandiosity and ambitions, Jack comes into his power as he reminds his VP, “I am the American Phenomenon!”

Perhaps a desire for an earthbound reality was at play in the decision to make the leads a baritone and a mezzo, instead of the more stellar choice of tenor and soprano. Matthew Worth was an appropriately stiff and earnest...
President, and Daniela Mack was a contained, almost contemplative First Lady. Both sang with warmth and appeal, and their characters grew in strength and pathos.

After the couple finally settled into bed, Act I appeared to draw to a close. Soprano Talise Trevigne, who was both a maid and a kind of narrator, sang, “Let them sleep now; let them be one.” But morning arrived before intermission did. The chorus shouted “JFK! JFK!”, and members of the Texas Boys Choir appeared like acolytes to sing ‘The Eyes of Texas Are upon You’, a popular sports anthem recast in a haunting minor mode. Meanwhile the maid opened Mrs Kennedy’s closet and we saw the pink Chanel suit.

Act II mixes speeches, TV reporters, more Texas hoopla, and the couple’s return to their hotel room. Jackie has a duet with her future self, Jackie Onassis in oversized sunglasses. The final scene is Jack at his most open-hearted and revealing. As he puts on a fresh shirt and tie, he sings, “I’m a lucky man.”

A later reading of Vavrek’s libretto showed that many of the lines that were so touching in performance appeared almost cryptic on the page. They had gained weight and heightened poignancy from Little’s score as well as Straussberger’s direction.

Given the surreal flow of scenes, David Little’s music was conservative and grounded. His orchestrations were often thick and heavy with percussion. But during many of the most touching scenes mentioned here, the textures lightened and the strings seemed to glow.

JFK may be the shortest title in the history of opera. Yet the 35th President of the United States is a dauntingly vast topic, and also one that is so familiar that the public has become rather desensitized to the tragedy. But this work was inventive and, best of all, achieved the goal of opera: it left the audience feeling something.

The Fort Worth Opera Festival continued the next day with a double bill of recent works, jointly produced with the American Lyric Theater and the Fargo Moorhead Opera. The two chamber operas shared the same five-member cast, and both drew inspiration from stories by Edgar Allan Poe.

Buried Alive by composer Jeff Myers and librettist Quincy Long explored the tenuous grip on reality of a man who awakened on the table in a morgue. In spite of the man’s jumbled mind, the story offered few surprises and never seemed to have any reason to be an opera. The orchestra sounded as dark and gloomy as you’d imagine a Poe opera to be, yet to little effect. Vocal writing was often little more than chanting on one note, especially when it came to singing by the perhaps dead man.

Music and story came together much better in Embedded by composer Patrick Soluri and librettist Deborah Brevoort. Soprano Caroline Worra was a middle-aged TV newswoman on the trail of a terrorism story. Her desire to remain attractive, both onscreen and off, was expressed in a sensual kind of music from the orchestra. It reappeared with a darker, even more erotic tinge when she met her source and realized that mortal danger was at hand.

Four days later, there were more singing politicos in Lady Bird by composer Henry Mollicone and librettist Sheldon Harnick. This was another world premiere but one that took place largely out of the national spotlight, perhaps because of the location—Texas State University in San Marcos, which is about 30 miles south of Austin. The production was modest (lots of projections) and the performances serviceable for a regional college. Carolyn Watson conducted and Samuel Mungo was the stage director.

Despite the creators’ fine credentials and the worthiness of the topic, the fundamental structure of this one-hour piece needs lots more attention before it can attain any future life. The action starts aboard Air Force One, and there’s Mrs Kennedy in the pink suit. As the new president is being sworn in, the performers freeze in place. Then, on the other side of the stage, comes a very long flashback to the meeting and courtship of Lady Bird and Lyndon. Then it’s to the Oval Office and LBJ just can’t decide whether or not to run for his first full term.

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Cycle Comes to an End
Susan Brodie

Sarasota Opera's 28-year-long Verdi Cycle came to a splendid finish with two concerts, a conference of international Verdi scholars, and the final performances of the rarely-performed Battle of Legnano and the ever popular, spectacular Aida.

The idea of performing all of Verdi's available music was arrived at almost by accident. After a run of Rigoletto in 1989, Artistic Director Victor DeRenzi decided to program the rarely-heard Aroldo the following season. When it too was rapturously received, he decided to expand the planned sequence of several Verdi operas to include every one that Verdi wrote. This included several fragments of manuscripts now in private collections; the first pages were legible in the auction catalogs and thence transcribed for performance on the "Young Verdi" concert on March 19. These were songs, choruses, and several overtures, all written before his first opera, Oberto, and all recognizably Verdián, if less than fully developed in style and technique.

But of course the meat and potatoes of the cycle were the operas. The final rarity, heard on March 16, was The Battle of Legnano (1849), Verdi's first overtly political opera. Set in 12th-Century Lombardy (northern Italy), it tells of the German invasion led by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I. Medieval Italy was a conglomeration of city states, much like the Italian peninsula in 1848 when Verdi began writing the opera. The movement to throw off Hapsburg rule and create a unified Italy was dear to Verdi, and the eponymous battle had contemporary resonance in the political situation of 1848.

Revolutionary zeal animates the opera but takes a back seat to a love triangle complicated by the conflict between love and duty. Arrigo, a Veronese soldier thought to have died in battle, returns to Milan to rejoin his army and his best friend, Rolando, and to claim his sweetheart Lida. She, however, believing Arrigo dead, has filled a promise to her father and married Rolando. When Arrigo learns the unwelcome news, he curses her for her betrayal and joins the Company of Death, a brotherhood of warriors sworn to die fighting. Lida still loves him and invites him to meet in secret, though she intends to remain true to her husband. Rolando bursts in on their meeting and seeks revenge by locking them together in the tower, so that Arrigo will appear to break his vow to his comrades by deserting. Distraught, Arrigo leaps from the parapet and manages to escape. In the final act, as the Lombards celebrate their (offstage) victory in the Battle of Legnano, the wounded Arrigo dies a war hero at the feet of Rolando, with whom he has reconciled.

True to Sarasota's mission to present Verdi's operas as he would have seen them, Martha Collins's staging was charmingly old-fashioned. Jeffrey W Dean's sets and Howard
Tsvi Kaplan’s sumptuous costumes created a picture-book representation of medieval Italy; only the compact dimensions of the stages dictated movable set elements instead of the more customary painted backdrops, which would have flapped in the breeze of passing performers. Walls with openings and stepped platforms supplied visual depth and space for crowds. The chorus—chest-thumping warriors, robed magistrates deliberating military strategy and Lida’s ladies-in-waiting—were directed to group in masses that resembled crowd scenes in medieval paintings. During arias they formed small groups and turned upstage, while the soloist moved front and center. There was no ironic directorial subtext, which freed the singers to act with complete sincerity. Despite the hoary plot devices, it worked.

Musical values were solid. The orchestra, led by DeRenzi, played with crisp precision but tempos that tended toward the metronomic. In the men’s choruses this enhanced the military fervor, particularly in the patriotic march that recurred often; but it also seemed to hamstring the soloists. Verdi needs supple phrasing; but, apart from the occasional held high note, there wasn’t much nuance.

The young cast was commendable, though nearly all seemed to have been coached to oversinging. As Lida, soprano Jennifer Black sang with luscious, free tone, though cadenzas had some wayward pitch and blurry ornamentation. Tenor Martin Nusspaumer had the voice, looks, and temperament of the warrior and lover Arrigo; strain in his upper register, apparent from his first aria, was likely owing to the illness that sidelined him after the first scene of the final performance. Baritone Todd Thomas embodied Rolando with utter commitment; his strong baritone sometimes crossed over to bluster but served to emphasize his rage. Bass Young Bok Kim as Federico Barbarossa brought a note of brashness to the emperor’s sonorous threats. Smaller roles were ably filled, and the chorus of studio artists and apprentices was excellent.

Aida, with its massive cast and super-sized staging, must have felt like a lavish reward to the company for their monumental achievement (final performance was March 19). Again a fully traditional production, Stephanie Sundine’s staging could lay claim to authenticity thanks to the use of the disposizione scenica, a compilation of original stage directions issued by Verdi’s publisher Ricordi after the premiere. David P Gordon devised monumental masonry elements painted with colorful hieroglyphics and human figures in Egyptian style. Costumes were more Cecil B DeMille than undyed linen; and, in case you wondered, Amonasro (played by the sonorous Marco Nistico) wore skin-darkening make-up (Aida was black). It was an appealingly colorful production, com-
plete with a prancing ballet of scantily clad handmaidens and men (choreography by Miro Magloire).

Best was Aida herself—Michelle Johnson, a 2011 Met National Audition winner. Hers is a sumptuous young voice with a sturdy chest register, a free and penetrating middle, and the ability to soar easily above the staff. The high diminuendo of ‘O Patria Mia’ posed a challenge, but the talent is there—I’d love to hear her Aida in two years.

Jonathan Burton performed the difficult role of Radames with clean strong tone, blazing high notes, and plenty of stamina. His portrayal was sympathetically conflicted. In contrast to the demeanor of many other tenors in the role, he fully engaged with the other characters.

Leann Sandel-Pantaleo sang Amneris with plush timbre and fire, but more striking was the fearlessness of her acting. Was it over the top to collapse on the floor sobbing after Radames chooses death over her love? Possibly, but after the spectacular excesses of the Triumphal March a viewer is certainly primed for grand emotions. While DeRenzi’s maddeningly unyielding tempos dampened expressive moments in Radames’s and Aida’s earlier arias, the Nile Scene and the tomb scene were more relaxed and engaging. After all, the hero and heroine can’t die without holding their high notes.

In the end, Aida, with its wrenching conflicts, extreme emotions, and lavish setting, delivered the operatic goods with a grand flourish. To an audience grown spoiled by a 28-year feast, Victor DeRenzi’s announcement that ‘Verdi is going on a cruise’ next year was cause for nostalgic celebration. In the meantime, Donizetti and Poulenc will have a big hole to fill next season.

In the exquisite four-hands fantasy Barnatan was joined by Biss; they managed to celebrate the obvious charm of the piece and to plumb its disturbing depths.

Opening night ended with the String Quintet in C, cellist Gary Hoffman joining the Doric Quartet. The Doric’s sense of Schubert’s string style runs to a huge dynamic range but with an intrinsically chaste tone, light on vibrato. The players proved extremely responsive to the complex web of textures created through the hour-long composition; and the sublime Adagio was just that—it seemed a glimpse of other worlds, other realities.

The second evening concluded with the Trio in B-flat performed by Barnatan, Beilman, and Hoffman. It came across in context as especially lyrical and winsome, no doubt in part because of the genial collegiality of the players and their obvious delight in the music.

The final evening ended—rightly, I believe—with song: the posthumous collection known as Schwanengesang. No one knows exactly how the composer might have packaged this baker’s dozen of works to texts by Rellstab and Heine, or whether he would have included ‘Die Taubenpost’ (on a text by Johann Seidl) as a lightweight written-in encore. For this performance Biss was joined by baritone Randall Scarlata, and their joint conception of the songs was considered and unflinching. The Heine settings in particular seemed to portend the emotional landscape of the expressionists; the starkness of ‘Der Doppelpärchen’ led to emotional catharsis, but certainly no happy envoi to a spring evening.

The Schubertiad was only three concerts, yet it proved a mammoth proposition. The evenings were draining and exhilarating by turns, and the succession of eight intense masterworks in close proximity proved quite an experience. Not that one would have wanted to miss any component. Perhaps the most interesting fact is that all the Schubert works were created in a few months, yet came across as so very different.

I suspect that, with all but the very greatest composers, a three-concert series of works from a short time span would risk over-familiarity. Not with Schubert. How strange and wonderful are these treasures; how crammed with ideas, and how rich and profound.
Yannick Nezet-Seguin has been a vibrant interpreter of Gustav Mahler’s symphonic works and a champion of choral music. So it was just a matter of time before he would put his stamp on the composer’s mighty Symphony No. 8 (Symphony of a Thousand) March 10-13. And, not coincidently, it was premiered in the US on March 2, 1916, with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Academy of Music. Stokowski was 28 when he saw Mahler conduct the world premiere in 1910 and went to great lengths to secure rights to bring it to America, a pivotal event for his orchestra.

Nezet-Seguin made this observance of the Eighth’s Philadelphia centenary his mid-season spectacular, with a beefed up orchestra and the combined voices of Joe Miller’s Westminster Choir, Scott Tucker’s Choral Arts Society of Washington, Fernando Malvar-Ruíz’s American Boychoir, and a star-studded list of soloists, adding up to 420 musicians and singers. The four-performance run was sold out and drew ticket buyers from a reported 33 countries.

I must confess to not being a huge fan of this work. Despite its reputation as a profound statement of humanitarianism, to me it is more an overreaching showpiece. Nonetheless, Mahler’s pleas for peace through sacred text made a profound impression in 1916 in the midst of World War I and obviously still resonates today.

The oratorio-like Part 1, ‘Veni Creator Spiritus,’ came roaring in with concussive theatricality; and Nezet-Seguin didn’t ease back on its sonic thunder. Clearly Mahler’s intent was to have the volume so engulfling that it reaches a realm of religious transcendence. Sustained at such a high level it also had the same numbing effect as a stadium heavy metal band.

Fortunately sopranos Angela Meade, Erin Wall, and Lisette Oropesa, mezzos Stephanie Blythe and Mihoko Fujimura, tenor Anthony Dean Griffey, baritone Markus Werba, and bass John Relyea were so good that it was easy to ignore the more puritanical liturgical aspect. Even with some jarringly clipped notes, Blythe cast a regal earthiness as Mulier Samaritana. But the technical demand may have been too much for Blythe, for she had to bow out of the final Sunday matinee performance (Elizabeth Bishop stepped in).

Part 2, ‘Final Scenes from Goethe’s Faust,’ sung in German, was lyrically obtuse but much more musically interesting. Mahler’s orchestral dynamics, tempered chorus, and adagio style were more mesmerizing. Nezet-Seguin completely illuminated the composer’s innovative structures with clarity—quite a contrast to the volume in Part 1. As Stokowski undoubtedly knew, this symphony was a showcase for the Philadelphia Orchestra strings, and that certainly remained true a century later. The woodwinds were vividly chamber-like, as were the timpani, horns, and four harps. Other instruments that floated in, almost like mise en scenes, were the celeste, harmonium, and the 6,938 pipes of Verizon’s Fred J Cooper organ. And in the balcony above the choirs, the air-slicing heralds from a phalanx of brass players never sounded better in this hall.

Without doubt the combined choirs sounded like a thousand voices, but they impressed me more with their combined technical clarity; it was especially lustrous in the Faust scenes. And the young men of the American Boychoir were especially flawless. Another outstanding moment occurred when Oropesa as Mater Gloriosa, not appearing until the finale, sang from the back balcony, representing the “Eternal Feminine drawing us heavenward”.

Nezet-Seguin displayed some new choreography for the Mahler with expressive physi-
cality conducting the choirs, head thrown dramatically back; and at one point his body dropped to half-plie with his arms shaking frantically to cue the fury of a fortissimo. The strain could have contributed to outpatient surgery he had the day after the final performance for epigastric hernia. At press time he was expected to be back for full Yannick drive in weeks.

And sure enough he was! Yannick Nezet-Seguin is a champion of new music, but months can go by without the chance to hear new commissions with the Fabulous Philadelphians. They are a hard sell for subscription audiences apparently, even when there are two new commissions by noted composers Maurice Wright and Jonathan Leshnoff on the same bill, both concertos premiered by Principal Timpanist Don Luizzi and Principal Clarinetest Ricardo Morales on April 14. These headliners didn’t fill Verizon Hall for a Friday matinee performance, which was enhanced with warhorses.

The concert opened with three dance variations from Leonard Bernstein’s Fancy Free. It’s an unabashed showpiece that gave Nezet-Seguin the opportunity to illustrate its subtler interiors with simmering samba rhythms that foreshadowed West Side Story. Concertmaster David Kim’s earthy violin line and David Bilger’s clarion Broadway-burnished trumpet led the way.

It was the perfect prologue to Maurice Wright’s raucous Resounding Drums for timpani and orchestra with soloist Don Luizzi downstage, astride five kettles flanking the cellos. The opening movement, ‘Leviathan’, conjures orchestral depths, as the rumble of the bass drum approaches like a beast from the oceanic deep. Rather incongruously, Wright’s second movement is a narrative titled ‘The Siege of Vienna’ about the 15th-Century Turkish invasion. It refers to military marches of the Ottoman Empire but otherwise sounds like renaissance orchestral bits. Spritely horn fanfares gave way to Wright’s dazzling percussive sound-field of the kettles and a backfield of cymbals, snares, chimes, bells, flexatone, xylophone, and harp, with a presence beyond their usual function as mere sound effects.

Nezet-Seguin and Luizzi mugged at each other as they wiped sweat from their brows before the final movement, ‘Singing Drums’, with Luizzi’s electrifying solo pivoting, almost in comic animation, to cover the skins and pedals of all five drums. In fact, the solo’s physicality was reminiscent of Gene Krupa’s cadenza on the jazz barnburner ‘Sing, Sing, Sing’ (had this been a jazz concert, the audience wouldn’t have waited until the end to applaud). Wright made this so much more than the bombast of these drums in this dynamic work.

With the senses so heightened, it is remarkable that the subtleties of Jonathan Leshnoff’s Clarinet Concerto (Nekudim), co-commission by the Philadelphians and Santa Barbara Symphony, proved just as engaging. Leshnoff strikes me as both a master of form and an innovator. This piece could have no better hands than virtuoso Ricardo Morales—it’s not a stretch to think that it is destined to be a classic. Morales’s impeccable tone control and phrasing of the first movement’s long clarinet lines penetrated Verizon Hall.

At the work’s orchestral core are stirring evocations of ancient Hasidic harmonies. In Hebrew, vowels breathe life into consonants, and here the clarinet soloist breathed life into the composer’s notes.

The second movement, ‘Chesed, Fast’, is illustrative of the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet (vav) and a symbol of mystical altruism. It was not necessary to understand its spiritual mooring to be entranced by Morales’s phrasing artistry and quicksilver fingering of the 16th-note riffs and harmonic flights of wind fancy.

Both composers were in attendance for this matinee performance and took triumphant bows with a rapturously appreciative maestro.

One of Nezet-Seguin’s signatures is making well-trod repertory the closing high point of a concert, but not so this time. Prokofieff’s Symphony No. 7 sounded like an orchestra in detention. It lumbered erratically through the first movement with various sections sounding underpowered and rote. The Andante’s swing-out waltz variation almost rescued the piece. The final Vivace seemed to have been taken at a crisp clip “before the bell”. The real shock was the standing ovation this shaky performance got.
[Reviewing consecutive performances of new works is an ARG specialty, more so when both performances can appear in the same issue. — Editor]

Jim Lowe

The Vermont Symphony performed a beautiful love letter last March, and its intended recipient was the soloist. Music Director Jaime Laredo conducted the world premiere of David Ludwig’s Violin Concerto with Bella Hristova as soloist on March 19 at Burlington’s Flynn Center and March 20 at Rutland’s Paramount Theatre. The program also included a lovely performance of Dvořák’s Romance and an exciting Symphony No. 5 by Beethoven.

Ludwig describes his concerto as a “wedding celebration”, honoring his marriage to Hristova last summer. Indeed, the names of the three movements’ titles reflect that. It could aptly be called storytelling with the solo violin playing the part of the bride.

Opening with a violin exclamation and crash of percussion and everyone else in the full orchestra, ‘Dances’ progresses into various Eastern European-style dances. Reserve grows into ebullience, then into a brilliant raucousness as the Gypsy-style violin moves in and out, mixing among the guests with warm, lyrical, virtuosic cadenzas. ‘Celebration’ begins tentatively with a tender song from the solo violin, accompanied gently by several of the first violins. The soloist’s song blossoms and grows joyful as other instruments join in; it begins with rhythmic and sonic infectiousness, building to an explosive excitement, then closes with the solo violin singing quietly, hauntingly, and tenderly.

The finale, ‘The Festival’, is about as wild as a post-wedding party gets. Bulgarian dances run rampant, with fluctuating rhythms reflecting revelers’ increasingly insecure footing. From start to finish the driven Gypsy violin frolics among the revelers, coming to a quiet but happy end. What a joyful wedding celebration!

Ludwig, who lives with Hristova in Philadelphia, employed a host of techniques in creating this more than 30-minute holistic work. Multi-tonalities contributed flavor to the tonal singing lines, while extravagant percussion, underscored by the rest of the orchestra, created the excitement.

Hristova is one of today’s young up-and-coming virtuosos and plays with a sure technique and a warm, often luscious sound. Here she alternated deep passion, fiery virtuosity, and softness, all with sensitivity and a sense of the whole. She delivered an invested and affecting performance. At Sunday’s Rutland performance, the concerto’s spirit seemed to infect the orchestra as well as the audience, which responded enthusiastically.

Laredo actually officiated at the Hristova-Ludwig wedding at his Guilford VT home, and Hristova was his student. Because he has had a long relationship with Ludwig, he proved a particularly collaborative interpreter. The VSO delivered Ludwig’s knotty soap opera with flair (this wasn’t their first Ludwig premiere).

Laredo’s approach to Beethoven was traditional and classical, but he used those qualities to deliver power and excitement. It was a substantial performance that proved particularly effective in the quieter passages. Yet moments that sounded like chamber music built with large crescendos to climaxes of grandeur. Sunday’s performance especially
reflected the players’ joy in the music. (Hristova joined the violins for the Beethoven.)

The opening Romance by Dvorak benefited from Hristova’s warm, lyrical playing. All the overt drama was there, but she could have brought out more of the quiet drama as well.

Jim Lowe is arts editor of the Barre Montpelier Times Argus.

Paul Horsley

David Ludwig knows better than to attach a “back-story” to a piece irrevocably, though he has told us that his new violin concerto was inspired by his recent marriage. Composers over the years have learned the perils of announcing a narrative or program for a piece, only to find later that they’d much rather the audience listen to it as “pure music”. But while Ludwig says his concerto “doesn’t tell a specific story”, he also says he couldn’t help making it personal, as it was “motivated by the idea of marriage”. The fact that his new wife, Bulgarian-born violinist Bella Hristova, is the soloist can’t help but enhance the biographical aspect of the work as its roaming world premiere is played by the five orchestra that commissioned it.

The concerto arrived at Kansas City’s Helzberg Hall on April 8 with Michael Stern conducting the Kansas City Symphony; and right from the start it was clear that the piece is deftly structured, judiciously orchestrated, and gorgeously lyrical to its core, and that it doesn’t really need a background story at all. After a solo violin flourish of motivic significance and a percussive crash (which the composer says is the “jarring but transformative start to something new” that marriage is) the first movement, ‘Dances’, presents a series of quirky textures and rhythms of the Central- and Eastern-European variety: jagged Bartokian pyrotechnics, delightfully irregular rhythms fading in and out of danceability, and lilting waltz-like excursions set to transparent Debussian complexity.

The centerpiece of the concerto is the slow movement, ‘Ceremony’, where Hristova’s lyric gifts were called on for a long, arching melodic line that worked its way into the stratosphere before gently relenting. One couldn’t help but think of Shostakovich’s searing adagio melodies with all their dark yearning. For good measure Ludwig has also woven in a tune borrowed from Hristova’s father, the Russian composer Yuri Chichkov, who died when Bella was a small child. This powerful movement with its superb lyricism, shimmering orchestration, and emotional content that (oddly) seems to approach tragedy may become the main reason that future soloists want to play this concerto. As it dies into oblivion, it’s as if the enormity of “I do” has set in, and the celebrants are left unsure as to how they feel about it.

The finale, ‘The Festival’, is a headstrong romp driven by perpetual-motion virtuosity from the soloist, irregular dance rhythms suggesting inebriation, and a sort of cadenza for percussion in the midst of the revelry. The chaos increases to a playful climax, then resolves with an abrupt bang. Though the concerto was composed for Hristova, there might be room for later soloists to find more boldness in the outer movements. But they will be hard-pressed to match her dolce lyricism in the slow movement.

The concert opened with Ives’s Symphony No. 3, which in Stern’s hands was brisk, clear-eyed, and weirdly beautiful, with lushness of texture emphasized over cacophony. Debussy’s ‘Iberia’ was approached as a generous complement to Ludwig’s evanescent textures, and Gershwin’s ‘American in Paris’ showed once again how incredibly idiomatic this orchestra can sound in the performance of American music.

Paul Horsley is performing arts editor of The Independent in Kansas City, where this review previously appeared.
Indianapolis Symphony Goes Finnish and French
US Premiere and Organ Extravaganza
Jay Harvey

The romantic era got the musical world used to solo display. It’s an emphasis made all the more customary in the 21st Century by the ubiquity of pop music, with such magnetic performers as the late Magus of Minnesota, Prince.

When symphony orchestras board the showboat, the result is often a hit with audiences, not only in new music but also in revivals of especially spectacular repertoire from the past. The cusp of the winter-spring transition in the Indianapolis Symphony’s season included two such programs, each with a charismatic soloist.

The remarkable novelty came first, with a program unfortunately offered only once, on March 18. It was the American premiere of the Clarinet Concerto by Kimmo Hakola, 58, with soloist Kari Kriikku, 55, who commissioned it. The concert was a three-Finn show, as the conductor, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, 30, was also making his Indianapolis debut.

The four-movement concerto proved consistently surprising, exerting a hypnotic force. An effortless outpouring of virtuosity from the soloist characterized the first movement, with the orchestra cast as an indefatigable partner, spurring the clarinet on.

Kriikku exhibited the full spectrum of his instrument’s sound, leaping confidently among registers with a variety of tones, from caressing and sweet to yawn and squeak. A cadenza concentrating these qualities introduced a comic element that would later become riotous: in the midst of a sustained exhibition, the soloist held up a forefinger as if to beg the audience’s indulgence for a moment while he turned the page.

The second movement, ‘Hidden Songs’, supplied a respite, but still required the soloist to meet a variety of challenges, particularly control of dynamics. In a lovely passage for clarinet and harp played against sustained harmonics from the first violins that were succeeded by chimes and a folk-like episode, Kriikku exhibited his most lyrical playing.

The third movement found the soloist in full cry, incorporating a touch of Terpsichore—sideways locomotion with funky ankles a la James Brown and a version of Michael Jackson’s “moon walk”. The finale opened with a shout from the orchestra, and then it was off to the races for everybody. It should be made clear that Hakola has created more than a jokey piece. He uses the orchestra imaginatively, and the tricks he puts the soloist through are mainly in the service of clarinet virtuosity at a level that few artists are capable of.

The ISO audience got a chance to assess the mainstream credentials of the guest conductor after intermission. A stunning, precisely detailed performance of Carl Nielsen’s Symphony No. 4 (Inextinguishable) underlined the Scandinavian provenance of the bulk of the program.

The one exception was a brand new work by the 2016 winner of the orchestra’s annual Marilyn K Glick Young Composer Award. Daniel Temkin’s Cataclysm opened the concert. According to the composer’s program
notes, the piece traces dream states, some of them shadowy and indistinct, others confrontational and massive. Temkin, a doctoral student at the University of Southern California, manages the orchestra with a deft use of color over the work’s eight-minute length. In thickening the texture, he refrains from a merely noisy way of evoking the sensory overload dreams often present with.

France was the theme of the orchestra’s April 22 and 23 classical concerts. The British conductor Matthew Halls, 40, was on hand for music by Milhaud, Messiaen, and Ravel.

Something especially rare was added with the inclusion of Alexandre Guilmant’s Symphony No. 1, the composer’s own arrangement of his Organ Sonata No. 1 (1874) for organ and orchestra. Paul Jacobs, head of the organ department at the Juilliard School and at this point the only organist to have been honored with a classical Grammy, was soloist at the ISO’s 1931 Wurlitzer organ. Once the pride of a theater in Youngstown, Ohio, it was purchased by a collector in 1968 and eventually donated to the Central Indiana chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society. That organization gave it to the ISO in 2003. It has been renovated to make it more suitable for symphonic use, which is relatively infrequent.

It still has the brilliant colors—with more than a touch of garishness—of the instrument it was created to be. Jacobs’s articulation and control seemed immaculate, but there were fleeting coordination difficulties in the more tumultuous passages of the outer movements. In the Hilbert Circle Theatre, built as a movie house 100 years ago, the Wurlitzer displayed the uncanny ventriloquism such instruments often have. The sound can seem to come from anywhere in the acoustical environment and either dominate it or link arms with whatever else is going on. And Guilmant made sure there is much going on, especially in the opening Introduction and Allegro and the Finale, which ascends to heights of Napoleonic grandeur.

Jacobs’s choice of reed stops was quite attractive, especially so in the second movement Pastorale, where the organ at the outset paves the way for the woodwind-led initial orchestral entry.

To open the program Halls conducted Les Offrandes Oubliées (The Forgotten Offerings), which Olivier Messiaen wrote at the age of 22. A triptych of orchestral reflections on the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice, the work seems extraordinarily precocious. There’s absolute confidence in Messiaen’s mission-driven handling of the orchestra; the penetrating, sustained outburst in the middle is rhythmically spicy in a way that would set a pattern for the composer’s mature manipulation of rhythm as a structural element. The finale is prayerful and sonically chaste in its use of violins and violas, which were fully evocative under Halls’s control.

The program’s concluding works were a noble, poised account of Ravel’s Mother Goose Suite, following one of the most estimable works of the prolific Darius Milhaud, La Création du Monde (The Creation of the World). Jazz fans often find this piece the most clear-minded appropriation of their music from the classical side. The reduced orchestra, representing the 1920s blend of the new style with pre-jazz Palm Court ensembles, acquitted itself well, conveying the creation myth in all its propitiousness while remaining light-hearted, sentimental, and peppy—just the way the composer processed what he’d heard with delight in Harlem nightspots.

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he entered wearing a sequined brassiere and a two-piece close-fitting floor-length brilliant red gown with a slit (audience side, of course) up to her ilium. A few measures into the concert, when she leaned to her far left on about a 45-degree angle, the bottom side of both bare legs was visible from her six-inch stiletto ivory heels with two-in-thick soles to just millimeters shy of her crotch. But I digress.

"Who’s on first?" On April 14, apparently no one was in Bartok’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with 29-year-old Yuja Wang, Music Director Ward Stare, who turns 34 on August 27, and the Rochester Philharmonic (RPO). This was not only Wang’s first concert following her first vacation—a full month of not touching the piano—since making her European debut in 2003, but also the first time she performed any of Bartok’s concertos. And it sounded like it!

She used a score, and her lips were visibly counting the beat when she was not playing. Although her tone for the first seven minutes was emaciated, she was a pounder from start to finish—and void of expression. She managed the first movement rhythmically but conveyed no idea of shape, form, or ensemble with the orchestra. Ensemble in the orchestra was messy too (what I could hear of it). On recordings it’s hard to hear orchestral details in the first movement, but here, in my preferred seating area of the Eastman Theater, the orchestra was often inaudible as Wang banged away. In the 19-measure three-quarter-time coda (easy to count), she finished two to three measures ahead of the orchestra!

Because the second movement is not rhythmically challenging, it should be easy to concentrate on form and expression, but here both Wang and Stare flat-lined the music with meaningless clustered chords and cymbal smashes that all sounded alike. There was no mystery, no ominous crawling crescendo, no grip of any kind. Nor was there any definition to the motoric finale, to which the bass drum gives an almost hypnotic beat. The bass drum, which can sound great in this hall, was an amorphous muffle (Stare has moved it from far left to mid-stage, where it doesn’t project well). Stare had his hands full trying to keep the orchestra together, let alone attending to Wang, who seemed in a world of her own most of the time. At the end, after a quick deep bow, she suddenly exited; a surprised Stare grinned at the audience and waved her goodbye.

But she did come out for two more curtain calls. The standing audience screamed like mad; I shrank in my seat after a performance that sounded like a raw initial read-through. Indeed, the orchestra’s only previous performance of the concerto was in 1971, and Wang was using her stint in Rochester as her debut performances of both Concertos Nos. 1 and 3.

Two nights later was Wang’s first performance of Concerto No. 3; she again used a score. The RPO’s only previous performances were in 1965 and 2005. Given the work’s more traditional style, it quickly became evident that the soloist’s approach to its lyricism, flow, and line
was studied rather than free, mechanical rather than musical. Indeed, the main problem was that Wang played like she was the star attraction all of the time, even when, for example, after the brief pause midway in the first movement, the orchestra clearly has the melodic and harmonic lead and the piano a subsidiary role with repetitive chords merely meant for color. But she pounded away on her wiry-sounding piano. As a friend said, it was like she just body-surfed right over the orchestra. In fact, at the conclusion her demeanor revealed a completely self-centered attitude—starting to exit, Stare calling to her, Wang returning to shake hands with the concertmaster, after which she failed to turn to the orchestra. Stare had almost manually to guide her where to stand, how to take a joint bow, etc.

For someone who's been on the concert stage well over a decade, such ignorance is really surprising.

For Concerto No. 3 Wang wore another tight-fitting two-piece “gown” with revealing audience-facing slit. My friend, a woman of 59 with liberal, tolerant tastes, made a perceptive comment: “Her dress was distraction because I was waiting not for her to malfunction but for her dress to malfunction” (and to see what her panties looked like).

In Concerto No. 3 it should have been easy to concentrate on the orchestra's work as well, but it wasn’t. Not only did Wang’s brittle loudness get in the way, but Stare too seemed in mechanical mode. Even the fragile insect chirps in the midsection of the second movement were literal rather than whispered or fleet, and the fugue in the final movement was stiff rather than dramatically engaging.

Wang will be playing all three Bartok concertos in the 2016-17 season, concluding the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s season next May by playing all three over two weekends. Bully for her. Here, she made me feel like a guinea pig.

At this point Ward Stare wasn’t “new” to the RPO. He became music director in July 2014 but conducted just a few concerts that “first” season. I wanted to wait until his first full season of conducting (2015-16) to report on how the RPO is doing musically, following a few turbulent years. I was also waiting for a good opportunity to hear the same works twice—a fairer way to evaluate progress.

The concert opened with Saint-Saens’s ‘Danse Bacchanale’ from *Samson and Delilah*. The first night, following the oboe’s snake-charming introduction, things immediately got down to business with a French horn fart—the kind that comes only from unprofessional laziness. Ensemble was poor between the strings and the brass, and among the woodwinds, horns, and strings—sections were ahead or behind the others. And forget orchestral balance. Stare liked it loud; strings buried not just the woodwinds’ melodies but even the trumpets’! And defining cadences in the lower instruments were often ignored.

What a contrast two nights later. No horn fart, but its octaves were poorly tuned, and strings still drowned the woodwinds. But ensemble between sections was much better, and rhythms were tight—Jim Tiller’s castanets served as a bright and firm anchor. And in the coda the RPO was truly virtuosic.

After intermission in Rachmaninoff’s *Symphonic Dances* the opposite happened: Thursday's performance was much better than Saturday’s, despite occasional problems with ensemble and rhythmic alignment, and even though in the second theme, which begins with an oboe solo, the accompanying clarinet came in two to four measures early—more unprofessional sloppiness. I mention this not to berate anyone but because, overall, I heard...
a lack of discipline, or, to put it another way, what I suspect is poor rehearsal technique.

Also, on the podium Stare doesn’t convey a sense of authority. Nonetheless, on Thursday he did convey a clear concept of each movement’s form. Despite Rachmaninoff’s many tempo changes, he never distorted the direction of the music (as many conductors do). The muted brass at the opening of the second movement were perfectly shaped (Stare himself was appointed principal trombonist of the Chicago Lyric Opera when he was 18), the waltz flow was seamless, and balances (especially between the violins) was superb, though Concertmaster Juliana Athayde’s solos (both nights) were sour, shaking, and uneven. Stare’s dead-on rhythms in the final movement were dynamite. The woodwinds were excellent, Rebecca Gilbert’s flute outstanding (no solos, just reliably artistic). And Stare sustained and paced the midsection, creating in it a glorious sound.

What a letdown the second evening! Not only was discipline (especially ensemble and rhythms) poor, but Stare himself lost his grasp of form. The tempo in the first movement became slower and slower. Rachmaninoff’s motto motif here is two 16th notes linked to an 8th note; in the recapitulation, when Stare finally set a firm tempo, the two 16ths were rushed in an irregular pattern all around the orchestra. Fluctuating tempos also destroyed the second movement’s waltz. Nor was the flow as liquid in the final movement as it was the first night.

During Christopher Seaman’s 13 years as RPO music director I was rarely moved by his interpretations, but in 2011 he left the orchestra in superb world-class shape. In just 16 months his successor Arild Remmereit refined this excellence to his own tastes, producing a lean tone, rhythmic precision, and balances that were pristine. After he was fired in December 2012, the orchestra had 2-1/2 years of guest conductors and no consistent presence on the podium. I came away from these concerts (and others) with the feeling that the basic disciplines of ensemble, rhythmic togetherness, and balances are now weak. This is not a problem of the musicians but of their leader. With Ward Stare nearing the end of his first full season on the podium, one cannot rely on the consistent presence of these basic elements that are the substratum of any quality performance.

A few words from his chirpy daughters, and he’s in. There are a couple of brief and oddly placed scenes of violent racial strife back in Texas. Finally Lady Bird goes on a four-day whistle-stop campaign swing through the south on The Lady Bird Special. The train caboose enters and exits three times in a row for three similar speeches. The opera ends with a kind of hymn of praise to her good deeds, accompanied by images of wild flowers (in black and white).

Mollicone has an easy fluency with melody and knows that a constant pulse is needed to keep opera moving. He achieves and sustains a patriotic feeling, but he does so with tunes that sound like they’re from the time of the Civil War (or maybe the New Deal). There’s a rousing choral setting of the Pledge of Allegiance, but it’s interrupted by a digression into the Declaration of Independence.

Lady Bird marked the third time I’ve heard an operatic depiction of LBJ in just six months, starting with Philip Glass’s Appomattox at Washington National Opera (Mar/Apr 2016), followed by JFK. Johnson’s profanities and paranoia fortunately were left out of Lady Bird.

In fact, the best scene in the opera is that flashback, when he’s a young tenor full of love and ambition and Lady Bird the more moderate and sensible of the two.

A few points of similarity between JFK and Lady Bird: both have excellent depictions of the couples’ first meeting. Both have the First Lady in a scene by herself in a different era. A comparison of JFK to John Adams’s Nixon in China is also obvious, since both works mix a good amount of dignity with some screwy fantasy. But in Nixon there’s little romance. That may be the dominant emotional take-away from JFK: the sight of a handsome young couple with so much living still ahead of them.
The Toronto Symphony’s 12th three-concert New Creations Festival in March at Roy Thomson Hall continued to present an interesting and confounding array of contemporary music. This year the festival also broke a barrier that separates the culture of youth from the rarefied world of sometimes academic-sounding orchestral experimentation: two of the concerts gave Canadian hip-hop DJ Scratch Bastid (Paul Murphy) the profile of a soloist. The audience appeared gleeful about the decision.

Each year the TSO invites a recognized composer to help plan its ambitious nod to new music, and this year’s guest was Australian Brett Dean, a fairly prolific, self-taught composer and 14-year veteran of the Berlin Philharmonic’s viola section. Besides conducting and selecting some of the concerts’ repertoire, he performed his own viola concerto at the opening concert on March 5.

Like many new-music makers, Dean writes mainly outside conventional melodic structures. The viola is an instrument that normally lies in the background of much orchestral music, often barely audible amid the timbres of instruments that project more easily. Dean’s Viola Concerto introduced the large Toronto audience to sounds that made a strong impression.

The piece, in three asymmetrical movements, opened with 2-1/2 minutes of mysterious atmospherics, conjured by celeste and subdued rustling sounds from the orchestra—an ideal underlay for a solo instrument like the viola. The second movement introduced both the orchestra’s power and the viola’s challenge. It is titled ‘Pursuit’, and the soloist and the orchestra were in a combative relationship—and no amount of frenetic bowing could change the viola’s intrinsic disadvantage. The final movement began slowly and quietly, giving the violist plenty of space and attention. Overall, the concerto revealed both Dean’s virtuosity and his approach to orchestration, which has heft, subtlety, playfulness, and an affinity for wind and percussive effects.

Music Director Peter Oundjian opened the concert with György Kurtág’s austere, meditative miniature, The Answered Unanswered Question, played by two violinists and two cellists off stage and celeste, in a deliberately dimly lit hall to add gravitas to the piece. The effect was quasi-religious.

The TSO’s principal keyboardist, Patricia Krueger, also performed in a number of other works during the festival. She earned her pay in Aussie pianist Anthony Pateras’s Fragile Absolute, the first piece in the second half of the opening concert. Pateras’s composition dispensed with the strings entirely in favor of two pianos, electric keyboard, celeste, a small ensemble of brass and winds, and percussion. The program notes explained the composer’s notion of the “fragile absolute”, which he began as a graphed mapping of his musical plan, aiming for “a unified web of sound”, but ended up following the composer’s in-the-moment musical impulses. Those impulses produced a piece the audience loved, probably
because of its energy and sonic unpredictability. The typical full orchestral pallet doesn’t seem to be his taste.

Before each concert, performers entertained in the back lobby with a variety of new music. Before the first concert, Pateras played a solo acoustic piano work (he also specializes in electronica) where he generated a mesmerizing effect from a relentless, high-frequency pointillist jabbing technique. He made the piano sound sometimes like a roaring jet, hammering away at small patches of keys with such speed and force that he looked like a man possessed—but the result was strangely soothing.

The last piece on the opening program, Winds of Change (Orchestrated String Quartet No. 3) was an orchestral re-construction of a piece former TSO composer-in-residence Kevin Lau wrote for the Afirara String Quartet and a disc jockey. On the two-CD Centredisc release “Spin Cycle”, in its original form, the quartet performs the piece, the DJ scratches his response, and the composer then revises it, incorporating the two incongruous musical styles.

The TSO’s world premiere of the re-imagined piece was re-titled Concerto Grosso for Orchestra, String Quartet and Turntables. Recognizing that the home of a symphony orchestra was alien territory for a DJ, Lau had fun with the visceral impatience classical musicians (and audiences) often have with such an interloper. Oundjian was instructed to shoot disdainful glances at turntable operator Bastid every time he interjected squeaks and squawks. The Afirara's role was to be peacemaker, but this part of the concept didn’t really come off. By the end of the piece, Bastid may not have won over the purists, but he definitely won over the audience, which included fans of both types of music. The collaboration, whatever its aesthetic consequence might be, was a hit and showed one way traditional orchestras can appeal to a wholly different demographic. The TSO players, who play with such commitment, also seemed pleased with their contribution to the project.

The second concert introduced another side of Dean’s compositional imagination. The soloist for the Canadian premiere of his Dramatis Personae (2013) was trumpeter Hakan Hardenberger. The music showed off both his physical fitness and technical prowess, if not what might traditionally be referred to as his musicality. The piece opens with some exotic woodblock and gong sounds, but quickly moves to a fast-paced, abrasive orchestral romp with loads of noise, until the trumpet enters, and its job is to join the party. The first “persona” in this concerto was a confident, if frustrated, soloist bent on leading the show against the orchestra’s resistance. They played at cross purposes at first, until the orchestra offered the soloist a brief bit of breathing room where Hardenberger let loose with emphatic squealing, sputtering, and ele-

phantine blaring. The movement ended with the sound of a deflated musician hounded into silence.

The second movement, 'Soliloquy', was in the soloist’s comfort zone. The orchestra played atmospherically underneath Hardenberger as he probed the instrument’s expressive possibilities, including its lyrical nature. The effect seemed to be relief both for the musician and the audience. Hardenberger made the movement his own, largely because the orchestra stepped back and let him.

The third persona, ‘The Accidental Revolutionary’, was inspired by a scene in Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times where the hapless everyman finds himself in the midst of a politi-
cal demonstration. Until the last third of the movement the trumpet and orchestra continue their uneasy relationship, the jabbering solo trumpet continuing its brassy palaver against a rough crowd of unsympathetic collaborators. Eventually the piece cracks up, with a funny, chaotic mash-up of a conventional triumphal march and narcissistic brassiness. The Ivesian result was both hilarious and consistent with the overall ethos of the piece—an exploration of solo impulses up against a musical crowd that left little place for harmony.

The second evening began with a piece by another Australian composer, James Ledger. This was, in fact, the first time one of his pieces had been played in North America. Ledger titled the piece Two Memorials (for Anton Webern and John Lennon). In a panel discussion the day before the concert, Ledger conceded that allusions to Webern would be easier to hear than anything specifically Beatlesque because of copyright considerations. Both Webern and Lennon died of gunshot wounds. That was really the extent of the musical connection. There are some rhythmic moments in the piece that suggest a few Beatles tunes, such as 'Strawberry Fields' and 'Blackbird'. In the playful conclusion Ledger sampled a portion of the Webern memorial and then played it backwards as the orchestra continued playing.

In an interview before the festival began, Oundjian said, “The thing that I’ve come to accept and realize is that it doesn’t matter that much if the festival sort of fails or some people think it failed. If you’re effective a decent percentage of the time, then you should be happy.” Good thing! The TSO-commissioned multimedia piece From the Vortex Perspective by Canadian composer Paul Frehner and experimental film maker Peter Mettler was a hit-and-miss affair. Frehner’s music had minimalist impulses serving the theme of cycles, both natural and cultural, and was in itself appealing. Mettler created a film, projected on three screens at the back of the stage, ostensibly inspired by Frehner’s music. The images of forests, flowing water, and whirling dervishes were interesting in their own right, but really were peripheral to the music and suggested a conceptual relationship that wasn’t really convincing.

The final night, March 12, saw Scratch Bastid return, purportedly to present his own "reading" of what he’d heard during rehearsals of the pieces on the three programs. His earnest effort to put a gloss on the serious music we’d experienced was anticlimactic. Billed as a survey of the three programs, it ended up being largely Scratch’s response to only one piece on the last night’s bill, an orchestral suite with baritone called Knocking at the Hellgate, created from Dean’s 2004 ironically titled opera, Bliss.

Hellgate is a six-part piece with three interpersed arias, here sung by Canadian baritone Russell Braun. It includes snippets of a game show host exhorting his audience to jack up their love for stuff. Dean’s critique of materialistic shallowness grabbed the DJ’s imagination; it was this bit of the larger piece that figured prominently in the festival’s finale. The performance of the suite was excellent, but over much of Dean’s orchestration the baritone’s singing was largely muffled, making that aspect of the piece seem low on energy.

A couple of women I spoke with on the streetcar going home said, given how much hard orchestral work went into the three concerts, the TSO should have had a greater part in closing the concert, and I concur. As novel as the DJ was in the overall mix, his contribution wasn’t as musically significant as his place in the last night’s proceedings warranted. Besides, his take on the music was surprising limited, given how much he had to work with.

A Toronto classical music commentator pointed out that this year’s festival was devoid of female composers. Last year, a Vivian Fung piece was part of the opening concert. The TSO management admitted the lapse on social media, and ensured that future New Creations Festivals will be more attentive to the place of women composers in the world of new music. The 2017 festival will have a better balance plus a patriotic element in the year Canada celebrates its sesquicentennial. Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq will perform a piece by Canadian vocalist Christine Duncan; and Owen Pallet, a Canadian composer, has invited English singer Mica Levi to contribute a new work. And a new piece by Canadian Cassandra Miller will help close next year’s festival. This should allay fears that the TSO is insensitive to the contributions women make to new music.
Few Satisfactions at Cincinnati’s MusicNOW

Stephen Estep

The Cincinnati Symphony’s contemporary music showcase, MusicNOW, comes around in March every year. New pieces are commissioned, 20th-Century masterworks are revisited, and guest artists are brought in from the realms of classical, world, folk, and indie rock music. Composer, guitarist, and festival organizer Bryce Dessner wasn’t there this year, since his band, The National, was on tour Down Under. The audience was noticeably smaller than the last time I went (2014), strange, since mandolin genius Chris Thile was the non-classical act for Friday night. Friday’s audience had a larger than normal contingent of 20- and 30-somethings. They were also the quietest, most respectful audience I’ve seen yet at Music Hall.

Dessner’s Aheym had the Kronos Quartet playing with amplification, which served to flatten the dynamics and take away some of the fire in their sound. The loud parts weren’t loud enough. The piece was busy with mostly minor chords and little rhythmic change; rippling cello and (sometimes) viola parts in 5/8 made for an unsettling background. As the piece went on, Dessner introduced bow-bouncing and then harmonics, as if he’d been reading a book on extended string techniques and included them as he learned about them. Still, it was decent minimalism.

Jennifer Koh was the violin soloist in The Seamstress by Anna Clyne. It depicts the title character sitting alone, unraveling an antique cloth while her memories and imagination wander. The violin opened with a folk-like line with a chromatic flourish at the end of the first phrase. That line was repeated—a passacaglia, really—with the orchestra adding a light accompaniment. Clyne’s confidence and facility with orchestration were quickly apparent. After a few minutes, the flute and harp introduced a faux-baroque section that was untypically cinematic; the main scalar eight-note phrase was repeated too much. A faster part followed, once again too reliant on scalar material that moved inside the interval of a sixth or so. A pause and then a nearly silent sigh brought in a clear, cold-winter-night part with striking chromatic inflections. Most of Clyne’s ideas, though, were very narrow in scope, as if, once she was satisfied with a chord progression, she was afraid to let it be changed.

My Beautiful Scream was Julia Wolfe’s musical response to the 9-11 attacks and to the magical age her children were at the time. If my sense of relative pitch told me correctly, the Kronos quartet held out D, E, and F in a close cluster over a quiet wash of gray noise. The amplification fit into the tapestry better here. The orchestra contributed occasional Kanchelian outbursts that grew to waves of sound, while the quartet played barbarous post-minimalist gestures. The orchestra’s portrayal of tragedy was with slow grinding rather
than with shrieks or fast-moving violence. It is interesting to me that modern composers paint these grim, bitter landscapes with always-audible tonality in the background. The mourning was heartfelt.

Last, Chris Thile, of chambergrass bands Nickel Creek and The Punch Brothers, performed original songs, bluegrass, and Bach. The Bach, a transcription of two movements of the Violin Sonata in A minor, combined the pungency of the harpsichord with the sweet sustained notes of the violin. Thile has recorded some of the sonatas and partitas, making them even more intimate than they already were. In his own songs, with just his voice and mandolin, he created the most harmonically audacious music of the evening by far.

In 2014 Penderecki’s Polymorphia was followed by 48 Responses to Polymorphia, written by Radiohead member Jonny Greenwood. Saturday likewise brought us two related pieces: Lutoslawski’s Funeral Music and Dessner’s Repose Lutoslawski. But first, John Schaefer of WNYC interviewed Music Director Louis Langrée; then they showed a video clip that did little more than restate the program notes. People clapped when the sponsors were announced, when the concertmaster entered, when Langrée and Schaefer entered, again when one of them said something important, then when they left, and then when Langrée came back after the video! Instead of getting right to the music, everything happened in fits and starts.

Anyway, the Lutoslawski. The chromatically slithering tri-tones of the opening were ominous; the division of the strings into such small sub-sections gave the orchestra an unnervingly wiry sound. I haven’t been so appropriately creeped out by a piece of music in a long time. Dessner’s response started with cellos and basses playing col legno chords under keening violins and violas. A contrapuntal section reminded me somewhat of renaissance polyphony and of the layered strings in Gorecki’s Symphony No. 3, but with half the strings’ moving notes on the off-beats. The volume swelled to a mezzo-forte but could have gone further. A segment with taunting, out-of-tune pentatonic phrases vanished mid-sentence. A later serene section would have been more effective if set after a more dramatic part. The piece feels real, though, and it has the most depth of anything I’ve heard from Dessner. It just needs bolder architecture.

After intermission there was another interview, then The Sands, Terry Riley’s piece for string quartet and orchestra provoked by the First Gulf War. In spite of the often angry writing, the orchestra sounded complacent. A waltz-like section in Lydian mode sounded aimless; the performance just didn’t flow. Only in the third movement, with its gently sordid, half-remembered “circus” atmosphere, was there a sense that the orchestra felt at ease behind the wheel.

Like sportscasters filling time between swings of the bat, there was another damn interview while the stagehands did their thing. Make it stop! Magnus Lindberg’s Feria began; its breezes brought more Finnish shivers than Mediterranean caresses. It was colorfully orchestrated but loud and earnest rather than festive. I felt less like a critic and more like a psychiatrist taking notes about a patient’s turbulent life. Langrée seemed at his most relaxed; the music had plenty of room to breathe, and the orchestra played their best. After the annoying interviews and the soulless Feria, though, I was out the door the second the applause started. Here’s hoping 2017 is more satisfying.
From Deja Vu to Hypnotic
Robert Markow

What kinds of music are Japanese composers writing in the 21st Century? This was the theme proposed and developed at a three-day conference in New York February 27-29, a joint effort by Music from Japan (MFJ) and the Music Critics Association of North America. Critics from the US and Canada, composers and musicologists from Japan and the US, and members of the host organization (MFJ) assembled for a serious look at the subject.

Based in New York, MFJ is the leading presenter of Japanese contemporary and traditional music in the US and around the world. It was founded in 1975 by Naoyuki Miura, who remains its artistic director 41 years later. Among other activities, MFJ has an ambitious commissioning program that has resulted in world premieres of works by nearly 70 composers. Each year since 1975, MFJ has mounted a festival with a different theme. These themes have included the music of Okinawa, rhythm and drumming, and flute music. This year MFJ had its First Artist Residency in conjunction with the theme “Towards Neo-Japonism.”

Musicologist Yuji Numano, currently teaching at Japan’s leading music school, Toho Gakuen, supplied a concise overview of the history of western classical music in Japan, beginning in the late 19th-Century Meiji Restoration. This talk turned out to be the most enlightening event of the conference. By the 1930s concerted efforts were being made to blend Japanese traditional music and instruments with western forms. Numano laid to rest the widespread misconception that Takemitsu’s November Steps (1967) was the first such composition.

Another step in the cross-fertilization of Japanese and western musical cultures came with the theoretical separation by Fumio Hayasaka (1914-55) of esthetic attributes into Asian and western spheres. In the Asian: simplicity, infinity, and unmeasurable rhythm and tempos; in the western: complexity, finiteness, and logic.

An identity crisis ensued where Japanese composers were faced with the challenge of writing music with Asian qualities that deliberately did not evoke picture-postcard images of tea houses, cherry blossoms, and Mt Fuji. The outcome was what Numano calls Neo-Japonism, which has come to define the kind of music many Japanese composers are writing in the 21st Century. Some of its characteristics include the extensive use of reference, citation, metamorphosis, and repetition; the dissociation or distancing (Numano used the German Verfremdung) from Japanese taste and traditional instruments; and the fluidity of time as opposed to its mechanical division into units.

Numano cited the music of composer Misato Mochizuki (b 1969) as a prime example of Neo-Japonism. Mochizuki, who studied in Japan and Paris, was invited to New York as MFJ’s first artist-in-residence. An entire concert was devoted to her music. In the 168-seat Victor Borge Hall in Scandinavia House on Park Avenue, the audience heard three of her five Intermezziopos composed between 1998 and 2013. Unlike Brahms’s works of the same title, each of Mochizuki’s is a plural affair, an assemblage of tiny fragments or “thought-prompts” without predetermined order that presumably add up to a unified view through “fragmented discourse.” (The term is borrowed from French literary critic Roland Barthes.)

I searched in vain for structure in Mochizuki’s Intermezziopos. Nos. 1 (flute and prepared piano), 2 (13-string koto), and 5 (viola and accordion)—all getting their American premieres—offered a seemingly random array of multiphonics, taps, clicks, scrapes, scratches, bulging dynamics, bent notes, and other effects. I couldn’t help thinking that this has all been done before, particularly in the 1960s. Mochizuki’s Pas d’Apres (Next Step) for flute, guitar, and violin was an MFJ commission first heard in 2003. Unlike the Intermezziopos, it had strongly motive dancelike impulses and made its mark by integrating three disparate timbres into a unified whole. In the
The Sunday concert, "Japanese Composers in the 21st Century", presented eight short works by eight Japanese composers born since 1955. This was the world premiere of Hiroyuki Yamamoto’s *New York Dance*, MFJ’s latest commission. The fluidity of time was much in evidence in his 12-minute work, though time without end might have been a more appropriate image—it sounded not so much as having finished as simply having run out of notes. Yamamoto claimed that *New York Dance* is styled on "certain pronounced rhythms", though these were less pronounced than the fixation on certain intervallic patterns, mostly minor seconds and major sevenths.

Of the remaining works, all American premieres, I was quite fascinated by Masahiro Miwa’s *Rainbow Machine Koan-001* (2015), a perpetual motion machine for piano whose musical material is derived from computer algorithms. The hypnotic repetition of slowly changing, sparkling, glistening patterns in right and left hands, seemingly unrelated yet codependent, held my attention for its entire 10 minutes. The aural effect was not unlike a Balinese gamelan. Visually one might associate it with the uniformity of endless detail in a Jackson Pollock drip painting. Coincidentally, pianist Stephen Gosling stood out as the finest of the many fine musicians at this concert. (A performance of the work, premiered by Hiroaki Ooi, can be heard on YouTube.)

Two other works, both from 2006, caught my fancy. 'An Interview with LB Interpreted by Viola and Piano' by Yoshifume Tanaka proved fascinating in its attempt to capture the inflections of speech through instrumental means. ("LB" is Luciano Berio.) The two instruments teased, cajoled, imitated, and mimicked each other in a curious dialog. Dai Fujikura’s ‘Cutting Sky’ for viola and koto blended the two instruments into what Fujikura calls a “super-koto’. (The viola was played only with a plectrum, like the koto.) The imagery of the title is explained by the composer as if the tautness and precision of the music were “cutting the air with the sharpest of swords”.

As the exception that proves the rule, Haruyuki Suzuki’s ‘Myoclony’ (2013) for violin, cello, piano, trumpet, and oboe was inspired not by the Asian orientation of the fluidity of time and space but by the process of fragmentation and deliberately jerky motion. Its 13 minutes of deliberately disjointed squawks, squawks, and explosive effects left no favorable impression. But as if thumbing his nose at disbelievers, Suzuki ended the piece with a tonal cadence. Works by Satoshi Minami, Sunao Isaji, and Akiko Yamane filled out the program.

In its archives Music from Japan holds recordings of almost every concert it has ever presented plus radio broadcasts, forums, and lectures. It also has scores and commercial recordings of many of the artists who have performed at its concerts. Much of this material can be accessed on the media database: www.musicfromjapan.org/resource. Inquiries may be sent to mailto:mfjrc@msn.com.
Clear Winners in Adult and Youth Divisions
Donald Vroon

At the Adilia Alieva Piano Competition in March, 275 people had applied from 24 countries, mostly in Europe. That number was whittled down to 22 or so by the time of the competition. People were rejected mostly because they were not on a high enough level to compete (it would in many cases have been unkind to bring them to Geneva when they hadn’t a chance). Others were accepted but decided not to come for one reason or another. And then there were the last-minute “no-shows” that seem to happen every time—perhaps a loss of courage? (Sometimes there are visa problems or travel barriers.)

This was my second time on the jury of this competition, and I think the overall level was the highest I have seen in any competition I have attended. Three or four who never made it to the finals would probably have done so with less competition.

There were the usual cases of pianists who were so nervous they fell out quite early in the process, and there were the usual cases of men and women who were so attractive and pleasant that you wished they had played better. There was the usual Russian woman who was so masterly you almost felt sorry for the instrument and the music. (She was very unhappy when she didn’t win a prize.) There were players who were very songful and made me love the music more, but still couldn’t stand up to some of the other players.

First prize last time went to a French pianist who went on to the Moscow competition and won an important prize there. This time it was again a French pianist, Guillaume Vincent, who had won a lesser prize in 2014. I guess the whole jury was Francophile, including the French conductor and the Finnish music critic. There was no disagreement, though I would have been just as happy to give First Prize to Benedek Horvath, a Hungarian. These were the two best, most balanced and polished pianists. As it was, the jury gave Horvath Second Prize, and he had to share it with another French pianist, Maroussia Gentet. They had a lot in common. They both played Schumann’s Davidsbündler- tanze, and they both tended to be tasteful almost to a fault, playing in a reserved manner without a lot of color. Both of them made everything they played sound noble and beautiful, but somewhat smoothed out. I guess pianists seldom take risks at a competition.

In the youth division there were five finalists, and they were all good. The First Prize winner was certainly way ahead of the others, though he was only 18. Alexandru Botac, from Romania, was outstanding even after all the professionals. His Liszt was stunning, his Debussy ‘Claire de Lune’ utterly ideal—the way I had always dreamed of hearing it, his Beethoven perfectly idiomatic. He was very expressive but resisted the temptation to over-
do the contrasts. Second Prize was won by Vergun Velikov from Azerbaijan—a natural musician with great instincts, both in lyrical things and in the brilliant pieces. Another wonderful prize winner in the youth division was an eager and lively 15-year old from England, who handled the wild and the delicate equally well, with nice touch and tone: Katie Morgan.

I enjoyed the music so much that I didn’t mind the long days and hour after hour of piano sound. I loved each of these people for the joy they brought us, for their dedication and character. How could I not love people God has given so much to? I especially enjoyed the final youth recital in a beautiful 12th Century church in Geneva with great acoustics.

I am not a competitive person and have never been pleased with the whole principle of competition: people should cooperate, not compete. But I felt quite strongly as this competition went on that what we were doing was worthwhile. There are thousands of pianists out there who would like to make a career out of it. Before they possibly waste years of their life, they need some expert judgement as to whether they have what it takes—and they need to hear other pianists of their generation to know how they stack up. I think it was obvious to all the other candidates, for example, that Mr Botac was ahead of them all. It didn’t take a jury to make that clear. Yet a jury of experts is important to confirm what some people know right away. Also, as many who attended the competition told me, most people miss the fine points that set one pianist above another. And it is important confirmation to a pianist who has worked hard for many years, too.

Even more than that, I would say a competition fights the celebrity system. We are not impressed by mannerisms and showmanship. We heard some really great performances—and none of these people is well known. Sometimes what we heard was more absorbing and more profound—more “true”—than any recording we know. I urge readers not to buy recordings by the names of the artists; often an unknown will do it better.

We lived and ate in France (and drank great wine), partly because it is less costly than in Switzerland. But the border there is wide open, so we came and went at will. It’s a beautiful part of the world, with a nice climate, mountains, and sunshine. This has been an every-two-years competition, but Adilla Allieva, who sponsors it, is thinking of making it annual.

Left to right: Vergun Vekilov, Alexandru Botac, Benedek Horvath, Vincent Guillaume, Maroussia Gentet, Petr Chukhnov, Gabriel Stern
English composer, pianist, and conductor Thomas Ades will become an artistic partner of the Boston Symphony for three years beginning with the new season. He will appear as conductor and performer with the BSO and Boston Symphony Chamber Players, teach Fellows at the Tanglewood Music Center, and direct Tanglewood’s Festival of Contemporary Music in 2018 and 2019.


British conductor, keyboardist, and cellist Jonathan Cohen will become the seventh current artistic partner of the St Paul Chamber Orchestra starting with the new season. A specialist in baroque opera and classical-era symphonic repertoire, he is founder and artistic director of England’s Arcangelo (see recording review May/June 2016, p 66) that performs on both period and modern instruments, and associate conductor of Les Arts Florissants.

Guillermo Figuera, 63, will become principal conductor of the Santa Fe Symphony and Chorus starting with the new season. He is music director of the Music in the Mountains Festival in Durango CO, and was former music director of both the Puerto Rico Symphony and of the New Mexico Symphony from 2000 until its demise in 2011. He was also former concertmaster of the New York City Ballet and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, of which he was a founding member.

South Carolinian Jonathon Heyward, 23, recent winner of the Grand Prix at the Besançon Conductors Competition, signed a two-year contract to replace Jamie Phillips as assistant conductor of England’s Hallé Orchestra. Heyward lives in London and studies at the Royal Academy of Music.
Danish conductor Thomas Dausgaard, who became principal guest conductor of the Seattle Symphony in 2014 with a three-year contract, has signed on to an additional three years in the position until 2020. He is also chief conductor of the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and chief conductor-designate of the BBC Scottish Symphony.

Michigan-born South Korean Han-Na Chang, 33, will move up from principal guest conductor to chief conductor and artistic leader of Norway's Trondheim Symphony in 2017, succeeding Krzysztof Urbański. In 2014 the cellist-turned-conductor, a Lorin Maazel protege, resigned as music director of the troubled Qatar Philharmonic after just one year. Alexandre Bloch, 30, will become music director of France's Lille National Orchestra starting with the new season. He succeeds Jean-Claude Casadesus, who held the position for 40 years. Bloch is principal guest conductor of the Dusseldorf Symphony.

Jed Bernstein resigned in April after two years as president of Lincoln Center, saying he wants to return to his first love, creating and producing theater, which is his background.

Jeff Melanson, 44, resigned as president and CEO of the Toronto Symphony in late March amidst ugly allegations of personal and professional impropriety by his wealthy estranged wife, who has sued for annulment. He was released only 18 months into a five-year contract by mutual agreement with the board.

Violinist Jonathan Crow will become artistic director of the Toronto Summer Music Festival on September 1, succeeding Douglas McNaibney, who will resign at the end of this summer's season on August 7, after six years in the position. Crow is concertmaster of the Toronto Symphony and a founding member of the New Orford String Quartet. McNaibney is currently professor of chamber music at McGill University's School of Music in Montreal; he also performs and records as a violinist.

Alexander Scheirle became executive director of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra on May 1 succeeding Kristine Spen-sieri, who was interim executive director since June 2015. Scheirle previously was executive and artistic director of Colorado's Crested Butte Music Festival since 2004. He was a founding member in 1990 of the self-governing Bavarian Chamber Philharmonic and served as its executive and artistic director from 2000 to 2007.

Jeff and wife Wu Han, artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 2004, have extended their contract to 2022.

Husband David Finckel, and wife Wu Han, artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 2004, have extended their contract to 2022.

American Record Guide

Music in Concert
Mary Deissler became president and CEO of the Charlotte (NC) Symphony on July 1, succeeding Robert Stickler, who is retiring. She was previously president of the Chicago Academy for the Arts for one year and CEO of Boston’s Handel & Haydn Society for 25 years.

Joseph Specter became president and general director of the Arizona Opera on July 1, succeeding Ryan Taylor, who left May 1 to become president and general director of the Minnesota Opera. Specter was general director of the Austin (TX) Opera for four years.

Julie Kent, 46, became artistic director of the Washington Ballet on July 1, succeeding Septime Webre, who announced in February that he would leave after 17 years. Kent retired from the stage in June 2015 after 29 years with the American Ballet Theater, mainly as principal ballerina.

Melanie Smith will become president of San Francisco Performances in August, succeeding founder Ruth Felt, who will retire after 36 years. Smith has been executive director of the San Francisco Girls Chorus since 2006 and was SFP’s director of education and artistic administration from 1997 to 2006.

Jenny Krueger became executive director of Idaho’s Sun Valley Summer Symphony on June 1. Before that she was executive director of the Acadia Symphony and Conservatory of Music in Lafayette LA for six years. She succeeds Jennifer Teisinger, who left in December to become executive director of the Bravo Vail Music Festival.

Jeffrey Kimpton, president of the Interlochen Center for the Arts since 2003, announced that he will retire in 2017.

American Daniel Kramer, 39, became artistic director of the troubled English National Opera on August 1. He has been an associate at various London theater companies but has never run an arts organization. Music Director Mark Wigglesworth quit the ENO in March, claiming a loss of artistic quality owing to budget cuts; and Kramer’s predecessor, John Berry, quit after 20 years in 2015 amidst funding cuts and a number of senior resignations.

Hanna Munitz announced her retirement from the Israel Opera at the end of this year’s season after 31 years with the company, 21 as general director.

Two awards for sopranos: Tamara Wilson was given the 2016 Richard Tucker Award of $50,000. It is given to an American singer on the threshold of a major international career. And Ailyn Perez won the 2016 Beverly Sills Artist Award of $50,000 for the furtherance of her career. It is given to young singers who have appeared in solo roles at the Metropolitan Opera. Perez was winner of the 2012 Tucker Award.

New York-born Karina Canellakis was given the 2016 Solti Conducting Award in March. Canellakis is in her second season as assistant conductor of the Dallas Symphony and is a protege of conductors Jaap van Zweden and Simon Rattle. The $25,000 award is given to a promising American conductor 38 years old or younger for career advancement. She is yet another artist who tries to conceal her age (why do they do that?), and apparently she made it just under the wire to qualify for the Solti Award, since she saw Itzkah Perlman on Sesame Street when she was 3.
Nashville Symphony musicians ratified a new two-year contract in April, three months ahead of schedule. It went into effect August 1, providing a 4.5% increase the first year and a 5.3% increase the second year. This restores musicians’ salaries to their 2013 level. The contract also restores one second violin position to the orchestra.

Opera Philadelphia and Harlem’s Apollo Theater announced plans in March to continue co-producing new operas over the next few years, following the April production of Charlie Parker’s Yardbird (review on p. 54).

Universal Music Group (UMG) announced yet another change in May. Deutsche Grammophon, Decca Classics, Mercury Classics, and ECM labels will now be incorporated under the Verve label, mainly a jazz-crossover label, to be headed by Danny Bennett, son of singer Tony Bennett. A new head of the classical labels will report to Bennett, who reports to Michele Anthony, executive VP of UMG, who commented about “the high value we place on building our robust jazz and classical repertoire. We are committed to growing our presence in these genres even further and creating crossover successes.”

Big changes were announced in April for Harmonia Mundi USA, the Los Angeles-based American distributor of the HM, Alia Vox, Channel Classics, Hyperion, and Onyx classical labels as well as some jazz and world-music labels. Matthew Owen, operations manager and commercial director since 1995, is now Los Angeles general manager of PIAS (Play It Again Sam), the independent Belgian music company that bought HM last fall; and President René Goiffon and Artistic Director Robina Young, who together launched HM USA 30 years ago, are now consultants and no longer on staff.

American Record Guide

Countertenor Brian Asawa, 49, died in Mission Hills CA on April 18 following a long but unspecified illness. In 1991 he was the first countertenor to win the Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions. While he performed around the world and recorded widely, his home away from home was the San Francisco Opera.

Charles Kaufman, 87, savior of the Mannes College of Music, died at his home in Hillsdale NJ on March 17 from leukemia. He staged a faculty revolt in 1979, saving the near-bankrupt school and transforming it into the Mannes College New School for Music. The New York State Board of Regents removed most of the trustees, and Kaufmann became dean from 1980 until his retirement in 1996.

Isao Tomita, 84, died of heart failure on May 5 in a Tokyo hospital. He achieved fame in 1974 with his electronic arrangements on an RCA album titled “Snowflakes Are Dancing”. Other famous albums included his arrangements of Moussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition and Holst’s Planets.

Klaus Maetzl, 75, a co-founder of the Alban Berg Quartet in 1970, died on May 4. No further details were given. He was the quartet’s second violinist until 1978.
You would guess that any summit meeting of international string virtuosos headed by the sterling pianist Leif Ove Andsnes would bring out the best in all participants and the music, and you would be right. To hear solo artists of the caliber of Andsnes, violinist Tabea Zimmermann, and cellist Clemens Hagen pooling talents for the three Piano Quartets of Johannes Brahms, as they did April 10 at Chicago’s Orchestra Hall (they performed the cycle the night before in Carnegie Hall), must be considered a rare luxury. Luxurious, too, to have James Ehnes available at short notice to step in for the originally announced violinist Christian Tetzlaff, who had withdrawn from the quartet’s US performances to remain in Europe in preparation for the anticipated early arrival of his child. His partner gave birth to a daughter on April 6.

Of course, there was no guarantee going into this Brahms marathon—it lasted more than 2-1/2 hours, including one intermission between the first and second quartets and a pause before the third—that players so formidable as soloists would be as formidable as an ensemble. It took no more than the natural flow of warmly blended lyricism that Andsnes and colleagues achieved in the opening pages of Piano Quartet No. 1 to banish such worries. Their ardently romantic reading took much of its rhythmic spine and clarity of texture from the pianist’s bracing directness and lack of pretension. Each of the excellent string players contributed greatly to the heartfelt dialogs that drive this music, subsuming his voice to a cohesive blended impulse. The headlong drive and vitality they brought to the Hungarian rondo—with Andsnes as self-effacing primus inter pares—made the finale impossible to resist.

The same caring response to the shape and significance of every phrase marked their interpretations of the lesser known but no less compelling Quartets 2 and 3. How closely these musicians listened to each other, and how spontaneously Brahms’s melodic outpourings appeared to pass from one to the other!

For me No. 2 was the high point of the afternoon. Why this ingenious masterpiece, with its expansive nocturne-like slow movement (the beating heart of the interpretation), continues to languish in the shadow of the much better-known No. 1 is baffling. In any case, here a velvety string tone sensitively blended and balanced against Andsnes’s rippling arpeggios and chordal triplets, in a sweeping account that never sacrificed classical control to romantic exuberance. Ehnes’s fine-grained sound allowed the contributions of the violist and cellist to emerge in ideal balance with the keyboard.

In the more troubled sections of No. 3 (another splendid piece Brahms labored over for some 19 years before finally releasing it for publication), Hagen’s mellow-toned eloquence was echoed by the sensitive musicality of Zimmermann and the others. A packed hall erupted in extended ovations at the end.

It’s worth noting that Tetzlaff rejoined Andsnes, Zimmermann, and Hagen for the European portion of their tour later in April.

JOHN VON RHEIN
Cellist Steven Isserlis and pianist-composer Stephen Hough have been a performance team for nearly 25 years. They have toured Europe, North America, and Australia together and recorded much of the great romantic literature. Both have stellar individual careers but find time in exceptionally busy schedules for work together as a duo. It was astounding that their March 15 concert was their New York debut as a duo. The entire concert was the combination of contrasting performance styles uncannily balanced for a unified and quite satisfying result.

Hough has composed several cello and piano pieces for Isserlis, as well as a concerto. His Sonata for Cello and Piano Left Hand (Les Adieux) was written at Isserlis’s request for a mutual pianist friend with right-hand problems. Hough writes that the darker colors resulting from the piano’s lower register “conjure up ghosts of Beethoven and Dussek”, hence the subtitle. Even though it is a single movement, there are two clear sections, with a return of the first section after a powerful cello cadenza. There were some beautiful intertwined melodies as well as interesting and very energetic counterpoint. I cannot imagine a more compelling performance; I also expect to see this work programmed and recorded by other artists. While the piano left-hand aspect lends a visual interest, the musical content alone is more than sufficient to secure a good future for the work. It was unique to see the page turner move from pianist to cellist during this work.

The recital started with Dvorak’s arrangement for cello and piano of his piano duet, Silent Woods, followed by the Ballade and Serenade by his son-in-law, Joseph Suk. This Czech music supplied a light, entertaining opening. From the beginning there was a noticeable difference in performance style between Isserlis’s extroverted and Hough’s cool, elegant playing. Schubert’s Arpeggione Sonata may be the only major work composed for the large bowed guitar-like arpeggione, but it has become a significant work in standard cello repertoire. Isserlis and Hough captured all of its classical beauty with poise and perfect ensemble.

Grieg’s big Cello Sonata completed the program in a grand manner. With all of the work’s references to Grieg’s well-known Piano Concerto, it is familiar sounding and very accessible, even if you are hearing it for the first time. This was the finest playing of the evening from a pair clearly in tune with its romantic style. As the audience was standing and wanting more after its conclusion, Isserlis charmingly asked what they could play to follow a work like that.

Their single encore was ‘Berceuse Orientale’ by Ludwig Lebell from their children’s album, “Children’s Cello”. Rarely does a sophisticated recital end with guffaws from the audience. Isserlis announced that Hough told him this work was his chance to play an entire piece in tune. He began bowing a drone that alternated between two open strings on the cello. Hough added an oriental-flavored melody with his right hand. As it became clear that the cello part was not going to change, Isserlis assumed a bored look and positioned his left elbow on the top edge of the cello’s body and leaned his head into his left hand. About this time, one of the stage crew entered with two champagne glasses on a tray. Without a break in the music they toasted each other and drank from the glasses. Finishing the little piece they took one more extended bow, including a bow from the Stradivarius cello, closed the keyboard lid on the piano, and were done. We all left with a big smile on our faces.
Renee Fleming and Olga Kern
New York

Renée Fleming may be the most famous soprano opera singer in the world. This year marks the 25th anniversary of her Met debut; and her résumé, discography, and concert schedule are the envy of anyone who aspires to success in this very competitive field. She still has a glorious voice, an ebullient, engaging personality, and an ease in performance that have long been hallmarks of her career. Fleming has been honest in recent years about scaling back her operatic work. Besides opera and orchestral performances all over the world each year, she consistently gives recitals, putting herself and a pianist alone on stage, performing repertoire of a much more intimate nature.

Fleming could easily have packed Carnegie Hall by singing favorite opera arias but instead collaborated with excellent pianist Olga Kern, as she often has, and chose works with substantial piano parts. Her program on March 9 included song cycles by Schumann and Debussy plus a Rachmaninoff group—sure signs that she is digging deep into challenging and rewarding song recital repertoire. Kern also contributed solo piano pieces on both halves of the program.

The balance between a song recital and the large hall with all of its visual grandeur was a little off. A large black supertitle screen hung high at the back of the stage; this was quite effective for translations, eliminating the need for audience page-turning. Fleming used a microphone to talk to the audience between groups of songs, something she is quite adept at. But the cables, wrapped in a gold fabric sheath, metal supports hung from the ceiling, and a huge array of speakers positioned on and above the stage created a cluttered look.

The singer entered in black lace, the pianist in red ruffles. Colors were switched for the second half with Kern in a black sequin gown and Fleming in a brilliant red one—something quite appropriate for a large-scale event but possibly too much for a song recital. Fleming opened by delivering a wonderful reflection on Schumann’s song cycle Frauenliebe und Leben (A Woman’s Life and Love) and its place in history. The emotions expressed, from a woman’s perspective (as seen by a man), were revolutionary in 1830. She and Kern worked together exceptionally well, as Kern listened and adjusted with amazing acuity, seamlessly intertwining the piano part with the vocal line and keeping things on a small, nuanced scale. Fleming’s performance captured this essence admirably, though I would have liked more German consonants.

Rachmaninoff’s songs have come to be accepted as some of the best of the 20th Century. Unfamiliarity with the Russian language and difficult piano accompaniments have kept them out of the standard repertoire until the past couple of decades, but singers and pianists now regularly program and record them. Fleming’s vowels and lack of consonants never diminished the beauty of the voice or the music, but she did not sound very Russian.

It was awkward for a solo piano piece (‘Lilacs’) to be played in the middle of the group: both artists left the stage, the piano was repositioned, Kern played her solo, then the process was reversed for the final three songs. ‘Spring Waters’, dedicated to Rachmaninoff’s first piano teacher, was the appropriate conclusion to the first half. It has a notorious piano part that Kern played from memory. Fleming held the final high B-flat for what an accompanist might think an eternity, before Kern blazed through the concerto-like ending.

Kern began the second half with Debussy’s ‘Fireworks’, his last prelude. She seemed to have two gears here: loud and brilliant or hushed and far-away; she could have made the
transitions smoother. Nevertheless, it was a commanding way to open the second half.

Debussy’s wonderful cycle *Ariettes Oubliées* (Forgotten Melodies) followed. These six songs were the recital’s high point. Some titles give an idea of the range of emotions and musical colors: ‘It Is Ecstasy’, ‘It Weeps in My Heart’, ‘The Shadow of the Trees’, and ‘Wooden Horses’. Fleming moved the brilliant ‘Chevaux de Bois’ from its published 4th position to last, which did not bother me at all, despite my apprehension when I saw the program. This was the artists at their best, despite a few moments of rhythmic vagueness.

For the final group of songs, Fleming selected an American composer, Patricia Barber, who was in attendance. Barber is a jazz singer and pianist in the Chicago area, where Fleming first heard her. At Fleming’s request several songs were arranged into a set for a high voice, and they worked extremely well as modern art songs. The singer’s earliest professional performances were as a vocalist in jazz clubs to earn some extra money as an undergraduate, so she was completely at home in this style. She sold every facet of the songs to the audience, who responded with a standing ovation.

Three encores followed: ‘Danny Boy’, ‘Shall We Dance’ and ‘O Mio Babbino Caro’. It is notable that only after Fleming’s third and final encore did she take a solo bow. All others were together with Kern, making it very clear that this was far more than a soloist-accompanist recital.

JAMES HARRINGTON

Who says you can’t go home again? Returning to the city of my birth after a long absence, I was greeted by a raw chilly rain and gusty winds. As if lathered on, the city’s congestion had reached epic proportions far beyond what I had remembered. This Floridian was prepared to brave it all in order to attend a performance of Frederick Delius’s rarely heard *Mass of Life*.

Based on Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Delius’s massive edifice, celebrating man rather than God, had not been heard in the United States for many decades. Stephen Lloyd of the Delius Society thought the last performance to have been on May 15, 1979, under Paul Callaway in Washington DC. Walter Susskind conducted several performances in 1974, in St. Louis and New York.

In his pre-concert talk, American Symphony Music Director Leon Botstein spoke mostly about Nietzsche and his philosophy turning religion on its end, and the attraction this had for the atheistic Delius. He also took a few questions from the audience, including one from a man who claimed to have travelled the world and heard the Mass many times. His travels included Florida, but no performance has ever taken place in that state.

April 5, in a packed Carnegie Hall, proved to be a most memorable date as Botstein led the American Symphony and the Bard Festival Chorale in what many consider to be Delius’s magnum opus, a work that is both typical and atypical of the composer. His mature and unique chromaticism was present in abundance, but so was a vigor and moving grandiloquence, especially in the Meistersinger-like dance songs that contrast with the composer’s usually quiet reflectiveness.

The orchestra, once associated with Stokowski, played very well for Botstein, who tended to speed, rather than indulge some of the tempos. At the start of Part 2 the mercilessly exposed French horns handled their parts faultlessly, and the distant mountain calls were of sublime beauty with their echoes both on and offstage.

Baritone Thomas Cannon had the most prominent role; his powerful voice projected...
well as the embodiment of Zarathustra. Most of his part was delivered without the score in hand, and he had fully absorbed the Delius idiom and vocal expression. The other soloists—tenor Rodrick Dixon, soprano Sarah Fox, and mezzo Audrey Babcock—were nearly all one could ask for in terms of vocal quality. They had the ability to ride the crest of sound when the composer unleashed his full forces of orchestra and double chorus.

The writing for the double chorus is especially difficult in both its chromatic idiom and unusual intervals. While the Bard Festival Chorus may have lacked the sheer numbers of some of their British counterparts, they sang lustily and with full-throated volume when the music required. There was never any feeling that they were underpowered. Intonation, always a problem with music of this complexity, was not here; they were secure in their training under Choral Director James Bagwell, who took a much-deserved bow.

It was easy to forgive the audience for their applause after the towering first chorus, 'Oh Thou My Will! Dispeller Thou of Care!' Less forgivable was their burst after the final glorious choral peroration, covering up the quiet peroration, covering up the quiet measures. During most of the Mass the audience was unusually quiet, as if transfixed.

The decision to have an intermission between the two parts of the work was understandable, though I would have preferred the Mass to be played without interruption. Also, the standard procedure of having soloists and chorus rise and sit between sections presented a visual distraction from what could have been a more sustained musical rapture.

When the concert ended, it was evident that something very special had just taken place, and one of music’s greatest outpourings of life-affirming hedonistic beauty had again revealed itself. Unforgettable.

ALAN BECKER

Esa-Pekka Salonen: Karawane
Joseph Flummerfelt’s Farewell
New York Philharmonic

On March 18 Alan Gilbert led an extravagantly colorful New York Philharmonic program, including a formidable recent choral-orchestral piece by composer-in-residence Esa-Pekka Salonen that supplied the swan song for choral maestro Joseph Flummerfelt.

The concert opened in the melancholy netherworld of Sibelius’s Violin Concerto, an early work that already had the combination of warm lyricism and cool grandeur that came to characterize his mature style. With Leonidas Kavakos as the soloist and Gilbert in charge of the orchestra, this should have been a terrific performance, and it was.
The concert opened in the melancholy netherworld of Sibelius’s Violin Concerto, an early work that already had the combination of warm lyricism and cool grandeur that came to characterize his mature style. With Leonidas Kavakos as the soloist and Gilbert in charge of the orchestra, this should have been a terrific performance, and it was. Despite Kavakos’s austere stage presence, he can produce more colors than practically any violinist on the current scene. And Gilbert is a renowned Sibelian. Kavakos’s melting lyricism and shivery high notes were impressive; Gilbert pushed the performance straight ahead, milking the big climaxes and avoiding the lugubriousness that can drag the piece down.

Shostakovich’s *Age of Gold Suite* that followed with its wrong-note sardonicism was a raucous contrast to the Sibelius, especially with the Philharmonic’s uninhibited percussion and brass.

That set the stage perfectly for Salonen’s *Karawane* (2014), based on a 1916 Dada nonsense text by Hugo Ball. In remarks before the piece, Salonen explained that the Dada movement’s creation of meaning in meaninglessness, a flight into pure abstraction, was an “optimistic idea” forged “on the ruins of Europe” after the realization that all the eloquent literary and scientific words from the Edwardian era did not prevent the disaster of World War I. (The US premiere with Salonen himself conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic was reviewed in M/A 2016.)

*Karawane* does sound mysteriously optimistic and upbeat, a “circus lost in time and space” (Salonen’s metaphor) that pulls the listener irresistibly into its dreamlike tent. Dizzying solos appear during its 30-minute duration. I especially enjoyed Carter Brey’s luscious cello under swirling winds. Harmonies were basically diatonic but spiced with imaginative dissonance. Even the violent crunch at the end was oddly uplifting, more catharsis than nightmare. The chorus alternated lusty shrieks, haunted whispers, and long, lyrical lines.

There was a touch of *Daphnis and Chloe* (Salonen loves Ravel, as his performances with the L.A. and New York Philharmonics attest), but the piece has a distinct off-kilter personality. Although this is a choral work, it resembles Salonen’s 2007 Piano Concerto in its hot syncopated rhythms and hyper-vivid colors.

In poignant remarks, Gilbert announced that this was the final choral performance of Joseph Flummerfelt, who led the New York Choral artists (which he founded) and has been preparing choirs for the Philharmonic for 44 years. I’ve been an admirer since the 1970s, so this concert was a bittersweet experience.

Even in a complex work like *Karawane*, Flummerfelt’s choral sound retained its warmth and seamlessness. He evokes this sonority, he tells me, not by controlling singers but by connecting them with creative energies they don’t know they possess. To him, an obsession with control is a sign of “insecurity,” and he believes our current fetish for mechanical perfection is a “sickness”. His goal is “to help human beings be more in touch with themselves”; and students at the Westminster Choir College of Rider University have told me over the years that their experiences with “Flum”, as they affectionately call him, have been life-changing. A Flummerfelt performance has a unique humanity and mystery, particularly in Brahms, one of his favorite composers, whose Requiem I heard (twice) two weeks earlier in a sublime reading with Flummerfelt’s Choral Artists and the New York Philharmonic under Christoph von Dohnanyi.

Over the years, I’ve become spoiled: other choirs now sound either too cool or too churchy. Many orchestras, even great ones, have been saved from routine performances only when Flummerfelt’s choir stood up and lifted everything to the heavens. In this case, the Philharmonic rose to the occasion with blazing commitment.

JACK SULLIVAN
A number of music critics currently have a sour outlook on Gustavo Dudamel's conducting. I'm not one of them. When I heard him in November 2008 with the Israel Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall and in January 2009 with the Chicago Symphony at Orchestral Hall, my response reminded me of what my mother used to say about one-of-a-kind people: "After God made him, He broke the mold." It was in 2009 that Dudamel became music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Now, here I was seven years later finally hearing him with his own orchestra perform Mahler's Symphony No. 3 at Disney Hall on March 5. I heard their Saturday night performance (the third of four), after which they would perform it on tour at Lincoln Center, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, the Paris Philharmonie, and London's Barbican.

When it comes to Mahler’s symphonies, one usually expects to have something eloquent to say—certainly with No. 3. In the 35-minute first movement I heard razor-sharp precision in each of the orchestra's sections, but they weren’t brought together into an organic whole. The rhythms felt pushed and edgy rather than tight—a major flaw in a movement called ‘Summer Marches In’ that’s supposed to have the character of a joyous Sousa-like march. Trombonist Jorgen van Rijen played his lengthy solos with technical perfection but a detached style that didn’t convey their long-lined mournfulness. Dudamel’s underlying pulse had no backbone. Frequent tempo changes weren’t integrated; sections didn’t flow into one another. Nor did Dudamel give phrases time to breathe—he kept pushing, pushing. The most memorable example of that was in the fugue-like passage with unison cellos; it was played with the awesome precision of an intellectual Bach fugue rather than as a prelude to the vibrant twitterings of nature.

The source of the problem became crystal clear at the opening of the second movement. It begins with pizzicato strings over which a solo oboe has the melody. Normally I’d have said that the soloist was rhythmically behind the strings, but not so here. Dudamel held absolute grip on the strings, as if they were the main attraction, but they’re only accompaniment and here pressed forward to boot, not allowing Principal Oboist Ariana Ghez the breathing room to expressively shape the theme’s innocence and tenderness. And at the end of the movement, when the strings should have fluttered with what felt like tremolos around the lonely trumpet solo, they simply did not float. Dudamel then wrapped up the movement so quickly it almost felt as if he dropped a measure.

The conductor exhibited the same lack of atmosphere near the end of the next movement as principal trumpet Thomas Hooten played his ineffably beautiful post-born solo from the nether-reaches of the upper hall. But instead of trusting Hooten’s serene musicality, Dudamel kept total control, which meant nudging ahead impulsively. In the fourth movement soprano Tamara Mumford was crystal clear, but, like the oboist, her tender sorrow was muted by Dudamel’s failure to interact with her and the text. The atmosphere remained indifferent.

Then it was as if the presence of the L.A. Master Chorale’s women, L.A. Children’s Chorus, and text from Youth’s Magic Horn calmed the conductor. The music began breathing; the atmosphere was transformed. And without a break Dudamel began the utterly eloquent finale, as he held the ending notes of phrases just a bit (like Bernstein), letting the inner harmonic shifts do the job. In the first movement the big climaxes had no effect because everything surrounding them sounded pretty much on the same level; but here the first powerful

Continued on page 43
Kancheli: *Dixi*  
(US premiere)  
Boston Symphony

Andris Nelsons has made a specialty of Shostakovich. His performance of the composer’s Symphony No. 10 in April 2015 was rushed into production by Deutsche Grammophon for a summer release (ARG, Nov/Dec 2015) and earned the 2016 Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance. More Shostakovich recordings are on the way, including Symphony No. 8, to which he gave a heart-rending performance at Symphony Hall on March 26, as the finale to a diverse and satisfying Russian-Georgian program.

The evening started with the American debut of Giya Kancheli’s *Dixi*, which includes Latin texts and dates from 2009. Pounding and clipped tutti chords alternated with hushed and reverent singing by the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. Visuals quickly came to mind: war raging outside an Orthodox cathedral, or a film presentation with a split screen of troops marching and peasants praying. The back and forth between chorus and orchestra continued for some time, though the slices of contrasting sounds varied in size and scale. Eventually the forces aligned somewhat, the hostility of the orchestra waned, and the sound of the chorus swelled. Singers and instrumentalists joined together for a long crescendo that became a hopeful and affirming march that concluded the 20-minute piece.

Kancheli’s emotional message was far different from the familiar sentiment we’d soon hear from Shostakovich. There was still division in the motherland, but things were no longer so violently torn asunder. This was not music of the post-war chill but of the ongoing era of struggle and rebuilding after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Even though John Oliver, founder of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, retired at the end of last summer and is now its conductor laureate, the singers sounded as good as ever, though this was the first time I can recall seeing them sing with scores in their hands. Betsy Burleigh was the guest conductor who prepared the chorus, and she joined Nelsons for a bow.

Some welcome relief—fun even—came next with Rachmaninoff’s *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Piano soloist Nikolai Lugansky started off with a compressed and rather metallic sound, but it soon became clear that he was giving a different kind of touch to each variation. A spacious and inviting world of color and life opened up, and Lugansky was entirely impressive, especially in the faster passages. In retrospect, the lyrical 18th variation was almost a sentimental set-up for what was in store after intermission.

Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 8 was so beautifully performed, its message so passionately delivered, that it became hard to draw a full deep breath until the music came to an end almost 70 minutes after it started. The writing, of course, is decidedly bleak. But rather than being barren or detached, the performance was soulful and almost constantly engaging. On the other hand, sometimes one had to almost turn away from the intensity.

Nelsons has a unique podium manner: he bends and reaches forward as if trying to hover over the orchestra and tap the players with his baton. It works. From start to finish there was incredible precision of attack and unity of sound. Among the many solos given to principals, the standout was English horn player Robert Sheena. During his lengthy threnody in the first movement, Nelsons simply dropped his hands and allowed it to proceed like a cadenza. There were many other fine solos, and Nelsons acknowledged practically every individual player during the ovations. A happy and productive relationship is clearly at work in Boston.

Joseph Dalton

*American Record Guide*  
*Music in Concert*  
39
Toronto Symphony
Rochester NY

Who says major modern orchestras can’t play Bach? Or can’t accompany Bach concertos without sounding heavy?

When pianist Angela Hewitt and 19 string players from the Toronto Symphony played Bach’s most popular keyboard concertos, No. 5 in F minor and No. 1 in D minor, at Rochester’s Eastman Theater on April 15, I asked myself, “What was their secret? How did they fill such a large hall while playing with such delicate elegance?”

Using a concert grand Steinway, Hewitt’s touch in the outer movements was buoyant, intricately shaded, and marvelously fluid. The sheer intelligence behind every small phrase was in itself an aesthetic delight. But this was no mere mathematical intelligence. Her spontaneity created bell-like held notes. And how did she sustain so many tones—with a pedal? No, I never saw her use the pedal (and I was in the sixth row). She also had the piano on an angle, keyboard turned slightly toward the audience, for better audience viewing perhaps, but I’ll bet it really was to project the sound better.

She conducted from the keyboard, or, rather, started each movement with her hands and did the rest with a few nods of her head. All the work was really in rehearsals, and did it pay off? Ensemble and balances were exquisite. Splitting the first and second violins left and right was especially effective in Concerto No. 1. I can see why a number of critics and music aficionados have told me, “I don’t like Angela Hewitt.” Her playing is neither showy nor dramatic, and her use of ornamentation is minimal—something that made the slow movements almost unimaginatively straightforward, especially at her very slow tempos. But she is who she is: highly intelligent and gracious, and a most engaging team player. Despite being low-key, she and the players filled the Eastman Theater with sound (originally seating 3,352, now 2,326, but still a huge space). After intermission, with a massive Toronto Symphony barely fitting on the Eastman’s huge stage for Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 8, I would normally say about the first half, “What a waste of an orchestra!” But not this time! Rather, what a marvelous contrast to show off the TSO’s versatility!

In deeply sincere, even personal remarks before the Shostakovich, Music Director Peter Oundjian, 60, framed the work succinctly—indeed, beautifully—for the audience: written in 1943 in the shadows of the siege of Leningrad and the to-the-death battle of Stalingrad, with the fourth movement a requiem. In fact, from the way Oundjian conducted it, the entire symphony had a requiem substratum from which all else emerged and to which it returned.

After the rich cellos and string basses established the dramatic motto theme, the smooth and seamless strings settled immediately into a requiem—and Oundjian, leader of the Tokyo Quartet for 14 years until a repetitive stress injury ended his violin career in 1995, knows his strings! After a seamless transition to the winds, Oundjian made the stunning violas weep, forced a weeping scream—or was it a screaming weep—as he created a battle sequence that seemed to emphasize not militarism but a human being’s helplessness in the face of it. At the end of the first movement, my throat unexpectedly gurgled as I tried to swallow. Should have brought more than one handkerchief.

Oundjian’s is not an acid-toned orchestra (he’s a very sophisticated and classy man), but Shostakovich himself took care of that as the brutal second movement built to a climax with piccolo, flutes, and contrabassoon sounding like death dancing on the dead. The conductor consulted the score only in the third movement with its tricky rhythmic thrusts. He took it non troppo as asked. Oundjian was animated but not a show-off, making up for low acidity with the orchestra’s consummate balances and ensemble, as muted violins played at full
The La Jolla Music Society (LJMS) presented the Montreal Symphony at San Diego’s Copley Symphony Hall on March 23, part of the orchestra’s ten-city coast-to-coast US tour. Music Director Kent Nagano conducted, and 25-year-old Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov, winner of Moscow’s Tchaikovsky Competition in 2011, was the soloist.

Nagano deliberately juxtaposed two works premiered in Paris in March 1913. Both starred danseur Vaslav Nijinsky: Claude Debussy’s Jeux was largely ignored, and Igor Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring set off a riot. Here they bracketed Sergei Prokofieff’s extremely popular Piano Concerto No. 3, premiered by Chicago Symphony in 1921 with the composer at the keyboard. All three works allowed Nagano to show off the superb sections of his extraordinary orchestra, which proved keenly supportive of Trifonov’s singular playing. Many in the audience were heard to say, “I never heard anything like that.”

Indeed, neither had I. Trifonov, who famously lost a baby tooth in his concert debut at age 8, seemed to play as if from inside the piano, his slender body bending very close to the keyboard sometimes, appearing to coax notes out. He made Prokofieff’s cross-handed requirements look easy and played the challenging work clearly and without affectation, bringing out jaw-dropping finesse and precise, uninhibited syncopation. The orchestra appeared to relish every moment, listening to his encore (a simply played rendition of the Tchaikovsky-Pletnev ‘Silver Fairy’) with rapt attention and responding with sincere applause. When one thinks of the rigors of a ten-city tour, one marvels at the presentation of an encore; and if reports of other concerts are to be believed, encores differed from place to place.

Nagano has been with the 120-plus Canadians since 2006. His conducting style is such that he seems to wear the players on his fingertips. Their appearance, demeanor, and sound exude youthful enthusiasm and rapport. It was edifying to hear Jeux open the concert and to find Nagano a master at demonstrating its contrasts, shimmer, delicacy, fly-away qualities, and lusciousness. Not only that, but hearing it performed in concert underscores the fact that it is exceptionally well constructed. A mere recording can never convey that.

As expected, The Rite of Spring was both stirring in its percussiveness and touching in its solemnity and delicacy. I am not averse to choreography—after all the music was written for that purpose—but it was a boon for a change to listen without the distraction of dance.

It was a generous program, and yet Nagano generously supplied two splendidly played encores, endearing themselves even further to the San Diego audience: Debussy’s Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun and the ‘Farandole’ from Bizet’s Arlesienne Suite No. 2.

CHARLENE BALDRIDGE

Montreal Symphony — San Diego

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CHARLENE BALDRIDGE
John Adams:
*Scheherazade.2*
Seattle Symphony

Under the leadership of Music Director Ludovic Morlot, the Seattle Symphony goes from strength to strength, especially in the exploration of new music. Thus an invitation for John Adams to give the West Coast premiere of his new violin concerto with Leila Josefowicz seemed both apt and timely. The resulting concert proved of interest for what else Adams tucked into his program besides the performance of *Scheherazade.2, Dramatic Symphony for Violin and Orchestra*. [Both the world premiere and second performances were reviewed in July/Aug 2015. -Editor]

“A piece that feels like a symphony but behaves like a concerto” was Adams’s clever way of introducing the work to the Seattle audience. Like Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy*, Adams created a symphony-concerto with a strong narrative apparatus: a revisionist take on the Scheherezade story that envisions the legendary storyteller as an empowered woman in an often hostile world.

With Josefowicz in the title role (surely not a misuse of the term), the success of the piece was assured. Though Adams has often created music that is grand, this seems a relatively recent adoption of the grand manner. *Scheherazade.2* has the brazen virtuosity of any of the great conventional warhorses; it conforms to a conventional four-movement symphony model and adds a narrative dimension for good measure.

For me the latter is perhaps the least interesting part of the package. If Adams found the storyline useful when conceiving the work, all well and good; and if the same apparatus helps recalcitrant audiences in need of encourage-

ment in the ways of contemporary music, so much the better. But the logic and drive of the music make the piece effective, plot or no plot. All is balanced and connected. All makes artistic sense with or without any story.

A big part of the work’s appeal is the sheer bravado of the fiddle part. Although there are pretty moments, it lingers in lyrical mode only rarely. Josefowicz’s big sound and big technique were put to the test, but she had the feisty, uncompromising ability to sell the work—and sell it big.

*Scheherazade.2* has a few orchestral quirks, most significantly the use of cimbalom as a counterfoil to the soloist. (In his pre-concert chat, Adams spoke enthusiastically about what he called the Hungarian folk instrument’s “sour” sound.) It’s essential to the mix, not a colorful bit of exoticism; nor is the big set of tuned gongs that make the work’s enchanting final moments so special. Adams knows his orchestra and knows how to make it deliver; even somewhat cliched effects like bowed vibraphone sounded fresh and special.

To round out the program, Adams chose two pieces from early in the 20th Century. Elgar’s beefy *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 3* supplied a change of pace. Respighi’s *Pines of Rome* was essentially a salute from a master of orchestration to one of yesteryear. Yet there could be another connection: *Scheherazade* (.1) was the brainchild of Rimsky-Korsakoff, and Respighi was an acolyte of that great Russian orchestral master.

In any case, *Pines* proved great fun. Adams clearly enjoyed himself on the podium; and, although a few aspects of the SSO’s rendition were rough around the edges, the audience fell completely for the sumptuous splendors of Respighi’s 1924 score.

DAVID GORDON DUKE

Utah Symphony
Urbana IL

On April 27 Thierry Fischer and the Utah Symphony gave a concert in the Foellinger Great Hall of the Krannert Center in Urbana IL. The program opened with an articulate, disciplined reading of Haydn’s Symphony No. 96 (*Miracle*). The front of the stage was filled with at least 20 percussion instruments, so Fischer had most of the musicians in the classical-sized orchestra stand so that the audience

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could see them. Fischer’s approach to the Haydn was rather stately, so the solo oboist’s graceful sense of humor in the Trio of the Minuet was welcome. After the clean and sturdy Finale, with an energetic coda full of color and contrast, the musicians left the stage.

After a long wait for chairs and more percussion instruments to be brought on stage for Andrew Norman’s Switch, a piece for solo percussion and orchestra commissioned by the Utah Symphony, the music began without the soloist. After pointillistic sounds from solo strings and sudden outbursts from winds and the tutti percussion section, soloist Colin Currie ran in from stage left and romped joyfully among his semi-circular battery of instruments (marimba, cowbells, congas, bongos, side drums, snare drum, and bass drum), matching his hits with sounds in the orchestra. The soloist’s hits are supposed to act like switches to instigate a particular texture, pitch, or color somewhere in the orchestra. Noting each new sound combination was a challenge for the listener, so the act of listening became a game. Some thematic material seemed to be derived from a set of ancient-looking gongs that were not sounded until the end of the piece.

After the Norman, selections from Prokofieff’s ballet Romeo and Juliet gave the orchestra a greater opportunity to show what it could do. If Norman’s orchestra is made of individuals who interact busily and precisely at great distances and in non-conventional ways, then Prokofieff’s orchestra is a single gigantic expressive entity. Explorations in orchestra in this piece, particularly the lower voices in the brass, string, and woodwind sections. Fischer’s bold, sure, yet non-interventionist style of conducting allowed the musicians to play comfortably and brilliantly.

Bartok’s Miraculous Mandarin, also ballet music, is a parable about modern urban existence. Bartok’s unusual material and his brilliant orchestration are engaging, even if one doesn’t know the characters or the narrative. The clarity of Fischer’s conducting and the orchestra’s terrific string sections (all of them) made the performance exceptional. I also enjoyed the whimsical Poulenc piece they played as an encore.

The Bartok had its premiere in 1926, the Prokofieff in 1938, and the Haydn in 1791. These pieces seem to me to represent the eternally modern, while the Norman, which had its premiere this season, seems like something that will remain tied to the technically oriented flash of the early 21st Century.

ELAINE FINE

The Los Angeles Philharmonic itself seems in world-class shape; its principal players were excellent, even if most were not individually memorable—but timpanist Joseph Pereira certainly was. During the entire evening Dudamel was in total control of his players, and not at all flamboyant. But what I didn’t sense, even in the final two movements, was spontaneity. Why not? All the reasons for it are present in this superb ensemble. Given Dudamel’s image, one would expect a performance to be done in by hysterical flamboyance. But not so on this night. This one was limited by excessive control and a weak grasp of form in the first four movements.

GIL FRENCH

The climax was followed by a second terrifying one, after which a silken flute solo seemed to emerge from the heavens, leading to the grand coda with a glorious trumpet quartet and the nine flawless French horns.

I was somewhat compromised sitting in the fifth row of “the galley” to the conductor’s left with the first violins, cellos, and string basses pointed away from me; they sounded once removed. The second violins and violas were across stage but pointed right at me—their rich harmonic movement was highly effective. Such imbalance can tilt one’s experience.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic—from page 38
The brochure promoting the Nashville Symphony’s March concert at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center read simply “Mozart & Ravel”. If it had instead said “Jennifer Higdon”, the composer whose music occupied the concert’s entire first half, one suspects that the performance would have been poorly attended. After all, who in Nashville, aside from a handful of new-music aficionados, has heard of Higdon?

But those of us who were lucky enough to get tickets for the program likely will never forget her name. The NSO under the direction of Music Director Giancarlo Guerrero performed two of Higdon’s recent compositions: All Things Majestic and the Viola Concerto. Both works, for the most part, made strong impressions. They were recorded for future release with her Oboe Concerto (recorded in January) on Naxos.

All Things Majestic is a four-movement work for large orchestra, commissioned in 2011 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Grand Teton Music Festival in Jackson Hole WY. Higdon arranged the piece as a kind of picture post card, with each movement named for one of Wyoming’s vast and beautiful geographic features.

The first two movements, ‘Teton Range’ and ‘String Lake’, were the most conventional and predictable sections of the piece and as such were the least satisfying. Both movements had Coplandesque arrangements with warm, consonant chords, played mostly in the brass, conjuring the grandeur of the Teton mountain range and glossy string surfaces suggesting a placid lake. One could have mistaken both pieces for 1930s-era Works Progress Administration commissions. But the work really took off in the third movement, a quasi-scherzo titled ‘Snake River’. Her glistening orchestra- tion with its wild winds, pizzicato strings, and off-kilter brass readily conveyed images of the river’s breathtaking rapids. The finale, ‘Cathedrals’, made good use of spikey dissonant chords to suggest jagged mountain features.

Higdon’s Viola Concerto, which the Nashville Symphony commissioned along with the Curtis Institute of Music (where Higdon teaches), the Library of Congress, and Aspen Music Festival, is a strikingly original work. (The world premiere was reviewed in J/A 2015, p 13.) Many of the concerto’s appealing melodies were scored for the viola’s higher registers, giving the concerto a brighter sound than what’s heard in more typically dark, moody viola works. The overall structure of the concerto was also fresh, with the slowest movement coming first, followed by two fast movements.

I couldn’t imagine a better performance than the one delivered by the NSO and soloist Roberto Diaz, who gave the premiere. Diaz, the former principal viola of the Philadelphia Orchestra who now serves as president and CEO of Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute, proved to be a true musician-scholar. His performance was polished to perfection, and he imparted in every note a sense of urgency and warm emotion. His rendition earned warm applause for himself and the composer, who was in the hall.

After intermission, Diaz and NSO Concertmaster June Iwasaki performed together as soloists in Mozart’s Sinfonia Concertante. They gave beautifully synchronized performances, conveying a welcome degree of exuber- ance. Guerrero, who conducted without his customary baton, led an ensemble that was both breathtakingly clean and intimate.

La Valse closed the concert. Guerrero gave this music a sensuous interpretation, a reading that slowly gathered heat, finally reaching an exhilarating boil in the wildly surreal Viennese waltz that closes the piece.
Contemporary and classical works always stand side by side in concerts of the Albany Symphony. At their April 16 program at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, the selections fit together nicely, talking to each other across eras. What’s more, Music Director David Alan Miller led performances that were polished and engaging.

The biggest drama of the night came with the return of soloist Evelyn Glennie. She and the orchestra are a natural match, given their common taste for new music. Two years ago the team earned a Grammy Award for a Naxos recording of John Corigliano’s *Conjuror*. No better way to solidify a bond than that.

This time they tackled Michael Daugherty’s *Dreamachine*. This is the third big Daugherty work the ASO has performed in just two seasons (yes, another disc is on the way). So his music has become familiar, yet it remains charming and also explosive. One of his first big pieces 20 years ago was a symphonic take on Superman, and ever since then comic books often come to mind when listening to his flashy orchestral writing. As with those inky illustrations, there’s a pleasing balance of dark shadows and lively colors. And the story always leads to at least one big “Ka-Pow!”

There was even more of that than usual in *Dreamachine*, given that the whole front of the stage was full of instruments waiting for Glennie to bang, strike, shake, rattle, or jiggles. The movement titled ‘Rube Goldberg’s Variations’ was especially delightful. Here all of Glennie’s instruments were handheld and toy-like, which allowed her to move around. Off in her own corner of the stage she almost danced. In one passage Principal Trumpet Eric Berlin gave a brilliant electricity to the music. Another hallmark of Daugherty is that he shines the spotlight on many individuals in the orchestra.

The movement called ‘DaVinci’s Wings’ was rather earthbound despite its title—lots of crash landings. ‘Electric Eel’ had a foggy underwater resonance, thanks especially to the humming vibes. ‘Vulcan’s Forge’, the finale, went into deep space and concluded with a quote from the “Star Trek” theme.

Composer Derek Bermel is another ASO regular, but his fascination with world music results in each piece being an unexpected journey. *Mar de Setembro* is a setting of four poems by Portuguese writer Eugenio de Andrade. Soprano Sara Serpa sang with an unaffected, vibrato-free sound, aided by amplification. With a lean but lush orchestra, the piece was all about gentle touch and sensuality. Serpa comes from the jazz world, and, by the time she seemed fully warmed up and comfortable, the whole thing was over.

Bermel’s use of the orchestra in massed and layered sounds was a contrast to the rest of the evening, where solos abounded. In Ravel’s *Tombeau de Couperin*, which opened the concert, Principal Oboe Karen Hosmer was in fine form, as was the whole woodwind section. The strings aided them with a soft pillow sound.

Perhaps it was all this other detailed work that made the final piece, Haydn’s Symphony No. 103 (*Drumroll*), have such depth and perspective. It opened with Matt Beaumont playing a roll with hard sticks on the timpani. The cello section came in with a neat and unexpected growl in the Andante. And all the strings contributed to making the clever minuet a delight.

**JOSEPH DALTON**

*American Record Guide*
Cypress Quartet
Farewell
San Francisco

The four mid-career musicians of the Cypress String Quartet started their farewell series of concerts late last winter. After a 20-year run and many new works, they called it quits permanently in late June, even though they were still in excellent form. When they disbanded, each went to new projects—a stunning change of direction that very few healthy and thriving groups undertake.

I heard them on March 11 at the Herbst Theater, where they played the world premiere of Dan Coleman’s clever and quite beautiful Quartet No. 3 (Together, As the River), quoting a Louise Glück poem—a work that could well have been titled the “Permutations Quartet”. It exploits the various combinations of duets and trios available, methodically presenting one after the other. Over the 19-minute span Coleman’s quartet becomes airborne, lifting one’s spirits in the process. He wrote for 10 of the 11 possible permutations, maintaining a delicate patina. If we number the players from the top 1 through 4, these included: 1-2, an animated close interplay of two violins; 1-4, a brisk top-and-bottom exercise; 1-3-4, a reflective Brahmsian segment, with 1-3 equally autumnal. 1-2-3 was I think the most beautiful, while 2-3-4 brought forth more heated exchanges. The finale with all four voices had fetching sonorities, bringing closure—but not before a 3-4 afterthought. How appropriate this math, almost on the eve of Einstein’s birthday!

The whole, however, is much more than a mathematical assignment; it is total equality, with every instrument equally weighted in leadership and thematic content. Each player has thematic material equally; there is no accompaniment as such. In addition, Coleman has a gift for highly lyrical and alluring counterpoint, here giving the illusion of the musicians’ total effortlessness. The sound is totally consonant, yet the piece has the composer’s own voice.

This commissioned premiere was to be the final segment of the “Call and Response” format that Cypress has done annually. But Coleman, 43, tapped twice before for C-&-R since the millennium, confessed that this time he was doing a solo flight, not responding to the Beethoven works that rounded out the program.

In playing the first and last of the Beethoven string quartets, the San Francisco-based Cypress players again showed their characteristics, with first violinist Cecily Ward holding back slightly to avoid hogging the limelight, and the exuberantly expressive Jennifer Koetzel doing the same as cellist, balancing violinist Tom Stone and violist Ethan Filler. The Cypress was ultra-refined, articulate, yet not shying away from emotion. And their sound was exquisite.

Beethoven’s last completed quartet (and work) uses a simplistic four-note theme, varied and transformed in many ways. There are two other surprises: in the slow movement, all the players start on the lowest string, then work their way up till all four are on the highest; and in the finale, the musical question is posed, “Must it be?” with the riposte, “It must be!” offering a mystery for the ages: What exactly was Beethoven referring to?

Anticipation of death just months away? Perhaps. The exchanges reflect defiance far more than any morose wallowing. Wasch-echt (genuine to the core) Beethoven, as they’d say back in Bonn.

The concert opened with Quartet No. 1. Noteworthy is its invention in the Adagio, a doleful tragedy inspired by the tomb scene in Romeo and Juliet, moving on to hard strokes and high passion rare for its time.

The Cypress players now go their separate ways with new challenges. Some, no doubt, will be drawn to education, carrying forward the music that they’ve delivered to some 150,000 Bay Area students over the years. Their imprint has been noteworthy. Playing to hundreds of middle-school youngsters and musicians at this concert, the Cypress profited from the pin-drop silence, without so much as a cell-phone ringtone or dropped notebook disturbing the intense experience. We adults could learn some pointers from these kids!

PAUL HERTLENDY

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Ying Quartet
Rochester NY

I wanted to start with the second (better) half first, but that's not the way the story told itself to me, when the Eastman School of Music's resident quartet performed Beethoven's Quartets Nos. 12 and 7 at Kilbourn Hall on the first day of spring.

As violist Philip Ying said in his brief introductory remarks, a pair of Beethoven quartets tests a group's ensemble in every way—its unanimity of concept, thought, and emotion, not to mention its technical mastery. Indeed, the players' ensemble was total and their technique superb.

So why did their opening quartet, No. 12, the first of the late quartets, leave me cold and the audience with relatively modest applause? In the first movement, second violinist Janet Ying's playing projected no special character or personality. They then took the Adagio (but not too slow and very cantabile says the composer) at a faster than normal tempo, giving it the gait of a happy, comforting lullaby. It would have worked beautifully, if only they could have held the tempo, but they accelerated repeatedly during its 12 or 13 minutes. As a result, they didn't sustain the mood; the long Adagio had no form and lost its initial character. The Scherzo that followed was well played with solid form but without tonal or stylistic subtlety, thus missing its teasing quality and wit; and in the trio the Yings again reverted to pressing forward, here so fast that the lead notes of phrases were simply lost.

In the finale the first violin plays the melody and the others produce almost a harmonium-like moving chordal support. But the lack of tonal and stylistic variation was puzzling. Three of the four players are siblings. Had they grown up matching one another's styles so perfectly that they lack the breadth of colors and nuances—and thus transparency—that other quartets have? Even Robin Scott, in his first season as first violinist (the third in seven years), matched the others' tone and style.

Such pompous speculation was dashed after intermission when the Yings turned to Quartet No. 7. Their approach to the first movement was gossamer, fleet, buoyant, and sweet, not big and bold. Nor did they rush. As a result, the contrast between relaxed and ardent passages was especially vivid. Phrases were more keenly shaped and tone colors much more varied. Their articulation was much more pronounced than in No. 12. And because they had a solid grasp of form, long lyrical lines were beautifully nuanced with elegant, flowing touches of rubato, and climaxes were shaped gradually to stunning effect. The same was true in the scherzo-like second movement, even though their approach was serious and dramatic rather than humorous. It was as if a scrim that had masked their ability to project in No. 12 had been removed for No. 7. Here was real music making.

Or so I thought until the old bad habits returned in the final two movements. In both quartets the Yings were unable to play an Adagio adagio. They pressed forward, accelerating early and often. I thought of Mahler's dictum: "If it's not working, go slower." Even cellist David Ying, usually so soulful and musical, accelerated his key melodic lines near the end. The final movement was so rushed that the players consistently either smudged or swallowed the opening notes of the main thematic phrase.

Quartet No. 7 drew a typical Rochester standing ovation. What wasn't typical for the Yings was the lack of an encore for the home town crowd, even at this untypically short one-hour 40-minute (including intermission) concert.

GIL FRENCH

American Record Guide

Music in Concert
Union Terminal Organ Series
Cincinnati

There is more music in Cincinnati than anyone can take in. It’s not New York, but as a native New Yorker I often get the same feeling I had there—that I’m missing so much.

Next season the orchestra will not be playing at Music Hall, which is undergoing extensive renovation. So this spring I have treasured every orchestral concert—and there have been great ones, such as the return of Jesus Lopez-Cobos to conduct the Mahler Ninth.

And I have rejoiced in the symphonic organ at the Museum Center (railway station), which is also going to be closed next season for renovations. It may even mean two years without the organ series, because, obviously, you cannot move a huge organ with all those pipes. We have had 14 years of these concerts, and every year there have been amazing performances.

This year we got to know Isabelle Demers—one of the greatest organists I have ever heard. In November she played a fascinating Harry Potter Suite (based on music by John Williams) where the instrument made sounds I have never heard before in music I had never heard (I have no interest in the movies). As if that were not enough, her reading of Reger’s Wacht Auf was stunning. Her program also included remarkable transcriptions (her own, I think) of movements from Scheherazade and the Symphonie Fantastique.

In February Benjamin Sheen paired up with Randolph Bowman, first flute of the Cincinnati Symphony, in a beautiful program. Its most amazing piece was a movement called ‘Pan and the Birds’ from a flute sonata by Jules Mouquet—music I had never heard before.

In April Thomas Murray returned to this organ—he was the first to play it in public, many years ago—and showed that he understands the instrument and the acoustic perfectly. He opened with Edvard Grieg’s Holberg Suite, originally written for strings. I have to admit that I have never liked the piece and often think its recordings sound like sludge. It is a far better piece on the organ! For one thing, the organ is much more colorful than strings. The Rheinberger sonata that followed had me worried—how would Mr Murray put across the Fugue in this huge, super-reverberant space? I can only say that he did it—brilliantly.

A tribute to Duke Ellington by George Faxon followed. Then there were five choral pieces, sung by a combined choir: Christchurch Cathedral and Cincinnati Choral Society. That’s about 65 voices—none too many for the huge space! They were ‘Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God’ by Howard Helvey (a local composer whose work I usually like—including this one), ‘Like As the Hart’ by Herbert Howells (an Anglican standard from 1941), ‘A New Song’ by James Macmillan (Psalm 96), and the first two movements of the Durufle Requiem. How very moving all of this was in that vast cavernous space!

Mr Murray closed the program with two movements from the Hereford Variations by one of his pupils, Peter Berton, and the Durufle Organ Suite. The latter ends with a fiendishly difficult Toccata—not only difficult for the organist, but also for the listener. It is the most dissonant thing this composer ever produced, and it is weird, wild, and powerful. I wonder if any other organ could have made it so overpowering and stirring—or any other organist!

DONALD VROON
Floyd: *Prince of Players* (world premiere)

**Houston Grand Opera**

The subject of 90-year-old composer Carlisle Floyd's newest opera is the seismic shift in “legit” acting styles, from artificial to more realistic, that occurred in 17th-Century England. The title character is Edward Kynaston (c. 1640-1712), one of the last restoration “boy players” or actors who performed women’s roles. Kynaston fell from stardom when King Charles II lifted the ban on women on stage in 1661 and royally decreed: “No He shall ere again on an English stage play She.”

*Prince of Players*, Houston Grand Opera's fifth Floyd commission, had its world premiere on March 5 in Wortham Theater Center's Cullen Theater. It is based on American playwright Jeffrey Hatcher's 1999 *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, the inspiration for Richard Eyre's 2004 film *Stage Beauty*.

The historical Kynaston always played both male and female characters, but in the opera he refuses to start playing men. Where's the art or skill, he demands, when a woman is played by an actual woman? The actor hits bottom both personally and professionally when, to survive, he has to sing bawdy songs in rowdy taverns as drag chanteuse Lusty Louise. His savior is his former dresser, Margaret “Peg” Hughes, who loves him and becomes one of London’s first actresses. Forming a romantic and professional couple, they jettison the mannered, gesture-based style of acting he had laboriously perfected since childhood and wow the public with a more realistic and natural theatricality.

*Prince of Players* opens with Kynaston and star actor-manager Thomas Betterton enacting Desdemona's murder from Shakespeare's *Othello* in the old stylized way and closes with Kynaston and Peg playing the scene in a new, more passionate, and powerful way. In between, Floyd's two-act, two-hour “chamber opera” is colorfully orchestrated and applies his trademark lyricism to Peg's and Kynaston’s declarations of love, the latter’s tale of his homeless childhood, his committed defense of the old-fashioned acting style, his break-up with a titled male lover, and Betterton's plea for his stubborn prima donna to start playing men.

With eloquent conducting by Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers, HGO’s handsome production boasted strong vocal and dramatic performances by the 19-member cast. Many of them were current or former members of Houston Grand Opera Studio, the training program that Floyd co-founded in 1977. Baritone Ben Edquist was compelling as Kynaston; and soprano Mane Galoyan, tenor Chad Shelton, and bass-baritone Federico De Michelis were vocally potent as Peg, King Charles II, and Thomas Betterton. Also lending solid support were Joseph Evans as Kynaston’s nemesis Sir Charles Sedley, fellow tenor Scott Quinn as the Duke of Buckingham (Kynaston's pre-Peg love interest), Sofia Selowsky as royal mistress and future actress Nell Gwynn, and fellow mezzo Megan Mikhailovna Samarin and soprano Pureum Jo as Kynaston groupies Lady Meresvale and Miss Frayne.

Director Michael Gieleta, lighting designer Renée Brode, and set designer Shoko Kambara evocatively conjured up a restoration world of pomp and candlelight; and Gregory Gale’s sumptuous gowns, robes, and wigs were especially striking.

**WILLIAM ALBRIGHT**

*American Record Guide*
Music-lovers know Bach from Beethoven or Brahms, but they leave tilling the turf between Lully and Rameau to specialists in small seminars. But the Paris-based American conductor William Christie—God’s gift to the French baroque—regards those two composers as worlds apart; and with his period-instrument ensemble, Les Arts Florissants, he explores these worlds with vigor and joy. He triumphed in April with a stunning, witty opera-ballet by André Campra (1660-1744)—born before Bach and between Lully (1632-1687) and Rameau (1683-1764).

A huge hit in 1710, Les Fetes Venitiennes had more than 300 performances before languishing, until Christie, with director Robert Carsen and (surely wild-eyed) choreographer Ed Wubbe of Scapino Ballet Rotterdam, shaped it, raunched it up, and presented it in Europe. Its three performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music were the US premiere.

In the prologue to three barely-connected acts, scruffy tourists jostle into the Piazza San Marco, wearing backpacks and snapping selfies. “This is you, now,” is the message to the audience. Suddenly a towering red puppet lumbers in, maneuvered by men in red velvet with long sticks. It is the grotesque spirit of Carnival, sweeping away inhibition and swinging forward a fantastical past, in a red haze. Egged on by La Folie (mezzo Emile Renard), singers and dancers of both sexes don orange wigs and red velvet gowns slit up to here. They party like it’s Venusberg, ignoring the arrival of La Raison (soprano Magali Leger), a nun with two horrified—and titillated—priests in tow. Reason gets nowhere with the revelers, who rudely hustle her off. The audience is now prepared for anything.

Puppeteers turned into stage crew and revolve the buildings’ panels into courtly salon walls, while listeners savor the gutsy, precise orchestral tone, with theorbo, lute, gamba, and harpsichord. Christie maintained euphony and space between tones with open-mouthed delight, as if hearing them for the first time.

The first entrée (or act) is about mistaken identity. The Prince (smooth, balanced baritone Jonathan McGovern—who, like others in the company, had more than one role) wants assurance that his intended lady will love him even if she mistakenly thinks he is only a servant. After a few dances (beak masks are prominent), it turns out she will. Entertainments ensue, with drinks and pass-arounds for nobles looking on.

Entree II, about faithless love and more mistaken identity, takes place on a canal at night and has two jealous girls, a fickle boy, and, in an upstairs window, his first choice. She was the charming soprano from Scotland, Rachel Redmond, a veteran of Christie programs. Her intonation was elegant, as was almost everyone’s.

The high point is a parade of gondolas—dancers wearing little boats, paddling on a
canal where stage fog stands in for water. Wubbe's louche dance-making is like Mark Morris exploded, and dancers cavorted with phallic bow ornaments. The act concludes back on San Marco, reveling girls (or ersatz girls) wearing small gaming tables. The giant puppet surveys the carnival and the fetes roar on.

Redmond appears in the last entrée also, rehearsing for an opera while fending off a lecherous coach—very funny Dutch tenor Marcel Beekman. The opera is about shepherds and sheep—which we won’t discuss either, except to say that, buoyed by the accompaniment, sheep-costumed dancers did evocative pastoral impressions. And they bleated.

After the raging black-clad god of wind descends to carry off the shepherdess (she’s fine with that, knowing it’s her lover in disguise), the scene shifts back to the piazza for the epilogue. Fast-forward to hung-over tourists awakening as from a dream and shambling off, dragging gear, leaving behind litter and plastic bags. We’re back in the present. Nice touch.

Curtain calls were celebratory, the cheers long and loud. Les Fetes Venetiennes, three hours with intermission, was a boisterous, imaginative spectacle, connecting the centuries.

LESLIE KANDELL

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Strauss: *Elektra*
Metropolitan Opera

In the end-of-season production of Strauss’s intense shocker *Elektra*, the Metropolitan Opera gave us a breathtaking, concentrated evening of music drama, achieving a quality too rarely reached these days by the august company. Seen mid-run on April 26, a strong cast, helmed by Esa-Pekka Salonen, galvanized a nearly full, unusually attentive audience into prolonged and well-deserved ovations.

Of major interest was the 2013 staging by French director Patrice Chereau, who died a few months after the production’s premiere at Aix-en-Provence. Chereau’s groundbreaking 1976 Ring Cycle at Bayreuth remains the touchstone interpretation of that work; Met audiences first admired his penetrating directorial style in 2010 with Janacek’s *From the House of the Dead*. This *Elektra*, staged in New York by his assistant, Vincent Huguet, had a valedictory resonance. With Waltraud Meier and Adriana Pieczonka reprising their roles from Aix and the later La Scala revival, with Salonen conducting, the evening gave new life to the work of a much-missed man of the theater.

Strauss’s second major opera (his first written with librettist Hugo von Hoffmansthal) distills a climactic episode in the myth of the House of Atreus. Clytemnestra (Waltraud Meier) has murdered her husband Agamemnon and fears revenge by her children—with good reason, it turns out. Her son, Orestes (Eric Owens), has been banished; her angry daughter, Elektra (Nina Stemme), lives with the servants and rages like a wild thing; her more docile daughter, Chrysothemis (Adriana Pieczonka), remains in her mother’s good graces but longs to marry and have children.

In Chereau’s vision, the relationships reflect a normal family with unusually powerful secrets. The scene opens with several minutes of silence, broken only by the rhythmic swish of a broom. When the “Agamemnon” theme crashes forth, the tension among the servants—each a clearly delineated character—becomes manifest. Chrysothemis, more mature than her sister, understands Elektra’s anger but is frustrated. Queen Clytemnestra, as chic and poised as a Westchester matron, begs her rebellious daughter to help her recover her peace of mind; but Elektra, even as she visibly longs for her mother’s love, rages like an angry teenager, now with saccharine teasing, now with biting sarcasm. She fantasizes about revenge, but her anger all but paralyzes her, so that she cannot recognize her brother and finally cannot force her legs to dance in celebration of the final act of revenge. These women are far more human than the stylized archetypes usually presented, and the music-making was markedly more lyrical than the usual shout-fest.

The fine ensemble cast was dominated by the ladies. Stemme portrayed Elektra with wild-eyed, nearly catatonic frenzy that somehow never crossed into caricature; and her unforced, powerful soprano promises an unmissable Met Isolde in the fall. Meier’s touching, human Clytemnestra was more troubled mother than hateful harridan; her voice was occasionally covered by the large orchestra, but she never resorted to forcing. Pieczonka’s womanly Chrysothemis sounded more girlish than her sister, but her bright timbre was as strong as Stemme’s. Owens’s dark-voiced Oreste sounded sepulchral in its first entrance with the low brass, but he sang with warmth toward his sister. Smaller parts were strongly sung and characterized.

Salonen more than fulfilled expectations, vividly realizing the score’s contrasts between ear-caressing lyricism and blasts of dissonance. Even with a false start owing to a missed lighting cue, it was a night to remember.

SUSAN BRODIE

... a friendly mother-daughter talk ...
Thomson: *Four Saints in Three Acts*  
**Minneapolis**

“Pigeons in the grass, alas.”

A fairly good-sized army of the musically inclined can probably name the source of that whimsical statement as Gertrude Stein’s libretto for Virgil Thomson’s avant-garde opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and they may even quote the line from time to time when in an especially impish mood.

But how many have actually seen the opera since its premiere in Hartford in 1934? *Four Saints* is a tough sell—chiefly, one suspects, despite the tunefulness and charm of Thomson’s music, because the opera has no plot. It takes time and imagination to put the work across. Why not just do another *Tosca*?

Twin Cities audiences have heard *Four Saints* in concert versions on rare occasions, and the University of Minnesota School of Music Opera Theater staged the work with student singers in 1987. The two performances given March 19 and 20 at the Cowles Center in downtown Minneapolis by the enterprising choral organization Vocalessence were billed (perhaps rightly) as the area’s first professional staging.

The performance, presented in the intimate Gooddale Theater, was lively and enjoyable. Presiding in the pit, Vocalessence Artistic Director Philip Brunelle conducted a 23-piece orchestra, sustaining high spirits and, where needed, a sweet lyricism in Thomson’s beguiling score. The staging, devised by choreographer Carl Flink, offered what was basically a dance version of the opera—athletic moves by the eight dancers of Flink’s own company, Black Label Movement, and effective dancing as well by the intrepid members of Brunelle’s Ensemble Singers, who portrayed the opera’s various saints.

Flink’s choreography outlined geometric patterns. He wisely didn’t try to enforce a story line on Stein’s libretto, though, while evoking an aura of faith and innocence, he did make allusions to resurrection and Jesus’s healing of the sick. The singing was resonant and enthusiastic, though not all the words could be understood—an impossibility, presumably, unless the singers are miked. Robin Joy Helgen and Michael P Schmidt were impressive as the Commere and Compere.

And there was much to look at. In place of the original production’s Saran Wrap-draped sets—a key element in the legends surrounding *Four Saints*—Brunelle and his team, including set designer Paulo Herwig and lighting designer Marcus Dilliard, engaged a scientist from 3M to make polymer films through which light continually moved, creating bright colors that shifted from start to finish.

Thomson and Stein, one suspects, would have loved it.

MICHAEL ANTHONY
“Who’s that cat, is he cool?” purrs the lady in white, watching the sax player from across the nightclub floor. “Who’s that guyyyyy?” she purrs, as she flicks her feather boa and moves in for the kill. It’s the question posed, but never quite answered, in *Charlie Parker’s Yardbird*, the opera by Daniel Schnyder. First premiered by Philadelphia Opera in June 2015 (review Sept/Oct 2015), it played two performances at the Apollo Theater in Harlem at the beginning of April.

Parker came from a working-class family in Kansas City. He dropped out of high school to pursue his music and at age 19 moved to New York, leaving behind his first wife and child. He settled for a while in California, but returned to New York, where he died at the age of 34. “Bird” was addicted to drugs, alcohol, and women, but he left an important musical legacy: bebop, a radically new form of jazz, documented in a revered discography.

The high and low points of Charlie’s life are told in a series of 21 musical numbers that introduce the important people in his life. The opening tableau of Ron Daniels’s production is empty but for a sheet-covered body on a gurney dominating the dark stage. That made it a bit confusing when Parker himself (Lawrence Brownlee) strolls out and marvels with pride that “they named this place after me”, as waiters set up cafe tables and panels spelling “Birdland” drop from the flies (sets by Ricardo Hernandez, lighting by Scott Zielinski, adapted for the Apollo by Drew Billiau, costumes by Emily Rebholz). We eventually figure out that Charlie’s body was misidentified and that Charlie’s ghost wants to write down his final masterpiece before his death is discovered. His close friend Baroness Pannonica “Nica” de Koenigswarter (her real name!), in whose home he suffered a fatal heart attack while watching television, begs him to wait to reveal his death.

There follows a procession of reminiscences, as the ghost Charlie encounters his mother, his first wife Rebecca (with babe in arms), Dizzy Gillespie, his third wife Doris (a second wife seems to be MIA), and finally Chan, the woman in white who shared his final years. A recurrent presence is his pusher, Moose, sinister and silent in sunglasses, gliding on in a wheelchair to sell Charlie what he craves. Parker left a wake of pain as well as an important musical legacy; but, as he croons to his saxophone, music was always his first love.

Schnyder’s music, scored for a wind-heavy ensemble, mixes jazz and more “classical” idioms: long stretches of sustained arisoso-like solos suddenly break into racy bebop-like licks, which infuse energy into the more bland reminiscences. Librettist Bridgette Wimberly, a much-honored poet and playwright, brought a lyrical sensibility to the book that sometimes clashed with the needs of operatic delivery. Few of the monologs really took off until the orchestra moved from background accompaniment to more energetic writing.

Individual performances helped compensate for dead stretches. Lawrence Brownlee, one of today’s best Rossini tenors, gave a forthright interpretation of Parker. His diction was impeccable but unaffected, his high notes soared, and the lower part of his voice had a manly swagger.
Of New York City Opera’s contributions to the world, the most significant was surely the popularization of projected “supertitles”, which quickly spread, forever changing the way we experience opera and triggering opera’s big growth era in the US. The concept actually originated for a Toronto production of Elektra, but “Bubbles” (Beverly Sills, who then headed NYCO) got wind of it, recognized the potential, and quickly made projected English titles a regular policy at the company. So there is some irony that the resurrected company’s latest venture foundered partly because of the lack of comprehensibility—a problem that supertitles could easily have solved.

Stewart Wallace’s opera, Hopper’s Wife, was originally commissioned by New York’s 92nd Street Y and California’s tiny, plucky Long Beach Opera, where it premiered 20 years ago but won scant attention. Michael Capasso, who revived the NYCO and now runs it, apparently saw this forgotten chamber work as just the thing to round out his first season, which had opened with Tosca, the opera that launched the company’s first season in 1944.

Like Mark Anthony Turnage’s Anna Nicole, the final opera before the company’s bankruptcy in 2013, Hopper’s Wife (seen April 28) is an outrageous, bawdy, vulgar romp with a complex score. The libretto by Michael Korie starts with biographical details from the life of painter Edward Hopper, then takes an absurd turn when his wife, Josephine, runs off to Hollywood with his model, Ava. Ava becomes a starlet, and Josephine transforms herself, naturally, into Hedda Hopper, the scandalous

Perroni as Doris, Chrystal Williams as Rebecca, and Will Liverman as Dizzy Gillespie made worthy contributions.

This production was originally a collaboration with New York’s Gotham Opera, but it went out of business last October and Apollo Theater came to the rescue. Shortly before the New York opening of Yardbird, Opera Philadelphia announced a continuing collaboration with the Apollo Theater for several seasons. Next up, Daniel Bernard Roumain’s We Shall Not Be Moved with back-to-back performances in Philadelphia and New York in autumn 2017.

SUSAN BRODIE
midcentury gossip columnist who helped fuel Hollywood’s McCarthyite “Red Scare”.

Mezzo-soprano Elise Quagliata was superb as Josephine-Hedda. She had the most sophisticated music in the score, which Wallace described as the “urban sound of the New York she yearns to return to”. She also had to sing while being tossed about violently by Hopper. Through it all she managed to occupy center stage with a riveting charisma and a vivid portrayal of her character. Her lyric, stylish voice matched her glamorous appearance.

As Ava, soprano Melanie Long had one of the longest and most vivid nude scenes in any opera, and she not only had to maintain some degree of aplomb but sing in a style that evolved from “country” to bluesy belting. She managed that brilliantly—and she’s a looker, with or without clothes.

Baritone Justin Ryan, who portrayed Edward Hopper, was riveting, especially in a vivid, crude scene relating to his obsession with pornography. His death became a mad scene, powerfully scored and vividly portrayed.

In the days before supertitles (and subtitles), opera companies did a brisk business selling librettos, and prudent fans carefully crammed before performances in order to have a decent understanding of what was being sung when. At the same time, considerable effort went into making the words perceptible. Things have changed irrevocably. With the routine use of supertitles by all but the tiniest companies, audiences have left printed librettos behind; my own large collection is now rarely used except when I listen to recordings. Composers, librettists, conductors, and singers are less concerned with being understood, knowing that the audience is reading along. Much has been written decrying this trend, but it is an inexorable part of the modern opera landscape.

Operas with English texts remain the big question mark. Many English-language operas are easily understood, especially with a small orchestra in a small room with the right singers. And in some cases, especially with more abstract operas, a clear understanding of the text isn’t really essential. But Hopper’s Wife is the kind of work where the audience needs to follow every word. Wallace’s score would have none of that. Yes, there were only ten musicians in the orchestra, but only two were strings; all others were brass, winds, and percussion, constantly churning the very sorts of sounds that mask language.

That said, Wallace’s score is smart and interesting. A knowledgeable friend dismissed it as a mash-up of Benjamin Britten and Kurt Weill with a bit of Wynton Marsalis thrown in. And while that aptly summarizes the influences (I would add Aaron Copland), I think it minimizes the consummate skill that transforms these elements into a sophisticated, varied, constantly moving sound. Conductor James Lowe faced an impossible task. He could suppress the orchestra so that at least some of the text could be followed, or he could sacrifice comprehension and revel in the beauty of the score. He chose the latter. In this installment of the long-running opera battle between music and words, music won. With supertitles, we could have had both.

As befits the downsized company, the production was frugal but intelligent. The entire opera took place on a small stage with basic props in front of a large scrim with simple, attractive projections, all designed by Sean Cawelti. Andreas Mitisek, the stage director, drew masterly acting from each of the characters.

For nearly half a century, New York City Opera occupied the 2586-seat New York State Theater (now renamed for industrialist David Koch), going head-to-head with the Metropolitan Opera next door, using its own formula of younger singers, bargain prices, and a healthy mix of new operas. With such a long and proud history but with little in the way of financial resources, the revived company must chart its course in a tough landscape. This inaugural season nods to several aspects of the company’s heritage, and Hopper’s Wife, performed in the 192-seat Harlem Stage Gatehouse, suggests that the company’s commitment to daring modern works will remain an important part of the mix.

JAMES PAULK

JULY/AUGUST 2016
Critical Convictions

The Internet
On December 3 IPower announced to us that they had “upgraded” the program we were using for our web site—and, of course, that meant that many things we were doing could no longer be done. What it meant for our readers was inability to gain access to the index and the current issue. We were forced to work out a whole new method to match the “upgrade”, and we found that even if we bought the new software this “upgrade” was designed to make us buy, there was no way to give access to our readers without collecting everyone’s e-mail address. That would be a full-time job for many weeks. We only wanted to serve our readers as we always have.

This is another example of how this country is run by the big industries. There is no longer enough competition in any industry to assure that someone out there listens to the customers. They clearly do not. As with supermarkets, the food industry, hotels, and almost every other industry, the companies make the policy and the changes and force the customers to accept them, sometimes softening it by putting a PR “spin” on it. And they always call these changes “upgrades” or improvements, but they seldom are.

The other principle violated by all this is “If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.” That has been common sense for centuries. But the computer industry would make much less money if they followed that rule. Every day they are “fixing” things that aren’t broken—because they can make money that way. They “upgrade” simply to make the old way obsolete and force people to buy into the new way—which is certainly NOT an improvement, as anybody with brains can figure out. They declare what we have been doing for years “obsolete” and make it impossible for us to continue; then they try to sell us new software and “safeguards” (appealing to America’s “security” neurosis).

There was nothing wrong with the way we did it for years, and no one complained or wanted a change. IPower decided they could make money by declaring another “upgrade”. That’s all there was to it.

We had to try to find a way around the new, awkward, costly procedure that they tried to force us to adopt. Their “help” lines and people would not help, naturally—they never help the customer save money! The computer industry robs people right and left with impunity and has been doing so for many years. By the time you read this we will have found a solution, though it will probably be less convenient than the old way.

The week this issue was to go to the printer (deadline week) we got up one morning and found that Microsoft had been busy in our main computer and had replaced Windows 7 with Windows 10. That is the computer we use to lay out the text, and suddenly it was unusable. We didn’t ask for that and didn’t want it, but the industry does what it wants and expects you to be grateful for the “upgrades” (that’s PR-speak). Of course, the upgrades won’t work with half the programs you use every day, so they are forcing you to buy new programs. This is a despicable business practice but perfectly normal in the computer industry. We are all its slaves—the more so the more we have become dependent on the computer. The customer is not asked, but is forced to conform. In fact, there’s also a lot of thought control in all this. Whoever designs the software, you are forced to think the way he thinks—or it’s simply not any practical use. And they try to have monopolies on the software, so they end up controlling the minds and methods of the whole population. Does that ever worry you?

Every few weeks we get a notice from some business that we deal with telling us that they are “going green”. Sounds noble, doesn’t it? But what they mean is, “we can save money if we reduce our service to you”. What they are telling us is that they will no longer send invoices and statements to us by mail. Instead they will require us to look up the statement or invoice on their web site. Since every business has to have such statements and invoices—printed out—for tax and bookkeeping purposes, we now have to find them and print them. It’s our time, our printer, our paper—what is “green” about that? They are simply saving themselves a lot of work and making the customer do the work instead. This is normal in today’s business world. The larger business makes the smaller business or the individual do all the work and spend all the time and money so they can say they are “going green”. Green=dollars. They are saving money, that’s all—and at the expense of their customers. That is a large part of what the Internet has brought us, and sensible customers hate it.

American Record Guide 57
It takes a lot more work to buy anything and pay for it than it used to.

We are all becoming computer slaves. It is now very common that no company will let you order unless you have a password. This is idiotic. Do they want my business? Then they should accept my order, password or no password. I refuse to have to remember hundreds of passwords (and in some cases they want me to change them—“update them”—every few months).

In the latest example (the day I wrote this) I tried to order another item from a company I had ordered from before. When I checked the box that said “returning customer,” it demanded a password. I can’t even remember if I had one, let alone what it might be, so I checked the “new customer” box. It refused to accept my business and again demanded a password. So, that company will miss out on my business.

A few days later a website asked me to prove that I was not a robot by a series of tests. I refused. Again, do they want my business or no?

The demands of websites are chasing away customers. Many people, of course, are delighted to be computer slaves and will struggle to cooperate with website demands. But people like that are one reason why the customer is treated so badly these days. No one fights irrational demands; people meekly submit.

I might add to the above story that the one website traced my attempt to buy something, and for many days afterward they sent me pop-up images and messages all over the place. Of course, that must work with some people, but it just hardened my heart against them. I will never buy anything from them.

Even some stores and chains ask your zip code when you buy something. A friend of mine refused to give it, and they tried to refuse to check out his merchandise. Isn’t that stupid? “It’s our policy” is the only answer you get from employees—they, too, are sheep and computer slaves.

**Acoustics**

Acoustics is not an exact science. In fact, it is not a science at all, and acousticians are nothing but witch doctors.

All the great halls in the world were built before the age of acoustics and without the help of the modern “discipline” (guessing game). Think of it: Vienna, Amsterdam, Boston, Carnegie in New York: all more than 100 years ago.

And think of all the modern halls that were built with very expensive advice from reputable acousticians: Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center, The Meyerson in Dallas, Davies in San Francisco, Festival Hall in London—you can name dozens, I’m sure. All of them are failures, and many of them went thru a remodeling (or many) costing millions that was supposed to fix the problems but never did. Modern acousticians have a miserable record.

I am sorry to say that this musing was an outgrowth of a hearing I attended at City Hall in Cincinnati in April where another such monstrosity was perpetrated. Cincinnati’s Music Hall, built in the 1870s, has always been one of the best in the world. Like the hall, its sound is warm, elegant, spacious, smooth, and blended. It’s the biggest orchestra hall in the USA, and its size is part of its glory: there is room for the sound to blend and expand and resonate.

A few years back some idiots decided that the hall was simply too big. It’s true that it is too big to sell out very often, but some of us consider that a great blessing, because you can decide to go to a concert at the last minute and there are always seats. Also, by the law of supply and demand, the prices are pretty reasonable. But a past conductor—among others—decided it was demoralizing to the musicians to look out and see so many empty seats week after week. The solution: remodel the hall and reduce the capacity.

Acoustical witch doctors were brought on board to testify that shrinking the hall would improve the sound. The audience includes wealthy people who decided the hall is too old-fashioned and not as modern or luxurious or comfortable as they wished. The staff wants more office space, as does the music library. The musicians say they have trouble hearing each other on the stage. (Musicians always say that, and in the past the symphony spent lots of money hiring acousticians to remedy that. Apparently none of those expensive remedies worked. What makes them think this latest one will?) People who know sound—including me—admit that the sound in the hall is uneven, that there are some seats where it seems rather distant and weak. But of course, that is true in any hall—certainly in Carnegie, which I know well.

So the politicians and the moneyed crowd and the orchestra's administration got together to present a complete remodeling program to be approved by the city's board of historical
preservation. It involves getting rid of 1000 seats and bringing in the walls from the sides and back. The new floor will be concrete topped by wood, and the new walls will be a concrete mixture, too. (Isn’t this unbelievably stupid? Concrete does not resonate—it simply bounces a hard sound—like a rock.) The lobby will be completely redone, removing the gracious chandeliers (and the ones in the hallways) and adding lots more concession stands! New, modern entrances will be built; and the old ones will be blocked and locked. That’s only part of the picture.

Of course all of this was decided by the people who have the money and the people who will make money from it, as well as idiots who want a modern, 21st Century hall for their orchestra (and the models presented do in some respects make it look like a modern hall). By the time this hearing was held it had all been decided, and the hearing was a total farce. It took almost 3 hours, and the 7 of us who had the sense and the courage to oppose the plan were given 2 minutes each of that time—strictly enforced. The rest was an exercise in cheerleading and group-think, with 30 or 40 people testifying for hours how wonderful this plan was.

I testified that acoustical witch doctors had ruined many a hall and could hardly be trusted to “improve” this one—which did not need improving. It’s not broken, so why fix it? But no one in these times ever heard of that kind of reasoning. After all, computers are always “updating,” and everything has to be “up-dated,” right?

I also wrote to the board that the low ticket prices they are forced to charge when so many seats are empty are a benefit to the community. (By the way, 8 or 10 concerts or operas do sell out the full 3500 seats every year.)

So sometime in the Fall of 2017 I will have to follow up this article, either admitting I was wrong or crowing that almost nobody had the sense to oppose the disaster.

The musicians themselves, by the way, were mostly very gullible and fell for it all. Expert after expert was brought before them to tell them how wonderful this will be. Only one musician testified against it—and on the basis of acoustics. Very few people think for themselves, and most people are very easily led. And almost any political “hearing” is a farce—that’s the American way—as is almost any attempt to make people think that anyone cares what they think. Efforts are made (but not significant ones) to impress people that their voice is heard, but it is very clear to any-one who thinks for himself that people like us are merely an embarrassment, to be treated as an anti-social nuisance. Our society only rewards conformity.

There was a time when someone proposed a similar kind of modernizing in Boston—and, thank goodness, it was defeated. The scandal of concrete poured at Carnegie Hall resulted in its removal, at great expense. Resonating chambers were built at the Meyerson in Dallas—the sound needed more space! (It still sounds dry and cold to me.) So we are about to witness the cramming of the sound in Cincinnati and a further distancing from the hall’s 19th Century roots—approved by a commission in charge of historical preservation. That’s America!

The Spring 2016 issue of Symphony News (from the League of American Orchestras, formerly known as ASOL—pronounce that to get its significance) lists the first two most important articles as: “Gender and Musical Instruments” and “Orchestra Diversity Programs”. How could anyone but a complete idiot care about either of those subjects? They go on to tell us in their publicity that “diversity is the focus of the League’s 2016 conference” (clichés, anyone?). Well, what else is new? This hopeless organization has devoted conference after conference all these years to “how to get more people of color to our concerts and into our orchestras”. And nothing has worked. And every year since the first time I attended such a conference I have responded, “who cares?”

Why should classical music lovers care (either way) whether a certain percentage of concertgoers is black, white, yellow, or green? What has that got to do with the survival of our music? Part of the problem is precisely that these people have relativized the whole cultural scene. Therefore, any black person has been granted the right to say, “Why should I care about music written by dead white men?”. And why should they? How are you going to “market” it when that’s how you’ve taught people to think? Maybe you try to market it the way everything else is marketed: under the assumption that no one does think. Just throw adjectives at them and use every cliche in the book, from “iconic” to “diversity”. No wonder audiences are getting stupider and stupider—our marketing appeals to stupid people who look at television and haven’t any critical faculties at all.
Overview: Liszt

Symphonic Poems

There’s no question that the tone poems of Franz Liszt are bombastic, banal, and way too long for their often tenuous literary connotations; neither is there any question that they are extremely well orchestrated (by Liszt or his pupil Raff), highly charged dramatically, and, in the right hands, tremendously effective. However, finding the right person for the job is no easy task: all too many conductors seem almost embarrassed to treat these highly emotional poems as the honest potboilers they are.

Bernard Haitink was the first to record all 13 of Liszt’s tone poems. There are a number of good things in his set, including sumptuous sonics; but he often seems emotionally unsuit-ed to this unashamedly passionate music. All too often one gets the impression he considers it beneath him: his readings are never less than cold and austere.

Kurt Masur doesn’t shy away from the drama inherent in the music; yet often he too lacks the last measure of vulgarity that is Liszt’s chief redeeming virtue. He is often superficial and bland. He isn’t treated kindly by his engi-neers either, often sounding cramped and “gray” next to Haitink. João on Hungaroton comes off somewhere in between sonically and also has the most trouble securing precise execution from his players, including some distressing “auto horn” sounds from the brass-es. In trying to keep the music from getting out of hand, he fails to work it up as much as it deserves.

Of the various miscellaneous Liszt collections, our Editor praises Solti’s recording of Les Preludes, Tasso, Prometheus, and Mephisto Waltz as “the most exciting, most dramatic performances ever recorded” (Decca 417513). Both Ivan Fischer (Hungaroton) and Michel Plasson (Berlin) offer Les Preludes, Tasso and Mazeppa, supplemented by Orpheus (Fischer) and Mephisto Waltz (Plasson). But Plasson has some strange ideas about tempo, particularly in Les Preludes, where he breezes through the grand statement that opens and closes the work rather matter-of-factly. And listen to his plodding tempo in the central section of Tasso. In contrast, Fischer treats Tasso with consummate imagery, while his crisp tempos and brazen brasses set just the right mood for Mazeppa. Plasson’s second installment—Mountain Symphony, Prometheus, and Flesh— is better than the earlier disc, despite the reverberant sonics. Ferencsik’s Hungaria is very fine, but the accompanying Preludes and Orpheus are routine. The Editor likes Mehta’s excellent Liszt with the Berlin Philharmonic (Sony)—and he has always liked the Karajan Preludes on DG (not an all-Liszt disc).

Liszt composed most of his symphonic poems in Weimar in the 1850s, though he’d first sketched some of them decades before. He sought help orchestrating them from August Conradi and Joachim Raff, revising several of them before settling on a final version. In his later years he kept up an interest in the genre he’d invented. From the outset they were regarded as ground-breaking efforts. Wagner confessed that he had become “harmonically a different fellow” after studying them. Even the hostile Eduard Hanslick praised the concept, if not Liszt’s examples, writing “We need briefer pieces for concerts and Liszt’s symphonic poems are advisedly short.”

They’re not easy to play or lead. Just as Liszt’s keyboard works need a virtuosic pianist, the symphonic poems need a virtuosic orchestra—their string writing is especially difficult. The music also demands a conductor who can control the ebb and flow of their episodes, so they sound more of a piece. Part of that skill is bridging the masses of sound across Liszt’s poetic silences. (Sibelius thought Liszt forgot that the orchestra has no sustaining pedal.) The conductor shouldn’t be afraid to flirt with vulgarity. Always the gentleman in life, Liszt could let himself go in his music. He also used emotional, as well as dynamic and tempo expression marks for his works. In Hamlet the timpani must sound “vacillating”; in the introduction to The Battle of the Huns the instruments must sound “sombre...spectral in tone”. Some of this the music takes care of itself. If in Hamlet the timpanist plays the part accurately, it’ll sound hesitant because Liszt wrote the rhythm that way.

One of his most important innovations was thematic transformation—modifying a theme or motive, along with its harmony, rhythm, and color, to fit illustrative or psychological needs. He didn’t invent the practice; Schubert had used it effectively in his Wanderer Fantasy. But Liszt raised the technique to unprecedented heights of sophistication, as in
his *Faust* Symphony, where the entire third movement is almost nothing but caricatures of the themes from the first.

Liszt’s sometimes excessive repetition has always been a major stumbling block to the enjoyment of his work. It wasn’t ineptitude on his part; he regarded repetition as a key to understanding. Alan Walker’s superb biography has an amusing anecdote from when Liszt first saw Weingartner’s opera *Sakuntala*. When the king makes his entrance, Liszt grabbed Weingartner’s arm, saying he must repeat that section. Weingartner said he couldn’t have the enjoyment of his work. It wasn’t ineptitude on his part; he regarded repetition as a key to understanding. Alain Walker’s superb biography has an amusing anecdote from when Liszt first saw Weingartner’s opera *Sakuntala*. When the king makes his entrance, Liszt grabbed Weingartner’s arm, saying he must repeat that section. Weingartner said he couldn’t have the enjoyment of his work. It wasn’t ineptitude on his part; he regarded repetition as a key to understanding.

With one exception, the recommendations immediately below will be recordings currently available. There are some complete sets of the Weimar poems. Bernard Haitink’s on Decca is generally fine, with one glaring exception. The Naxos recommendations nearly constitute a set in themselves. Martin Haselbock’s collection *The Sound of Weimar* includes the *Dante* Symphony and a few other later works. The Haselbock set is in the HIP vein, with a small string body. The performances are competent, but little more, and his interpretations are routine. Alleged historical accuracy can’t trump mediocre rendition. At Weimar Liszt was often stuck with a 37-piece group that included only one bass viol. For most passages in the symphonic poems—such as the antiphonal scales toward the end of *Les Preludes*, the divisi parts in *Mazeppa*, or the bravura lines in *Battle of the Huns*—the 11 violins Liszt had must have sounded hopeless, even if one of them was Joseph Joachim. One of my prime Crank Theories is that HIP caught on merely because it’s cheap: 30 strings cost less than 60.

1. *C’est quon Entend sur la Montagne* (What One Hears on the Mountain) or as the Germans sensibly call it, *The Mountain Symphony*, was inspired by a poem in Victor Hugo’s *Autumn Leaves*. Liszt sketched it as early as 1847; the premiere was in 1857. The music tries to depict a climber’s perceptions at the mountain’s summit of the clash between worldly and spiritual sentiments. A religious episode at its center returns at the end as a conciliatory gesture. It may be the first time program music tried to reflect philosophy and is the granddaddy to Strauss’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Apart from some early pages, where Liszt drifts off into rhapsodies, it has many pages of innovative and inspired symphonic writing. Liszt makes the most of color instruments like the bass drum and harp. Olin Downes felt that the closing bars, with their pizzicato fragments of a main theme, pointed to the end of Strauss’s *Zarathustra*. At over 30 minutes it was the longest symphonic movement of its time. Composers as different as Draeseke and Saint-Saëns regarded it as Liszt’s best tone poem. Liszt noted that the conductor Conrad Stoer wrote a pendant named *What One Hears in the Valley*.

In 1848 César Franck wrote a tone poem on the same subject, which could also be considered the first of the genre. It’s an attractive work, though it and Liszt’s have the same quirk: they both sound like a series of impressive introductions to an event that never quite happens.

The best overall performance and interpretation is by Michael Halasz. The New Zealand Symphony plays with assurance and vigor. Halasz’s interpretation makes the many episodes hang together. Haitink’s is good if you don’t mind a bit of an edge. Plasson’s has beautiful playing—no edge. All of them make some sense out of its effusive architecture.

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<th>Artist</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Haitink</td>
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<td>Plasson</td>
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2. *Tasso* (1854) is a musical portrait of the great Renaissance poet from his tragic years to his posthumous vindication. Unlike the *Mountain Symphony* with its abundant thematic invention, *Tasso* uses basically two main themes. They’re transformed almost ruthlessly—even the humblest background figures will turn out to be thematic. The music foreshadows Tchaikovsky at his most emotional and could be described as a condensed one-movement symphony. The idea, if not the specific sound of the work, is the germ of Strauss’s *Death and Transfiguration*. (Strauss in his younger days conducted a complete cycle of Liszt’s symphonic poems.) It seems like a self-rising score, but can be tricky. The ending, where Liszt rather lays on the fireworks, can sound like a cheap brass band if the conductor doesn’t monitor the balances carefully.

Fruhbeck de Burgos’s interpretation has fine playing from the Berlin Radio Symphony and expressive shaping of its themes. Silvestri, with the Philharmonia, is maybe the best reading of all. The sound is monaural, but good.
3. **Les Preludes**

When I was a child, an intellectual was anyone who could hear *Les Preludes* and not think of "The Lone Ranger." Nowadays, as Johnny Depp’s recent flop proved, nobody remembers the Lone Ranger. (Loved Tonto’s crquelure war paint, though.) From the outset, *Les Preludes* has been the most popular of the symphonic poems and deservedly so. It has memorable melody, expressive harmony, excellent scoring, and good construction. The retrofitted descriptive poem from Lamartine tells of life as a series of preludes to death. Life leads us through strife and storm, then bucolic calm and peace, ending in the great final struggle where we recover our consciousness in full combat. The episodes are vividly pictured by the composer and easily followed by the listener. Even George Bernard Shaw, by no means a Lisztian, praised its solid formal integrity.

Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops triumph in this work. Their performance is full-blooded, brawny, and yet tender where it needs to be, with up-close sound that’s still excellent. Fiedler leads the work to its thunderous conclusion as no one else ever has. His interpretation takes us back to the days when this music was considered great and persuades us that our forbears were right in so considering it. Jun Markl directs a more intellectual, but still convincing approach on a record of Liszt tone poems. His CD, incidentally, is marked Vol. 4; where are the others? Fruhbeck de Burgos again does a fine job, with top-notch playing.

Fiedler RCA 63532  
Markl MDR 1204  
Fruhbeck de Burgos BIS 1117

4. **Orpheus** (1854) was inspired both by Liszt conducting Gluck’s opera and a portrait of Orpheus on a vase in the Louvre. In a good interpretation it emerges as beautifully compact song for orchestra. Liszt wrote that the piece “has no working-out.” Owing to its brevity—10 to 12 minutes—its repetitions aren’t a problem, especially if the music is led with flexibility and played with sweetness of tone. Its concluding chord progression ascending into the Empyrean is one of Liszt’s happiest inspirations. *Orpheus* has always been well regarded, even by people cool to Liszt. All three performances below do the music justice, with refined playing and sympathetic direction. [There was once a great Beecham recording.—Ed]

Fruhbeck de Burgos BIS 1117  
Halasz Naxos 553355  
Mehta Sony 66834

5. **Prometheus**

Like several of its mates *Prometheus* (1855) began as an overture, in this case to Herder’s drama *Prometheus Unbound*. Also like some of its mates, it pits a lone protagonist against his enemies. Much of its structural rhetoric is classical—such as the scale passages in the closing pages. The harmony, however, is often advanced, as in its opening gesture where the orchestra builds up a towering wall of sound, hinting at chords of the fourth. The central section uses a fugue to develop its material. The score has an alternate short-cut, but all the recordings I know use the full text. The piece only runs 12 to 14 minutes.

Solti builds the opening crescendos with shattering power, and the momentum continues for the rest of the piece. Markl takes a more thoughtful view, but with no loss of effect.

Sterling issued an earlier edition, done mainly by Raff. It’s about half again the length of Liszt’s and in addition to the same themes adds the *Pride* motive from Liszt’s *Malediction*. In contrast to Raff’s symphonies, which use a classical-sized orchestra with few color instruments, Raff’s score here uses a bass clarinet and a bass horn. It’s well worth getting.

Solti Decca 417 513  
Markl MDR 1204  
Schaefer Sterling 1099 [2CD]

6. **Mazeppa**

Like *The Mountain Symphony* this is based on a Hugo poem, in this case from his "Orientales." To punish an adulterous affair with his chieftain’s wife, the eponymous hero was strapped naked to a wild horse, the poor beast running till it collapsed. Rescued by Cossacks, he eventually became their leader. As Liszt was himself conducting an illicit affair with Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein, wife of a Russian nobleman, the poem may have touched an autobiographic nerve. Hugo’s work also serves as an allegory of triumph over adversity. The poem originally inspired the fourth of Liszt’s Transcendental Etudes, but the piano piece ends in a brief coda.

The music is highly graphic and easy to
The ride has Mazeppa’s brawny brass motive accompanied by ceaselessly galloping string triplets of formidable difficulty. Two quieter episodes use a more poignant transformation of Mazeppa’s theme before the music tapers off into silence. Approaching fanfares then announce his triumphal march, its theme originally written for a workers’ chorus. The music has all manner of color effects, from con legno strings to maybe the first use of flutter-tongue trumpets—depending on the conductor’s pace—at the end. Debussy liked the work and would taunt as hypocrites people who pretended to be shocked by it. It’s a perfect pops concert entry that gave rise to later “ride” showpieces.

Arthur Fiedler, on the same album as his great Preludes, does a resounding job with Mazeppa. Abetted by great sound, he makes the best out of every dramatic and colorful opportunity, ending in a rousing reading of the march. If there were a complete set of Liszt’s tone poems as good as these two, it would be definitive. Zubin Mehta and Michel Plasson are close seconds, also with good recorded sound.

7. Festklaenge
Liszt wrote Festive Sounds (1854) to celebrate his impending wedding to Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein. It has never been popular, giving wits back then the chance to crack that neither the wedding nor the music came off. The music has no program—nor does it need one, launching into festivities immediately. In tribute to the princess’s Polish forbears, the music includes a polonaise, its theme detailed like a Tchaikovsky ballet melody. The score has enough possible cuts to border on the aleatoric, but most recordings wisely play it uncut. The music isn’t profound, but in the right hands there are pages that can sparkle. The right hands here are Michael Halasz and the New Zealand Symphony. Their performance has just the lightness of touch and nimble skill to make the music good, clean fun.

Halasz Naxos 557846

8. Heroic Elegy
Liszt began sketches as early as 1830 for what became Symphonic Poem 8 (1857). The original was a movement from his projected Revolutionary Symphony. A written preface describes it as an evocation of Grief, the emotion always with us, transfigured and glorified by Art. The work has two main themes, one a funeral march, the other a more lyric melody. At the emotional peak of the elegy, Liszt combines them to moving effect. The music also quotes ‘La Marseillaise’, where the words call the citizens to arms.

As the British composer Humphrey Searle noted, this music can be a profound oration looking ahead to the great funeral marches of Mahler. Liszt’s effective percussion scoring and his exploration of the orchestra’s deeper sonorities only reinforce this impression. This is particularly true of the peak of the work, where a descending phrase gets quieter while the bass drum, side drum, cymbals, tam-tam, and deep bell almost smother the music in a mighty crescendo. The closing chord progression, with its final resolution to F major will please anyone who appreciates the power of good harmony.

There has been a tendency to draw the work out too much. Liszt thought it should run about 20 minutes. At over 27 minutes, Haitink is off the deep end—the only misconceived entry in an otherwise excellent cycle. There simply isn’t enough textural interest to sustain so slow a pace; you keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. Halasz again has the most incisive reading, with excellent playing and a sympathetic view of the work.

Halasz Naxos 557847

9. Hungaria
The Hungarian poet Martin Vorosmarty wrote a poem honoring Liszt. It so moved the composer that he determined to write a patriotic commemorative work. The result was Hungaria (1856). The work is an expansion of an 1840 piano piece, ‘March in the Hungarian Style’, which supplies its main theme, a mor- dant march. Other significant figures are some brass and timpani rhetoric and a dance-like figure by the horns. Liszt ingeniously juxtaposes these elements till the peroration thunders out a Hungarian folk tune with the initial march theme as a bass.

Hungaria tends to come off as an extended—some say too extended—Hungarian Rhapsody. A good performance can redeem it, as there’s no end of ingenious orchestral color, such as the flashing woodwind writing and the horns’ slurping glissandos in the dance theme. The New Zealand orchestra under Halasz plays the music with transcendent skill, obvi-
ously enjoying every bar of it. It's a performance about as good as you’ll ever get.

Halasz Naxos 557847

10. Hamlet

Though listed as the tenth, *Hamlet* is actually the last of the Weimar symphonic poems to be played. It was written in 1858 but not premiered until 1876.

It's a brief, enigmatic piece—performances have run as short as 10 minutes—needing a tight reading to carry its point. Gerald Abraham has noted that its form is nearly a palindrome. A lot of its material is brief, recitative-like phrases. The rhythms are so gestural as to suggest a pantomime, and I’ve seen it done as an effective ballet. The music does coalesce into a convincing melody, eventually transformed into a eulogy for the prince.

Jun Markl’s interpretation is longer than usual, but he has such command over the proportions and balances of the music that it sounds the most tightly knit of any. Haitink’s reading is one of his best: totally in sympathy with the spirit of the music and compactly dramatic. Halasz and the New Zealanders again deliver a dark, forceful vision of what can be one of Liszt’s most probing works.

Markl MDR 1204
Haitink Decca 140 6902
Halasz Naxos 553355

11. Battle of the Huns

The spark for Symphonic Poem 11 was a painting by Wilhelm von Kaulbach celebrating the Christian victory over the Huns at Chalons in 451. According to legend, the fight was so fierce that the spirits of the slain even continued their struggle in the skies. Kaulbach depicts the scene with a rather mechanically balanced composition. Liszt’s music has a form both original and coherent. He represents the Huns by a bunch of short, fast themes pitted against the 4th Century hymn ‘Crux Fidelis’ for the Christian forces. He used the opening of the hymn in several works as a symbol for the Cross, as did Mahler in his *Resurrection* Symphony.

At first the short themes dominate the music. The hymn appears in bits, but gradually dominates the field—in other words, a group of brief, rapid themes “loses” to a long, slow one. The Huns’ figures are short-breathed, mostly of a clattering nature. Liszt tosses and churns them about, sometimes over the hot, simmering roll of the suspended cymbal. Amidst all this, the chorale stands at first like a mirage.

The work has kept some popularity with the record-buying public, owing to the excitement of the battle, the grandiose finale with the organ, and Liszt’s consummate scoring, abounding as it does in novel sounds.

Possible reasons for its neglect in concert—other than the customary programmers’ laziness—are its difficulty and the vital need for the organ. In a stroke of instrumental symbolism, Liszt extends the final C-major organ chord out beyond the sound of the orchestra. Strauss recycled that effect in *Zarathustra*, even down to the same tonality. Liszt felt this to be a duty which “as a Christian and a man I could not miss”.

Halasz leads a terrific performance, full of kinetic energy. Its many orchestral details well reproduced. Ansermet leads the Suisse Romande Orchestra in an excellent, nuanced interpretation. The sound is mono, but still good. The Editor favors Mehta. If you ever run across the London Symphony/Dean Dixon performance (once on Westminster), grab it. The sound isn’t state-of-the-art, but it’s still good; and Dixon’s interpretation is unmatched in its merciless fury. Bring anti-whiplash collars; even the London Symphony can barely keep up. If Dixon had led the Huns, they’d have won.

Halasz Naxos 557846
Ansermet Cascavelle 3143
Mehta Sony 66834

12. Ideals

*Die Ideale* (1857), 12th and last of the Weimar symphonic poems, expands on Schiller’s verses of that name. Liszt changed their order and added an apoteosis. Various stanzas of the poem appear in the score. I was at a performance where they projected the verses on a screen during the playing, but I still found the relationship hard to catch. It’s an episodic work, hard to make coherent, but has its share of beauties. Elgar conducted it in his youth, and his music has echoes of its elegiac passages. Ravel also praised it. There are alternate passages as shortcuts, but the best readings play it intact. The emotional arc of the piece, byways and all, is clear. It begins in disillusion, then moves through ideals, aspirations, life’s burdens, its purpose, faith in the ideal, and finally, apotheosis. Walker notes that Liszt was very proud of his parallel thirds on the timpani in the closing bars. For a work running 28 min-

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utes it’s sparing in themes, two principle motives bearing most of the expressive weight.

Jun Markl’s interpretation has a purity and coherence that increases the stature of the work. Once again, Halasz leads a good reading on a budget label.

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13. From the Cradle to the Grave
Liszt’s last symphonic poem (1882), though sounding like Senator Bernie Sanders’s platform pledge, was inspired by a Michael Zichy drawing. Its three movements—The Cradle: The Struggle for Existence; To the Grave, Cradle of Future Life—amount to about 15 minutes. In I, its main theme is harmonized in thirds and so transparently colored as to sound like Debussy. One could mistake the more heavily scored and violent center section for early Bartok. In the final movement, the theme from the first movement reappears, but even its thirds are stripped away. Like a minimalist, Liszt has pared the sound down to the barest essentials yet remains an expressive program composer.

With the recommended recordings, the other tracks may influence your choice. The Halasz has other Liszt symphonic poems (see above). The Haitink is his complete set. Volkov’s is my favorite, partly because it also has Liszt’s Three Funeral Odes

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<th>Volkov</th>
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<td>Haitink</td>
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Faust Symphony
Liszt’s two symphonies are often described as bundled symphonic poems. Whether or not this is so, they’re certainly the best symphonies written between Schumann and Brahms. Liszt wrote this symphony in only three months in 1854. Its complete title is A Faust Symphony (after Goethe) in Three Character Pictures. He named the movements Faust, Gretchen, and Mephistopheles. The first is a lopsided sonata form, almost all exposition. The very opening theme, representing the questing side of Faust’s nature, is a series of augmented triads. Using all 12 tones of the chromatic scale, it’s nearly a tone row and shows just how advanced for the 1850s was Liszt’s norm of consonance. I’ve often wondered in what key someone with perfect pitch would hear this motif? He follows the logic of the theme, realizing that when working with augmented triads a composer can’t help lapping over into whole-tone passages. The other themes are agitated, melancholic, or heroic as expression demands, adding up to a fine dramatic portrait. The Gretchen movement is gentler, exploring chamber-like sounds, as in the violin quartet near its close.

In the final movement the motifs associated with Faust in I are brilliantly transmogrified by Mephistopheles for his own purposes. Liszt was a genius at thematic transformation; his skill has been matched only by Wagner and Strauss. Virtually the whole movement uses bitter parodies of Faust’s various motives. As Gretchen alone can resist the Devil’s wiles—too bad she couldn’t resist Faust’s—her theme alone stays pure. The descending chromatic chord sequence depicting the fading of Mephistopheles’s powers takes us deep into the world of Wagner’s Ring.

The symphony at first had an orchestral ending. In 1857 Liszt added an optional choral ending, which lifts the work onto a higher plane. It was the first Weimar symphonic work that Liszt scored entirely by himself, and it shows his mastery of a large modern orchestra. Faust is among the most harmonically advanced symphonies of the 19th Century—and maybe the most innovative first symphony ever composed.

The classic Ansermet was really too fast. James Conlon on Erato was very strong but not as intense as Bernstein. The Muti was white-hot but a little rough in sound (Philadelphia). We liked the Simon Rattle recording: graphic, vivid, exciting.

Leonard Bernstein’s is a superheated interpretation unlikely ever to be even matched, never mind bettered. The entire symphony glows with conviction, and Bernstein’s transcendent conducting of the choral ending takes us forward to the world of Mahler’s 8th. The DG remake with the Boston Symphony is nearly six minutes longer than the Sony (New York). Critics have accused him of egging the custard, but there’s nothing he does that isn’t in the score. For a more classical viewpoint, Solti’s is a well disciplined reading. Noseda uses the instrumental ending, very well done, but one misses the voices. And Beecham (with chorus) still has fans among our writers.

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<th>Bernstein</th>
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<td>Solti</td>
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<td>Noseda</td>
<td>Chandos 10375</td>
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<td>Beecham</td>
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Dante Symphony
This is from 1859 and was originally to be part of a multi-media event. Liszt wanted the music coordinated with lantern slides by the artist Bonaventura Genelli. It is in two movements, Inferno and Purgatorio, the latter ending with a Magnificat for women’s choir (or, for masochists, an optional boys’ choir). Liszt contemplated a Paradiso movement, but Wagner convinced him it was musically impossible to depict Heaven.

The first movement is laid out in an ABA format. The A section represents the horrors of Hell, the B the touching scene where Dante and Virgil meet the shades of Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo. Tchaikovsky’s tone poem on the subject is wholesale theft from Liszt, and not his first. He never credited Liszt for any influence, possibly because he didn’t care for Liszt personally. Hell’s music is heavily scored, with formidable use of the lower brass and two timpanists—as Wozzeck might say, “helping with the thunder”: the central love music is tender and could scarcely contrast more. The conclusion, representing the words “Abandon hope all ye who enter here”, is especially vivid, with open fifths on the brass and final chords like the slamming of a door. It’s mostly an extremely violent movement that in careless hands could degrade to a vulgar brawl. It’s easy to see why audiences then had trouble getting it. A technical curiosity is that while I of the Faust Symphony explores augmented harmonies, this movement builds on diminished ones.

‘Purgatorio’ is calm almost to a fault. The movement opens with one of Liszt’s best inspirations, a sweet oboe melody depicting the episode of the Angel Pilot. To represent the stresses of Purgatory, Liszt uses a chromatic fugue. This can develop to a mighty climax worthy of Beethoven IF conductors can resist the urge to run through it (an urge unsupported by the score). It is said to represent the Mount of Purgatory, and the penitents have finished their arduous trek. They—and we—are entitled to savor the vision. At first from afar, the women enter with the Magnificat, growing louder as the music progresses in ascending modulations, like a preview of Parsifal. After a powerful outburst, the music gradually dies away. At the Princess’s urging—the things we do for love—Liszt wrote an alternate louder ending. It’s an undistinguished series of progressions taken from the Magnificat. They’re not separate endings; to get the louder one, the forces simply keep playing. While everyone’s curious to hear it—once—most performances use the quieter, more poetic conclusion. It ends on a 6/4 chord, heightening the feeling of yearning for the transcendent. As with the Faust Symphony, the choral music lifts the work to a nobler level.

Varujian Kojian offered two versions of the finale, but his performance was episodic and superficial. Daniel Barenboim (Warner) reveals all of the seething passion and mystical beauty of this unjustly neglected masterpiece. Both Kurt Masur (EMI) and James Conlon (Erato) place due emphasis on forward pulse in the opening ‘Inferno’, Masur in particular bringing out the snarling brass writing to compelling effect—but he gives the rapt and beatiful final sections rather short shrift, taking only 22:39 as against 29:50 for Conlon, who brings out the ethereal beauty of the music. György Lehel on Hungaroton treats the ‘Inferno’ more massively, his slower tempos imparting a chilling sense of doom that contrasts effectively with the more exciting pace of Masur and Conlon.

Giuseppe Sinopoli’s is the best all-round reading. His ‘Inferno’ never sounded more demoniacal, nor the climax of ‘Purgatorio’ more impressive. The Dresden basses are magnificent in their propulsion of the work. As part of the Decca set that includes Solti’s Faust Symphony, Jesus Lopez-Cobos is excellent and does include the louder ending. We found Francois-Xavier Roth’s interpretation with historical forces excellent. Roth’s well-judged tempos and his sensitive handling of phrasing and the themes’ details are the sort of thing that could give HIP a good name. Wish there were more like it.

Sinopoli DG 457 614
Lopez-Cobos Decca 466 751
Roth Actes Sud 7

Episodes from Lenau’s Faust
A final product of Liszt’s Weimar years. The first episode is ‘The Night Procession’ (1860). As the world-weary Faust rides at night through the forest, he meets a procession of children singing the Pange Lingua hymn. Moved by their innocent faith, he buries his face in his horse’s mane, weeping bitter tears. The music is beautifully evocative. The transparent colors of the introduction and the modal harmonies of the Latin hymn look forward to the Russian nationalist school. Even at the peak of the procession, Liszt keeps his colors full and rich rather than merely loud. Though
rarely done, the work always makes a good
effect. Aaron Copland was one of its admirers.

The second part is the familiar ‘Mephisto
Waltz 1’. That it’s a concert hall staple should-
n’t make us deaf to its genius. Faust and
Mephistopheles observe a wedding party at a
local inn. To stir things up, Mephistopheles
takes up a fiddle and plays a waltz of such
vigor that “the walls themselves are pale with
envy”. After a tune-up episode, the waltz, being
devilish, proceeds much faster than the ball-
room variety. Faust’s hook-up with a local
belle has a more languorous theme. Many crit-
ics have rightly noted how much it sounds like
Scriabin. The work has two endings, and the
less played is actually the better. Rather than
the snappy popular conclusion, it more poeti-
cally mirrors Lenau’s line “they sink into the
ocean of their lust”. Virgil Thomson considered
it the ancestor of Ravel’s Vector.

Liszt intended the two to be played togeth-
er. Aside from being first-rate pieces, the con-
trast of moods is satisfying intellectually as
well as emotionally. Both James Conlon and
Ilan Volkov conduct probing interpretations
using the alternate ending.

Conlon Erato 45256
Volkov Hyperion 67856

St Francis Legends
After leaving Weimar, Liszt kept up an interest
in the genre he invented, orchestrating his
Two Legends, ‘St Francis’s Sermon to the
Birds’ and ‘St Francis Walks on the Water’.
Though not strictly symphonic poems, their
narrative and descriptive style lets them sneak
in under the tent. Finished in 1863, they
weren’t published till 1984. The introduction
to the first is full of charming bird calls. The
way Liszt interlocks them almost note by note
to form an overall fabric is a preview of musi-
cal Pointillism. The scoring mostly celebrates
the orchestra’s higher registers. The second
narrates an episode where St Francis of Paola
asks a ferryman to take him across the water.
The ferryman cracks that if Francis is a saint,
he can walk over himself. Francis spreads out
his cloak and walks over the waves. The music
has a simple striding theme over a vivid musi-
cal depiction of the waves. An ethereal chord
progression recalls some of the noblest
moments in Raff’s Lenore Symphony. A digni-
fied coda denotes the holy man home and dry.
Both works have the spontaneity of an artist’s
study sketch compared to an elaborate fin-
ished painting. James Conlon’s glowing con-
ducting reinforces exactly that quality.

Conlon Erato 45256
Volkov Hyperion 67856

Piano Concertos
Since the piano concertos of Liszt were origi-
nally intended to serve as vehicles for his own
prodigious talent, it comes as little surprise
that the solo writing is of almost fiendish diffi-
culty, and that so many pianists should be
content to treat them as little more than virtu-
oso vehicles, overlooking their poetic aspects.

Sviatoslav Richter with Kyril Kondrashin
remains at or near the top of nearly everyone’s list for its magisterial blend of lyricism and bravura, and sonics remain more than respectable even today. Kondrashin also recorded Byron Janis in 1; Gennady Rozhdestvensky conducted 2. Those recordings—products of a trip made by Janis and the Mercury crew to Moscow in 1962—show Janis at the top of his form: exciting, high-strung, Horowitzian pianism that is tempered by unfailing good taste, tonal subtlety, and a true sense of Lisztian style.

Geoffrey Tozer and Neeme Jarvi on Chandos offer a refreshing look at both scores, with remarkable poetry in 1 and a brooding quality in 2. Mark Koldys still finds Leonard Pennario unsurpassed for sheer poetry in both scores; he considers 2 easily among the best ever. Mr Haller was fond of the Katchen/Argenta. Earl Wild and Sir Malcolm Sargent used to stand against all comers in 1, but the sound now shows its age. Jorge Bolet’s recording of 1 for Everest is highly regarded, but his later disc of both concertos (Vox) we described as “expressive and personal but subtly lacking in intensity, with 2 in particular lacking in spontaneity”.

Charles Rosen’s performance of 1 is no more than filler for Emil Gilels’s Chopin. The Zimerman/Ozawa on DG has been praised by some of us ("demonically brilliant") but others find nothing special about it—certainly not when held up against Richter or Janis. Claudio Arrau is on the grand scale and unhurried. Others (such as Lazar Berman on DG) are also broadly scaled but fall short of the truly moving and captivating interpretations achieved by Arrau.

We found François-René Duchable on Erato “a powerhouse” in 1, but tempos in 2 are so rushed as to vitiate the nobility of the score. The same is true of Jean-Yves Thibaudet: a strong, sturdy performance of 1 coupled with a routine run-through of 2. We found the pairing of Gerhard Oppitz and Roberto Abbado highly competitive, Oppitz hewing closely to the manner of his mentor, Wilhelm Kempff.

We liked the RCA recording by Barry Douglas and Hirokami; these artists manage even more than Richter (hampered somewhat by Kondrashin’s unimaginative accompaniment) to organize this music into a vivid, comprehensible, beautifully structured statement. The soloist has flexibility, subtlety, and variety of expression. Zoltan Kocsis’s recording of 1 is fairly exciting and sometimes spectacular, but it is coupled with an unexceptional 2.

Louis Lortie is a bit eccentric; some of his lingering, phrasing, and rhythms will strike you as affectations. He is inclined to muse at some length, and you never know what he will come up with. Oleg Marshev has a big, beefy sound, strong in the bass. The barnstorming episodes are good, but he spends too much time on the lyrical contrasts, and he cannot summon a light enough touch for them.

Nelson Freire is a superb pianist and Lisztian, but his recording with the Dresden Philharmonic demands far greater involvement from the orchestra. An orchestra can ruin a concerto recording. That is true of the Biret recording, too, but she also lacks abandon.

Barenboim is mannered, fussy, and ponderous. Stephen Hough is a bit too even-tempered for these concertos. Our reviewer really liked the BIS sound in the Alexandre Kantorow recording, and the performance is confident and unanimous. Fialkowska gives a thoughtful reading of No. 1. Her attention to line and phrasing pays rich dividends. She is also soulful and poetic in No. 2—very expressive—and her dialog with the cello is magical.

| Richter | Philips |
| Janis   | Mercury & Newton |
| Douglas | RCA |

After the concertos, surely the greatest of Liszt’s works for piano and orchestra is Totentanz, a demonic set of variations on the familiar Plainchant for the Dead, Dies Irae. Raymond Lewenthal’s arrangement of the score is based on the Busoni edition. Jerome Lowenthal may not be as demonic as some—and the same applies to Thibaudet. We like Byron Janis with Fritz Reiner, and we called Zimerman’s Totentanz nothing short of spectacular. The Editor is very fond of the Watts/Leinsdorf (Sony). Like Lewenthal, Steven Mayer used the Busoni edition, though there are a number of differences between the two; we had high praise for the result, as well as the demonstration quality sonics (ASV).

Earl Wild on Chesky “owns” the Hungarian Fantasy (Duchable on Erato is too sedate). Wild embellishes his part a bit. So does Thibaudet, but he shows little respect for the work, and his decorations are unsettling rather than enlivening. Oppitz and Abbado offer a bracing performance in clear, realistic sound. Shura Cherkassky’s DG recording with Karajan may lack the last degree of flamboyance, but it is fresh, with new colors and details and remarkable spontaneity. Mr Vroon likes the Entremont Hungarian Fantasy.

On Music & Arts (with Totentanz) Lowenthal offers the Malediction in two versions, one
with full orchestra and one with chamber ensemble—since the music remains basically the same, what's the point? Ponti on Vox (part of the Romantic Piano Concerto series) is a potent brew, its shifting moods traced very well. Both Ponti and Lowenthal take about 14 minutes for Malediction; at 18 minutes it becomes more of a Benediction with Claudio Crismani on an Italian import.

Anyone interested in obtaining all of Liszt's works for piano and orchestra in one handy set could do a lot worse than Beroff and Masur, though they're not quite fiery enough for some of us. They don't include the recently exhumed "Third Concerto" in E-flat, Gabor Darvas's arrangement of the Concerto Pathétique or the Concerto in the Hungarian Style—orchestrated by Tchaikovsky and once available with Katsaris and Ormandy.

The E-flat score was apparently lost or misplaced during Liszt's lifetime and not rediscovered until 1988. It is now available in three different interpretations: Jerome Lowenthal with Sergiu Comissiona, Steven Mayer and Tamas Vasary, and Jeno Jando and Lamberto Gardelli. Liszt undoubtedly would have revised it extensively if he had found the time. Lowenthal outplays Mayer but is hampered by the Vancouver Symphony. The Concerto Pathétique has a rather more complex history: it began life as the Grosses Konzertsonat for piano, but was transcribed for piano and orchestra a year later. Six years after that Liszt reworked it for two pianos and called it Concerto Pathétique. It has been recorded twice with orchestra, both times on rather obscure labels (AVM and RS).

Hungarian Rhapsodies
From someone who didn't even speak Hungarian all that well, these remarkable pieces—either in piano form or as orchestrated by Liszt or his student Franz Doppler—are the very essence of Gypsy abandon, potent emotionally and dramatic, a kaleidoscope of shifting colors and moods. Six of them were orchestrated; the others remain in piano form.

We praised the Dorati (Mercury) in glowing terms: "here is all the fire and smoldering passion anyone could wish, set forth with such vitality you want to push your chair aside and dance along," Mr Vroon is just as vociferous in his praise for Fistoulari on Vanguard, preferring his blend of warmth and atmosphere to Mercury's brighter sound (though he shares Haller's love of the cymbal, employed by Dorati in all but 2). Boskovsky uses a cymbal too, but Mr Vroon is not swayed. Ivan Fischer's recording with the Budapest Festival Orchestra is another great one—with cymbalom (Philips). Zubin Mehta's somber, dispirited readings show there's no Gypsy in his soul: rhythms are flaccid, attacks tentative, and the vivid colors of Liszt's palette (or Doppler's) are reduced to pastel approximations. Korodi on Capriccio is just as sluggish as Mehta; he does include a cymbalom in 3, but it's so muffled it might as well have been omitted.

Edith Farnadi's piano set fails to match Cziffra in virtuosity, but it has a very special poetic and noble quality, capturing the more wistful, nostalgic moods of these pieces extremely well. Alas, her piano is woefully out of tune. We had no enthusiasm for Mischa Dichter's recording ("affected and superficial"), but we found Roberto Szidon (DG) exciting, with "an effortless sense of melody".

There is an attractive earthiness in the Hungarian set combining the efforts of Erika Lux, Kornel Zempleni, Erzsebet Tusa, Gabriella Torma, and Gabor Gabos. Gyorgy Cziffra's Hungarian Rhapsodies are highly regarded (recorded twice). Eight of the rhapsodies were recorded by Balint Vazsonyi; the Editor likes its very Hungarian style and atmosphere; pianists may not praise all the playing.

Piano Sonata
Liszt was extremely successful in his lifetime but has had detractors then and since. Brahms fell asleep at the composer's own performance of the sonata, and Clara Schumann called it "truly terrible." But almost everyone likes some of his piano music, and anyone who has written any since his time owes him a huge debt because of his advances in piano technique. I (the Editor) understand what Clara and Brahms thought of the sonata. I normally find it diffuse, not clearly organized, rambling, sprawling, and incoherent. I have heard many miserable performances of it, and even the best recordings sometimes fail to excite me. It's a moody, romantic piece; and you have to be in the right mood to go along with it.

Alan Becker points out that since Liszt had abandoned his career as a piano virtuoso before he wrote this, it would pay a performer to "think of the sonata on a more spiritual level," Wagner saw it that way. A number of pianists appear to as well—Mr Becker names Clifford Curzon first of all. Burkard Schliesmann has said about this that the "massive waves of sound" breaking over us yield the image of "a restless and passionate soul seeking and finding the path to faith and peace in God through a life of struggle and a vigorous pursuit of"
ideals". It’s a spiritual pilgrimage, in other words, and it “must be played in one breath”. Too many recordings are episodic or virtuosic.

We did review Schlesmann’s recording (Bayer; March/April 2000); we called it bold, dazzling, with amazing clarity, wildness, and passion—a spellbinding, soul-stirring, authentically romantic reading.

We have reviewed at least 90 recordings of the sonata. It is not easy to name one—or even five or ten—as top choice(s). It is a very hard piece to bring off, yet there have been some great recordings.

Our review of the Rubinstein suggests that he gives full value to its contrast of the demonic and the angelic but doesn’t hold the piece together well or play with the dangerous intensity that it requires to be heard at its best. Cecile Ousset is a favorite of some of our writers (“tough and crisp and exciting”), but others point out that in the sonata she is somewhat monochromatic. (It was coupled with the Paganini Etudes, which are quite thrilling.) Some of us have praised the great power of Jorge Bolet, but our Editor calls it “too prosaic Paganini Etudes, which are quite thrilling.) Some of us have praised the great power of Jorge Bolet, but our Editor calls it “too prosaic. Boukoff is virtuosic, with real character (Bourg). Emil Gilels’s Orfeo disc (recorded in concert) is a big-scale performance that takes some daring chances, and it has a dazzling range of piano sounds.

Claudio Arrau’s reading of this is incomparable; it is sober, lyrical, sweet, and warm—not a big display. He seems to identify with the music’s emotional core. Besides his famous Philips recording, Music & Arts has published a concert performance from 1976 where he is stirred up by an audience to rather fiery playing.

For sheer smooth flow it is hard to beat Clifford Curzon—but he doesn’t get very exciting! Martha Argerich has plenty of dash and dazzle, as we expect from her.

The Richter was reissued with the two piano concertos. The Editor finds it driven and relentless—even irritating. But if you want Richter, look for that recording instead of the many concert performances of his that turn up often.

The Horowitz recordings seem wayward and erratic, but he has long been viewed as a true Lisztian. Earl Wild seems only to scratch the surface of this music. Our critic said he would like more shaping, more repose, more structure, more inwardly generated momentum, more awareness of a goal. Our Editor described the André Watts (EMI) as warm and communicative (he has beautiful tone and really conveys the poetry of the music), in stark contrast to the Earl Wild, which he describes as “about as unromantic as you can get…. he never seems to get beyond surface virtuosity and into the music”. The Watts is an all-Liszt disc, with a number of great performances.

Sergio Fiorentino gives this sonata a deeply moving performance, with clarity, power, and a good sense of architecture. The lyrical sections are flowing and tender, but there is plenty of majesty in the grand sections. Our reviewer called him a true aristocrat of the piano and this performance “awe-inspiring”. The Katsaris recording does not have good sound.

Alfred Brendel’s most recent recording for Philips was received in lukewarm fashion: “played skillfully and fluently but with little of the romantic passion and emotional intensity it requires”. We called Emanuel Ax’s performance for Sony “solid and massive rather than impetuous”—yet worthy, and a fine foil to the more fiery and mercurial Martha Argerich for DG.

Pierre Laurent Aimard fails to grasp the Lisztian rhetoric and doesn’t phrase the music coherently. The flow is not natural; he fusses too much over details. Patrice Lare is restrained and big on clarity. Duchable seemed fine at the time, but has left less of a lasting impression.

Arnaldo Cohen is lyrical and refined. Yojo Christie’s sonata flows naturally and still has the vigor and impetuosity of youth (he was in his teens). He leans toward the splashy, but there is still great refinement in the lyrical sections. Yingdi Sun has too many blurry notes and aimless phrases, and the counterpoint is muddled. Yundi Li is not fiery or exciting, but he is sensitive. Our reviewer called his Liszt finely chiseled—perhaps too careful and planned, missing a sense of spontaneity.

Mykola Suk (Ukrainian) was reviewed twice by us. Putting them together we can expect loud playing that sounds tremendous and soft playing that many pianists wish they could do so beautifully. But he tends to push the instrument and his hands to the limit—and beyond. Missing and dropped notes can be disconcerting in the concert recording (M&A), but apparently not in the TNC release (March/April 2007: we called him “a powerhouse of a pianist”). Sophia Agronovich was also born in Ukraine and lives in the USA. She seeks out subtleties, and her gentleness will disappoint some people; but she dares to be different: beauty has tamed the beast.

Among the Russians, Boris Berezovsky has all the elements of a great performance, but they fail to cohere. He doesn’t seem to “get”
Liszt; and too much seems tight, over-rehearsed, and businesslike. Another Boris—Gilbert—has great weight of expression and a profundity one encounters only in the finest performances. Denis Matsuev plays with laser-like precision and dry tone. He misses the mark emotionally: he tries to conquer the work rather than commune with it. We described Lazar Berman as technically secure but lacking in passion, demonstrating no emotional involvement for all his singing tone.

Alexei Grynyuk was born in Kiev and is still quite young. His Liszt sonata has all the thrills associated with the piece. His technique is excellent, and he comes across on the gender side, more reflective, but with a sparkly, bubbling sound in rapid passages. He never pushes his tone, and you end up wanting to give him a standing ovation.

Polina Leschenko, another Ukrainian, can be brilliant but often seems cold and gets lost in the notes. Valery Kuleshov makes the sonata dance—it’s a very different and fresh reading. Olev Marshev is heavy-handed in comparison—a fairly standard interpretation that you have to be in the mood for. Vesselin Stanev (Bulgarian) has precious little emotion or grandeur in his playing.

Two English pianists who have recorded this fairly recently are Paul Lewis and Stephen Hough. We called the Lewis a first-class recording, praising his pacing and sense of architecture. There is nobility and grandeur, with a lot of tight control. Hough we called evocative, spiritual, and scrupulous. These descriptions sound rather English, but we also noted a lyric element in Hough.

Leslie Howard’s Hyperion recording is part of his series of the complete piano music of Liszt: at 24 minutes it stands poles apart from Arrau’s gentle and lyrical 32-minute rendition, and the headlong tempos seriously compromise the structural integrity of the work.

Khatia Buniatishvili reminded our reviewer of Martha Argerich: “jaw-dropping speed and strength...among the great performances’. She is self-indulgent but also poetic. Nino Gvetadze, from the same country (Georgia) is extremely refined, at the expense of excitement and grandeur. Ben Schoeman (from South Africa) emphasizes the contrasts between the sections, which makes it feel even more episodic than it is.

Another little-known pianist, Domenico Codispoti, is deliberate, expansive, fairly slow, and almost introverted (in Liszt!). He has a lovely sound and a good grasp of structure. Vardon Mamikonian offers a thoughtful rendering with a nice range of colors. He excels at the lyrical and introspective sections, and maybe his tempo gets too flexible sometimes.

Krystian Zimerman is a marvel of stupendous technique welded to an intensely musical mind and heart and a poetic and fiery temperament—he never allows its golden thread to slacken. In contrast, Ivo Pogorelich, also on DG, is occasionally labored in octave passages; nevertheless his playing is freer in rhythm and more declamatory—highly expressive, intense, and spacious. We generally dislike Maurizio Pollini’s performance: “stubbornly earth-bound, reduced to a series of problems to be (brilliantly) solved, a set of instructions to be (completely) obeyed”, yet in the end cold and dispassionate; “an intensely private act of musical ratioinacion...the physical energy...translated into an almost abstract state”.

We liked Vladimir Feltsman (Sony) very much—deeply-felt; it grows in stature with each hearing. Peter Donohoe (rather incongruously coupled with sonatas of Bartok and Berg) is “ruggedly dramatic”, but also one of the most expansive on record—yet it never drags. We liked the playing of Dag Achatz but not the metallic sound.

Our Editor was impressed by Andrea Lucchesini’s technique and even more by his musical instincts. David Fray (French) suffers from some technical (engineering) problems. Eugene Alcalay takes longer to get thru the sonata because of hesitations that really stretch out too far. The quiet sections almost come to a halt.

Nelson Goerner is clean and powerful (loud!) but not romantic and never lyrical. Idil Biret is a bit dry, but mature and probing—she doesn’t miss much. Andrew von Oeyen is similar—that is, he conquers all the challenges of the piece, but never sounds really juicy or romantic. Klaus Sticken is very tender and poetic, with beautiful phrasing. Markus Groh seems to have a nice balance of poetry and virtuosity. Claudius Tanski (MDG) has a very impressive technique and sense of timing and is powerful and clangorous without ever becoming unpleasant.

Dubrava Tomsic (Slovenian) is rather literal and predictable. Zeynep Ukbasaran (Turkish) is too cautious and controlled. But we were quite pleased with Huseyin Sermet, whose reading we called immensely powerful and exquisitely lyrical.

Terence Judd has unpredictability, but there are some blurred passages and missed notes, and the sound is not great. Jerome Rose is recorded very close-up and has a big sound,
but there are better recordings of that type. Barbara Nissman gives a “gorgeous” performance, but not quite on the sublime level of some others.

Hamelin gives one of the clearest performances, very well articulated but without any tendency to show off. In other words, as usual, he is musical above all. Yet his dynamic range is astounding, and the Hyperion sound is great. Garrick Ohlsson is more aggressive, virtuosic, and no-holds-barred. Hélène Laurens is cautious and carefully examines every detail—quite the opposite of Ohlsson’s vigor, drama, and excitement.

Harold Schonberg wrote in ARG that the recording by Jeanne-Marie Darré “is one of the all-time great performances, right up there with Horowitz and Cortot”. It has to do with conviction and personality; she really makes the music her own.

By the way, Leo Weiner orchestrated the sonata, and that has been recorded.

**Pilgrimage Years**

This is a large three-volume work where Liszt chronicles periods in his life, from a visit to Italy to reflections on literature and poetry. Most of the music was conceived in the 1830s, but the first two books were finally published in the early 1850s. Volume 3 was published many years later and is much more somber. Some parts of these books are played on their own a lot: the *Dante Sonata*, the Petrarch Sonnets, ‘Fountains of the Villa d’Este’, and so on.

Nicholas Angelich (an American) recorded the three sets of *Années* for Mirare (9941). Some of the 28 pieces are too relaxed, but he favors a meditative approach. Other pieces are very exciting. His imagination and tone colors are captivating, and his technique is impeccable.

Jerome Lowenthal is a wonderful pianist, and he recorded the complete three volumes for Bridge, plus some pieces from *Christmas Tree* (9307).

Craig Sheppard recorded the first two books for Romeo, and we thought it was not up to the best competition. Part of the reason was a rather heavy touch. Sergio Fiorentino approached these pieces with his usual aristocratic elegance and polish. It may at first seem understated, but it wears well (APR).

Recordings of the first year worth considering are by Leslie Howard, Daniel Barenboim, Lazar Berman, Alfred Brendel, and Stephen Hough. Hough (on Hyperion) adds in the Gounod paraphrases—rather rare, but very attractive. His playing in general is rather laid-back, but he does let go in ‘Orage’. Laplanche falls short of these.

**Poetic & Religious Harmonies**

These are ten pieces based on Lamartine’s poetry. If you understand French and want to hear the poems, they are read before the piano plays each piece on the Accord recording by Roger Murarro. His playing is rather large-scale, even somewhat dramatic—which some hearers will think inappropriate. Philip Thomson on Naxos is rather prosaic and takes two discs. Brigitte Engerer gets it on one. Her approach is restrained—Liszt as Mozart—but perhaps that suits the music. She has nice tone and lyricism (Mirare 84). Yuri Favorin is powerful but applies too much force for most of this music. Steven Osborne is just too English: polished, precise, clear, and straightforward—certainly not poetic!

The most often-heard and -recorded part of this is *Funérailles*. In fact, that has been recorded so many times (and generally so well) that we are not giving it special attention.

Perhaps the most beautiful part of the *Harmonies* is the Benediction de Dieu dans la Solitude (translated by one writer as “Blessing God in the Desert!”). The two greatest recordings of this 19-minute piece are by Claudio Arrau and Michel Block. (Block also included Funérailles with his Benediction.) It is very gentle Liszt and has a theme that sounds a bit like ‘Home on the Range’. Other excellent recordings of it are by Michel Dalberto, Janine Fialkowska, and Miriam Gomez-Moran. Garrick Ohlsson does both Benediction and Funérailles colorfully and with lyricism, never letting either disintegrate into pompous rhetoric.

**Transcendental Etudes**

These 12 etudes are not for amateurs, and a pianist who decides to perform them has worked his way up to them over many years.

Mauricio Baglini is a favorite around here, but not in all these pieces. His technical prowess is as great as ever, even in the most difficult pieces. His sense of dramatic timing is perfect, and a few of these are the best you will hear. But some pieces start out well and end up rather lame, and the piano (Fazioli) sometimes seems too loud and percussive.

Boris Berezovsky doesn’t have the breakneck brilliance that Lazar Berman brought to these pieces, but neither is he as stodgy as Richter. He’s very poetic, with lots of pianissimos, and he tends to muddy the textures with too much pedal; but some of us respond well to his way in this music.

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Miroslav Kultyshev is never over-the-top, even where you expect it. He is not a pounder and often seems light in touch. Mr Becker places him second only to Gekic in these pieces. Natalia Strelchenko does many of these quite beautifully, but without quite the jaw-dropping virtuosity of some other players. Great sound.

Jerome Rose seems to find less in this music than many others do. He is rather bombastic, which can exhaust the listener, and his piano sound is raw and metallic.

Only one of us has heard the performance of Aquiles Diel Vigne, but Mr Kang called it “probably the best interpretation since Arrau”. He does not try to overpower the listener with virtuosity; he always has good taste and nice colors.

Fialkowska has plenty of electricity and excitement and never produces an ugly sound (she sounds a bit like Rubinstein). The sound engineers do not really shine here, however. Jorge Bolet and Lazar Berman were the two favored by Harold Schoenberg in ARG.

Freddie Kempf is spectacular and gets spectacular sound from BIS. His technique seems limitless, and his crescendos are cataclysmic. What he is missing is charm, and that shows in a couple of pieces. (In general, Liszt is not after charm in these etudes!)

Kemal Gekic (a Croatian) rates in the top two or three for all of us: “exactly how we imagine Liszt would have played them”, “astonishing, with bold colors yet poetic.” This pianist also recorded Soirees Musicales for Naxos—Rossini-based. That album (553961) also includes Liszt’s transcription of the William Tell Overture.

Gekic
Kultyshev
Kempf
JVC 8505
Orfeo 759081
BIS 1210

Christmas Tree is not top-drawer Liszt. It has both his wild and contemplative sides, but what you remember is the few familiar Christmas melodies. It takes 35 or 40 minutes. The Gallo recording for piano duo seems fine. Liszt also made a solo piano version, which Roland Pontinen plays on BIS, but the rest of his program clashes with it. There are also recordings by Leslie Howard (in his complete Liszt), Alfred Brendel, Jerome Lowenthal (with Pilgrimage Years), and Jerome Rose.

Other Piano Pieces
First we should probably mention the Paganini Etudes, since we were just discussing the other main set of etudes. There are six Paganini ones, and they sound like Paganini but on the piano instead of the violin. They are really charming music, and no one recorded them better than Andre Watts (EMI). We also liked the Hamelin recording on Hyperion, which had less legato and seemed a little cold compared to the old Magaloff recording (Philips).

Opera transcriptions were a favorite genre for Liszt, and you can get all his Verdi transcriptions on Connoisseur Society 4187, played by Alberto Reyes. Michel Dalberto’s beautiful Liszt recital, once on Denon, includes the ‘Benediction’ and ‘Funeralles’ from the Poetic & Religious Harmonies, a set of Bach variations, and the three Liebestraume—certainly among Liszt’s greatest hits.

There are a number of Fiorentino recitals, and he was an amazing pianist and Lisztian. Dmitri Vorobiev has a nice Liszt recital that includes the Benediction, all six Consolations, and the three Petrarch Sonnets. He is a sensitive interpreter.

We liked Jon Nakamatsu’s Harmonia Mundi collection, which includes the Dante Sonata and the Petrarch Sonnets. The playing is almost too perfect and needs a touch of abandon.

The two big names playing Liszt in the last century were Vladimir Horowitz and Jorge Bolet. Horowitz was more electrifying, but Bolet was the more poised, elegant artist. Harold Schonberg favored Bolet in ARG, but the Editor favored Horowitz and thinks both of them have been superseded. Jack Sullivan has suggested that Arkady Volodos is a current pianist in their class—with their beautiful sound, playing that ravishes the ear, and utter perfection. Many famous pianists play Liszt, but few of the famous names seem Liszt “naturals”, and Volodos is (Sony has issued his Liszt).

At this point it is worth quoting Harold Schonberg further: “No composer is more at the mercy of his interpreters than Liszt. Liszt banged out by the younger percussive school of contemporary pianists completely distorts the composer’s message.”

It is our belief that that statement (from 1999) no longer applies, and we are again living in a great age of Liszt pianists.

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is one of the outstanding pianists fairly new to the scene, and we liked his Liszt recital on MDG—mostly neglected works. His ability to project and sustain the sound at any intensity is astounding.

The best Liszt collection may very well be the recently reissued Wilhelm Kempff one (Pentatone). It has the two St Francis Legends,
the three Petrarch Sonnets, and four other pieces from the Second Pilgrimage Year (Italy). But there are so many fine collections, and often we have led you to them by recommending one piece (or more) from them (as above). There is even the complete Liszt piano music—endless it is—on Hyperion by Leslie Howard.

**Choral Pieces**

*Via Crucis* is the stations of the cross. It is rather austere—not very "Lisztian," though he was a deeply religious man—and is often accompanied by an organ, but we know one recording with piano duo accompaniment.

There is a Liszt mass (Missa Choralis), which comes either a cappella or with organ accompaniment. There’s a fine Warner recording with the *Via Crucis*.

*Christus* is a three-hour Latin oratorio on the life of Christ. It is heavily meditative, and listeners always find it *long*. James Conlon’s Rotterdam recording is often considered the one to have, but Philip Greenfield has nice things to say about the Kofman recording on MDG (and about the music—Nov/Dec 2007).

His other oratorio is the *St Elizabeth Legend*—rarely recorded, but we liked the CPO recording.

**Organ Pieces**

Liszt wrote 13 original works for the organ as well as numerous transcriptions and arrangements. His interest in the organ dates from his appointment in 1848 to a post at the court of Weimar. Bach had held the same post more than a century before. Bach's organ music had been published for the first time in 1844, and among the earliest projects Liszt completed in Weimar were transcriptions for piano of six of Bach’s preludes and fugues.

The most complete recording of the organ works is the five volumes by Martin Haselbock (NCA—SACD). He was the editor of the Universal Edition of the organ works and delivers exciting and committed performances. All of them were played on German romantic organs built by Ladegast, including the one familiar to Liszt (Merseburg, Vol. 1).

Liszt’s three major works for organ—Fantasy and Fugue on *Ad Nos*; Prelude and Fugue on *BACH*; Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen—have been recorded many times. The choice is between a French romantic or a German approach, influenced by different styles of organ. Haselbock (Orfeo), Daniel Roth (Motette), Andreas Rothkopf (Naxos), Louis Robilliard (Arion), Chantal de Zeeuw (Pierre Verany), Ken Cowan (JAV), and Thomas Trotter (Decca) give excellent accounts of these three pieces with a variety of styles, approaches, and organs. Labric has a great organ but is very fast. Nolan at St Sulpice plays only *Ad Nos* on a Signum disc, but it is both majestic and ethereal. Kaiser on the same Ladegast organ in Merseburg as Haselbock (where it was premiered) is very slow (Brilliant—note that *Ad Nos* can vary from 24 to 37 minutes!). Mention should also be made of the classic accounts by the legendary Jeanne Demessieux of the *Ad Nos* and *BACH* (Festivo), Louis Robilliard’s on two Cavaille-Coll instruments (Festivo) and Gillian Weir’s *Ad Nos* on the organ of Royal Albert Hall, London (Priory).

The Editor adds his favorites: the Erato disc by Marie-Claire Alain and Olivier Vernet on Ligia. Our reviewer called the Vernet very musical and very French.

There is a CPO recording of arrangements of the big three organ pieces, with orchestra added. An oddity.

**Songs**

Liszt’s songs present a more intimate side of his compositions. His experience with lieder began with transcribing Schubert songs as virtuoso solo piano works. Like Schubert he frequently revised or recomposed his songs. He became strongly critical of his songs from the 1840s as “too sentimentally bloated and often excessively choked up in the accompaniments.”

Of the more than two dozen recordings in our index, Julius Drake’s Hyperion project is the place to begin. Matthew Polenzani sings Vol. 1, which includes the early high-flying settings of the Petrarch Sonnets and the William Tell songs. Angelika Kirschschlager in Vol. 2 and Gerald Finley in Vol. 3 sing more subdued settings. (Volume 4 with Sasha Cooke will be out soon.) Two other excellent tenor readings of the dramatic songs are by John Aler (Newport) and Szabolcs Brickner (Hungaroton). For a soprano reading, Diana Damrau is hard to beat (Virgin). Baritone Konrad Jarnot’s meltingly beautiful performance is another not to miss (Oehms).

In this issue we cite extensively from Mario Vargas Llosa’s book *Notes on the Death of Culture*
This curious program is called Composed to the Soul. It is a fine representation of early classical material played in early music style by fine musicians. What more can be said?

Well, to begin with, Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-87) wrote six quartets for two violins, a tenor, and cello obligato, Op. 8, in 1768. A copyist of that time transposed the first violin part down an octave and wrote it out for viola da gamba, as it is played here. These are attractive three-movement pieces played with love and warmth. Abel also wrote six concertos for harpsichord, two violins, and basso continuo, Op. 11, in the same year. These are all in two movements; the one included here has a pair of Allegros. This also gives the effect of chamber music and is beautifully played with harpsichordist Michael Fuerst. The two arias included fit well in the game. Like all of the other pieces, they last about ten minutes apiece—a substantial pair sung with remarkable beauty both stylistically and technically by Mields.

This program is very pleasant to these ears, particularly the arias, which are done with a lively and lovely personality. Texts are included in Italian, German, and English, as are informative liner notes by Eckert. CPO records this variety of balances with their customary care for natural and warm sound. I found this a fine program for enjoying relatively little-known music. I only wish they had given us more of it.

D MOORE

ABEL: Home Is a Harbor
Jamie Chamberlin (Lisa), Ariel Pisturino (Laurie), Babatunde Akinboboye (Lance), E Scott Levin (Leo, Liam), Janelle DeStefano (Linda, Lenore), Jon Lee Keenan (Larry, Bum), Carver Cossey (Lou); La Brea Sinfonietta/ Benjamin Makino

The Palm Trees Are Restless
Hila Plitmann, s; Tali Tadmor, p
Delos 3495 [2CD] 125 minutes

American composer Mark Abel has written several song cycles. This recording contains his most recent cycle, The Palm Trees Are Restless; but more important, perhaps, it contains his first opera, Home Is a Harbor. Looking over the cast bios, one is struck by the fact that nearly all the participants in this project are California-based, making the point very clearly that that large Western state has become an important cultural hub in the country, and Mr Abel is at the forefront of its musical life.

The opera deals with young twin sisters who set out on their post-high school lives in different directions, one as an art student who goes to NYU and the other who stays near home to attend college and wait for her soldier boy friend. Both find disillusionment and sadness, only to return home in a third act which offers hope for the future, if from a slightly unbelievable (because it's too good) situation. But even the ultra-optimistic ending does not destroy the effectiveness of the piece. It is short but filled with characters and situations that remind us all too well of the realities of our world.

Musically it is something of a pop opera, with a musical style full of hints of jazz and pop music. The voices are all operatically trained, but the orchestra's instrumentation comprises mostly winds, percussion, piano, and organ, with few strings. It comes across as a very modern accompaniment, but not at all unpleasant. The La Brea Sinfonietta, under Benjamin Makino, plays the score expertly.

All the singers do a fine job; I would not be surprised to read some of their names on the rosters of major opera companies. The two sopranos who sing the twins Lisa and Laurie, Jamie Chamberlin and Ariel Pisturino, create very believable young women with their well-supported sopranos. Best of the lot is Babatunde Akinboboye, whose rich baritone demands special notice from the listener. Most of the others have more than one role, and they create a slightly different sound for each character. As with many modern operas, the vocal line is not typical of romantic opera. But it is tonal and effective in conveying the drama of the situation.

The program ends with Mr Abel's song cycle The Palm Trees Are Restless, where he sets five poems by Kate Gale. I find the poems fascinating reading, but I'm just not in love with Mr Abel's music for them. They are performed very well by soprano Hila Plitmann, accompanied by Tali Tadmor at the piano.

The recording comes with good notes by and about the composer and the full texts of opera and songs.

SININGER

AGRELL: Harpsichord Sonata; see ROMAN

The disappearance of any minimal consensus about aesthetic value means that in this field confusion reigns and will continue to reign for a long time.

-- Mario Vargas Llosa
**ALBENIZ: Iberia I**

Alexander Boyd, p—Claudio 6022—40 minutes

This is the first of two volumes to contain all four books of *Iberia*. As such, its abysmally short timing can only be justified if the pianist or recording is something special. Even then, it would be pushing it to suggest one spend hard earned funds for half a disc of music. All four books usually take no more than 80 minutes.

Born in Australia in 1972, Boyd is on the staff at the Guildhall School of Music in Birmingham, England. His recorded legacy is limited, but he has been active as both recitalist and chamber music player for several years. Since *Iberia* is one of the most technically demanding works in the repertoire, it was given that the pianist would easily jump over the performance hurdles—and he definitely does, with grace and ease.

Interpretively, Boyd’s opening ‘Evocation’ is an enticingly languid affair. He lets the piece unfold slowly, sinuously, and with careful attention to let detail emerge. In that respect, it’s not unlike De Larrocha’s first recording for Hispavox (and EMI—my benchmark choice), except that she lets the music move forward more freely.

‘El Puerto’ picks up the tempo a bit and can boast of some delightful turns of phrase. Still, Boyd does tend to dwell on things a little more than is usual. He loves to gently caress and cajole the music, and that is not necessarily bad. If you are impatient you may want to look elsewhere. If you see *Iberia* primarily in hot, sultry phrases, you may find this attractive.

‘El Corpus Christi en Sevilla’ should call to mind a brilliant religious festival. Here it takes on an impressionist flavor, while keeping some of the excitement in check. Like ‘The Great Gate at Kiev’ the grandiloquence of the music’s procession dictates that all stops be pulled out. It is certainly an effective enough reading, and the pianist from overreaching.

‘Rondeña’ gives us a slice of small town Andalusia, incorporating the Fandango. Boyd’s performance wins me over completely. It has flair, charm, the warmth of Spanish inflections, and the feeling of being one with the music. Yes, others have done just as well, but accomplishing all of this is no small achievement. Delicious!

‘Almería’ is slightly mysterious in conveying the sleepy Andalusian port town—at least as it was when Albéniz composed it. The movement is well characterized, with a hypnotic gentle rocking rhythm underpinning the lovely melody. Boyd is very effective at painting a mood picture and sustaining it over the almost ten minute span. He also generates excitement as

the pace quickens and reaches its emotional climax.

‘Triana’ lustily portrays the Gypsy quarter in Seville. Different rhythms tumble over one another, and Boyd presents it all in full technicolor and with enough sparkle to make it competitive. Claudio also supplies some of the best sound to be heard today, along with short but penetrating notes by pianist Gemma Kateb. Apart from that early De Larrocha (in a class of her own), this one will do very nicely.

**ALBERTI: Keyboard Music, all**

Manuel Tomadin

Brilliant 95161 [4CD] 279 minutes

Since around 1985, we’ve reviewed only one other release by Domenico Alberti (1710-17), a disc of violin sonatas (M/A 2001). He was a harpsichordist and singer who often accompanied himself. His sonatas (which the scholar Michael Talbot claims probably came from his later years) abound with ingratiating, tuneful melody and a left-hand accompaniment of broken chords, the most famous of which bears the name “Alberti bass.” Talbot sums up this music as follows: “Alberti’s galant idiom, much admired as a novelty in its day, proves not lacking in taste and workmanship”.

It never seriously occurred to me that Alberti would use his eponymous accompanimental pattern almost ceaselessly—that is, until I heard these convincing performances. Every now and then he will break from it and also introduce a melody more poignant and more memorable (as in a Sonata in E and A that appears at the end of the second disc). But most of the time the music is bland and banal—acceptable as a historical curiosity, probably effective as a teaching tool, but hardly the sort of stuff one would want to listen to more than once. You have been warned.

**ANDERSON, J: In Lieblicher Bläue; Alleluia; Stations of the Sun**

Carolin Widmann, v; London Philharmonic & Choir/ Vladimir Jurowski

LPO 89—54 minutes

Julian Anderson (b. 1967), composer in residence with the LPO 2010-14, studied with Goehr and Murail. His music is impressionist and densely atmospheric in late century British orchestral style.

*In Lieblicher Blaue* (In Lovely Blue, 2015) is a work for violin and orchestra based on the poem by Hölderlin, unfortunately not printed in the notes. That would likely have helped in

July/August 2016
making sense of the episodic nature of the piece. It is attractive and lyrical, but the theatrical element (the violinist moving around and facing or not facing the audience) is lost on the audio disc, and the special effects (playing with a pencil, alternate bowings, thunder) would be considerably illuminated by the text.

Alleluia (2007) is a setting for chorus and orchestra of portions of the complete 10th Century Sequence. Alternately mystical and dancelike, the intimations of nature in a bleary-eyed stream of consciousness is a competent representative of the modern National Music Council (NMC) musical language.

The earlier Stations of the Sun (1997-98) is a 17-minute piece in four continuous sections. The scherzo-like opening leads to some lyrical meditation; a more active portion blends into a statement of the ‘Alleluia Adorabo’ chant, and it concludes with a disjunct finale. The piece does not especially cohere, but its individual episodes are not unattractive.

Anglebert: Harpsichord Pieces
Charlotte Mattax Moersch—Centaur 3455—79:14

This would be a suitably captivating place to start for people who do not know this composer. Jean-Henri d’Anglebert (1629-91) was one of the harpsichord superstars of 17th Century France. His four long published suites from 1689 function as anthologies: the player is expected to choose whatever works best for him, not necessarily playing everything. There are alternate choices for some of the movements.

Here we get an almost-complete G-minor Suite (no Passacaille), shortened versions of the G-major and D-minor suites, plus seven other pieces from manuscripts. Laurent Stewart’s 2008 program offers those three suites more nearly complete. For a yet more comprehensive collection and the fourth suite, don’t miss Elizabeth Farr’s 2CD set on Naxos, from 2007: half on a Buckers copy and half on a late-harpsichord with gut strings.

All these players are terrific with this music, as are some others. Charlotte Mattax Moersch gives a fine sense of air and space to her delivery. Everything is fit perfectly into place, flowing naturally, without ever seeming too fast or slow. She integrates the profuse ornamentation smoothly, which is a primary challenge in playing these pieces. The tender pieces sing. It’s harder to obtain the seven extra pieces elsewhere. That by itself is a sufficient reason to buy this excellent recording.

Mattax Moersch has had a fine 35-year career already as harpsichordist and researcher, and sounds at the top of her game here. The booklet notes are well written and brief. The harpsichord is a 1980 copy by Martin, after Blanchet.

B Lehm

Arensksy: Trio 1; see Collections

Atterberg: Symphony 3;
3 Nocturnes; Vittorioso
Gothenburg Symphony/ Neeme Jarvi
Chandos 10894—63 minutes

It is hard not to recommend this. Besides a great conductor, who gives the music full value in every paragraph, here we also have a great orchestra with wonderful sound. I have a recording we reviewed in 1989 that I have listened to all these years—Sixten Ehrling conducting—but now it sounds pale compared to this. Better sound and a little extra time in each movement allow the symphony to make a stronger impression. The trouble is that Ehrling’s Caprice recording (21364) includes the wonderful horn concerto—with the Gothenburg orchestra—and I can’t not have a good recording of that (is the BIS still around?). Maybe Mr Jarvi will include it in his Atterberg series; that would solve the problem.

All the Atterberg symphonies are pleasant and attractive, but the Third is not especially profound and sometimes sounds like incidental music. I don’t need to hear it often, but I like it when I hear it. It dates from 1914-16 (the composer lived to 1974). It is pure Scandinavian romanticism. It had been played 22 times by foreign orchestras (mostly German) by 1924.

Jarvi includes four other pieces—more than Ehrling did. The Nocturnes are from the opera, Fanal (The Beacon, 1932). Jussi Björling sang a leading role in it, and it was presented 30 times by 1957. The nocturnes are really just incidental music (again), and I would rather hear opera excerpts, with voices.

Atterberg’s 7th Symphony also has themes from that opera, and its original 4th movement (excised) later became Vittorioso (1962), the last item on this concert. It belongs with the Nocturnes. The truth is, though it is descriptive music, I find all four of these pieces rather non-descriptive. Atterberg was a good craftsman, and you can hear that, but he was seldom really inspired—and you can hear that too. I want a new recording of the wonderful horn concerto, and I’ll let you know when it comes along.

Vroom

Bach, CPE: Cello Concerto; see Haydn

It is the mark of a serious intellect to countenance some inconsistency.
**BACH: Cantatas**  
Dorothee Mields, s; Orfeo Baroque Orchestra/ Michi Gaigg—Carus 83309—67 minutes

I admired Mields awhile back (N/D 2014) and I still do. The voice is lovely and clear, agile and bright—in other words, perfect for Bach cantatas.

The ever popular *Ich Bin in Mir Vergnugt* and *Mein Herz Schwimmt im Blut* are followed by the aria and ritornello ‘Alles Mit Gott und Nichts Ohn’ Ihm’ (four stanzas). It makes for a nice collection of cantatas, though when I see new recordings of Bach cantatas, I’m more excited by recordings of cantatas we don’t hear as often.

I like it when singers move a little more quickly through recitative. These sound a little careful, nicely performed but lacking any feeling of spontaneity. There is much to enjoy here; after all, there’s a reason these cantatas are so often performed, and Mields is an ideal soloist. The Orfeo Orchestra also sounds great, and the inclusion of the aria is a nice addition to the program. A lovely addition to your Bach library. Note, texts, and translations.

**BACH: Dialogue Cantatas (3)**  
Johanna Winkel, s; Thomas E Bauer, b; Chorus Musicus; Neue Orchestre/ Christoph Spering  
Oehms 1815—51 minutes

The title of this program is a bit misleading. It implies a lot of direct exchanges for the two singers—something Bach indulged in rather rarely. These are cantatas that call for two singers, with only one duet offered, in three cases joining the voices in recitatives, with two participations in chorale movements. Otherwise, there are only solos in recitatives and arias. In fairness, though, one of these cantatas does bear the subtitle *Concerto in Dialogo* and contains that one recitative duet.

This release also follows an earlier one (Oehms 887), where Bauer joins Spering in three cantatas for bass voice (56, 82, 158). In reiwewing that (M/J 2014) Catherine Moore had nothing but praise for singer and conductor.

In this case we again have three cantatas: *57, Selig ist der Mann; 32, Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen; and 58, Ach Gott, wie Manches Herzzeleid*. Of the three, No. 32 is perhaps the most familiar. It offers a lovely array of both vocal and instrumental colors, built around the happily duetting singers and spiced with oboes. That and No. 57 conclude with chorale movements, while in No. 58 chorale settings with the soloists frame the work, and the instrumentation is even richer in oboe sounds.

It would be pointless to seek out other recordings of all three works. Suffice it to say that this is a most satisfying bouquet of Bach’s intimate sacred works, blessed by really beautiful solo singing, handsomely joined by a choir of 12 singers and 15 instrumentalists.

The booklet (pasted in, unfortunately) contains excellent notes and full German texts, without English translations.

**BACH: Chorales & Chorale Preludes**  
Anna Christiane Neumann & Anja Kleinmichel, p  
Genuin 15375—69:33

Readers seeking a devotional record will find this a beautiful and undisturbing one. It’s called “Bach Without Words” and is mostly piano solos, with five pieces for four hands. Before most of the chorale preludes, Neumann plays a simpler four-voiced version from the Bach-Riemenschneider collection of 371 chorales. There are more than a dozen arrangements here beyond Busoni, showing the richness of this genre, where ensemble music and organ solos have been adapted to the piano.

‘Aus tiefer Not’ in F-sharp minor (S 687) is a highlight, with the original manual-only organ piece spread out to different registers. It is directly playable on piano without any problems, keeping the notes exactly as Bach wrote them; but Gyorgy Kurtag’s re-orchestration for two pianists gives it more color and weight. In ‘O Lamm Gottes’ and ‘Allein Gott’, Kurtag’s arrangements have a simulation of the organ’s Quint stop: having the melody played several octaves and a fifth higher, to create that distinctive tone color by reinforcing overtones. Saint-Saëns used a similar effect in the slow movement of his fifth piano concerto. Neumann’s own transcription of ‘Jesu, joy of man’s desiring’ is simpler than the familiar Myra Hess arrangement, omitting some of the inner voices. A lesser-known Hess transcription of ‘Wacht auf’ is here.

The performance of Vaughan Williams’s arrangement of ‘Ach bleib’ bei uns’ is disappointingly lethargic, needing more dance to the bass line. There is one other thing that bothers me a little: both in the simple chorales and in the more elaborate arrangements, Neumann pedals through the phrase endings and leaves no silence. It sounds unnatural. Singers absolutely must breathe, and on all of Bach’s keyboard instruments it was necessary to lift off the notes to be able to restrike them. A bit of practice on clavichord would have helped her to open it up a bit here. I wanted more articulative variety in some other places, but these well-balanced performances will please pianists. I’d be glad to hear any of this music in church.

**BARKER**

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**BARKER**
**Bach: French Suites & Overture**  
Vladimir Feltsman, p  
Nimbus 6314 [2CD] 124 minutes

Recordings made in 2005 (French Suites, with tube microphones and pre-amplifier) and 2002 (concert performance from Moscow Conservatory), probably released on another label. The French Suites are some of the most beautiful-sounding recordings I’ve heard in a long time—lots of warmth, just enough ambience, plenty of space to allow the piano sound to bloom. And the performances are magnificent: it’s as if Feltsman’s ahead of the curve, giving the music artful and often unexpected phrasing and a truly singing approach to the intricate counterpoint. Tempos are always appropriate and often on the moderate side (Allemande and Courante from Suite 1). Detached playing, when it does make an appearance (Gavotte and Bourree from Suite 5), lacks the abrasive and relentless quality that I’ve grown tired of in other players. Some of Feltsman’s eccentric mannerisms remain: occasional odd ornaments, sudden transpositions of music an octave down, and even (in the Courante of the French Overture) reversing Bach’s left-hand figuration. Yet it’s done with so much love and conviction that I never wince. What a change from the anemic, no-pedal-allowed Bach that Andras Schiff now inflicts on us via ECM (for instance in his WTC).

**Bach: Goldberg Variations**  
Erich Traxler, hpsi—Paladino 73—77 minutes

The graphic design of the package is not very attractive, but the music is. Erich Traxler, an Austrian harpsichord professor aged 33 at the time, gives an interpretation that is mostly hard-edged and on the exciting side, instead of going for restfulness. He keeps the listener guessing whether the next variation will be faster or slower. He takes all the repeats, but without changing registration or doing much ornamentation. He brings out contrasts through different rhythmic inflections at very small levels in phrases. The easier the notes are to play, the more he bends things in unexpected places, perhaps trying to make something extra-special of the music. It doesn’t need as much as he does, but this approach does keep things interesting, and the repeats don’t sound like mechanical repetitions of Bach’s ideas.

Variation 19 is very fast. None of the other tempos seem out of line. Variation 25 is unsentimental and relatively uneventful, moving along with less metrical freedom than the earlier part of the performance had led me to expect. There is not much pathos in the several other G-minor variations, either.

The harpsichord is by Keith Hill, 1992, in Ruckers style. Traxler’s choice of Werckmeister III temperament doesn’t call much attention to itself, though the E-minor parts of some variations bring obtrusive D-sharps, and it makes the G-major scale sound melodically lumpy in Variation 13.

Listeners who want more tenderness and straightforwardness in this music can seek it elsewhere. I like the congeniality and patience I hear from Kenneth Weiss, Pieter-Jan Belder, and Richard Egarr. Traxler’s way works, too.

**Bach: 2-4 Harpsichord Concertos; Triple Concerto, S 1044**  
Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Trevor Pinnock, Marieke Spaans, Marcus Mohlin, hpsi; Concerto Copenhagen—CPO 777681 [2CD] 106 minutes

Having about 20 other recordings of the Bach multiple-harpsichord concertos, including the older one led by Pinnock with Mortensen’s participation, I was not in the market for another one. The compositions are well served so many times over. Nevertheless, this new set recorded in 2011 and 2013 is terrific, and it compelled me to go buy the two earlier discs where Mortensen plays the single-harpsichord concertos (recorded 2002 and 2005). This is so good that I’d recommend it to friends who don’t have any other recordings of the pieces, for the joy of the music played energetically.

Concerto Copenhagen (“CoCo”) and the harpsichordists make everything sound natural and vital, with moderate tempos and no eccentricities. Mortensen is their stand-up director regularly, but he leads all of these from a harpsichord. This is some of Bach’s most visceral music, especially the two concertos for three harpsichords, written for public entertainment at a coffeehouse. Another high point is the slow movement of the double concerto in C minor that is usually played in D minor on violins: Mortensen and Pinnock have their left hands on manuals registered with buff stops, letting the more sustained melodies in their right hands project through the texture more clearly.

The Triple Concerto is the one with violin, flute, and harpsichord, arranged by Bach by recycling a harpsichord solo prelude and fugue and one of the organ trio sonatas. Katy Bircher and Manfredo Kraemer play the flute and violin solos. It shows how Bach as orchestrator added new contrapuntal parts imaginatively on top of already-complete pieces, along with inserting new sections. In the slow move-
ment Bach has the violin and flute exchange parts on the repeats. Does this have implications for organists changing stops or manuals on repeats in the original trio sonatas?

Most of the concertos are played with strings in a hefty-sounding configuration of 4-4-2-1 and two of them with only one player per part. Mortensen did it both ways in the single-harpsichord concertos of this series, too: three concertos with single strings, the rest with bigger sections. Some other lithe one-per-part performances not to miss are the multi-harpsichord set led by Pieter-Jan Belder (Brilliant), and the Triple Concerto by Rachel Podger (Channel SACD).

B LEHMAN

BACH: Lute Suite 2; Chaconne;
MARAIS: Folies
Jose Luis Martinez, g
Centaur 3449—45 minutes

Many would consider this an expressive and interesting performance. Martinez has a lovely sound and an imaginative approach to articulation. But I found his realizations wayward, unconvincing, even disorganized. His rubato would sound spontaneous to some; to me it is indulgent. His habit of anticipating a melody note with the bass is distracting. And his dynamic range on this short disc is too narrow for the grandeur of this program.

This is really great music, and I want it realized with more consistency and thoughtfulness than I find here. You’ll find many better performances of the Suite—my favorite from recent years is Jason Vieaux’s Azica disc (J/A 2009). For the mighty Chaconne there are many choices, including Pepe Romero’s performance with the entire violin partita on Philips. More recently, there is a remarkable performance by 14-year-old Junhong Kuang on his debut Naxos recording (M/J 2015).

KEATON

BACH: Lutheran Masses in F & A;
PERANDA: Mass in A minor
Hana Blazikova, Joanne Lunn, Aki Matsui, s; Robin Blaze, ct; Katsuhiko Nakashima, Gerd Türk, Yusuke Fujii, t; Peter Kooij, Dominik Wörner, b; Bach Collegium Japan/ Masaaki Suzuki
BIS 2121 [SACD] 72 minutes

In the Lutheran usage of Bach’s time, the Mass as a musical item consisted of the Kyrie and Gloria with German texts, but on festive occasions they could be sung in their ancient Greek and Latin to elaborate music. On such occasions, Bach would most often use settings by other composers, but there are four surviving Lutheran Masses from his Leipzig period. They are cast in a consistent format. The Kyrie is set as a chorus. The Gloria is divided into five movements, opening and closing choruses enclosing three solo arias. In a single instance one of these inner movements is a duet. It appears that all of these masses derive their musical material from earlier church cantatas, some from cantatas that are now lost. For many years critics disparaged them for this reason. Spitta dismissed them as “mindless adaptations”. These days we hold them in higher regard both for their sheer musical quality and for Bach’s ingenuity as a parodist.

I recently reviewed the first volume of the Lutheran Masses recorded by Masaaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan (BIS 2081; March/April 2016) containing the masses in G minor (S 235) and G (S 236) as well as four settings of the Sanctus and Bach’s adaptation of a Kyrie by Francesco Durante. The present recording completes the set of four Lutheran Masses and includes a Kyrie-Gloria mass by Marco Giuseppe Peranda (c1625-75) that Bach sometimes used at Leipzig. These two Lutheran Masses were recorded in February of 2014. Peranda’s mass was recorded a year later.

Readers of my reviews will already know my high estimation of Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan. I have been hooked on them since the earliest volumes of their Bach cantata series. I consider them the gold standard for Bach's sacred vocal works, and both volumes of the Lutheran Masses sustain that estimation. These are performances of the highest technical standard. They unfold with unfailing elegance and sensitivity. The vocal soloists are among the leading exponents of this repertory, and the recorded sound is warm and clear. It is worth noting that the soloists in the Lutheran Masses are Blazikova, Blaze, Nakashima, and Kooij. The other soloists listed are heard in Peranda only.

Peranda was born in the central Italian city of Macerata and studied in Rome. The greater part of his career was spent at the court of Dresden, where he was a younger colleague of Heinrich Schütz. Musicians of northern Europe held Peranda in high esteem for his contrapuntal skill and the expressive power of his music. During his Weimar period Bach copied out sets of parts for a Kyrie in C minor by Peranda and the Mass in A minor heard here. Only the Kyrie parts from Bach’s copy survive, but there is a complete manuscript of the work by his cousin Johann Gottfried Walther, and that was probably Bach’s source for the work. Program annotator Klaus Hofmann conjectures that one of the elements of Peranda’s mass that attracted Bach was the brilliant vocal polyphonic writing in as many as six voices, sometimes with independent instrumental parts. Peranda scored the work for two violins, three violas, bassoon,
and continuo. Bach modified this instrumentation for Leipzig by replacing the second and third violas and bassoon with trombones. Peranda's original scoring is given here. Like so many liturgical settings of the 17th Century, Peranda's mass unfolds as a series of short and contrasted sections rather than extended movements. There are places that remind me of the flavor of Monteverdi's sacred vocal music, and I suppose it is possible to hear Peranda as a later growth from that venerable stock.

I would not hesitate to recommend this and its companion disc to any readers looking for an excellent recording of the Lutheran Masses. Among other recent recordings of these works special mention should be made of the pair of discs from Harry Christophers and The Sixteen (Coro 16115; March/April 2014; 16120; S/O 2014), who gives a more relaxed and intimate reading of this music with only two voices to a part and a correspondingly light instrumental accompaniment. He turns the masses into chamber music, while Suzuki with his larger forces produces a more conventional impression of liturgical choral music. Both approaches yield outstanding results.

BARCHE: movements
Tafelmusik/Jeanne Lamon; Chamber Choir/Ivars Taurins—Tafelmusik 1028—61 minutes

This is a compilation of instrumental and vocal music extracted from recordings released by the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir from 2006 to 2015. The program includes a selection of sinfonias from Cantatas 1, 11, and 249a; Adagio movements from Cantatas 42 and 135; and the Andante from Cantata 208. There are two movements from the Sonata for 2 Violins in G (S 1039) and the third movement from the Concerto for 2 Violins in D minor (S 1043). The only complete works are the Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 and Bach's only Latin cantata, Gloria in Excelsis Deo (S 191). Brief notes cover the ensemble; there are no texts for the cantata.

BARCHE: Organ Pieces
Preludes & Fugues in F, C minor, E-flat (St Anne), E minor (Wedge); Toccata & Fugue in F; Fantasia & Fugue in G minor; An Wasserflüssen Babylon; O Mensch Bewein

Barbara Harbach—MSR 1444—75 minutes

This is a digitally remastered reissue of two recordings that first appeared on the Gasparo label. The original release dates are not given, and they do not appear to have been reviewed in ARG.

American Record Guide

The program includes some of the best known of JS Bach's larger-scale free organ works. There are also two chorale preludes. 'An Wasserflüssen Babylon' (S 653) is the version in five parts with double pedal. 'O Mensch Bewein' is from Orgelbüchlein.

In her performances Barbara Harbach tends to favor brisk tempos, particularly in the Toccata in F and the Wedge. Such tempos can be very effective, but here they sound impatient and driven at the expense of dignity. The 16th-note passages in the Wedge Fugue are notoriously difficult to bring off with metrical clarity, and here they are something of a jumble. Harbach employs a good deal of tempo flexibility and agogic nuance, but much of it is unconvincing. Rather than underscore the phrasing and trajectory of the music, the devices here make it seem unsteady. I confess this is a highly subjective reaction, and other listeners may disagree. As in so many cases, I would urge anyone considering the purchase of this recording to sample some of the tracks to determine whether the interpretations are congenial.

None of this is meant to disparage Harbach's formidable technique or the boldness of her interpretations. Indeed, hers is one of the most fluent performances I have heard of 'An Wasserflüssen Babylon.' It is exceptionally difficult for the double pedal writing to come across smoothly with good phrase connection.

The first part of the program is played on the three-manual Fisk organ (1980) at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York. The tone combines clarity with warmth and refinement—hallmarks of Fisk's best work. Judging from the decay of final chords, the room is far from dry, but without sumptuous reverberation. The rest of the program is played on a smaller two-manual Schlicker organ (1970) at First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lyons, New York. In comparison with the Fisk, I would have to describe the tone as nasty. Perhaps it makes a better impression in person than it does on this recording, but I became very tired of the blatant tone and screaming upperwork of this instrument.

Barbara Harbach is on the faculty of the University of Missouri in St Louis. In addition to her reputation as an organist and harpsichordist, she is a prolific composer and a devoted champion of music by women, both early and modern.

--Mario Vargas

Our superficial and glitzy culture...cannot replace the certainties, myths, mysteries, and rituals of religion that have stood the test of centuries.

GATENS

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**BACH: Organ Pieces**

*Organ Pieces 2*  
*Prelude & Fugue in C; Trio Sonata 2 in C minor; Concerto in A minor after Vivaldi; Toccata & Fugue in F; Ein’ Feste Burg (S 720); Nun Danket (S 326); Von Gott Will Ich nicht Lassen (S 658)*

Todd Fickley—MSR 1562—73 minutes

This is the second volume in Todd Fickley’s “Bach Project” to record all of JS Bach’s organ works on historic instruments using Hauptwerk computer technology. In Hauptwerk, each pipe of an organ is recorded, often numerous times with different key velocities for attack and release. The data is loaded into the memory of a computer, and when connected to an appropriate organ console, the player is in effect able to play the organ that has been so recorded. I recently reviewed the first volume of the series (MSR 1561; S/O 2015). The instrument on that recording was the 1721 Schnitger organ at St Michael’s Church, Zwolle. The present volume uses the four-manual 1973 Marcussen organ at St Lawrence Church, Rotterdam. With 85 speaking stops and some 7,600 pipes, it is said to be the largest purely mechanical organ in Europe. Most of its principals and octaves consist of more than one rank of pipes tuned in unison to add substance and richness to the tone.

In my review of the earlier recording, I described the tone as clinical: very clear but not really spacious, even though the pipes were recorded at a distance of 32 feet so as to capture the five-second reverberation of the room. The sound on the present recording seems to me more convincing, suggesting that not all Hauptwerk files are created equal. The Rotterdam Marcussen was recorded at a distance of 50 feet for the six-second reverberation of the room. As the recording engineer points out, the organ’s tone is gentle, though full organ is not lacking in majestic power. The individual registers have a remarkably refined tone heard to good advantage here in the lighter registrations of the trio sonata and Schübeler Chorales.

Fickley’s playing leaves a mixed impression. In the larger-scale free compositions—Prelude & Fugue in C (S 545) and Toccata & Fugue in F (S 540)—he employs the somewhat brittle articulation beloved of exponents of “authentic” performance practice, where detachment of the notes seriously compromises phrase coherence. He uses a big registration with 16-foot manual stops plus mixtures for the F-major fugue, and this tends to obscure the intricate contrapuntal argumentation that animates this movement. On the other hand, he gives us remarkably persuasive performances of Trio Sonata 2 and the A-minor Concerto after Vivaldi. The light registrations and

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**BACH: Organ Pieces**

*Trio Sonatas (6); Toccata & Fugue in D minor (Dorian); Trio in D minor; Toccata, Adagio, & Fugue in C; Canzona in D minor*

Kare Nordstoga—LAWO 1087 [2SACD] 129 min

This recording was made on the four-manual Arp Schnitger organ (1693) at St James Church, Hamburg. Great as this instrument is, I am not convinced that a large organ in a large church is the ideal vehicle for the Bach trio sonatas. They were probably written as study pieces for the composer’s eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. They are very different in style from most baroque organ music in that they have the character of chamber music. I believe they are heard to best advantage on instruments with a somewhat light and clear tone.

The Schnitger heard here was designed to have a large sound to fill a large space. Even the quieter registers have a dense and powerful tone that is at odds with the liveliness and transparency of the music. For example, the first movement of Sonata 5 in C is one of the most cheerful of Bach’s works, but here the sound is simply too big to be playful. These are very ponderous performances. The organ sounds uncomfortably close, presumably so recorded for the sake of clarity, but there is still a lively reverberation that obscures the details of the part writing.

In general, I prefer the recordings by Margaret Phillips (Regent), Olivier Vernet (Ligia), or the classic recordings of Marie-Claire Alain (Erato). Among more recent recordings, Todd Fickley has demonstrated a keen feel for the style of the trio sonatas in the two that have appeared so far in his “Bach Project” using Hauptwerk computer technology (Vol. 1: MSR 1561; S/O 2015; Vol. 2: MSR 1562 below).

Of the pieces recorded here, the organ is heard to best advantage in the broad gestures of the Toccata, Adagio & Fugue in C. The Dorian Toccata & Fugue needs greater clarity. The fugue in particular is a rich fabric of contrapuntal argumentation with intense chains of suspensions. Here it comes across as a jumble of sound in a reverberant cloud. The other two pieces are the single-movement Trio in D minor and the Canzona in D minor, given here in an understated performance at slow tempo.

Kare Nordstoga is organist of Oslo Cathedral and a professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music. His technique is more than equal to the Bach trio sonatas, widely regarded as the most demanding of his organ works. Sometimes the playing sounds abrupt and impatient, especially in the Toccata, Adagio, & Fugue in C, where Nordstoga does not convey the spacious rhetorical pacing of the music.

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GATENS
bouncy articulation of the outer movements of the trio sonata impart a personality of chamber music that I consider indispensable for these works. Too often we hear organists treating them as conventional baroque organ music with a result that is excessively ponderous. Much the same is true of the concerto, though here the outer movements have heftier registrations. The chorale preludes display some of the exquisite solo registers of the Marcussen organ.

GATENS

BACH: Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue; Partita 1; French Suite 5; English Suite 3
Idil Biret, p—IBA 8571310—76 minutes

Biret plays Bach on the piano with minimal pianistic touches. She uses very little pedal, but can phrase voices just with her fingers. She does not adopt the harpsichord-like terraced dynamics of just loud and soft, but her crescendos and decrescendos are suitably limited. She takes most indicated repeats, sometimes not repeating the second half. She adds some ornamentation the second time through. Her strong accents and the very close placement of the microphones can make for some harsh piano sounds in this recording from 2015. There is much beauty in the slow movements, but little pizzazz or personality in the quick ones. Her tempos seem slower than average.

When I listen to others play the familiar French Suite 5 (Schiff is a favorite, London 225373) I usually hear more engaging pianism and almost always more inventive touches on repeats: additional ornamentation, different phrasing and/or dynamic inflections. There are none of Gould’s tempo or dynamic eccentricities here, or his vocal embellishments, but the connection Gould has with the music is also absent. He also rarely takes a repeat. The French Suite’s final movement is a joyous Gigue—a wonderful romp that is usually taken at a pretty fast tempo. Biret is clear and always under control, but I want her to let loose. I felt the same about the Partita and Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue. She is best in the English Suite.

The part of me that likes to analyze Bach wants performances like Biret’s. I can follow the harmonic movement well, and each contrapuntal voice is clean and clear. I do not get distracted by the performance—as I do with, say, Argerich (DG) or Schiff, my two contrasting favorites. If I want to delve deep into any of the works here, this recording is worth a listen; but for a Bach piano recital I will go elsewhere.

HARRINGTON

BACH: Partita 4; English Suite 3; Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue
Nelson Freire—Decca 4788449—82 minutes

Freire’s is a frustrating release. He plays certain works romantically, with profound expression, noticeable but musical rubato, and lovely, lovely tone: a slow movement from a Marcello concerto transcription, the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, chorale preludes (including ‘Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland’). In the two suites, the sempre staccato comes on and with it a slight but noticeable and irritating rushing with very little rubato and attenuated joy and beauty. How I long for truly romantic Bach suites on the piano. Freire could do it if he wanted to.

On the other hand, Aurelia Shimkus’s release is a romantic delight from start to finish. Although I prefer the Liszt Prelude and Fugue on BACH on organ, her performance is electrifying in its technique and very moving in its expression. She plays the most romantic account of Bach’s Capriccio on the Departure of the Beloved Brother that I’ve ever heard, inflecting it with generous rubato, extra bass octaves, and more. This performance harmonizes perfectly with four Bach-Busoni transcriptions: three chorale preludes (‘Ich Ruf zu Dir,’ Komm Gott, Schopfer, Heiliger Geist,’ and ‘Durch Adams Fall ist Ganz Verderbt’) along with the Toccata and Fugue in D minor. Compared to these readings, the performance of the unfinished quadruple fugue from The Art of Fugue is a little tame, but hardly antiseptic.

HASKINS

BACH: Psalm 51;
VIVALDI: Nisi Dominus, R 608
Celine Scheen, s; Damien Guilhon, ct; Le Banquet Celeste/ Damien Guilhon
Glossa 923701—56 minutes

One of the more curious pieces in the Bach catalog is his adaptation of Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater to an anonymous German paraphrase of Psalm 51 (“Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden...”). The German text is in the same meter and rhyme scheme as the Latin Stabat Mater. Pergolesi’s valedictory masterpiece was written in 1736. By the 1740s manuscript copies of it were circulating in northern Europe. Bach’s adaptation probably dates from 1745 to 1747, but the occasion for it is not known. The work was only discovered in 1946.

Bach’s adaptation remains very close to the original in most respects. He modifies the string writing mainly by giving the viola a more independent part, where in Pergolesi that instrument tends mostly to double the bass.
There are occasional modifications of the voice parts, sometimes to accommodate the prosody of the German text, but Bach also produces shapely lines in places where the original has repeated longer notes. Bach reverses the order of the second and third movements from the end, presumably to suit the expressive character of the German text, and he repeats the final minor-key “Amen” in the major.

The piece can be sung by two solo voices, as it is here, though I have heard performances that use a small chorus of treble voices for some movements. Here the voices of soprano Celine Scheen and countertenor Damien Guil- lon (who also directs the performance) blend remarkably well. They are both notable for purity and refinement of tone and outstanding vocal control.

In general, the recorded sound is warm and clear. The recording was made at the Abbaye aux Dames in Saintes, France. There is a rich reverberation that is most evident at the ends of movements. The gentle lingering of the sound makes the upward-resolving appoggiaturas in the 11th movement (‘Offne Lippen’) exceptionally poignant. The sound does not seem uncomfortably close, but in the extended introduction to the first movement the rhythmic snuffling of the string players is quietly audible.

Antonio Vivaldi’s Nisi Dominus (R 608), a setting of Vulgate Psalm 126 for alto solo, strings, and continuo, probably for Vespers, comes early in his output, most likely intended for one of the more vocally gifted young ladies at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice. Program annotator Stefano Russomanno points out that the setting seems to be suffused with the character of an instrumental concerto. Sometimes the voice part suggests virtuoso violin writing, and Guillón handles the vocal acrobatics impressively. There is some delicious word painting, as in III, where upward rushing scales accompany the word “surgite” (rise up), and the music suddenly turns slower and more sustained at the word “sederitis” (take rest). The doxology is unusually expansive: spread over three movements, with the first of the three taking nearly five minutes.

Damien Guillón is one of the top countertenors currently active, with an impressive record of concert and operatic performances as well as recordings. He has worked with many of today’s leading exponents of early music. He founded the instrumental ensemble Le Banquet Céste in 2009, and his reputation as a music director continues to grow.

**BACH: St John Passion**

Julian Pregardien, Evangelist; Tareq Nazmi, Jesus; Christina Landshamer, Ulrike Malotta, Tilman Lichdi, Krešimir Štrazanac; Bavarian Radio Choir; Concerto Cologne/ Peter Dijkstra

BR 900909 [2CD] 106 minutes

This is a concert recording from two performances in Munich in March of 2015. In addition to the two CDs of the work itself, there is a third disc (72 minutes) containing a talk (in German) about the St John Passion with musical illustrations.

In his program notes, Karl Böhmer writes at some length about the different versions of the St John Passion and the fact that it would have been performed in Bach’s day by no more than eight voices, with the soloists also singing in the chorales and choruses. Bach never produced a definitive final version of this, as he did for the St Matthew Passion. The first version was written in Bach’s first year at Leipzig for Good Friday of 1724. The 1725 version marks the greatest departure from his original conception, with three replacement arias and a new opening chorus based on ‘O Mensch Bewein’ that was later transposed up a semitone for the conclusion of Part I of the St Matthew Passion. In 1739 Bach began work on what would have been a definitive version of the St John Passion, but broke off for unknown reasons towards the end of Part I. The version of 1749, the year before he died, returns for the most part to the original conception of 1724, but with some revisions of the aria lyrics (possibly mandated by the city authorities) and instrumentation.

The “standard” performing edition is a compilation that corresponds to none of these exactly. In general the libretto of 1724 and instrumentation of 1749 are favored. It seems somewhat odd that Böhmer should delve into these historical matters when the present recording is essentially the “standard” version performed by a choir of about 30, a separate quartet of soloists for arias and recitatives, and separate soloists for the Evangelist and Jesus.

The performance leaves a mixed impression. The instruments seem closer and clearer than the voices. In several places the solo voices are overbalanced. In secco recitatives the harpsichord is so prominent as to be a distraction. Peter Dijkstra generally favors quick tempos. The orchestral introduction to the opening chorus of Part I has a boldness and urgency that is very effective. The recitatives tend to sound rushed and abrupt. The drama of the work demands vehemence, but the effect here is more frantic than dramatic. Greater rhetorical nuance is required. Much the same can be said for the crowd choruses. They should be
ferocious, but that does not mean the tempos must always be blisteringly fast. Over the course of the work that can be tiresome.

The treatment of the chorales is often a vexed question. I am convinced that they represent the voice of the congregation, even if they are not actually sung by the congregation. They ought to be sturdy, dignified, and steady—like the timbral pillars that uphold the more personal devotion and elaborate music of the arias and the narrative flow of the recitatives and crowd choruses. Some directors turn them into perfunctory little choral allemandes. Others treat them as subjective choral part songs with many inflections of tempo and dynamics. Dijkstra does not fall headlong into either of these extremes, but he inclines to the part song approach, especially with exaggerated breaks for commas in the text that do not correspond with the musical phrases.

The soloists are very good, though with the possible exception of Julian Pregardien (Evangelist) their names are not quite household words. Bass Tareq Nazmi has the dignified gravity for the role of Jesus. One of the most beautiful aria performances here is by alto Ulrike Malotta, whose rich tone and vocal control make 'Es ist Vollbracht' from Part II deeply moving. Soprano Christina Landshamer is clear and lithe in the athletic lines of 'Ich FOLLOW dir'. Tenor Tilman Lichdi sounds technically stretched in 'Erwäge, wie sein Blutgefärbter Rüchen—tentative in places. Bass Kresimir Strazanac is overbalanced in 'Eilt, ihr Angefochtenen Seelen', but he hardly has a fighting chance with Dijkstra's blistering tempo, which makes the aria sound almost trivial.

The competition is stiff in recordings, and without presuming to give a general overview, it is worth mentioning some that I have found particularly attractive. John Eliot Gardiner with the Monteverdi Choir, the English Baroque Soloists, and an impressive roster of solo singers (SDG 712; J/A 2011) delivers a performance that is at once poised and dramatic. Philippe Pierlot (Mirare 136; S/O 2011) proves that the work really can be performed convincingly with slender forces. The recording by Masaaki Suzuki and Bach Collegium Japan (BIS 921; S/O 1999) may not be as strong dramatically as some others, but he excels in the heartbreaking meditative quality he brings to the arias.

Peter Dijkstra, who is described here as an avowed anti-specialist, has been director of the Bavarian Radio Choir since 2005.

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The past is always a rebuke to the present...it’s a better rebuke than any dream of the future.

--Robert Penn Warren

**American Record Guide**

**Bach: Toccatas**

Alessandro Deljavan, p—Piano 99—74 minutes

We have previously reviewed the Italian-Iranian pianist Alessandro Deljavan in programs of Alkan (J/F 2014), Godard (M/A 2015), and Hummel (M/J 2015). I see he has also released Chopin Waltzes, which Mr Vroom liked (M/A 2016), and Schumann, a composer that I think would suit him well. As a pianist, his technique is flawless and his tone almost impossibly perfect.

Although his Bach playing suffers from the nervous tic of almost constant detached playing in fast movements, I can say at least that his detached playing never sounds ugly or violent, but rather light (without becoming pallid). In slow movements or interludes he often turns a phrase in an unexpected and wonderfully musical way (Toccatas 1 and 6). Other interpretations are middle-of-the-road and, frankly, uninspiring (the rather workaday account of Toccat 3, for instance). But his pianism is exquisite; I will return to this release.

**HASKINS**

**Bach: transcriptions**

Angelika Nebel, p—Hänssler 98941—75 minutes

This is the third such compilation from Angelika Nebel (S/O 2010; J/A 2013). She has avoided the standard transcriptions by people like Busoni and given us what lesser-knowns have made of Bach’s music.

James Harrington reviewed the first two volumes. He called it beautiful music, beautifully played, and commented on her “unerring sense of great arrangements”, which she plays with every possible nuance. The music is attractive, and her playing is as musical as you could hope.

This starts with Lizzi’s transcription of the organ Prelude and Fugue in C. There are transcriptions here by Egon Petri and Kabalevsky, as well as by the pianist—but most are by people you never heard of.

“Clarity of voices, a perfect legato, and never a harsh sound characterize her playing” (Harrington). I agree. You will never tire of this: Bach’s great music in very pleasant transcriptions.

**VROOM**

**Bach: 3 Trio Sonatas; Suite in D minor**

Lorenzo Cavasanti, rec, fl; Sergio Ciomei, hpsi, org—Dynamic 7739—51 minutes

Not long ago Lorenzo Cavasanti and Sergio Ciomei recorded Vivaldi Sonatas and I was lavish with praise (M/J 2014). Here they present more traditional fare, though it is untraditional in a way. This program consists of the Suite, S

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997 performed on recorder and harpsichord and Trio Sonatas S 525, 526, and 529. I recently heard two different and desirable recordings of the complete set S 525-30 adapted this way (M/J 2015). Although there was room to include one more sonata here, what we have is superior, with crisp energy and sometimes magical intermingling between the top two voices. The switches between flute and recorder, harpsichord and organ add welcome variety. In addition, Ciomei has written the booklet essay explaining some of their decisions.

GORMAN

BACH: Violin Concertos (4)
Cecilia Bernardini, Huw Daniel, v; Alfredo Bernardini, ob; Dunedin Consort/ John Butt
Linn 519 [SACD] 60 minutes

Butt and his Dunedin group continue to build their Bach repertoire with this elegant release. The two surviving solo concertos are here, along with the Two-Violin Concerto and its natural companion, the reconstructed Concerto for Oboe and Violin. Beyond all these, the only bonus, for us and for Alfredo Bernardini, is the brief sinfonia to Cantata 21, Ich Hatte viel Bekummernis, with its poignant oboe solo.

Cecilia Bernardini, now the leader of the consort, is the daughter of Alfredo, and they instinctively play harmoniously together in the C-minor duo concerto. Cecilia herself has a somewhat light but very appealing sound, playing with springy vitality in all her assignments. Daniel, another member of the group, exhibits somewhat less personality, but is a dutiful partner. Tempos are all on the brisk side, though they are finely modulated. The accompanying ensemble consists of four violins and one each of viola, cello, and bass. Butt leads from the harpsichord.

These are engaging and thoroughly enjoyable performances that stand up well to competition. Buyers should certainly consider alternatives among period-style presentations. There is the recent Harmonia Mundi release (902145; J/A 2013) by the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra. In my review of that I discussed other possibilities, including Christopher Hogwood (a classic for Oiseau-Lyre), Rachael Podger for Channel, and my favorite, by Andrew Manze for Harmonia Mundi. Each of those earlier releases includes varying “bonus” music, and one’s choice might be affected by those factors.

Still, this latest recording of the four basic works can be confidently recommended.

BARKER

BACH: Violin Sonatas
Erich Hobarth; Aapo Hakkinen, hpsi
Aeolus 10236 [2SACD] 120 minutes

Beyond the expected set of six sonatas, S 1014-19, this includes the three probably-later sonatas, S 1021-23. Overall, the easy-flowing interpretations offer few surprises. I have liked all of Hakkinen’s previous albums using this ex-Kipnis “Big Red” harpsichord, where he played Bach concertos and solo pieces. Its sound can be overbearing here when he engages the 16-foot stop. Hobarth competes with the harpsichord’s extra resonance by playing with prominent vibrato, especially in the E-major Sonata. The C-minor Sonata is fast and restless. In the two sonatas where the harpsichord’s right-hand part is improvised, it works fine here without a cello.

Hobarth plays reliably, always in full control without projecting much personality. The F-minor Sonata is often hazardous to violinists’ intonation, but there are no such problems here. In two of the three extra sonatas, Hakkinen plays a smaller Italian-styled harpsichord. It draws out a gentler touch and more relaxed-sounding arpeggiation from him, becoming the highlight here for me. It made me wish the whole album had been on this instrument. Hobarth seems to be playing more easily here, too. The booklet’s essay is thorough; it gives the background of this music, and it explains Bach’s roles as a violinist.

BLEHMAN

BACH: Violin Sonatas
Leila Schayegh, v; Jorg Halubek, hpsi
Glossa 923507 [2CD] 95 minutes

Schayegh and Halubek have been playing these sonatas together for ten years, and it shows. This is like a championship figure-skating routine. Their fluent gestures challenge the laws of gravity. It sounds as if each completely trusts whatever the other might do spontaneously with the tempo or with newly improvised notes, and is there for them. They elaborate the music richly, not only with imaginative melodic divisions over the harmonic structure, but also with an inserted harpsichord cadenza.

The tempos tend to be swift, but breathe well. Intonation is perfect. The violinist uses two different mutes in some slow movements. The harpsichordist plays on four-foot stop alone at one place, inverting the music (the violin plays bass!), but it works. The alternate movements to Sonata 6 are included as an appendix, so one can program a CD player to insert them at the right spots.

This is a must-hear album. Some might not
fancy the amount of freedom in the improvisations, but it sounds essential to me, the way they have integrated all this. The balance and tone are excellent, too. I gave a copy to a friend who never heard this music before, because this is the way it goes.

B LEHMAN

**Bach: Solo Violin Sonatas & Partitas**

Pavlo Barton Pine—Linn 2360 [2CD] 148 minutes

Rachel Barton Pine—Avie 366 [2CD] 126 minutes

Here are two more sets of the perennially popular Bach solo violin works. Pavlo Beznoziuk is a period instrument specialist, and Rachel Barton Pine divides her time between an instrument in modern setup and an instrument in baroque setup. Here, she plays her violin in modern setup, the “Marie Soldat” Guarnerius del Gesu of 1742, but she uses a baroque bow. I assume that Beznoziuk plays an instrument in baroque setup with a baroque bow, but I really don’t know.

I was surprised to find Beznoziuk sounding unenergetic. His tempos are often a bit too slow, and he sounds almost labored sometimes. He often sounds just this side of plodding. I felt like he needed to drink a cup of coffee before the takes to perk up. Pine doesn’t sound like that. Her playing is warm and gentle, but she is too reserved for my tastes. She doesn’t plumb the emotional depths of these remarkable works but merely skims their surfaces. Neither performer offers any special insights. Again, I direct the reader to Lara St John’s set (J/F 2008) for a real emotional workout.

The set by Pavlo Beznoziuk, recorded in 2007, was originally issued as SACDs in 2011. The sound is good but it has a bit more ambience than I like. Pine’s set has a warmer, more close-up sound that I much prefer.

**Bach: Solo Sonatas & Partitas**

Eliot Fisk, g—Nimbus 20581 [2CD] 124 minutes

Eliot Fisk is among the most important guitarists of my generation. He is a graduate of Yale, student of Andres Segovia and Ralph Kirkpatrick, is on the faculty of the Salzburg Mozarteum and the New England Conservatory, and has won international recognition. Yet he has never inspired the affection of listeners the way artists like Russell, Barrueco, or Isbin have; and this set is a good example why. Though he has a monumental technique, he seems to prefer a “take no prisoners” approach to one of refinement and beauty.

Listen to the double to the corrente of the first partita—sure, it’s inhumanly fast, but it’s not even or smooth. Notes that should be connected are shot out as from an AK 47. Or listen to the prelude of the first sonata, where one can’t seem to decide what the meter is. And the great Chaconne is marred by uneven articulation and odd accents. The arpeggio passage after the major key B section is frankly weird.

Yet there are some absolutely lovely performances here, free of affectation and careless playing. The third sonata and partita are as fine as any I’ve heard.

This was recorded in 1999 and originally released by the Musical Heritage Society, and the notes from the original are here as well. Competition is rather limited—no surprise, since few have the vision—or ability—to perform and release this entire set. Nicholas Golus’s masterly set of the sonatas on Naxos remains available and has all the refinement and consistency the music demands. The partitas are a problem. Timo Korhonen’s set was disappointing (N/D 2010). The third partita was transcribed by Bach himself for lute, and there have been many fine recordings—my favorite remains Scott Tennant on GHA, though that only seems available used. Pepe Romero’s masterly performance of the second partita is deleted except as part of an 11-disc retrospective of his work on Decca. Nigel North’s recent set of all the solo violin and “cello works” (J/A 2015) was exquisite, but it’s on lute, not guitar. Perhaps your best bet at this point is Paul Galbraith’s set on Delos, restrained and elegant. But again, he’s playing an eight-string hybrid instrument held like a cello. That’s not terribly relevant in Bach, and if you want all of the music he is preferable to Fisk.

KEATON

**Bach: Well-Tempered Clavier I**

Celine Frisch, hpsi

Alpha 221 [2CD] 103 minutes

I appreciate that this is very well done, but I don’t like the results. Supremely difficult music sounds easy for Celine Frisch. Her Apollonian performance is perfectly polished, which is impressive in her technique and thoroughness, but it makes the music sound less interesting. There is not much arpeggiation to clarify the counterpoint. Much of the interpretation is so fast and aggressive that I hardly notice anything but the raw speed, especially in the fugue in A and the preludes in E-flat and B. The slower music goes along without much inflection. In fast pieces there are long passages of unvaried articulation. Once each prelude or fugue has started, hardly anything surprising happens before the end. Because of the Pythagorean major thirds in the unspecified temperament, some rough intonation draws
too much attention to itself, especially in the B-flat minor and A-flat pieces. This removes some beauty from the music.

The booklet essay says generic things about the composition and nothing about the performer or instrument. The sound is fine.

Some listeners might want exactly what is offered here, but not this listener. I want more gentleness and grace, more unpredictability.

B LEHMAN

BACH: Well-Tempered Clavier I
Christophe Rousset, hp
Aparte 120 [2CD] 125 minutes

Over a month of listening to this, I haven’t found enough to enjoy. The main problem is that the harpsichord’s tone is harsh and lacks bloom. A note in the booklet by a harpsichord builder points out that this original Ruckers instrument from 1628 was nearly ruined in 1967 by some piano builders.

Rousset’s interpretation is mostly moderate and straightforward, without much emphasis of detail. There are a few startling spots in the E-minor and B-flat preludes where he plays chords without any arpeggiation. The E-flat prelude has tempo disagreements, so the opening section sounds like it has nothing to do with the rest of the prelude. The B-minor prelude is uncommonly fast, given the rest of his interpretation. Rousset used a surprising edition in the D-sharp minor fugue, taking one of the manuscript readings that has a high C-sharp. In the booklet notes with a short analysis of each piece, Rousset spends too much of his space referring to Book 2, about 20 years removed from this music. His assessment is weak, too: the presence of chromaticism in Bach’s music doesn’t automatically make the pieces “atonal”. Quite the contrary!

The temperament is unspecified but sounds like Vallotti, causing hundreds of rough places that are deal-breakers for my ears. Every piece with more than two or three sharps or flats in the key signature runs into problems along the way. The notes weren’t tuned moderately enough for the scales where they are played (for example, one hears a B-flat where the music calls for A-sharp). I know that some people relish such uncompromising spiciness, but it ruins about half the music to hear it run through this instrument’s unpleasant tone and intonation. I tried the set on several CD players—didn’t help. I buy Bach recordings for beauty.

Peter Watchorn’s set is far above this: it brings out strong affekt in the music and never sounds ugly.

B LEHMAN

BACH FAMILY: Oboe Concertos & Quartet
Jared Hauser, ob; Carolyn Huebl, v; Atlantic Ensemble; Blair Sinfoniette/ Robin Fountain
Blue Griffin 389—68 minutes

Jared Hauser performs works by JS Bach and two of his sons, Johann Christian and Carl Philip Emanuel. The C-minor Concerto is better known as a concerto for two harpsichords and orchestra, but it appears to be Bach’s own arrangement of a piece initially composed for oboe and violin. The F-major Concerto was also a harpsichord concerto (in E) before this re-working by Mr Hauser. The key change is better suited to the technique of the oboe, particularly at a period of time when the instrument was dramatically limited by the lack of range and keywork that the modern oboe employs.

The J.C. Bach Oboe Concerto, on the other hand, was certainly written for the oboe, and it leans toward the classical style with its transparent texture and sonata form. This is hardly surprising, as it was written in the mid-1760s after “the English Bach” had settled in London. The first performance of this took place when the young Mozart, who later wrote an oboe quartet of his own, was visiting London.

CPE Bach, one of the oldest of Bach’s large family, wrote two oboe concertos, transcribed from harpsichord originals. With its graceful, clean harmonies and vestiges of baroque elements, the E-flat Concerto bridges the baroque and classical periods. Unlike the other works on this disc, this piece affords the soloist several florid cadenzas, performed here with conviction, ease, and elan.

Jared Hauser boasts a silvery, singing tone and lovely phrasing, with tasteful, elegant, and appropriate ornaments. He is sensitively accompanied by the Blair Sinfoniette of Vanderbilt University, where he teaches. His collaborators in the Atlantic Ensemble match well with his style and grace. This is a thoroughly enjoyable performance.

PFEIL

BADINGS: Symphonies 4+5
Bochum Symphony/ David Porcelijn
CPO 777 669—62 minutes

Henk Badings made a bad name for himself when he took the position of professor at the Royal Dutch Conservatory in Utrecht. That school was renamed Reichskonservatorium at the time of the German occupation; Badings replaced a Jewish professor stripped of his position. It took him a long time to recover his reputation, and his work is slowly being reevaluated.

It is tempting to dismiss Symphony 4...
(1943) as catering to Teutonic (i.e. Nazi) taste, with its Wagnerian opening, first theme march, and standard forms; the finale gives a nod to Brahms (First Symphony finale, yet). The funereal slow movement, though, gives one pause under the circumstances. The finale concludes in an apparently confident major. It’s a skillful, competent piece impossible to condescend to, but many will object to its provenance.

When the war ended Badings found himself back in The Hague. Symphony 5 (1949) was written for the Concertgebouw’s 60th anniversary and was premiered by Van Beinum. This piece contains elements of Debussy, a little jazz, and a good deal of Francophilia, but the German background still governs. Those classic forms seem a little inorganic with their lack of inevitability and abrupt endings, but the end result is pleasant enough. I doubt anyone would consider these major revelations worthy of frenzied attention, but they may be of interest to collectors of midcentury conservatory symphonic music that’s been forgotten. Performances are excellent.

**BALAKIREV:** Piano Pieces
7 Waltzes; 4 Nocturnes; Fantasiestuck; Chant du Pecheur
Nicholas Walker—Grand Piano 713—76 minutes

As with Volume 1 (636, S/O 2013), Walker’s research at the St Petersburg Conservatory allows him to brings us another world premiere recording. This current disc owes much to Chopin’s influence on the leader of the “Mighty Handful” of Russian composers in the late 19th Century. While Balakirev’s waltzes and nocturnes may not be on quite the same level as Chopin’s, they are quintessentially Russian. Anyone with even a slight familiarity of the nationalistic music that Rachmaninoff and Scriabin grew up on will enjoy this.

Walker has uncovered early unpublished works and manuscripts that allow corrections to be made to ones already published. I am comparing contents and performances between Walker and Alexander Paley’s 6CD set (Brilliant 92617, originally recorded in 1992 on Essay 1030+2, M/A 1995). Walker plays at a quicker tempo in all but two of the common works. He also has better recorded sound, more interesting and sympathetic notes on the music, and works not available to Paley’s recording 20 years ago. I have no doubt that Walker’s series will replace Paley as the reference set for Balakirev and expect the journey towards its completion will be quite enjoyable.

**HARRINGTON**

**BARTOK:** 2-Piano Sonata;
**DEBUSSY:** En Blanc et Noir;
**SCHUMANN:** 6 Studies in Canon Form
Martha Argerich & Daniel Barenboim; Pedro Gonzalez & Lev Loftus, perc
DG 4795563—59 minutes

In concert at the Teatro Colon, in their home city of Buenos Aires, these two childhood friends make astonishingly good music together. This particular event, on July 26, 2015, was by all reports the cultural highlight of the season. This is the second in-concert recording of the pair in as many years (DG 479 3922, M/A 2015, made my Critics Choice list last year). As they walk on stage, hand in hand, one can only wonder if they recollect 60 or more years ago when, as children, they would play together under a grand piano at musical soirees. Now, universally acknowledged as two of the finest living pianists, they have found great joy and musical satisfaction by joining forces.

They open with Schumann’s Six Studies for Pedal Piano, a rather unusual set of pieces, all canons, arranged for 2 pianos, 4 hands by Debussy. One look at the original score and the possibilities for performance at two pianos are quite obvious. Debussy adds little to the original, simply giving one of the canonic voices to each pianist and dividing up the accompaniment and bass line. The beautiful phrasing of the first voice is always matched by the second, and there is much captivating music here. It is a wonderful, low key, romantic contrast to Debussy’s late two-piano masterpiece En Blanc et Noir. With at least a half dozen recordings of this work in my library, I heard new music and textures in the hands of these two pianists. The same holds true with Bartok’s unique and revolutionary work. One of my favorite works, it requires two virtuosic pianists, two percussionists playing a wide variety of instruments, and a perfection of ensemble made quite challenging by its rhythmic complexities. This performance goes to the top of my list, for both performance and recorded sound.

This concert has very few missed notes or moments of imprecise ensemble. The flaws are rare and do not intrude at all on the quality of the performances. The duo’s musicality and the creative spirit that flows back and forth between them is unmatched by any of the more note-perfect performances of these works. The Schumann is a rarity given a stellar performance. Both the Bartok and Debussy are standard repertoire pieces with many recordings available. No matter how many you might have, there will be new musical discoveries when listening to Argerich and Barenboim.

**HARRINGTON**
BARTOK: Violin Concerto; see PROKOFIEFF

BARTOK: Violin Sonatas, Rhapsodies; Solo Violin Sonata; Romanian Folk Dances; Piano Sonata; Andante
Tanja Becker-Bender; Peter Nagy, p
SWR 19003 [2CD] 147 minutes

Bartok was a curious composer. His early works have a late-romantic, often Straussian character. Then he went on a trip with his friend Zoltan Kodaly in 1908 to record Hungarian folk music, and after that his style began to change radically. I think Bartok the composer was born during that trip. This set assembles music from both before and after 1908. Most was written after, but there is a violin sonata from 1903 and an Andante from 1902.

Violin Sonatas 1 and 2 are two of the finest violin sonatas ever written. Sonata 2 was a favorite of Bartok and Joseph Szigeti, and they would play it whenever they performed together. It is a favorite of mine too, and I believe it to be an exploration into the mystery of life. Tanja Becker-Bender adopts a too straightforward approach to this music, failing to bring out the mystery of either sonata or the barbarity of Sonata 1. For Sonata 1, I stick by my recommendation of Gidon Kremer and Martha Argerich. For Sonata 2, anyone who loves this work must hear the definitive recording made in concert at the Library of Congress in 1940 by Bartok and Szigeti (J/F 1989). A very similar, superb performance in excellent SACD sound was released in 2014 by Barnabas Kelemen and Zoltan Kocsis (J/F 2015). Becker-Bender’s Rhapsodies lack the excitement that Isaac Stern and Leonard Bernstein bring to the First and the imagination that Lara St John and Ian Rechtman bring to the Second (J/F 1998). The Solo Violin Sonata lacks the majesty that Robert Mann brings to it (J/A 2003). The most satisfying performance of a work by the mature Bartok by Becker-Bender is of the Romanian Folk Dances. It is a good performance with plenty of enthusiasm, but it is hardly alone in that. Peter Nagy performs the Piano Sonata to good effect with a real feel for the work’s idiom. The Violin Sonata of 1903 and the Andante of 1902 sound like the works of a very inferior composer, and they cannot even hold my interest. The early Violin Sonata especially outstays its welcome: Sonata 2 last about 20 minutes, but this piece goes on for 28 minutes and has much less to say. I agree with Bartok’s decision to remove his early music from his catalog.

Bartok’s music for the violin is some of the finest ever written, so seek out the best recordings of these works.

MAGIL

BATE: Cello Concerto; see BAX

BATES: B Sides; Liquid Interface; Alternative Energy
Mason Bates, synths; San Francisco Symphony/Michael Tilson Thomas—SFS 65—71 minutes

Mason Bates (b. 1977) credits as his major influences Beethoven, Pink Floyd, and some 1990s Detroit DJs (Bates was a DJ himself). He studied at Juilliard with David Del Tredici and John Corigliano; the latter in particular seems to be the major influence; this conductor is also cited as a mentor. The music is a good example of what one might expect from a Millennial postmodernist: tonal, with mild minimalist influence, filled with pedal points, ostinatos, and uncomplicated counterpoint. Orchestration is professional and tinged with touches of movie music. There are plenty of beats and some pop flavor. Technology is omnipresent (Bates’s instrument is the synthesizer). His work is unquestionably Americanist, with some old-fashioned jazz and even a little bluegrass sprinkled in to go along with the pop. Topics are of our time. Mr Bates has a lyrical bent that verges on the romantic. There are some touches of alien mystery invading the proceedings.

In general, the music is thoroughly accessible and is probably meant to draw in the young unwashed crowd. The work is filled with color and will not offend anyone. I doubt it will impress more sophisticated audiences who want more expressive substance.

The packed program opens with The B Sides, referring to the flipsides of hit records. The voice of a rocket captain is heard disembodied in III, where a grand rising scale leads to the climax. Textures can become dense and intense for excitement and progress to standing-ovation stuff by the end.

The subject of Liquid Interface is global warming. The first movement deals with the melting of an Antarctic glacier. A playful scherzo (‘Liquido’) follows. The slow movement is more lyrical but eventually moves into swing dreams (it’s New Orleans, of course), and the finale begins as a Coplandesque hymn before evaporating into mysterious silvery droplets.

Alternative Energy proposes a journey through a number of dance-like episodes held together with insistent harmony and some bluegrass flavor. A particle collider is suggested by electronic atmospherics and robust slams (‘collisions’) resulting in a robotic dance. A century from now we end up in China and proceed with a robust Asiatic frolic. We end a century later in 2222 in a nuclear plant in the wilds of mysterious Iceland, of all places. This is, to say the least, a unique jour-
ney, and is musically quite diverting, if not filled with memorable expressivity.

I could say the same about most of this music, but would never deny Mr Bates's gifts and formidable technique. These are bright, amiable, and sonically striking works that should be crowd-pleasers. I would like to see how much exists below the glittering surfaces.

GIMBEL

BATES: Mothership; Sea-Blue Circuitry; Attack Decay Sustain Release; Rusty Air in Carolina; Desert Transport
Boston Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose
BMOP 1045—54 minutes

Mason Bates enjoys a lot of attention these days—he initially caught my eye as a composer who has also performed as a DJ and incorporates some of the sounds of electronic dance music into his scores. About six months ago I heard part of his 2012 violin concerto (J/F 2015), which I found masterly (but which did not float Gil French’s boat). He studied with Corigliano, and his music has a sheer and ebullience that reminds me of the older composer. In terms of his stylistic orientation, the music also seems to participate in the movie music that John Williams wrote to revitalize that repertory as well as the quirky flirtation with pop culture that Michael Torke attempted about 40 years ago. That Bates accomplishes this unusual combination with such flair speaks of his considerable technique as a composer, his ear for harmony and sonority, and his fine feel for form.

The four works here—with titles like Mothership, Sea-Blue Circuitry, Attack Decay Sustain Release, Rusty Air in Carolina, Desert Transport—will please some of our readers, annoy others, and nauseate a few more. The problem for the naysayers will be the light touch of Bates’s music: a certain breezy accessibility that is neither fish nor fowl, that isn’t particularly effective on the dance floor and a bit too ingratiating to measure up to the kind of momentous utterances that many of us prefer in orchestral music. (Perhaps the fault lies also with the performances, which are slick and often superficial—playing the right notes with the right rhythms and the right volume is no longer sufficient for performances of new music.)

Still, there are moments in some of the works—particularly Sea-Blue Circuitry and Desert Transport—where the alchemy comes together brilliantly, suggesting sentiments both moving and culturally weighty. If he chooses to—and he just might, based, in particular, on my earlier encounter with the violin concerto—Bates will settle into the compositions of his maturity with youthful delight and the wisdom or poetry that I think gives new classical music a lasting impression. If he doesn’t, the works he produces—which are, in the end, quite a lot of fun—will not lack for enthusiastic audiences.

HASKINS

BAX: Cello Concerto;
BATE: Cello Concerto;

Lionel Handy, vc; Scottish National Orchestra/ Martin Yates—Lyrita 351—61 minutes

Arnold Bax’s concerted works have never been as popular or often recorded as his symphonies, though they are just as notable examples of this Englishman’s impressive mastery of lush, imaginative orchestration. I’m only aware of one other recording of his 1932 Cello Concerto, and that dates back over a quarter-century: Rafael Wallfisch on Chandos 8489 (M/A 1988), issued on LP and cassette as well as then-new-fangled CD.

But despite many felicities in scoring, the thematic ideas in this concerto, however melilious, are too my ears lacking in the shapeliness and character needed to fix them in mind. This of course is the complaint that many have about much of Bax’s music: gorgeous robes draped over a less than commanding statue. If Bax is your cup of tea, you’ll very likely be delighted with this 38-minute creation mined from the same quarry as his even bigger symphonies, as was ARG’s reviewer back in 1988, Arved Ashby. But on the other hand if you find them “loose and baggy monsters” (as Henry James described the typically well-padded Victorian novel) then, like me, you’ll probably consider them pleasant background music but not sharply etched or taut enough to hold sustained attention. No blame (if any there be) attaches to cellist Lionel Handy or the orchestra or Martin Yates; their playing is outstanding, as are Lyrita’s sonics.

The music of Stanley Bate (1911–59) is much less familiar than Bax’s, and only in the last six or seven years have his symphonies and concertos begun to appear on commercial recordings (on the Dutton label—see ARG’s index for reviews). Though still strongly bound to traditional forms and modern-but-tonal harmonies, Bate’s 1953 Cello Concerto, here in its first recording, compares favorably to the Bax. It’s leaner and more sinewy, nimble and concise, with more forward motion and less luxuriating in lavish instrumental embroidery, has better and more memorable themes (especially in the elegiac slow movement), has clearer and more telling interplay between solo protagonist and orchestra, more cogent large-scale structural logic, and more direct
(and in my view more genuine) emotional charge. I won’t claim that Bate’s concerto is as good as the Walton, Barber, or Prokofieff; but it speaks a similar dialect and is at least in the same ballpark in quality, making it well worth seeking out by listeners who love those much-better-known masterpieces.

**M LEHMAN**

**BEETHOVEN: Cello Sonatas**

Daniil Shafran; Anton Ginsburg, p
Melodiya 2296 [2CD] 109 minutes

These sonatas are some of the most important staples of the cello literature. Shafran and Ginsburg were two of the most important performers on their instruments. Therefore, I’m a bit surprised that I have not run into these 1971 readings before.

As one might expect from the date of these recordings, the sound is fine and the interpretations are replete with vibrato from the old days. The playing is lively and expressive, as one expects from Shafran. Repeats are observed except in the first movement of Op. 5:2, which requests repeats of both halves of the Allegro and gets neither. Otherwise, these are highly accurate and enjoyable performances that I recommend to people who enjoy virtuosity in the earlier style of playing.

**D MOORE**

**BEETHOVEN: Diabelli Variations**

with Sonata 23
Nick Van Bloss, p—Nimbus 6276—80 minutes
with Other Diabelli Variations
Nami Ejiri, p—Genuin 16404—79 minutes

The biggest surprise is always Beethoven’s own use of Diabelli’s melody. For the musically astute, he does wonders with the little tune. For the lay person, the music may not be all that interesting or engaging.

Here are two more pianists entering the fray. The first adds one of the composer’s most famous sonatas to the mix, the other gives us a selection from the 50 variations created by some other composers.

Van Bloss is a young Londoner about to enter middle age, a product of the Royal College of Music, and a writer who has already produced his own autobiographical memoir, “Busy Body”. This he did during his 15-year retirement from concert giving. Now he is back on road again. He has emerged from his self-imposed exile as a pianist of a high order. His Diabelli is never forced, and it is innocent of interpretive excess. As the interview-style notes tell us, his period of rethinking and restudy have blessed us with far more than just another recording. Indeed, it is a testament as to why artists should get to know a work intimately before they commit to performing it.

Variations 16-18, for example, are sometimes dispatched with ultra speedy surety and a vengeance aimed at dazzling the listener. Bloss will have none of that. These, and many others, are played sanely, and they make their point without pressing the argument too much. I am also impressed with his handling the contrasts between the variations and the natural transitions he builds into the structure. His spare use of pedal helps to achieve exceptional clarity.

If an intellectual approach to the Diabelli threatens to turn off some listeners, fear not. Bloss has enough zing in his playing to hold the listener’s attention. His Appassionata is a strong effort that adds substantially to this well-filled disc. It should disappoint no-one and competes well with many other fine performances.

Born and trained in Tokyo, Nami Ejiri is now professor of piano at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. She can boast of having won the Vianna da Motta International Piano Competition in Portugal, along with other prizes in Italy, Austria, Poland, and Japan. Her Beethoven may sound a little wooden in variation 1, but settles into a respectable gait for most of her journey. As we might expect, it is all reasonably well played but a bit stiff, draggy, and unyielding, especially following on the heals of Bloss. She does tend to over-egg the pudding sometimes, and the heaviness of some of the variations is annoying. Still, it must be admitted that she has her own way of doing things. If the result is not yet another faceless performance, it is still not my cup of tea.

The remaining 9 variations are taken from the 50 that music publisher and composer Diabelli asked a wide variety of composers to contribute. It was to have been part of a compilation, but Beethoven went his own way and the rest is history. Nami’s choices include Czerny, Hummel, Liszt, Moscheles, and Schubert. All are interesting and well played, but the set has been recorded in excerpt and complete before. Melvin Chen offers a more appealing performance of the Beethoven that is “intellectual, smart, and pretty darn impressive”, along with several of the same selections by other composers (J/A 2006). The budget Brilliant label has a two-disc set containing the Beethoven and all 50 of Diabelli’s composers, in “nothing to sneeze at” performances (N/D 2015).

**BECKER**
**Beethoven: Piano Concerto 3; Mozart: Concerto 22**
Alicia De Larrocha; SW German Radio/ Garcia Navarro; Ernest Bour
SWR 1906—72 minutes

These recordings from 1977 and 1986 appear to be new to the catalog. While De Larrocha has recorded both works before, they were not with these conductors or orchestras. Since we usually associate her with Spanish music, these will be a discovery for many listeners.

The Southwest German Radio tapes have been remastered and the sound is quite good. The performances, while not striking out in new directions, are good as well. Beethoven's concerto has the advantage of Ernest Bour as conductor. His is a distinguished reading of the orchestral part and, if De Larrocha fails to contribute more than a decent, perfectly acceptable traversal of the score, fans of the pianist should not be disappointed. The problem occurs when one considers the many real- 

ly fine interpretations currently available. I'm afraid this just isn't up to the competition.

Mozart's concerto makes a stronger impression; the pianist demonstrates more sensitivity and more varied tonal control than in the Beethoven. Once again, the competition is fierce, but team Navarro and De Larrocha are well able to contribute competitively. If my enthusiasm seems muted, it's only because the 

Beethoven is clearly looking forward in the Ninth, so this was a bad time for the no vibrato affectation. It sort of works in the eerie violin writing in the opening, but when it pops up later, it is not to advantage, e.g., a passage near its end that anticipates Bruckner but sounds frail here. But this is an excellent Ninth anyway, exuberant with eloquence and verve, and the fast tempo really works. The bubbly Molto Vivace is light and deft. The Adagio sings and sounds fresh at the fast tempo. If the violins are thin when they accompany the winds in the horn solo, so be it. This is still a wonderful Adagio. The finale is almost rollicking sometimes, with some interesting balances and emphases on harmonies. It opens dramatically, with the cellos exceptionally eloquent, and the way the tune passes up the string choir is impressive. The vocal contributions are well scaled, and the small choir does its job well.

This Ninth is a true "ode to joy".

The First and Second go as expected, with the Second reflecting backward and looking forward with a touch of darkness at the same time. The opening to the Fourth is as dark as I have heard it, quite a feat for a chamber orchestra. My only complaint about the high-
spurred Seventh is the too-heavy accents in the opening.

Most of the problems here are occasional and probably the result of “period” influence: a few tempos that are too fast and hurried, exaggerated accents, and that minimal vibrato that sometimes helps make a small violin section too bright. At least there are none of those HIP swells.

The Polish Chamber Philharmonic strings sound small even for a chamber orchestra, and more bass would be welcome, but there are advantages to that small size. The recording in stereo is excellent, with fine staging, detail, and tone quality; and I have seen comments raving about the sound on a surround system. Tacet says these recordings were made on equipment run by vacuum tubes. Readers familiar with tube amplifiers often associate them with a dark warm sound, but many modern tube designs produce sound as clear as their solid state counterparts, and that is the case here. Thomas Seedorf’s notes take a historical approach and are worth reading even if you know these works well.

If, like me, you prefer large orchestra Beethoven, it may take a fine staging or two before you truly appreciate this set. But give it a chance. It is infectious.

**Hecht**

**Beethoven:** Symphony 7; Wellington’s Victory; Pleyel: Jubel March; Dussek: Brunswick March
Vienna Academy Orchestra/ Martin Haselböck
Alpha 473—63 minutes

Beethoven was the first great composer to present his concert music (symphonies and concertos) in something like the public concerts we have today. This recording repeats one such program, from December 8, 1813, when Beethoven conducted these works in the Ceremonial Hall of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. This recording, which uses period instruments, was made in the very same hall. In addition to the two works of Beethoven, marches of Pleyel and Dussek were played, using a mechanical military trumpet devised by Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, the metronome man. The instrument was recreated in 2015, and the marches are played in orchestrations by Thomas Trsek.

I listened to this Seventh only one day after hearing Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic do the piece. After hearing the intensity and, dare I say, brutality of Rattle’s interpretation, it was refreshing to hear lighter textures and more clarity in the part writing. You might say I was able to hear a little Haydn shining through. Tempos here are brisk, but appropriate for the emotional weight the musicians are trying to convey; and we have all the repeats.

It is an enjoyable recording—even the marches and Wellington’s Victory. It won’t be for people who prefer the probing and depth of great conductors leading large ensembles; but if you’re partial to this sort of thing, it is very nicely done. One wonders if Beethoven’s premiere sounded like this, but I’m pretty sure it didn’t; this is much too well played—in tune and nearly perfect in ensemble. So, while our imaginations may be able to take us back to 1813, there is really no way to know how close this brings us.

**Althouse**

**Beethoven:** Violin Sonatas 6+7; Rondo; 6 German Dances
Thomas Albertus Irnberger; Michael Korstick, p
Gramola 99053 [SACD] 58 minutes

Thomas Albertus Irnberger and Michael Korstick present the first two of Beethoven’s Op. 30 Violin Sonatas. These are very fine works, and Sonata 7 is the darkest of the sonatas. A certain concentration is needed to give these works the gravity they need, and though Korstick is up to snuff, Irnberger is not. He fails to hold my interest, and I like these pieces very much. He is too laid back for Beethoven and should listen more attentively to his perceptive pianist. The Rondo and Six German Dances simply do not hold my interest, though this may again partly be his fault.

**Magil**

**Beethoven:** Violin Sonatas
Tasmin Little; Martin Roscoe, p
Chandos 10888 [3CD] 238 minutes

The whole world knows these sonatas as numbered 1 through 10, but Chandos has chosen to list them by opus number. Why? Now that I got that off my chest, let us proceed.

As readers of ARG know by now, I never tire of saying that the essential quality a performer must have in order to correctly interpret Beethoven is rudeness. Rudeness was not only a part of his character; it was fundamental to his esthetic. Wild outbursts are the norm in his music, not the exception, and abrupt shifts of dynamics are his stock in trade and must make listeners jump out of their seats if done correctly. All of this actually serves a spiritual purpose—the joy of untrammeled self-expression and unembarrassed exuberance and the striving for ecstasy. Beethoven was an artist with his head in the clouds, and he got there not by floating but by vigorous bounding. His music is some of the most energetic ever written, and a feeling that they are

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about to lose control is often required of the interpreters.

The English are usually too reserved to do justice to this music, and Tasmin Little and Martin Roscoe are not exceptions. These aren’t bad performances, but the exhilaration that I want to hear in this music is lacking. With this approach, the gentle Sonata 10 (Op. 96) comes off best, though III especially could use a shot of methamphetamine. Sometimes Little and Roscoe sound downright sleepy in these works, though their tempos don’t necessarily drag.

My top recommendation for a set of these sonatas remains Augustin Dumay and Maria Joao Pires on DG (M/J 2003) followed closely by Gidon Kremer and Martha Argerich (J/F 1998). The greatest recordings ever made of Sonatas 5 and 9 (Spring and Kreutzer) were made by Szymon Goldberg and Lili Kraus (J/F 2013). Good sound.

BELLINI: Zaira
Saioa Hernandez (Zaira), Anna Malavasi (Nerestano), Simone Alberghini (Orosmane), Enea Scala (Corasmino), Michela Antenucci (Fatima), Abramo Rosalen (Lusignano); Valle D’Itria Festival/ Giacomo Sagripanti
Bongiovanni 2565 [2CD] 136 minutes

This opera by Bellini was an early failure and has been very seldom revived. This recording was made in 2012. Some of the music Bellini later recycled into other operas, and there are plenty of good Bellini tunes, though not up to the standard of Norma or Puritani. The biggest problem in a modern revival might be the story. The heroine must choose between a Muslim sultan with whom she is in love and her Christian father and brother. Though the major characters are mostly depicted as fair-minded and rational, any story that could exacerbate Christian-Muslim relations in our society might be wisely avoided. Therefore, don’t expect Zaira to turn up in many opera houses.

Among the musical high points worth noting is ‘O Zaira, in quel momento’, an aria given to Nerestano, a pants role who is discovered to be the brother of Zaira. The aria with its cabaletta is quite striking, and it is sung by Anna Malavasi, a mezzo who is the strongest member of the cast, displaying a beautiful sound and a wide range. Another effective moment comes in an ensemble near the end, just before the final tragic confrontation, when the people gathered in the garden express their varied emotions in an unusual blending of voices.

The other singers are quite good, though none quite up to Ms Malavasi’s level. In the title role, Saioa Hernandez shows plenty of coloratura ability and range, though her voice seems a bit monochromatic. The baritone Simone Alberghini sings well but without any particular distinction. The villainous role of Corasmino goes to a high tenor; Enea Scala sings all the notes, but he tends to sound very tight on top.

The chorus and orchestra perform ably. The set comes with a booklet containing an essay and a full text, but there are some errors in the text, including grammatical ones.

BLISS: Beatitudes; Enchantress; Rout; Madam Noy
Jennifer Vyvyan, Heather Harper, s; Pamela Bowden, a; Gerald English, t; Wigmore Ensemble; BBC Symphony & Chorus/ Rudolf Schwarz, Arthur Bliss—Lyrita 1115—76 minutes

Richard Itter, Lyrita’s founder, made home recordings on tape and acetate of many BBC broadcasts starting in 1952. Lyrita reached an agreement with the Beeb and Musicians’ Union in 2014 and began releasing some of these archival recordings. The Beatitudes was broadcast in 1964, and the others in 1957 and 1958; all are monophonic, but the sound is clear and clean and with only a moment or two of distortion—my ears adjusted to it quickly.

The Enchantress, for contralto and orchestra, is a long setting of Henry Reed’s adaptation of the Second Idyll of Theocritus, where a lady prays to gods and goddesses and works sorcery to bring her lover back to her. Bliss magnificently portrays her agony and desperation. The music is passionate in the truest sense of the word, and even in its obvious cinematic parts it remains several cuts above mere hackwork. Rout, for soprano, strings, flute, clarinet, side drum, glockenspiel, and harp, is a cheerful, festive number—‘rout’ meaning ‘revelry’—where the soprano sings made-up sounds rather than words.

The Beatitudes takes up the lion’s share of the album—48 minutes. It was commissioned for the opening of Coventry Cathedral in 1962, but it had to be performed elsewhere, mainly because of a conflict with the premiere of Britten’s War Requiem. The Coventry Theatre was the unfortunate choice, with its poor acoustics and schlepped-in Hammond organ. Not until 2012 was the piece finally performed in the intended space. Like the War Requiem, the traditional text is interspersed with poetry by other authors, including George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Dylan Thomas, and the prophet Isaiah. The music is expressive and dignified, even in its tumultuous moments, but on the whole it is not engrossing. There are no ideas that grab your full attention, nor
many subtleties that draw your mind briefly and leave your pondering their graces.

These performances are very good, with only a few flabby notes; and the singers are excellent, but the pieces deserve sympathetic recordings with modern sound. The Dutton label released the 1962 Coventry Theatre performance a few years back, but that’s the only other commercial recording I can find (we did not review it). Notes and texts are in English.

**Boismortier:** *Entertainments of the Countryside; Flute Suites*

Catherine Daron; Stephane Van Dyck, t; Lesser Pleasures of the King/Jean-Luc Impe

Musica Ficta 8020—61 minutes

6 Flute Sonatas, op 91

Wilbert Hazelzet; Gerard de Wit, hpsi

Brilliant 95086—57 minutes

The program from an ensemble calling itself The Lesser Pleasures of the King in reference to a French stock expression presents a variety of selections from four opus numbers that date from around 1730. The instruments you’ll hear are flute, bagpipe, viol da gamba, harpsichord, theorbo, and percussion. A tenor sings some airs, and the texts are printed in English and French. All the singing and the playing has impeccable style, and if you’ve never heard voice and bagpipe working in unison now you can. The booklet essay by performer and musicologist Jean-Christophe Maillard who died in 2015 now becomes a part of his legacy.

The *Entertainments* have a beautiful, reverberant sound, so if you like the French baroque style this program may recommend itself because it differs from anything else you might already have. Although this content is musical diversion, and the finger vibrato from the flutist may occasionally make you think something is amiss with the intonation, it’s a very pleasant way to pass an hour and one you’ll probably return to and recommend to others. I certainly will!

JS Bach was the first composer to write sonatas for flute and obbligato harpsichord. He wrote three, in A, E-flat, and B minor. This set of six Op. 91 was otherwise probably the first in the flute repertory, published in 1742. The notes by Th. Coldwell supply several examples of sonatas for solo instrument and obbligato harpsichord written before these to place the set in historical context, and the booklet also has the poem ‘To Mercury’ dedicating these sonatas to the great French flutist Michel Blavet.

Douglas Worthen and Ursula Dutschler on Musica Omnia (N/D 2010) gave marvelous performances using a replica of a Pascal Taskin harpsichord with many elements that add color including a buff stop. Another recording by Ivan Bushuev and Olga Martyanova (J/A 2013) was very nearly as good and had a large booklet plus SACD sound. Now Brilliant gives us two of the leading figures of the early music world in sound more lively and vibrant than either of them. Worthen and Wilbert Hazelzet sometimes differ in their interpretations, taking the middle movement of the Sonata in C minor at 2:25 and 3:43, for instance. They don’t differ in any consistent way; sometimes one is slower and one faster, sometimes their tempos are exactly the same. As a result, I have a hard time recommending and preferring one. Both pairs of players offer renditions that are superb and distinct enough to be complementary. The sonatas are presented in a scrambled order on this program, whereas Worthen presents them in order. Get this one for joyous, spirited playing that soars; and get the releases from Musica Omnia or Caro Mitis if you’d like to hear another approach just as good.

**Bortkiewicz:** Piano Pieces

Sonata 2; Yugoslav Suite; Fantasy Pieces; 3 Mazurkas; 2 Preludes; España; Lyrica Nova

Nadejda Vlaeva—Hyperion 68118—76 minutes

Sergei Bortkiewicz (1877-1952) is not a widely heard or recorded composer. A substantial recital of his piano music, as well played and recorded as we have here on a major label, should go a good way towards increasing the awareness of this very accessible late romantic composer. I reviewed six of the nine discs by Jouni Somero on the Finnish FC label (9723 & 9736, S/O 2012; 9740, 9741, 9742, J/F 2013). I was under the impression that his set was complete, but the current release contains a number of works he did not include. There is also no duplication of repertoire between this program and Hyperion’s other excellent Bortkiewicz piano recital by Stephen Coombs (Hyperion 67094, J/F 2001). I like Vlaeva’s sophisticated, yet thoroughly Russian approach to this music. She lets the music sing and doesn’t miss any of the big virtuosic moments either.

Bortkiewicz’s piano writing is stylistically influenced by Chopin, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Liadov. The technical requirements are most similar to what is found in Rachmaninoff. With few exceptions, his piano writing calls for a very secure technique. He is skillful at writing beautiful melodies, and I find his music generally positive and bright. There is drama, poetry, brilliance, and even some sadness and melancholy (though not to the
level we usually associate with Rachmaninoff). He described himself as a romantic and a melodist, with an aversion to what he called modern, atonal, and cacophonous music. In the four *Lyrica Nova* one hears touches of Scriabin, but these are still solidly in the late romantic style and display Bortkiewicz’s melodic skill.

The works selected for this program were all written in the 1940s in Vienna, where he lived from 1933 to the end of his life. The *Jugoslavische Suite*, *6 Fantasiestücke*, and 3 *Mazurkas* are all listed as world premiere recordings on Vlaeva’s website. Hyperion makes the more general statement that many of these pieces are recorded for the first time. Sonata 2 is a big (23 minutes) four-movement work that was first published in 1995. Composed in 1942 and premiered by the composer, it was assumed lost for many years. Vlaeva recorded the third movement (all that was released) during the 2006 Rarities of Piano Music Husum Festival (Danacord 669). She also gave the German (2006) and North American (2007) premieres of the sonata. Her previous recording of the complete work won my high praise (Music & Arts 1224, N/D 2009). I like this new recording even better. With 22 other tracks of smaller scale works, you cannot go wrong with this as a great introduction to the piano music of Bortkiewicz.

**HARRINGTON**

**BORUP-JORGENSEN**: Solo Viola Partita; Sonata; Percussion & Viola; O Baume Lebens; Mobiles after Alexander Calder; Violin-Viola Duo
Anette Slaat{o}, va; Helge Slaat{o}, v; Christina Bjorkoe, p; Signe Asmuss{en}, mz/ Mathias Reumert—DaCapo 8.226584—77 minutes

Axel Borup-Jorgensen (1924-2012) was born in Denmark but raised in Sweden. His music is squarely in the style of mid-20th Century Central European Expressionism. The shades of Schoenberg and Hindemith hover over these scores. Jorgensen does this style well, but he gives the impression of a talented mimic rather than an original. His music never engages my emotions.

Music for Percussion and Viola, perhaps inspired by Bartok’s Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, comes across as a bit gimmicky, and sometimes the percussion covers the viola. ‘O Baume Lebens’, with a text from Rainer Maria Rilke’s Fourth Duino Elegy, is a clever concept, but it too fails to move me. So many composers have adopted a modern or avant-garde style who really have nothing compelling to say, and I would say Borup-Jorgensen appears to be one of these, though he is technically accomplished.

**BRAHMS**

**BRAHMS**: Cello Sonatas
Roderic von Bennigsen; Idil Biret, p
IBA 8571319—58 minutes

This is without question the worst recording I have heard of these pieces. It is played with feeling but the cellist has a weak old man’s kind of vibrato, doesn’t use the written phrasing in many places, goes out of tune when he gets tired, and is hard on the ears. It is Disc 2 of a Biret Chamber Music Edition and was recorded in 1971. Her playing is fine in itself, and the two work well together; but it is not a performance to be heard more than once.

**D MOORE**

**BRAHMS & REGER**: Clarinet Quintets
Sharon Kam, cl; Isabelle van Keulen, Ulrike-Anima Mathe, v; Volker Jacobsen, va; Gustav Rivinius, vc—Berlin 643—75 minutes

Israeli clarinetist Sharon Kam performs two late-romantic autumnal masterworks for clarinet and string quartet that both say “farewell to life”—the Brahms Quintet in B minor and the Reger Quintet in A. German musicians Isabelle van Keulen, Ulrike-Anima Mathe, Volker Jacobsen, and Gustav Rivinius collaborate on the project.

**HASKINS**

**BOULEZ**: Piano Music, all
Marc Ponthus—Bridge 9456 [2CD] 81 minutes

On the face of it, one of the greatest of Boulez’s contributions was a considerable enlargement of the timbral possibilities in music. He was certainly not the first, nor the last, to elevate the sound of the music to such a prominent place; but I’ve always thought he was one of the greatest contemporary composers to pursue this concern.

Whatever his motivations—possibly his interest in timbre—piano music has occupied only a small portion of his catalog. There are the three sonatas (the last was never completed), the early *Notations* (1945), the 2001 *Incises*, and a brief *Page d’Ephemeride* (2005). The sonatas dominate the releases reviewed in our pages—among them a DG by Pavali Jumppa nen (J/A 2005). Over the course of a number of tries, I’ve never warmed very much to the earlier Boulez piano music (except the third sonata), but the late pieces appeal to me a great deal: the gestures and sonorities are more surprising and therefore more satisfying.

Marc Ponthus has devoted much of his career to music like this, and I suspect his performances are ideal. I wish the recording sounded a bit brighter to accentuate the dazzling, crystalline sonorities that Boulez favors. But the release is a must-have for this music.

**AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE**
The Brahms is somewhat curious. Kam released an outstanding rendition three years ago with the Jerusalem Quartet on Harmonia Mundi (902152; J/A 2013). Her effort here is almost identical—wonderful clarity, beautiful phrasing, and brilliant ensemble work—but the strings here are markedly different. They have a more gossamer sound and a more relaxed vision; the Jerusalem Quartet boasts a richer tone and greater unity in detail. Nevertheless, the performance is satisfying, and fans of the Reger will admire how the group underlines the beautiful moments in a score with abstruse themes and extra-chromatic harmonic progressions.

**HANUDEL**

**BRAHMS: Clarinet Quintet; ZEMLINSKY: Clarinet Trio**

Emma Johnson, cl; John Lenehan, p; Michelangelo Quartet—Nimbus 6310—67 minutes

In 1885, a group of German and Austrian musicians founded the Vienna Tonkünstlerverein (Vienna Musical Society) as a means to promote music in the Hapsburg capital city. As the honorary president, Johannes Brahms hosted several composer competitions to encourage new chamber music that followed the traditional path of the Leipzig School rather than the avant-garde ideas of the New German School. In the 1890s, Meiningen Court Orchestra clarinetist Richard Muhlfeld moved Brahms to come out of retirement and write some of his finest scores for him—notably the Trio in A minor, the Quintet in B minor, and the two sonatas. Hence, when the Tonkünstlerverein declared that the entries for the 1896 competition must have at least one wind instrument, 10 of the 18 submissions included the clarinet. This outcome should have been a windfall for the clarinet, but the only piece from the competition to have significant staying power was the third place winner, the Trio in D minor for clarinet, cello, and piano by a 25-year-old Alexander Zemlinsky.

Clearly inspired by the Brahms Trio for the same medium, Zemlinsky follows in the elder composer’s footsteps with fresh melodies, thematic economy, and stirring counterpoint. Brahms not only lauded Zemlinsky’s effort; he recommended it to his publisher, Simrock. Yet despite his success as a composer and a conductor, the modernist wave of the early 20th Century swept Zemlinsky aside, and he watched his one-time counterpoint student and brother-in-law Arnold Schoenberg make many more headlines. In the late 1930s, the rise of Nazi Germany forced both men to seek refuge in the United States; but while Schoenberg enjoyed celebrity in Los Angeles, Zemlinsky struggled in New York, and he soon died in obscurity.

In this 2013 recording, British clarinet soloist Emma Johnson enlists the Michelangelo Quartet in a presentation of the piece that probably occupied the minds of almost every entrant in the 1896 competition—the Brahms Clarinet Quintet. Formed in 2002, the Michelangelo Quartet is an ensemble of international soloists: Romanian violinist Mihaela Martin, Russian-born violinist Daniel Austrich, Japanese-born violist Nobuko Imai, and Swedish cellist-conductor Frans Helmerson. Afterward, Johnson asks Helmerson and noted British keyboardist and prolific recording artist John Lenehan to join her for the Zemlinsky Trio, a pairing that would have made Brahms smile.

Johnson usually emphasizes personality at the expense of fundamentals, but she makes an honest effort here. While her thin and tubby sound is still easy to pick out in the texture, her ensemble work is good, her intonation is more stable, and her handling of the expressive limits of her set-up is respectable. The Michelangelo Quartet is a very reliable partner in the Brahms, even if the group’s delicate sound is better suited for classical textures. Helmerson and Lenehan are both solid in the Zemlinsky.

**HANUDEL**

**BRAHMS: Intermezzi (10); SCHUMANN: Fantasy in C**

Iskander Zakirov, p

Blue Griffin 387—75 minutes

Zakirov was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and apparently has had an active performing career. His photograph places him somewhere in the 35–40 age range, though I have no idea when it was taken.

What is clearly evident is his artistry and his ability to handle these demanding works. The Fantasy shows his imaginative flexibility and his unfussy presentation. While he is well able to handle the technical hurdles, one is never aware of any attempt to display his prowess. The music is left to unfold naturally, and without calling undue attention to itself. Sometimes I wished for a little more bravura, but it would be hard to fault the sincerity of his playing.

The 10 Brahms Intermezzi are also very well executed and give the impression of a mature artist and scholar giving his all to the service of the music. There is no ego on display, no conscious effort to force a particular interpretive viewpoint on the music. It is simply there—to be played, to be experienced, to be enjoyed. Since these pieces are slow in tempo, I would advise not approaching them all at once.

Would I recommend this recording? Most
Brahms: Piano Pieces, all
Geoffroy Couteau—LDV 1705 [6CD] 6:36

Pieces, op 76; Rhapsodies, op 79; Fantasies, op 116; BACH-BRAHMS: Chaconne for Left Hand
Anna Vinitskaya—Alpha 231—73 minutes

Hungarian Variations; Waltzes; Piano Pieces, opp 76+118
Jonathan Blow—BIS 2127 [SACD] 81 minutes

Sonata 3; Ballade 4; Fantasies, op 116; Lullaby (arr Godowsky)
Brian Lee—Blue Griffin 383—76 minutes

Brahms’s instrument was the piano. In his youth he played in bars, and his musical career began as an accompanist for violinist Eduard Remenyi. He is not numbered among the virtuosos of his day—indeed he probably would have fought the honor—but he regularly performed his own music, which, as we know, is not a trivial assignment. His earliest works (early 1850s) were mainly sonatas, works that continue the Beethovenian example. Then he moved to variation form, including several sets: Schumann (1854), Hungarian Melody (1853-6), Original theme in D (1857), Sextet theme in D minor (1860), Handel Variations (1861), and Paganini Variations (1862-3). After all the variations we have nothing for about 15 years (if we ignore popular pieces: the Op. 39 Waltzes of 1867 and the Hungarian Dances of 1869). When he returned to the piano he wrote independent short pieces: six collections beginning with the op. 76 Piano Pieces (1878) and concluding with the Op. 119 Piano Pieces of 1893. These six sets contain 30 short works, almost all less than five minutes long and showing Brahms’s language at its most concentrated.

Couteau’s six discs are nicely laid out in chronological order, thus making it easy to navigate. It is always interesting and instructive to examine the three early sonatas and the Op. 4 Scherzo. All are challenging, difficult works that show the roughly 20-year-old composer flirting with virtuosity and already interested in rhythmic irregularity and surprise; the opening of the first sonata’s finale, for example, makes almost no sense to the ear; what is the meter? They also show, though, a composer of serious intent and great promise. The second sonata is the most romantic of the group with eruptions of emotion and closing with soft trills that remind us of late Beethoven. The best of the bunch (and the most often played), though, is the third sonata; because here we find a more direct expression along with the touching moments (the second theme of I, the Andante and Intermezzo) that are largely absent in the earlier pieces. Couteau’s performances are very satisfying—direct and unmannered. He doesn’t overplay or try to raise the dramatic level of the pieces; Brahms’s frequent instructions of fortissimo or accent are acknowledged, but nothing feels overdone.

As with the sonatas the variations are a journey unto themselves. The earlier sets are somewhat in the manner of Mozart and Haydn, where a simple melody is elaborated on gradually and becomes more intricate and difficult. (I wonder how many amateur pianists have enjoyed playing pieces like this up through the variation that matched their level of ability and then stopped?) With Brahms, though, the later variations, the Handel and the two Paganini sets, are rich, sophisticated pieces, worthy to stand with Bach’s Goldbergs or Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations. Couteau does a splendid job with these pieces, particularly the second book of Paganini Vari-
The late pieces are wonderful as well. Many of them are thorny, difficult intellectually as well as pianistically, but Couteau elucidates them admirably. He strikes me as an excellent player, but not one of extremes. Tempos are conventional, expression is contained and not overstated; it comes as no surprise that this fine young pianist is French. His Brahms is engaging and well thought out, lovely in tone and clear in its message. I’m tempted to say he’s at his best in the tender, contemplative intermezzos like Op. 116: 2+4 or Op. 118:2 (the wonderful Landini cadence piece). At the same time, though, the extroverted pieces like the G-minor Ballade, Op. 118:3 or the final Rhapsody, Op. 119:4 have terrific energy and strength. All of this adds up to a remarkable achievement for a pianist still in his 30s.

Anna Vinnitskaya, born in 1983, has placed in several piano competitions since she was a child. Her most impressive victory came in 2007, when she entered the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels and became only the second woman to win first prize. Her early training was Russian, so her playing explores the emotional, passionate side of Brahms. I found myself uttering words like “volcanic” when listening to her tackle pieces like the Rhapsody, Op. 79:1. She also offers Brahms’s transcription for left hand (little is changed from the original) of Bach’s Chaconne for violin. Vinnitskaya asserts in the liner notes that she did not use her right hand, even though she could have done so on a recording. (The engineer, she says, was watching her!) Her playing, in any case, is very impressive; but I often found passages a little too fast to register. She tends to charge through a thicket of notes with astonishing agility, but something slower would be richer in emotional range.

Like Vinnitskaya, Jonathan Plowright is a veteran of the competition circuit and already has 11 CDs to his credit; at present he teaches at the University of Chichester and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Of all the pianists here Plowright is the one who impressed me most. His tempos are a trifle slower than the others, but he uses the time to illuminate Brahms’s textures and reveal the beauties of the music. I’ve known the Op. 76 Piano Pieces for many years, but never have I understood them so well. Plowright balances his chords and textures beautifully, bringing out melodies or inner parts with superb control. I have sel-dom heard playing this compelling. Incidentally, this is the third volume of Plowright’s complete Brahms. The first two volumes would be worth seeking out.

Brian Lee’s recital is perfectly competent and respectable and could be recommended in a less crowded field. Here, though, it falls a notch below the others. Tempos are consistently slow, and Lee’s touch is generally too heavy (though the two Intermezzos in E, Op. 116: 4+6, are very nice). The subtle art of voicing chords so as to bring out one note more prominently than the others is better handled by the other pianists, particularly Plowright. Of some interest is his “encore”: the Brahms Lullaby as arranged by Leopold Godowsky. I’d never heard this before, but Lee brought to my attention how lovely and precious the hackneyed song really is!

To sum up, if you want a complete set (well, minus the studies and arrangements), Couteau is a fine choice—better than the old Rosel set and worthy to stand with Katchen. The one who opened my eyes, though, is Plowright.

ALTHOUSE

**BRAHMS:** Piano Quintet
Idil Biret, London Quartet
IBA 571320—41 minutes

There’s nothing wrong with this performance, but neither is there anything that would place it ahead of a great many others. This is a well-recorded work. And all the other recordings have another work with it, whereas here you are buying a half-empty disc. I wonder if Decca still offers the wonderful Ashkenazy performance with members of the Cleveland Orchestra. It was 425839 and included the clarinet trio—and it was recorded in 1990. This recording is from 1980, though the sound is not a problem.

VROON

**BRAHMS:** Trios, all
David Perry, v; Uri Vardi, vc; Paulina Zamora, p
Delos 3489 [2CD] 83 minutes

These are excellent readings of the Brahms trios, warm and expressive. The playing is rich and full without sounding over-projected, and all the tempos are in the conventional range. The only movement that gave me pause was the slow movement of the B-major, where pianist Zamora seems a little impatient. The players have international backgrounds—Vardi was born in Hungary, Zamora in Chile—but all have American training, and the strings are both at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Zamora teaches at the University of Chile School of Music, but has appeared in Wisconsin.
Fine as these performances are, I have some quibbles with the sound. Balances favor the strings, particularly the cello, so you don’t easily hear the piano’s contributions. And the piano sound itself could be a little brighter; was the lid partly closed? I would also note that 83 minutes doesn’t fill two CDs, though these do come at mid-price.

A welcome release, worthy to join (if not replace) old favorites like the Fontenay or the old Suk, Stark, and Katchen.

**ALTHOUSE**

**BRAUNFELS:** *Don Juan; Nursery Song Variations*

Altenburg Philharmonic/ Markus Frank

Capriccio 5250—51 minutes

Braunfels’s first orchestral work—the nursery song variations of 1909—is here coupled with the *Don Juan Variations* (1924) composed at the height of his power and technique. If you reversed the dates, no one could tell. Braunfels was already a consummate musician at 27, and the works share virtuosity. The *Don Juan* varies the Champagne Aria from Mozart’s opera. It begins with the theme amidst rolling background figures in a sea of exotic and effective colors. Braunfels puts Mozart’s tune through its paces; his views on it are sprightly, plaintive, and comical by turns. He also throws in the mix ‘La Ci Darem’ from *Don Giovanni* and even a wailing phrase from Mahler’s *Resurrection Symphony*.

Braunfels blends the Variations on the French Nursery Song, intertwining them subtly, rather than offering self-contained packages like the Mozart—yet another reason a listener would find both pieces comparable mature. This work appeared on a Dutton release (J/A 2015). They’re both capable performances. The Dutton was more transparent; this one has a fuller, more “German” sound. As the remaining pieces on the two records have no duplication, this one’s worth it for the *Don Giovanni* entry alone.

**O’CONNOR**

**BRAUNFELS:** *Songs*

Marlis Petersen, s; Konrad Jarnot, bar; Eric Schneider, p—Capriccio 5251—70 minutes

Walter Braunfels (1882-1954)—pianist and music educator, was, as the liner notes remark, “a composer whose music died twice”. The first death came when he was declared “half-Jewish” by the Nazis and his music was banned as “degenerate art”. A second death followed when his music faded into oblivion as the arbiters of musical taste in post-war Germany found little value in tonal music.

In the 1920s and 30s only Richard Strauss’s operas were performed more often than his. Several recent recordings of his works indicate renewed interest in his music. This appears to be the first release dedicated to his songs, though they occasionally have shown up in song programs (e.g. Hebbel Lieder, M/J 2015). The singers alternate in singing groups of these 41 songs. Konrad Jarnot sings the more pensive songs: two groups of six songs each (Op. 1 and Op. 4); *Music to Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night* (five songs, the first spoken in English, the rest sung in German translation); ‘Reflections on Beethoven’s Music’ (at 4:00 the longest song of the program); and ‘An Die Parzen’. With his exquisite Fischer-Dieskau approach to lieder, Jarnot makes you wonder why these songs have been ignored for so long and hope that more are forthcoming.

Marlis Petersen has been an advocate of Braunfels from early in her career. She sings his two sets of songs about birds (*Federspiele*), which she considers “real jewels of the art of lied: simple deeply touching airs”. She also sings *Klärchen-Lieder* and Two Songs to Hans Carossa, Op. 44. Her bright crystalline tone that has made her such a Mozart singer is in full evidence here.

Eric Schneider’s accompaniment is exemplary, particularly in the more challenging Shakespeare songs. These three artists are to be commended for helping make these lushly chromatic songs better known. For the last issue I reviewed Jarnot’s excellent recording of Korngold songs. The style of these songs is similar enough to make me feel I’ve gotten a second helping of music I love.

Notes in German and English; texts only in original languages.

**R MOORE**

**BRUBECKS:** *Lord, Lord; In Your Own Sweet Way; The Things You Don’t Remember; Upon This Rock; The Gates of Justice; On the Threshold of Liberty; Bass Trombone Concerto I; Polishing the Brass*

Christopher Brubeck, trb; Grammecy Brass Orchestra/ John Lambert

E-1 7752—50 minutes

It takes almost no time to realize that the Grammecy Brass Orchestra is a first-rate brass band whose members have terrific skills and know how to play in tune. That judgement comes a few seconds into Chris Brubeck’s 9-minute *On the Threshold of Liberty*, a blockbuster of a brass-band showpiece.

Most of the works are by Dave Brubeck (1920-2012), father of Chris (b 1952). They wrote ‘Polishing the Brass’ (1997) together. Dave wrote the mellow ‘In Your Own Sweet Way’ in the 1950s and dedicated it to his wife.
Lola. I am also taken by the grandiose Upon This Rock, composed for the 1987 visit by Pope John Paul II to San Francisco, and by the somber Chorale from the 1969 cantata Gates of Justice—Open the Gates.

Chris Brubeck is the virtuosic jazz soloist in the rollicking first movement of his own Bass Trombone Concerto I.

KILPATRICK

BRUCH: Octet; see SVENDSEN
BRUCH: Kol Nidrei; see Collections

BRUCKNER: Songs & Choral Pieces
Robert Holzer, b; Philipp Sonntag, org; Thomas Kerbl, p; Bruckner Choir & Chamber Orchestra/Thomas Kerbl
Gramola 99071—52 minutes

If you know Bruckner only by the sweeping lines and grand architectural structure of his symphonies, this program will present the composer in striking contrast. Here is an interesting potpourri of 16 works, 8 of them only 60-90 seconds: short choral pieces, 6 songs, and 2 larger-scale works for soloists and chorus.

The program begins with five pretty but unremarkable choralle settings for either mixed chorus or soloist, most of them accompanied by organ. That is followed by a setting of 'Ave Maria' for solo voice and organ, one of three settings of the text composed by Bruckner. (You can hear in it a phrase from his best known motet setting of the text.)

Bruckner wrote only about 20 songs, the earliest around 1845 and the last in 1882. 6 are included here, 4 of them substantial. (When asked why he wouldn’t compose songs, Bruckner is alleged to have remarked, “I could, if I wanted to, but I don’t!”) One point of interest that may tempt Bruckner enthusiasts to get this is the inclusion of a simple 13-bar strophic song, ‘Der Mondabend’ (The moonlit evening), not recognized as one of Bruckner’s songs until 2013 when it was verified in the Landesmuseum of Upper Austria and published by the Bruckner Institute. This is its first recording. The rest of these 16 works, recorded in 2011, were released previously on a Brucknerhaus CD.

The performances are good to excellent. Holzer has a voice that is just right for this music, with a commanding lower range (e.g. a resounding low F at the end of ‘Ave Maria’). Kerbl’s deft piano accompaniment is admirable, especially in ‘Wie Bist Du, Fröhling, Gut und Treu’, a through-composed song of five stanzas, with varied and substantial accompaniment.

The choral singing is generally good, especially in the short works. The 'Kantate für Dechant Jodok Stülz,’ the longest work of the program at (8:49), finds everyone at their best. The Magnificat, one of Bruckner’s earliest compositions, was recorded in concert, and the spacious sound ambiance hits you as a striking contrast to everything else. The instrumental balances are somewhat off-kilter, and there is some howling from the men.

Most of these works will be of interested to Bruckner devotees, but Bruckner will be remembered rightly as a composer of grand symphonies, significant large scale choral works, and 40 motets (particularly the ones typically categorized as “graduals”).

Notes supply historical information about these works in German and English. Texts are in original languages only.

R MOORE

BRUCKNER: Symphony 9
Concertgebouw/ Mariss Jansons
RCO 16001 [SACD] 55 minutes
with Mass in F minor
Ruth Ziesak, Janina Baechtle, Benjamin Bruns, Gunther Grosbock, Vienna Academy, Austrian Radio Orchestra/ Cornelius Meister
Capriccio 5247 [2CD] 124 minutes
with 2-piano arrangement
Matthias Giesen & Klaus Laczkia; St Florian Orchestra/ Remy Ballot
Gramola 99089 [SACD] 144 minutes
One fast, one medium, and one slow. Two nice album-mates.

The fast one is the Jansons. It’s played with this orchestra’s usual beauty and skill and Jansons knows his way around the piece, but it’s one of those businesslike performances that don’t engage with the music. The notes are nicely laid out and “laid out” is the right term. This performance is expressively DOA. It’s the shortest of the three readings but it was endless to listen through. Sterile. Empty.

The slow one is Ballot. Really slow. His first movement is 32 minutes long. His scherzo takes 14. His finale is 30. These are like Celibidache’s 1995 Munich tempos and nobody else’s (Maazel came close in his 1999 Bavarian Radio first movement and Giulini in his 1988 Vienna Philharmonic performances of the slow movement), but even Celibidache was faster on other dates with other orchestras, and his 1995 performances were with an orchestra that he had built and trained for this kind of sustained music-making.

Celibidache, Maazel, and Giulini were all technically supreme musicians. When they used extreme tempos it was to create a big enough space to make room for (to bring forward) something in the music that couldn’t fit
in a smaller space. They never sacrificed line or clarity in the process.

Ballot (who took some lessons from Celibidache and was 28 at the time of this recording) has created Celibidache-sized canvases but doesn't fill them well. The outer movements trudge along but don't cohere: they're like dreams where you try to walk but can't because you're stuck in mud or thickening cement. The scherzo is an aural battery: it pounds and pounds like a brutal machine. There's certainly an element of oppression and weight in this music, but there's a lot more to it than that. Except not here.

The 2-piano transcription (previously issued on a 2006 disc) was made in 1911 by one Karl Grunsky. The booklet “explains” that this is an adaptation of Grunsky's work (which was based on the corrupted Lowe edition) to Bruckner's original text. I enjoyed this. First of all, the tempos have some audible relationship to the music's content. Second, freed from the orchestra, the music's originality is much easier to hear. Bruckner's sophisticated harmonies and the harmonic clashes they generate are front and center. It's easy to understand why his contemporaries (who probably first heard his music played in piano reductions) had trouble understanding it. Also, his structures emerge even more clearly in these skeletal renditions.

Freed of the seductions of Bruckner's orchestral palette, we can hear how his music reached back and forward in time and pulled simple melodies and extraordinary harmonies into heightened expression. It's not the only way, or even the best way, to hear this music; but it is an ear-opener. The pianists, whose task could not have been easy, do a fine job.

Last, but not least, is Meister. He gives a fine, middle-of-the-road reading. Nothing is out of balance, nothing is botched or misspent. The dark drama of I is given its due. If is the right mixture of rural friskiness and dark undertones. III's anguish and consolation are laid out sensitively. If I heard this in a concert hall, I would be pleased with the evening. And he includes a lovely performance of the F-minor Mass (has anyone made an unsatisfying recording of this work?) with good soloists and a fine chorus.

Of course, this is not a one-off concert, but a recording, and the question is whether it deserves a place on your shelf along with (or instead of) previous recordings. I got my answer to that quickly.

I was wondering whether Jansons's tempos, by themselves, were why I found his recording so unappealing. To find out, I pulled out the 1961 EMI recording with Schuricht and the Vienna Philharmonic with timings similar to his (I 25 minutes; Jansons 23, II 10:23 vs 10:52, III 20:14 vs 20:44) and was amazed at the difference. The opening string tremolo from Schuricht is like a mysterious murmuring of voices. The instrumental voices, when they come in, sing or proclaim their melodies. The builds up and down are riveting.

None of these performances, including Meister's, has that kind of charisma. Schuricht was 81 when he made his recording and had a lot of life, and a lot of Bruckner, behind him to bring to his performance. As had Giulini, Karajan, Furtwangler, Celibidache, Asahina, Kubelik, Haitink, Horenstein, Inbal, Van Beinum, Dohnanyi, and Colin Davis. This symphony asks a lot of its conductors. If they don't know how to differentiate the various statements of the lyric theme of I or how to capture the numinoseness of the end of that movement when time seems to slide into an abyss with woodwinds calling back and forth, or how to handle the huge emotional range of III with its calls of despair and visions of consolation, or the enigmatic harmony of the end, then they're not ready to challenge the greatness of older recordings.

None of these conductors is at that stage yet. Ballot and Meister, in their very different ways, may get there in time. Jansons is advanced in life and experience, but seems uninvolved.

The playing follows the conductors. The Concertgebouw gave Jansons what it seems he asked for: very accomplished playing without much involvement—another day at the office. Ballot's orchestra holds up well under very difficult circumstances. Ensemble is shaky in the scherzo but good elsewhere, and the players make a nice sound. Meister's musicians sound involved, in control of the music, and comfortable, without the supreme presence that the greatest ensembles have brought to this piece.

The sound quality in all three discs, recorded in concert, is excellent. I really like having the piano reduction of the symphony. I think I'm going to go back to it a lot; I hear more in it each time. Believe it or not, there are other transcriptions of this work including one for organ (sensibly enough, given Bruckner's career as an organist), one for solo piano, and one for chamber ensemble. I don't know them.

But none of these recordings is a serious challenge to the great ones.

CHAKWIN

Political correctness has convinced us that it is arrogant, dogmatic, colonialist, and even racist to speak of superior and inferior cultures and even about modern and primitive cultures.

--Mario Vargas Llosa
BRUHNS: Organ Pieces, all
with SCHEIDEMANN: Prelude in G; Jesus Christus, unser Heiland; Dic Nobis Maria; Fugue in D minor; Toccata in G
Bine Bryndorf
Dacapo 6.220636 [SACD] 79 minutes

This program combines all of the surviving organ works by Nicolaus Bruhns (1665–1697) with a cross section of the far more numerous organ works by Heinrich Scheidemann (c1595–1663). Together these composers represent the earliest and latest phases of the 17th-Century North German school of organ playing and composition. The best-known exponent of the style was Dietrich Buxtehude.

Scheidemann was the son of the organist at St Katharine’s Church, Hamburg. The church paid for the younger Scheidemann’s studies in Amsterdam with Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, who was indisputably the most celebrated organist and organ teacher in northern Europe at the time and the predominant influence on the emerging North German school. Indirectly, Sweelinck transmitted the influence of the Italian masters, above all Frescobaldi, and the florid idiom of the English virginalists. All of this can be heard in the Scheidemann pieces here. He eventually succeeded his father as organist of St Katharine’s.

Bruhns came from a musical family in Schleswig. In 1681 he went to Lübeck, where he studied with Buxtehude, who was the strongest influence on his style. He later studied with Johann Lorentz in Copenhagen. Bruhns was appointed organist at Husum in 1689 and remained there for the rest of his short career. A mere handful of organ works by him survive. There are two Preludes in E minor, customarily called the ‘Little and Great’ owing to their difference in length. There are also Preludes in G and G minor and a substantial chorale fantasia on ‘Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland’. A fragmentary Adagio movement completes the list.

Although Bruhns predeceased Buxtehude, his music has a well-integrated ensemble and attractive solo colors. The recording seems to have been made at a respectful distance, but not at the expense of clarity or imposing power where needed.

Bine Bryndorf is a professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Music and an organist at Trinity Church, Copenhagen. Her playing here is eminently musical, not an academic exercise in period technique at the expense of artistic sense—as we too often hear in recordings of early organ music. She clearly understands the musical rhetoric of the Stylus Phantasticus as evidenced by her flexibility in tempo. Without such an understanding, the fits and starts of that rhapsodic style can easily sound arbitrary. Some years ago I was quite impressed with the 6th volume in her recording of the organ works of Buxtehude (Dacapo 6.220530; M/J 2008) for the same reasons. Earlier volumes in that series were favorably noticed by David Mulbury and Ralph Blakely (M/J 2004; N/D 2004; S/O 2007).

BYRD: Harpsichord Pieces
Colin Tilney—Music & Arts 1288–62:33

This “Contrapuntal Byrd” program gives an enjoyable hour of some of William Byrd’s longest pieces. About half of the selections are from My Ladye Nevell’s Booke. The 15-minute Quadrant Pavan and Galliard is one of those wonderful Byrd pieces that has a universe in it: startling cross-relations, rhythmic shifts, deep chords, and virtuosic use of the pedals.
elaboration. Tilney plays on a single set of strings, and the contrasting sections of the keyboard bring out plenty of variety. 'The Maiden's Song' gives a beautiful demonstration of the tenor register. All the music evokes a serene world different from our own and is well worth spending meditative time in.

Tilney sustains the concentration well over these long spans. This is steady well-groomed playing with a low profile, rewarding close attention. It tends to sound solemn, which matches the music most of the time. He bypasses some opportunities to bring out the music's most expressive quirks, letting the listener find them for himself. The paired fingering brings appropriately variegated articulation. I wished for a bit more rhythmic pointing and sense of fun in the A-minor Fantasy, but that's only a small complaint.

Tilney recorded half of these same selections in 1974. I compared those, finding that the remake has much better flexibility, intonation, and tone. Even if you already have a large collection of Byrd harpsichord recordings, you'll want to overdose and add this new one.

B LEHMAN

CAGE: Flute Pieces 2
Katrin Zenz—Naxos 559774—67 minutes

This release includes a number of early works in overdubbed performances—the Composition for Three Voices and Sonata for Two Voices—along with an overdubbed Solo for Flute, Alto Flute and Piccolo. For the early Solo with Obbligato Accompaniment of Two Voices in Canon and Six Short Inventions on the Subject of the Solo, Ms Zenz adds vibraphone (Tobias Liebezeit) and piano (Chara Iacoviodu).

Completing the excellent recording is the 1986 Hymnus (with Iacovido, vibraphonist Maxim Mankovsky, and pianist Ludovic Frochot). None of these works has been recorded very often and the performances are sensitive and committed. The interpretation of indeterminacy in the Solo for Flute+ is particularly inventive and persuasive. The reading of Hymnus seems more meditative than the one recorded by Ulrich Krüger on Mode (S/O 2002) and therefore makes a good alternative.

HASKINS

CAMERLOHER: Chamber Music; Symphonies; Arias
Neue Freisinger Hofmusik/ Sabina Lehrmann
Thorfon 2629—71 minutes

Coming up with a balanced program that is the broad range of Camerloher's achievements as a composer proved challenging for Sabina Lehrmann, as she explains in her notes. Placidus von Camerloher (1718-82) was well known and admired in his own time. He was an ordained priest, but devoted his career to music. In 1745 he became the orchestra conductor at the cathedral of Freising (just north of Munich, where his brother Joseph was employed as a composer). The other varied requirements for his position—choir master of the boys, giving organ lessons, and writing music for the cathedral and for secular entertainments at the bishop's court—gave Camerloher ample opportunity to experiment in nearly every genre. His music was ranked with the likes of Jommelli, Johann Stamitz, Richter, and Abel; yet, his music is little known among modern audiences, and most of it has yet to be recorded.

The program includes four symphonies (in C, B, D minor, and F), each of them in the typical mid-century, three-movement form. Like Haydn's symphonies of this period, they exhibit a broad affective range and emphasize solo virtuosity, particularly in the violin and flute. Including two solo works for the galli-chone, a type of bass lute common in southern Germany, and a Two-Violin Sonata in D minor, gives some indication of the qualities of Camerloher's chamber music. There are also two Latin arias for bass voice.

Camerloher's music fits well in the classical style of better-known composers like Haydn and Stamitz. The connection to Stamitz seems obvious on account of his tendency to rely on the spectacle of sequential passage writing, which one also finds in the contemporary Mannheim style. The playing is good, on the whole. It is exciting, if also a bit surprising, to hear new music coming from an era that one thinks one already knew well. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

CANFIELD: 3 After Concertos
Hayraper Arakelyan, sax; Rachel Patrick, v; Sinfonya Varsovia/ Ian Hobson
Toccata 346—63 minutes

A decade ago David Canfield (born 1950) was best known to record collectors around the world as the proprietor of Ars Antiqua, for three decades the largest international seller of used classical records, and publisher of a long-running series of authoritative price guides to them. Many of those collectors (including me) also knew that Canfield was a skillful composer, as he'd been issuing recordings of his own (and other composers') music for many years on his own small record label. But it wasn't until he'd sold Ars Antiqua in 2005 that some idea of his impressive range, fluency, and productivity became apparent as he began to release volumes of his more recent chamber
music, and programs of his orchestral pieces began to come out too, some on different labels. (See ARG’s index for reviews.)

All of this music displays Canfield’s well-crafted, bracing, melodic, tonally-anchored, modern-but-traditional idiom that presents no difficulty for listeners comfortable with, say, Hindemith, Poulenc, Bloch, Piston, and Creston (to choose just a few of many possibilities). With its enriched harmonies, idiomatic (often highly virtuosic) deployment of instruments, and clear formal outlines that enclose meditative or rhapsodic andantes with vigorous, forward-driving allegros powered by plenty of rhythmic verve and life-affirming exuberance, this is listener-friendly music that performers and audiences alike take to quickly and easily.

But an impressive body of work in his own persuasive and pleasing individual voice wasn’t enough for Canfield, a man whose restless first work in the series, the 2007, 23-minute persuasive and pleasing individual voice was—


dancing fleet-footed capers that Felix Mendelssohn would have applauded. For the 21-minute 

Concerto After Tchaikovsky, also in the standard three-movement pattern, Canfield takes the Russian’s great 1878 Violin Concerto as a large-scale model, though he also draws on melodic contours, harmonies, and orchestral panoply inspired by Tchaikovsky’s symphonies and ballets. All the actual music, however, is by Canfield.

Canfield’s trio of “After” concertos finishes off with his 

Rhapsody After Gershwin. This piece, inspired by Gershwin’s 

Rhapsody in Blue, shows Canfield imagining what Gershwin might have written had he lived long enough to follow up his evergreen concert favorite with a similar jazz-inflected composition with a bravura solo part for violin instead of for piano. Here, I think, Canfield surpasses himself and creates a work that outgrows any niche audience and can be welcomed into the widest concert-hall performing repertoire. Following Gershwin, Canfield casts his rhapsody in a single but sectionalized 19-minute span. Sassy jazz elements and opulent scorings are of course front and center, but the work takes just as much from the later, more adventurous harmonies that Gershwin evolved for 

Porgy and Bess. To these Canfield adds wonderfully spacious and uplifting melodies of the sort so crucial in Gershwin, as for example the glorious, long-breathed tune that first appears in 

Rhapsody After Gershwin at 4:14. The solo part is, as you’d expect, suitably acrobatic and includes a brilliant cadenza, but it’s the soaring melodic lines that make this gorgeous showpiece resonate in memory.

Canfield’s concertos are magnificently served by Toccata’s production. Saxophonist Hayrapet Arakelyan and violinist Rachel Patrick (for whom he wrote his 

Rhapsody After Gershwin) are not only dazzling; they are

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clearly in love with Canfield's music and exultant about the chance to show their delight and adoration. Sinfonia Varsovia and Ian Hobson respond with similar devotion and excitement, and Toccatas's recorded sound is an ideal blend of razor-sharp clarity, airy spaciousness, and full-throated richness, close to the soloists without repressing the orchestra. You can almost see the rosin gripping Patrick's bow as she digs into Canfield's snappy riffs, then watch as the long-lined melodies sail serenely out over the orchestra in the dreamily yearning lyrical interludes. I can't imagine a better recording of this music, but the piece is so irresistible that I'm betting you'll be able to hear it in person "at a theater near you" before long.

M LEHMAN

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: Songs
Salvatore Champagne, t; Howard Lubin, p
Oberlin 16-02—70 minutes

Salvatore Champagne, tenor and Oberlin Conservatory voice faculty member, became aware of some of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Shakespeare settings through his pianist and collaborator Howard Lubin. His interest in those songs led to 15 years of research, and he discovered the composer's 125 unpublished settings of Shakespeare Sonnets and a Leaves of Grass song cycle. This handsomely packaged release presents settings of 10 excerpts from the Calamus cluster of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass and 17 of the Shakespeare settings he had found. All are recorded here for the first time.

Champagne writes in his foreword, "Castelnuovo-Tedesco's refined musical and poetic sensibilities are ideally suited to the Whitman and Shakespeare texts. Perhaps most striking is how vividly the abundant humanity evident in the writings of these two authors is reflected in the music of this remarkable composer." These are indeed finely crafted songs.

The Whitman songs, which begin the program, capture well the various moods of the texts: the pensiveness of the opening song, 'What Think You When I Take My Pen in Hand to Record?'; the exuberance of 'Two Boys Climbing Together'; the tenderness in 'A Glimpse Through an Intercise Caught' of "a youth who loves me and whom I love", sitting contentedly amid a rollicking bar-room scene carried in the accompaniment; expansiveness of the world reflected in 'This Moment Yearning and Thoughtful'.

The Shakespeare settings also catch their emotion with great imagination and variety: the lightness and freshness of 'Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?'; the reality of aging in "That Time of Year Thou May'st in Me Behold" with its accompaniment like the ticking of a clock; the frostiness of winter in 'How Like a Winter Hath My Absence Been'.

The performers' musicianship here is commendable. Champagne's sensitivity to the text shows a depth of understanding distilled from his intensive study of these songs. Lubin's collaboration exhibits an expected unity of approach. The recorded sound is very good. The timbre of the tenor's high and very light voice is clear and penetrating. His diction is crystal clear, and his polished technique is admirable. This is a fine opportunity to discover another aspect of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's music.

The disc from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music comes in a hard cover 66-page book with excellent essays about the composer's life and music and many photos. Full texts are included, but why weren't the Shakespeare texts printed in the order they are sung?

R MOORE

CERVETTO: 6 Sonatas, op 1
Gary Karr, db; Elmira Darvarova, v; Harmon Lewis, org—Ulicht 5995—74 minutes

Here is another strange-sounding arrangement, this time of some strangely-organized music by Giacobo Basevi Cervetto (1690-1783), an Italian-London-Jewish cellist who wrote these works in two forms, for two violins and bass or for three cellos. They have been recorded before in the three-cello form by the Cologne Cello Trio (Fono 97 259; S/O 1999). I enjoyed that. This one is less satisfying to listen to, mainly because Karr out-volumes the violin and is often inaccurate in his pitch (Sorry, Gary! I have similar problems on the violin these days.) He plays with style and evident enjoyment, so if you can take it, this is a lively reading of some lovely late Baroque music.

Unfortunately, the recorded balance favors the bass player. Which line is supposed to dominate is anyone's guess, but the result here is not altogether satisfying to the ears. The music itself is quite fine and otherwise well played.

D MOORE

CHOPIN: Ballades;
DUTILLEUX: Piano Sonata; 3 Preludes
Arthur Ancelle, p—Melodiya 2399—72 minutes

Ancelle's playing has sensitivity and transparency. The Ballades are so often recorded that it has become a challenge to produce memorable performances or apply new perspectives. Ancelle's Chopin is not what I'd call spectacular, and does not stand out, but these pieces are thoughtfully interpreted.

Ballade 1 is full of drama, but I wish Ancelle had added more color. The underlying
sense of pulse so crucial to a cohesive Chopin could be stronger here and in Ballade 2, as the rubato sounds inconsistent. As Ancelle accelerates, he loses some of the cleanliness. Ballade 2 feels hurried, and while the middle section has a full array of sound and is full of passion, it sounds too bombastic sometimes. Ballade 4 also sounds hurried and is too bright.

His performances of Chopin are solid, but Dutilleux is the high point of the program. With glittering textures, the preludes are stylistically akin to Takemitsu’s works. The sonata has a playful quality, full of rhythmic intricacy and complex harmonies. Ancelle does an excellent job bringing out the wide variations of color in a way that I wish he had done with the Chopin.

KANG

CHOPIN: Ballades; Berceuse; Mazurkas (4)
Yundi, p—Mercury 4812443—56 minutes

This Chinese pianist has dropped his family name for now; he was formerly known as Yundi Li. I was struck by the overabundance of Yundi glamour photographs in the booklet. There are even two devoted to his hands. The actual notes are very brief, and there is no indication of the timing anywhere.

Most pianists have a daunting task ahead of them in recording the ballades. Tons of treasurable performances precede them, and finding something new and meaningful to say is usually met with failure. While not one of my first recommendations, Yundi does a pretty good job of justifying this new recording.

Ballade 1 opens in a somewhat self-conscious manner. My fear that this might be yet another recording where strangled rubato rules was altered from this initial impression by the time we reach the gorgeous melody at "meno mosso". Yundi settles on a naturally expressive unfolding of the central section. He uses pedal sparingly and is careful that everything is clearly articulated. His technique enables him to give an extra charge and excitement when required—a skill that is particularly apparent in Ballade 2, when the quietude is fiercely interrupted by the violent outburst of "presto con fuoco". It is a most satisfying interpretation.

Ballade 3 takes on an extra degree of seriousness, and you may notice certain subleties overlooked in other performances. It is Ballade 4 that draws the most attention. By now you may have noticed that the music blooms best once the volume has been lowered and the ears have been given a reprieve from the intensity of the sound. This last ballade is not only the greatest of the four, but the one that shows Yundi in the best light. His sensitivity, control, and interpretive judgement shine forth from every measure and do him much credit among the pantheon of interpreters.

The sheer loveliness of the Berceuse owes much to its melodic contours and to its delicate filigree. Here those contours are well-realized and the filigree sparkling, if a little too much so. Still, there is little to quibble about.

Yundi glows in his photographs in the booklet. Yundi, p—Mercury 4812443—56 minutes

Saving the best for last, the four Mazurkas, Op. 17, are all one could wish for. Nothing is ever forced. Rubato flows naturally, and the contrasting rhythmic episodes help make each piece an adventure in itself. They are so good as to make one wish for a complete traversal of these gems.

WRIGHT

CHOPIN: Preludes
with Polonaise; Berceuse; Barcarolle
Nelson Goerner, p—Alpha 224—59 minutes

CHOPIN: Piano Concertos, arr sextet
Joseph-Maurice Weder; Berlin Camerata
Oehms 1831—74 minutes

A string quintet is no substitute for full orchestra in Chopin’s concertos, but this can be done better, as Gianluca Luisi and the Ensemble Concertant Frankfurt have shown (MDG 903 1632). MDG recorded these sextets in a large, reverberant room to sweeten the strings; but this newcomer is very close and dry, so we get to hear, in exhausting detail, every scrape of the bow, every undernourished tremolo. And the phrasing of Berlin Camerata is stiff, unyielding, less flexible than a good orchestra, where the Frankfurt ensemble does its best to treat these mini-concertos as chamber music, its expressive solos responsive to and in dialog with the pianist.

Mr Weder is decent but prosaic, his phrasing sometimes choppy and at odds with the strings, rather than the unbroken, seamless cantabile of Luisi’s luminous interpretation. Enough said. If you want Chopin’s concertos stripped to their bones, go to MDG’s gorgeous SACD, not this one.

WRIGHT

CHOPIN: Preludes

with Polonaise; Berceuse; Barcarolle
Nelson Goerner, p—Alpha 224—59 minutes

CHOPIN: Concerto, arr sextet
Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy, p
Brilliant 95210 [2CD] 96 minutes

Goerner and Schmitt-Leonardy present us with two different approaches to Chopin. The former is bolder and more extroverted, while the latter employs slower tempos and spends more time shaping melodic lines.

Both have gorgeous sounds and are finely detailed. Schmitt-Leonardy exercises a lighter touch in the ‘Raindrop’ Prelude. I prefer
Schmitt-Leonardy’s approach to the left-hand melody in the middle section—it has more solemnity, while Goerner’s much faster-paced rendering sounds a bit cursory. Goerner’s pacing works better in Prelude 17, as I am made more aware of harmonic changes. While Schmitt-Leonardy can shape beautiful lines (the lyrical lines in Prelude 3 have never sounded cleaner), his slower tempo means some plodding.

Goerner’s Barcarolle is carefully voiced and well paced. His approach is restrained, yet sensitive. He has a slightly more free approach to tempo, especially towards the end of the piece. Schmitt-Leonardy’s Ballades are quite introverted and sound spare, with minimal rubato and his delicate touch. I especially enjoy his graceful touch at the opening of Ballade 2. While I do admire his very restrained approach in Ballade 4, I prefer the dynamic power and range that Goerner displays, as Schmitt-Leonardy’s playing remains austere. His attention to individual melodic lines comes at the expense of the larger narrative structure. The Ballades do have moments of drama, and it is a shame that he does not communicate these.

**CIMAROSA: Piano Sonatas I**
Dario Candela—Dynamic 7720—71 minutes

So far, we’ve reviewed only one other release of Cimarosa’s sonatas, by Danae Kara on Agora (N/D 1998). Mr Linkowski complained about the boredom induced by the music, the “dry, coarse” sound and the straightforward performance, filling up the rest of his review with an informative account of Cimarosa’s life and works.

Here we have the first 44 of the sonatas. I am also little charmed by this music, but grateful that we are in somewhat better hands with the Italian pianist and musicologist Dario Candela. He plays the music sensitively, with gracious rubato and tone. One example of such playing (among many) is Sonata 17 in D minor. Elsewhere (Sonatas 30 in D and 37 in E-flat) he embellishes the music with ornamentation and passagework. In short, he is more engaged with this essentially frivolous music than I could ever be, and I salute him.

**CIPELLO: After Life,**
**LAITMAN: In Sleep the World Is Yours**

In Tom Cipullo’s chamber opera, Gertrude Stein—herself in the afterlife—conjugates up Pablo Picasso on accident while trying to bring back her lover, Alice Toklas. Librettist David Mason has Picasso and Stein argue about and justify their lives, their choices, their art, and their broken friendship. Stein wants to know what the world thought of her after her passing, often mentioning how she was on the cover of Time. Picasso says, “The world has always known who I am. Guernica! Night Fishing at Antibes! I found my own way to scream. Even a casserole can scream.” They come across as two arrogant and insecure people. Suddenly, the ghost of a girl who had sold Stein a flower in life appears from the darkness. She, an orphan, had died in a concentration camp. Stein and Picasso sing, “We tried to resist. We made art. Art is life.” The girl sings, “I never read your books. I never saw your art, but I was alive. I looked at the stars, I walked on the earth.” In the end, in spite of the girl telling them “the dark is waiting for us all”, the two artists can barely take their attention off themselves.

Mason wrote the libretto just a year or so ago, around when ISIS was releasing videos of their bloody executions, and he wondered at the time “if art was useless in such circumstances”. As Picasso intones, “The Germans were lovers of art!” But, Mason says, “Only recently, I realized that it is often art that makes the moments themselves bearable at all,” and his libretto both reinforces and counters that. While listening to Picasso’s ghost, I felt that fighting war with painting was futile and that his arguments were empty. But the girl’s experiences of beauty didn’t keep her alive, either: Guernica still stands as an indictment of barbarism.

I’ve heard a few of Cipullo’s pieces before, and they were very good, but the accompaniment does nothing to illuminate the text; it lends it no power or personality. The singers are expressive, but Cook, singing the part of Stein, gets wobbly or shrill in a few places; she’s not bad—just not consistently good.

Lori Laitman’s In Sleep the World Is Yours is a 17-minute setting for soprano, oboe, and piano of three poems by Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger, the younger cousin of Paul Celan and another casualty of the concentration camps.

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The music is pretty when it should be poignant. Maybe it’s meant to represent the innocence of a young life and a certain naivety the poetry has, but it sounds too placid. Chenovick frames her words strangely and is difficult to understand.

Both pieces were written for Music of Remembrance, a program that “remembers the Holocaust...with concert performances, educational programs, recordings, and commissions of new works”. Naxos has released six other albums in association with MOR, with pieces by Paul Schoenfield, Jake Heggie, Gerard Schwarz, and others. Notes and texts are in English.

Clarke: Viola Pieces
Duo Runya, Gabriele Campagna
Avea 16008—68 minutes

Violist-composer Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) lived in that magical time and place: England in the early 20th Century. Lionel Tertis was establishing the viola as an important solo instrument, and Clarke even studied with him for a while. She wrote an important viola sonata in 1919, the same year as Ernest Bloch’s Viola Suite and Paul Hindemith’s Viola Sonata Op. 11:4. It has an imposing opening movement, an impish middle movement, and a dreamy finale.

The Lullaby of 1909-18 has a lovely, nostalgic mood of the type that only the English seem to feel. The Passacaglia on an Old English Tune of 1940-41 is beautiful and majestic. My favorite of the short pieces is the arrangement of the old Scottish border melody ‘I’ll Bid My Heart Be Still’ (1944). Morpheus (1917-18) is one of the better-known pieces here. The program concludes with the Dumka for violin, viola, and piano, possibly from 1941. It sounds appropriately Slavonic.

Duo Runya is the sisters Diana Bonatesta, viola, and Arianna Bonatesta, piano. They are joined by Gabriele Campagna in the Dumka. Duo Runya is two fine musicians; but I find the performances of some of these works, including the sonata, Morpheus, the two lullabies, and ‘I’ll Bid My Heart Be Still’ on Helen Callus’s disc, A Portrait of the Viola, even more compelling (N/D 2002).

Coates: Wilking Quickstep; Plantation Echoes; March Funebra; Boutey en Avant Quickstep; Columbian National Potpourri; Tycoon March; Funeral March; Overture

Details about the life of Thomas Coates can only be pieced together from newspaper clippings, concert programs, and so forth. He was born in Easton, Pennsylvania in 1803 (maybe, or maybe 1813). He became an excellent horn player and played in various bands, then became a bandleader in the 1850s. Bands on both sides of the conflict played his music during the Civil War. After the war he resettled in Easton, where he died in 1895.

This recording offers all of Coates’s band music that was published in the 1880s. There are several marches, including two funeral marches (Coates was lauded in his lifetime for his funeral marches). ‘Columbian National Potpourri’ includes patriotic music that was popular in the postwar period, including an unconventional setting of ‘Star-Spangled Banner’. Two selections by other composers are also included as solo vehicles for cornet player Elsa Koehler and baritone player Barry Bocaner.

Newberry’s Victorian Cornet Band, founded in 2002 by Michael O’Connor, is led here by well-known trumpet-cornet player Douglas Hedwig (J/F 2008: 187). It consists mostly of brass instruments but includes a piccolo and three clarinets, so there is a bit of woodwind in the band’s sound. The instruments and mouthpieces date from the 1880s and 90s. Given that these are professional musicians who play modern instruments most of the time, the band sounds as we might expect: not perfectly in tune and a little tentative sometimes. But they are good players, and it is easy to imagine that this is how bands sounded in the 1880s, when they were the most popular music groups in America.

Cooke: Symphonies 4+5
BBC Symphony & Northern Symphony/ John Pritchard, Bernard Keeffe
Lyrita 1123—60 minutes

Arnold Cooke (1906-2005) was an English composer born in Yorkshire. He played piano as a youth and started composing when he was 8. Not long after that he took up the organ and cello. His first major teacher was Edward Dent at Cambridge; but the most influential was Paul Hindemith, with whom he studied at the Berlin Hochschule fur Musik. After return-
ing to England, he served as head of the Festival Theatre in Cambridge and taught at the Royal Manchester College of Music. After wartime service in the Navy, he taught at Trinity College of Music in London, retiring in 1978. He also helped found the Composers' Guild of Great Britain. His compositions include six symphonies, several concertos, two operas, a ballet, and five string quartets and other chamber music.

If any composer bears the stamp of his teacher, it is Cooke, who sounds almost like Hindemith himself. Some British critics recognize the Hindemith influence but underrate it. Hindemith himself. Some British critics recognize the Hindemith influence but underrate it. There is nothing wrong with reflecting influences if the music is well composed and worth hearing, and both of these works are certainly Hindemith's, but he still manages to exude Hindemith's laconic, wry manner. Both composers were neoclassicists (though Hindemith went on to a romantic period), who propelled their music with motifs, canons, fugues, and repeated phrases spun against busy accompaniment. Many of Cooke's motifs sound like Hindemith in melody and rhythm, and Cooke passes them around the orchestra choirs much in the way his teacher did. Their approach to cadences is similar, as are their endings, though Hindemith's are much fuller. Both composers employ a lot of bubbling woodwinds, and both use the brass to execute melodic lines, fanfares, muscular themes, and those ostinato-like marking devices. (It may be the latter that leads some people to hear the influence of Bruckner on Cooke, but Bruckner is not a composer I associate with Cooke.)

One area where Hindemith is much stronger is melody, particularly those long sweeping lines that I don't hear from Cooke. Nothing in either work here even hints at the glorious four minutes of melody that makes up the second half of the first movement of Hindemith's Concert Music for Strings and Brass. That melodic gift, combined with the greater warmth and depth that Hindemith drew from the strings, makes his slower movements especially superior to Cooke's. Indeed, most of Hindemith's orchestral music is more sophisticated, cleverer, sleeker, and often more serious than Cooke's. When I listen to these and other symphonies by Cooke, I think of Hindemith's Symphony in E-flat, Synphonietta, Concerto for Orchestra, Symphonia Serena, Symphonic Dances, and even Pittsburgh Symphony.

Nevertheless, derivative though he may be, Arnold Cooke is a fine composer, and these are fine symphonies. If he is no Hindemith, that is no disgrace, given that Paul Hindemith is one of the greatest and most underrated composers of the 20th Century. The Fourth Symphony opens with a big brass fanfare. What follows is linear, with active brass and lively canons against busy accompaniment, and those marking motifs move things along. Many ideas are passed back and forth, some of them short, bitten-off phrases. There is less Hindemith in II, other than those short brass motifs and a general restlessness. III begins with a burst of triplets, the brass is lively, and there are frequent handoffs from choir to choir. The finale begins with a march paced by marking motifs. What follows is the usual rhythmic material and short motifs.

Symphony No. 5 (1979) begins with a three-chord fanfare, which is a main theme of sorts. The music moves away from Hindemith slightly in the content of the motifs, but much of the elder's styling remains: short phrases, passing off of ideas, canons, chugging rhythms, etc. I is formal in the brass writing, with the winds and strings more playful. The blunt ending is vintage Hindemith. The soulful Lento begins with a clarinet solo that strongly recalls the one in the Symphonic Dances (III). Hindemithian treading chords reappear later, and Cooke projects some independent thoughts with musings among the winds and a major trumpet theme. III is a bustling Scherzo dominated by an ostinato mixed with chordal outbursts of brass and a lilting melody. IV begins with a short fanfare that gives way to a lively quasi March, interrupted by a variety of brass interjections. There is a touch of old romantic Hollywood, as well, but most of this is busy Hindemith-like writing in the winds and strings. The work concludes with a brass canon over vigorous timpani.

These recordings come from the large Richard Itter Archive that contains broadcast recordings from 1952 until 1996. (Itter was the founder of Lyrita.) The sound is excellent for broadcast mono, but both works would benefit from stereo's ability to present all that passing off of ideas and motifs. It would also fill out the orchestral sound. Lyrita's stereo recordings of Symphonies 1 and 3 show what is possible. (Only 2 and 5 have not been recorded). The notes by Pat Conway are excellent, though I think he, too, underplays the Hindemith influence.

HECHT

DAVIS: Anno; Anno Epilogue; VIVALDI: 4 Seasons
Grace Davidson, s; Kerenza Peacock, v; Trafalgar Sinfonia/ Ivor Setterfield
Signum 437—62 minutes

A novel idea nicely executed, this album is based around Vivaldi's Four Seasons, but it adds an original new work for voice and strings.
based on the spirit of the piece and on the poems that inspired Vivaldi in the first place. Oliver Davis’s *Anno* is a cross between Baroque sprightliness and minimalist repetition, with a touch of pop lyricism. Davis writes appealing tunes and elegant string lines. Soprano Grace Davidson, who specializes in old music, sings these pieces with straight-line purity but also plenty of warmth—a winning combination. I wish more Baroque specialists sang this way. She is worth the price of admission.

As for the *Four Seasons* themselves, there is plenty of competition. I’ve always been partial to Karajan in Berlin. None that come with a complementary new work based on Vivaldi’s poetry. This performance is sensitively phrased, well played, and exceptionally lively. Kerenza Peacock’s violin sizzles and sings with open-hearted fervor, and the recording is excellent. The separation between string choirs and the violin soloist is beautifully handed so one can hear every line and nuance. There is a marvelous sense of space. Listen to the enchanted harpsichord against quiet strings in the slow music—pure Vivaldian atmosphere.

The album ends with an *Anno Epilogue* by Davis that quotes the most lyrical theme of the opening vocal work, but expands it into an instrumental piece—a bit schmaltzy, but endearing. As Andrew Porter once said about the Pachelbel Canon, “It’s gush—but what gush!”

**SULLIVAN**

**DEGLI ANTONI:** Violin Sonatas, op 4
Alessandro Ciccolini, Coro d’Arcadia
Brilliant 95118—79:28

Almost any composer of chamber music who was active in the latter half of the 17th Century is likely to be typecast as a forerunner of Corelli. Pietro Degli Antoni (1639-1720) and his much younger brother Giovanni Battista Degli Antoni (1660-c.1696) were both born and trained in Bologna, and spent most of their careers there, becoming members of the city’s Academia Filarmonica. Pietro was longer-lived than Corelli (1653-1713), with whom he was professionally associated and friendly.

Pietro was an active and experimental composer for instruments, and his Op. 4 set, published in 1676 (24 years before Corelli’s classic Op. 5 set) are by no means antecedents, but stand quite well in their own right. Corelli developed a strong feeling for dance forms and styles in his solo-violin writing. Piero, by contrast, clearly based a lot of his idiom on vocal elements—his wife was an opera soprano.

Degli Antoni’s sonatas, 12 of them, are laid out in anywhere from four to six movements. All of the movements are meant to allow the violinist opportunities for virtuosic and expressive display. The faster ones clearly stress the virtuoso, but all of them show the assimilation of vocal characteristics, with strong expectations of expressive qualities.

In this first integral recording of the Op. 4 set—indeed, the first really serious attention given Piero’s music at all on records—Ciccolini demonstrates confident technique. His playing
The American Establishment narrative may be a pivotal event in their history, the presentation does not do them the justice they deserve. Many Chinese regard their revolution as a sort of Chinese analog to Shostakovich’s 11th Symphony and its depiction of the first round of the Russian Revolution. Musically, there’s very little kinship between Shande and Shostakovich. There is a... well, a long march in the first movement redolent of the march in the corresponding movement of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony, though Shande works on a much simpler, more literal, level than Shostakovich (yes, his march builds in intensity but not with the exquisite, calculated ferocity of the Leningrad Symphony).

The second movement is a sort of scherzo, with much Chinese-sounding thematic material, including (according to the album notes) some Yunnan folk melodies and a Yao dance tune. III is also scherzo-like (hmmmm, think of the back-to-back scherzos in Shostakovich’s Eighth). IV is the slow movement, and the finale caps it all off on a triumphant note that was surely acceptable to all Party officials. Even so, it’s all very tuneful, enjoyable, colorful, deftly orchestrated music. If anything, it’s too cheerful, given the grim nature of the subject. But like Shostakovich, perhaps Ding Shande was to tone the line and not write music that would depress the people. But I don’t think he was a hack either, and the music feels heartfelt.

This was more than a bit of a surprise. When I saw this album in my review pile, I questioned what our Editor was thinking, but it worked out well. This is also not a new recording. It was actually recorded in Hong Kong in November 1983 and issued on another label before Naxos obtained the rights for it; Marco Polo is a Naxos label. Although it would be what we call “early digital,” the sound is very good, with a nice, spacious feel to it and very little digital strain. Maybe Naxos-Marco Polo did some judicious remastering. The Hong Kong Philharmonic, even pre-dating the transforming leadership of Kenneth Schermerhorn (1984–88), sounds very polished.

HANSEN

Dohnányi: Konzertstück; see Collections

Donizetti: Le Duc d’Albe
Angela Meade (Helene), Michael Spyres (Henri), Laurent Naouri (Duke), Gianluca Baratto (Daniel); Halle Orchestra/ Mark Elder
Opera Rara 54 [2CD] 94 minutes

Donizetti’s Duke of Albe is one of those works, like Puccini’s Turandot and Mozart’s Requiem, left unfinished at the composer’s death. The booklet accompanying this recording includes an essay giving the history of the work’s com-
position and why it was not finished and performed on schedule. It also tells of attempts to complete the opera after the composer died. Instead of any of these “completions,” Opera Rara has chosen to record only the first two acts of the opera—mostly completed by Donizetti—and to enlist the composer Martin Fitzpatrick to complete a few parts of these two acts left unfinished. Thus this recording is not a complete opera but a rather definitive performance of the first two acts.

The Donizetti enthusiast will not be disappointed by the musical riches in these acts; one only laments that conditions did not permit the composer to finish the opera. In Act I there is an excellent trio for the Duke, Helene, and Daniel. But Act II has even more. Helene has a major aria in ‘Ton ombre murmure,’ followed by a good trio for Helene, Henri, and Daniel, followed even more impressively by an exciting love duet for Helene and Henri. Finally, the ensemble beginning with ‘Liberté’ is highly reminiscent of the great prayer in the final scene of Maria Stuarda, one of Donizetti’s most beautiful moments.

This recording certainly has the singers to do this music justice. In the title role, Laurent Naouri uses his well-placed baritone to create a believable villain. As Daniel, the revolutionary, the bass Gianluca Buratto displays a fine, strong voice—which I would like to hear more of. As the lovers Henri and Helene, Opera Rara has two young American bel canto stars, Michael Spyres and Angela Meade. Both are spectacular. Their elegant phrasing and attention to dynamics makes their singing a joy to hear. Both can scale their sumptuous sound back to a tiny pianissimo on high notes. These two are truly great bel canto singers.

The Halle Orchestra and Opera Rara chorus perform expertly under Mark Elder. Though this is far from a complete opera, it is a great bel canto document. And it has a full text.

DORATI: Cello Concerto; see Collections

DORATI: Cello Concerto; Festival Overture

Chinese composer Du Mingxin (1928-) studied in Chongqing, Shanghai, and at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in the USSR. He also taught at the Central Conservatory in Beijing. He contributed to Red Detachment of Women and wrote several movie scores. His best known work in the West may be his violin concerto.

These recordings are from 1988—reissues. Great Wall Symphony’s four movements describe “the past and the present of the Great Wall in the four categories of Chinese traditional aesthetic: appearance, sentiment, spirit, and soul [and] expresses the historical consciousness of the Chinese people and their daring ambition to rejuvenate China and face the future” (booklet notes). The movement names are subtitles to those categories: ‘Dominating the World,’ ‘Experiencing Eternal Vicissitudes,’ ‘Locking the Mountains,’ and ‘Restoring the Prestige.’

The work is full of romantic melodies mostly based on pentatonic scales. Most of it is simple and straightforward without much counterpoint, though there are passages of vigor, marching drum beats, etc. All could have come from a 1940s or 50s Hollywood movie set in China.

Festival Overture is similar to the vigorous parts of the symphony. In fact, the last movement’s final chords begin the overture. Both works are pleasant enough, but they are probably best heard as five tone poems, one or two at a time. Taken together, they get boring. The performances are well conducted and performed, and the sound is good.

I wish I liked the Western-style Asian pieces that I have heard, but with a few exceptions, they are not convincing. The moderate appeal of Great Wall Symphony lies in its resemblance to Hollywood scores. Even so, I would not pay full price for 44 minutes of this music.

HECHT

DUPARC: Songs, all

Andrea Mastroni, b: Matia Ometto, p

Brilliant 95299—63 minutes

Henri Duparc, the man Cesar Franck considered his best student, gave up composing in 1885 at age 37. A physio-psychological condition called “neurasthenia”—perhaps it would be diagnosed today as acute clinical depression—was followed by blindness. He died in 1933 at age 85 without composing again. Always a severe self-critic, he destroyed all but about 40 works. He is remembered almost exclusively for these 16 songs, settings of texts by Baudelaire, Gautier, Prudhomme, Silvestre, and others.

This is the first time I’ve heard the songs sung by a bass. At first it seemed the wrong voice for them, but it didn’t take long to be won over by such fine singing. While it is most customary to hear them sung by a woman, there is no reason a bass shouldn’t sing them, and Mastroni makes a good case for that. He caresses the line of the songs tenderly. His soft singing is gentle and eloquent, and he rises to the more dramatic moments appropriately. He ends ‘La Vague et la Cloche’ with its words “the pointless labor and unending hubbub of
life, alas, of human life!” on a sepulchral optional low-C to conclude the program.

For a mezzo reading, I like Nora Gubisch with Alain Altinoglu (N/D 2011). Philip Greenfield raved about Konrad Jarnt with Helmut Deutsch and found Paul Groves with Roger Vignoles very good, though the sound quality is thin (I/A 2005), and I concur with his assessment. Two fine readings by two voices are available: Sarah Walker and Thomas Allen with Vignoles (Hyperion); and Catherine Robbin and Gerald Finley with Stephen Ralls (N/D 2002). Best of all, even though only five of the songs are included, is Veronique Gens with Susan Manoff (M/A 2016), one of the finest recitals of French songs I’ve ever heard. Now we have a lovely reading by a bass that is eminently worthy of exploring and grows on me more each time I hear it.

My chief complaint is that texts and translations are not included. You are referred to Brilliant’s website. After too long a search I found only the texts but no translations.

---HL Mencken

DUPHLY: Harpsichord Pieces
Yves-G Prefontaine, hpsi
ATMA 2716 [2CD] 148 minutes

Prefontaine plays a personal selection of about half of Duphly’s music, shuffling the four books together and grouping the pieces by key. His playing sounds ordinary. It is clean and there is flexibility to the phrasing; that’s better than metronomically stiff, but it doesn’t bring much special or memorable to the pieces. He has an odd way of halting in the middle of an ornamental figure and then speeding up, drawing attention to itself and distracting from the grace. In ‘La du Buq’ there are too many predictable pauses breaking the flow.

The deal-breaker for me is the choice of an excruciating temperament by Marpurg, sounding like the 1756 one that is a crude modification of 1/4 comma meantone. It mars almost every piece in the program in small ways, enough to cause cringes. It turns the E major and F minor music directly into disasters, making Duphly sound like an utterly incompetent composer for the last half of disc 2.

Leonhardt’s playing of this repertoire was tauter and more buoyant than this. Belder’s 4CD set gives us all the music played well at a low price. Hamada’s single disc that I reviewed a few months ago is exquisite, a must-hear program where Duphly’s music sings with uncommon expression.

---BELEHMAN

Duron: Songs & Arias
Eva Juarez, s; Corte Musical/ Rogerio Gonçves
Pan 10320—59 minutes

Sebastian Duron (1660-1716) was a younger contemporary of Juan Hidalgo (M/J 2016) and José Marín (S/O 1998). This new release is a collection of his solo vocal music, especially arias from his zarzuelas. Eva Juarez has a rich and flexible voice, well suited to both lyrical arias (such as ‘Auras suaves’ from the zarzuela Las Nuevas Armas de Amor) and the more virtuosic passage-work (as in ‘Se hacemos treguas’ from El Imposible Mahor en Amor le Vence Amor).

She is effectively supported by A Corte Musical, who can supply both sonorous halos (‘Ondas, riscos, peces, mares’ from Veneno es de Amor la Envidia) and vivacious dance rhythms (as in the Christmas jacaera, ‘Vaya pues rompiendo el ayre’). This release is an excellent introduction to another facet of the fascinating repertoire of Hispanic vocal music, and I can only hope it will lead to more performances and recordings.

---BREWER

Dutilleux: Piano Sonata; see CHOPIN

Dutilleux: Wolf; Devil’s Daughter; 3 Cas-sou Sonnets; 4 Melodies; Wuthering Heights Tableaux
Vincent Le Texier, bar; Loire Orchestra/ Pascal Rophé—BIS 1651 [SACD] 74 minutes

The premise of this album is to present works that Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013) wrote before he became famous in the late 1950s when Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony gave the world premiere of his Symphony No. 2. This also is the first recording of the Sonnets and Melodies in the version for orchestra, the first recording since 1954 of the complete ballet Le Loup (The Wolf—1953), and the first CD release of the five selections from the film Le Fille du Diable (The Devil’s Daughter—1946) and the Three Symphonic Tableaux (1946) from the stage version of Les Hauts de Hur-levvent (Wuthering Heights). What a varied collection of music this album has—and how very strange when heard in one sitting.

The orchestra’s full name is the Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire, that is, the Loire region, since it was created in 1971 by combining the Nantes opera orchestra and the Angers symphony orchestra. It’s a splendid group of more than 100, and Pascal Rophé, music director since 2014, has them playing with excellent tone, ensemble, pulse, rhythm, and forward motion as they capture the wide array of moods and dramatic expression in the five works. It’s a pity, however, that baritone Vin-

---AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE
cent Le Texier (also known as an actor) was used for the Trois Sonnets de Jean Cassou and Quatre Melodies. At (I think) 59, his voice is clearly over the hill; he is shaky not from vibrato but age, has trouble nailing pitches, and generally is loud and blunt. The name may sound familiar because he was the husband that mezzo Magdalena Kozena left to live with her dog on the heath (it’s enough to give Adolphe a heart attack when it imitates the extensive howling of a wolf). Le Loup (1953) at 29 minutes resists concentration because its three movements (really two—if there weren’t a separate track for the second, you wouldn’t know the difference) are long amorphous stretches, unlike Tchaikovsky’s and Prokofiev’s ballets, which are broken into smaller dances. Nor does it help that the useless liner notes tell us all about music not on the album but nothing about the works at hand—they read like pages taken from a biography of the composer. Yes, the fairy tale is about the bride who is deceived into thinking that the wolf is a transformation of her husband, but that’s all we’re told. The result? Picture music without any pictures. The performance is excellent, and the music reminiscent of Poulenc, but the engineering crams all of the treble instruments—strings, winds, and brass—on the left side, leaving only the cellos, string basses, and bass drum on the right. A bizarre stage setup! In the other works the stereo spectrum is much more balanced.

Music from The Devil’s Daughter (1946), five selections (the album says six, but two of them are one waltz in extension) in 11 minutes, is film noir soundtrack straight out of the 1940s complete with threatening opening credits music that turns into pure slush, three excerpts that are quite inventive but so short and disconnected that they’re inconsequential and trivial, and final credits music that evolves from a horror-film dirge into a dramatic catharsis. Interesting, but nothing to write home about.

The Three Tableaux from Wuthering Heights has an Ondes Martenot in all three movements; it is especially effective in the second where it imitates the extensive howling of a wolf on the heath (it’s enough to give Adolphe Adams’s Giselle the willies). Again, the music is typical 1940s film or stage music, imaginatively written but nothing memorable.

That leaves the two song cycles. Jean Cassou was a resistance fighter in World War II who was tortured by the Nazis, and the texts accordingly deal with despair, loss, and death. (This is a rare performance of the first sonnet, ‘Eloignez-Vous, which has never been printed.) The sonnets I can only describe as extremely frustrating, even when following the two published ones (1954) with a piano reduction score. The reason is that Dutilleux’s music here is atonal, and the vocal line moves off the beat and not in rhythm with the accompaniment. There is no traditional tonal, melodic, or rhythmic anchor. Even worse, Le Texier’s blatant, struggling voice is so overbalanced that it actually buries the orchestra playing at full volume.

Quatre Melodies (1943) is better. The balance between voice and orchestra is fine. A song about death is in the style of Poulenc. One about the dance of insects at night sounds very much like Ravel, especially a section from his Left-Hand Piano Concerto; here the orchestra is wonderfully nimble and atmospheric, but the baritone is too heavy. In a short love song he’s far too forceful, as the orchestra ascends from more than an octave below middle C to three octaves above. The final song about a fellow who dies and is buried during Mardi Gras has a wonderful Queen Mab touch to it; again, the voice is too heavy, but the orchestra is marvelous.

DVOVAR: Cello Concerto

with SCHUMANN: Cello Concerto
Carmine Miranda; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky—Navona 6034—62 minutes
with THOMAS: Ritual Incantations
David Finckel; Taipei Symphony/ Felix Chiu-Sen Chen—Artist Led 2802—51 minutes

The two concertos on Miranda’s recording are some of the most individual works ever written for cello and orchestra. The cellist’s liner notes discuss the inspiration and formal structure of both works.

Unfortunately, Miranda’s playing, though as original in concept and technical prowess as his writing, is so replete with unexpected rubatos and phrasings that do not conform to the written music that the performances of both works are not very satisfying. They give a new slant on the music, but it is at an angle that tends to distort rather than express the composer’s intent. The orchestra goes along with him as best it may, and there are moving passages; but I cannot recommend this as your only recording of these great works.

The recording is curiously balanced. One can hear some voices but not others; and the volume seems to be changing, attempting to make chamber music out of these sensitively scored works. This isn’t a bad idea in itself, but you’ll have to decide if the result is worth it. About half of every phrase I liked a lot, but the other half turned me off.

Finckel, on the other hand, plays in a more normal idiom, and the Taipei Symphony is dramatic and recorded in a smooth sound that depicts the grandeur of the Dvorak in a satisfying manner. After the individuality of Miran-
da's interpretation, it is a bit less deep in concept but very satisfying to the ears and the sensibilities. His technique is fully as accurate as Miranda's and he uses it well.

The 15-minute 3-movement suite by Augusta Read Thomas begins where the passionate Dvorak leaves off. It is music full of questions but gives few answers. The idiom is not particularly dissonant but not tonal, either. If you are ready to be made sad and nervous with no real answers to your emotional reactions, you will find Thomas's work quite lovely. The playing and recording are excellent.

D MOORE

Dvorak: Piano Quartet I; Suk: Piano Quartet; To the Forgotten Graves; Janacek: Tale Ensemble Raro—Solo Musica 222—72 minutes

The first moments, even the first chord of Suk’s quartet that begins this disc, establish in one stroke the quality of playing here: fervent, ardent, grandly romantic, with a dominant piano. Ms Ketler, the pianist, drives these interpretations; and her partners are fully onboard with her—no undermining, no resentments, but just voluptuous, full-throated romanticism.

Suk’s piano quartet, his Opus 1, is in a balanced three movements, the first turbulent and dramatic, the second sensual and tranquil, a furiant rhythm ample room to swing. It all ends in decisive, rousing triumph.

Dvorak’s first piano quartet is up next, again Ms Ketler leading the way, rushing impatiently and most convincingly Dvorak’s sometimes plain piano part, but she lets her mates take the lead in the string-heavy variations of II. She’s back in the driver’s seat again, whipping the ensemble along most agreeably, in the amiable scherzando finale.

Janacek’s Tale for cello and piano gets the most ravishing, sensitive performance here, Ms Ketler molding her repetitive part with care, her subtle rubato and variegated touch adding a lot of interest to the sometimes threadbare score. The cellist is gutsy, fiery, closely recorded, each aggressive bow stroke viscera palpable.

Ms Ketler gets the last say in a hazy, moody late piano piece of Suk. By this time Suk wasn’t so much influenced by his father-in-law Dvorak or 19th Century romantics generally and had come a bit under the spell of the impressionists. For a violinist, Suk writes pretty idiomatically for piano but also with the individuality you’d expect from a non-pianist. I am again impressed and moved by his piano music, as I was by Paul Orgel’s touching performance of Suk’s About Mother (S/O 2015).

Wonderful close, rich sound, great playing by everyone. This is a fantastic release.

WRIGHT

Dvorak: Piano Quartets

London Bridge Trio—Champs Hill 107—67:20

Utterly prosaic playing and sound. I don’t think the English have any idea what to do with Dvorak. He lives in an entirely different world. English musicians seem to specialize in bland technical accuracy at the expense of atmosphere, beauty, emotion, and flavor.

Americans do better: there’s a lot more subtlety in the Dorian recording of these (90125—S/O 1990). And Naxos has a recording by the Vlach Quartet of Prague (572150—March/April 2010) that sounds very Czech and costs very little. There are a number of others of both and a few of just one quartet that would easily put this one in the shade.

VROON

Dvorak: Quartet 13;
Suk: St Wenceslas Meditation;
Janacek: Quartet 1

Wihan Quartet—Nimbus 6322—65 minutes

Greg Pagel called the Wihan’s Smetana quartets a “must-have” and praised their maturity (ArcoDiva 86, J/F 2015), noting that they’d been together for 30 years with no personnel changes. After that recording their violinist Jiri Zigmund retired, and Jakub Cepicky, son of their first violinist, took his place—quite capably, I might add. I wish the Dvorak had a few more moments where the clouds covered the sun, a few more moments of dramatic intensity; but other than that, it’s nearly perfect. The quartet’s tone is friendly and bright, and their sense of ensemble is astonishingly natural. Suk’s beautifully restrained nationalist prayer is given a fine reading with some of the shadowing I’d like to hear in the Dvorak.

The minor problems in the Dvorak are more pronounced in Janacek’s Kreutzer. By nature, it’s a much more turbulent piece, and the Wihans don’t put that across. They capture its inscrutability, but they don’t convey the fact that the story’s characters are making agonizing moral choices. The text on the artwork’s spine says, “Dvorak-Suk-Janacek Volume One”, and while I look forward to what’s to come, I hope the quartet digs some deeper emotional wells. The sonics are exceptional; notes are in English.

ESTEP
Dvorak: Symphony 6; 2 Slavonic Dances
Houston Symphony/ Andres Orozco-Estrada
Pentatone 5186575—51:36

A very short program, and part of it is the fast tempos. Every movement seems too fast.

Yet he takes the repeat in I. I am not stupid; I don’t need to hear the same 4 minutes all over again. I suppose when you do the repeat there is a tendency to go fast, because people are impatient with it. Serebrier does the repeat but does not fall into fast tempos (N/D 2015—"everything flows beautifully”—Althouse).

II is an Adagio, but you’d never know it from this performance. It is too fast to enjoy the broad melodies. If a conductor can’t give us a real Adagio, what good is he?

III is dull.

IV is again way too fast. Why do some people think fast is exciting? It usually isn’t. Here the speed seems forced on the music, imposed on it—not a natural outgrowth of the way the music is written. This guy is just a peppery conductor who can’t seem to control himself. Never is the music sparkling or ecstatic; it’s just fast and driven.

The pause between the symphony and the two dances is too brief. Op. 72:3 is a boring piece; Op. 46:8 is a much more appealing Slavonic Dance—but again, it’s just fast.

The orchestra sounds like any other. It sure doesn’t sound Czech. The SACD sound should help, but doesn’t. There is nothing about this recording that is even competitive, let alone superior. Kubelik, Belohlavek, and Neumann led Czech orchestras in great performances of this symphony. Macal and Serebrier are also worth hearing.

Suk: Fantasy
Christian Tetzlaff; Helsinki Philharmonic/ John Storgards—Ondine 1279 [SACD] 67 minutes

The Dvorak concerto gets top billing on the album cover, and it’s a fine performance, but the big prize here is Josef Suk’s 23-minute concerto-like Fantasy in G minor, Op. 24. It’s not a complete stranger to records—we’ve reviewed at least four recordings in ARG over the years—though I have to say this is the first time I’ve encountered it. There’s a fairly recent recording by Julia Fischer (Decca, S/O 2011), which Elaine Fine liked very much. Carl Bauman was less impressed by Pamela Frank (Decca also, M/A 1999), even with a conductor on the podium with impeccable credentials in Czech music, Charles Mackerras; the problem was too-relaxed tempos and hazy sound with a lack of orchestral detail. Well, the good news is, none of those problems apply to the present recording. Tetzlaff’s playing is superb—neither too syrupy and sappily romantic, nor too Teutonic and classically restrained. He and Storgards’s orchestra really entwine themselves in a performance of marvelous unanimity—we can probably give the conductor a lot of credit for that!

The closest spiritual cousin to Suk’s piece may be the Glazounov concerto, though perhaps Glazounov composed something more of a fantasy-like concerto, and Suk produced a concerto-like fantasy. In any case, it starts with a big, powerful, pile-driver statement from the orchestra, quickly followed by a very Czech-sounding flourish from the violin. The orchestra is hardly ever relegated to mere accompaniment through the whole piece. So is it a concerto or isn’t it? Here’s what Oliver Frænzke says in his excellent, perspicuous album notes (translated by Celia Skrine): “It is in fact a single-movement work with innumerable changes of tempo, several of them slow; and apart from the fact that the piece begins and ends in fast tempo, it cannot have a three-movement form read into it because it lacks the calm repose of a normal middle movement with no onward impetus or wilder passages.” It is a somewhat restless, late-romantic work with rapid shifts in mood—musical Attention Deficit Disorder. But it is also rich in melody, beautifully orchestrated, and...well, if you like
other works by Suk like his Serenade for Strings and the Asrael Symphony, you’re probably going to love this. It grabbed my attention the first time I played it, and as I’m writing this I’m listening to it again and still hearing new things. Good catch. But wait, there’s more!

The Dvorak concerto has been recorded quite a lot, and there are some outstanding earlier recordings to choose from, with the grandson of the Fantasy’s composer and great-grandson of Dvorak, Josef Suk and the Czech Philharmonic/Karel Ancerl (Supraphon) leading the pack. There’s also the wonderfully fluid, warm Milstein (EMI), the almost as lush Perlman with the rich London Philharmonic under Barenboim just reissued by Warner, and one I’ve long had a soft spot for, Schlomo Mintz with Levine conducting the Berlin Philharmonic (DG). Tetzlaff made an earlier recording, too, for Virgin, with Vaclav Neumann conducting. From our Dvorak Overview (S/O 1998): “Tetzlaff may not be the most colorful violinist around, but his intonation is unforced, gimmick-free SACD (hybrid) sound my go-to, gotta-hear-it recording I turn to when I’m craving the Dvorak Violin Concerto, but it’s a very fine complement to Tetzlaff’s more colorful take on the Suk piece. And I do have to say, the solo work in the slow movement is warm-hearted and radiant, and the technical demands of the closing Allegro giocoso do not appear to faze the violinist one bit. There are more limpid, meltingly lyrical recordings of the Romance, but this one more than balances out the supercharged opening of the program with warmth and serenity.

The other good news here is the sound. Actually, for some listeners, Ondine’s spacious, unforced, gimmick-free SACD (hybrid) sound may put Tetzlaff’s Dvorak over the top as a first choice. Certainly, the balance between the soloist and the orchestra—and the wealth of detail in the orchestral fabric, in all three pieces—is spectacular. The Suk Fantasy coupled with the excellent sonics is enough to make this worth the asking price. Think of the Dvorak as a very substantial bonus. HANSEN

EISENGA: Motion; Passacaglia; Music of the Morning; Kick; House of Mirrors; L’Atlante delle Nuvole
Piccola Accademia degli Specchi
Zefir 9627—56 minutes

Music for Week
Erik-Jan De With, sax
Zefir 9618—62 minutes

Quartet 1; City Lines; Piano Concerto; Dickens!
Gerard Bouwhuis, p; Francis B Quartet; ensemble
Zefir 9606—60 minutes

Cloud Atlas, Les Chants Estivaux; Theme 1; City Lines; Growing Worm
Jeroen van Veen, Sandra van Veen, Marcel Worms, p
Zefir 9619—57 minutes

Douwe Eisenga (b. 1961) is a year younger than I. After what he calls a short career in pop music, he enrolled in a conservatory and discovered the wide world of 20th Century concert music. The music he has come to write borrows extensively from minimalism, but—like his older contemporary Simeon ten Holt—he chooses to eschew the term. For Eisenga, it’s maximal music: “a mesmerizing mix of minimal, rock, and baroque. All of these elements come together in music with maximum effect”.

I first became aware of him via a personal e-mail. For many reasons his music strikes a chord with me: the pieces have a certain pop sensibility in their use of a steady pulse, a triadic but essentially not completely functional harmonic scheme, a clear separation between melody and accompaniment, and a rugged urgency that reminds me of what life feels like. And he’s Dutch—for some reason I have the closest affinity for Dutch culture, music, and people: if I could find a way to live there, I would do it in a heartbeat.

He has a number of recordings. House of Mirrors is a suite of pieces especially conceived for the excellent Piccola Accademia degli Specchi, a group I’ve previously reviewed in a fine program of Glass, Mertens, and Sommacal (M/J 2010). Their colorful instrumentation (flute, saxophone, violin, cello, and two pianos) and excellent technique offer many possibilities for a composer, and Eisenga takes advantage of them all. His passacaglia uses the familiar descending tetrachord but with a few well-chosen variations and a haunting, unforgettable melody. The longest work here, Kick, includes very colorful harmony and delicate interweaving melody that recalls nothing so much as the counterpoint of JS Bach; its progress is interrupted several times in the final third of the work by unexpected, mysterious, but completely compelling solo piano pas-

-- Mario Vargas Llosa

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sages. Needless to say, the ensemble’s performance perfectly captures the magic of this music.

In the dance piece Wiek (Rotor), “three dancers find themselves sharing a circular area with the horizontally rotating blades of a turbine. The seated audience surrounds the space, allowing no chance of escape; the dancers must confront the situation. Feeble humans are compelled to enter into combat with forces far greater than their own, and the audience is made complicit in the inevitable outcome.” The loop-based music Eisenga contributes complements this scenario perfectly, and the individual movements employ less contrast than other works of his. Although only saxophonist Erik-Jan de Wit is credited (through overdubbing he performs all the ensemble saxophone sounds in the work), the music includes percussion, keyboards, and some additional electronic sounds. As befits theater music, the composition seems contrived to supplement and not overwhelm the activities an audience watches, though the breathless Dance 2 is an instance where the propulsive energy of Eisenga’s music probably assumes a greater prominence in the proceedings.

Eisenga's writing seems particularly well suited for the piano, and Zefir 9619 collects five works involving that instrument. The most arresting one is Growing Worm, a five-minute character piece that begins simply and seems to grow by adding more twists and turns to the opening material; the chromatic inflections Eisenga introduces as the development proceeds gives this piece a momentary, spiky dissonance, but the forward drive so characteristic of the composer's aesthetic remains intact. In both Les Chants Estivaux (for 4 pianos) and City Lines (for two), he adds immeasurably to the pattern-oriented keyboard music of older contemporaries with a wealth of very different figurations that alternate unpredictably but with a marvelous sense of rightness. Theme 1 displays a more expressively straightforward approach as one simple idea gradually develops and eventually reappears transposed up a fourth to bring it to a close.

One of minimalism's most pervasive problems is contrast. When the great process pieces of the 60s and early 70s gradually gave way to shorter pieces with more change—the post-minimalist turn identified by Kyle Gann—the newer style raised a problem that the elder generation has attempted to answer in various ways and with varying degrees of success. Nyman and (to a lesser extent) Glass populate their musical world with similar figurations that have appeared in earlier works, recycling them in an intertextual way (for Glass, without a hint of postmodern irony and, perhaps, with a workmanship that sometimes recalls nothing so much as extremely prolific composers of the past like Carl Czerny). Reich favors very attenuated contrasts in his new works, barrel- ing through the design of each movement much like Bach might, but without his polyphonic richness.

In all three parts of his Piano Concerto—by far the strongest work of all the ones I discuss here—Eisenga poses what sounds to me like the first steps in a solution to this problem, one that could have long-range importance. About halfway through the first part, the musical character and figurations change noticeably; from then on, there’s a richer texture among solo piano and orchestral parts and more constant change in the figurations; the whole suggests to me a kind of updated Mozart piano concerto. It occurs to me that what minimalism needs is to retain its rhythmic pulse and pattern-oriented manner, but to introduce much more variation among the patterns that appear in a single movement or piece and introduce—much as Mozart did—sharply etched melodies that throw into sharp relief the inherent expressive contrast suggested by the varied patterns. The trick, of course, is to accomplish this without destroying the rhythmic momentum that minimalism depends so much on for its effect. (Or maybe also throwing that away will prove decisive.) Eisenga uses sharp contrast of pattern more consciously in the piano concerto, but the melodies are still a little bit too uncharacterized, often consisting of little more than linear presentations of the nearest chord tone, one per each change of harmony. Melodic they certainly are, but they seem to point up their inadequacy for the rich variety Eisenga seems to be aiming for elsewhere.

The degree of contrast in the much shorter Dickens! is even more palpable. Here as elsewhere, the musicians bring a joy and excitement to the performance that any composer would envy, and the sound is excellent.

ELGAR: Froissart; see VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

ELGAR; WALTON; Cello Concertos; HOLST: Invocation; HOLST: The Fall of the Leaf
Steven Isserlis; Philharmonia/ Paavo Jarvi
Hyperion 68077—73 minutes

This new Isserlis recording has a lot going for it. These outstanding British composers make a very listenable program. Each work seems to lead to the next, beginning with Edward Elgar’s famous E-minor Concerto from 1919, played here with great involvement and a warm sound from everyone. Gustav Holst’s 1911 Invocation, Op. 19:2, follows, a thoughtful and
dramatic piece that shows the composer’s somewhat more dissonant side compared to Elgar. This work is not well known but it makes a fine contrast to both the Elgar before it and William Walton’s great Concerto of 1956 that follows. Finally, we end with a set of variations for cello solo from 1963 by Gustav’s daughter Imogen Holst, whose music is less known than the others, but well worth hearing. The theme is from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book and makes a lovely close to a beautiful program.

Iserlis and the orchestra play with panache and a beautiful sound that Hyperion captures to the hilt. They are outstanding performers and I am very glad to have this.

D. MOORE

E Elgar: Sea Pictures; Polonia; Pomp & Circumstance Marches

Alice Coote, mz; Halle Orchestra/ Mark Elder
Halle 7536—65 minutes

I started with the five Pomp and Circumstance Marches. First, I should admit that I really like only 1 and 4. Some call No. 2 “Schubertian”, but though I love Schubert I find that march boring. No. 1 is rather nice here, and No. 4 is routine. I really like both 1 and 4 on Helios 88005 for organ and brass band, recorded in 1982 at Ely Cathedral. (There should be an organ in at least No. 1, but you often hardly hear it.) There is no better No. 1 for orchestra than Zinman in Baltimore (Telarc 80310, 1/F 1993). And both 1 and 4 are very strong on the Barenboim recording from 1973 (Sony 48265—yes, you can hear an organ).

I don’t like the singer here; I am used to Janet Baker, who of course has never been matched. We have also liked other recordings; see our index. The singer also looks like a hooker in her photo.

Polonia is a rarity, so some readers will want it. The only other recording I know is Andrew Davis on Chandos (5083, March/April 2011). Lawrence Hansen reviewed that and liked it, but from his write-up I think he was eager to hear something “new” by the composer. I find it deadly dull here. Yes, there are tunes by Chopin and Paderewski in it, as well as the Polish national anthem. It was written for a benefit concert for Polish war victims (1915). But I got no kick out of hearing those tunes out of context in a rather abstract, English-sounding piece.

VROON

TV stars and football players exert the sort of influence over habits, taste, and fashion that was previously the domain of teachers and thinkers and (further back still) theologians.

--Mario Vargas Llosa

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E Elgar: Sea Pictures; Piano Quintet

Rodolfus Choir, English Chamber Orchestra, English Symphony/ Kenneth Woods
Avie 2362—60 minutes

These are both orchestrations, but not quite what you might expect. The piano quintet has no piano in it at all, unlike most such orchestrations, which sound almost like piano concertos. It is a three-movement work conceived on a symphonic scale, but the man who did the orchestration (Donald Fraser) thought it would work better without the piano. Elgar was not a pianist in any professional way, and GB Shaw heard orchestral strivings in his playing. Mr. Fraser thinks Elgar orchestrated like an organist, and that’s the approach he takes here.

What Donald Fraser says about the Sea Pictures in the notes is particularly noteworthy: Edward Elgar would not, at first glance, seem a composer likely to have written one of the greatest song cycles in the English language, as it was a genre he attempted only once, compared with the many memorable cycles by the likes of Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, Mahler, and his fellow Englishmen Britten and Vaughan Williams. In fact, Elgar seemed a composer content to write one or two staggering masterpieces in each genre and then leave it behind: two concertos, two symphonies, two chamber works for strings, two big overtures, and two big orchestral tone poems. Sea Pictures, however, stands alone.... Elgar originally conceived it for soprano, changing course and keys on encountering the great contralto Clara Butt, who sang the first performance dressed, we are told, as a mermaid.

Well! No mermaids here; it becomes a choral piece. It’s rather nice either way, but I can only hear Janet Baker when I hear this music. The poetry is very good—by such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning (though one is by Elgar’s wife)—and one hears the words more distinctly with a soloist. (In fact, this choir might as well be singing German.)

To be fair, this is a beautiful recording of both pieces. It’s just that I know them so well in their original form that I can’t be happy with a piano quintet without a piano or a song cycle without a singer. Some of our readers will want to hear this, I’m sure. It is, after all, Elgar; and it is beautiful music.

VROON

E Elgar: Symphony 1

Berlin Staatskapelle/ Daniel Barenboim
Decca 478 9353—52 minutes

Brahms’s influence on his immediate contemporaries such as Gernsheim and Herzogenberg was deadening, especially in scoring.
Tchaikovsky commented to Ethel Smythe that the Brahmsians bullheaded ignored any developments in modern orchestration. Later generations—Elgar, Carl Nielsen, Schoenberg—were able to take the best from Brahms’s formal solidity, but had no fear of vivid orchestration. Elgar’s work, and this symphony in particular, proves that panache and good form get along fine.

Barenboim’s interpretation is athletic, even boisterous. His tempos are flexible without losing the thread of Elgar’s complex argument. He applies accelerandos or ritardandos with the instinct of a good musician. No doubt the HIPsters will frown; hard cheese for them.

His reading favors the darker, richer side of Elgar, where Brahms’s influence can be heard at its best. The recorded sound is beefy, with the many details of the score audible so that the listener better grasps the construction of this great work. Anyway, beef should naturally accompany an English symphony. His sympathy with and comprehension of Elgar’s idiom is everywhere apparent.

There are several exciting recordings of the symphony out there—Barbirolli’s remains my favorite—but this one clears the upper deck.

O’CONNOR

ERNST: Violin Pieces, Vol. 5
Sherban Lupu; Ian Hobson, p
Toccata 310—70 minutes

I was much impressed by Sherban Lupu’s collection of music by George Enesco (M/J 2013), so I looked forward to hearing this. The opening Polonaise de Concert turned out to be an unpleasant surprise. A showpiece, it makes great technical demands on the player, and Lupu is obviously struggling to grab the notes. The next piece, Ernst’s arrangement of Stephen Heller’s slow and sentimental Album Page, goes better, but Lupu still sounds a bit wobbly. Technique deteriorating? Born 1952, Lupu must have been 60 or 61 years old when these recordings were made in 2013, and I feared that his technique must have begun to deteriorate.

Listening further, it became clear that he must have had a bad day when he recorded the Polonaise, because the rest of the music here is played without a hitch. The problem that remains is the quality of the music. It is mostly insipid display pieces, most based on tunes from famous operas by Meyerbeer, Carafa, Halevy, and Pacini. The program concludes with Ernst’s variations on the Dutch national anthem. The Three Rondinos based on tunes by Meyerbeer, Carafa, and Halevy are particularly insipid.

Stick with Ilya Gringolts’s recording of the Six Polyphonic Studies, including the most technically dazzling performance I’ve ever heard of the showstopper arrangement of ‘The Last Rose of Summer’, if you want to hear stupefying virtuosity (J/A 2008), or Thomas Christian’s two-disc set of Ernst’s more serious music (J/A 2015).

MAGIL

FARRENC: Trios, opp 33+34
Mary Ellen Haupert, p; Nancy Oliveros, v; Laura Sewell, vc—Centaur 3435—51 minutes

Louise Farrenc (1804-75) was a concert pianist, renowned teacher, and composer of a large quantity of piano works, chamber music, and three symphonies. Her piano teachers included Moscheles and Hummel, and she began her composition studies with Reicha at the age of 15 when classes at the Paris Conservatoire were only open to men. Eventually she became the first woman to hold a permanent position as a Professor of Piano at the Conservatoire and she worked for nearly 10 years and was paid less than her male counterparts. With the success of her compositions, her students, her own performance career, publications and awards, she demanded and got equal pay.

Beside the two trios offered here, she composed a nonet, wind and piano sextet (preceded Poulenc’s by 80 years), flute and clarinet Trios, two piano quintets (like the Trout for piano with violin, viola, cello, and bass), two violin sonatas and a cello sonata.

While her chamber music does get heard occasionally these days, it is far too seldom. Her early romantic style was praised by Robert Schumann, among others. Her Flute Trio has been a mainstay of my own repertoire since the early 1990s, and owing to my detailed knowledge of that work, the two trios here felt like old friends even on first hearing. Farrenc’s style, even with different melodies, harmonies, and rhythms is as distinct to me as Mendelssohn or Schumann.

Either of these would make a perfect opening to a trio recital. The first, in E-flat, is in four movements and just under half an hour in duration. The second is in D minor, has three movements (the second is a set of variations), and lasts about 24 minutes.

I enjoyed the wonderful ensemble, and especially the interplay of musical lines in this performance by a trio of ladies from the Midwest. They have impressive individual biographies, but there is no mention of this ensemble and how they got together or how long they have been playing together. The sound is great, the performances quite good. Haupert’s booklet notes are both informative and interesting. And I really like Farrenc’s music, so this disc
will remain on my active listening stack for the foreseeable future.

HARRINGTON

FONTANESI: Intimate Chamber Pieces
Cello Sonata; Suite Blu; Quintetto Domestico; Like a Weeping Cloud; De Profundis
Ensemble Sherazade
Bongiovanni 5189—58 minutes

David Fontanesi (b. 1969) is a new composer to my ears and apparently to ARG as well. He is an Italian with a romantic twist and a compact way of going to work, meaning that none of these “intimate” pieces is much over a quarter-hour long.

The four-movement Cello Sonata is played by Paolo Andriotti and Michelangelo Carbonara. It is a relatively gentle and distinctly attractive piece. I only wish that Andriotti was a bit more solid in his intonation in places. Then come Cecilia Alegi, mezzo, and Lorenzo Fabiani on violin to join Andriotti in a setting of part of John Keats’s ‘Ode to Melancholy’, sung in English, though pronounced oddly, so that one is hard put to understand it without following the printed text. Fabio Catania on viola joins the violin and cello and piano for De Profundis. I hate to keep on criticizing, but the violin is as questionable as the cello in intonation; and the recorded balance or the nature of the setting itself makes the words unclear. As a musical composition all of these pieces sound attractive, but the use of long notes in the voice makes the words incomprehensible.

Back to instruments, we are now introduced to Ginevra Petrucci on flute; she and Andriotti play Suite Blu for flute and cello, a classically-oriented piece, amusing to hear. Then all of the instrumentalists get together for Quintetto Domestico.

All of this music is quite lovely. I only wish the violinist and cellist played more reliably in tune and that the composer were more aware of how to make vocal works understandable. As it is, this is a not unpleasant but not outstanding introduction to a composer who is a master at bringing the past into the present.

D MOORE

FRANCK: Violin Sonata; see Collections

FREY: Piano Pieces 1
Luisa Splett—Toccata 339—66 minutes

Emil Frey (1889-1946) was Swiss and a student of Robert Freund, a student of Liszt. In 1905 he moved to Paris, where he entered the conservatoire to continue studies with Gabriel Fauré and Charles-Marie Widor. As with most musicians of the time, he came in contact with many doers and movers in this center of the artistic universe. Finally moving to Berlin in 1907 he pursued his varied interests, which spread from French impressionism to Romanian folkloric elements, to Russian music, and finally winding up with the Second Viennese School. All this is amply discussed in the notes by Splett.

This first volume of his piano music takes us from the Debussy-Fauré like ‘Berceuse’ of 1906 to the Reger-like Passacaglia of 1933. The latter is a substantial composition with impressive cumulative power. The ‘Humoreske’ of 1911 and Variations on a Romanian Folk Song (1910) show the influence of Frey’s visit to that country. While they are melodic, it is not the sort of melody that engulfs one in its beauty. Its magic is more of the forward-thinking prickliness of Roussel. A friendship with George Enesco undoubtedly was an influence in the somewhat exotic sounding Variations. There is nothing academic about this music; a creative vibrancy hangs over each note.

The grand Sonata Dramatica, written during his time in Moscow in 1912-13, is in three movements. The first, in sonata form, is dramatic and may remind some of Medtner. Arresting ideas tumble over each other in rapid fashion, yet there is always a coherence and a discipline at work. An oriental cast hangs over the movement, and the performer is challenged by some major technical requirements.

The largo is thought-provokingly emotional, rather than overtly pretty; and the finale after a brief introduction is a wild rhythmic and melodic gallop that would befit a trip to hell. In cyclic manner it returns to themes of previous movements. Swiss pianist Splett has mastered every twist and turn of this complex music and it would be difficult to envision a more sympathetic realization of this great sonata.

What remains is the short three-movement Little Slavic Suite from 1917. Once again it is a gem of a piece, highly individual if not without its recognizable influences. It would be difficult not to like this music, and even more difficult to reject it since Frey absorbs his sources well and creates something entirely new from them. Excellent sound. Can’t wait for Volume 2.

BECKER

FRICKER: The Vision of Judgement;
Symphony 5
Jane Manning, s; Robert Tear, t; Leeds Festival Chorus; Liverpool Philharmonic/ Charles Groves (Vision); Gillian Weir, org; BBC Symphony/ Colin Davis—Lyrita 1124—67 minutes

Peter Racine Fricker (1920-90) achieved a fine reputation after WW II as one of the finest British composers of his generation; but his

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star waned, and his music is now largely forgotten. His catalog, though, encompassed more than 160 works in every genre except staged opera; and his music was regularly heard in the 50s and 60s. In 1964 he was appointed visiting Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara; he was later to have a regular appointment and become department chairman. He did maintain ties with England, particularly through the Cheltenham Festival in the summers of 1984-86.

These are two of his finest large-scale works. In The Vision of Judgement (1957) he set portions of the epic poem Christ by the 8th Century Anglo-Saxon poet Cynegils. It is a loud work, relying heavily on brass and percussion, with precious little lyricism to leaven an unrelenting dissonant style. Fricker’s style drew heavily from prevailing European music; it has none of the traditional English folk-derived sound that characterized Vaughan Williams or Holst. The choral style is heavily homophonic, so the powerful text comes over well. In general, though, the music sounds heavy-handed, lacking in variety and finesse.

Fricker’s symphony was commissioned by the BBC orchestra in 1975-6 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Royal Festival Hall; it uses a large orchestra, including lots of percussion and a substantial part for organ (though it is large orchestra, including lots of percussion and a substantial part for organ). It is a short work, only 19 minutes, concentrated and dense in style. Here the brevity is a plus, for this is a more interesting work than The Vision of Judgement.

These recordings were made privately by Richard Itter, the founder of Lyrita. Both are BBC broadcasts, the Vision from 1980, the Symphony from the 1976 premiere (monaural). The quality is quite acceptable, if not at the highest level. Readers interested in post-war British music should grab this while it is available.

ALTHOUSE

G R O M M E L: Piano Sonatas 4-7
Tatjana Blome—Grand Piano 640—70:40

I think I love the piano as much as anybody, and I think this composer was a piano lover and knew what the instrument could do. He was also a moderate man, and his music is never obnoxious or outrageous. He lived from 1906 to 1984, and these sonatas were written from 1943 to 1966 (but the last three sonatas were revised up to 1982). Mark Lehman reviewed his first three piano sonatas on Grand Piano 606 and ended by hoping for a second volume from this pianist.

Well, here it is—and Mark’s review of the first volume is far better than anything I could write (J/A 2012). This is post-romantic music, never very dissonant. I’m afraid I find it rather boring. Mark Lehman is a composer and appreciates craftsmen in his field. I am a music lover and listen for inspiration of some kind. I’m afraid I don’t hear it here.

Please read Mark’s review to understand why this music appealed to him so much—maybe the description will make it appealing to you.

VROON

G A B R I E L I, A: Sacrae Cantiones (1565)
Ensemble Officium/ Wilfried Rombach
Christophorus 77390—64 minutes

The title on this recording of motets by Andrea Gabrieli (c1532-85), “Music at San Marco”, is misleading if the listener is expecting a program of the composer’s polyphonic works. Most of the music here comes from an early printed collection, Sacrae Cantiones (1565), that appeared the year before Gabrieli was appointed first organist at St Mark’s in Venice. It is a collection of five-part motets dedicated to Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, ostensibly in hope of gaining an appointment with the Munich court. At this stage in his career, Gabrieli was strongly influenced by Orlando de Lassus. The two composers were named in the quartermaster’s list as part of the entourage that accompanied Duke Albrecht to the coronation of Emperor Maximilian II at Frankfurt in 1562. They remained lifelong friends.

It was customary at that time for sacred polyphony to be performed by combinations of voices and instruments, and various combinations are heard here. The instrumental ensemble consists of a cornet, three trombones, and organ. In some instances voice parts are doubled, and in others the voices are replaced. A number of the motets are performed by the choir with a very unobtrusive organ doubling. The three-movement motet ‘Levavi Oculos Meos’ uses a different combination for each movement: solo voice with organ, a five-part ensemble of solo voices with organ, and the full choir with organ. The one motet that does not come from the 1565 set is the 10-part ‘Laudate Dominum in Sanctis Eius’, published posthumously in 1587. Its style is probably more in keeping with most listeners’ expectations of the composer.

The performances here leave nothing to be desired in terms of technical polish. They are shapely, well paced, and expressive without subjective excess. The recorded sound is warm but clear. Admirers of Gabrieli will not be disappointed unless they want to be bowled over with reverberant polyphonic waves of sound.

GATENS

July/August 2016
Today there is no way to know for sure whether or not Vincenzo Galilei (c. 1520-91), father of astronomer Galileo and lutenist Michelangelo, intended for the music in his 1584 Libro D’Intavolatura Di Liuto manuscript to be performed. In the booklet essay lutenist Zak Ozmo raises this question by describing how the “exceptional difficulty” of the music strains both player and instrument to their limits.

Galilei includes pieces in all 12 chromatic keys, and the collection is thus one of the most comprehensive well-tempered precursors of Bach’s familiar 1722 keyboard collection. Zak Ozmo plays a set of five pieces (always Pazza-Pazzamezzo Moderno, Romanesca Moderna) in each of four keys: G, G-sharp, A, A-sharp. Ozmo seeks to maintain the contrasts that Galilei described in his own writings between the “excited” sound of the Romanesca and the “quiet” of the Passamezzo in his interpretations. Nevertheless, the performances are rather studied in a reflective, introspective, and deliberate manner. Melodic lines do sing in the slow-paced tempos, meant not for dancing but for courtly or intellectual enjoyment.

The listener must take steps towards the music to engage in its subtle beauties. Lean in, much as a lute player leans forward to enfold the instrument. I would be glad to hear the music in a workshop where Zak Ozmo could experiment with different tempos, demonstrate the technical demands of the music, and illustrate his process in creating this program.

First recordings.

C.MOORE

Baldassare Galuppi was a theater man known for his operas and oratorios. He wrote these keyboard sonatas in the 1750s when he was in his mid-40s. There are six sonatas here, plus a bonus single-movement sonata in G not belonging to this opus. The recording fills a niche: I don’t see any other recording of these sonatas, and there are at least 125 other unfamiliar sonatas by this composer. There was room for more of them here.

The compositions are pleasant, not very challenging to listen to or to play. They could be mistaken for Telemann’s music. New Grove’s article describes them well: “The texture is generally thin and homophonic, with a singing soprano line, clear and regular phrasing and characteristic gestures and motifs reminiscent of aria types, particularly in slow ornamental movements.”

The instrument is a French double, a modern copy of the Goerms-Taskin harpsichord from about ten years after the publication of this music, and tuned in Vallotti’s temperament. An Italian harpsichord would have made this more interesting, but the musician-ship and sound here are fine. Andrea Chezzi plays cleanly and simply, getting most of his contrasts from manual changes, rather than improving much embellishment.

The first movement of Sonata 6 has an interpretive miscalculation, where the buff stop sabotages the melody and the syncopation. Everything else goes well, and I have enjoyed listening to this repeatedly.

B.LEHMAN

Very little was known about Luigi Gazzotti (1886-1923). Researcher Daniele Rubboli has done a thorough job, presumably passing the information he had gleaned to the annotator, the pianist Saltini.

Gazzotti was a contemporary of the Italian verismo composers—Mascagni, Leoncavallo, and Puccini. Although he composed five operas they were not even close to becoming standard repertoire items. The 23 chamber arias here are delicate little flowers with barely a whiff of verismo. They do sound like something Puccini might compose on an off-day, but a sunny one. Gazzotti is closer in style to Piero Tosti, but less exuberant and tuneful.

Soprano Barbieri, like Gazzotti, was born in Modena. She studied at the Conservatorio in Ferrara. In 1992 she was one of the winners in the Luciano Pavarotti-Philadelphia Opera Voice Competition. In 1994 she was a winner in the Placido Domingo Operalia Competition. Her career in opera encompassed more than 30 principal roles in Europe and America. I really do not care for her voice. Her vocal interpretation is tender as befits the Gazzotti songs, but the top range is uncomfortable—awkward steel. Pianist Saltini is a marvel. His accompaniments are crystal clear in articulation, yet with a warm radiance and delicacy.

The texts are available at the Tactus website.

PARSONS

I always look forward to hearing a Ginastera album, whether I finally like the music or not. By the time I was done with this Volume I of
the composer’s orchestral works, my regard for the composer dropped considerably, and I have no desire to hear any further volumes if they’re conducted by Mena.

The liner notes say Ginastera identified three different stages in his composing career. So I chose to listen to these works in the order written (the album presents them in reverse order). Here Estancia (1941) is in its rarely performed complete version rather than the famous suite of just four dances, and the music has never sounded so sluggish and square. Lucas Somozoa Osterc has a minimal role in the work; his voice is adequate but has a faintly irritating pulse (not a vibrato but a pulse, almost like a rapid wave) when he holds a note for several bars. Complete text and translation are included. Ollantay is from 1947 and Pampeana 3 from 1954 (revised 1967).

In all three works opening notes of phrases aren’t together, and slow introductory sections move hesitantly with quarter- and half-note rests held for varying lengths. In slow passages, e.g., the ‘Danza del Trigo’ (II of the Estancia Suite), Ginastera marks a slow lyrical melody with phrasing that extends over a number of measures, but Mena has the violins “separate” or give a slight pulse to each note, killing any long-lined lyricism. Also, accents aren’t crisp, rhythms are unbelievably foursquare, the Nocturne in Estancia is stuftifying, and its concluding ‘Malambo’ is the least exciting I’ve ever heard.

Balances are awful. In Ollantay the opening to III is not complicated music; but, even as I listened with the score, Mena didn’t make clear to me just what lines have priority over others. And in I of Pampeana 3 he doesn’t coordinate slow-moving flutes at a fifth in parallel with a celeste playing fifths—pure sloppiness.

When Pampeana 3 opens it sounds like the orchestra is playing slightly behind Mena’s beat. And in all three works it is often impossible to figure out the tempo in slow movements because he doesn’t establish a basic pulse. That’s rather deadly when the composer says a tempo after a slight retard; what tempo are they supposed to return to?

Mena makes me feel that Ginastera relied on a very few basic rhythmic and melodic patterns, a lot of repetition, and a paucity of substance. That’s not true, of course: there is an extended woodwind fugue in Estancia, and Ollantay is in a style considerably different from Estancia. Nonetheless, he makes Ginastera sound boring.

I also had trouble with the engineering. I like my music loud—I like to feel it, especially in this repertoire. But something was off-kilter in Estancia. The violins are jammed far right, and the orchestra sounds loud but not projected, as if recorded at too far a distance. For the other two works I turned up the volume yet more, and the sound popped to life. In other words, this album may have to be played too loud for comfort to experience any degree of orchestral richness. This is the first time I’ve heard Chandos record the BBC Philharmonic at MediaCityUK (yes, that’s how they spell it) in Salford; perhaps that makes a big acoustical difference. I count only 72 players in the album’s photo of the orchestra. That surprised me because other Chandos albums make the orchestra sound much larger; here they sound smaller.

Then I turned to Giselle Ben-Dor conducting the London Symphony in the complete Estancia (originally on Collins, now on Naxos), and my interest in Ginastera was restored.

**Gjeilo:** Ubi Caritas; The Spheres; Sanctus: London; The Crossing; Northern Lights; The Ground; Lake Isle; Serenity (O Magnum Mysterium); Tundra; Reflections; Sacred Heart
Matthew Sharp, vc; Ola Gjeilo, p; Tenebrae; Voces8; London Chamber Orchestra
Decca 24646—48 minutes

This arrived with a note from our editor stuck to the jewel box. Freely translated, it said, “Danger: New Age sounds lurk within!” Well, plucky soul that I am, I listened and I’m pleased to follow up with a review.

Born in Norway and now based in the USA, Ola Gjeilo (b 1978) is a popular composer whose music travels in the same contemporary choral circle as Rutter, Whitacre, Lauridsen, and, maybe, Arvo Part. Mr Vroon is quite right that there is a New Age feel to some of the music. ‘The Spheres’, for example, could serve nicely as background music for an aromatherapist or Reiki master at work. (It’s also known as the Kyrie from Gjeilo’s Sunrise Mass.) But a lot of the music is more interesting: attractive, brimming with emotion, and very easy on the ear. The composer obviously is quite taken by the ‘Ubi Caritas’ prayer because we are given two warm and lyrical settings of it. (The second one goes by the name of ‘Sacred Heart.’) Gjeilo’s ‘O Magnum Mysterium’ also is beautiful; and I really like ‘Tundra’, which puts a cello, piano, and string quartet together with the Tenebrae choir for a propulsive trek across barren North European terrain. (It’s quite visual, like something out of a film score.) Also notable is ‘Northern Lights’, a serene yet intense love poem taken from the Song of Songs.

Voces8 and Tenebrae are distinguished ensembles that lend choral luster to the proceedings. I’m less than thrilled with the engineering, because someone felt a need to boost
the instruments (especially the piano) higher than they needed to go. As a result, graceful licks from the keyboard and cello often upstage the voices.

In the end, this is music that charms and calms more than it challenges and inspires. If that’s your ticket, you’ll like it.

GOODARD: Songs
Tassis Christoyannis, bar; Jeff Cohen, p
Aparate 123—72 minutes
Benjamin Godard (1849-95) was a French violinist and composer of six operas, five symphonies, two piano and two violin concertos, string quartets, violin sonatas, piano pieces, and songs. Our index lists 10 or so recordings of his instrumental works. As far as I can tell this is the first recording dedicated to his songs.

Though they were popular in his lifetime, Godard’s 162 published songs are now rarely heard. These 26 imaginative and delightful songs were selected by the performers. Most are recorded here for the first time. These are fine settings of texts by Gautier, Hugo, and Baudelaire, and La Fontaine.

You can hear touches of Fauré, Massenet, and Gounod in these songs. His contemporaries described his music as sentimental, and their dismissal of him as a composer effectively relegated his songs to obscurity.

These artists make a good case for the songs. Christoyannis does a wonderful job of bringing out the wit in Six Fables of La Fontaine. His sturdy voice is also capable of the gentleness many of the songs require. They do a fine job of communicating both the great tenderness and the ardor of ‘Chanson’ (Opus 7:4), Godard’s setting of Victor Hugo’s poem. Cohen conveys well the spirit of spring in the enthusiastic accompaniment of ‘Printemps.’ These are fine performances. The songs may not be worthy of the highest ranking, but they are too good to be dismissed as merely pretty music.

Notes, texts, and translations. R. MOORE

GRANADOS: Goyescas; Poetic Scenes;
Intermezzo; El Pelele
Joop Celis, p—BIS 2122 [SACD] 77 minutes
Magical. I knew, based on his phenomenal four-disc York Bowen series (Chandos 10774), that Joop Celis would play Goyescas like a god, as both Granados and Bowen wrote thickly intricate, chromatic, complex piano music. Celis spins out all the ornate embroidery with effortless dexterity, but ensures that the melodic strands are never buried, shifting the filigree from foreground to background via careful weighting of the fingers and precise pedaling. There is no slackening of tempo or stretching the bar to accommodate all the fiendish turns and ornaments woven into Granados’s dense textures—Celis leaps gracefully about the keyboard, without hesitation or fear of hitting a wrong note, and yet without harshness (it is the same in his Bowen series). His left hand is powerful, thunderous, but never pounding. The clashing tonalities of bells at the end of ‘Love and Death’ induce a fluttering harmonic interference pattern (“beat”) in the bass; the suppressed sobs of the bereft lover felt palpably in the chest and throat, like a gentle wave of suffocation—incredible! Wonderful pedal work all through, building mighty, rich sonority that sacrifices clarity only in service to the music’s expression and yet never obscures important lines or melodic gestures. This is a performance for the ages, even better than Alicia de Larrocha’s legendary Decca recording.

Celis closes his recital with a return to Granados’s last two Goya-inspired pieces, the regal and evocative intermezzo from his Goyescas opera and the jaunty and splashy ‘Pelele’, a joyous etude depicting the carefree play of young women tossing a straw man into the air.

This was recorded in the same hall as Celis’s Bowen series and the sound is sumptuous, even better than the excellent Chandos discs, the surround-sound SACD layer expanding the soundstage well beyond and above the confines of my living room. This profoundly sensuous recording is the best disc of piano music I’ve heard all year.

WRIGHT

GRANADOS: Torrijos; Galician Suite;
March of the Defeated
Madrigal Choir; Barcelona Symphony/ Pablo Gonzalez—Naxos 573263—55 minutes
Granados enthusiasts will eat this up with a spoon. These are all billed as “world premiere” recordings, and indeed I do not find any reference to them in the ARG Index.

Justo Romero’s concise, informative album notes liken the opening of the March of the Defeated to a Spanish Holy Week processional

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march. It certainly does have a grim somberness to it, though the mid-section of the piece is more cheerful and lyrical. The opening theme returns in altered form to close the piece. Exactly who has been “defeated” is not specified. Perhaps we could look at this piece as foreshadowing of the composer’s own untimely end, in World War I, on a ship torpedoed by a German U-boat on the return trip to Spain after the world premiere of Goyescas at the Met in New York.

The theme of loss and failure continues in the incidental music for a play about an ill-fated expedition by General Jose Maria Torrijos and a small band of followers to overthrow the oppressive regime of King Ferdinand VII. The music is mostly lyrical and fragrantly orchestrated, with modest choral interjections in the first, second, and fourth of its five movements. There is certainly a strong 19th Century romantic Spanish tinge to the music, but not to the point of cliché. Mr. Romero says, “This is vivid, narrative music, with touches of verismo and no pretensions other than a desire to illustrate and enhance the stage action.” I’m inclined to agree. The problem is that, like some movie scores, the music may not be able to stand on its own without the stage action. Now that this review’s almost done, I probably won’t listen to it again.

For the Suite on Galician Songs, Granados actually does quote some folk music themes, and each of the four movements illustrates an aspect of the Galician geography or regional character. Think of it as almost a gentle little Spanish Ma Vlast. Both in running time (slightly more than half an hour) and in musical depth, this is the most substantial work on the program. It opens with a movement called ‘Morning Song’ and ends with a fiesta. Worth hearing again.

It is hard to find fault with any other aspect of this production. The Barcelona Symphony has a lush, florid tone; and Gonzalez leads them in idiomatic, superbly paced performances. The recorded sound is first rate, capturing all the rich variety and detail of Granados’s orchestrations and the lovely tone of the orchestra. The only way Naxos could best it is to release this album on one of their hi-def audio Blu-rays.

HANSEN

GRANADOS: Trio; Violin Sonata; Cello Pieces; Violin Pieces
Trio Rodin—Aevea 16013—72 minutes
A very logical program, starting with the trio, then pieces for cello and piano and, finally, violin and piano.

The 25-minute Trio of 1895 begins like early Fauré, a soothing, rippling piano figure setting off each section of the movement as a structural signpost. The scherzo (II) is brash and playful, with a contrasting musette trio evoking the hurdy-gurdy. The slow III is mysteriously titled “duet”, though it’s really a wistful and sweet terzetto amongst all three players. The finale is pure Schumann, redolent of his late violin sonata finales, full of swaying, stamping rhythm and unison writing, with passing references to prior movements, though it’s not really cyclic. Allusions to Spanish folk music are fleeting, and there’s maybe a hint of Scarlatti in an ornament here and there, but this is mostly standard and ingratiating 19th Century romanticism.

The three cello pieces are later works in self-consciously archaic style, evoking the qualities of the Spanish Dances and Goyescas, and based on folk song and dance.

The violin pieces return to a more generic romanticism. The Violin Sonata, also 1895, here for the first time includes all four movements, the last two incomplete. The scherzo is delightful, just as good as the first movement’s effusive outpouring of bittersweet lyricism: it’s a gentle, Schubertian descending cascade of notes from the piano as the violin spins out a wandering melody, then a contrasting trio with a repetitive Spanish-hued violin theme. But Granados’s inspiration failed him in the bland III and IV; I see why he never finished this work. The recital ends here, a bit melancholy, Granados’s grand ambition (described in the booklet) for this sonata unrealized. This won’t be the scherzo’s last recording, though.

The performances are wonderful, Ms Garcia a standout, well capturing the Spanish flavor of her cello pieces. The sound is clear, warm, pristine.

WRIGHT

GRAZIANI: Cantatas, op 25
Consortium Carissimi/ Garrick Comeaux
Naxos 573257—71 minutes
Published in 1678, this collection of 14 sacred cantatas for 1-4 voices by the Rome-based composer Bonifazio Graziani (1604-64) has a nice variety in the writing, and texts that are appropriate to different seasons of the liturgical year. For instance, in ‘Crudelissime Spine’ on a Good Friday text there’s a fine vocal blend (mezzo, tenor, bass) and earnest yearning in the ascending beseeching melodies; and in ‘Mobile Nave E Nostra Vita’ the interplay of the soprano, tenor, and continuo works very well.

12 of the 14 cantatas are here. It might make for a better introduction to Graziani’s Opus 25 if there were two discs, each with...
seven cantatas, with instrumental music of the period added to flesh out the programs.

In the last issue I reviewed another program of Graziani (motets and oratorios) by this same ensemble (Naxos 573256, M/J 2016) and my comments are quite similar there. As sometimes happens with music recorded for the first time, there’s a certain note-by-note quality in the interpretations. There are some tuning and pitch problems (as in the long soprano sections of ‘Ecco Aperto L’Abisso’), and the voices aren’t always together.

First recordings. Notes, bios; texts and translations on the Naxos website.

C. MOORE

GRIEG: Quartet;
SIBELIUS: Quartet;
THOMMESSEN: Felix Remix

Engegard Quartet—BIS 2101 [SACD] 72 minutes

Eight years ago the Engegard Quartet recorded the Grieg quartet on SACD (2L 53) in a true surround configuration placing the listener right smack in the middle of the quartet, violins in front, viola and cello behind. That performance is febrile, white hot (too hot for me), the surround perspective largely wasted on this thick, symphonic work lacking any Haydnesque conversational back-and-forth. Now with a new cellist and second violinist, they’ve recorded it again on SACD, this time with the normal forward perspective you’d hear in concert—much better.

There’s still plenty of passion, now delivered with less raspy vehemence, more control, and more spacious, less claustrophobic atmosphere. This is the symphony of Grieg’s maturity, much better than his tepid and derivative student exercise in the form, but scored for quartet—though it has been recorded by string orchestras. So even if you have the Engegard’s first recording, you’ll want to hear this—it’s not superfluous or redundant in any way—much more mature.

Along with his Symphony 4, Sibelius wrote his only important quartet after having throat cancer surgery, and it’s cut from the same ruminative and melancholy “can’t smoke or drink no more” blues of that symphony. It’s a much more cerebral work than the flamboyant and energetic Grieg, though it has its share of virtuosity and muscle, sometimes symphonic, sometimes embodying the subtlety of its sobriquet: Intimate Voices. Like the 4th, it takes some patience to appreciate its unique language, but it’s worth the investment; and its two finales (at least that’s the way I always hear it) are stout and triumphant, unlike the more and deficient finale of the 4th.

Olav Thommessen is a mischievous jester who loves to rewrite and vandalize the works of better composers, in this case the scherzo from Mendelssohn’s Quartet 4. Like an unfunny PDQ Bach, he extends and repeats phrases from the scherzo to the point of absurdity, throwing in a bunch of anachronistic glissandos and other garish modernist effects. A little of this goes a long way.

Gorgeous, warm, blended sound on both CD and SACD layers, and the quartet plays with great clarity and blend.

WRIGHT

GRIGORJEVA: Svatki; Salve Regina; Dip-tych; Lament; Nature Morte; In Paradisum

Conrad Steinmann, rec; Ysus Quartet; Theatre of Voices, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir/ Paul Hillier—Ondine 1245—66 minutes

I don’t know about you, but when I think of the line of Baltic composers who’ve been tugging at our spiritual heartstrings in recent years, I don’t picture them smiling. And, needless to say, I don’t picture Gorecki, Pärt, et al as female, either. So I’ll admit that the first thing I noticed about this release once I got past the vibrant colors of the cover, was the photo of a smiling and attractive Galina Grigorjeva (b 1962). She has become one of Estonia’s leading composers in recent years as the creator of works that have met with approval across Eastern and Western Europe and the USA. When not composing choral fare, she specializes in ensemble works and music for solo instruments. I have seen her songs included in some of the choral anthologies that have come ARG’s way—it’s probably time for choral aficionados to get to know her better. Enter this distinguished release.

As with many of her unsmiling male counterparts, Grigorjeva (who was born in the Ukraine) embraces the musical traditions of Russian Orthodoxy. You’ll have no trouble discerning those influences, believe me. But she also alludes to the polyphonic style of the West while using a wide array of idioms, textures, and feelings that are very much her own. Take, for example, the 4-minute ‘In Paradisum’ that concludes this program. After a couple of minutes of luminous harmonies, static rhythms, and Maestro Hillier’s sopranos plucking stratospheric notes out of a wispy ether, Grigorjeva channels her inner-Rachmaninoff to take us to the Gates of Paradise in true Slavonic splendor. I had no idea it was coming and loved it when it happened.

Listen also to the way she depicts the images in poet Joseph Brodsky’s “dramatic triptych” called Nature Morte, which is sung in English. The opening poem turns out to be a nightmarish cacophony of sprechstimme,
sensations of nothingness than a direct rendering of his words. The third poem, 'Who Are You?', is a brief, existential consciousness. Consonants are barely brushed, as Grigorjeva’s Butterfly becomes You?’ is a brief, existential Stabat Mater where Jesus answers Mary back from the cross. The ‘whether dead or alive’ conclusion to the poem and triptych offers the most touching moments of the entire program.

The spirit of minimalism animates the ‘Salve Regina’, which puts the string quartet to work with the voices, churning out recurring melismas and open harmonies that manage to sound medieval and modern at the same time. Svjatki, a set of seven songs keyed to the religious and pagan aspects of the Christmas season, dates from the composer’s student years. The music runs all over the place—from the bouncy, upbeat ‘Slava’ prayer that begins the set to the spooky dreams, mournful meditations, and hearty celebrations that follow. And if you’ve ever tried to coax music out of a recorder, you’ll have a hard time believing the wretched pasted-in jobs, contains texts and translations.

HANDEL: Stabat Mater
Magnus Staveland (Imeneo), Monica Piccinni (Rosmene), Ann Hallenberg (Tirinto), Fabrizio Beggi (Argenio), Cristiana Arcari (Clomiri), Europa Galante/ Fabio Bondi
Glossa 923405 [2CD] 114:44

Handel’s Stabat Mater was his penultimate Italian opera, using a weak and recycled libretto of shallow dramatic value.

Rosmene and her sister Clomiri are devotees of the goddess Ceres; on their way to Athens for a ceremony they have been captured by pirates, to the great alarm of the women’s father, Argenio, and Tirinto, who loves Rosmene. But the two women are rescued by the Athenian general Imeneo. He claims as his reward the hand of Rosmene, with whom he has fallen in love. The powers—that-be decree that Rosmene must pay this debt of gratitude, to Tirinto’s horror. The rest of the opera involves the pressures put on Rosmene to abandon Tirinto—with whom Clomiri has now fallen in love. Caught between her love for the devoted Tirinto and her sense of obligation to Imeneo, Rosmene evades into brief insanity, but eventually she decides that honor and duty require her to accept Imeneo.

This rather spare drama—which Handel tried to make palatable by calling the work an “operetta”—was first performed in London in

shouts, glissandos, syllabic outbursts, and nasty dissonances—all of which convey the bumps and bruises of the text. But ‘The Butterfly’, Brodsky’s second poem, is a sad, disembodied affair where words flicker in and out of consciousness. Consonants are barely brushed, as Grigorjeva’s Butterfly becomes more a contemplation of the poet’s haunting brush with Grigorjeva’s ‘Lament’.

In sum, I’m quite taken with this music and think you will be too. Ondine gives you everything you’ll need in the way of sound and textual support to make your first encounter with Galina Grigorjeva a lasting one.

GREENFIELD

HANDEL: Arias for Cuzzoni
Hasnaa Bennati, Les Muffatti/ Peter Van Heyghen
Ramee 1501—69:22

Here again we have explorations of music that Handel composed with specific singers in mind. This singer was one of the most formidable and popular of her day: Francesca Cuzzoni (1691-1772). She was not very attractive in person and in character, and her relationship with the composer was often very stormy. But he employed her in her prime, from 1723 to 1728, with great audience success.

The present release offers a good survey of her service with Handel. The booklet notes give a very good account of her career. There are 9 of her arias (3 with recitatives), drawn from 8 of the 9 operas where she created her diva roles: Ottone (1723), Tamerlano (1724), Rodelinda (1725), Scipione (1726), Alessandro, Siroe, and Tolomeo (all 1728). The ninth, Admeto (1727), is not represented vocally, but is acknowledged with two of the eight orchestral tidbits that are interspersed for variety.

A singer of Moroccan background and French training, Bennati has a strong and somewhat weighty soprano voice, dark in color, slightly fluttery in pitch, but with well-schooled technique. Handel’s challenges to agility hold no terrors for her. Nevertheless, she does not seem to me to live up to the expectations of a Cuzzoni clone. No one alive today knows how Cuzzoni sounded, of course. But we do have descriptions by her admirers. She was credited with a bright and sweet voice, a purity and security of intonation, and a spontaneous, natural way with embellishment.

None of those qualities appear in Bennati’s singing. Each of her selections involves some kind of dramatic statement, but there is little variety of emotion in what seems like an abstract recital of soprano challenges.

To tell the truth, I found myself enjoying much more the orchestral excerpts, played with crisp articulation and plenty of period-instrument color by Van Heyghen’s 23-member band.

Fine sound. The booklet, one of those wretched pasted-in jobs, contains texts and translations.

BARKER
Handel collectors would want either or both of those recordings and this new one for the 1742 revision, with its tighter and much stronger emotional concentration. Of the five characters, three become almost marginal. Poor Arcari barely has a chance to be heard as the mostly evaporated Clomiri. Staveland has a burly tenor voice that creates a not particularly appealing title character. Argento is a rather cardboard figure of marginal interest, and Beggi cannot make much of him. Rosmene and Tirinto are the two primary personalities. Picciniini has a somewhat light voice, but she summons much power in portraying Rosmene's emotional twists and agonies. Hallenberg sang Tirinto in Spering's recording, and in this repeat performance she brings deepened vocal richness and expressive nuance. Handel already had the two lovers sing a duet to end Act I, and he was right to insert at the end a particularly beautiful duet, not for Rosmene and Imeneo, but as an exchange of pained farewells, couched in tactful euphemisms. It is followed only by an ensemble finale that proclaims the necessity of restraint of personal passion by uprightness and reason. I had been rooting for Hallenberg all along, and when it was clear that her character was the loser, I found myself genuinely saddened. Here is Handel, at the end of his operatic career, turning the lieto fine—the “happy ending”—poignantly on its head.

Biondi leads with his well-established styliness and instrumental perfectionism. The sound is vivid and realistic. This is a unique and valuable release, with a booklet containing good notes and full libretto with translation.

**BARKER**

**HANDEL: Trio Sonatas (7)**

Brook Street Band

Avie 2357—76 minutes

When we talk of Handel’s Corelli-style trio sonatas, for two violins with continuo, we are usually referring to the total of 13 in two published sets, Opp. 2 and 5. But the modern catalog of his works also lists eight more trios. Virtually all of them are alternate versions of trios from the sets or involve music identified with other Handel works, or both. Three sonatas are of questionable authenticity, and another is an arrangement for two recorders with bass.

Most of these have been recorded at one time or another and usually as part of samplings otherwise devoted to the two published sets. Here we have a rare program of them all by themselves. This ensemble has already recorded both the sets (Op. 2, Avie 2282: J/F 2014; Op. 5, 2068: J/F 2006).
There are seven trios here. The core of the assemblage is the “set” ofthree—in E, G minor, and E—often called the “Dresden Sonatas”, though there are questions about their dating and authenticity. There is a Sonata in C minor that is an alternate to Op. 2:1. And then there are three that are related to dramatic works. A Sinfonia in B-flat is an early piece, drawing on Handel’s first opera, Almira (1705). A Sonata in B-flat is essentially the very modestly scored overture to Handel’s first English oratorio, Esther (1718). And a Sonata in C is nicknamed Saul because it contains thematic material that Handel used in that great Biblical drama (1739).

There are four players here: violinists Rachel Harris and Farran Scott, with cellist Tatjana Theo and harpsichordist Carolyn Gibley. I have commented before on this group’s “brand of quite unashamedly period-style playing, rendered with a lot of spirit”. That description holds here: these are not the most elegantly refined performances. But the seven compositions are delivered with great enthusiasm, and this disc may serve as a pleasant supplement to recordings of the two published sets of trio sonatas, either from Brook Street or other groups—my recommendation for that is Richard Egarr’s two-disc set from Harmonia Mundi (907467: J/F 2010).

**HAYDN: Cello Concertos; BACH, CPE: Concerto in A**

Mark Coppey, Zagreb Soloists
Audite 97716—67:30

I approached this with fear and trembling—a new recording of the Haydn concertos with a young soloist and a new Solisti di Zagreb. The group was always small—10 or 12 players. Maybe they have been corrupted by the period performance nonsense? Maybe the cellist will sound off-pitch in an attempt to reproduce “period” pitch?

Well, the group was led by a great cellist in the past—Antonio Janigro—and this cellist is their current leader. Having a cellist for a leader is good, I think, because cellists are often more human, more earthy, more emotional than other musicians. And in the notes this cellist tells us about PPP that “it’s time to stop making an issue of it”. He adds that it is dangerous to treat a piece of music like a museum piece. The music must be brought to life. So the pitch here is modern, though the strings are gut, not metal.

The result is delightful. He’s a wonderful player, and the small orchestra is with him all the way. They have played together for two or three years—this is not the standard recording where the soloist meets the orchestra and conductor in the studio for the first time! They are very much in tune with each other, and the music sounds vital—not “ye olde”. The strings and soloist use enough vibrato to blend well and never produce that scraping sound that we all too often hear. Nothing sounds tinny.

The tempos are faster than old favorites like Walevski and DuPre, but they are not mechanical or breathless. The slow movements in both the Haydn concertos are a minute or two faster than I am used to, but they are not extreme. The older recordings were more willing to sound “romantic”—after all, both movements were called “Adagio” by Haydn. I won’t give up those older recordings, but I like this new one.

The CPE Bach concerto sounds more “baroque” than the Haydns, and it made me consult an old Tortelier recording that takes 3 minutes longer. I find that the tempos affect me less than the sound. The new recording sounds really good, and the Tortelier sounds like it belongs to the dim past. I will gladly substitute this one for that, despite the slight tinge of period sounds.

**VROON**

**HAYDN: Opera Overtures**
Czech Chamber Philharmonic/ Michael Halasz
Naxos 573488—79 minutes

Sometimes the mood of the moment is just right for the music that happens to be in the CD player. One recent Sunday afternoon, I was cruising down a two-lane, punching the fresh, newly green Iowa landscape through the windshield and right out the back window, on my way to the John Wayne Birthplace Museum in Winterset. I was jamming—playing this at a volume level suitable for critical evaluation in the acoustically adverse environment of an automobile cabin—and all seemed right with the world. The music is mostly light and happy and cheerful—even more so when presented in performances as unforced and full of Haydn-esque high spirits as these. Dare I say that sometimes they cross the boundary into the realm of bouncy! (The connection between Haydn and John Wayne? Absolutely none. He belongs to all of America, but remember that Iowa gave him to the rest of you!)

Haydn was the first to admit that as an opera composer, he was nowhere near Mozart’s league, but that seems a little unfair. The music is very different—technically simpler, far less psychologically complex, but superbly crafted. One can easily picture the air of anticipation in the theater at Esterhazy as the orchestra in the pit plays one of these curtain raisers. And all of the operas represented here have been recorded in their entirety—I own or
have heard most of them. Although the back of the jewel case promises music covering everything from “dark, supernatural dramas to light-hearted capers”, the program predominantly leans toward the latter, though the closer—the overture for Haydn’s take on the Orpheus myth, has a bit more weight in its slow introduction, until the jolly allegro fires up.

The orchestra and Halasz have a well-attuned feel for Haydn’s idiom—you won’t mistake this for Mozart, and that’s just fine. Halasz isn’t grasping for more than the robust, cheerful music can deliver; and the orchestra plays with crisp, bright clarity without a hint of fussiness and very little period performance practice pedantry. Sonics are superb: crisp and clean, with just the right hint of room ambiance. In the early days, we’d give Naxos a break and say “pretty good sound for a budget-priced disc”. Now they set a standard the old “major” labels struggle to meet.

**HAYDN: Symphonies**

7+83; Violin Concerto in C

Handel & Haydn Society/ Harry Christophers

Coro 16139—74:24

78-81

Accademia Bizantina/ Ottavio Dantone

Decca 4788837 [2CD] 105 minutes

The Decca set has Symphony 78, which is very attractive; I have never much cared for the other three. We are told right up front that these are period instruments, and the word “rigorous” is on the cover to describe these performances. Let that be a warning to you: unless you like strict, uncompromising period sound and techniques (from scraping, metallic violins to bippity rhythms and no sustained notes or legato) you won’t like these performances. Nos. 79 and 81 are the first recorded period performances. Though sometimes they sound limp, they are generally polished, vigorous, crisp, and bouncy readings; the other side of that is a total lack of majesty or warmth. To me they sound frivolous and shallow and hold no interest.

The Coro was recorded in Symphony Hall in Boston. That really helps! The wonderful resonance of the hall is here, and it covers some of the scraping sound made by the violins—it blends the sound better than on the other recording. Harry Christophers is also less “rigorous”, and the music has more expression. No. 7 has a slow movement labelled Adagio, and I don’t think that’s what we really hear (it’s a bit fast), but it’s not a travesty. The minuet is not a day at the races. The finale is charming. I still prefer old recordings on “normal” instruments (Adam Fischer, for example), but for a symphony this early the period instruments are not so bad.

The violin concerto is very irritating—to me unbearably tinny and shallow and frivolous. I couldn’t bear to listen to it all the way thru.

Symphony 83 is The Hess, and it’s my favorite of the Paris Symphonies. It was written for a big orchestra, and it sounds flimsy and dumb played by such a small group. Tempos are reasonable, but the repeats are endless. It takes more than 30 minutes here, versus 21 for Karajan and 24 for Barbirolli. (Barbirolli takes 3 more minutes than Karajan in the slow movement.) I prefer both of those recordings—and many others—to this one. The tiny, tinny sound is much worse in a symphony that was obviously written for a much larger orchestra.

Stephen Chakwin reviewed the previous release in the Handel & Haydn series ((J/F 2014) and liked the conductor (as I did) but complained that the orchestra is “hard to listen to—the overall ensemble is coarse, the string sound often lacking in color”. So Symphony Hall may help, but it’s not enough.

**HAYDN: Trios 25, 26, 27, 30**

Grieg Trio—Simax 1267—65:27

Trios 25 and 27 are more recorded than the others, and for good reasons. Dorian issued an excellent recording of those two plus 12 and 28 that sounds much better to me than these. It’s more indulgent, more relaxed, more phrased, less cold and businesslike. It seems to be a trend to play classical period music coldly—as if those composers had no emotions. So for those two trios, stick with—or see if you can find—Dorian 90164 (J/F 2008). All of us seem to like the Beaux Arts recordings, too (S/O 2009—nine earlier Haydn trios on Pentatone). See our index for further reviews.

There is nothing wrong with these recordings until you compare them. They are not “period instruments’, and they are not extremely cold and distant; they are simply not as warm and attractive as the KLR Trio on Dorian or the Beaux Arts. But I might keep this, because I like Trio 26 and have no other recording of it.

**HENSEL: Germany-Italy Travel**

**Album 1839-40**

Students of the University of Music, Vienna

Gramola 99094—70 minutes

In 1839-40 Fanny (Mendelssohn) Hensel traveled with her husband, the Prussian artist Wilhelm Hensel, to Italy, where she composed a collection of 18 pieces—songs, duets, quartets,
and solo piano works—as a kind of travelogue. “I have recently composed a good deal,” she wrote, “and my piano works, which I’ve written here based on names of my favorite local places, truly came to me while at these locations, and in some cases accompanied my experiences there; in the future they will serve as a pleasant souvenir, a sort of second diary.” She wrote the music on papers of various colors, and her husband adorned them with sketches of the places they visited.

The album is released with the title “Scenes from a Marriage” and performed by about two dozen university students; it is the result of a year-long project by the gender studies program of the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna to fulfill the university’s “socio-political mission of familiarizing students with the music of female composers who have not yet entered the musicological canon and whose works have been too rarely played or remain undiscovered.” The notes indicate that the travel album is performed, “in contrast to previously existing recordings, in the cyclical order conceived of by the composer and painter.”

This is the second recording of this travel album I’ve been sent for review, and it is another good one. The previous Coviello release (“Italian Journey” N/D 2006) offers fine performances, more ethereal and transparent sound, and notes, texts, and translations. Those performances may be somewhat better than these, but this release has other advantages.

One advantage is the inclusion of the version for piano accompaniment of the dramatic scene ‘Hero and Leander,’ at 6:41 the longest work of the program, which “appeared” in 2015 on the occasion of Fanny Hensel’s 210th birthday; this is its first recording.

The tempos here are more relaxed without feeling slow. The sound may not have the crystalline purity of Coviello’s excellent SACD sound, but it is warm and clean. Philip Mayers for Coviello offers a more finely nuanced and lyrical performance of ‘Villa Medicis,’ and his ‘Tarantella’ has more vigor and is enhanced by more spacious acoustics, but the student pianists are more than satisfactory.

The greater number of performers adds variety to the program. The student singers are all very good and Gramola’s sound offers more immediacy and vitality than Coviello’s. That comes through especially in the ensemble singing, particularly in the male quartet ‘Lass Fahren Hin das Alzufflüchtige.’ It is necessary to go to Gramola’s website to get English translation of the notes and texts, but it is worth doing; they are more comprehensive and more sensibly displayed than the liner notes from Coviello. Another big advantage of Gramola’s release is the photos of Wilhelm’s drawings in the liner notes. (Coviello included only a few of his drawings—and then only as a kind of black-and-white watermark under the texts.)

Both recordings are very good, but the Gramola release is the one I will keep.

HENSELT: Piano Pieces
Sergio Gallo—Grand Piano 661—59 minutes

Robert Schumann called Adolf von Henselt the “Chopin of the north.” Chopin was a Paris, of course—not really a northerner—and Henselt, though born in Bavaria, made his fame in Russia and is to this day considered one of the founders (with Anton Rubinstein) of the Russian piano school that culminated in Rachmaninoff. Among the people he knew in Russia were Tchaikovsky and Balakirev—the latter could be called a real friend. He was born in 1814, so he is of the generation of Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt. Unlike them, he was subject to stage fright and thus didn’t perform too much in public. He studied with Hummel, as did the Tsar’s daughter—hence the Russian connection.

His music supports Schumann’s judgement. This is Chopin II (he met Chopin, but there is no proof that he heard him play). If you like Chopin you are bound to like this, though of course Chopin himself really stands alone. I am trying to say, without insulting Henselt, that his music is very attractive—like Chopin’s—but simply not as great. I could listen to it for hours and never be irritated or annoyed—it is unfailingly pleasant. I like to have music like this playing in the background (as it is at this very moment)—music that is not too demanding, but that, when you pause in what you are doing to notice it, you consider worthy of your attention.

There are lots of études here, a few waltzes, and even a transcription or two. One is a Dargomizhsky song, another a waltz by the senior Strauss, and finally his reworking of Weber’s Invitation to the Dance (the kind of thing Liszt would do). There are only two small pieces that I found ordinary and not interesting.

Steven Haller reviewed the Hyperion recording of Henselt’s piano concerto and praised it to the skies (N/D 1994). We have had three other reviews of his music—see our index.

Sergio Gallo lives in Atlanta and studied here in Cincinnati but is a native of Brazil. His playing is lively and attractive, and he planned this program intelligently to present the listener with variety and contrast as well as the flavor of this composer’s lovely music.
**Hill: Wind Chamber Pieces**

*Austin Chamber Soloists*  
Pierian 53—64 minutes

These are the first recordings on CD of two major and two minor works for winds by Harvard professor Edward Burlingame Hill (1872-1960). There is an earlier recording of the Sextet, made on Columbia long ago with New York musicians and pianist Lillian Kallir. In M/J 2015, Alan Becker registered a quite positive impression of Hill’s orchestral works on Bridge, including the Fourth Symphony. He mentions Foote, Loeffler, Carpenter, Converse, and Sowerby for comparison, but I wasn’t thinking of them at all. This music is more French than American and more like Hanson than Loeffler. If you don’t mind being reminded of Widor, Magnard, and Caplet you’ll probably enjoy everything. Lines that follow a scale or move chromatically often underpin Hill’s writing, and that offers a clarity and logic even as other elements such as harmonies and changes of texture offer surprise.

The 1925 Flute Sonata was preceded by three studies for flute and piano written over the winter of 1921-22: *Idyll, Elegy, and Scherzo*. The short pieces are captivating miniatures filled with skill and inventive sounds. The Flute Sonata is filled with French gestures and touches of jazz. At the end of IV the performers do have one rough patch going into the coda.

The Four Pieces for Wind Instruments (1928) for flute, oboe, two clarinets, bassoon, and horn amount to eight minutes of simple, concise charm, but little of consequence. The program concludes with Hill’s 1934 Sextet for wind quintet and piano. This is a significant work in four traditional movements filled with splendid sounds and unexpected turns, though the opening movement struck me as squawky and raucous on hearing it the first time—think any French wind stereotype from the 1930s. The slow movement, marked Lento con duolo (with sorrow), offers fine gravity, though a finale has some bits of imitation that sound academic and out of place in a work otherwise so centered on color and variety rather than craft, but this dogmatism does recall the Quintet for winds and piano by Alberic Magnard (1894), which contains a fugue. The sextet and sonata are both shot through with masterly treatment of motifs, just not with skill that calls attention to itself this way.

The sound is good to barely adequate. Sound quality was almost the only complaint I had about a Mozart program from this same group that was played very well (N/D 2012). Here, the second movement of the flute sonata is more distant than the first, and there could be other small quibbles. Karl F Miller, music librarian retired from the University of Texas at Austin (and former ARG reviewer), wrote the notes and contributed a Hill discography.

Flutist Karl Kraber, who plays on everything, is a marvelous performer with a long and distinguished career as a member of the Dorian Wind Quintet (1965-85) and principal flutist of the Austin Symphony (1985-2005). Here he sounds excellent but a bit wispy sometimes, owing in part to the way he was recorded. His playing is relaxed, free, and expressive. Pianist Gregory Allen is a professor at the University of Texas’s Butler School of Music and the other anchor to these performances. He offers sympathy, color, indulgence, energy, and gravity when each is called for. I have heard him in concert (with Kraber) and heard him sight-read a difficult accompaniment perfectly. Balances with piano and among the other winds are ideal, and intonation and ensemble are precise.

I can’t muster quite the same enthusiasm for this program as the Initium Ensemble’s portrait of Caplet (M/A 2014) or this group’s second recording of Mozart arrangements (mentioned above). But I can confirm that these works from Hill’s maturity are worth hearing more than once, and you must have them if you’re at all interested in American composers born before 1900 or good writing for winds.

**Gorman**

**Hillborg: Beast Sampler; O Dessa Ogon; Cold Heat; Sirens**

Anna Holgersson, Ida Falk Weinand, s; Erik Ericson Chamber Choir; Swedish Radio Choir; Stockholm Philharmonic/ Sakari Oramo, David Zinman, Esa-Pekka Salonen  
BIS 2114 [SACD] 62 minutes

Grammy award-winning, Swedish superstar rock musician and former student of Brian Ferneyhough, Anders Hillborg (b. 1954) creates eclectic collages incorporating a number of contrasting modern styles. *Beast Sampler* (2014), the “beast” being the modern orchestra, begins with Ligetian cluster glissandos and contrasts them with mystical polychords, chirpings of “elastic seabirds”, and noble chorales. The “samplings” are evocative if somewhat scattered, but certainly impressive.

In startling contrast, *O Dessa Ogon (Oh These Eyes)* (2011) is a stunning song for soprano and strings, a setting of a reflective poem by contemporary Swedish poet Gunnar Eklöf depicting a sleeping lover seen in a mirror. Soprano Holgersson is otherworldly.

*Cold Heat* (2010), for orchestra, returns to those birds, who become warped and subject-
ed to drama with additional choraæes. This time there is a central scherzo in jazzy mixed meters (Zinman apparently asked for plenty of rock, and this angular dance is certainly not it). The classical structure ends with a varied recap of the first section.

Finally, Sirens (2010) sets the siren song from the Odyssey in English with barely audible singing from the women. The half-hour episode floats by dreamily in the distance. Don't let Hillborg's bio prevent you from investigating this important composer. There is good reason for his increasing prominence. Texts included.

GIMBEL

HOLST: Japanese Suite; see VAUGHAN WMS

HOLZBAUER: Günther von Schwarzburg
Anna Moffo (Nenza), Orietta Moscucci (Asberta), Luigi Infantino (Günther), Giacinto Prandelli (Karl), Raffaele Arie (Rudolf); RAI Milan/ Olivier de Fabritis—Myto 321 [2CD] 131 minutes

Since Myto has not published any information other than a track list, a few words are in order. Ignaz Jakob Holzbauer (Vienna, 1711-Mannheim, 1783) was a peripatetic composer traveling from court to court for employment. He studied singing, keyboards, violin, and cello with the choir of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. He taught himself counterpoint by studying Fux's Gradus ad Parnassus. His first court position was in Moravia as Kapellmeister to Count Rottal of Holesov (three operas). There he married the singer Rosalie Andrés (1737). Before 1742 he was at the imperial court in Vienna, composing several ballets. Andrés sang there. In Italy around 1744 Andrés sang, but there is no record of what Holzbauer was doing. Back in Vienna he wrote ballet music for some operas by Hasse. By 1751 the pair were in Stuttgart, he as Oberkapellmeister. 1753 found Holzbauer as Kapellmeister in Mannheim. Although busy with duties in Mannheim, he made several trips to Italy, composing operas for Turin and Milan. In 1777 he composed his masterpiece, Günther von Schwarzburg, for Mannheim. He composed only two more operas La Morte di Didone for Mannheim (1779) and Tancredi (1783) for the Mannheim court after they had moved to Munich.

Mozart praised Holzbauer's music for its dramatic and expressive range. Despite this praise, The New Grove Dictionary of Opera (from which this information was obtained) found "evidence of a genuine melodic gift, but his transitional material is not as accomplished as other works of that period. His accompaniments tend to be laden with detail, reflecting the abilities of the virtuoso Mannheim orchestra... his accompanied recitatives employ stinking orchestral effects."

Günther is a singspiel in three acts with a libretto by Anton Klein. There is some authentic German history in the plot. It is set in 1349 when Karl (tenor), king of Bohemia, and his rival, Günther (tenor), contend for control of the Holy Roman Empire. With the help of the Count Palatine, Rudolf (bass), of the Wittelsbach house, Günther is crowned in Frankfurt. Karl loves Anna (soprano), the countess Palatine and daughter of Rudolf; but Asberta (soprano), the dowager queen and mother of Karl, uses evil skulduggery to gain the throne for her son. She poisons Günther and kills herself. Anna and Karl are wed as the chorus mourns their fallen hero.

Holzbauer's only opera in German (the others are in Italian) comes from an Italian source and is sung in Italian. Myto's booklet shows the German incipits! This is early Moffo, and she is quite accomplished, a beautiful voice, easily produced through its range whether forte or piano. Moscucci is a light weight chicken squawking her way through Asberta's music. Arie was a major bass at the time. We hear him at his finest. Infantino's bright-sounding tenor has surprising heft. He usually sang light-weight roles. He proclaims the text with enthusiasm. Karl doesn't take the stage until Act 2. Prandelli's voice usually had a lot of heft. He sang a lot of Puccini. There is a curious catch, maybe glottal, that makes his voice instantly recognizable. The RAI orchestra is at ease playing a German opera that is really Italian in style.

PARSONS

HOMILIUS: The Messiah
Meike Leluschko & Friederike Beykirch, s; Annekathrin Laabs, mz; Patrick Grah, t; Tobias Berndt & Sebastian Wartig, b; Saxon Vocal Ensemble; Baitzorf Court Orchestra/ Matthias Jung—CPO 777 947 [2CD] 96 minutes

Gottfried August Homilius (1714-85) was widely regarded in the later 18th Century as one of the greatest German church composers. His standing declined in the estimation of 19th and 20th-Century authorities as the cantatas and other sacred vocal works of JS Bach came to be better known. While Homilius may still have been regarded as a noteworthy figure, his compositions were dismissed as representing a period when Protestant church music in general was in decline. In recent years there has been a renewal of interest in his works.

He was a native of Saxony, the son of a Lutheran pastor, and had his early education at St Anne's School in Dresden. In 1735 he began the study of law at Leipzig University
but was also a music pupil of Johann Schnei-
der (1702-88), the organist of St Nicholas
Church. This was, of course, during JS Bach's
tenure as St Thomas. In 1742 Homilius was
appointed organist at St Mary’s Church
(Frauenkirche) in Dresden. In 1755 he was
appointed music director of that city's Holy
Cross Church (Kreuzkirche), and this entailed
teaching responsibilities at the Holy Cross
School and directing music at the three principal
Dresden city churches.

Der Messias is a Passion oratorio based on
an anonymous libretto. There are four biblical
Passion oratorios attributed to Homilius, but
by the middle of the 18th Century such works
were considered old fashioned. Far more in
favor were oratorios whose librettos were free
paraphrases of the Gospel accounts. The best-
owned example is Wilhelm Ramler’s Der Tod
Jesu as set to music in 1755 by Carl Heinrich
Graun. In the text set by Homilius, the events
of the Passion are related as by a faithful
observer contemplating them rather than as
the straight narrative found in the Gospels.
The story unfolds as much or more in accom-
panied recitative as in secco recitative, with
chorales, arias, and choruses offering further
devotional commentary. Hans John, writing in
New Grove, observes that “Homilius followed
the example of Graun in emphasizing melody,
naturalness, and folk-like simplicity. The
works are rooted in the era of Bach and Han-
del, but at the same time increasingly show
pre-classical traits.” This description perfectly
fits The Messiah. It is cast in a much simpler
and more straightforward musical idiom than
its counterparts by Bach or Handel. Sustained
contrapuntal writing is not conspicuous. There
is one chorus in prelude & fugue format, but it
is exceptional. This is a work addressed to
pietistic sensibilities.

A performance of The Messiah is docu-
mented at St Mary’s Church, Dresden, on
Good Friday of 1776. That may have been its
first performance, but there is evidence linking
the work to the court of Duke Friedrich of
Mecklenburg-Schwerin, who held regular
public performances of sacred vocal works at
the church on the grounds of Ludwigsburg Cas-
tle, where he resided. The score and perform-
ance materials survive only in the Mecklen-
burg State Library at Schwerin. It is possible
that the Dresden performance in 1776 was a
preliminary run for its presentation at Lud-
wigsburg.

This recording was made in performance
at St Anne’s Church, Dresden, in June of 2014.
There is a good deal of reverberation that
would probably blur intricate musical textures,
but the simpler idiom of Homilius comes
through quite well. Balances between voices
and instruments are not always ideal, but that
seems to be a hazard with concert recording. It
is a technically accomplished performance. If
it is not equal to the very best early music
ensembles currently active, it is not far behind.

Matthias Jung founded the Saxon Vocal
Ensemble in 1996. They are devoted to per-
forming baroque music from Central Ger-
many, especially the Dresden court.

Huanzhi: White-Haired Girl Ballet Suite;
Spring Festival Overture;
Wei: Heroes’ Monument
Tokyo Philharmonic/ Lim Kek-Tjiang
Marco Polo 8225826—46 minutes

This collection of music by Chinese com-
posers primarily shows the influence of Com-
unist Party ideals and music appreciation.
The White-Haired Girl Ballet Suite consists of
selections from a complete ballet written by
more than 20 composers. The Suite identifies
seven of those composers, among whom is Li
Huanzhi, who also single-handedly wrote the
Spring Festival Overture. The ballet takes
place during the Sino-Japanese war and is
about a young girl who is driven into a cave by
her malicious overlord. Her hair turns white
from living in the cave. Once the overlord is
finally denounced and tried, the girl is able to
leave the cave.

According to the English and Chinese
booklet, this type of story and multi-composer
score is typical of the Party’s “Model Opera”
(though it’s a ballet) of the 1950s and 1960s.
The music is very Western sounding, with
heavy influences from Russian composers.
There are a few riffs where orchestra instru-
ments mimic the sound of Chinese instru-
ments. The 21-minute Suite begins with an
ethereal theme played by shimmering strings
followed by four themes alternately lyrical
then bombastic until a final return to the
opening theme. It’s all very derivative of ballet
music by Glazounov, Prokofieff, and Khach-
turian. The piece is interesting if not parti-
cularly memorable. It does tend to sound like
something written and approved by a commit-
tee.

The Heroes’ Monument is a 19-minute
slog through heavy and sad tonal music. The
Monument is in Tiananmen Square and is a
memorial to those who died to create modern
China. This was written by Qu Wei, another
contributor to the Ballet Suite. This must have
pleased the Party. It’s listenable, but very drea-
ry. There are two meandering themes purport-
edly based on folk songs that are repeated a
lot. I lost interest long before the piece was fin-
ished.

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The *Spring Festival Overture* by Li Huanzhi is very pleasant. Written in 1949 (early in the Communist period) it displays a freer hand in design, content, and melody and celebrates the joyfulness of spring. Again, it is derivative of Russian composers and primarily sounds like sections from Glazounov's *Seasons*. Of the three compositions, this six-minute *Overture* is worth repeated listening. It's easy to become pre-occupied with trying to identify which Russian composers the music most sounds like. The Tokyo Philharmonic plays well, the conducting by Kek-Tjiang is precise, and the sound is very good. Recorded in 1979, this was originally released on Hong Kong records.

**Hurd: The Aspern Papers**

Ckaire McCaldin (Miss Tina), Louise Winter (Juliana), Pippa Goss (Mrs Prest), Owen Gilhooly (Harry Jordan)

Ulster Orchestra/ George Vass

*Night of the Wedding*

Rhian Lois (Marquise), Nicholas Morton (Count), Matthew Buswell (Marquis); Simon Lepper, p/

Ronald Corp

Lyrita 2350 [2CD] 111 minutes

The English composer Michael Hurd (1928-2006) wrote many different kinds of music, most of it vocal. This recording consists of two of his operas: his setting of Henry James's novella *The Aspern Papers* and the 16-minute farce *The Night of the Wedding*.

The first thing that strikes me about Hurd's music is that he is not afraid to write a tune. Except for the Act II, scene 2 monolog of Juliana, *The Aspern Papers* has no arias; rather, it is dialog among the characters. But the dialogue is not the typical 20th Century music we hear in so many operas. Hurd writes a lush orchestral score where the voices fit perfectly to very accessible music. One could easily play this recording just to enjoy the music. Yet the drama is not sacrificed, proving that music can be pleasant to listen to and dramatically effective at the same time.

The performance is quite good. All four singers are able to be dramatic yet sing very well. Clare McCaldin is very effective at suggesting the loneliness, sadness, and embarrassment of Miss Tina, the most sympathetic character. Also effective is Louise Winter as the aged Juliana. Pippa Goss creates a believable Mrs Prest in her brief appearances, and Owen Gilhooly projects well the typical American cad of Henry James's works. None of these roles is terribly difficult, but they do offer fine dramatic and vocal opportunities, making this another opera suitable for conservatory or chamber company production. The Ulster Orchestra plays well under George Vass.

*The Night of the Wedding* is for one soprano and three baritones. It would be a fine choice as a curtain-raiser for a double bill. It is done with piano accompaniment, and all the singers are fine.

The recording is an unexpected pleasure. It comes with bios, an essay about the composer, and full text.

**SININGER**

**Iturrálde: Saxophone Pieces**

Juan Jimenez, Claude Delangle; Esteban Ocana, p

Naxos 573429—66 minutes

Noted for his enthusiastic and daring fusion of jazz and folk music, Spanish postmodernist and saxophonist Pedro Iturralde (b. 1929) has seen curiously few recordings of his oeuvre. Here his compatriots Juan Jimenez and Esteban Ocana offer his entire saxophone catalog, a set of 11 miniatures, the two longest of which are divided into five miniatures themselves.

Renowned Paris Conservatory saxophone professor Claude Delangle joins Jimenez on the opening selection, the 'Hungarian Dance' for two saxophones and piano that the composer completed at only 20 years of age. Other titles include the multi-movement *Memorias* and *Suite Helenica*, 'Tribute to Trane', 'Zorongo Gitano', and 'Aires Rumanos'.

The recital is well done and enjoyable. All the performers boast the virtuosic technique and sincere phrasing that the scores require, and they tackle each one with confidence and zest.

Jimenez sports a lively and bright tone that suits the music, though it can spread at loud volumes, and his vibrato could be more subtle. Delangle, by contrast, boasts his usual rich and mellow sound, and while he blends wonderfully with Jimenez in the 'Hungarian Dance' saxophone aficionados will know which player is which. Ocana is excellent, rendering his parts with breathtaking ease, clarity, touch, and musicianship.

**HANUDEL**

**Ives: Holidays Symphony; 3 Places in New England; Unanswered Question; Central Park in the Dark**

Melbourne Symphony/ Andrew Davis

Chandos 5163 [SACD] 72 minutes

This is the second volume of an Ives series. The initial one contained the first two symphonies. I have not heard it, and to my knowledge, it was not reviewed in ARG. Davis is a devoted Ivesian who participated in a 1966 Ives weekend in

July/August 2016
London. He has been Chief Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony since 2013.

The pieces in this volume are well connected and of a type. All present Ives's mystical side, usually with an outburst somewhere along the way. Listening straight through may or may not be a good idea, but these are excellent performances, well played by an orchestra that has come a long way since it recorded Korngold and Hindemith with Werner Albert for CPO—and it was not bad then. The sound is typical Chandos: full, rich, but not as detailed as some other labels (though playing it on an SACD system may change that).

Davis treats these works as “grown up” Ives as opposed to the insouciance of someone like Bernstein—not that there is anything wrong with Bernstein. His music does seem drawn from the spiritual and religious, and it is those elements that Davis emphasizes. The insouciance is there, but it does not dominate the mysticism. Other ways to classify these performances are symphonic, European, or just plain British. Ives’s modernism is emphasized some because the playing is so refined. Everything is carefully constructed and scaled, building gradually and steadily, and the orchestra handles those long mystical passages well. The big outbursts are more orchestral than imitation band music (for want of a better description). The one in Fourth of July is a veritable explosion. Thanksgiving Day, a stern work to begin with, is quite grim at the beginning, with the hymn at the end offering relief.

This treatment is consistent with Three Places in New England, also known as Orchestral Set No. 1. It is played here in James Sinclair’s version for large orchestra, something I wrote about at length in my review of Sinclair’s recording (S/O 2008). All this holds in the darker and moodier Central Park in the Dark, aka Contemplations No. 1. Contemplations No. 2, better known as The Unanswered Question, is another matter because of the recording. The strings sound as expected, and the trumpet’s big tone works well. The oddity is the extreme forward placement of the flutes and the aggressive nature of their sound. Perhaps Davis wanted the flutes to be fiercer than usual.

Comparisons are difficult in this music, partly because it is so complicated: different performances bring out different elements. It is probably better to treat comparisons according to general approaches, while taking programs into account. Thus, compared to Davis, the readings of Holidays Symphony by Michael Tilson Thomas and the Chicago Symphony are leaner, clearer, sleeker, and less misty. Near the end of ‘George Washington’s Birthday’ the passage where a solo violin suggests someone practicing down the street is clearer with Thomas. Davis’s violinist is there, but almost lost in the mist and barely heard. On the other hand, the bells in ‘Decoration Day’ are much more effective for Davis than for Thomas. I do like Thomas’s very distant ‘Taps’ compared to the more close-up one for Davis. (Thomas also made an excellent video of this work with his San Francisco Symphony. I have not heard the CD he made with SF.)

Now throw into the mix Sinclair’s Holidays, and this gets more complicated. Sinclair “interprets” and probes more, and he builds more from the bass than anyone else. Complicating things further, he attaches ‘Washington’s Birthday’ to Symphony No. 3 and other works on one disc and puts the three other holidays with some other Ives pieces on another. Sinclair’s solid recording quality lies somewhere between the big warmth of Davis and the cooler, clearer Thomas. Another good one is Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, who leads an excellent German performance (J/A 1995) somewhat similar to Sinclair’s. The problem there is that his Holidays comes only with Central Park in the Dark, making for a very short playing time. All these performances have different strengths.

Donald Johanos’s Holidays with the Dallas Symphony still stands up well. The only way I know to get Bernstein’s complete Holidays is on a huge Bernstein set. I have most of it as LP couplings. Ormandy’s Holidays seems forced, the strings too aggressive.

To get Sinclair’s large orchestra version of Three Places in New England, you need a recording made after Sinclair produced that version. That means his Naxos reading or Davis’s. (Dohnanyi’s was recorded in 1993, but I don’t know it or the version.) The qualities of both reflect their Holidays performances.

HECHT

Ives: Piano Sonata 2
Tzimon Barto; Christiane Palmen, fl; Jacques Mayencourt, va
Capriccio 5268—46 minutes

Ives’s dense, idiosyncratic Concord Sonata devotes each movement to a particular American Transcendental literary figure: Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts, and Thoreau. The highly experimental work is difficult owing to its seeming lack of direction and prevalent tone clusters. Barto is thoughtful with his interpretation. Moments of lyrical beauty emerge in the first movement.

Barto presents the work with the optional viola (first movement) and flute (final movement)—unusual in a piano sonata. I had not heard it performed this way before.

I prefer Marc-Andre Hamelin’s tighter ren-
dition. Bartó's playing is far slower. With a piece so heavy and murky, Hamelin's faster tempo helps the momentum. Otherwise, it sounds more like a slog.

**JAKUBENAS: Choral Pieces**
Jurgita Mintautiene, s; Gintautas Skliutas, t; Dainius Jozenas, p; Vilnius Municipal Choir/ Vaclavas Augustinas
Toccata 28—55 minutes
Vladas Jakubenas (1904-76) was a major figure in 20th Century Lithuanian music. A composer, conductor, writer, and teacher, he was trained at the conservatory in Riga, Latvia. He moved on to Germany where he spent four years (1928-32) under the tutelage of Franz Schreker at the Berlin Academy of Music. He returned to Lithuania and became busy as a bee in all phases of his country's musical life. But the Soviet and Nazi occupations forced him to flee to Germany, where he spent five years in refugee camps. He immigrated to the USA in 1949, settled in Chicago, and spent the rest of his life there as a pillar of the Lithuanian-American community.

Jakubenas was a solid enough craftsman whose choral music drew from Lithuanian folklore and from themes of exile and return. He also was an enthusiastic arranger of sacred chants and hymns for the Lithuanian church. I didn’t notice any interpretive thunderbolts from the singers either, especially since the dry, closely recorded sound all but precludes sumptuous tone and telling dynamic contrasts. So while I admire Toccata’s resolve to unearth the unknown, this release feels more like they were doing their duty than introducing an undiscovered master to the world.

**GREENFIELD**

**JANACEK: Quartet I; see DVORAK**

**JOSEPHS: Requiem; Symphony 5; Beethoven Variations**
Robert Dawe, bar; Adelaide Quartet, Chorus, Symphony/ David Measham
Lyrita 2352 [2CD] 116 minutes
Wilfred Josephs (1927-97) was a prolific English composer who, like many of his colleagues, wrote serious music as well as scores for movies, television, and theater. Though his lifelong ambition was to compose, he followed his family into the medical profession, choosing dentistry because it would give him time to write music. He attended Guildhall School of Music in London and studied composition with Alfred Nieman. Later he moved to Paris to study with Max Deutsch, a serial composer from whom he learned much about atonality. He taught for a while in the US and in Britain.

Among his commercial scores were ones for The Prisoner, I Claudius, and All Creatures Great and Small. He also wrote 12 symphonies, several concertos and ballets, and the opera, Rebecca. By the time he died, he had produced 180 opus numbers.

Josephs wrote his Requiem in 1963 to honor the Jews who died in the Holocaust. It is one of his best works and a standout in 20th Century pieces for chorus and orchestra. It won a major prize from the city of Milan and was first performed there. Carlo Maria Giulini conducted it with the Chicago Symphony and called it the “most important work by a living composer.” He might have been right. The seed of the piece was the composer’s String Quintet (two cellos), which was an elegy for the victims of Adolph Eichmann. To produce the Requiem, Josephs carried the quintet over to make up three of the larger work's ten movements (in four parts) and added a baritone soloist, chorus, and orchestra. For his text he chose the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer of mourning, and set it in Hebrew. He chose that text instead of the Catholic Requiem Mass because he wanted to glorify the victims of the Holocaust without mentioning death.

Most of the Requiem is quiet (sometimes barely audible), intensely bleak, and slow, both in tempo and note values, as if the composer were achingly inching through the devastation of the Holocaust. Much of the writing is in the middle and upper registers, lending it an other-worldly but in no way heavenly atmosphere. The few outbursts are shocking when they occur. In the words of Bernard Jacobson, the Requiem “makes free play with tonal implications while the formal organization is based on techniques stemming essentially from the 12-tone method but no longer narrowly 12-tone in character.” Its opening for the quintet sounds like a blend of Ives and Berg. The music is neither rich nor romantic, but it does possess considerable body. As the work proceeds, the louder sections aside, it grows more lean, like a prisoner gradually fading away from starvation. Much of it is chant-like and ritualistic, and almost always we are aware of devastation.

The second section is the only truly loud music. For some reason it reminds me of Walton’s very different Belshazzar’s Feast, Bernstein’s Jeremiah Symphony, and a little of Hermann’s Moby Dick. The third section uses the baritone and orchestra and is more soloistic than the rest of the work. ‘Amen’ breaks some
of the calm with sharp chords. Part IV begins with an odd processional that is not weighty because much of the pacing comes from wind instruments instead of low strings or brass. ‘Ezri Meyim’ divides the chorus into two antiphonal parts. ‘Monumentum’ for string quintet is the bleakest movement in this already bleak work. It consists mostly of long sustained chords with a few solo lines. The piece nearly comes to a halt here and seems to be ending several times, only to float on. I am not sure if the way it creates impatience on the part of the listener is what the composer wanted or a miscalculation. ‘Ohseh Shaloh’ for the complete ensemble maintains the bleakness until the final eruption of ‘Kol Yisrael’.

Joseph’s Fourth Symphony grew out of his anger over the Vietnam War. In a sense paralleling Vaughan Williams’s fourth and fifth symphonies, Joseph’s Fifth (Pastorale, 1970) may be a calming response to his Fourth. It describes the reactions of a city dweller to visiting a quiet, somewhat dark and desolate expanse of nature. The opening movement is more calm than pastoral and more brooding than a portrait of relaxing in nature. II is mischievous but good natured and carries a touch of calm over from I. It presents a bit of Malcolm Arnold, the Scherzo from Gustav Mahler’s Seventh Symphony, and, in the tune played as a round, Benjamin Britten. The core of the symphony is the restful and dreamlike Adagio, written mostly for strings with some quiet horns and spare winds. Its sedate, nocturnal fragments, like quiet thoughts, sound more American than British, though not so far as to resemble someone like Copland. The finale is a portrait of a country evening, complete with buzzing insects and scurrying small animals. After a return to the symphony’s opening, the orchestra celebrates morning with bell sounds and the round tune from the previous movement before ending quietly as it began.

Beethoven Variations is based on a theme Beethoven used in his minuet from Piano Sonata 20 and later in his Septet. It begins cleverly by putting the tune in the marimba substituting for piano and a chamber group for the Septet. The variations are simple at first, then more varied and complex. Paul Conway’s excellent notes find suggestions of Strauss’s Rosenkavalier in one, but mostly I hear a combination of Arnold and Britten, before the work ends much as it started out with the return of the marimba. This is a good-natured work, but it has some tough strains, too. The variations are more well-crafted than brilliantly inspired, but are very enjoyable.

All these recordings are reissues from the early 1980s. The sound is excellent, especially in the Requiem. Early digital was justly criticized at that time, though many people claimed that the problem was the recording technique not the technology. Lyrita has ranked second to no one in its recordings, and did a good job in skirting those early digital problems.

JOURNEAU: Little Suite; Basque Nights; Largo; Marine; Trio; Sonatine 2; Short Pieces for Clarinet
Ensemble Opus 41—Skarbo 4151—73 minutes

Maurice Journeau (1898-1999) is, even to someone as pretentious as moi, a new name. Born in Biarritz, he studied with Max d’Ollone and Nadia Boulanger. He apparently lived as an independent composer, apart from any major French musical circles. In his 90s, musicians discovered his works and began to perform them—none too soon, if the examples here are typical. His work incorporates all the best traits of French music: clarity, wit, serious workmanship, and sound construction. Most of these works date from the 1920s and 30s; their language derives from Fauré.

In the Little Suite for strings and piano (1929) I is a strophic movement. It’s tuneful, with some tang in the harmony. II, an elegy, has a broad, eloquent cello solo. III, a waltz, has a genial cabaret-like tune. His Largo is a sober, long-spanned melody worked up in skilled variations ably voiced for the ensemble. Marine (1936) for violin and piano begins with a minor mode theme over a piano accompaniment using arpeggios. The accompaniment stays constant while the theme appears in various registers. Its refrain uses more rhetorical gestures from the piano, the violin now becoming more the accompaniment.

The Trio (1924) at 25 minutes is the longest work on the record. I is both lyrical and impassioned, with a somber edge. Its series of moods is well blended. II, marked slow and mild, has a tune for solo cello upon which the piano works colorful variants. The animated finale has a theme tonally from the 1920s, but with a rhythmic pulse more from the early 19th Century. A contrasting theme is slower and elegant. The conclusion, in detached fragments, has the enigmatic poetry of Schumann.

Piano Sonatine 2 (1925) is cheerful and melodic. Written for Journeau’s younger sister, it’s a simpler piece, but with no loss of content. The Three Short Pieces for clarinet (1984) have assertive, fanfare-like lines of unpretentious charm. Most of the works are in triple time, but there’s no feeling of monotony. If Journeau wrote any symphonic music, I’d like to hear it.
Performances are excellent, readily communicating the sheer pleasure the composer must have had in making approachable, high-quality music. Sound is good, but the recording is at a high volume level. I recommend dialing it down a bit. There's a website for the composer at www.journeau.com

O’CONNOR

KAPUSTIN: Cello Pieces
Christine Rauth; Benyamin Nuss, p; Ni Fan, vib; Saarbrucken Radio/ Nicholas Collon
SWR 19002—79 minutes

Ukrainian Nikolai Kapustin (born 1937) has been turning out examples of “fully-composed jazz” for a while now; and collections of them, mostly piano solos, have been issued on various labels for the past couple of decades. Several of ARG’s reviewers have praised these recordings; see, for examples, Jonathan Bellman on Kapustin’s piano sonatas played by Stephen Osborne (Hyperion 67159; M/A 2001), Paul Cook on Kapustin piano pieces played by John Salmon on Naxos (J/A 2000), and Alan Becker on piano preludes played by the composer on Boheme (J/F 2011) and by Catherine Gordeladze (M/A 2012).

But a note of discontent with Kapustin’s relentless barrages of notes, his reliance on shopworn jazz cliches, the sameness of his materials, and the lack of identifiable melody or even distinct ideas has also crept into the reactions of other ARG reviewers. Brent Auerrelen’s bars of notes, his reliance on even less distinct ideas has also crept into the reviews here in the Cello Concerto, especially when the interplay between soloist and orchestra allows both of them chances to rest while the other speaks. The more tightly wound duos—cello and piano, cello and saxophone, cello and vibraphone—typically ramp up the rate of information flow too high. Keep in mind that for most listeners the key difficulty with much “modern” music, and certainly with most Schoenbergian 12-tone music, isn’t dissonance or fragmentation so much as just too much information coming at the ear at once. It’s too dense, too intense, too relentless: there’s no time to take it in, to absorb it—no chance to breathe. And who wants to listen to someone talk who never ever pauses? Kapustin needs to calm down, shape his music into apprehensible phrases, and take a deep breath of fresh air once in awhile.

M LEHMAN

KAUFMAN, J: Reflections; Horn Sonatina; Poem; Chorale & Rondo Allegro; In Time Past & Time Remembered
Barbara Ann Martin, Victor Hubbard, s; Louise Schulman, va; Lawrence Zoernig, vc; Lawrence Sobol, cl; Susan LaFever, hn; Peter Basquin, Joshua Pierce, p; Joseph Passaro, perc; Long Island Chamber Ensemble/Lawrence Sobol
Phoenix 182—73 minutes

Jeffrey Kaufman studied at the Manhattan School of Music and at Juilliard; he has also produced radio programs, concerts, and Broadway musicals. His writing is straightforward and not terribly subtle, never more dissonant than Hindemith. The Horn Sonatina has a lot of Germanic rhythms and quartal harmonies, so I suppose it’s difficult not to sound at least somewhat like Hindemith. The sonatina and ‘Poem’—in a version for cello and piano and another for cello, horn, and piano—attempt an air of mystery, and they come across as trying too hard.

Reflections, for clarinet and piano, has a cheerful first movement, a slow movement markedly influenced by 20th-Century French wind writing, and a pagan-rural finale with some interesting piano chords. It’s more varied and more natural-sounding. The Chorale and Rondo Allegro for woodwind octet was commissioned by the village of Port Jefferson,

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New York, for the town’s 150th anniversary. The Chorale uses the final cadence from ‘A Mighty Fortress is Our God’ as part of its material; the Rondo is pensive for a piece written for an august occasion.

In Time Past and Time Remembered sets eight poems from Mark Van Doren’s collection, That Shining Place. It is scored for soprano, boy soprano, clarinet, viola, piano, and percussion; and the text is alternately spoken and sung. It’s well over half an hour long, and though there are many good moments and much excellent writing, there’s little sense of progression. It has the best sound and performance; the sonics elsewhere are sub-par, sometimes distorted, and at least a few tracks appear to have been taken directly from an LP—Reflections has some pitch wobble. The playing in the octet is pretty good, but the other instrumental pieces lack musicality.

Koechlin: Chamber Music

Oboe Sonata; Oboe Trio; Au Loin; Sonata for 7 Players; Le Repos de Tityre
Stefan Schilli, ob; Oliver Tiendel, p; Christopher Corbett, cl; Marco Postingel, bn; Henrik Wiese, fl; Cristina Bianchi, hp; Heather Cottrell, Daniel Giglberger, v; Ania Kerynacke, va; Kristin Von Der Goltz, vc—Oehms 1823—59 minutes

Charles Koechlin was a prolific composer whose style ranged from gentle, impressionist sonorities to experiments with polytonality and austere neoclassicism. These works run the gamut of his musical language. Au Loin, for English Horn and piano, is from 1896; and the Sonata for 7 Players was completed in 1949. The earlier pieces, including the 1916 Oboe Sonata, show the stamp of his teacher, Gabriel Fauré, and are tuneful and lovely; but the later works are fascinating in their variety and complexity. The Reed Trio, for example, is uncompromisingly polytonal, with each instrument notated in a different key. Probably the most unusual piece is the luminous Sonata for 7 Players, scored for oboe, flute, harp, and string quartet. In four miniature movements, neoclassical in form and style, it consists of melodic fragments layered over ambiguous, modal harmonies.

Stefan Schilli and his colleagues from the Bavarian Radio Symphony play with suppleness and elegance. The music of Koechlin is somewhat under-recorded, so this offering fills a gap—and the performance is flawless.

Korvits: Reflections from a Plainland; Labyrinths; 7 Dreams of 7 Birds; Last Ship; Song

Kadri Voorand, voice; Tonu Korvits, kannel; Anja Lechner, vc; Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir: Talinn Chamber Orchestra/ Tonu Kaljuste ECM 2855—63 minutes

Tonu Korvits (b. 1969) is the most recent contributor to ECM’s exploration of new music of Estonia. His primary mentor seems to be the eminent Veljo Tormis, who was honored three times with quotations on this disc, released under the title Mirror. Reflections on a Plainland (2013), for a cappella chorus and cello, is a melancholy take on a Tormis song.

Labyrinths (2010), for strings, is a series of seven concise pieces, really sketches, filled with quiet harmonics, passing pizzicatos, some angst, some creepiness, and a general atmosphere of darkness. The set ends with supplication. What the piece adds up to is hard to say.

Song of the Plainland (2008) is an arrangement of the Tormis song that supplied the Reflections that opened the program. Scored for voice, kannel (the Estonian zither), and strings, the work is a beautiful evocation of Estonian pain and longing. It is sung with Ms Voorand’s gentle, folk-like soprano.

Seven Dreams of Seven Birds (2009, rev. 2012) is for cello, choir, and strings. The atmosphere is entirely dreamy, held together with nondescript cello recitative and quiet commentary by the choir. In “There it is” the “it” “swishes, and whooshes” while birdies accompany the isolated cellist; “Lazy darkness” covers all. Unexpectedly, a rustic dance begins (and ends). We then ‘listen to the big moon’ (incredibly, in English). The work ends with quiet waltz-like drifting.

The Last Ship (2008), an arrangement of a 1981 Tormis song, is another sad waltz, this one pining that “after my death my ship will come”; but still “I received the heavens from you”.

The program concludes with an original but as always melancholy Song (2012, arr. 2013). Mr Korvits’s work is consistently nonassertive, which will be considered positive by many listeners, but for me its lack of presence became tedious. This is not ECM’s most distinguished Estonian foray.

Clever people are impatient. Things are so easy for them that they don’t realize they’re difficult for other people.

---Anthony Gilbert
Krehl: Clarinet Quintet; String Quartet
Wonkak Kim, cl; Jessica Tong, Alicia Choi, v; Rose Wollman, va; Kirsten Jerme, vc
Naxos 970173—62 minutes

In 1924, Leipzig Conservatory director and faculty member Stephan Krehl passed away at the age of 59, bequeathing a legacy of several important textbooks on music theory, harmony, and counterpoint that he completed over the course of a 35-year teaching career. He also left behind a fair number of late romantic compositions that have yet to reach a large audience.

The Larchmere Quartet, currently in residence at the University of Evansville, offers two of Krehl’s definitive works, each in four movements requiring half an hour in performance: the String Quartet, Op. 17 (1899) and the Clarinet Quintet, Op. 19 (1902), the latter written for none other than Richard Muhlfeld, the dedicatee of the Brahms Clarinet Quintet. Tennessee Tech University clarinet professor Wonkak Kim appears as the guest artist.

The performances are well done and enjoyable. Krehl rarely ventures beyond the conservative Leipzig tradition, but his music is superbly crafted and genuine. His sonata forms are robustly developed, his slow movements are tender and affecting, and his scherzos are hearty and exuberant. The Larchmere sports a rather translucent sound, but the ensemble work is very good, and the group’s sonic philosophy fits Krehl’s neo-classical leanings, even if tone and intonation could be stronger in some areas.

Kim renders the Clarinet Quartet with a clear and nicely rounded timbre, and while he sometimes plays with a little too much caution, he reads Krehl correctly, placing himself on par with his colleagues with seamless blend and excellent legato. This is a solid introduction to a composer who deserves a bigger place in the canon.

Krenek: Piano Concertos
Mikhail Kozhiev; English Symphony/ Kenneth Woods—Toccata 323—69 minutes

Ever prolific and chameleonic, Vienna-born composer Ernst Krenek (1900-91) produced a large and widely varied body of works (see our index for reviews) including four piano concertos. The first three, dating from 1923 to 1946, fill this new Toccata release identified as Krenek’s "Complete Piano Concertos, Volume 1", with Concertos 1 and 2 in their first-ever commercial recordings. (Concerto 3 was written for and first played by Dimitri Mitropoulos and has long been available on an archival recording.) Presumably Concerto 4 will be on Volume 2 and, unless it is very long, will be accompanied by other Krenek symphonic works. There are plenty to choose from, including his 1950 Double Concerto for violin, piano, and small orchestra.

Concerto 1 "in F-sharp" dates from 1923 and is half an hour long in four continuous movements. I, a five-minute introductory moderato, begins with a meandering piano solo, followed by orchestral entrances in a similar lackadaisical vein that ebb and flow between broader, more assertive sections and more rambling episodes before leading into II, a full-fledged allegro. The music is backward-looking in language, somewhere between Brahms, Reger, and Busoni, with a dash of early Hindemith; and though II is often busy, the first half of the concerto is notably plodding and diffuse, the themes forgettable, the rhythms four-square, the figuration generic, the orchestration thick. A few somewhat spikier ideas stand out briefly but are mostly drowned among the Victorian drapery until finally, after much well-padded rambling, the music heats up quickly into a fiercely impassioned climax that ushers in III, a three-minute adagio. This is a curious synthesis of intensity and delicacy, the piano adding raindrop figures over song-like melodic lines in an elegant but touching manner that recalls some of the more lyrical moments in Beethoven’s piano concertos. The much-longer finale that follows is a genial, sometimes carnavalesque allegro that waltzes along, if a bit cumbersomely, in triple-meter, with a dandy, rondo-like tune that might have come from Offenbach or perhaps Saint-Saens in an unbuttoned mood. The movement’s gaiety melts gently away at its conclusion as the piano reprises the concerto’s opening solo, now in a more measured and organized chorale style. Were I the 23-year-old composer’s teacher looking it over, I’d have advised him to revise (and shorten) its first half to match the higher standards of its second half.

By the time Krenek wrote his second piano concerto, in 1937, he’d jumped on the 12-tone wagon. Again in joined movements—this time five of them—making the effect of a single 25-minute span, Concerto 2 comes off as more of a fantasia than as an example of the more traditional formal scheme that Schoenberg used in his much more famous 12-tone concerto of five years later. Some idea of the expressive range of Krenek’s concerto, despite its stringently dodecaphonic language, can be seen from the movement markings: Andante dolcissimo, Allegro con ferocita, Quasi cadenza, Adagio con intimo sentiment, Allegretto vivace molto grazioso e leggiero. The thematic per-
mutations and scoring here are far more sophisticated and effective than in Concerto 1, and if—of course only if—you respond to well-crafted (but not harshly abrasive) nontonal music, you’ll find much to enjoy and admire in this work.

Concerto 3, from 1946, abandons the dodecaphony and fragmentation of its predecessor, instead adopting a more extrovert if still somewhat chromatic idiom with hints of Prokofieff, Bartok, Hindemith, and mid-period Stravinsky in the transparency and wit of its chamber-music scorings. It’s also more concise (13 minutes), its five short, well-contrasted movements much more easily assimilated than the longer spans of Concertos 1 and 2. Though it begins with an aggressively spiky piano ostinato, there are fantasy and color in this concerto also, as for instance the dulcet, chiming duet for harp and piano in IV. At one point the pianist even plays directly on the piano’s strings, playfully mimicking its duet-partner. Krenek’s Third is for me the most enjoyable and accessible of the concertos here, though still a distinctly minor effort that sounds more tossed-off than carefully worked through (as does much of Krenek’s oeuvre).

Readers, especially Krenek fans, should be aware that my view of these works is somewhat colored by the fact that Toccata’s sonics are by no means faultless—certainly not as good as the typical CPO or Chandos release. The sound tends to generalize both details and timbres and is noticeably unflattering to both the piano soloist and the orchestral accompaniment, especially in the more heavily scored first two concertos. As for these performances, they are capable and polished but I doubt that they’re interpretively the last word on this music. I don’t have the vintage recording of Concerto 3 for comparison, but I do have a radio broadcast of Alfred Brendel in Concerto 2 that’s somewhat brisker in tempos but also more nuanced and shapely.

That said, anyone interested in Krenek’s atonal phase will want this release for Concerto 2; and Concerto 3 will likely be of interest to listeners who like middle-of-the-road midcentury modernist works in the genre.

M LEHMAN

LHAND: *La Mort de’Orféo*

John Elwes (Orféo), Johanna Koslowsky (Euridice, Nisa), David Cordier (Teti, Lincastro), Michael Chance (Bacco, Fosforo), Myra Froese (Aurora, Calliope), Wilfrid Jochens (Mercurio, Fileno), Nico Van der Meel (Apolline, Irene), Harry Van der Kamp (Ebro, Furore, Caronte), Lieven Deroo (Fato, Giove), Currende, Tragicomedia/ Stephen Stubbs

Pan 10331 [2CD] 118:36

Stefano Landi (1587-1639) was a Roman by birth and career. He enjoyed the support of several powerful and culture-loving Roman families, for whom he composed numerous vocal pieces. Landi might well have been the personality who would make Rome the successor to Florence and Mantua as the commanding center for early experimentation in opera. Because of the fluctuating opposition of successive popes to the theatrical performances, such was not to be, and it was Venice that would fill the vacuum.

It was during an early period in Padua (his family’s home city), in about 1619, that Landi made his only venture into opera, composing *La Mort de’Orféo* (The Death of Orpheus). That places the work almost two decades after the first Florentine ventures treating the Orpheus story and 12 years after the trailblazing *Orféo* of Claudio Monteverdi—who was 20 years older than Landi and would outlive him by 4 years. There is no evidence that Landi’s opera was ever given a staged performance. He was able to make a compensatory mark in Rome, however, with his important contribution to early oratorio in his *Sant’Alessio* (1631), labeled a *dramma musicale* and actually staged privately.

Landi’s five-act *tragicommedia pastorale* takes the Orpheus story to the final phase of the musical hero’s life, following what the Florentines and Monteverdi treated. When Landi’s work begins, Orfeo has already lost Eurydice definitively, and has forsaken women, dedicating himself to art in his pastoral world. Divine powers, knowing the terrible fate that awaits him, attempt to intervene; but that fate is sealed. The god Bacchus, outraged that Orfeo has renounced not only women but also wine (if not song), unleashes on him his frenzied Maenads, who tear him to pieces. His mother, the Muse Calliope, laments; and Mercury shows Orfeo that Eurydice (who appears only briefly) has drunk the memory-destroying waters of Lethe, and persuades Orfeo to do the same. (He is barred from the Underworld by Caronte, who presses the Lethe draft with a drinking song.) Forthwith, Orfeo is welcomed in heaven by Jove himself and praised by happy choruses.

M LEHMAN

---Mario Vargas Llosa

**American Record Guide**
Though the plot is somewhat spare, the treatment is full of characters allowing a variety of personifications. There are 26 roles in the piece, and the 9 singers identified above take double and even triple assignments—and there are many choral functions: shepherds, satyrs, maenads, gods, etc. Landi’s music mostly follows the established idiom of monodic, proto-recitative declamation, but with flexibility in treating both serious and grotesque or humorous characters. Notable is the chorale sections in Sant’ Alessio are also splendid. (The choral sections in Sant’ Alessio also follow Monteverdi’s use of madrigalian textures, but lean rather to more formal monodic, proto-recitative declamation, but far less extensive than what Monteverdi allowed himself.

Recordings have been slow to catch up with Landi’s music. In recent years, at least two fine single-disc programs of his short arias and madrigals have appeared: one from Alpha (20: M/I 2004), the other from Musica Ficta (8021: S/O 2015). Landi’s Sant’ Alessio had already been given its debut recording under William Christie for Erato (14340: M/A 1997). Unfortunately, that excellent presentation is long gone and has had no successor. La Morte d’Orfeo was recorded in 1987 (Accent, never reviewed in these pages). This Pan edition is a straight reissue of that 1987 recording.

It still stands as a wonderful realization of this fascinating and significant score. The solo singers are of that generation which would be making early-music history. To single out just a few, Elves is an appealing Orfeo. Countertenor Chance and tenor Jochens etch quite strong characters, as does bass Van der Kamp. The others are admirably versatile too. Perhaps the most musically impressive moments, though, are contributed by the chorus (prepared with the help of Erik Van Nevel), with wonderful vigor and color. Stubbins gives the same astute overall direction that he would later bring to his work with the Boston Early Music Festival—making me wonder why he has not brought this work to Boston.

The sound, nearly 30 years old by now, is as fresh and clear as ever. The album booklet gives good notes and a plot synopsis. The full Italian libretto is also given, but not translation—the one fly in the ointment.

Otherwise this is indispensable for any serious collector of baroque opera.

Elena Langer is a Russian composer based in Britain. This release illustrates her vocal chamber music. Landscapes for Three People is a setting of poems by Lee Harwood that examine relationships and love triangles, exploring feelings of joy, grief, betrayal, and loss. It is scored for two high voices, soprano and counter tenor, and the oboe serves as the third member of this menage, sometimes under-scoring emotions left unstated by the singers. The instrumentation, which includes strings and harpsichord, reflects sonorities from the baroque era, with a nod to Purcell. The musical language ranges from the ethereal and unearthly to bitter argument and impassioned lyricism. At the same time, the instrumental accompaniment is spare and nimble, giving the soloists plenty of room for subtle shading. Snow, the only purely instrumental work on this album, was written in 2009, when the composer was a fellow at Tanglewood. The shimmering, percussive piano writing suggests whirling snowflakes around a winding, soaring violin melody. The text of The Storm Cloud is from a traditional Russian lament and reveals the influence of Russian folk music, enhanced by Langer’s delicate touch even in the most vigorous, percussive sections. The Two Cat Songs, also in Russian, were written for soprano Anna Dennis. They are playful and light, with long melismas that suggest graceful feline movements and even gentle mewing. Ariadne is a depiction of the story from Greek mythology, expressing Ariadne’s loneliness and grief following her abandonment by Theseus. It is strongly dramatic, with angular loneliness and grief in the end returns to ethereal floating. Again, even in the most intense moments Langer uses a light touch, never overpowering the singer.

The final selection is a setting of the opening lines of John Donne’s poem “Stay, O Sweet”. This piece returns to the baroque flavor of Landscape, wrapping up the program nicely. Especially noteworthy are the purity and impassioned beauty of the vocalists and the exquisite tone and artistry of Nicholas Daniels’s oboe playing. This excellent performance of such haunting and exquisite music is worth exploring.

BARKER

Art is always and necessarily the foe of specialization.

--Henry Zylstra, Testament of Vision

PFEIL

July/August 2016
LANTINS: Chansons
Miroir de Musique/ Baptiste Romain
Ricercar 365—67 minutes

Arnold and Hugo de Lantins are two lesser-known contemporaries of Guillaume Dufay. It is not known if they were brothers. They both came from the diocese of Liège and were employed along with Dufay at the Malatesta court in the early 1420s and in the Papal chapel in the early 1430s. They certainly moved in the same circles as Dufay and their songs are preserved in the same manuscripts, a strong indication of their reputations.

This new release is a significant collection of their songs (10 each). What is most refreshing is that the music is presented with very little additional ornamentation or improvisation by either the vocalists or instrumentalists, which allows the natural beauty of the melodies to be heard. The excellent interpretations range from a cappella to mixtures of voices and instruments with a few songs performed instrumentally (some very nice bagpipe playing by Baptiste Romain). The booklet has a fine essay by David Fallows and complete texts and translations. If you appreciate the songs of Binchois and Dufay, this is clearly recommended for your library.

BREWER

LARROCHA: Compositions 1930-58
Marta Zabaleta, Albert Guinovart, p; Ala Voronkova, va; Peter Schmidt, vc; Marta Matheu, s
Columna 2136 [2CD] 119 minutes

Who knew that in days of her youth, this famous Spanish pianist dabbled with the art of composition? Here’s an opportunity to hear an entirely new side of the Catalonian. From the pianist’s daughter we learn that “the small works she composed in her childhood and youth were not meant to be transcendent, but were simply a pleasure for her to write them. She referred to them as ‘sins’ of youth and for her they were mere anecdotes of a stage of her life.”

Listening to these pieces now is like encountering the sinful pleasures of a young and talented artist. If expectations are not too high, they can be enjoyed for what they are. Even Mozart’s earliest pieces failed to reach what he was able to do in his maturity. Rossini managed something considerably more in his sins of old age. With the young De Larrocha we are initially surprised to find the opening piece (‘Primaveral’, 1940) to be wistful and Ravel-like in harmony. ‘Travesuras’ (1943) is of similar nature and calls for substantial technical abilities. As the parade of brief pieces continues it is apparent that they have oodles of charm and are most entertaining. A few even have a sophisticated pop element (think Gershwin).

Unlike most programs of miniatures, I found it not only possible, but enjoyable to listen through the full contents of the first disc. There is plenty of variety. If we have to wait until track 10 to encounter her first piece—a Spanish Jota—that only adds to the attractiveness of the presentation. Homenaje a Schumann (1939) bespeaks the pianist’s love for this composer. A four-movement suite could well be a tribute to Bach and Scarlatti (both dear to her heart). A cello Romanza is a lyrical outpouring of some beauty, and a three-movement Violin Sonata (1940) continues in the vein of Bach, leavened with a bit of Kreisler.

All this is brilliantly performed by pianist Marta Zabaleta and the others.

The second disc has some early songs. Marta Matheu has a very appealing voice and texts and translations are included, though not by side. These are in a full Spanish idiom. It’s all very pretty, Rodrigo-like, and a nice little discovery.

More piano pieces follow, from the briefest of tidbits to full-fledged miniatures. Many have a captivating rhythmic flair; others adapt a Baroque sound. 10 Inventions close the program and, if not sounding like Bach of Scarlatti, are molded in the spirit of those masters. With good sound and notes, it’s easy to rejoice in this offbeat discovery.

BECKER

LASSUS: Magnificats
Die Singphoniker—CPO 777 957—64:16

Most of the 101 settings of the Magnificat by Lassus date from after about 1560 and were a response to an increase in Marian devotion following the Council of Trent. While most of his settings are based on the traditional chant, 40 are what have been termed parody or imitation Magnificats, each is based on a different polyphonic model; and these works have rarely appeared on earlier recordings. This new release offers a sample of them. Four are based on Italian madrigals (by Cipriano de Rore, ‘De le belle contrade’; Giacchet de Berchem, ‘O s’io potessi donnà; Anselmo de Reuix, ‘S’io credessi per morte’; and Philippe Verdelot, ‘Ultimi miei sospiri’); one is based on a risque French chanson (by Claudin de Serisy, ‘Il est jour’), and one on Josquin des Prêz’s motet, ‘Præter rerum seriem.’ In each setting of the Magnificat, Lassus used motivic passages from the source compositions to compose new polyphony for the even-numbered verses of the original text, leaving the odd-numbered verses to be performed in chant.

American Record Guide
As in their earlier release of Lassus’s hymns (M/J 2013), the five singers of Die Singphoniker (along with a guest tenor for the six-part settings) give us a model of expressive polyphonic singing, well balanced and with excellent intonation. This new release includes all of the models, which is especially useful in the case of the lesser known madrigals by Berchem and Reux. A lost opportunity was to record the more intimate secular works in a less resonant acoustic than the Magnificats.

Lassus’s greatest invention is reserved for the Magnificat based on Josquin’s motet, and it appears that the older composer’s artistry inspired his younger imitator. The clarity of the a cappella interpretation by Die Singphoniker supersedes the muddy textures of the 1988 recording of this piece by the larger male ensemble, Pro Cantione Antiqua, with instrumentalists from the Collegium Aureum and the Bläserkreis für Alte Musik Hamburg (DHM 77066).

The booklet includes two very informative essays on the music (by Bernhold Schmid) and on the theological and liturgical significance of the Magnificat (by Gerhard Hölzle). In addition to the translation of the Magnificat text in Hölzle’s essay, the original texts and translations are supplied for all of Lassus’s models. This is clearly a significant addition to the Lassus discography.

BREWER

LEHMANN: Chamber Music
Various artists—Enharmonic 16-031—69 minutes

Mark Lehman, a regular contributor to these pages, is also a composer. He writes tuneful, well-crafted music in a neo-classical style. I’ve covered his music before, but this is the first CD devoted entirely to his works.

The album opens with Hungarian Suite, a set for solo piano that sounds folkloric, though the material is entirely original—“Hungarian in my imagination only”, as he puts it. These pieces are melodic, mildly dissonant, and quite charming. I particularly like ‘Rainy Afternoon’, with its misty lyricism. One can’t help thinking of Bartok in lively pieces like ‘Hopping Dance’, played with skillful rubato by Angela Park; but the sensibility is Lehman’s own. The sonatinas for violin and piano and for cello and piano both refer to Hindemith in their dry eloquence, lucid counterpoint, subtle chromaticism, obedience to sonata form, and sure sense of where they are heading. The intimate canons in the poetic slow movement of the violin piece display the silken tone and sensitive phrasing of violinist Rachel Patrick. The cello work is more gruff and expansive, with a bigger emotional reach and a forceful reading by cellist Cole Tutino. The nod to Hindemith is more literal in the Piano Sonatina: the outer movements are based on the opening of Mathis der Maler, though their playful, jazzy personalities are something else entirely. Angela Park is the excellent pianist in all three works.

The most modernist pieces are Three Primitives for piano, written originally in 1988 for cello and clarinet. The mood here is mostly grey and somber. Lehman calls the movements “a dour, limping march, a morose sardanade, and a Missing Link tango encumbered with an undanceable extra beat”. The dancer lurching through the tango seems to have had too much to drink. One of the briefest pieces is perhaps the most eloquent: ‘October Farewell’ for cello solo, composed for a close friend of the composer who died in 1994. Alan Rafferty, a cellist with the Cincinnati Symphony, plays his heart out in this gravely emotional piece.

As a cat fancier as well as a music lover, I have to say that my favorite pieces are the most recent ones, Sleeping Cats, written in 2009 as elegies, says Lehman, for five felines “who have been my companions at different periods in the past 40 years”. By turns wistful, playful, and melancholy, these pieces have an intimacy that perhaps only cat lovers can fully understand. (I have owned nine in my lifetime.) These “endlessly fascinating creatures”, writes Lehman, “are like beautiful children, innocent and loving, who never grow up. They leave us far too soon, but we remember them always.” They supply a touching coda to a rewarding album.

SULLIVAN

LEIGH: Jolly Roger
Nielson Taylor (Venom), Alan Dudley (Rowlocks), Vernon Midgley (Roger), Marietta Midgley (Amelia), Helen Landis (Ms Pott), Patricia Whitmore (Ms Warly); BBC Concert Orchestra/ Ashley Lawrence
Lyrita 2116 [2CD] 133 minutes

Jolly Roger or The Admiral’s Daughter is Walter Leigh’s 1933 “burlesque” operetta with book and lyrics by V.C. Clinton-Baddeley. It is an odd blend of Gilbert and Sullivan wit with English music hall bawdiness. The music sounds like HMS Pinafore meets The Pirates of Penzance. The plot is a blend of every pirate movie you’ve seen, but done as satire. Everything is overplayed: damsels in distress, virginal maidens, lusty pirates, seafaring sailors, and as usual in these shows, a peasant who is actually a displaced Baronet.

The dialog reeks of ancient words and usage with lots of “nay, nay”, “wherefore”, “o woe is my misfortune”, “a pox on the scurvy owl”, “zounds”—all done to evoke the 1690 set-
ting. The women and pirates have some racy
dialog about rape and licentious activities.
There are plentiful asides by the characters to
let the audience know their real thoughts or
intentions.

The music sounds old-fashioned for 1933,
but 1920s operettas by Sigmund Romberg,
Rudolf Friml, and Ivor Novello were still very
popular. Once you accept the overplayed con-
cept and antique language, the music is enjoy-
able, the dialog is sometimes witty, and the
comedy is light. The Ohio Light Opera might
have some fun with this.

The plot, to put it mildly, is very silly—as
are all the character’s names. Jolly Roger is not
a ship (as in Barrie’s Peter Pan), but the titular
hero, the displaced Baronet who loves Amelia,
the daughter of Admiral Sir William Rowlocks.
England’s King George has sent Rowlocks to
Jamaica to arrest the Governor, Sir Roderick
Venom. The Governor and his pirate gang
have been looting ships coming into Kingston
harbor. Along with the Admiral are several
wards including Prudence Wary, and Amelia’s
guardian, Miss Flora Pott. Bold Ben Blister
(that’s his full name), a proud English sailor
with a rural accent, is the comedy lead who
mixes the plot action and characters. Blister is
a model English music hall comedian with a
large part to show off his comic abilities, and
he has the funniest songs and dialog.

The Governor is smitten with Amelia, has
Jolly Roger arrested as leader of the pirates,
and threatens to execute Roger if Amelia does-
not agree to the Governor’s marriage proposal.
She agrees, but the Governor has Roger
imprisoned. Blister outwits the guards, allow-
ing Blister and Roger to escape, but not before
hearing the Governor’s plan to invite the
Admiral and Miss Pott onto his pirate ship for
lunch—he plans to make them walk the plank.
Blister and Roger try to rescue the Admiral
and Miss Pott, but they are captured and also
walk the plank. All are thought to be drowned,
but miraculously Blister and Roger (as described
in a hilarious song) find a longboat and are
saved. The Admiral and Miss Pott also have a
very funny song about how they were "fished"
out of the water. The Governor and his pirates
are arrested and sentenced to be hanged
(there is no funny outcome to this), and Jolly
Roger is made the new Governor and marries
Amelia. Everyone sings a rousing finale.

The English-only booklet relates the com-
poser’s background and the show’s history.
Leigh was considered one of England’s leading
light music composers, and Jolly Roger was his
third and final operetta. He was killed in WW
II. Jolly Roger displays his talent for light music
and songs that are melodic, short, and related
to the plot. There are some lovely ballads,
quick-witted patter songs, and impressive
choral work.

Jolly Roger was a success in 1933 and had a
six-month run in Manchester and a long run in
London. The cast was headed by George
Robey as Blister, known to British audiences as
"the Prime Minister of Mirth". Also in the cast
were Muriel Angelus as Amelia, who would
later introduce 'Falling in Love with Love' in
Rodgers and Hart’s Boys From Syracuse on
Broadway, and Sara Allgood as Miss Pott. Film
historians will recognize Ms Allgood as the
popular character actress who played the
mother in 1941’s How Green Was My Valley
and many other US wartime films. The show
was televised by the BBC in 1948, but revivals
have been rare.

This 1972 recording is from a BBC FM
radio broadcast taped in very good monaural
sound by Richard Itter in his home studio. It is
one of more than 1500 broadcasts the BBC is
licensing for release. The voices are brought
forward with excellent clarity so that every
word and song (even the chorus) can be
understood without a libretto (none is sup-
plied). The orchestra is somewhat recessed
but still very clear.

It takes theatrical flair to perform satire,
and this cast has flair to spare. They speak
their lines as if they actually believe this non-
sense and sound as if they have been perform-
ing Jolly Roger for years. Leslie Fyson’s Bold
Ben Blister is masterly in his comic timing and
English sailor accent. Neilson Taylor’s Roder-
ick Venom will remind you of Basil Rathbone
playing nasty. Vernon and Marietta Midgeley
play Jolly Roger and Amelia as two innocents.
Helen Landis is very funny as Flora Pott. The
Ambrosian Singers, BBC Concert Orchestra,
and conductor Ashley Lawrence perform this
one-time broadcast with consummate profes-
sionalism.

At first I had a difficult time accepting the
satire and stylized language, but repeated
hearings have made me an advocate. This
"jolly" recording will stay on my shelf. Lyrita
deserves praise for releasing this. The booklet
has a plot synopsis, track listings, and timings,
but no biographies of the performers.

FISCH

LIEBERMANN: 2-Piano Music
Jeffrey & Karen Savage
Albany 1596—58 minutes

This delightful release contains all of Lowell
Liebermann’s music for two pianos—Three Lu-
Variations on a Theme by Mozart, Op. 42
(1993), and Daydream and Nightmare for two
**LINDBERG:** *Al Largo; Era; Cello Concerto 2*

Anssi Karttunen, vc; Finnish Radio Symphony/ Hannu Lintu—Ondine 1281—66 minutes

Magnus Lindberg (b. 1958) is a Finnish composer who has recently changed his compositional way of thinking from a sort of edgy modernism “carved in stone”, as he has put it, to a style more related to the masters of the early 20th Century. That style is demonstrated to great effect in *Al Largo*, a 25-minute tone poem suggesting being so far out at sea that the shore is no longer in sight, full of exciting sounds and grand statements. Written in 2010, it is one of the first pieces in his new style, and I find it most beautifully conceived and scored.

*Cello Concerto 2* is a little more dissonant, based as it is on a 2006 duo for cello and piano (recorded elsewhere by Karttunen) called *Santa Fe Project.* The concerto is a strong piece in three interconnected movements. I sometimes wish that Karttunen were a little more consistent in his intonation.

The program ends with another instrumental tone poem, *Era* (2013) that evokes the period of music just preceding WW I. The grandeur of early Schoenberg and Stravinsky are strong forces at work, and I found this and *Al Largo* well worth the price of admission. The Cello Concerto is only a little less impressive and will grow on me, I suspect. The recorded sound is remarkably clear, and the performances are most effective.

**D MOORE**

Music is the mediation between the intellectual and the sensuous life.

---Beethoven

**LIPKIN: Symphonies 1-3**

BBC Scottish Symphony/ Lionel Friend; BBC Philharmonic/ Edward Downes, Adrian Leaper

**Lyrita 349—68 minutes**

Matyas Seiber was a composition teacher of Malcolm Lipkin (b. 1932) and seems to have imparted to his pupil an embrace of motivic repetition, though Lipkin often repeats his short melodic gestures without direction or development, as a sort of compositional padding. His music is essentially tonal, though quite chromatic, and he’s not a serialist like Seiber.

Symphony 1 from 1965, cheekily subtitled *Sinfonia di Roma,* might have been more honestly titled Symphony of Road Rage. It depicts in three short movements a sort of morning, midday, and evening in the life of a busy Italian roadway that passes through an otherwise beautiful tourist area. The car horns and squealing brakes are just getting warmed up in I, then shout and bray along with maybe a few wrecks in the repetitive and abrasive II, and befoul our protagonist’s evening in III, the traffic lighter but still steady, a notturno where no one may relax for long. And how many symphonies end with a nocturne?

Lipkin’s 2nd from 1979 is subtitled *The Pursuit* and is a single 21-minute movement that often reminded me of Nielsen or fellow British composer Richard Arnell in its brass-heavy scoring, almost but never quite finding a triumphant solution to the heavy burden eternal life places on a soul. At least that’s my interpretation of poet Andrew Marvell’s quatrains guiding this work’s spirit (printed in the booklet). It has a striving, desperate quality all through and ends quizzesically, dying off in mid-phrase, unresolved.

**Symphony 3, Sun,** is programmatic like 1 and 2, the sun’s daily journey from dawn to dusk as analogy for a man’s life. Another Scandinavian’s influence is felt here—Sibelius—in much of the woodwind, brass, and string writing. This symphony is much quieter, yet still uneasy, pensive through most of its 26 minutes. It’s repetitive like Symphonies 1 and 2, but its phrases are longer. It is a mysterious, mostly quiet tone poem that, after a contrived and unearned climax about 20 minutes in, again ends without clear resolution—maybe it’s an overcast English day where the sun finally burns through the clouds just moments before setting. It doesn’t add up to much, but the aimless repetition (reminding me of Allen Pettersson’s middle symphonies) is hypnotic and pleasant.

This is a mix of analog and digital recordings—the tape hiss tells me 1 is analog, 2 and 3 digital. The recordings are clear and dynamic.

—**D MOORE**

Music is the mediation between the intellectual and the sensuous life.

---Beethoven

**July/August 2016**
the performances clean and committed enough. The booklet supplies a list of about 50 other British symphonies written at the time of Lipkin’s for anyone wanting to explore the historic context of these works.

WRIGHT

**LISZT:** Grandes Etudes; Carnaval de Venice; Paganini Etudes
Goran Filipec, p—Naxos 573458—69 minutes

In the latest of Naxos’s efforts to record the complete Liszt piano music, Filipec gives us a collection of studies inspired by Paganini, with his lavish, gorgeous sound. The Grandes Etudes have the perfect balance of full-bodied resonance, with his delicate touch applied wherever appropriate. Etude 3, with its crisp sound, has plenty of spontaneity and wit. The diabolical Etudes after Paganini show his astounding perfect control.

KANG

**LISZT:** Piano Pieces

*Opera Variations*
Han Chen—Naxos 573415—63 minutes

Vallee d’Obermann; Apres une Lecture du Dante; Sonata; Aufenthalt; Liebesbotschaft; Erstarrung; Ave Maria; Widmung; Rigoletto Paraphrase; Isolde Liebestod
Sergio Gallo—Quartz 2113 [2CD] 120 minutes

Bach Variations; Petrarch Sonnets; Sonata
Maria Razumovskaya—Malachite 20301—75 min

Taiwanese pianist Chen’s Naxos debut is brilliant and riveting. Winner of the 2013 China International Piano Competition, he demonstrates an understanding of how to balance Liszt’s bombast with sensitivity and thoughtfulness in these transcriptions. Most of these operas may be unfamiliar: when’s the last time you saw Oberon performed? Or Hunyadi Laszló? But Chen does an excellent job. The opening Oberon Overture has just the right amount of flash, even swagger. The fantasy from the opera La Sonnambula is fun. His playing is crystal clear in the rapid passages that populate these works. The more meditative ‘Fantasy on Der Freischiitz’ balances out the frenetic virtuosity. An excellent recording.

Gallo’s ‘Vallee d’Obermann’ is solid, with pacing suitable to a piece that takes a while to build. The sound is rather dry, though. ‘Apres une lecture du Dante’ sounds mild. His performance of the Piano Sonata sometimes lacks cohesiveness, though he has beautiful lyrical passages. As he moves from the opening chords to the rapid arpeggios, he is able to build effectively. Some of the rapid passages sound labored and messy—not all of the voicing is completely there, but the overall spirit remains.

In her debut recording, Razumovskaya presents a steady and controlled Liszt. The opening Bach Variations demonstrates her abilities as a sensitive pianist. The phrasing is delicately lyrical. Her Petrarch Sonnets show the same attention to melody, along with plenty of power and adept handling of dense textures. One needs a broad sound when playing Liszt, and she supplies it.

The same lyricism and security appear in her adept sonata. Her playing sharply contrasts Gallo’s. From the very first chords one can see that she has a fine sense of dramatic tension and can emphasize the grandeur of the piece. While her playing seems sometimes too careful and is slower than most recordings, Liszt’s intense imagination is forefront, and the larger narrative structure coheres. With faster renderings, it can be too easy to perform the Liszt sonata, with its many fragments; this pianist shows a better mastery of Liszt, every phrase and sentence in place.

KANG

**LISZT:** Songs
Daniel Weeks, t; Naomi Oliphant, p
Centaur 3414—51 minutes

Weeks and Oliphant are faculty members of the University of Louisville School Of Music and are frequent collaborators in song recitals. This is a strong reading of a well-selected sampling of Liszt songs. Both artists present nicely shaped performances that are attentive to the moods and drama of these songs with fine attention to dynamics.

In spite of that, I did not find this an ingratiating recording. Weeks hits the high notes in Liszt’s earlier high-flying settings of Petrarch, but his tone is pinched and his hard-edged timbre is not enhanced by the close miking. In ‘Oh! Quand Je Dors’ he doesn’t capture the magic of a soul awakening to the dream of a kiss. Elsewhere his phrasing is stiff.

For a tenor reading of the Petrarch Sonnets Szabó’s Brickner’s (M/I 2011) is the most thrilling of the four tenor recordings I know, but John Aler’s survey of Liszt songs (J/A 1988) remains my favorite of all.

Notes, texts, translations

R MOORE

**LISZT:** Transcendental Etudes
Dinara Klinton, p—Genuin 16409—67 minutes

Klinton offers one of the best Transcendental Etudes I have heard recently. The works are virtuosic milestones owing to their devilish difficulty and incredible poeticism. She dis-

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plays effortless technique, especially with the incredibly demanding and powerful 'Mazeppa' and 'Appassionata', noted by Henle to be among the most difficult in the set. The hand-crossings in 'Mazeppa' are fluidly handled. 'Harmonies du Soir' is particularly lucid and expressive, with utmost delicacy—those arpeggios in the higher register float on air. Klinton plays without hesitation, though sometimes 'Mazeppa' does need more dynamic and expressive range. Definitely a pianist to watch.

KANG

LOCATELLI: Caprices
Igor Ruhadze, v
Brilliant 94774 [2CD] 99 minutes

Pietro Locatelli (1695-1764) was the precursor of Paganini. In fact, his Caprices were a model for Paganini when he wrote his. Locatelli published his 24 Caprices (an extra one is here, making 25) in 1733, and they were preserved since then as studies, especially popular among the French. These works make considerable technical demands, and though they pale in comparison with the demands of Paganini’s, they pushed the technical boundaries of early 18th-Century violin technique.

The most noticeable thing about these that cannot compare with Paganini’s Caprices is the relative lack of invention, though they were advanced for their time in that respect too, adopting the newer, more dramatic style of composition of Vivaldi, unlike Locatelli’s earlier Corelli-influenced compositions. These works concentrate more on exploring a few technical challenges, unlike the later numbered Caprices by Paganini, which are more character pieces. They may have more appeal for violin students than for the average music lover.

Igor Ruhadze does justice to these works and then some. I know, because I followed with the score, which can be downloaded free of charge at imslp.org. In true 18th-Century style, he also adds some ornamentation at the ends. He has a clear, full tone, accurate intonation, and a formidable technique; and this is the best recording I’ve heard of these works. Good sound.

MAGIL

LUPUS: Mass, Cantus Coagulatus
Ensemble Ordo Virtutum
Musique Suisse 6286—77 minutes

According to the 16th-Century St Gall monk Mauritius Eick, the meaning of cantus coagulatus should be construed as “converged” or “agglutinated” music. Truly, the practice of singing plainchant and figurative polyphony converge in the office music and Mass composed some time between 1562 and 1564 by Manfred Barbarini Lupus da Correggio. The artistic life of the great monastery of St Gall had declined in the late Middle Ages. But under the guidance of the new Abbot, Diethelm Blarer, the music was rejuvenated when he commissioned Lupus to compose a Mass and Offices. The Vespers and Mass from the feast of St Gallen, the hymn ‘Rector Eterni’ from the feast of the Blessed Notker offer glimpses of this music.

Stefan Morent acknowledges that the critical reception of Lupus’s music as “backward and artistically inferior” might be warranted if one were to limit one’s view to the notation of his music in manuscripts preserved at the monastery—an odd blend of ancient neumatic notation for chant and mensural notation for the polyphony (depicted in the cover art here). The Vespers is sung in a strict, one might add, fairly uninspired alternatim fashion—that is, verses of chant alternate with polyphony, either sung or played on the organ. Much of ‘Rector Eterni’ and ‘Sancti Spiritus’ are also sung this way. But the Mass is more complex, with stylistic similarities to the polyphony of Rome in the Counter-Reformation. Lupus’s most inspired polyphony—in the Gloria and Credo, for example—weaves together, rather skillfully, decorative counterpoint and a declamatory, chordal style of writing.

Hearing the Ensemble Ordo Virtutum perform this repertory, one might be inclined to agree that Lupus’s music deserves a wider audience. Notes are in English; Latin texts are translated into German only.

LOEWEN

LUTOSLAWSKI: Livre pour Orchestre; see SZYMANOWSKI

MAGNARD: Violin Sonata;
STEPHAN: Groteske
Judith Ingolfsson; Vladimir Stoupel, p
Accentus 303711—55 minutes

Both Alberic Magnard (1865-1914) and Rudi Stephan (1887-1915) were composers who wrote mostly big works for orchestra and almost no chamber music. And both were killed early in World War I, Frenchman Magnard as he stood alone in front of his house firing at the invading Germans who mowed him down and burned his house (a photo of it is in the liner notes), and Stephan, the only casualty out of 900 German soldiers who faced the Russians in the Galician city of Styri on September 18, 1915.

Magnard thinks big in his 45-minute four-
movement Violin Sonata in G, Op. 13 (1901). Except for the four-minute Scherzo, the other movements are 11 to 15 minutes long with substantial structures and glorious writing for each instrument. Sometimes Magnard reminds me of Mahler’s writing in his songs, where the “accompaniment” is anything but a mere accompaniment as it soars with its own eloquent lines. Other times one instrument is in strict time with the other, yet has embellishments that go far beyond the main melody. Yet even when one instrument serves as “mere” accompaniment to the other, the writing demands that one listen to both instruments simultaneously.

That is especially true in this stellar performance. Judith Ingolfsson, a graduate of both the Juilliard School and Cleveland Institute of Music, was winner of the 1998 Indianapolis International Violin Competition, and is now a professor in Stuttgart. Vladimir Stoupel was born in Russia, where he studied for five years with Lazar Berman, and is now a French citizen who lives in Berlin. They have worked together for years, founding a music festival in France in 2009 and making their first joint recording in 2010.

Ingolfsson’s 1750 Lorenzo Guadagnini has not a warm comforting sound but a rich bronze-like patina that reminds me more of Gil Shaham. While her tone-color isn’t variegated, her use of vibrato is inherently linked to her depth of expression from the utterly intense to enharmonics played pianissimo. Every moment seems to say precisely what she intends, yet her music-making feels spontaneous rather than rigidly controlled. So does Stoupel’s. His piano breathes style, mood, and atmosphere into her breadth of contrasts. II, marked “calm,” is especially gorgeous, never wearing out its 15-minute welcome.

Stephan’s Groteske (1911), his only chamber work, has the sound of late 19th-Century French works. A masterpiece of consistently high contrasts between loud-dramatic and sensitive-intimate and not merely clever, it is based on a waltz rhythm but is far too dramatic for that. Stephan was a very serious composer and an excellent one, though the structure here will fool the first-time hearer with several implied false endings in just nine minutes. Once again, the players’ superb balances, articulation, assertiveness at one moment and lyricism at the next are pristine. Engineers supply the perfect atmospheric ambience for both works.

French

Mahler: Symphony 1
Bavarian Radio Orchestra/Yannick Nezet-Seguin
BR 900143—53 minutes

With around 160 recordings of Mahler’s First Symphony around, it is reasonable to hope that a newcomer has a good reason for existing, and on paper this one does. Any recording by the Bavarian Radio Orchestra has value for that reason alone, as does the chance to hear the Mahler of a young conductor like Nezet-Seguin, Music Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra. A couple of reviews compared this reading positively with the two by Raphael Kubelik with the same orchestra (DG in the studio, which I have heard and a concert recording from Audite that I have not). Maybe we have something here.

Or maybe not. The strongest plus is excellent playing by an orchestra that has come into its own. Some writers have called it the best orchestra in Germany (with obvious implications), and they may be right. Recent performances have cultivated an Old World quality that I don’t hear much these days, and I do not hear it here. The recording is close-up and sounds a little bright and maybe even forced. Perhaps technology is striving for dynamic contrasts that the conductor has not supplied. The BRO of Kubelik’s time was not as good as today’s group, but it was good enough and more responsive to the spirit of this work. The sound of that old DG recording holds up well, too, and it seems more natural than the newcomer.

The general interpretation is overt, direct, and not particularly subtle. Textures are brightly lit and well defined, and the overall approach is youthful, without the illusion of looking to the past. Mahler was 42 when he wrote the symphony, so a case can be made for that approach, but this execution of it seems brilliantly artificial or slightly off, partly because many of the interpretive gestures from Nezet-Seguin sound more calculated than inspired.

The opening is not mysterious so much as direct and fast, even hurried, without much sense of awakening. It also seems suppressed and one-dimensional. The string sighs are well drawn out, but I’m not sure to what purpose. Nezet-Seguin seems to be trying to be youthful, but the result does not come across that way. The music never gets truly soft, and the overall build-up could have been more creatively shaped. When the main tune begins, it is basically just there. The approaches to the trumpet fanfare and later to the big brass entrance are a little heavy-handed and fast, rather than shaped; and the ending is kind of frenetic.

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The various parts of II do not always cohere in this performance. The A sections are too controlled, and the trio slows down so much that the feeling of a dance is lost. There is some odd underlining here, too; others may like it more than I do.

The outset of III floats more than it marches and seems sleek for the sake of sleek. The effect is somehow linear, even with the use of rubato. It seems dreamlike in a way that is not convincing. The Klezmer section is more romantic than usual but sort of works. The heavenly section is beautiful, but also impersonal.

The Finale in many ways repeats the problems of I. The opening is too mannered and brilliant to be explosive. The first lyrical section is serene and maybe too slow, as Nezet-Seguin again plays up some obvious qualities a bit too much. Generally speaking, the big moments are youthful and brilliant, but some slower parts are stretched out enough to try one's patience—like drawing toothpaste from a tube. That is true before the final outburst, and the ending lacks real energy.

People who enjoy this reading should play it next to one of the Kubeliks. It expresses what the new performance is trying to achieve and demonstrates why it fails.

HECHT

MAHLER: Symphony 2

arr Bruno Walter—4 Hands
Maasa Nakazawa & Suhrud Athavale
Naxos 573350—76 minutes

arr Heinrich von Bocklet—2 Pianos, 8 hands
Brieley Cutting, Angela Turner, Stephen Emerson, Stewart Kelly
Melba 301144—78 minutes

Mahler’s Resurrection Symphony is one of my favorite musical works. Mehta’s Vienna Philharmonic recording (Decca 466992, Overview —MI/A 1996) was in my top 10 all-time favorite recordings published a couple years ago in ARG. I was fortunate to discover Mahler via a college chorus that sang this work with the Buffalo Philharmonic under the baton of Michael Tilson-Thomas back in the early 1970s. There are few undergraduate experiences as memorable as being on the stage with about 250 of my classmates and over 100 musicians in the orchestra singing the final “zu Gott wird es dich tragen!”. If ever there was a grand, orchestrally conceived work, this is it. One does not listen to Mahler and run to the piano to play through a favorite section; you will more likely turn up the sound system, reset to the favorite section and pretend that you are a conductor!

My vantage point, as a pianist, is that I have played orchestral works arranged for piano 4-hands from an early age—this is how I learned Beethoven’s Symphony 5, for example. The culmination of this kind of repertoire for me was Rachmaninoff’s Symphony 1 at the Newport Music Festival in 1999. The performance, shoulder-to-shoulder for 45 minutes on a hot July day in a Newport mansion, produced a huge feeling of accomplishment and was quite an exhilaration. Comments from family and friends in attendance were kind but honest: a big romantic symphony is not particularly effective when performed on a single piano, no matter how committed and able the pianists are.

This brings me to the two discs at hand. There have been at least three piano versions of Mahler’s Symphony 2, and two of them are recorded here. The first was by Hermann Behn, published in 1896 for two pianos. Bruno Walter, at that time a young conducting assistant of Mahler’s, made his piano 4-hands version in 1899. It is easy to imagine Mahler and Walter at a piano together playing through this. The notes tell me that Walter’s manuscript has a number of directives in Mahler’s hand. The published score is available online at ISMLP.com. It does not seem to contain any directives beyond what is found in the original edition of the orchestral score. It was in 1914 that Heinrich von Bocklet made his version for a double duet: four performers at two pianos. Given the huge nature of this symphony, four pianists have at least a fighting chance of covering most of the notes.

After listening both with and without the score in hand, I have nothing but admiration for the efforts of Nakazawa and Athavale. Naxos has supplied excellent piano sound and wonderful booklet notes. The pianists always make music and musical sense even with the restriction of one keyboard. Lines that go back and forth between the performers sound like they are played by one person. The frequent tremolos used to sustain the massed orchestral sound are shaped and phrased as a string section would. The most amazing ability of these two is making lines clear when they inhabit the same octave on the piano. I know that proper hand position goes out the window when one must play with the fingers in order to make room for another hand with fingers barely on the keys and his wrist hanging below key level. I found that this duet version was most effective in the lighter, Wunderhorn folk style Mahler often uses in middle movements and at some spots in the big outer movements. The huge orchestral climaxes just don’t work here, yet Nakazawa and Athavale always keep to attainable
dynamic levels and never sound forced. If the score asks them to get soft in the final pages, they do, and that makes their big sounds as effective as they can be.

I have not had the fortune to see the Bocklet score. While I would expect some choreographic problems, if the arrangement is as good as it sounds, a lot of it may have been eliminated. Dead-on ensemble is not as perfect here as in the one piano version, but I forgive this because here we have double the sound density, which works far better in the outer movements. The quartet of Australians also makes beautiful music together and may forego a little bit of perfection to achieve a level of excitement that can sometimes rival the orchestral version.

I could not bring myself to prepare the duet version with one other pianist, but I might be persuaded to join three others. I have truly enjoyed these recordings. My wife (also a participant in that performance over 40 years ago) enjoyed many of the lighter moments because of the excellent pianism. But, being a singer and choral conductor, she could not countenance the absence of voices in these versions. I often found myself singing the bass part along with the pianos. Either version will give you a new take on the music.

**MAHLER: Symphony 3**
Dallas Symphony/ Jaap Van Zweden
DSO 7 [2CD] 96 minutes

It is probably a combination of orchestra, hall, conductor, and engineering (I don’t like any of them): this is a boring recording.

Tempos are on the fast side, and everything is businesslike. The playing is excellent technically but has no soul. There is no ambition. Nothing is expansive; nothing stretches your attention. It all passes quickly and leaves you unaffected. I usually find this one of the most moving pieces of music, and I listen to it every year on my birthday to check whether I am still really alive. It’s always Bernstein, Horenstein, or Lopez-Cobos; and I do feel very alive by the time it’s over. When this was over I wondered if there was something wrong with me.

I think it’s true that some Mahler symphonies can hardly fail and almost play themselves. Certainly 5 and 6 are almost foolproof—and maybe 1 as well. But that was never true of 3. It is the slowest and longest Mahler symphony, and you have to be in tune with that—and so does the conductor. It must not be rushed! It must unfold—majestically, magisterially, and inexorably. Do we have the patience for this? Did we ever? Was it not always a rare phenomenon? We should not expect most performances or recordings to resonate deeply. But they have to do better than this one for me to listen more than once.

**MANEN: Choral Pieces**
3 Cançons Iberiques; El Cavaller Enamorat; Muntanyes del Canigó; El Pardal; Els Dos Camins; Muntanya de Montserrat; El Petit Maridet
Daniel Blanch, p; Angels Balaguer, s; Lieder Camera/ Xavier Pastrana
LMG 2133—74 minutes

Joan Manen (1883-1971) was a distinguished Catalan violinist who enjoyed a major career in Europe and the Americas. (His Carnegie Hall debut took place in late 1920.) He also was a composer and, from the sound of things here, a talented one. His choral fare is imbued with the spirit of his homeland: Catalonian melodies, folk tales, and dance rhythms echo through the songs. You can hear the dance motif of the Catalan Sardana in ‘El Cavaller Enamorat’, a work from the 1920s. Local humor abounds in the 10 sections of El Petit Maridet, Manen’s most popular work. It is all sung by enthusiastic voices possessed of all the ethnic flair one would want. The recording could be better, as the sound becomes clattery when sopranos head skyward and volume levels increase.

What’s missing along with top-notch engineering are translations of the texts that inspired the composer in the first place. All we get in English are notes that describe the music’s context but say little about its content. It’s a sad fact to contemplate, I know, but most of the world does not speak Catalan. So as Senyor Manen’s luminous fare plays on, we’re pretty much kept in the dark. Barcelona, we have a problem.

**MARAIS: Dialogues**
Meineke van der Velden; Wieland Kuijken, gamba; Fred Jacobs, theorbo
Ramee 1407—58 minutes

**Favorite Pieces**
Francois Joubert-Caillet, gamba; L’Acheron
Ricercar 364—76 minutes

There is something basically confusing about the written organization of the music of Marin Marais. Of course cellists are spoiled by the six solo suites of Bach, all in six movements. The gamba music of Marais appears to be in five books that were actually preceded by a book of trios and contain pieces for everything from a solo viola da gamba to goodness-knows what, mostly in unpredictable movements and vary-
These new interpretations, also recorded in 2014, are perhaps the most concerned with variety of articulation and clarity of voices. Their emphasis on the individual players leads them to play in a more leisurely fashion, particularly in slow movements, resulting in performances taking about five minutes longer overall. This does not make the music boring; the emphasis on voice clarity does good things for Marais, making it easier to keep one’s attention on the small but important events that take place in his marvelous music. The effect is further enhanced by the richness and clear balances of the recorded sound. All of these recordings sound good. I am inclined to prefer the present one as the deepest in concentration. Liner notes are by Mathias Corvin and are in English, French, and German.

The collection of Pieces Favorites is put out as an introduction to a project that intends to cover all five or six books of Marais’s gamba output played by Francois Joubert-Caillet with L’Acheron, consisting here of gamba players Andreas Linos and Sarah van Oudenhove, theorist Miguel Henry, Vincent Fluckiger on guitar and archlute, and Philippe Grisvard on harpsichord. This release picks popular numbers from all of the books plus Couplets de Folies from an Edinburgh manuscript. It is a fine program played to the hilt, though if they are planning to do his entire output, I would rather wait for the individual releases. Still, this is a very enjoyable selection from all of his books played with beauty of tone and sensitively phrased.

D MOORE

MARAI S: Folias; see BACH

MARAI S: Viol Pieces, 1689
Paolo Pandolfo & Amelie Chemin, gamba; Thomas Boysen, theorbo, g; Markus Hünninger, hpsl—Glossa 920415—72:20

In 1686 Marin Marais published his first music for viola da gamba in a single part-book, and at the conclusion of that book were 18 pieces for two gambas. The implication that Marais intended this collection to contain music for unaccompanied solo gamba or duet is supported by the printing three years later of a separate book for the basso continuo, with a few extra pieces added. This new release is the only one to include a few movements performed without continuo, from the works for two gambas the D minor Sarabande and the G major ‘Fantaisie en echo’ and also the Prelude in D minor, the first piece in the 1686 book, and the Rondeau in G minor, an addition at the end of the 1689 continuo book, as unaccompanied solos by Pandolfo.

To my knowledge, this is the third complete recording of the pieces for two gambas following Jordi Savall’s “classic” interpretation with Christophe Coin from 1978 (SACD reis-
sue, J/A 2011) and the 1990 recording by the Smithsonian Chamber Players (Kenneth Slowik and Jaap ter Linden, gambas, and Konrad Junghänel, theorbo; DHM 77146). All three contain effective interpretations of Marais's intricate compositions. Savall and Coin are well matched, and there is no doubt about Savall's abilities, but the reissue makes their breathing much more evident than earlier. The strongest competitors for Pandolfo and Chemin are Slowik and Ter Linden, and at the moment I slightly favor their interpretation for the effectiveness of Junghänel's accompaniments without the big-band approach of combining harpsichord and theorbo.

**Marcello, R.: Solo Cantatas**

Darryl Taylor, ct; Jory Vinikour, hpsi; Ann Marie Morgan, vc; Deborah Fox, theorbo

Naxos 970246 [2CD] 121 minutes

Composer and singer Rosanna Scafi Marcello (c. 1704-c. 1742) was married to the composer Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739), and these pieces were for a long time attributed to him. The music has some good aspects, but it is rather uncomplicated, which leads to a certain featureless quality in the interpretations. The music is not easy, particularly because there are frequent wide leaps (up to an octave and a half) for the singer to navigate. Rosanna herself was known for her virtuosic skills and very large vocal range, so I wonder if these pieces were written for her.

There are some fine passages here, especially in the quick movements, such as the aria 'Se Ti Sembrasse All'Or' from Cantata 9 and the fluttering repeated melodic gestures depicting a butterfly ("farfalla") in 'Corre Al Lume' from Cantata 4. There is often a nice variation of pulse and articulation in the accompanying instruments.

The timbres and colors in countertenor Darryl Taylor's range are not always the best fit for this repertoire because of the big leaps. In the slow tempos and low register (such as heading down to the lowest notes in 'Non Partite' from Cantata 11) he sometimes tends to run out of breath. The harmonic changes also are hard for all the performers here, and there are places where tuning with the harpsichord is avry.

This is certainly an ambitious project, but although it is good to hear music that would otherwise lie silent on the page, a better introduction to Rosanna Scafi Marcello's music might well be as part of a mixed program that includes music by other composers. That way, the music by an unfamiliar composer gradually becomes part of a living repertoire for the performing artists.

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**Mattheson: The Harmonious Language of the Fingers**

Andrea Benecke, p—Oehms 1837—74 minutes

Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) is best known today as an important theorist and observer of what was then known as the most important 18th Century music of his day. Like Telemann, Mattheson flourished in the important city of Hamburg, whose composers promoted a more transparent and gracious music; another Hamburg resident, Johann Adolf Scheibe, articulated this aesthetic in his criticism, publishing one of the most memorable disparagements of Bach in the process.

Well, as everyone knows, Bach had the last laugh, and Mattheson (who grudgingly admired him but nevertheless omitted him from a compendium of composer biographies he published in 1740) is hardly performed today. But in his own time, Mattheson (and several other composers who today are almost forgotten) commanded an acclaim far superior to the pious Bach—who, let's face it, probably came off as a provincial know-it-all to his more cosmopolitan contemporaries. Mattheson's *Harmonious Language of the Fingers* appeared in 1735: it comprises 12 fugues (including both double and triple fugues) and 5 galant-style suite movements. The music is very charming and well made: the fugues would make great study material for undergraduate counterpoint courses.

Benecke, a pianist and composer, became interested in Mattheson in 2006, recording *The Harmonious Language* that year (no longer around); the present performance was recorded in 2015 and includes an early sonata for good measure. I wish I could be more enthusiastic about this release. It certainly has much to recommend it: Benecke is a fine pianist with a beautiful tone; she takes a vocal approach to the material, refusing the constant detached playing that has become nearly ubiquitous in Baroque performance; the sound is excellent. But her reading is often too literal (a fault that she shares with many other Baroque performers); the volume never exceeds, and usually hovers consistently around, mezzo forte; and the various fugues share more or less the same expressive identity. Still, the recording has historical interest (it's hard to imagine another pianist taking this on) and the music is not without interest.
MATTHEWS, D: Beethoven Transcriptions; Diabelli Variation; Quartet 11
Kreutzer Qt—Toccata 318—74 minutes

Three Beethoven transcriptions by David Matthews, from the piano originals to string quartet. The Op. 119 Bagatelles (trans. 2013) come across as sketches for the earlier quartets (which they might have been). The transcription of the entire Piano Sonata 28 also comes across as inventive late classical chamber music, rather than the knotty, otherworldly utterances of the original. One could take this transcription in particular as what is “real-ly” the late sonata, and there is some truth to that; but any pianist can tell you that confronting this work (or any other of its period) without the pianistic tactility that the composer requires creates a quite different effect.

Listeners should decide for themselves—I was amused but not convinced. The transcription of the slow movement of Sonata 11 is considerably less hazardous, but not very interesting. Remember that we normally hear these works performed by great pianists, and they add to our perceptions of them. I might add that the Kreuzers’ shoddy ensemble and often inelegant intonation do not help much.

Matthews’s own Quartet 11 (2007–8) takes Beethoven’s Bagatelle 8 as its starting point for a set of variations employing various genres (dances and scherzos, a lengthy slow movement Cavatina, a fugal finale with transcendent coda). His referential neoclassicism is interesting enough, but others have done it better.

Included is a Diabelli variation that Matthews fantasizes he might have written if asked by Diabelli. Notes by the composer; essay on contemporary transcription by violinist Peter Sheppard Skaerved.

GIMBEL

MEDTNER: Sonata—Reminiscenza; Sonata Tragica; Prologue; 3 Fairy Tales; Canzona Matinata; RACHMANINOFF: 6 Preludes

Yevgeny Sudbin, p
BIS 1848 [SACD] 60 minutes

This is yet another superb release by Yevgeny Sudbin (b. 1980). The SACD sound from BIS remains consistently reliable as state of the art. The booklet notes, in English, are very well written by Sudbin himself (resident in the UK since 1997). His BIS recordings already include Medtner’s three piano concertos (J/A 2008, M/1 2010, J/A 2015) and Rachmaninoff’s Concertos 1 (J/F 2014), 4 (M/1 2010), and the Paganini Variations (M/1 2012), plus a huge Rachmaninoff solo piano recital (M/A 2006). He has all the musical sensibilities and technical abilities to make the current release one of the most enjoyable I have run into in a long time.

Medtner and Rachmaninoff were good friends and dedicated major works to each other. Their styles are similar, and almost all of their piano music is technically demanding. Rachmaninoff regularly programmed works by Medtner in his piano recitals, but never any of the sonatas. The current program is about two-thirds Medtner and includes his first opus and two of the sonatas. They cover about 25 years of the composer’s creative life. Sudbin’s interpretations are on the same level as the best Medtner pianists I have heard (Hamelin and Milne). I can only use superlatives because there are truly no weaknesses in these performances. Medtner’s thick textures are remarkably clear and balanced. There is wonderful legato and beauty in the melodies and great excitement in the virtuosic sections.

Three pairs of Rachmaninoff Preludes complete Sudbin’s program. Op. 23:4 and 5, Op. 32:7 and 8, and Op. 32:12 and 13. The famous G minor is played very aggressively, and Sudbin doesn’t ever lose the main melody to the counter-melodies in the lyrical middle section. The G-major Prelude has one of Rachmaninoff’s most poetic melodies, spun with a perfect legato here. The huge final D-flat Prelude is appropriately virtuosic in Sudbin’s hands (which he notes are not big enough to play all the mammoth chords that the composer was noted for). All we can do is hope for the rest of the cycle—maybe with more Medtner? Probably not, but at this point, there is no music that Sudbin could record that I would not want to hear.

HARRINGTON

MENDELSSOHN: Cello Sonatas; Songs Without Words, opp 30:6; 62:1+6; 67:2+4; 102:3

Friedrich Kleinhapl; Andreas Woyke, p
Ars 38 197—64 minutes

Mendelssohn is one of the friendliest composers of the romantic era, and his cello sonatas are a good example of his beauty of style. These players do them musical and technical justice with warmth of expression that puts them across in an unusually fine way. My only minor cavil is that the rapid passages in the finale of Sonata 2 are slightly less than perfect in the cello line sometimes, partly because of the superfaster speed.

The rest of the program consists of fine arrangements of some of the most popular of the piano Songs Without Words arranged for cello and piano. This is all lovely Spring listening, and there aren’t many duplicates of this
program. Check out the Cello Overview (M/A 2009) for more options.

D MOORE

MENDELSSOHN: Midsummer Night’s Dream; Fair Melusine & Hebrides Overtures
Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard—BIS 2166 [SACD] 69 minutes
If you have heard Beecham’s Fair Melusine Overture you will hate this. This man has no idea of charm or sweetness or warmth. Everything is brisk and imperious. Judging from this, poor Felix had no idea how to charm an audience. Well, it’s clear right from the start (this is the first thing on the disc) that this conductor hasn’t.

There is no magic in Midsummer Night’s Dream, either, though anyone who knows the Shakespeare play or the Mendelssohn music has a right to expect it. It’s miserably prosaic. Liszt called the music charming and enchanting, but you won’t find any of that here. The famous Wedding March has no majesty. This is a dull performance, and all the singing is in German. There are excellent recordings in English, the language of the play and a language Mendelssohn spoke like a native.

I don’t like the small orchestra either.

VROON

MENDELSSOHN: Songs 2
Mary Bevan, Sophie Bevan, s; Paula Murrihy, Kitty Whately, mz; Robin Trichtler, t; Benjamin Appl, Jonathan McGovern, bar; Malcolm Martineau, p—Champs Hill 91—79 minutes

Volume 2 in Martineau’s project of recording all the songs of Felix Mendelssohn and his sister Fanny has Hensel maintains the same high standards it set previously (N/D 2014). Many of the fine young singers return here. The 31 songs of this generous program again are arranged thematically rather than chronologically; spring, love, and night are themes of three groups; settings of poems by Goethe, Byron, and Von Strehlau constitute three other groups. Three of Fanny’s Op. 10 songs are included. As in Volume 1, only one complete set of songs is included, in this case Op. 99.

Two fine mezzos not heard in Vol. 1 do an excellent job here. Murrihy sings the Op. 99 songs, and Whately sings the three songs of Fanny. Again with the brilliant collaboration of Martineau, with first-rate sound, and with enchanting singing, this second volume is a thorough delight. Trichtler’s luminous voice is ideal for these songs, and his performance of ‘Frühlingsglaube’ gives the program a sprightly beginning. The Bevan sisters are again terrific. Sophie floats ethereally to high B-flats in ‘Romanze’ and imparts a magical aura to ‘Der Mond.’ Mary sings luminously in three ‘Suleika’ songs and brings out the drama in ‘Des Mädchens Klage.’ With his rich voice Appl is excellent in two Lenau settings, ‘Auf der Wanderschaft’ and ‘Schilflied.’ The lighter-voiced McGovern sings two tender Byron settings.

The excellent notes by Susan Youens add significant value to this project. Texts and translations.

R MOORE

MESSIAEN: L’Ascension; Diptyque; Offrande au Saint-Sacrement; Prelude; Le Banquet Celeste; Apparition de l’Eglise Eternelle
Tom Winpenny, org—Naxos 573471—66 minutes

The second volume in Winpenny’s series of Messiaen organ works for Naxos (S/O 2015). These works are from the 1920s and 30s and show the influence of Dupré and Tournemire. The four meditations, L’Ascension (1933-34), established Messiaen as one of the most important composers of his generation.

Winpenny is a fine player and delivers satisfying performances of all these pieces. His series compares favorably with ones by Gillock (N/D 2015, M/J 2016) and Zwoferink (J/A, N/D 2015). He plays on a 1992 Rieger organ that is suited to this music. Notes on the composer and music and organ specification.

DELCAMP

MEYER: Canzona; Imaginary Variations; Moment Musical; Misterioso; Trio
Poznan Trio—Naxos 573500—72 minutes

Five chamber works by Penderecki and Boulanger pupil Krzysztof Meyer (b. 1943). He taught at the Cracow Academy until he moved to Cologne in 1988 to teach at the Hochschule für Musik. He was a prolific composer, and these works were written from 1976 to 2010. He rejected Penderecki’s avant-gardism in favor of that composer’s later neo-romanticism, taking up the training given him by Boulanger, and has produced a modern language that is expressive but not terribly removed from the non-traditionally-tonal music of its time, but among its best examples.

The earliest work on the program is the Moment Musical (1976), a small schizophrenic fantasy for cello solo with lyrical interruptions, glissando shadows, and some hysterical chatters. Appearing in the middle of the program, it comes across as a relatively minor contribution compared to what will follow.

The outstanding Piano Trio (1980) is the most substantial work on the program. In five movements, this masterly piece is filled with arresting ideas, with a satisfying unified struc-
ture. Fanfare and gigue figures develop in alternation. It opens with a passacaglia theme and variations with pizzicato tremolo and distant bells, bringing on reference to the opening movement. Romantic declamation ends conclusively on C. A pizzicato scherzo with lyrical overlays and strong octave motivic statements follow. The finale begins with glimpses of peace and progresses with drama, recalling previous materials until the work concludes in C and those bells. The piece is impressive.

Written just after the brilliant Trio, Canzona (1981) for cello and piano begins with broad lines that open out into dark virtuosic intensity before reverting back to lyrical Eastern European darkness. It opens the program.

Another recital piece, Misterioso (1994), for violin and piano, offers pleading declamatory poetry in that same resigned style.

The most recent piece, Imaginary Variations (2010), for violin and piano, is constructed as continuous variations on a motive in contrasting textures, like a free set of traditional variations. It takes up 16 minutes.

In sum, Mr Meyer is an excellent composer unfairly neglected in this country, and the release is well worth your time. Excellent performances.

GIMBEL

MICHAEL: Musicalische Seelenlust
Ensemble Polyharmonique/ Alexander Schneider—Raum Klang 3403—58 minutes

The music of Tobias Michael (1592-1657) fits in the rich choral tradition of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. Michael had been employed as Kapellmeister by the earls of Schwarzenberg in Sonderhausen; but after Johann Hermann Schein’s death in November of 1630 Michael submitted his application for the vacant position of Thomaskantor. His career from then on was devoted to restoring the reputation of the choir.

Michael’s most important achievement in his capacity as Thomaskantor was the publication, in two volumes, of his Musicalische Seelenlust in 1634-5 and 1637. Schneider draws his program from both volumes to show the range of Michael’s creative genius. It contains short solo and choral works—what Alexander Schneider calls “sacred madrigals,” perhaps because many of them fit the mold of Monteverdi’s madrigals for five voices and continuo. Still, one might describe the smaller works for solo voice and continuo as sacred cantatas or concertos because they have the same stylistic qualities as Schütz’s Kleine Geistliche Konzerte.

Although Michael’s output of compositions is small—few occasional works survive besides Musicalische Seelenlust—one would be hard pressed to show how his music was in any way inferior to the much more prolific Schütz. Michael’s works show complete grasp of the operatic style that was all the rage in 17th-Century Germany. For example, his setting of ‘Ach das ich Wassers Genug Hätte’ as a duet for alto and tenor is more overtly dramatic than the settings by Johann Christoph Bach and Philipp Heinrich Erlebach, which appeared later in the century. Compare, for example, the excellent recordings by Michael Chance (Chandos 675, N/D 2001), Gerard Lesne (Astrée 8873, S/O 2002), and Ryland Angel (Deux-Elles 1147; S/O 2013) of Bach’s setting, and Erlebach’s setting by Ludger Remy (CPO 777346; J/A 2008). Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

MONTEVERDI: Madrigals VII
Le Nuove Musiche/ Krijn Koetsveld
Brilliant 94980 [2CD] 126 minutes

This ensemble has joined the ranks of others that have completed or are working on recorded traversals of all of Monteverdi’s madrigal publications. The group’s first venture, in its series for Brilliant, was a combination of Books V and VI (93799; J/A 2009). This is the next installment, and by 2017 we are promised the complete run of all nine books.

In this penultimate book whose publication he supervised himself, Monteverdi was riding the new crest of his seconda pratica. With the two previous volumes (Books V and VI) he had rounded off his mastery of the old idiom of the five-voice vocal madrigal and had moved into the techniques of using different numbers of singers with basso continuo and even other instruments. Now, in Book VII (1619) he offered a range of compositions for anywhere from one to four singers with continuo, and sometimes with further instruments. He still called them “madrigals”, but they were really demonstrations of the new monodic style. The book opens with a monody for tenor with instrumental ensemble and with a vivacious ballo of Arcadian celebration titled Tirsi e Clori.

The variety of textures is considerable. There are not a great many of the famous Monteverdi “hits” here, but the memorable Chiome d’oro certainly is. And there are two long monodic outpourings—one a love letter, the other a bitter farewell to a lover—designated as in genre rappresentativo (in a theatrical idiom—think Tatiana’s Letter Scene in Eugene Onegin).

In reviewing the previous release in this
series Catherine Moore appraised the group thus: “The singing is correct and attractive, with a nice depth of color in the full-textured imitative sections.” In the freer textures she did note “a tendency towards the tentative”. I concur, observing that these are young Dutch singers with fine voices—if unspectacular or ostentatious ones. That does lead to some reservations. There is a certain restraint that can make so much monodic writing a little tedious. I found the Chiome d’oro just a bit shrill, too. On the other hand, Jasper Schewpepe—identified as a baritone but sounding more like a tenor—is quite compelling in the Partenza Amorosa. Perhaps the telling example is the concluding ballo, which is nicely sung but lacks the bounce and vivacity that is needed to bring the piece to life.

There are not too many competing recordings of this collection. In the recent presentation by the Delitiae Musicae for Naxos (555314: J/A 2007), I find the rather far-fetched reorderings of the pieces so as to create a phony scenario just too quirky, no matter how fine many of the performances are. I much prefer the vivacious recording by La Venexiana for Glossa (920927: M/J 2005), and I hope that there will be a revival of the recording under Rinaldo Alessandrini once available from Opus 111.

Still, it could be worth following this new Monteverdi series as it unfolds. Full texts with translations.

MOONDOG: Round the World of Sound
Dedalus & Muzzix
New World 80774—60 minutes

Old hippies might remember Moondog (real name: Louis Thomas Hardin, 1916-1999), considered at the time (and apparently today) a “blind visionary”. Blind as a result of a freak explosion (picking up a blasting cap while on a walk on a railroad track in 1932 when he was 16), Mr. Hardin went on to become a composer with the aid of braille and dictation to assistants. He was invited to sit in on New York Philharmonic rehearsals by Rodzinski and later became the orchestra’s “mascot”; Bernstein later took an interest in him and they became friends.

He became a New York institution and bagman, living on the streets and wandering around in his strange duds and Jesus-like countenance, like his New York Dada predecessor Baroness Elsa. His favorite music was European art music, but he spent time on Indian (Arapaho) reservations picking up their influence. Jazz musicians in New York became frequent visitors and fans, including the likes of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, and Dave Brubeck, who later gave him entry into that world, making records on the Prestige label. Columbia also picked him up, and he became an “underground” star, with the release of several well-publicized discs, one of which was a hit in the late 60s. Later he was cited by the minimalists as a founder of the style, garnishing worshipful adulation from the likes of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. He spent the last years of his life in Europe, becoming, as in America, a renowned recluse.

This disc contains arrangements of the first book of his Madrigals (1950-1968), cheery and catchy canons in his signature 5/4 meter set up in a cycle of descending keys, somewhat like the Well-Tempered Clavier. These are well-crafted little gems, open to any performance situation. New World neglects to supply the little texts, which would take up a couple of pages, but since sung language is not automatically intelligible, it would have been a source of added pleasure. Performances are quite amateurish, though an argument could be made that this is as it should be. Nevertheless, I would enjoy an effort by a gifted early music group even more. The music is always accompanied by a Navajo-inspired beat, which might be attractive to cool youngsters. New World does its usual stellar job with notes.

GIMBEL

MORAVEC: Amorisms; Tempest Fantasy;
Sacred Love Songs
Alias Chamber Ensemble; Portrara Ensemble/
Shreyass Patel
Delos 3470—62 minutes

Paul Moravec’s Amorisms (2014) is a ballet with vocal quintet, clarinet, and string quartet, based on five aphorisms on love from Shakespeare plays. The music is ethereal and complements the texts beautifully. I can’t comment on how this works with the ballet, but it works well as music and is given a fine sendoff by these excellent singers.

The brilliant Tempest Fantasy (2003) is a five-movement quintet also taking off from Shakespeare, this time inspired by characters from The Tempest. It has been recorded before, on an excellent Naxos (J/A 2007) with its dedicatee, clarinetist David Krakauer. Very freely tonal and spectacularly virtuosic, it deservedly won the Pulitzer in 2004.

Sacred Love Songs (2012), also for vocal quintet and string quartet, are three biblical songs, a setting of the Prayer of St Francis, and a brief interlude. It is similar to the Shakespeare pieces of the opening track: expressively tonal, graceful, and stately. It has affinity to
contemporary English choral style, but with Moravec’s singular language.

This Fantasy doesn’t measure up to the scintillating Trio Solistoi on Naxos, but the choral additions supply some extra attraction.  

GIMBEL

MOHVEC: Violin Concerto; Shakuhachi Quintet; Equilibrium; Evermore

Maria Bachmann, v; James Nyoraku Schlefer, shakuhachi; Stephen Gosling, p; Voxare Quartet; Symphony in C/ Rossen Milanov

Naxos 559797—56 minutes

Paul Moravec’s Violin Concerto (2010, rev. 2013) is an old-fashioned romantic violin concerto in modern terms. The soaring first movement is set up in the normal three parts, the more jocular central section rising in intensity until the passion returns. The slow movement is long-lined and melancholic. A long cadenza (acting as a third movement) blends into the finale, which begins uncertain of itself until the virtuosic fast music begins and ends up excitedly in a firm tonal cadence.

The Shakuhachi Quintet (2012) combines Beethovenian depth with a belated entrance by the Japanese bamboo flute. The intention is meant to combine two cultures in a fashion-able globalist manner, though the Western one seems to have the upper hand. The juxtapositions get more schizophrenic than unifying as 

GIMBEL

MOHVEC: Violin Concertos 2+5; Sinfonia Concertante

Frank Peter Zimmerman, v; Antoine Tamesit, va; Bavarian Radio/ Radoslaw Szulc

Hanslser 15042—75 minutes

These are fine performances with some influence from the period performance practitioners. Vibrato is not eschewed but it is chaste, and tempos are brisker than in some of the more romantic performances. I enjoyed Concerto 2 more than I ever have before, and this is a tribute to Frank Peter Zimmermann’s feeling for this music and Radoslaw Szulc’s careful shaping of phrases and dynamics.

When Antoine Tamesit joins in the Sinfonia Concertante, the feeling of emotional commitment largely disappears. Tamesit’s approach to Mozart is much more perfunctory. Too bad, because this work is the composer’s masterpiece in the form of the violin concerto, and I was expecting much after Concertos 2 and 5. The saving grace of this performance is the finale. When I was a boy, I heard the recording by Rafael Druiam and Abraham Skernick with the Cleveland Orchestra conducted by George Szell. They managed to get through the finale in six minutes flat, and ever since I heard that, any longer just sounds too slow. Zimmerman and Tamesit manage to play the finale in 5:46, and they don’t even sound as if they break a sweat at that speed. If you haven’t heard the Szell, you might want to hear this in order hear the finale played at what I believe is the correct tempo. It is, after all, a Presto. Very good sound.  

GIMBEL

MUHLY: Control; see THOMAS

NAGORCKA: Song of the Central Tree; Fly Away Home; Downunder Dance; Five Limit Fugue; Ceremonial Song for the Cleansing Wind; Early Harmonic Adventures of Septimus Mean; Septimus Confronts Equality; The Japanese Wind Bell; To be a Pilgrim; I am Like a Heron

Ron Nagorcka, Ole Jorgen, Nina Sauther haug, Hakan Henriksen, Thomas Grubb, David Scott Hames, Brita Sjoberg/ Sten Ivar Frydenlund

Ravello 7924—62 minutes

Ron Nagorcka’s music has been described as “out there!; wondrous; fascinating; unique; deeply satisfying; sensuous rather than cerebral most rewarding; passionate; reflective and witty; strong, sensitive and fun to play; distinctive”. Nagorcka lives in Tasmania on a nature preserve and composes in a solar-powered studio. He has been performing in Australia since the 1970s and recently began collaborating with musicians in Norway. This recording is a product of their 2013 performances in Trondheim, Norway. The pieces explore a number of exotic sounds, and he uses the MIDI keyboard to explore the possibilities of just intonation.

In his college years he learned to play the didjeridu, which is prominent here, along with his extraordinary basso profundo voice. There are four works with texts dealing with the nat-

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ural world, which plays an important role in his musical aesthetic. Several of the pieces were recorded in the Steinkjer Kirche, Norway, and use the two pipe organs found there. Texts of the poems, explanations of the tunings used, and bios of all the performers are included. Interesting sounds.

DELCAFP

**Nielsen: 25 Choral Songs**
Danish Choirs/ Michael Schonwandt, Phillip Faber, Susanne Wendt
Dacapo 8.266112—63 minutes

Nielsen wrote some 300 songs, and about 100 of them were conceived as choral works. Others, including many here, began as solo songs that were later arranged for group singing. They are very lovely pieces with folk-like simplicity; the style is conservative: even though Nielsen lived until 1931, these songs could have been written in 1830. All of the ones here are without accompaniment, and by and large they are homophonic, with little contrapuntal interest.

Five different choruses take part, ranging from professional groups to children's choirs; most are for mixed chorus, though some are for men or women (or children) alone. All the groups are wonderful, even the children (!), though we have to acknowledge that this isn’t the toughest repertory out there. What comes through again and again is the beauty of Nielsen’s writing, heavily triadic with sparing dissonance and no hint of dark emotion. Only a few pieces—e.g. ‘Danmark, du Kornblonde Datter’—stretch the singers.

An enjoyable release, then, of music that would be better known were it not in Danish. Extensive notes and texts in both Danish and English.

**Norman: Switch;** see **Thomas**

**O’Brien: To Spring Overture; Minstrel’s Curse Overture; Mazurka; Berceuse; Scottish Scenes**
Lispaja Symphony/ Paul Mann
Toccata 263—66 minutes

This is Volume 2 in Toccata’s survey of the orchestral works of Charles O’Brien (1882-1968). They’ve also released two CDs of his keyboard music.

In an earlier issue (N/D 2015) I noted that his orchestral music is conservative to the verge of atavism. The works here are less so, but still reactionary for their time. **To Spring** (1906) has both charm and momentum, scored with the suavity of an updated Mendelssohn. Unlike many of his other pieces, it also hangs together well. One understands why, in his day, it was his most popular work.

The **Minstrel’s Curse** (1925) at 25 minutes is more a tone poem than an overture. According to conductor Mann’s excellent notes, the score was “a spiderly shorthand full of errors... lacking in dynamics and other details”. He aptly describes it as a Lisztian piece; and while some of its themes are good, it’s simply too strung-out. It’s based on an Uhland ballad that Schumann set earlier for chorus and orchestra. Two minstrels play for a tyrannical king. Jealous of how they charm his queen, he kills one. The other curses him, blighting his kingdom. It’s generally a narrative piece, but possibly out of a misplaced reverence for form, O’Brien repeated wholesale a long expository section adding to the piece nothing but fat. A description of the action with time cues would help listeners figure out where the story’s headed.

The Mazurka and Berceuse are keyboard pieces, possibly orchestrated by O’Brien’s fellow composer Cecil Coles. Mann notes they too needed further work. The **Scottish Scenes**, composed in 1915, were scored in 1929 for a BBC airing. As musical landscapes go, they’re healthy examples. Their pleasurable native-sounding tunes are actually all by O’Brien. Their scoring is also handled with solid craft and imagination. I, ‘Moorland’, has a memorable cello solo, complete with Scotch snap. II, ‘Voices in the Glen’, has some whole-tone passages giving over to more melodic pages. III, ‘Harvest Home’, is a lively barn dance over a Scotch drone. The pieces would be an asset to any pops concert. Performances and sound are both well done.

**Orff: Gisei-das Opfer**
Uleike Helzel (Tonami), Ryan McKinney (Genzo), Markus Brück (Matsuo), Elena Zhidkova (Chiyo); German Opera Berlin/ Jacques Lacombe
CPO 777819—60 minutes

**Weingartner: Die Dorfschule**
Elena Zhidkova (Tomani), Stephen Bronk (Genzo), Fionnuala McCarthy (Schio), Clemens Bieber (Matsuo); German Opera/ Lacombe
CPO 777813—43 minutes

These two works, inspired by a medieval Japanese tale, have several things in common. Both were written by German composers in the early 20th Century. Both are short—one an hour long, the other less. Both are here recorded by the forces of the Deutsche Oper Berlin under Jacques Lacombe.

The story concerns the sacrifice of one child in order to save another child who is an
heir to the throne. While the story definitely reflects the medieval Japanese values of its time, the music of both operas sounds like the early 20th Century. But they do not sound alike.

Orff spent a lot of time writing about the influence of Debussy and the poet Maeterlinck on his music, and one doesn’t have to listen long before recognizing them in this work. It is not a stretch to liken the vocal and orchestral patterns to *Pelleas et Melisande*, Debussy’s great opera based on Maeterlinck’s play. The beginning of Orff’s work is an extended introduction with women’s chorus and two soloists, who later become identified as the parents of the sacrificed child—a sort of preview of the story before the actual drama is acted out.

Weingartner’s version begins when the drama begins. The composer, who was a major conductor of his time, would naturally have been familiar with the great composers of the early decades of the 20th Century. His orchestral writing in this opera is quite similar to Wagner, Mahler, and especially Richard Strauss. While his vocal writing is not as demanding as Strauss’s, his orchestra more than once reminds me of Strauss’s massive orchestral accompaniments, especially in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

Both scores are tonal and often very beautiful; these operas are not hard to listen to. The performances only enhance this pleasure. No role requires really virtuoso singing, but all of the singers have excellent voices, which they use very effectively. The singers listed at the beginning of this review have the largest roles, and they are completely convincing. The orchestra and chorus are just as fine.

These operas come with booklets containing good background essays, cast bios, and complete German-English texts.

**Sininger**

**Pachelbel: Suites, Canon, Songs**

Hans Jörg Mammel, t; Amandine Beyer, v; Gli Incogniti

*Harmonia Mundi 902238—79 minutes*

Johann Pachelbel might not even have composed the “Pachelbel Canon”—the evidence is merely circumstantial. The program concludes with the famous canon, nevertheless; but on the way, Gli Incogniti, Amandine Beyer, and Hans Jörg Mammel treat us to a selection of authentic arias and partitas (i.e. suites) from Pachelbel’s *Musikalische Ergötzung*. This collection, published in Nuremberg at the end of an illustrious career, includes partitas that fit well in the choreographic tradition fostered by the French. But the individual partitas lean stylistically toward the Italian sonatas modeled by Corelli, and even Biber, a little closer to home, through their rhythmic variety, affective use of dissonance, and the contrapuntal interaction between violins. The arias, too, adopt the rich coloratura of Italian operatic music. This is a lovely program, beautifully performed. Texts and notes are in English.

**Loewen**

**Paganini: Violin Concerto 2; see Collections**

**Pasquini: The Thirst of Christ**

Francesca Aspromonte (Mary), Francisco Fernandez-Rueda (St John), Luca Cervoni (Joseph of Arimathea), Mauro Borgioni (Nicodemus); Concerto Romano/ Alessandro Quarta

*Christophorus 77398—67 minutes*

Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710) is best known as a composer for the harpsichord. Even in his lifetime he was chiefly noted as a performer on that instrument and an accomplished organist. He was based in Rome from 1650 to the end of his life and enjoyed the patronage of many eminent nobles and churchmen. His principal patron was Prince Giambattista Borghese, whom he served as music director from 1666. Beginning in 1669 he resided in an apartment in the Borghese Palace.

Pasquini’s vocal music is not as well known, though he was regarded as the leading dramatic composer in Rome in the 1670s. From the 1680s on, he was overtaken by the younger generation of operatic composers, especially by Alessandro Scarlatti. Of Pasquini’s 18 known operas, 12 survive as well as 7 out of 13 oratorios plus cantatas and individual arias.

*The Thirst of Christ* (La Sete di Cristo) is a Passion oratorio to a libretto by Nicolo Minato; it was first performed in Modena in 1689. It is scored for four solo singers, strings, and continuo. The four singers assume the roles of the Virgin Mary, St John, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. The libretto consists of their dialog during the Crucifixion. There is some conversation between the characters, but the greater part of the text consists of devotional and penitential commentary on the events of the Passion.

The first of the oratorio’s two parts is more general in nature, but the second part gives the work its title. It opens with the baritone soloist (Jesus) singing a single word—“Sitio” (I thirst)—unaccompanied. It is the only Latin in this Italian-language libretto. The remainder of the oratorio consists of meditations and analogies prompted by this Fifth Word from the Cross. Pasquini’s music moves freely among the idioms of recitative, arioso declamation, and more extended lyrical arias.

**July/August 2016**
In his notes to this recording, director Alessandro Quarta observes that listeners may notice stylistic elements associated with the music of Alessandro Scarlatti, Arcangelo Corelli, and even Handel; but all of these were younger composers who were influenced by Pasquini. Readers may also be reminded of a Passion oratorio libretto by Pietro Metastasio—La Passione di Gesù Cristo—that also consists of the dialog of four biblical characters. That libretto was first set to music in 1730 by Antonio Caldara and then by dozens of other composers between then and the early 19th Century. Obviously Metastasio too had his precursors.

The performance is uncompromising in its early music atmosphere. I would describe the string tone as lean, even austere. The vocalists are decidedly early music singers who would be at home in baroque opera. On these terms, the performance is very fine. I find the sound and style agreeable, but others may not. My chief complaint concerns balance. Soprano Francesca Aspromonte sounds very close, and her tone can be uncomfortably intense in places. Baritone Mauro Borgioni sounds rather distant, and he is often overbalanced by the accompaniment. The two tenors seem to be between these extremes and are heard to better advantage.

Alessandro Quarta began his career as a singer and branched out into directing and musicology. He is currently director of music at the church of Santa Lucia al Gonfalone in Rome. He founded Concerto Romano in 2006 mainly for the exploration of the Roman repertory of the Renaissance and baroque periods.

PEDRINI: Violin Sonatas, op 3
Nancy Wilson; Joyce Lindorf, hpsi
Paladino 57—12:29

Now here’s a novelty—something to tease your guessing-game guests with. An Italian Baroque musician, theorist, composer, and instrument maker. An Italian Baroque musician who was a missionary to China and a respected personality at the court of the Chinese Emperor. Oh, come now, certainly you remember Teodorico Pedrini (1671-1746)?

Well, he turns out to be someone of real interest. Born in Fermo, he was trained musically in Rome. He was a member of the Lazarist order of missionaries. It was in 1702 that he undertook a long missionary journey that included stops in Central and South America before leading him to China (by way of Macau) in 1711. He succeeded the Portuguese Jesuit Tomas Pereira as court musician to the Emperor Kangxi, establishing close personal ties with the imperial family, despite not being able to speak Chinese.

This was at a time when the Chinese court was reaching out, mainly through missionary contacts with the Christian West. The emperor employed him as a builder and tuner of harpsichords—of which there were several at the court, gifts from foreign rulers—and had him complete a Chinese treatise on music begun by Pereira. All the while Pedrini pursued his other calling as a missionary. That brought on him many problems, as Chinese cultural and political life was in turmoil, and he was also embroiled in controversies with the Jesuits, even involving two periods of imprisonment. But the honor accorded him prevailed, and he died in Beijing, still appreciated, in 1746 at age 75. There is even a portrait of him.

Pedrini’s life and legacies have been the long concern of musicologist and harpsichordist Lindorf, who has done much research on him in Chinese archives. She is, in fact, author of the entry on him in the latest edition of Grove. She has studied the only surviving body of Pedrini’s own compositions, a set of 12 violin sonatas, preserved in manuscript but designated as his Op. 3. With violinist Wilson, she has recorded the sonatas in installments (2006, 2008, 2012).

Pedrini knew well Corelli’s Op. 5 violin sonatas, published in 1700. His writing demonstrates Corelli’s extensive influence: in movement layout (sometimes including dance movements, and making a Pastorale the last section of No. 12) and in the shaping of lines. There are many parallels to, and even virtual quotations, of some Corelli strains. But if Pedrini’s writing is somewhat derivative, it is still very attractive and inventive—perhaps a kind of “Corelli lite”.

Wilson is a careful and able player, with a tidy if not spectacular tone, her limited vibrato covered by well-centered tone. Lindorf’s playing is, of course, authoritative. Nothing is said in the latter’s notes about embellishment. My ears seem to hear some. And the reproduction of one page from the manuscript is confirmation of Wilson’s very responsible ornamentation.

While this release may not be all that sensational an addition to the discography of Baroque chamber music, it makes available a good deal of musical enjoyment, as well as giving a fascinating glimpse into a rare episode in East-West cultural contact.

PERANDA: Mass; see BACH
PETTERSSON: Symphony 13
Norrköping Symphony/ Christian Lindberg
BIS 2190 [SACD] 67 minutes

Symphony 13 (1976) follows the choral, political 12 and precedes the ultra-personal 14 with its fantasy on the Barefoot Song, developed at length in the Second Violin Concerto. This is a 66-minute, single-movement excursion into Petterssonian consciousness, with its typically relentless and often brutal torment and battles. It is not for seekers of prettiness. It requires sympathy, intense concentration, and relentless and often brutal torment and battles. It is also deliriously Petterssonian consciousness, with its typically rewarding if you are willing to take the journey.

The piece might be heard to fall into two large parts. The first opens with a broad motto that recurs at selected and often crucial moments as the work progresses. It is developed intensively in the first five minutes or so, before moving into a more varied stream. The Beethoven “victory motive” floats by briefly, along with a motive identified by the annotator as Shostakovich’s anagram (DSCH, with C an appoggiatura) though that is a typical Pettersson figure in all the symphonies. Development is relentlessly intense and sometimes dreamlike, held together by an immovable tonality always bubbling underneath. This takes up roughly half the movement.

Beginning with a relatively gentle Petterssonian barcarolle, the piece divides into recognizable genre types. The barcarolle turns into a plaint, a waltz, and a brief glimpse of peace. A wild scherzo follows, ending with a brief elegy. Fanfares appear. A viola solo obviously representing the man himself enters (the viola was his instrument and serves as a signifier through his entire cycle, as the solo violin does in Mahler). The viola discovers transcendence, which is followed by a march (To the grave? To peace?) Exhaustion leads to a funeral procession, a brief glimpse of major, a strong recurrence of the opening motive, a strettto, and a blazing major triad.

As with all Pettersson, this is by no means an abstract work. It is thoroughly autobiographical, and the fact that he managed to produce its 2046 bars is a testament to the human spirit.

The competition is Francis on CPO. As always I’m thrilled by Lindberg’s project to record the complete Pettersson symphonies, a daunting task for which I have the utmost awe, but as with much of this noble series, there are better performances elsewhere. Francis’s German orchestra has more chops than this Swedish outfit, and I don’t care for BIS’s recessed sound, though some may be more satisfied with the SACD sonics. If you insist on that, then there is no competition.

As I’ve said before, I don’t think we have heard the ultimate performances of these great works, and those will probably come from the great international orchestras. Since most of them don’t have the rehearsal time required, I wonder if we ever will. There is a brief clip of Lindberg conducting the work in Bernstein-ish fashion on YouTube along with a short, enthusiastic interview; and that makes me want to see him do this music, but I’m not sure how that will happen either. There is a recording of the piece with “virtual instruments” released in 2015 (not reviewed here). I’ve seen the images referred to as “Electric Sheep”. It will supply a useful distraction for the curious but unmusical crowd. Pettersson collectors will probably need both this and the CPO.

GIMBEL

PICO: Original Sin
Cesare Picco, cl; Sezione Aurea Baroque Quintet—Ishtar 35—40 minutes

This is very loud. The Baroque string quintet sounds harsh, except at low volume. The clavichord sounds abnormally loud in the mix. The string parts are mostly ostinatos, not melodically interesting. Composer Cesare Picco noodles ornamental lines and punctuating chords on his clavichord, on a Wurlitzer electronic piano—sometimes both at the same time.

Track 5, ‘Black Tower’, has some nice sounds from the clavichord’s lowest notes. ‘Aria 108’ is obviously based on the Air from Bach’s third orchestral suite. ‘Vincent at the Mirror’ mimics Arvo Pärt’s music. In that one, someone does an uncredited bit with a shaker that is probably supposed to make us think of the cardboard folder’s snake, if it were a rattler.

It’s all pleasant enough as ambient music, but I have not found much more in it than that on repeated hearings. It sounds like soundtrack music for an absent movie. Fans of Karl Jenkins’s music might like it. It’s over quickly. You can hear samples at http://ishtar.it/

B. LEHMAN

ponce: Sonata Meridional; Theme Varie & Finale; Cabezon Variations; Andante; Folis Variations
Judicael Perroy, g—Naxos 573285—58 minutes

The fourth volume of Naxos’s series of Manuel Ponce’s music has a few rarities—two versions of the Theme Varie et Finale and an unpublished slow movement from Sonata II. I’ve often wondered where I and II were, seeing his Sonata III. Counting the Sonata Meridional, there are 5. Well, apparently there were at least
6, but the rest of II has been lost. The movement itself is beautiful, with a particularly dramatic ending—I can only wonder what the rest might have been like.

The Theme Varie et Finale was written in 1926, and Segovia's edition came out in 1928. The two have significant differences, mainly in the number and order of the variations. While I have usually found Segovia's instincts to be sound, in this case I prefer the original. In any case, I'm glad to have it available. The other two pieces include Ponce's last guitar composition, the Variations on a Theme by Cabezón. It's rarely played, and I can't imagine why. It's really beautiful, and the variations are exciting. Then there's the Folias variations and fugue, considered by many to be the greatest guitar composition of the 20th Century.

Perroy still looks like a teenager, but he won the GFA competition in 1997. He has established himself as one of the finest guitarists of his generation, and this recording only confirms that. His technical command is astonishing; and his grasp of the sprawling structure of the Folias variations is impressive, particularly the build up to the final fugue, taken a bit faster than most, to excellent effect. One might complain that his playing is so dramatic that it comes close to overplaying, but I'm willing to tolerate a bit of roughness for the excitement.

And the excitement is what distinguishes this from Gerard Abiton's remarkable recording of Ponce's complete works (that, and the unpublished material). Abiton delivers refined and consistently expressive performances of all of Ponce's works, but doesn't match Perroy's energy. Frankly, I want both.

KEATON

POULENG: Sextet; see Collections

POULENC: Songs
Pierre-Yves Pruvot, bar; Charles Bouisset, p
Timpani 1222—51 minutes

This program presents the composer's 34 settings of poems by Paul Eluard: Le Travail du Peintre; Tel Jour, Telle Nuit; Cinq Poèmes; La Fraicheur et la Feu; Miroirs Brulants, and four single songs. The performances are very good, with agile and attentive accompaniment by Bouisset. Pruvot has a fine voice; his technique and attention to details are excellent, but his tone is more forceful and ponderous than you want in songs that require a more delicate touch.

I much prefer Holger Falk's sublime singing of this same program for MDG that added four Vilmorin settings for 10 minutes more music (J/A 2013). MDG also includes English translations of the songs. Here the texts are in French only.

R MOORE

POULENG: Violin Sonata; see Collections

PROKOFIEFF: Piano Concerto 2;
RACHMANINOFF: Paganini Rhapsody
Adilia Alieva; San Remo Symphony/ Walter Proost—Gallo 849—61 minutes

Alex Morin gave this a brief and dismissive review in M/J 1997. (The disc is still available.) He called the pianist's playing "draggy and unfocussed" and the orchestra "thin and imprecise in intonation." I have listened to this three or four times, and I think he was simply wrong about the pianist. The orchestra is not a great one, but they are there when they are needed, and a few of the soloists are rather good—especially brass. Yes, I like a big, thick orchestra as much as anyone; but the Prokofieff is hardly a piece that demands that. The orchestra punctuates the pianist's discourses; they don't have many lush romantic moments.

The pianist plays almost incessantly; she drives the whole interpretation. Her playing is lyrical, with marvelous contrasts. We are too used to hearing this hammered out by a pounder. It is too often treated as a mere show-piece for virtuosity. But we also tend to misunderstand "virtuosity". It's not just power and speed! The incredible virtuosity here is the way the pianist adapts to the mood of the music—and it changes from moment to moment. Prokofieff is not just an outrageous "modernist". He is a late Russian romantic whose language includes Rachmaninoff, even if he goes beyond that.

I was struck in many places by this pianist's virtuosity—and that includes sensitivity. In the first movement alone I would point to 2:00 and 7:30 as examples. There is certainly a lot of power in the Intermezzo, which follows a very fleet-fingered Scherzo. The orchestra's brass sounds pretty good in the Intermezzo, too. The last movement (there are four) is the wildest, and right away one gets the feeling that this orchestra is less assertive than what we usually hear in recordings of the piece. But that is partly because the conductor is following the pianist, and she is determined not to smother the music with noise.

This is a moderate interpretation. Tempos are not as fast as Ashkenazy or as slow as Toradze, though both of them have better sound and a richer orchestra. I consider the moderation a real plus here. Tempos are slow enough to allow for full expression but not so slow as to drag—as Toradze sometimes does. I really like both the Ashkenazy and the Toradze.
sets, but in this concerto they are both more percussive than this pianist is. Her tone is good and blends well with the orchestra. She phrases the melodies more, and she punctuates the musical sentences very convincingly. I listened to this the last time having just returned to the USA from serving on the jury of a piano competition. I’m in a “judgemental” mood. But I have to say I can’t find anything wrong with Alieva’s playing here—though it was recorded in concert; and I hear a few problems with the other two pianists, though I like them very much—and of course I am thrilled by the great orchestras and sound on their recordings.

After the concerto we are given the Hebrew Overture by the same composer—a very relaxing nine minutes after the tempestuous close of the concerto.

The Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini is often used as fill on Rachmaninoff concerto recordings. All the recordings I have seem to last 22 or 23 minutes, including this one and the one by Rachmaninoff himself. Alieva is again more lyrical than most; she does not treat it as a mere showpiece. She lingers on beautiful moments; she lets us savor them. In the famous 18th Variation she starts it out very nicely—great phrasing. It aches with romanticism. But when the orchestra comes in the magic is lost. The conductor doesn’t have much of a feel for this kind of music, and the strings are hard and crude. As is often the case, the orchestra spoils what was a promising performance. Never mind; I have at least a dozen recordings of it.

VROON

PROKOFIEFF: Violin Concerto 2;
BARTOK: Concerto
Gil Shaham; The Knights/ Eric Jacobson; Stuttgart Radio/ Stephane Deneve
Canary 16—63 minutes

This is as musical a performance of Prokofieff’s Concerto 2 as I have ever heard. Shaham’s tone, technique, and depth of expression are nonpareil; and Eric Jacobson gets his chamber orchestra to interact with Shaham with seamless, complimentary, enhancing playing. Except for one affected retard in the finale, they follow the score exactly, yet with consummate integrated flow. They make me truly appreciate that a chamber rather than full orchestra goes best with this concerto.

The only problem is that whenever Shaham plays, engineer Da-Hong Seetoo reduces the level of the Knight’s violins so that they become inaudible. As soon as Shaham stops, up they go again. That’s the kind of thing engineers can do in a control room.

Shaham owns the Canary label. He’s the boss. When the same phenomenon became even more glaring in the Bartok (the first violins barely play in I of the Prokofieff and have a lesser role in II), I began to believe that this is done at Shaham’s bidding. I hope I’m wrong; I hope this isn’t a vanity project (his six photos in the liner notes and anorexic photo on the cover can lead one to think it is). What a shame if it is; Lord know he doesn’t need to be vain—his supreme musicality speaks for itself.

Shaham’s playing in the Bartok is just as glorious. Bartok to me is essentially intellectual rather than emotional, even when he is lyrical. He phrases melodies almost mathematically rather than romantically. Yet Shaham takes even the most extended and unusually phrased passages and articulates them in such an ingenious manner that he made me say time and again, “Of course, that’s how it should be played. How lovely!”

Music Director Stephane Deneve also has a fine grasp of form and flow here. His orchestra plays with superb ensemble and partners perfectly with Shaham. But the engineering here doesn’t flatter the orchestra. It sounds very much like it does on Capriccio recordings from the 1980s when Neville Marriner was the orchestra’s music director: inner instruments like the harp and celeste aren’t projected well, lower strings are two-dimensional, violins are crammed to the far left, and the overall sound has a flat, harsh treble edge. I suspect I could live with that if the orchestra’s violins weren’t smothered when Shaham plays—Bartok, a superb orchestrator in this work, offers them many details.

Maybe this can be remastered, leaving the balance in the orchestras’ violins in the hands of the conductors as they would be in concert. Then we’d have a Prokofieff—and maybe even a Bartok—performance for the ages.

FRENCH

PROKOFIEFF: 2-Violin Sonata; see YSAYE

PROKOFIEFF: Violin Sonatas;
2-Violin Sonata; 5 Melodies
Natalia Lomeiko, Yuri Zhislin, v; Olga Sitkovetsky, p—Atoll 513 [2CD] 81 minutes

Sergei Prokofieff’s two violin sonatas, especially the First, are among the greatest ever written, and we are fortunate that there are several very fine recordings of them. James Ehnes recorded them with the Melodies (S/O 2000). Vadim Gluzman and Angela Yoffe recorded them in very good SACD sound (J/F 2014). Itzhak Perlman and Vladimir Ashkenazy recorded them. Kai Gleusteen made a fine recording of Sonata 1 (M/I 2004), and David

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Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter recorded it in concert in Salzburg in 1972 (J/F 1999).

So Natalia Lomeiko is up against some pretty stiff competition. She does well in these works, but is not up to the level of her illustrious forbears. The Sonata for Two Violins was written in 1932 while the composer was still in exile. It lacks the inspiration and mature style of the two violin sonatas. The Five Melodies are lovely works from 1925, and these are the best performances here.

MAGIL

RABL: Clarinet Quartet; Violin Sonata; Fantasy Pieces
Genevieve Laurenceau, v; Laszlo Fenyo, vc; Wenzel Fuchs, cl; Oliver Triendl, p
CPO 777849—72 minutes

In 1885 a group of German and Austrian musicians founded the Vienna Tonkunstlerverein (Vienna Musical Society) as a means to promote music in the Hapsburg capital city. As the honorary president, Johannes Brahms hosted several composer competitions to encourage new chamber music that followed the traditional path of the Leipzig School rather than the avant-garde ideas of the New German School.

In the 1890s Meiningen Court Orchestra clarinetist Richard Muhlfeld moved Brahms to come out of retirement and write some of his finest scores, notably the Trio in A minor, the Quintet in B minor, and the two sonatas. Hence, when the Tonkunstlerverein declared that the entries for the 1896 competition must have at least one wind instrument, 10 of the 18 submissions included the clarinet. This outcome should have been a windfall for the clarinet, but the only piece from the competition to have significant staying power was the third place winner, the Trio in D minor for clarinet, cello, and piano by a 25-year-old Alexander Zemlinsky.

Clearly inspired by the Brahms trio, Zemlinsky follows in the elder composer’s footsteps with fresh melodies, thematic economy, and stirring counterpoint. Brahms not only lauded Zemlinsky’s effort; he recommended it to his publisher, Simrock.

The first place winner, though, remains on the fringes of the repertoire. Like the young Zemlinsky, Walter RABL (1873-1940) thoroughly impressed Brahms with his entry, a quartet for piano trio and clarinet considered the first piece ever written for the medium. Although Brahms did not warm much to the 23-year-old graduate student at the German University in Prague, the invention, workmanship, and nostalgic aesthetic of the quartet had the elder composer’s ear, and he again pushed Simrock to publish it.

Rabl followed with more fine chamber music, notably the Fantasy Pieces (1897) for piano trio and the Violin Sonata (1899); but at the turn of the century his conducting career swiftly took off, especially in the opera house, and by the age of 30 he ceased composition. Still, his time at the desk gave him a sympathy for new and unappreciated composers. He promoted the music of Richard Strauss and Erich Wolfgang Korngold, and he ensured that Bruckner and Mahler had a place in the Teutonic canon.

Here some of the finest musicians in Central Europe gather for a celebration of Rabl and his music. The opening quartet introduces them all—French violinist Genevieve Laurenceau, Hungarian cellist Laszlo Fenyo, Berlin Philharmonic clarinetist Wenzel Fuchs, and Bavarian pianist Oliver Triendl. Laurenceau, Fenyo, and Triendl perform the Fantasy Pieces, and Laurenceau and Triendl conclude the recital with the Violin Sonata.

The performances are thoroughly professional and artistically convincing. Laurenceau and Triendl are brilliant all through, and their rendition of the Violin Sonata should assure its place alongside more famous entries in the genre. Fuchs and Fenyo are terrific in their supporting roles, lending inspired phrasing and splendid teamwork. The result is an engaging portrait of a young man who could already hold his own with the celebrity composers of his past and present, yet felt compelled to leave his craft behind and walk in another direction. Skilled musicians should ensure that these scores continue to be heard.

HANUDEL

RACHMANINOFF: Cello Sonata & Pieces
Sylvia Chiesa; Maurizio Baglini, p
Decca 481 2469—71 minutes

This program is presented as Sergei Rachmaninoff’s “Complete Works for Cello and Piano”. Well, yes, that would include the sonata and the Vocalise and Romance, but the other incidental works are arranged by different hands. The Andante Cantabile is from the Piano Concerto in F-sharp minor and puts this player through an uncomfortable hoop or two. The rest of the incidental pieces are smoothly performed, though the sonata comes as a relief from a rather unvaried vibrato on the part of the cellist.

But the sonata also brings a rather amazing amount of emotional rubato on the part of both players, much of it sounding arbitrary and unnecessary to the musical phrasing. The Scherzo is played with lots of ticks and clanks
RACHMANINOFF: Etudes-Tableaux
Zlata Chochieva, p
Piano Classics 95—62 minutes

At the age of 31, Chochieva has over two dozen years of performance experience, 14 top prizes at international competitions, and a list of teachers and mentors that includes Pletnev, Kovacevich, Badura-Skoda and Lowenthal. She has more concerts in her repertoire than years of life and first performed a full concerto with orchestra at age 7 (Mozart 17). Her earlier Rachmaninoff disc (Piano Classics 47, not reviewed) had super performances of the Chopin Variations and Sonata 1. Her Chopin Etudes (Piano Classics 68, N/D 2014) got a satisfactory, but not stellar review here. I have similar feelings about these Etudes-Tableaux.

Rachmaninoff created the title Etude-Tableaux, specifically taking these works beyond the traditional role of etudes. He gave a brief description of the inspiration behind five of them to Respighi in 1930 in preparation for their orchestration. He kept quiet about what was behind the other Tableaux.

There are eight pieces in Op. 33. There were nine, numbered as such in Rachmaninoff’s manuscript when the first edition appeared (numbers 3, 4, and 5 were not published at that time). The composer withdrew 4, revised it, and we know it today as Op. 39:6 (based on the Little Red Riding Hood story). The manuscript for Op. 33:4 does not exist, but 1-3 and 5-9 do. Numbers 3 and 5 were not published until after the composer’s death. Rachmaninoff did record Op. 33:7 (E-flat, Allegro con fuoco) and it was labeled as such. The same piece was called No. 5 in an early edition of 6 Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 33. Today, the original 3 and 5 are included as 3 and 4, and in most publications and recordings it is called No. 6 of 8 Etudes-Tableaux Op. 33.

Chochieva’s interpretations versus what I consider standard break down into three groups: Underplayed—quieter and slower than usual—in 33:1, 3, 4, 7 and 39:3+8. In the normal standard performance range are 33:2, 5, 6, 8 and 39:1, 4, 5, 9. There are some exceptional performances here as well: 39: 2, 6, 7. There is one very noticeable incorrect note in bar 41 of the popular Op. 39:5. After a series of B major chords, why Chochieva chooses to play an accented D natural in the left hand is beyond me. I don’t think it is a mistake, but a mis-reading.

This last, exceptional group is the reason I will return to this in the future. ‘The Sea and the Gulls’ (Op. 39:2), as Mrs Rachmaninoff suggested, is a meditation on the Dies Irae motive with repeated undulating waves in the left hand. Chochieva builds the central section to a climax worthy of The Isle of the Dead, with which it shares a number of elements. Op. 39:6, the ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ piece, is usually played as fast as possible with no real attention paid to the wolf chasing the little girl with ever increasing intensity and speed and a corresponding rise in the level of fear. Chochieva’s is without question the best performance of this piece I have ever heard (including the composer’s). Finally, the Funeral March (Op. 39:7) with the choir singing, the extended march in a light rain that builds up to bells pealing, is a compositional masterpiece. Most performers get bogged down in the inner voices and lose rhythmic momentum as they approach the bells ringing—not here. I always know where the beat is with Chochieva.

Very good notes by David Moncur and exemplary recorded piano sound contributed to the reasons I listened to this more than most others in recent months.

RACHMANINOFF: Moments Musicaux; Etudes-Tableaux, op 39
Boris Giltburg, p—Naxos 573469—71 minutes

Readers know by now that I am deeply moved by Rachmaninoff’s Moments Musicaux and consider them the best thing ever written for the piano. I can sit quietly thru the first two (there are six), but when No. 3 begins (Andante Cantabile) I start to tear up. 4, 5, and 6 just get better and better—such wonderful music! Nothing else makes the piano so powerful, so moving.

And this pianist, whom I’ve heard before and admired so much (for example, his Pictures at an Exhibition) plays these pieces better than I can ever remember having heard them. (I will go back and listen to a handful of other recordings before I print this review!) I have never heard a more glorious combination of power and sensitivity and tone. No. 5 is particularly outstanding.

I really like Thiollier and Ghindin in these pieces, and Ken-Ichiro is wonderful, too; but Giltburg is the most romantic of them all: perfumed, warm, sweet and gentle, full of feeling. Thiollier comes close.

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I do not like the *Etudes-Tableaux*. I think of them as products of a sterile period for him. Piano Sonata 2 (originally) was from the same period—and there’s not much else! Mr Giltburg writes the notes here—as well as plays them—and he tries to show how each is a picture, like a postcard. I’m afraid they don’t appeal to me at all. They are 40 minutes, but I would buy this for the 30 minutes of *Moments Musicaux*.

Boris Giltburg was born in Moscow but has spent most of his life in Israel. Maybe that is part of why he sounds the way he does. He does not boss the piano around, as so many Russians do; he coaxes beautiful sounds out of it.

By the way, the album cover has reversed the dates of the works: the *Moments Musicaux* are from 1896, and the *Etudes-Tableaux* are from 1916.

VROON

RACHMANINOFF: *Paganini Rhapsody*; see PROKOFIEFF

RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto 1;

STRAVINSKY: *Capriccio*;

SCHCHEDRIN: Piano Concerto 2

Denis Matsuev; Mariinsky Orchestra/ Valery Gergiev—Mariinsky 587 [SACD] 66 minutes

I like this program. Matsuev and Gergiev have put together a little survey of 20th Century piano concertos that’s a stimulating complement to their earlier recording of the Shostakovich concertos. “Wait,” you say, “the Rachmaninoff First was written in the 1890s, so it isn’t 20th Century!” But Rachmaninoff heavily rewrote the score in 1917, essentially creating a new work based on the old one, so the music is much more in keeping with his work of the 1920s than his very early work. This concerto very definitely points to the modernist future rather than looking back at the romantic past.

It has also been recorded a lot. Matsuev doesn’t bring any new insights to the piece, but I also cannot find fault with his interpretation, which is vigorous, direct, hard-driving, and controlled but not constrained. I won’t say it is more technically brilliant than the performance by Iñon Barnatan that I heard last week with the Minnesota Orchestra and Vassily Petrenko. Nor does it outclass one of my favorite old recordings, Abbey Simon with the St Louis Symphony under Slatkin (Vox) or the Viktoria Postnikova/Gennady Rozhdestvensky video (S/O 2011). Simon offers a more lyrical, singing solo line; and Postnikova is more mercurial, more attuned to the piece’s changing moods, than the sometimes slightly stolid and mechanical Matsuev.

One would never accuse Rachmaninoff of being a neoclassicist—unlike Stravinsky, who embraced the title and maybe even defined it as an aesthetic in the 20th Century. He wrote the Capriccio for his own concert use, and since he was a capable pianist but not a virtuoso, the solo part is not excessively demanding. The piece is still one of his fresher, more immediately appealing, less calculating works from the 1920s. Placed in the middle of this program, it seems like a natural progression from Rachmaninoff’s ripe, late romanticism. Here, Matsuev loses any hint of stolidity and seems particularly attuned to the music. Gergiev leads the accompaniment with equal commitment and laser-sharp, pin-point concentration—a spectacular performance.

With the Schchedrin we move up to 1966 and that composer’s unique, trenchant style. He’s moved beyond the world of Shostakovich and Prokofieff but still writes in an idiom accessible to people who like those two older composers. This piece is not quite as charming and easy-going as his justly famous *Carmen Ballet*. Again, I find Matsuev and Gergiev particularly attuned to the music. There’s no full-on slow movement, though I, ‘Dialogues,’ has quieter passages, and the third, called ‘Contrasts,’ starts with an extended Andante introduction that reminds me somewhat of Samuel Barber’s first Essay for Orchestra, before the tempo suddenly picks up and slides into a very “cool jazz” passage that could have dropped in straight from a contemporary animated *Peanuts* cartoon! Things become a lot more manic before it ends with a crazy contest of rising intensity and volume between the piano and orchestra. The center movement, called ‘Improvisations,’ is full of busy, manic energy. I’m not sure where it’s going, and in the back of my mind I suspect it’s a little too full of empty bluster and short on substance—but Matsuev and Gergiev punch it out with ferocious intensity and commitment.

All of this superb musicianship would come to naught if the sound were not as good as it is here. Like all recent Mariinsky releases, this is SACD, and the high-definition format’s extra spaciousness, depth of bass, and capacity to convey fine orchestral detail—like the throbbing woodwind accompaniment in II of the Stravinsky—really gets a workout here, much to the listener’s benefit. It certainly conveys well the clean, crisp, resonant acoustic of the still rather new Marinsky Concert Hall where this was recorded. Because the sound of the original master is so good, even the standard CD track has uncommonly good spatial imaging and punch.

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Vladimir Jurowski’s take on the symphony hews fairly closely to the Gergiev mold, a bit warmer and more lyrical, but essentially he does a lot to refute my usual assertion that the work is kind of discursive and prone to rambling in a way that the Second Symphony does not. He manages the febrile mood shifts with aplomb, keeps the first movement moving along, and makes the most of the effect of the rhapsodic lyrical moments. All good. The London Philharmonic has a slightly soft, warmer tone that helps emphasize the lyricism, though I’d prefer just a bit more crispness and punch in I and III. (But then I live in the Midwest, the Breadbasket of American Orchestras, so maybe I just tend to favor a brasher American tone.)

If you’re looking for a straight, solid, middle-of-the-road-in-the-good-sense Rachmaninoff Symphony 3, this one will serve you more than admirably. I’m in a bit of a hurry to get past the symphony because the rarer treasures here are the performances of 10 Rachmaninoff songs in orchestrations by conductor Jurowski’s grandfather, also named Vladimir (1915-72), who studied composition at the Moscow Conservatory under Miaskovsky in the early 1930s. He made the orchestrations for the tenor Ivan Kozlovsky, who recorded them with Kiril Kondrashin. If I’d been told these were long-lost arrangements by the composer himself, I’d have believed it. In a short note in the album booklet, the conductor says his grandfather’s own compositional style reflected Miaskovsky, Prokofieff, and Gostakovich to some degree, but in these orchestrations he really seems to have had an intuitive feel for Rachmaninoff’s orchestral idiom. They remind me a lot of Rachmaninoff’s operas, Aleko, The Miserly Knight, and the unfinished Mouna Vanna and Francesca da Rimini. I’m sure that’s partly because they’re sung in superbly idiomatic Russian by Mr Grinov, a genuine Russian tenor who has just enough weight at the lower end of his voice to give his performances here an extra injection of expressive force.

The songs are fairly well known these days in their original voice-and-piano guise. Thematically, some of them are rather over-the-top late-romantic stuff, like ‘What Happiness’, an expression of NRE (New Relationship Euphoria) if there ever was one. Some are quiet and pensive, like ‘How Beautiful It Is Here’, which closes the program. No matter, the music is gorgeous, stunning, and worth hearing again and again (something I’m doing right now, as I type this). Now I’m afraid I’ve undersold Jurowski’s interpretation of the Third Symphony. It is resplendent, a fitting complement to the songs—not your usual run-of-the-mill Rachmaninoff release, for sure!

Nor is the Kitaenko disc. The first thing that hit me was the sound—fantastic, demo-quality with rich, deep bass that doesn’t stop. Truly as good as it gets this side of a very well-engineered SACD. It’s a pity that in the last 10 years, as the CD heads down the downward slope of the technology life-cycle, the industry has finally figured out how to make it sound really good. The other thing that struck me about Kitaenko’s take on both works is that he is in NO hurry. In the symphony he runs a good minute longer than Jurowski in the first two movements, almost two minutes in III, and yet nothing sounds distended or dragged out, probably because much of the extra running time seems to be coming from the effusive, lyrical passages, so the overall structure of each movement stays intact. And Kitaenko hardly dawdles when it counts: the blaze of glory at the end of III is positively breathtaking.

I have to say this is one of the finest recordings of the symphony I’ve heard—and I’ve reviewed a lot of them for ARG. Kitaenko is not quite in Ashkenazy’s (Decca) or Previn’s (EMI) or Stokowski’s (EMI) class, but he gives them a run for their money. I’ll happily rank it with both Staktins (Naxos or Vox), the old Philadelphia Orchestra/Dutoit (Decca), and even last issue’s Gergiev. I’m sure some of my happiness with this performance comes from the lush, resonant sonics, but then isn’t that what a recording should do? Substitute something that makes up for not being in the actual concert hall with the actual orchestra? That was the Stokowski philosophy, and I’m very much in agreement.

The slow movement of the Third has always been a bit disappointing when one compares it to the slow movement of Symphony 2, but Kitaenko perhaps comes closest of anybody to infusing it with the lyrical warmth of the earlier symphony. That’s probably not exactly what Rachmaninoff intended—I’ve
always thought of No. 3 as his attempt to adopt a more “modern” and “objective” style in keeping with contemporary standards of the 1930s—but it sure works well. I will keep coming back to this performance.

I last heard the Symphonic Dances only a couple of weeks before this disc arrived, with the Wichita Symphony. The primary purpose of that trip was to hear Natasha Paremski in the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto 2 (for the record, she nailed it—better than anybody I’ve heard and well worth the 800-mile round trip), but the high quality of the orchestra was a pleasant bonus. Of course, the WSO is an American-sounding orchestra, and the Gurzenich Orchestra is much different—warmer, fuller, better upholstered, and very gratifying to hear. The beauty of collecting recordings is that you can have it both ways!

While I had no complaints about Kitaenko’s tempos in the symphony, there are some laggardly passages in the Dances, though not enough to make me unhappy with the luxuriant tones of the orchestra. The bass line is important for conveying the inner pulse of Oehms’s full-range sonics are some lag gly days in the Dances, very welcome here. The final moments of III though not enough to make me unhappy with recordings is that you can have it both ways!

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When a reviewer has nothing to carp about, there’s always short playing time. In this case, Oehms has headed off any such objections with a slightly overstuffed disc containing more than the regulation 79:57 of music. The extra playing time may cause problems in some older CD players, but I couldn’t find one that didn’t play it perfectly, even the original factory player in my 1997 Integra.

HANSEN

RACHMANINOFF: Vespers
Cologne Radio Choir/ Nicolas Fink
Carus CR 83471—52 minutes

In S/O 2014, Lindsay Koob gave us a rundown on a recent round of recordings of Rachmaninoff’s choral masterwork, placing them in context with earlier releases. He spoke approvingly of new ones from Dutch and Finnish choirs, while continuing to plight his troth with Paul Hillier and the Estonian Chamber Choir (S/O 2005). Last year (N/D) he commended Charles Bruffy and his singers from Phoenix and Kansas City for their sumptuous reading—perfect, he suggested, for “an especially luxuriant sonic wallow”.

Enter one of Germany’s fine radio choirs with this new recording of the Ganznächtliche Vigil. The West German Radio Choir is an ensemble of 45, so if you fancy imposing walls of sound cascading down on you as you listen, that isn’t in the cards here. Rather, the group’s moderate size reflects a moderate performance; no deacon for liturgical interpolations, flowing tempos, immaculately tailored dynamics, dutiful changes of color and mood, and (here’s the killer for me) not much in the way of Slavonic flair. While I found plenty to admire, in short, I wasn’t really moved. Carus does give these folks warm and lovely sound, but the booklet offers texts in Russian and German only. Sorry, no sale.

I, too, admire that Bruffy recording for Chandos, which proves beyond the shadow of a choral doubt that everything’s up to date in Kansas City—and in Phoenix, too. I still profess loyalty to Robert Shaw, who might not be on the Russophile hit parade, but whose choir produced some of the most heart-stoppingly gorgeous sounds ever captured in a recording studio. And I’ll always have a soft spot for Rostropovich, whose expansive account for Erato (now on Warner) taught me the work back when it was one of the few options available (1/11). Compare the WDR’s prim and proper “Sviat, Sviat, Sviat” in track 9 with Slava, who had the Washington Choral Arts Society all but waving pom-poms before the altar as they cheered God on. That same 2011 review, by the way, might present you with other choices—all more ethnically charged and more engaging than this one.

GREENFIELD

RAMEAU: Dardanus
Bernard Richter (Dardanus), Gelle Arquez (Iphise), Benoit Arnold (Antenor), Joao Fernandez (Ismenor), Alain Buet (Teucer), Sabine Devielhle (Venus), Emmanuelle De Negri (Amour), Ensemble Pygmalion/ Raphael Pichon Alpha 964 [2CD] 145 minutes

Dardanus was the fifth of Rameau’s operas and his third tragedie lyrique. It was first presented in 1739, with less than outstanding success. Rameau was determined to give it another chance, so he prevailed on his librettist to collaborate in a drastic revision, which altered the second of its five acts and totally recast the final two. This revision was presented in 1744, to much improved reception.

Its plot is a free treatment of the mythic stories of the legendary founder of Troy, Dardanus, who is portrayed as warring with the Phrygian king Teucer and his ally Antenor. Antenor is promised the hand of Teucer’s
daughter, Iphise, who loves Dardanus. Dardanus seeks the willing aid of the magician Ismenor, through whom the two lovers are brought together. Dardanus, however, is captured and imprisoned, and Antenor conspires to murder him. The imprisoned Dardanus is informed that the gods have decreed he shall be freed, but the one who does this shall die. Dardanus is horrified, the more so when Iphise comes to free him. He will not allow her sacrifice. The situation is resolved when Antenor, wounded in the latest conflicts, generously comes to be the liberator, and dies. Dardanus rejoins his forces and captures Teucer. The latter refuses his magnanimity, but Iphise reconciles them, so that Venus may preside over the couple’s happy union. All this is preceded, be it noted, by a Prologue, where Venus and Cupid fight off the forces of jealousy and assure the triumph of true love.

This new recording is the third of the opera. For each one decisions had to be made on how to treat the two versions of the score. The first used an edition prepared by Raymond Leppard for a 1980 stage production (Erato, not reviewed). Leppard created a streamlined confection based mainly on the 1744 version, with heavy cutting of the all-important dance episodes. The second recording, made for DG in 1998 (463 476: N/D 2000) by Marc Minkowski essentially went back to the 1739 version, but with a few interpolations from 1744.

The Leppard recording is long gone, and the fate of Minkowski’s is uncertain, so this new Alpha release has the immediate advantage of availability. Both Leppard and Minkowski had excellent casts, the latter’s perhaps somewhat stronger. Pichon’s singers are all apparently young and new on the scene. They cannot match the name recognition of their earlier counterparts. But in general they do very well: somewhat light voices, but well-steeped in French musical and linguistic style. The chorus of 20 singers sounds particularly lovely, and the period-style orchestra of 29 is at its best in the wonderful dances that were a Rameau speciality.

The booklet is stupidly pasted into the three-panel album, but it does give full notes, complete libretto, and English translations. A welcome addition, then, to the Rameau discography.

Almost everywhere, literary and artistic works of the highest worth are under-appreciated and marginalized because they are difficult and require a certain intellectual background and refined sensibility to be fully appreciated.

-- Mario Vargas Llosa

RAMETTE: Quartet; Violin Sonatas; Cello Sonata; 3 Poems

Vit Muzik, v; Karolina Rojan, p; Carmine Miranda, vc—Navona 6035—62 minutes

Navona has recently issued several discs of Yves Ramette, a Frenchman who lived from 1921 to 2012. They are mostly solo piano and orchestral works (see our index for reviews). This new Navona collects five chamber pieces—a string quartet, two violin sonatas, a cello sonata, and a brief song cycle on poems of Francis Carco set for baritone and mixed six-instrument ensemble—all of them written by the composer as a young man during the German Occupation (1941-45).

Ramette’s music, at least as represented by these pieces, isn’t easy to describe. His harmonic language and instrumental usages are French-inflected but mostly conventional and triad-based; nothing much here would bother his teacher Arthur Honegger, or Ravel, or even Cesar Franck. The sonatas and quartet are built from quite lovely but much-reiterated melodic phrases much interrupted by banal outbursts, resulting in large-scale forms with the feel of obsession, eccentric, unpredictable rhapsodies. This sort of architecture can sometimes work, as in Janacek’s music. But Ramette’s forms feel more clumsy and idiosyncratic than persuasive, even as his recurring ideas are hauntingly beautiful (as for example the five-note phrase first heard at 45 seconds into his First Violin Sonata that returns again and again).

I can see why there’s so much slow music in these works; it really does often come across as a heart-rending affirmation of peaceful beauty in the very difficult “Times of Torment” (as this disc is subtitled) when Ramette was writing it. Violinist Vit Muzik in particular finds deep emotional resonance in these passages, plays them con amore, and is quite well rendered in Navona’s recording (though the piano is less well captured). But the many and seemingly random noisy disruptions jar terribly, both psychologically and structurally.

In short: fascinating but not entirely satisfying music. Listeners more attuned to Shostakovich and Schnittke and other masters of contradiction may be happier than I with such warring musical impulses. But those Russians are surely far more self-aware artists—fully conscious of the ironies—than Ramette, who seems entirely sincere in everything he writes. And that, my friends, is always both a weakness and a strength in any art form.

M LEHMAN

July/August 2016
Ravel: Daphnis & Chloe

with Valses Nobles & Sentimentales
Stuttgart Radio/Stephane Deneve
SWR 19004—73 minutes

with Pavane; Bolero
London Symphony & Chorus/Valery Gergiev
LSO 696—79 minutes

So much of Deneve’s performance is jaw-droppingly beautiful. From the first general dance following the introduction up to the final general dance, the awesome integration of glorious instrumental solos, myriad textures, and voices into a seamless, superbly judged flow that maintains just the rich tension is pure heaven. Deneve’s supreme balances make for an utterly transparent texture. Special mention must be made of the stellar winds, brass, and violins in this orchestra; the long flute solo about 15 minutes from the end is perhaps the most glorious I’ve ever heard (only the alto flute was less than eloquent). All the ambient engineering needs is a healthy boost of the bass.

The problems with Deneve’s performance are twofold: in the opening ‘Introduction et Danse Religieuse’ he has a tendency to press forward, which means that the music loses the tension it needs over its eight-minute arc. And in the final ‘General Dance’ he so strictly maintains tempo from what precedes that he never really whips the music into the exotic frenzy that the union of the two lovers requires. Part of the problem is the engineering: I kept turning the volume higher and higher; and, even at a volume that would normally cause distorted sound, the sound never distorts, but it never projects the orchestra to an exciting level. The sound remains contained.

The musicality and transparency of Deneve’s recording puts Gergiev’s to shame. The Barbican acoustic is awful (not to be redundant). When Daphnis opens the orchestra is inaudible; when the first climax comes, it’s a distorted shout. The audio picture is flat and two-dimensional. There is no air around the instruments. Forget transparency; details are buried. The chorus, when a cappella, actually drowns the brass! The chorus’s tone is unsubtle and frontal, very inferior to the Stuttgart Vocal Ensemble. Orchestral soloists are plainly pedestrian with little character or shading compared to the Stuttgart players. And Gergiev takes so many liberties with the score that he kills the balletic flow. There is no graciousness or atmosphere created by the conductor, orchestra, chorus, or engineers. A total waste.

The Pavane shows Gergiev at his careless worst; the opening horn solo rushes in spots, the oboe solo has no shape or subtlety, ensemble is sloppy—instruments don’t move together on the beat, and the engineers place the strings at a distance compared to the winds. But Bolero shows Gergiev at his steadiest; the tempo is absolutely strict, and the crescendo builds gradually without a single moment of sudden volume increase. By playing without vibrato, most of the orchestra’s soloists maintain a hypnotic mood (only one erratic trombone swoop momentarily breaks the spell). All that’s missing is the kind of stylistic impulse that builds a feeling of terror or frenzy by the end, and that’s something I’ve heard only in one concert performance (Emmanuel Villaume and the Minnesota Orchestra). For that Paul Paray and the Detroit Symphony come close, though some will find their performance rushed.

Deneve’s performance of Valses Nobles et Sentimentales is best in the sixth and seventh waltzes where the orchestra becomes very buoyant; for the rest, the playing lacks the kind of “dancing on the head of a pin on toe point” floating quality that Fritz Reiner gets from the Chicago Symphony on RCA. As for Daphnis and Chloe, I’ll stick with Pierre Boulez and the Berlin Philharmonic on DG.

FRENCH

Reger: Clarinet Quintet; see BRAHMS

Reger: Clarinet Sonatas
Alan Kay; Jon Klibonoff, p
Bridge 9461—72 minutes

In recent years clarinetists have begun to record in earnest the catalog of clarinet works by a German romantic who is not Brahms. Here, well known New York performers and teachers Alan Kay and Jon Klibonoff are the latest to make a case for fin de siecle composer Max Reger (1873-1916), whose heavy chromaticism, dense counterpoint, lengthy statements, and aesthetic weight can overwhelm the casual listener. Yet Kay believes that the three Reger clarinet sonatas, inspired by Brahms, offer some of the composer’s most personal writing. Two Reger miniatures, the ‘Albumblatt’ and the ‘Tarantella’, finish the program.

The endeavor is very professional—easily one of the best recorded on behalf of a composer who many feel deserves better. Kay and Klibonoff boast superb clarity, warm phrasing, and Teutonic angst when called on; and their teamwork is smooth and natural. Yet Reger still comes across as remote and strange, even with this star treatment. His utterances sound personal, but he seems more interested in exploring the limits of tonality than in saying

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something significant. One can argue that Brahms had more genius with memorable themes, but in the clarinet sonatas Reger always comes up dry. Still, Kay and Klibonoff play them very well, and the performer or scholar looking to know these works better should begin here.

**Reich:** Electric Counterpoint
Daniel Lippel, g
New Focus 165—15 minutes

Mallet Quartet; Sextet; Nagoya Marimbas; Music for Pieces of Wood
Third Coast Percussion
Cedille 161—62 minutes

Reich's devotees have long known and celebrated the heritage of central African music that he explored—highly transformed—in many of his early works. Guitarist Daniel Lippel wanted to emphasize this African heritage in his performance of Electric Counterpoint, originally composed for Pat Metheny (M/A 1990) and recently recorded again in a fine performance by Jonny Greenwood (J/F 2015). Working with my old friend Martin Scherzinger (a composer himself, and an important scholar who counts African music among his dizzying array of interests), Lippel experimented with different sorts of timbres (including occasional preparation of guitars to resemble mbiras) and, now and then, a pronounced emphasis of the work's metrical ambiguity to effect a sonic hybridity between Reich's Western sensibility and an African one.

The result is stunning. The raspier timbres of the prepared guitars are quite effective in the outer movements, and Lippel's artistry works on its own to give the central movement a welcome urgency that I've never heard before. Some of the timbres—particularly the phased chords shortly after the beginning of III, don't have enough bite for me. Nevertheless, Lippel's release reminds me—in a good way—of Glenn Gould's famous dictum that the only reason to record a composition again is to do it differently.

As for Third Coast's new release—well, as I listen to the Mallet Quartet I'm reminded of the withering remark Morris Cotet made about Tehillim shortly after its ECM release—something to the effect that it sounds like Israeli pop music. (And Cotet, who spent his final years as a beloved rabbi, can hardly be accused of anti-Semitism.) I don't agree about Tehillim but I think the remark applies here. It's competent writing; and he put forth his best effort, I'm sure. But at this point in Reich's career, his best years—with works like Piano Phase, Music for 18 Musicians, and Different Trains—are largely behind him. WTC 9/11 (N/D 2011) may be his last really great work. (Of course, if I commanded his commission fees, I wouldn't stop composing either—so I forgive his continuing career and tip my hat to his many devotees in the performance world.) The Quartet has the same problems that most of his recent potboilers have: a slow movement that merely sounds like a fast movement played slowly and a suc-
cession of static modules of harmony in the fast movements that add up to less than the sum of their parts. At least this performance is a bit more engaging than the premiere by So Percussion (N/D 2011).

I believe I’ve discussed my dislike of Sextet before: the muddy harmonies, the inane transitions with stick-beating and puerile metric modulations; and worst of all, the dumb ending on a perfect fifth in the treble register only. Only one performance actually makes something of that ending by playing it as loud as they possibly can: the London Steve Reich Ensemble on CPO (M/A 2008), who have better pianists and much more finesse. But even they cannot wholly rescue this work from its pretentiousness. The only acceptable performances of the throwaway Nagoya Marimbas and the irritating Music for Pieces of Wood (which I will henceforth call “Bone Splinters Hammered into My Brain”) aren’t making matters any better, either.

HASKINS

REINECKE: Serenade for Strings; Flute Concerto; Ballade
Mario Carbotta; Rzeszow Philharmonic/ Vladimir Kiradjiev—Dynamic 7741—62 minutes

Carl Reinecke (1824-1910) conducted the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra for decades and wrote an abundance of music influenced by Mendelssohn and Schumann. In his 80s he wrote two major works for flute and orchestra, the Ballade and concerto here. Mario Carbotta is a fine flutist with an international reputation. He maintains a sound with brilliance that animates this often moderate writing. All the tempos are on the moderate to slow side, but still certainly appropriate. The Ballade has an autumnal beauty that has rarely been presented so well—except what happened to the last climax? It’s hardly there. The Ballade and the slow movement of the concerto are more like tragic opera scenes than works written for instruments. Even other sections in a major key often create an impression that is sad, or at least wistful and retrospective.

One small fault to this rendition is the lack of atmosphere that could be conjured, especially at the end of movements: the Ballade, the first two of the concerto, the Arioiso from the Serenade. The absence of vibrato from the violin section or the soloist here and there expands on that complaint. On some long notes, where is it, such as the big build-up 3 minutes into the slow movement of the concerto? The notes just sit there. Dull! Then a minute later, the quiet transition out of the agitated central section is handled beautifully, with sensitivity and atmosphere. The balance between the soloist and orchestra is marvelous, and conductor Vladimir Kiradjiev creates a full sound yet maintains clarity.

The Serenade in G minor for strings, Op. 242 was published in 1898. Its six movements open with a not-very-energetic march marked Molto moderato. There are two song forms, Arioiso and Cavatine, and a “joyous” five-minute fugue that has a slow section. The 30-minute set comes across as a pleasant diversion but quite sober and earthbound owing to the excess of moderation and warmth. An equal amount of time spent listening to Boccherini would offer the listener more variety and interest in writing for strings, though less burnished bronze. In IV there is a lovely contribution from a cello soloist who is not named but steals part of the show.

There is much to recommend this interpretation of the flute pieces despite the complaints, but the Serenade adds little value though there is nothing actually wrong with it. Since this suite constitutes half the playing time, your decision may amount to how much you’d like to hear its well written but unexceptional late romantic warmth.

GORMAN

RESPIGHI: Ancient Airs & Dances 1-3; The Birds
Munich Radio/ Henry Raudales
CPO 777 233 [SACD] 65 minutes

The performances sound on the “big” side. I think it’s the sound rather than Raudales’s interpretations, though perhaps he takes a somewhat more romantic tack with the music than other conductors. The sound is a little overblown, a bit enhanced, with a little too much reverberation. But it’s also rich and colorful, if not exactly warm. CPO has joined other stalwart companies like BIS and Pentatone on the SACD bandwagon, and I am pleased for the extra bass and general lack of digital strain here. It’s not the best-engineered recording I’ve encountered recently, but it may be just the antidote for folks who find Mercury’s sonics on the old Dorati set dry and hard. The Mercury sound never bothered me much, and Dorati has his players articulate the music neatly and crisply. Marriner (EMI) also offers clarity, which is not the present recording’s strongest suit, coupled with grace.

The Munich Radio Orchestra plays a bit heavily sometimes, and coupled with Mr Raudales’s unhurried tempos and CPO’s blowzy sound, this recording won’t be my first choice. But I like the way this interpretation draws the music closer to the world of the Roman Trilogy. Call it “Big Orchestra Ancient Airs & Dances”.

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In similar fashion, this account of The Birds is not a model of pointillist precision; but it has a warm, atmospheric charm that many earlier recordings lack. I like the way Raudales turns the finale of The Birds, the ‘Cuckoo’, into a sort of miniature impressionist tone poem—beautifully done. Not a first choice for any of the works, but not a bad choice either.

HANSEN

Ricordi: Carnaval Venitien; Le Bal de la Poupée; Le Livre des Serenades
Gabriella Morelli & Giancarlo Simonacci, p
Brilliant 95158—77 minutes

Say the name Ricordi to any musician and Italy’s top music publishing house will come immediately to mind. Giulio Ricordi (1840-1912) was the grandson of the founder of the music publishing house and joined the firm in 1863, eventually to become head of the company. He was also a composer admired by Liszt, among others. All of his piano duet music is given its world premiere recording here.

Morelli and Simonacci invest all of their considerable musical talents to give as convincing a performance as this music will ever get. The packaging is exceptional. The booklet cover is a reproduction of the original cover art for the 1881 publication of Carnaval Venitien. The notes are quite detailed, more interesting than the actual music.

After three times through the 35 tracks, I finally got it that there is more here than meets the ear, but probably not enough make this music worthy of serious detailed study. The Book of Serenades is dedicated to Liszt, and each one of the 15 pieces is in a different national style or musical form. Several of these raised the level of my interest considerably; the others fell into very predictable patterns. Only seven tracks are more than three minutes long and nine are less than one minute. Most of the music is composed of short repeated phrases, with little in terms of harmony or rhythm that make it rise above lightweight Italian salon music. Yes, there is bouncy 6-8 tarantella stuff here that you have to tap your foot along with. The melodies are charming at best and banal at worst. Small groups of these would make a light, audience-pleasing addition to any piano duet recital. One of the quicker pieces would undoubtedly make a nice encore. I cannot imagine a better performance than the one here.

HARRINGTON

Rindfleisch: Choral Pieces
Careless Carols; Mille Regretz; Anthem; Graue Liebesschlangen; Kaddish; Veni Sancte Spiritus; Salma de Alabanza; O Livoris Feritas; Klangfarben; Irish Blessing
San Antonio Chamber Choir/ Scott MacPherson
Gothic 49300—60 minutes

The choral music of Andrew Rindfleisch doesn’t flirt with soft rock. Nor does it go for tingling undulations of sound calculated to drive listeners to spiritual ecstasy, or for minimal bits of musical matter multiplied and re-multiplied to achieve maximal effect. Trendy it is not. But for the sort of deftly crafted, emotionally engaged choral fare that singers love to sing and audiences like to hear, this composer is worth getting to know. You can start by spending this very pleasant hour with him.

In ‘Careless Carols’ (from a poem by Rabindranath Tagore), Rindfleisch creates a whirling merry-go-round of sound that’s an absolute delight. I also love the bell-like effects he achieves in an ebullient ‘Veni Sancte Spiritus’. For tenderness amid sadness, try ‘Mille Regretz’, his setting of an anonymous text that also inspired Josquin back in the day. You’ll also encounter (among other things) the zesty rhythms of a Spanish psalm (‘Salma de Alabanza’), nasty voices recreating the treachery of Judas (‘O Livoris Feritas’), and a heartfelt ‘Irish Blessing’ to caress the soul.

The music is given the best possible advocacy from these clear, expressive, no-nonsense voices from Texas. The engineering takes it from there, and an informative, handsomely designed booklet helps clinch the deal. I get a lot of composer-of-the-month anthologies that come and—most often—go. This one isn’t going anywhere.

GREENFIELD

Roman: 12 Flute Sonatas
Musica Ad Rhenum
Brilliant 95214 [2CD] 146 minutes

I could not imagine this music performed with more passion, drama, and spirit. The pitch of A=398 may help to give a robust sound to the baroque flute Jed Wentz plays, but it’s only part of the reason. This is a masculine, tenor-like, full-bodied sound very appealing in its own way though distinct from the modern concert flute. Job Ter Haar on cello and Michael Borgstede on harpsichord play as one amidst the daring declarations from our operatic orator-soloist.

The amount of interest and variety here puts Bach’s sonatas to shame. This is not the kind of baroque music that usually got played on the university radio station when I was growing up. It doesn’t fit the stereotype of
sedate, courtly poise and powdered wigs. It does suggest the flesh and blood that acted out politics and enjoyed entertainments in those courts. If the possibility of 1727 brought back to life excites you, here it is, vivid as it ever was. You'll probably want to visit again and again, and there are 12 sonatas to take you away.

GÖRMAN

ROMAN: Keyboard Sonatas 7-12;
AGRELL: Sonata 2
Anna Paradiso, hpsi, clav
BIS 2135 [SACD] 77 minutes

The packaging makes this look humdrum, but that first impression was wrong. This is keyboard musicianship so superlative that I stopped the player after 20 minutes and immediately placed an order for the other volume. It's that attractive and expressive. Anna Paradiso obviously listens very closely to her instruments as she plays them, and this makes her interpretations vivid. She makes the music sound freshly improvised by a creative genius. There are no other recordings of these sonatas by Johan Helmich Roman (1694-1758), who had lost enough of his hearing by 1745 that he had to retire at age 51. These sonatas are from the early 1740s. The music is so inventive and inspiring I had to print out all my notes and I hope that the rest of them make an appearance soon. The recording is excellent in sound though I could do with a little less tapping on the cello strings. Melkonyan is a fine player that I hope to hear more of, particularly in this idiom. He balances virtuosity and lyricism beautifully, and so does Romberg.

D MOORE

RONTGEN: Suite; Czardas Variations;
3 Romances; Buiten
Nimbus 5918—71 minutes

Phantasiestücke; Neckens Polska; Sonata 2
Nimbus 5937—69 minutes

Mark Anderson, p

Julius Rontgen was born in Leipzig in 1855 to a Dutch mother and German father; he studied piano with Louis Plaidy, Carl Reinecke, and Franz Lachner and had quite a career as a soloist and accompanist. He co-founded and taught at the Amsterdam Academy of Music from 1884 to 1924 and continued composing until he died in 1932, writing about 100 pieces in those last eight years.

Rontgen's facility as a pianist is apparent in his writing. The first few of the variations in the Variations and Finale on a Hungarian Czardas have some stunning writing. The problem is the absence of anything harmonically, melodically, or rhythmically interesting. Even the 1919 suite, Buiten (Outside), an homage to Grieg, comes nowhere close to the famed Norwegian's talent. The booklet even says plainly, "One could look in vain for anything truly original or shocking in Rontgen's output, but this was not his motivation. His compositions are without exception very well written and are constructed with great skill. Here is healthy, joyful music from a composer who understood his material and his instrument intimately."

American Record Guide 179
I, for one, am not disappointed if a composer doesn’t shock me, and joyful music is always welcome, but I need more than pleasant symmetry. Rontgen, by choice or by temperament, wrote far too often like a neutered Schumann. I think he would have been a noteworthy composer if he’d come up with better thematic material and learned how to develop it creatively. Maybe some of his other pieces are better, but I’m not inclined to pursue them after hearing such a broad swath of piano music that all sound alike. Anderson plays beautifully, though—what tone, what technique, what a touch!

RONTGEN: Violin Sonata; Phantasy; Sonata Trilogica; 7 Concert Pieces
Christoph Schickedanz; Ernst Breidenbach, p
CPO 777768—74 minutes

Julius Rontgen was prolific. He wrote some 600 works but only published 112. A professional pianist, he performed Brahms’s Piano Concerto 2 under the composer’s baton in 1887. Brahms is a major influence in his works, too. A strong Brahmsian mood pervades the works collected here. They could almost pass for works of the master if only they had more sophisticated counterpoint in the piano. They certainly are appealing. Rontgen had a knack for writing music that engaged the listener, and it’s surprising that his name isn’t better known.

Although the works assembled here span the years 1884 to 1924, they share a common style. One of the pieces, the Sonata Trilogica of 1915, was left unpublished. This is a surprise—it is obviously a work of quality. The piano opening reminds me of the opening of Prokofiev’s great Violin Sonata 1. Rontgen may have quite a few works of this caliber waiting to be discovered. I hope that someone is going through his unpublished scores.

Christoph Schickedanz and Ernst Breidenbach are fine musicians with ample technique. This is labeled Vol. 1 of Rontgen’s Works for Violin and Piano.

ROPARTZ: Piano Pieces
Stephanie McCallum
Toccata 326—80 minutes

Joseph Guy Marie Ropartz has a trumpet piece, Andante et Allegro, that’s often performed at the high-school and undergraduate levels. I’ve accompanied it several times, and as with many other one-hit-wonders I play often—like Creston’s Saxophone Sonata, Chaminade’s Concertino for flute—I’ve often wondered what his other music was like. I’m glad this has come my way.

Guy Ropartz lived from 1864 to 1955; he was born in Guingamp, part of Brittany, and he made much of his Breton heritage in his musical career. At his mother’s insistence he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1885, but he went instead to the Paris Conservatory that year and studied with Theodore Dubois and Massenet. After hearing an opera by D’Indy, he asked Cesar Franck, D’Indy’s teacher, for lessons. He wrote five symphonies, six quartets, several chamber pieces, many songs, and a good bit of piano music. These are all first recordings.

Ropartz’s style is solidly French—you’d never confuse him for anything else. The harmonies have an impressionist influence, but there is a Franckian solidity to the textures with little of, say, Debussy’s stereotypical gossamer ripples. The Breton folk influence is very tastefully integrated. Some composers sit down and write one-off folk settings that often sound artificial; not Ropartz. And, that Breton sunniness helps counter a certain wanding grayness. Without the emotional flights of a Schumann or even the rhythmic and coloristic excitement of a Ravel, Ropartz needs something to keep him from dousing the listener in too much melancholy and cloudy-day contemplation.

Even so, the two long suites, Dans l’Ombre de la Montagne and Un Prelude Dominical et Six Pieces à Danser pour Chaque Jour de la Semaine (roughly half an hour each), feel very heavy when taken all at once. Un Prelude Dominical, originally for orchestra, is the more immediately interesting of the two, with some lively dances and fascinating folk harmonies, especially in ‘Mardi’ and ‘Samedi’. Repeated notes, filigrees, colors that brighten and then instantly fade, and wonderful use of the piano’s different registers make ‘Mercredi’ the high point of the piece.

You’d be hard pressed to find a better advocate for overlooked music than McCallum, an instructor of piano at the Sydney Conservatorium in Australia. Her playing is full of fine shades of color and a firm touch that suits Ropartz’s style quite well. Ropartz may not qualify as a forgotten genius, but he’s worth certainly worth hearing. Timpani has issued several albums of his orchestral pieces, so let’s hope the original scoring of Un Prelude Dominical is forthcoming.

The sound here is superb; notes are in English.

July/August 2016
Where has Johann Rosenmüller’s music been hiding all these years? His music is not represented in any music history anthology I know of, and so I programmed several of his sonatas on one of my own concerts not long after I reviewed Ensemble Masques’s recording (ATMA 2660; S/O 2013). A scandal ended Rosenmüller’s career in Leipzig, but his gifts as a composer led him to new heights in Venice by 1655, as trombonist at St Mark’s, and as maestro de coro at the Ospedale della Pietà.

The Johann Rosenmüller Ensemble’s performance of Venezianische Abendmusik (Christophorus 77333; J/A 2011) shows clearly that his creative genius extended to choral music. There are yet more riches to discover here with Jörg Breiding’s outstanding recording of Rosenmüller’s Vespro Della Beata Maria Vergine. The invitatory ‘Deus in Adiutorium’ is sung as chant, as are the five antiphons ‘Iam Hiems Transilvit’, ‘Beata Mater et Intacta Virgo’, ‘Gabriel Angelus Locutus est Mariae’, ‘Beata es Maria’, and ‘Dum Esset Rex in Accubitu Suo’. Rosenmüller’s intervening settings of Dixit Dominus, Laudate Pueri, Laetatus Sum, Nisi Dominus, Laudate Ierusalem, and the Magnificat are superb polychoral works. Each one seems to offer material for the aficionado of the stile moderno. Laudate Pueri, for example, includes unusual harmonic progressions, a fugal ending, and plenty of chromaticism to excite the ear. Laudate Ierusalem uses the spectacle of imitation between voices, cornets, and violins to evoke the sound of echoes. And the Magnificat incorporates some exquisite dissonance. Texts are in English. The program is broken up by Rosenmüller’s Sonatas 9 and 12 from his Sonate a 2, 3, 4, e 5 Stromenti da Arco & Altri (Nuremberg, 1682).

Roth: Quartets (3)
Allegri Quartet—Nimbus 6321—64 minutes
Recent recordings of music by English composer Alec Roth (born 1948) have been welcomed by ARG’s reviewers for their winsome and sensitively harmonized vocal settings. Richard Traubner found Roth’s Earthrise for unaccompanied choir on Signum 270 “stunning, with a lovely sense of space and breath” (J/A 2012, p 292), and Robert Moore praised his song cycles on Signum 124 (J/F 2009) and Signum 332 (J/F 2014) as “gentle and evocative” and graced by “melodies that stick with you”.

This new Nimbus gathers Roth’s three recent string quartets. His (clear, concise, and informative) notes credit Haydn’s ever-inventive and engaging quartets as his inspiration, specifically the Austrian composer’s wit and use of vernacular dance rhythms—though as Roth points out, he exchanges Haydn’s minuets and landler for slow tangos and perky disco beats. Listeners will certainly notice such pervasive dance-rhythms in these quartets, but will also be made quickly aware of the minimalist pulsation and bustling accompanied figurations that underlie them, though here cunningly deployed in movements short enough and clearly enough contrasted with each other to approach but never exceed the point of too much wearying repetition. Added to these elements are Roth’s tangy, folk-song-like harmonies and his sweetly singing or swaying tunelets that gently insinuate their way into the mind’s ear. Conventional formal development or contrapuntal intricacies have limited place in this music. Allegros are mostly sectionalized, serenade-like, strongly rooted in soothing song and invigorating dance. Only in the slow movements does the music become solemn or dark, and even there it remains more earthy and keening than learned or abstruse.

In sum this is clever, appealing, even rather addictive music. It’s fresh, it has melody, energy, quirky touches of exoticism, and atmosphere, but never becomes prickly or threatening. It has lots of pleasing variety and color, though it mostly avoids contemporary “special effects” in favor of more traditional devices like pizzicatos and drones. And the sequence of the three quartets, though clearly exhibiting the same personality and style, shows an evolution in subtlety and widening of emotional range that rewards sticking with the program all the way through. Performances and recording are excellent.

Adventurous listeners drawn to Roth’s quartets should also seek out the marvelous quasi-minimalist chamber-music fantasias of Scotch composer Eddie McGuire on Delphian 34157. McGuire, an authentic original only just appearing in widely distributed recordings, takes a similar point of departure as Roth but ventures much deeper into uncharted territory.

Rousse: Resurrection; Restiques; Suite; Fugue; Des Heures Passent
Jean-Pierre Armengaud, p
Naxos 573171—74 minutes
French composer Albert Roussel composed around the turn of the century. Though he was a contemporary of Debussy and Ravel, his music does not sound much like either. It is
dense and repetitive, often driving. Resurrection is the composer’s piano reduction from the orchestral work, and is based on Tolstoy’s novel. Roussel tried to capture the tormented characters; the liner notes tell us that the piece moves from darkness to light. Franck’s influence appears in the use of the chorale tune. Des Heures Passent is brooding and chromatic, composed early in the composer's career. Armengaud creates a nice dramatic arch.

Armengaud does a good job with this musical material. This music often seems directionless, but there are surprising moments. In the first movement of the Suite a lovely melody unexpectedly enters in the top register of the piano over the driving left hand.

**Rovigo: Sunday Mass; motets; canzonas**

Cappella Musicale di Santa Barbara/ Umberto Forni—Tactus 541801—67 minutes

Francesco Rovigo (c1541-97) served the ducal court of Mantua as organist and composer. In 1570 Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga sent him to Venice to study with Claudio Merulo. After returning to Mantua, Rovigo was appointed organist of the Cappella Palatina di Santa Barbara. After a sojourn at the ducal court of Graz from 1583 to 1590, Rovigo returned to Mantua, where his abilities as an organist were highly celebrated.

The liturgy of the ducal chapel in Mantua differed in some respects from the Roman, and Duke Guglielmo preferred that the liturgical music in his chapel be alternatim in structure—verses of plainsong alternating with polyphony. That is the structure of the five-part Sunday Mass (Missa Dominicalis). The present recording is claimed as the first for this work. This format inevitably produces short-breathed passages of polyphony as compared with fully polyphonic mass settings. Given this constraint, Rovigo’s writing is fluent and elegant. It is performed here by an ensemble of five solo voices with instrumental doubling. The plainsong is sung by a schola of three voices over a drone played on the regal. If there is historic warrant for this mode of plainsong performance, I am unaware of it.

In addition to the mass, the program includes two motets by Rovigo. The first, ‘Laudem Te’ in five parts, is a contracfactum of a madrigal. It is sung unaccompanied by the five solo singers. The program concludes with the eight-part ‘Laudate Dominum in Sanctis Eius’ a setting of Psalm 150, sung here by an expanded vocal ensemble with instrumental doubling.

Interspersed with the sections of the mass are several of Rovigo’s instrumental canzonas. The most ambitious is a canzona in eight parts that seems to reflect the polychoral music the composer must have heard during his time in Venice. The instrumental ensemble consists of cornetto, viola, tenor trombone, viola da gamba, dulcian, and organ. Umberto Forni is both the organist and director of the performances. As none of Rovigo’s organ compositions survive, the program opens with an exuberant toccata by Merulo.

This is a recording of a concert in December of 2014 at the Basilica of Santa Barbara in Mantua, where most of the music was probably first performed. The reverberation conveys the spaciousness of the setting. There is a fair amount of extraneous noise between the movements, but it does not interfere with the music itself. The performances are highly estimable, but not to the standard of the very best of today’s early music ensembles. I would not hesitate to recommend the recording to readers interested in these musical rarities of the later 16th Century.

**Ryelandt: Piano & Strings**

De La Haye Ensemble

Toccata 282—63 minutes

Collectors may be familiar with the Belgian composer Joseph Ryelandt (1870-1965) via his excellent Symphony 4 on Cyprès 1616 (N/D 1999). He was a composer of solid workmanship and a religious man, as proved by his deep knowledge of sacred musical tropes, both contrapuntal and harmonic. His chamber music has the same traits. He wrote most of the pieces here during the German occupation in World War I, but any stress or turmoil is internally generated by the demands of the music itself rather than being any sort of tone-picture of Belgium’s harsh times. The Canon en Trio has a beautiful melody on which successive entries amass further beauties. The Violin Sonata has limpid themes, with its movements cleverly blended.

In the Cello Sonata 2, I has long-spanned dance-like themes. II has a strophic hymn melody, well varied. Ryelandt handles its key changes with perfect fluidity. III opens with vibrant bell sounds, then a galloping figure underpinning a slower theme. The piece has a cute “just so” ending. Violin Sonata 5 uses as a binder a figure with its first tone played four times. II has the meditative flavor, if not the actual sound, of Schumann. III has a fast Brahmsian figure. The four-note motif from I returns to intensify an already effective finish. The Nocturne for Cello and Piano (1913) has an extended, soulful melody for the cellist. The relief theme has a repeated pitch motif like...
Sonata 5. The work concludes with rising phrases on the cello, till the piano takes them up, rounding them out in its high register.

Performances are skilled and sympathetic to the composer’s idiom. This is volume 1 of what looks to be a worthy series. The notes by Jan Dewilde and Koen Buyens are first-rate.

O’CONNOR

SACHSEN-WEIMAR: Violin Concertos

Anne Schumann; Sebastian Knebel, lps; Ensemble Fürsten-Musik

CPO 777998—78 minutes

Manfred Fechner notes that even the astute music theorist and composer Johann Mattheson attests to the value of the compositions of Prince Johann Ernst of Sachsen-Weimar, who died of cancer in 1715 at the age of 18. Now we may all judge for ourselves with this release of Johann Ernst’s six Op. 1 Violin Concertos. The program is broken up by JS Bach’s harpsichord transcriptions of the Concertos in D minor (S 987) and B (S 982), which he was commissioned to write in 1713 while serving as organist and Konzertmeister at the court of Sachsen-Weimar.

Prince Johann Ernst was a competent composer. His concertos exhibit the Italian style of Vivaldi, characterized by ritornello form in outer movements. Solo episodes are dominated by violistic displays of virtuosity—sequential string crossing and scale-like figures moving rapidly through a progression of keys. Slow movements are often lyrical, evoking opera arias or dance. Examples are the ‘Siciliana’ in Concerto 5 in E, the ‘Pastorale’ in Concerto 3 in E minor, and the ‘Recitativo’ in Concerto 6 in G minor. The performances are very fine and spirited and seem to capture the youthful vigor of the young composer.

LOEWEN

SCARLATTI: Sonatas

K 3, 84, 96, 159, 193, 208, 238, 239, 356, 420, 471, 490, 517, 539

Pater Katin, p

Claudio 3502—42 minutes

9, 12, 29, 32, 56, 69, 99, 119, 125, 141, 159, 208, 213, 318, 373, 417, 425, 479

Yevgeny Sudbin, p

BIS 2138 [SACD] 75 minutes

Peter Katin, who died last year, enjoyed a long career. After an early splash at the Proms playing romantic warhorses, he moved to Canada; on his return he was disgusted by the superficial marketing of classical music and took to promoting himself. His program of 14 sonatas was originally released on Claudio in 1985 and reissued again in 2001 (no ARG reviews, apparently). The present reissue underwent a thorough remastering and the sound is very warm, though I would appreciate a little more brightness. Perhaps brightness would be inappropriate for Katin, though, whose later musical tastes tended toward the more lyrical and intimate sound world of Chopin, Mozart, and Grieg.

The interpretations are very straightforward but quite satisfying because his phrasing is so natural and his technique so effortless. He never overplays, never overemphasizes the expression of any single piece. His account of the F-minor Sonata (K 239) is a case in point; it can be played—brilliantly, too—in a garish, almost violent manner, which emphasizes the music’s Spanish character; Katin will have none of this; and, though I’m usually sympathetic to a more incisive reading, I find his nobler approach just as compelling. He includes both familiar sonatas (K 96 in D, K 159 in C) as well as little-played gems like K 193 (E-flat) and K 84 (C minor). I’d love to hear his Chopin.

As for Mr Sudbin, don’t. He has taken Glenn Gould’s famous remark that the only reason to record something is to do it differently and taken it far, far beyond anything Gould would ever have considered. Some examples: slamming the pedal down for repeats of the famous C-major Sonata (K 159), adding unstylistic and unwanted left-hand countermelodies in the also-famous A-major one (K 208); and sickening, sudden contrasts of expression and volume in K 213 (D minor). It’s the musical equivalent of a very bad drag show; in over 20 years of reviewing for ARG I have never listened to something as egregiously tasteless as this.

HASKINS

SCELSI: Flute Pieces

Claudia Giottoli; Paolo Puliti, ob; Natalia Benedetti, cl; Raffaele D’Aniello, p; Leonardo Ramadori, perc—Brilliant 95039—70 minutes

Giacinto Scelsi (1905-88) has recently been praised in these pages (N/D 2015). Jack Sullivan said “Unlike other members of the avant-garde in mid-century, Scelsi maintained a tonal center, making the most recondite material go down relatively easily, though the music is always original and challenging.” He found the piano suites on MDG “a mesmerizing release”. I first encountered Scelsi’s music in the early 1990s not long after he died. These selections span nearly half his life, from the Suite for flute and clarinet (1953) to Krishna e Rada (1986) for flute and piano—but most of them date from the 1950s.

The three duos are fascinating studies in
interplay and sound. In her notes the flutist says, “By means of microscopic changes of pitch, rhythm, timbre, and vibrato, the flute and clarinet can together create a constantly shimmering sound that comes across as a continuum containing myriad microscopic color vibrations.” She also says Scelsi “thought of himself as an intermediary rather than a composer, believing that the aim of art is not so much to express the ego of the artist, but to promote contact with what is transcendent. Music is thus the space where human beings can communicate with their gods.”

If you’re willing to encounter modernism of such aspirations, you’ll find plenty here in ebullient sound. Claudia GiottoI has a thorough command of avant-garde techniques and gets quite a workout in the multi-layered opening and closing sections of Tetrakys (1959). She is also called on to play some extremely high notes and moves with admirable ease and freedom from the bottom to the very top of the instrument. All this preparation from her and her colleagues enables the music to speak through them, which means this release must have a place in every modern music collection.

GORMAN

SCHEIDEMANN: Organ Pieces; see BRAHMS

SCHMIDT: Ludi Musici
L’Acheron/ Francois Joubert-Caillet
Ricercar 360—68 minutes

Samuel Scheidt’s intensive study of Italian, French, and Netherlandish models under the tutelage of the Dutch keyboard virtuoso Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck led to an output of instrumental dance music. But this was by no means unusual. When Scheidt published his Ludi Musici in 1621, he was contributing to an already substantial repertory of 4-, 5-, and 6-part instrumental music published by his compatriots: Michael Praetorius’s Terpsichore (1612) and Hans Leo Hassler’s Lustgarten Neuer Teutscher Gesäng, Balletti, Galliarden, und Intraden (1601). Ludi Musici includes 32 pieces—19 for four parts, and 13 for five parts. Scheidt rarely indicates the instrumentation, and so one hears these famous pieces performed both on wind and stringed instruments.

The program here includes Pavanes, Galliards, Courantes, and Canzonas based on well-known songs—16 pieces played by viol consort accompanied by a continuo of plucked and keyboard instruments. The five-part ‘Canzon ad Imitationem Bergamasca Anglica’ and ‘Galliard Battaglia’ have become particularly well known through the publication of numerous arrangements. Their vigorous rhythms and virtuosic passagework are certainly exciting. Programming them with the four-part Paduan V and ‘Paduan Dolorosa’ shows off Scheidt’s broad stylistic range. The exquisite downward chromatic sequences in Paduan V are relentlessly doleful. The ‘Paduan Dolorosa’, on the other hand, expresses sadness through the slow progression of minor and dissonant chords in the thick sonorities of a viol consort.

SCHMIDT: Das Buch mit 7 Siegeln
Klaus Florian Vogt, t; Georg Zeppenfeld, b; Inga Kalna, s; Bettina Ranch, mz; Dovlet Nurgeldiyev, t; Volker Kraft, org; NDR Choir; Latvian State Choir; Hamburg Philharmonic/ Simone Young
Oehms 1840 [2CD] 109 minutes

Michael Steinberg wrote that while he couldn’t say if Franz Schmidt was a great composer, his oratorio, The Book with Seven Seals, was definitely a great work. This setting of verses from the Book of Revelation was Schmidt’s last significant orchestral work (1937) and he poured into it a lifetime’s knowledge, technique and inspiration. The end result is one of the greatest choral masterpieces of the last century. In addition to its sterling music, the piece is a compendium of Austro-German choral devices from the previous two centuries combining the techniques of Bach, Brahms, and Bruckner in its complex fabric. Schmidt’s harmony is sometimes as chromatic as Reger. The counterpoint is consummate and—more important—audible. The music is also a summary of the composer’s own output: one hears hints of the brilliant fanfares of Symphony 2 and of the somber downward-curving themes from Symphony 4.

The music itself, from its jubilant opening bell-like chords to a series of resplendent Hallelujahs near the end, pushes the performers to the limit, demanding complete mastery from both orchestra and singers. The language is postromanticism at its best—richly colored and endlessly expressive, with many pages of terror and grandeur. In addition to its abstract fugal parts, there are great passages of tone-painting. The text describing the opening of the fourth seal (pale horse, pale rider) has the spectral sounds of con legno strings played over muted trombone pedals. At the opening of the sixth seal, where a great earthquake erupts and sun becomes “black as sackcloth and the moon... red as blood” the choir surges out in overwhelming 16th-note waves. Schmidt conjures up a musical image of Francis Danby’s great painting of that episode. Schmidt was partly Hungarian, and the blaz-

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The performance under Simone Young is terrific. For such a relatively unknown work, The Book has had good luck on recordings. I haven’t heard one that was less than good. My current favorite is Welser-Most, but Young’s may be even better. She puts more of an edge in the orchestral accompaniment. The music in the fourth seal episode is really sinister, as I’m sure Schmidt intended. In the closing bars of the music, she summons up a truly splendid racket.

The Hamburg orchestra plays eloquently, and Kraft’s handling of the critical organ part is of daemonic intensity.

The choruses sing with discipline and beauty—even the complex contrapuntal passages are always clear. The soloists acquit themselves valiantly. Especially praiseworthy are Klaus Florian Vogt as the evangelist-narrator and Georg Zeppenfeld as the voice of The Lord. Their singing is of commanding stature, with expression and enunciation to match. Vogt is from stem to stern completely on top of one of the most demanding parts in the choral literature. Schmidt really needs a heldentenor and here he gets one. It’s a concert performance, but audience noise is near zero. The notes include German texts only. People who know their Bible may still keep up. In any case, you won’t need a script to tell that the heavens have opened up.

O’CONNOR

**Schmidt:** Piano Quintet Left-Hand
Kae Hosoda-Ayer, p; Christopher Ayer, cl; Jennifer Dalmas, v; Kathryn Steely, va; Evgeny Raychev, vc
Centaur 3472—70 minutes

At nearly 70 minutes, Schmidt’s quintet (1938) is one of the weightier chamber works around. Though compared to, say, one of Morton Feldman’s five-hour quartets it’s a mere sketch, most listeners will still find it full enough of interest. Schmidt wrote it for Paul Wittgenstein, a pianist who’d lost an arm in World War I and who commissioned most of the left-hand literature from those times.

I contrasts a staccato theme with a more flowing melody, Schmidt can ably extend a melodic line without its sounding strung-out. At 22 minutes long, the movement falls into several self-contained sections but remains coherent, even if it’s sometimes motivic to a relentless degree. People familiar with Schmidt’s Symphony 4 will recognize some progressions as well as the subtext of his keyshifts.

II is an intermezzo for solo piano. Chromatic chord progressions underlie the melodic line. Hosoda-Ayer uses enough rubato for expressiveness, but not so much as to lose tension. The scherzo, III, uses an A-B-A ground plan. The first part has varied melodic lines, often harmonically so adrift as to suggest polytonality. The textures are dense, choked even. The B section is more transparent, suggesting a Mahler ländler. Schmidt also incorporates the major-minor chord progression from Mahler’s middle symphonies. After the hectoring of the outer segments, the center part comes as a relief.

IV, the slow movement, begins with an extended theme with taut harmony and Hungarian turns of phrase often heard in Schmidt. The cello has an eloquent theme in rising phrases to an emotional peak. The movement plays out to a tranquil conclusion. The finale has variations on a pleasant tune by Josef Labor, Wittgenstein’s teacher. As Schmidt was a past master at variations, the results are predictably ingenious and enjoyable. They pass through several moods from melodramatic through further evocations of Hungarian dance rhythms before reaching an agreeable ending. The performers sound dedicated to the work, their playing underlining its many attractions.

O’CONNOR

**Schnabel:** Solo Cello Sonata;
**Moor:** Ballade;
**Beethoven:** Violin Sonata 9
Samuel Magill; Beth Levin, p
Navona 6024—74 minutes

Here we go again. What is it with this issue’s cello records? So many of them are built around transcriptions of music for other instruments. The major work here is Beethoven’s violin sonata arranged by Carl Czerny and later by August Franchomme and now by Magill for cello and piano. It is actually quite convincing this way, though Magill tends to pull the faster passages back in tempo—sometimes more than his partner (or this listener) expected or desired. Magill is not the neatest player around, though he is one of the more assertive. That attitude fits the Kreutzer well, at any rate.

I tend to forget that Artur Schnabel was a composer as well as a master pianist. His 1931 Cello Sonata does not even include piano. It is recorded here at a rather higher volume than the Beethoven. It is a somewhat atonal but highly expressive four-movement work that unfortunately brings out Magill’s tendency to slide around not quite accurately from one note to the next. Neither I nor ARG seem to know of another recording, and this one has its virtues as well as some vices.

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The program ends with Emanuel Moor’s Ballade in E, written in 1913 for cello and orchestra but not published until just recently. It is a highly expressive 14-minute work well worth hearing. I’ll be hanging onto this disc for that and the Schnabel sonata.

**Schmittke:** *Penitential Psalms; 3 Sacred Hymns*

RIAS Chamber Choir/Hans Christoph Rademann—Harmonia Mundi 902225—55 minutes

The *Penitential Psalms* were inspired by a set of Lenten poems found in a 16th Century manuscript. The writing is extraordinary, as Schmittke tips his cap in one direction toward the stark, unadorned musical style favored by Russian Orthodoxy and in another toward the wordless drones, tone clusters, and dark, canonic dissonances we’ve come to know as his brand of modernism. And when the breast-beating stops long enough for the petitioner to express a sincere need for divine help, the composer responds with radiant interludes that bespeak the presence of a healing God.

I can’t help feeling that taking in all 12 psalms for 45 minutes straight in a concert hall would be a tall order. But here the intensity is quelled some by the inclusion of the *Sacred Hymns*, which are redolent of Russian romanticism and are less wrenching to the ear and the soul. We’re accorded a 7-minute cleansing breath, you might say.

The singing is remarkable in every way. I’m no expert on Slavonic choral practices, but Schmittke has taken you to some of these pieces at the first piano recital I attended. While memories of that concert remain in my memory, along with his treasured recording, Israeli-born Amir Katz makes a strong impression as well and adds yet another really fine performance to the many currently available. This was probably to be expected from a pianist who can boast of studies with Leon Fleisher and Murray Perahia—two pianists who have conquered this music.

Impromptus D 899:1 and D 935:4 impress us at once with their light touch before embarking on their journeys. If other pianists have plumbed the depths with more angst than Katz, his playing gives a mostly refreshing and untroubled view of the composer. His tone production is smooth and silken, and he never seeks to add something that is not already present in the music. Both sound and notes are very good.

Fialkowska has only given us the second set of *Impromptus*. They are weightier performances than Katz and more reflective of the inner beauty of this music. This is especially so in D 935:1, where the music has a tinge of sadness and takes on a more profound utterance. This approach is also present elsewhere. In D 935:4 Katz gives us more of the composer’s wit, with playing that sparkles brilliantly. While Fialkowska’s efforts are quite wonderful here as well, it is clear that Katz has the upper hand.

The E-flat Sonata opens gently in an almost Mozartean manner. Fialkowska makes a most entrancing exposition of Schubert’s delightfully fresh ländler-like ideas. Unlike the frigid winters of her Canadian homeland, her playing has warmth and plenty of charm to thoroughly captivate the listener. Unlike some of the other sonatas by this composer, the music is not prolix and seems just right in dimensions as to be readily absorbed by the listener. The Andante molto introduces some storm clouds, but they are quickly dispelled; and in the ensuing Minuet all is again right with the world. In the closing Allegretto moderate charm and grace predominate, and all is assimilated to great satisfaction by this patriotic pianist at her unflattering best.

With warm plush sound and truly splendid notes we join in wishing Janina the best for her 65th birthday. She continues to look and sound like the consummate artist she obviously is. Both these recordings will find space in my collection.

**Schubert:** *Impromptus, all*

Amir Katz—Orfeo 898151—64 minutes

*Impromptus, D 935; Sonata in E-flat, D 568*

Janina Fialkowska—ATMA 2699—61 minutes

The two sets of Impromptus are among the most beloved of Schubert’s piano music. British pianist Clifford Curzon introduced me to some of these pieces at the first piano recital I attended. While memories of that concert

**Schubert:** *Piano Pieces*

Vladimir Feltsman

Nimbus 6297—77 minutes; 6298—77 minutes

The Russian-born Feltsman is a known quantity by now, and I have heard him in recital many times. He is also accumulating quite a reputa-
tion on disc, and these promise to substantially add to that.

Disc 1 has sonatas in A minor, D 537; in G, D 894; and the Adagio, D 612 and 2 Scherzos, D 593. Feltzman's own lucid notes explain the presence of the one-movement works, as possibly being intended for use in sonatas that remained unwritten.

Feltzman shows himself to be fully up to the challenges presented by these sometimes knotty works. Among such challenges is the ability to maintain interest during the often long duration of some of the movements. This he does very well in the long first movement of D 894. D 537, written at age 20, is a fully mature composition, and, of course, has that wonderful Allegretto (II) with a theme and variations so close to the composer's heart he was to modify and reuse it in D 959. Feltzman's analysis is as fascinating as his often tender performance. Everything about the performance bespeaks careful thought, study, and affection for the music, yet nothing is academically stiff.

D 894 was the last to be published in his lifetime. It's a strange bird of a work, more inward and tinged with sadness than some of his others. It has been said the sonata was the favorite of pianist Sviatoslav Richter; he tended to overindulge the music and stretched it to great lengths. Feltzman will have none of that. At almost 18 minutes the opening movement is unfolded at a leisurely pace, but nothing seems dragged out, and nothing overstates its welcome. Following the mostly quiet tranquility of the opening movement, Feltzman makes the Andante flow forth evenly and expressively, but not without an occasional troubling interruption. It's all a matter of dynamics—not too much or too little. III contrasts power with a beguiling gentleness as only Schubert could do. The Allegretto finale gives the impression of humor laced with a determination to disorient us with unease and irregularity. Feltzman is just about perfect here—enjoying himself thoroughly and relaxing sometimes to present us with some of the composer's most beautiful utterances.

The little Adagio is a thing of beauty with a pixieish element. Both it and the two Scherzos are light, cheerful pieces, here played with smiling gaiety, superb control, and phrasing both sensitive and moving.

Disc 2. After reading the pianist's notes for Volume 1, I had expected this volume to bring us more of the sketches or pieces perhaps intended for future sonatas. Instead we have the 12 Graz Waltzes, D 924. Nothing wrong with that, but they most certainly were never intended for sonatas. They also raise expectations that this series might take in a wider territory. In any case, they were published in 1828, a year after Schubert visited Graz. The charming set takes only 10 minutes. Like the Sonata in A, D 664, it offers an untroubled view of the world when compared with its monumental companion, the Sonata in B-flat, D 960.

The Sonata in A, D 664, from 1819, while exquisitely played begins a little too slowly for my taste. While there is nothing overindulgent, it hovers a little near that precipice. I prefer a simpler, more innocent presentation, such as Myra Hess's. With nary a pause Feltzman enters the Andante with emotion laid bare—and once again I would have preferred less heart-on-sleeve. The final Allegro delivers on that perfectly.

Speaking of emotion, Schubert's very last sonata has that in spades. You would not want it any other way. Here the pianist is on firm territory, though his competition is practically every other pianist of note, plus many also-rans. If I cannot say he adds anything new, he does maintain a high score among the top third of interpreters. It only remains to add these newcomers to my already sagging Schubert shelves. Yes, they are that worthy.

BECKER

SCHUBERT: Piano 4 Hands

Fantasy; Lebensstürme; Variations; Death and the Maiden

Mookie Lee-Menuhin & Jeremy Menuhin
Genuin 16412—66 minutes

Schubert’s Fantasy in F minor is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest pieces ever written for four hands at one piano. All of my recordings of this work are between 18 and 20 minutes long. Given the reverence with which piano duo teams approach this work, I have yet to hear an unsatisfactory performance.

The big Lebensstürme is another great work, on the scale of a symphonic movement, and it pairs quite well with the Fantasy. The Variations are also regularly heard on disc. The Menuhin duo (Yehudi’s son and daughter-in-law) plays them all with precision and clarity. They offer excellent performances that would please any listener and fill out the program with a world premiere.

A direct comparison of the three mainstay works with my favorite recording by Paul Lewis and Steven Osborne (Hyperion 67665, M/A 2011) leaves Lewis and Osborne in the top position. Hyperion adds three pieces (21 more minutes) to make a very generous 76-minute disc. Their Andantino and Rondo in A are both significant works. The Menuhins add one large (14-minute) work: a two-piano arrangement by Jeremy Menuhin of the variation movement from the Death and the Maid-
en Quartet. The bigger, more dramatic sounds here are quite in keeping with the original. The quartet music sounds perfectly natural on the pianos, and the performance is the reason I will return to this recording many times.

HARRINGTON

SCHUBERT: Piano Sonata in C minor; see SCHUMANN

SCHUBERT: Piano Sonata in G; Pieces, D 946
Elena Margolina—Ars 38193 [SACD] 74 minutes

Until getting this recording for review I had no knowledge of the performer. According to the cover photograph, she is not one of those young glamour gals that seem to dominate the scene these days. Perhaps, I thought, she might actually be a mature artist, relatively unknown to the musical world. As it is, this appears to be the case, though she does have a few other recordings to her credit.

Hailing from Russia, Margolina is a graduate of the St Petersburg State Conservatory and, summa cum laude, from the University of Music in Detmold, Germany (Brahms and Lortzing were once in residence there). She also has won many prizes, and has taught master classes worldwide.

Schubert’s sonata is definitely no stranger to these ears or to devotees of the piano literature. Probably composed in 1827, it belongs to what might be considered the composer’s middle period. The notes give us a fair glimpse of the pianist’s understanding. The long first movement begins with an extraordinarily gentle and subtle touch that grows from a sublime pp to an overpowering ff. There are many dynamic gradations between, all scrupulously observed and extraordinarily executed. She avoids the boredom many other pianists cannot sidestep by her uncanny ability to control these dynamics. The whole structure depends on it, and I cannot praise her interpretive ability too highly.

The Andante continues illustrates her deeply felt and wonderfully controlled dynamic gradations. She is also not reluctant to introduce an embellishment when it seems justified. It is a riveting performance, including the magnificent sound accorded the Steinway D. Super Audio really pays off here.

III and IV share a creative joy not always found in later works. With the weight of the first two movements lifted, we end up fully satisfied and able to smile, if not broadly, at least for a little while at having heard some of the best Schubert playing ever committed to disc.

The Three Pieces remained unpublished until 1868, a full 40 years after Schubert’s death. Edited by Johannes Brahms, they are usually played together as a cycle today. Some pianists avoid playing them in recital because of their formal strangeness. On record they are fairly well immortalized. These performances are among the best to be had.

BECKER

SCHUBERT: Die Schöne Müllerin
Matthias Helm, bar; Duo Hassard, g
Gramola 99065—62 minutes

This is a fine reading. Helm recounts the journey from eagerness and infatuation through anger and depression to suicide with apt changes of tone and vocal color. His technique is excellent and conveys the changes of mood clearly.

What sets this apart from other performances is not simply the guitar accompaniment, but the imaginative arrangement for two guitars by Duo Hassard (Stephan Buchegger and Guntram Zauner) and performed splendidly by them.

Guitar accompaniment was common and well accepted in Schubert’s time. Peter Schreier recorded this with guitarist Konrad Ragossnig in 1982. Christoph Pregardien with guitarist Tilman Hoppstock has recorded at least two discs of lieder by Schubert, Brahms, and Spohr (S/O 2010, J/F 2012).

This is not the way I prefer to hear this cycle, but it works well; it allows a gender and more intimate reading. When you are familiar with the sound of the piano accompaniment, you can hear how the guitar adds shading and nuance to the accompaniment.

Using two guitars offers considerably more substance than just one, and Duo Hassard performs beautifully.

Notes in German and English. Texts in German only.

R MOORE

SCHUBERT: Quartet 14; see SHOSTAKOVICH

SCHUBERT: Trio 1; Fantasy; Impromptu in A-flat
Boris Kucharsky, v; Peter Wöpke, vc; Elizabeth Hopkins, p—Paladino 46—76 minutes

Trio 2; Arpeggione Sonata
Boris Kucharsky, v, va; Thomas Carroll, vc; Elizabeth Hopkins, p—Paladino 47—75 minutes

The first trio is very nicely done, a little slow in tempo and congenial in spirit. This is not Schubert with an underlying spirit of Mozart, but rather something more shaped and rounded, more romantic. While the playing certainly isn’t sloppy, it also doesn’t sound "tight", as
with a high-precision ensemble. The music emerges as an effortless flow, and in the opening movements I would be happy if it never stopped!

The guiding light here seems to be violinist Kucharsky, who phrases with wonderful grace and beauty. Hopkins seems to be more tied to a regular pulse, but on her own in the Impromptu or the second movement of the Fantasy her playing and phrasing are splendidly subtle and musical. I would have been happy to hear another impromptu or two from her.

In the second trio, which is a bigger, more “orchestral” piece, these qualities are less apparent, but it too is very enjoyable. The Arpeggione, played here on viola, gives Kucharsky another chance to shine. In this piece his instrument is the Testore viola, previously played by Yehudi Menuhin. Kucharsky was a pupil of Menuhin and now teaches at the Menuhin School near London, as well as at the Guildhall School.

Althoise

Schumann: Cello Concerto; see Dvorak
Schumann: Fantasy in C; see Brahms

Schumann: Fantasy Pieces, op 73; Adagio & Allegro; 3 Romances; Marchenbilder, op 113; 5 Folk-Style Pieces; Abendlied, op 85; Träumerei
Emanuel Gruber, vc; Keiko Sekino, p—Delos 3481—70 minutes

In the liner notes, Lindsay Koob makes a good case for these transcriptions of Robert Schumann’s works for cello, pointing out that it was his second instrument after the piano and that his music sounds excellent played on it. This is true as played here. Several of these suites have been recorded with cello and, as a cellist, I tend to forget that the Fantasy Pieces and the Romances were originally intended for clarinet, while the Adagio & Allegro is for French horn and the Fairytale Pictures are for viola. The ‘Evening Song’ and ‘Dreaming’ are children’s pieces for piano solo. The only original cello suite is the 5 Pieces in Folk Style.

Gruber and Sekino play these works with style and sentiment, and it is an interesting collection to have in one place. My only dissatisfaction is that I have heard more accurate playing in the Pieces in Folk Style. Otherwise, these are enjoyable performances and contain the most Schumann for cello of any recordings. The recording is fine as well.

D. Moore

Schumann: 2-Piano studies; see Bartok

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music. The orchestra has a great overture—the only part of the piece that is well known—and some incidental music and accompaniment, but on the whole not a great deal. If we need a category, I guess we could call Manfred incidental music for an unstartled play. The piece has suffered a fate similar to Beethoven’s Egmont: only the overture is heard.

This will be of most interest to readers drawn to Lord Byron’s brand of romantic aspiration, despair, and world-weariness. The text deals with Manfred’s longing for the spirit, despair, and world-weariness. The performance itself, drawn from concerts, is fine; and, perhaps best of all, the CD is accompanied by a fine 96-page booklet with complete text and good notes.

ALTHOUSE

SCHUMANN: Piano Quartet

with Piano Quintet
Trio Portici; Philippe Koch, v; Pierre-Henri Xuereb, va—Pavane 7577—57 minutes

with Trio 2
Munich Trio; Tilo Widenmeyer, va
Genuin 16406—53 minutes

Both discs pair a core trio ensemble with extra musicians for the quartet and quintet.

The work in common here, the piano quartet, often invites pounding by the pianist and rough treatment from the strings—something Portici and friends never indulge and the Munich mostly resists. The fevered development of I especially tempts ensembles to bludgeon their instruments at the climax, and the Portici utterly refrain, where the Munich succumb just a little. The Portici take the sostenuto introduction slower; it’s more sedate than any I’ve heard, a sweet promise of the gorgeous, relaxed, unforced eloquence to come. The Munich Trio takes faster, more conventional tempos. Both do a great job with this piece.

The Portici’s quintet is again relaxed, warm, with a strong pulse grounded deep in the bar lines, steadily rhythmic, without the frenzied mania others bring to this work; this is a mature, middle-aged approach. The lazily rocking violin-viola figure in the trio of II shimmers dreamily, impressionistically—an effect I’ve heard before only in an arrangement for saxophone quartet (MDG 903 1396).

The Munich Trio fills out its disc with Schumann’s second trio, an uneven work, like most following his initial white-hot burst of creativity that lasted through his early 30s. Schumann by this time in his life, afraid of self-caricature, consciously ran from his earlier style but never did find a voice as attractive as the voice of his youth. This work is obviously by a master craftsman, but it is wrought of homely, uninspired materials. There are lots of eloquent and elegant interchanges between the players, especially the strings, but the ideas aren’t very interesting. In chamber music, it wasn’t until the two violin sonatas of 1851 that Schumann regained his inspiration after the piano quartet of 1842. This performance is as good as any I’ve heard, but doesn’t convince me it’s a masterpiece.

Both discs have beautiful sound and come with interesting booklet essays. I am especially taken with the warm, gentlemanly musicianship of Portici and friends, but you’re in expert hands with either ensemble.

WRIGHT

SCHUMANN: Piano Sonatas 1+2; Presto
Passionato; Toccata
Maurizio Baglini, p
Decca 4812391—66 minutes

Baglini always delivers high quality performances, especially with Schumann (M/A 2013), and this disc is no exception. I praised his previous recording that included Papillons and Carnaval for offering “a visceral and immediate listening experience with nothing impoverished or incomplete about it”. That holds true with his authoritative renderings of the piano sonatas.

His performance of Sonata 1 seems slower than I am used to; but his more brooding, introspective approach works. The Scherzo movement is crisp, with surgical incisiveness. Sonata 2 is lucid, flexible, with artfully employed rubato in I. In II he achieves great heights in terms of both intensity and beauty. His handling of the harmonies is captivating. The finale is notoriously difficult, with its sudden shifts of moods, but Baglini remains in control with his great sense of timing and dexterous technique.

He includes the original finale of Sonata 2, here designated ‘Presto Passionato’ and originally published as an appendix. Baglini’s liner notes explain that he may have changed the finale because of Clara Schumann’s refusal to perform the original (the reasons are unclear). Or the composer may not have been happy with it. Baglini says the original is “immense and truly innovative” and that is apparent in his fiery interpretation. The Toccata is brilliantly played.

I always look forward to Baglini’s releases, and was not disappointed. Excellent quality.

KANG

July/August 2016
Schumann: Violin Concerto; Symphony 1; Violin Fantasy
Paris Chamber Orchestra/ Thomas Zehetmair
ECM 247963—79 minutes

The Schumann concerto and the Fantasy were both written in 1853, very shortly before the composer’s attempted suicide on February 27, 1854. Both were written for Joachim, who premiered the Fantasy on October 27, 1853, with Schumann conducting. But Joachim found the concerto unwieldy and excessively difficult, so that work was not performed. The violinist and Clara revisited the piece in 1857, but decided it was unworthy of performance or publication.

As a result it sat in manuscript until Georg Kulenkampff gave the premiere with Karl Böhm and the Berlin Philharmonic on November 26, 1937. Many have pointed out liabilities of the piece, ranging from the lack of good concertante dialogue between orchestra and soloist to the absence of a cadenza; but the real problem is simply the lack of interesting thematic material. The difficult, sometimes awkward solo part offers some compensation.

Zehetmair, who recorded the work in the 1980s, overcomes the obstacles and presents the piece convincingly. His position as conductor, though, does reveal patches where soloist and orchestra are not quite together. The Fantasy, one 15-minute movement, holds together better than the concerto and makes a stronger impression. The symphony, of course, shows Schumann at close to his best. The performance is sprightly and rhythmic, but the orchestra sounds smaller than I’d like; and the rich, romantic abandon of, say, Bernstein is all too absent.

If you’re curious about the concerto (and the Fantasy), a better bet would be the Tetzlaff recording (M/A 2012); it is coupled with the Mendelssohn concerto. For the symphony I would prefer something that captures more of the youthful enthusiasm of the composer; Bernstein’s old New York performance would be a good place to start.

Althause

Schütz: Symphoniae Sacrae III
Dorothee Miels, Ulrike Hofbauer, Isabel Jantschek, s; Maria Stosiek, mezzo; David Erler and Stefan Kumath, a; Georg Poplutz and Tobias Mäthger, t; Martin Schicketanz and Felix Schwandtke, b; Dresden Chamber Choir & Baroque Orchestra/ Hans-Christoph Rademann
Carus 83.258 [2CD] 120 minutes

Rademann’s project to record all of Schütz’s music continues to grow. This is Volume 12, with all 21 vocal concertos of the Op. 12 Symphoniae Sacrae III. One could not find better advocates for Schütz’s music than this ensemble of soloists, chorus, and instrumentalists. They move the ear and the heart in every measure. Performances are extremely sensitive to phrasing and affect; regardless of the size of the ensemble, they pull together as though they were playing one instrument. The notes by Oliver Geisler are informative, and the texts are in English.

Published in 1650, not long after the end of the 30-Years War, this collection stands as one of the great monuments of large-scale choral music. Not since his Psalms of 1619 (Carus 83.255; March/April 2014) had Schütz undertaken such a huge project. In fact, the collection itself seems to grow organically, from a scoring for three soloists, four-part chorus, two violins, and continuo in ‘Der Herr ist Mein Hirt’, to six soloists, two four-part choruses, two violins, and continuo by the time one reaches the end of the collection in ‘Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott’. The frequent addition of cornets and trombones to double the voices in the chorus gives much of this repertory a festive glow.

Oliver Geisler considers it the crowning achievement of Schütz’s career, for just weeks after its publication, Schütz asked his patron to be released from service after 35 years at the Saxon court in Dresden. His later compositions were of a smaller scale and more introverted.

One hesitates to single out individual performances for comment, as they are all splendid. The interaction between solo soprano and alto in ‘Der Herr ist Mein Hirt’ is gorgeous. In ‘O Herr Hilf, O Herr, Lass Wohl Gelingen’ it is the delicate interplay between soprano and tenor soloists with cornetts that is so breathtaking. Schütz makes effective use of harmonic progressions by third—undoubtedly a trick he learned from his old mentor Giovanni Gabrieli—to draw listeners’ attention to the supplicatory words in ‘Vater Unser, Der du Bist im Himmel’. ‘Saul, Saul, Was Verfolgst du Mich’ is in every music history student’s anthology. Rademann’s crisp tempo at the opening is quite refreshing, compared to the more lugubrious opening of Gardiner’s 1987 recording with the Monteverdi Choir (DG 423405). These are both excellent recordings. Gardiner’s interpretation seems to convey Saul’s experience of conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) as a gradual awakening, whereas Rademann seems to emphasize God’s anger, as though he were portraying in music the very scene depicted in Caravaggio’s famous painting of 1601.

Loewen

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**Scriabin:** 10 Preludes; Sonatas 4+9; Piano Pieces

Ludmila Berlinskaya—Melodiya 2398—57 mins

Berlinskaya’s Scriabin is fantastic. Her clear and expansive playing clearly communicates Scriabin’s mysticism. The struggle with Scriabin’s forms and textures is to make coherence out of difficult harmonies and wandering forms; her liner notes affirm that Scriabin does not always (or ever) seem to draw logical lines with his music. Rubato always has to be delicately balanced. His music seems often to be caught between non-being and being. But Berlinskaya turns shadow into transient beauty, to quote a certain poet.

The program is sequenced from early to late Scriabin. The Preludes demonstrate incredible control and dexterity. Scriabin’s complex harmonies and dramatic power come to the fore in the properly eerie Black Mass Sonata. Vers la Flamme is gorgeous, beginning with sweetness and concluding with immense force.

The liner notes are part advertisement for Yamaha pianos (seriously, when was the last time you read a page and a half description of Yamaha instruments in your liner notes?) and part incredibly abstract description of Scriabin: Berlinskaya comments about the “blue star” in Sonata 4 and the “blinding ‘white’ sound at the end” of Vers la Flamme. But Scriabin’s music is hard to describe, so I cannot blame her.

**Seiber:** Ulysses; Elegy; Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

Alexander Young, t; Cecil Aronowitz, va; Peter Pears, narr; London Symphony, BBC Chorus/ David Atherton; London Philharmonic, Dorian Singers & Melos Ensemble/ Matyas Seiber

Lyrata 348—75 minutes

Matyas Seiber (1905-60) emigrated to England after Germany’s National Socialists shuttered his school and eliminated his music education position in Frankfurt. In London he got work as a composition teacher at Morley College. He studied composition with Kodaly in Budapest, though his music sounds nothing like Kodaly or Bartok.

The largest work here, Ulysses, for tenor, chorus, and orchestra, is a 48-minute setting of James Joyce’s abstract, allusive, opaque contemplations of the unfathomable vastness of space and time and the immense variety of life in the universe. A couple sample lines are “The heaventree of stars hung with humid nighthblue fruit” and “Were there obverse meditations of involution increasingly less vast?” None of it suggests any obvious tone-painting by a composer, so Seiber’s solution is to treat his large orchestra like a chamber ensemble, rarely using more than a few instruments at a time, gently passing short, chromatic, probably dodecaphonic fragments from cellos to bassoon to clarinet to brass at mostly slow tempos—the usual compositional transformations of serialists, like inversion, retrogression, canon, and fugue, are clearly audible. Unlike Schoenberg, who avoided repetition, Seiber repeats his short motifs again and again, aiding comprehension and letting us hear the themes clothed in the various timbres of the orchestra. The harmonic progressions are sometimes quartal—as in Schoenberg’s first chamber symphony and much of Hindemith—and very chromatic, though there are passages of triadic consonance. The scoring is delicate, clear, and colorful. The tenor has a warm, rich voice and none of the nasal hootiness that bedevils so many of them. Composers almost completely abandoned this type of academic serialism decades ago, so this sounds very dated, as does the rest of the music on this disc, stuck in amber, hard to relate to or listen to without a sense of distanced irony.

The elegy for viola and orchestra is more academic serialism, but much louder and insistent, the writing thicker, consistently employing more of the orchestra. It grates, where Ulysses at least intermittently soothes and beguiles.

Fragments from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man sets a more concrete text encouraging more conventional illustrative scene painting by, in this case, a Pierrot chamber ensemble of narrator, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, string trio, and piano, plus percussion, that Seiber uses pointillistically. Mr Pears acts his heart out, but it’s very hokey. Narrated monodrama is always risky, and the dated serialism and ethereally crooning wordless women’s chorus had me chuckling again and again. Time has utterly passed this work by, assuming such things were ever fashionable.

Ulysses was recorded on May 21, 1972, conducted by Mr Atherton, the rest in 1960, conducted by the composer (who died in a car crash that same year in South Africa). Sound is serviceable, all stereo. English texts.

**Shchedrin:** Piano Concerto 2; see Rachmaninoff

Wright

The vacuum left by the disappearance of criticism has been filled, imperceptibly, by advertising... The public lacks the intellectual and discriminating antennae to detect when it is being duped.  

—Mario Vargas Llosa

July/August 2016
Shostakovich: Chamber Symphonies

in C, C minor, D
Kiev Soloists/ Dmitri Yablonski
Naxos 573466—59 minutes

in C minor,
with Schubert: Quartet 14
LSO String Ensemble/ Roman Simovic
LSO 786 [SACD] 67 minutes

The second listing takes some explaining. It was Mahler who in 1896 started to set Schubert’s Death and the Maiden Quartet for string orchestra. He only finished the second movement. Donald Mitchell and David Matthews did the rest in our own era. It takes 44 minutes, which seems a bit much, since most quartet recordings of it are 36 or 37 minutes. Of course, four string players are far more nimble than a larger group. I suspect Mahler gave up on this when he realized that Schubert did not conceive the music orchestrally. It sounds odd this way—even a little bloated. There are 24 string players here from the London Symphony. They are very good, as you would expect.

Rudolf Barshai set five Shostakovich quartets for a chamber orchestra. The Naxos disc has 1, 8, and 4 in that order. No. 4 in D is not just for strings; it includes brass and woodwinds as well. The Kiev group has 29 string players, plus 10 others in No. 4.

The piece these two discs have in common is the 8th Quartet, the Chamber Symphony in C minor. And that piece sounds much better with the LSO strings. They are simply more refined, less outspoken, and better phrased. It is also possible that the SACD sound has something to do with it. I only know I can listen to that recording again and again and never tire of it, but I feel beaten down by the Naxos recording. Some people will prefer that, of course—it’s more shocking, more upsetting.

The two Shostakovich chamber symphonies reviewed in the last issue were based on quartets 3 and 4, so I had to compare Quartet 4. They are quite different. On that BIS recording I is definitely too fast, and II is too fast on the Naxos—and the winds are brash, as is the sound in general.

As I said last time, I prefer to hear these as quartets, not as “chamber symphonies”: But I may keep the LSO disc, because the playing is wonderful, the sound beautiful, and that quartet (No. 8) was the first—and most inspired—of Barshai’s transcriptions.

By the way, the LSO disc notes list “the orchestra featured in this recording”. They mean “the orchestra on this recording”. It’s the only one.

Vroon

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Shostakovich: Preludes;
Szymanowski: Preludes

Alexandra Dariescu, p
Champs Hill 109—58 minutes

This is the second volume of Dariescu’s trilogy of preludes; James Harrington was pleased with the first—with the preludes of Chopin and Dutilleux (Champs Hill 61, N/D 2013)—and praised her “subtle inflections” and “great sense of color and touch”. Those characteristics are fully evident in Szymanowski’s gorgeous Opus 1 set.

Her Shostakovich, alas, tends to be too careful—sometimes bordering on precious—or too meandering. The faster, louder preludes are her best, but even then, they sound as if she’s holding back a lot. Of the sets I know—Pressler, Mustonen, and Nemtsov—I prefer Mustonen (London 433055, J/A 1992, see Alkan). I’m impressed enough with Dariescu’s Szymanowski that I’m inclined to get the first volume for the Dutilleux, but her Shostakovich leaves too much to be desired. The piano’s sound is a little covered, too.

Estep

Shostakovich: Trio 2; see Collections
Sibelius: Quartet; see Grieg

Smetana: Ma Vlast
Hradec Kralov Philharmonic/ Marek Stilec
Arcodiva 180—77 minutes

This comes from Hradec Kralov, a city of only 93,000 in the Czech Republic and home to a fine orchestra with a good, firm, warm sound. Conductor Marek Stilec is a young Czech who has conducted Zdenek Fibich and Franz Beck for Naxos. He did a fine job with Fibich, and he is better here with Bedrich Smetana. This is a straightforward, solid, and fairly muscular Ma Vlast, with a good sense of pacing, balancing, and drama. Stilec seems to be saying that this music speaks for itself, and it has plenty to say if a conductor and orchestra present the score that way. The performance exaggerates and underlines nothing while giving every note its place, all without being dull. The orchestra has the right warm sound for Smetana, clearly knows the music, and is strong technically. The sound is on the close side, full and nicely detailed.

‘Vysehrad’ is slow and reticent at the beginning, but it picks up intensity and speed in a way that is solid and stirring without much rubato. Quiet moments are effective but not maudlin. ‘Moldau’ displays the orchestra’s fine woodwind playing. The tempo is deliberate, but the performers never forget they are portraying a river, so things keep flowing. The
rhythm of ‘Sarka’ is excellent, the quick changes in the story are deftly handled, and there is zip at the end. ‘Bohemia’s Woods and Fields’ displays nice breadth in the opening and proceeds almost like breathing, with fine string playing in the fugue and warmth in the hymn. The motifs at the beginning of ‘Tabor’ are deliberate and ominous, leading gradually to the full strength of the orchestra in what is a good example of Stíleč’s sense of slowly paced drama. ‘Blaník’ is not as charged as some performances, but it maintains the strength of the performance and catches the point of the music very well.

This Ma Vlast pulled me in right away, but its straightforwardness may not appeal to listeners who want more shaping of phrases, holding back here and there, more dramatic points, etc. Raphaël Kubelik is a good source for that, particularly his last recording, a great concert performance with the Czech Philharmonic in 1990 that celebrated his return to the Czech Republic. Compared to the Hradec Králov Philharmonic, the Czech Philharmonic is larger and sleeker in sound, and the recording is a little more distant and less detailed (M/J 1991, N/D 1993). A very different Kubelik reading is his irresistible and supercharged 1953 recording with the Chicago Symphony. The monaural sound is pretty good if a little harsh, and the performance comes through well (M/A 1997). I like the string playing in his Boston Symphony reading, but it is too laid back (J/F 1993). I never cared for his Vienna Philharmonic recording. I don’t know his Bavarian Radio performance (N/D 1990).

Another good Ma Vlast is a spirited one from Wolfgang Sawallish and the Suisse Romande. For a good slow, Germanic reading, Vaclav Neumann and the Gewandhaus fit the bill (J/F 2008). Harmoncourt with the Vienna Philharmonic is even slower—and mannered sometimes—but fascinating; it is worth seeking out (M/A 2004). Levine is slow and mannered. He makes a few good points, but DG’s sound is not good. If you want the Vienna Philharmonic, go with Harmoncourt. I do not care for Makkrais’s mannered one with the Czech Philharmonic (J/F 2001). Berglund (J/F 1997) with the Dresden Staatskapelle is liked by many, but I gave up trying years ago. Ma Vlast is a favorite of Mr Hansen’s, and he loved a video of it with Belohlávek (J/F 2016). I don’t know that one or Smetacek (M/J 1990), or Pesek (N/D 1997). Nor have I heard Belohlávek (J/A 1989, J/F 1993). I believe Vaclav Talich made three classic Czech recordings. I’ve heard only the first one from 1929 and could not stand the sound for long. There is a discussion of Ma Vlast in the Loose Ends Overview (J/F 1993).

The notes to this newcomer do their job well and include some interesting comments on the work by the composer.

SOKOLOVIC: Vez; Portrait Parle; Etudes; Mesh; Bouquet de Brume; Ciaccona
Ensemble Transmission
Naxos 573304—58 minutes

This collection of six chamber pieces by Canadian Ana Sokolovic (b. 1968) is released under the title Folklore Imaginaire. Ms Sokolovic is an unrepentant modernist with Baltic roots. Xenakis seems to be an important influence. Her music is often brutally and entertainingly bombastic, often quietly cosmic and structurally scattered, with some Eastern European dance elements. It is brilliantly crafted. She’s considered one of Canada’s major composers; she teaches at the University of Montreal.

Vez (2005), an effective recital piece for solo cello, is typical. Rough repeated notes interrupted by contrasting gestures, broad fragments of melody, a little dance, and fragmented pizzicato are all subjected to variation. It ends with thoughtful expansion.

Portrait Parle (2006), for piano trio, may be considered a sample of musical abstract expressionism with a collection of arresting but always entertaining gestures.

Three Etudes (1997/2013) for solo piano are, in order, a Xenakis-like prelude, a quiet slow movement, and a joyous dance.

Mesh (2004), for solo clarinet, is a collection of small contrasting pieces, all effective and likable, with a large variety of styles, including a little jazz. It would make a terrific addition to student recitals.

Un Bouquet de Brume (1998/2014) is an atmospheric nocturne for bass flute and piano. It should become the standard repertoire piece for the instrument.

Ciaccona (2002/2011), for piccolo, E-flat and bass clarinets, violin, cello, percussion, and piano, is probably the composer’s greatest hit—and deservedly so. This is an arrangement exclusively for this ensemble (an earlier version appeared on Centrediscs 11406, S/O 2006). The variations on the Xenakis-like theme are clever, in a variety of textures, attention-grabbing and virtuosic. New music chamber ensembles all over our country should have a look.

An excellent release. Three of these are first recordings; the others have been issued on Canadian labels (primarily Centrediscs). Performances are superb. Notes by French-Canadian semioligist-musicologist and Boulez specialist Jean-Jacques Nattiez.

GIMBEL

July/August 2016
SPEER: Kriegsgeschichten
Markus Miesenberger, t; Ars Antiqua Austria/ Gunar Letzbor—Pan 10317—51 minutes

The Türkischer Eulenspiegel by Georg Daniel Speer (1637-1707) gives one a glimpse of the kind of entertainment that had been amusing the German bourgeoisie since at least the late Middle Ages. The texts derive from Speer’s novel titled Ungarischer Oder Dacianischer Simplicissimus (Ulm, 1683)—a travelog about a fool named Lompyn and his exploits fighting the Turks as a mercenary in eastern Europe. Combined with music, the new narrative, published in 1688, was titled Strange Antics of a Very Modest Turkish Imperial Court and Field Fool Who Eventually Became a Mufti. To fit such a convoluted story into a performable structure was no mean task, as Gunar Letzbor notes. He found it necessary to excerpt passages, resulting in not one but two distinct programs. The first, performed here, entails Lompyn’s Kriegsgeschichten (War Stories). The second program, projected for 2017, will include Lompyn’s Liebesabenteuer (Love Adventures).

Speer conveys Lompyn’s narrative musically through varied-strophic recitative and simple arias, which Markus Miesenberger brings off remarkably well using an exaggerated dramatic style that plays up the absurdities. Between narrative segments come various dances—Kosaken Ballet, Moskowitisch Ballet, Pohlisch Ballet, Ungarisch Ballet, Walachisches Ballet, Griechisch Ballet, etc.—to evoke the exotic locations of Lompyn’s adventures. Letzbor also interpolates some of Speer’s sonatas; to him, the ones for trumpets and trombones seemed to suit the subject matter best. The results are wildly amusing, to say the least. The program ends with a Sonatina, Gigue, and Sarabanda. Notes are in English, but the texts will be intelligible only if you read German.

STEPHAN: Groteske; see MAGNARD

STOCK: Concierto Cubano; Oborama;
Percussion Concerto
Alex Klein, ob; Andres Cardenas, v; Lisa Pegher, perc;
Boston Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose
BMOP 1047—60 minutes

Three concertos by the late David Stock (1939-2015).
Concierto Cubano (2000), for violin, is set in the usual three movements. The language is generally octatonic in a friendly expanded tonality. Lively and lyrical, it is immaculately crafted. The slow movement is unabashedly romantic, the finale a rondo with a gentle samba as refrain. The piece is lovely and virtuosic and should make a memorable impression on general audiences.

Oborama (2010) is for five different types of oboe (one player), and each instrument has its own movement. There is a melancholy ballade for English horn, an amusing little scherzo for musette (piccolo oboe), a Satie-esque Gymnopedie for oboe d’amore, a funereal episode for bass oboe, and a very short, joyful finale for the usual oboe. It’s a great show for audiences looking for a lesson in instrumentation—and a significant challenge for the player, met with aplomb by Mr Klein.

The Percussion Concerto (2007) opens with a beautiful late-Beethovenian slow introduction, immediately invaded by percussion banging (“cool!”) in astonishingly bad taste. I imagine this might appeal to the young crowd who don’t like classical music. I guess Ives is supposed to be an inspiration. Fanfares follow, leading to bland academic band music. Here come some funny sounds. (“What was that?”) A cadenza (“Isn’t she great?”) There’s a band music coda. Tonal cadence! No. 2 is an “Introspective” slow movement ballad with marimba (tremolo). More cadenza leads to the Finale, a Cuban dance. Spaced-out meandering, more fanfares, tonal cadence: Standing ovation. Stupid piece.

Even the best composers are entitled to a bomb. This is one. Mr Stock was a dependable composer of skillful and often moving postmodern music, and I’ve liked most of what I’ve heard. The first two pieces on this program are typically fine, brilliantly performed by the superb players. I’d do everything possible to avoid the percussion piece, though the attractive and talented Ms Pegher will certainly have her fans. You can find a few excerpts on YouTube, but that’s certainly enough.

STRADELLA: String Sinfonias (11)
Ensemble Arte Musica/ Francesco Cerra
Brilliant 95142—73:13

It is gratifying to see the music of Alessandro Stradella (1639-82) getting more and more attention in recordings lately. He was a pioneer in consolidating forms and idioms in late 17th Century Italian music. In the instrumental realm, he was the master whose innovations and experiments paved the way for the crowning syntheses of Corelli.

Stradella’s chamber pieces for strings are mostly recognizable to us as trio sonatas for two violins and continuo, of which nine survive. There are also two works that call for a
different “duo” of violin and cello, with limited continuo. All of these Stradella labeled simply “sinfonias”, and at least three of them he used as introductions to vocal works.

These sinfonias have been sampled liberally over the years, often in anthologies. The “duet” Sinfonia No. 1 in D minor is a particularly delicious work, justly recorded often, and a work I have long treasured. I also recall a Vox recording of a swatch of them, in dim, long-ago LP days. This new release claims to be the first complete recording of all that survive in manuscript collections preserved in Modena and Turin.

The two-violin trios are cast in four or five movements. In some cases, however, the sequences take on an an interrelationship and overall shape that Cera in his annotations calls “rhetorical”. The two violin-cello “duos” are continuous flows of a series of tempos and forms.

It is easy to reckon so much of this music as primitive gropings toward the clearly defined structures of Corelli in his four sets of trio sonatas. But that would do Stradella’s compositions an injustice—as if they are simply stepping-stones to what was to come. There is a lot of really enjoyable and even ingenious music in these works, and they can stand on their own merits.

They are given impeccable and lively performances by violinists Marco Piantoni and Nunzia Sorrentino, with cellist Rebecca Ferri and Cerra, who deftly alternates on harpsichord and chamber organ, allowing a variety of colors.

Collectors of Baroque instrumental music will find this release an important and ear-opening one.

BARKER

STRAUSS: Duet-Concertino;
Bürger als Edelmann Suite
Annette Brun, s; Italian Swiss Radio/ Markus Poschner—CPO 777 990—72 minutes

In addition to offering modern Strauss performances, this record adds the bonus of the composer leading some of his songs with the same orchestra back in 1947. The Duet-Concertino was Strauss’s last orchestral work. It’s an affectionate little piece, unpretentious yet engaging, showing the composer’s technique at idiomatic writing for the soloists. The way their parts intertwine and then separate has the feel of a narrative for two characters—like Don Quixote. We’ll never know, but it’d be a kick if Strauss, for his own amusement, actually meant this to be a droll symphonic poem.

The Bürger als Edelmann Suite is more familiar fare. Both works get good performances, though the same program led by Paavo Jarvi (Pentatone 518 6060) is crisper and more athletic.

If you know German, the historian Bernhard Paumgartner makes a brief speech in the 1947 concert, trying to place Strauss in the German musical tradition. A tricky bit then—Strauss’s place was still ambivalent. Strauss conducts his own songs ‘Morgen,’ ‘Allerseelen,’ ‘Ich Trage meine Minne’ and ‘Das Rosenband’—Annette Brun—a new name to me—sings them beautifully with clear tone and enunciation. Despite some surface noise, the sound is good. Notes include texts and English translations.

O’CONNOR

STRAVINSKY: Capriccio;
STRAVINSKY: Les Noces; see TCHAIKOVSKY

STRAVINSKY: Firebird
Basel Symphony/ Dennis Russell Davies
SOB 10 [2CD] 98 minutes

This release presents both the first and latest versions of Firebird. The complete original ballet score in a stunning performance by Sinfonieorchester Basel is on disc 1, and a newly written piano 4-hands version is on disc 2. The whole project owes its conception and realization to conductor-pianist-arranger Dennis Russell Davies. Inspired by Stravinsky’s well-known arrangements for piano 4 hands of Petrouchka and The Rite of Spring, Davis took the composer’s solo piano ballet rehearsal score of Firebird, resolved a number of differences between it and the orchestra score, and created a 4-hands version. Davis and his wife play the new version with exceptional insight and nuance.

Firebird was the first Ballets Russes production for which Diaghilev commissioned an original score. Originally he approached Liadov, and then Nikolai Cherepnin, before a young (28-year-old) Stravinsky accepted the offer. Premiered in Paris on June 25, 1910, it was an immediate success. Nowhere in Stravinsky’s varied oeuvre is the tie to his predecessors, particularly Rimsky-Korsakoff, more evident. Its originality and brilliant orchestration firmly established him as a major composer. The composer went on to make three suites of music from Firebird in 1911, 1919, and 1945. All of the suites scaled back the huge orchestral forces of the original (quadruple woodwinds, triple brass, 7 percussion parts besides timpani, 3 harps, celeste, and piano).

This disc is not only one of the best performances I have heard in a long time, but one of the best sounding as well. With exemplary

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booklet notes, the entire production is top quality. The addition of Davis’s piano duet version makes for a very different aural experience of the same music. As with almost all great orchestral works realized on the piano, it can never be as effective—and I am pianist who enjoys and appreciates the piano versions more than most. Visceral excitement in a section like the ‘Danse Infernal’ and a big powerful climax like the final Hymn may only be approximated by pianists. The piano versions do allow different musical lines to be heard with more clarity than if buried in a thicker texture.

A single disc was released in 2014 (SOB 6, J/F 2015) with all of the same forces performing The Rite of Spring in both orchestral and piano duet versions. Most of what Mr Hecht had to say in his favorable review of that recording applies here as well, with the exception that this recording has 23 tracks on each disc. I can only echo his thought that even though you may have a number of recordings of this great work, you will be pleased with this release.

HARRINGTON

**STRAVINSKY: Rite of Spring: Firebird Suite**

*Frankfurt Radio/ Andres Orozco-Estrada Pentatone 5186556 [SACD] 57 minutes*

With all the recordings of these works available, new ones must be good, interesting, or revealing, not to mention very well performed and recorded. Either that, or they should be a document of a conductor or an orchestra, or have some other property that makes them compelling and interesting. This Rite of Spring is good, interesting, and revealing, as well as spectacularly played and recorded. I had never heard anything quite like it, and I didn’t like it all, at first. "This is not Stravinsky!" was my reaction. In time it grew on me. I now like it for what it is, which still is not "Stravinsky".

The most general way to describe this Rite is as a powerful Teutonic performance played by a German orchestra that sounds very German. It is certainly not Russian, primeval, or wild (the fitting descriptor for Leonard Bernstein’s classic first recording of the piece). What it is disciplined, deliberate, and often slow, as well as careful—even cautious—to the point where you may sometimes think you are hearing notes put in place rather than played. At the same time, it is burly, brawny, crushing, and either industrial or militaristic, depending on how you view those terms. A very slow ‘Spring Rounds’ sounds like a panzer division driving ahead for an assault. ‘Sacrificial Dance’ sounds more like a march than a dance. ‘Games of the Rivals’ is clean and detached, and ‘Mysterious Circles’ is another powerhouse. After a vertical and powerful ‘Glorification of the Virgin,’ ‘Evocation of the Ancestors’ is huge, particularly in the drums. ‘Ritual Action of the Ancestors’ is commanding. The marked ‘Introduction’ and most of the slower sections eliminate any thought of French, impressionist, or Russian influence. This Rite will have its detractors, but it will have admirers, too. If you are of a mind for the style, the reading is imposing and in its way thrilling.

**Firebird Suite** (1919) follows suit, though of course, it is not as heavy. The quiet opening sounds are like a soft march in the bass with notes more separated than usual—an effect I’ve never heard before. ‘Firebird’s Dance’ is well executed, metric, and clear but hardly fanciful. ‘Variation of the Firebird’ remains strict, the soft strings note to note. Even the well-played oboe solo retains that character. The effect is beautiful and calculated but not magical. ‘Princess Round’ maintains that clear measured quality but with a gripping underpinning of possible violence. ‘Infernal Dance’ is the one truly violent and wild passage. ‘Berceuse’ is beautifully played, especially by the bassoon and soft strings, but, as always, ‘steady as she goes’. The controlled ending fills out well, with an unexpected slowdown at the end.

Stunning playing by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, which sounds on a par with its great radio counterpart in Bavaria. In some ways the orchestra is the star here. The sound is up to the playing in terms of clarity and power. You won’t forget the drums soon.

HECHT

**STRAVINSKY: Soldier’s Tale**

*Virginia Arts Chamber Players/ Jo Ann Falletta Naxos 573537—58 minutes*

Naxos’s use of the English title makes it clear that this is an English-language performance. It uses the translation of Ferdinand Ramuz’s French by Michael Flanders and Kitty Black, with updates by stage director Pamela Berlin.

In reviewing our coverage in the Stravinsky Overview, I wrote more about the narration and acting than the music because most of the piece is spoken text. Almost any modern ensemble can play the music with panache, so preference of recording often depends more on the spoken sections than the musical ones. The Overview’s favorite recording is Kent Nagano’s tough, theatrical, and gripping performance with rock singer Sting, plus Ian McKellen and Vanessa Redgrave. The runner-up, with mostly English performers led by violinist Nicholas Ward, is also theatrical, but in a more polite English style.

*American Record Guide*
This one with American performers comes from a production in Virginia. (For pictures, see http://hamptonroads.com/blog/751674/2015/05/our-va-arts-festival-presents-stravinsky-soldiers-tale). The musical element is polite, straightforward, and nicely carried out. The narration and acting (no British accents) are delivered in a story-telling, rather boyish mode that seems aimed at a young audience, though I do not think that was the case. In one sense it is like a long bedtime story. The translation is a rhyming one, and these speakers bring out the rhymes more than those on the other two recordings. Thus, the Falletta sounds like poetry, the other two like a play. Sometimes I thought of Alexander Pope (remotely), sometimes Sergei Prokofieff’s Peter and the Wolf. It may be stretching a point, but the narrator and characters sound like young middle class Americans from the same acting school. The Devil resembles a salesman (not a bad idea) more than a devil, and Joseph seems naive and boyish (not entirely inappropriate). All told, the performance is enthusiastic, cleanly drawn, and charming, but not that varied in characterization.

An interesting fact is that it comes in at 58 minutes. Most are 51 or so. The tempo in the newcomer does not seem that slow, so perhaps Berlin’s adaptations produced a longer text. The text is not supplied, so I cannot easily compare, but it sounds longer. But this recording may be just the thing for those who find Nagano too boring or Ward too British.

HECHT

SUK: Piano Quartet; see DVORAK
SUK: Serenade; Fantasy see DVORAK

SUSA: The Dangerous Liaisons
Anna Dugan (Merteuil), Abigail Shapiro (Tourvel), Janet Todd (Cecile), Noragh Devlin (Rosalba), Brittany Nickell (Volanges), Timothy Murray (Valmont). Oliver Sewell (Danceny); Manhattan School of Music/George Manahan; Albany 1618 [2CD] 122 minutes

The San Francisco Opera commissioned Conrad Susa (1935-2013) to compose this opera based on the 18th Century novel by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos. The opera’s three main roles were to be sung by Frederica Von Stade, Thomas Hampson, and Renée Fleming, so the initial production was guaranteed to be a financial success. Later Susa revised the score, and Randol Bass made a reduction of the score, with the composer’s approval. That is what is recorded here.

Whatever the version, the opera is an effective piece of theatre. Like the several stage versions, it presents fascinating characters either

ruled by or fighting against the sexual mores of their day—a subject sure to supply many interesting conflicts and situations. It is not a score I would listen to purely to hear beautiful music. But it offers music that enhances the dramatic situations, especially several ensembles which Susa has created to enable the characters to give voice to their feelings, often at the same time—the real glory of opera.

The cast has no stars of the magnitude of that original cast, but all the student singers sing securely, with well-placed and well-controlled voices and good understanding of their characters, ably conducted by George Manahan. Janet Todd as Cecile is particularly impressive; her silvery soprano seems just right for Cecile’s innocence (at the beginning). One of the attractions of this work is its rather large cast, with five major female parts and two men. Since the music is not very virtuosic, it should be a natural choice for conservatory presentations.

The recording comes with a booklet containing good background material and a full text.

SININGER

SVENDSEN: Octet;
BRUCH: Octet

Tharice Virtuosi—Claves 1207—68 minutes

Svendsen (1840-1911) and Bruch (1838-1920) were almost the same age, but these string octets are separated by more than 50 years. Svendsen wrote his piece while a student at Leipzig Conservatory and was awarded First Prize for his effort, and Breitkopf & Härtel offered to publish it. It is a fine piece, generous in melodies with interesting counterpoint and varying textures. He makes excellent use of his forces; everyone has something to say. The style is more cosmopolitan, less folk-inspired than the music of Grieg, his Norwegian contemporary.

Bruch’s octet was written the year before he died. It is thought to be a reworking of a quintet, now lost; in any case this octet in three movements (no scherzo) was his last work. In the case of Bruch, though, the composition date hardly seems to matter, since his style changed so little. This could easily be something from the 1870s. Whatever its source or date, though, it is a very nice work, rather Brahmsian in sound.

The Tharice Virtuosi is an international group, led by Liviu Prunaru, who is concert-master of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. The common connection of the players is some association with the International Menuhin Musical Academy, either as student or teacher. Their playing is a delight, rich in sonority, well

July/August 2016
SVIRIDOV: Songs
Elena Obraztsova, mz; Makvala Kasrashvili, s; Georgy Sviridov, p; Moscow Chamber Choir, Yuriy Choir/ Vladimir Minin
Melodiya 2420—78 minutes

This program presents music by Russian composer Georgy Sviridov (1915-98) with the composer at the piano. There are two sections, settings of Russian poet Alexander Blok (1880-1921) and the cycle Cast Off Russia based on Sergei Yesenin (1895-1925).

The Blok songs are demanding and intense, with occasional interesting harmonic twists. Obraztsova handles the wide leaps with skill; the voice is full but has some brightness to it in the upper register. She’s fearless in the lower register. There is a nice contrast in the inclusion of the duet ‘Lullaby’, sung with soprano Makvala Kasrashvili. The voices are haunting together and I wanted to hear more of this.

The inclusion of the chorus from the cycle Songs From Hard Times is another nice moment of variation in the program. The choral writing behind Obraztsova’s solo is rich and colorful. I loved it. As much as I like Sviridov’s songs, after hearing this and the duet, I’m hungry for more ensembles.

The cycle Cast Off Russia was first performed by a tenor; when the premiere was a failure, the composer re-worked the piece for mezzo-soprano. This was recorded in performance about a month after its premiere in 1983. The piece is difficult and dramatic. The powerful climax is split between the last two songs, where, in both, broadening rhythmic gestures in the piano accompany aggressive hymn melodies in the voice.

What’s missing here is text and translation. But aficionados of Russian song may well enjoy this. Notes.

SYMANOWSKI: Mazurkas; Piano Sonata 1
Sang Mi Chung—Centaur 3460—64 minutes

Szymanowski’s music is not to everyone’s taste; his ambiguous tonal framework and sometimes directionless-sounding structures could make it challenging. Yet with as clear and sensitive a guide as Chung the patient listener will be rewarded with fascinating dissonant harmonies.

Taken in small doses, the mazurkas are treats that display Chung’s gorgeous sound and clarity. The sweeping Mazurka 2, with her orchestral touch, is a far cry from Chopin’s miniatures.

Chung’s strengths are her facility with dense textures and her sensitive touch. Her playing is appropriate to Szymanowski’s romantic style. She is able to capture the complexities of Piano Sonata 1 with flexible sound and appropriate nuance. II is especially beautifully played, showing that Chung can release and bring tension appropriately. IV is breathtaking in its pacing. The only instance where she could have applied more restraint was III, which is supposed to be in the ‘minuet’ style. Too much rubato and a heavier touch detracts not only from the transparency of texture but also from the clarity of the movement. I far prefer Rafal Blechacz’s lighter touch and straightforward rendering of the movement (J/F 2013).

Still, Chung offers us wonderful interpretations of these works, and her sound is wonderful, too.

SYMANOWSKI: Preludes; see SHOSTAKOVICH

SYMANOWSKI: Symphony 2;
Lutoslawski: Livre pour Orchestre;
Funeral Music in Memory of Bartok
Polish Radio/ Alexander Liebreich
Accentus 30349—65 minutes

Karol Szymanowski completed his Second Symphony in 1910 and revised it sometime before 1936 to clarify the structure. It marked the end of his early period and was the first major work of his career. In his Second Symphony Szymanowski in many ways brought together the essence of Strauss, Reger, Scriabin, Zemlinsky, and preatonal Schoenberg. The composer described I as music in a ‘grand manner’ and II as a “theme and nine variations, the adagio and finale with a fugue’. He once characterized the piece as zopfmusik—braid music; that is like a braid of different materials. That is apparent if you think of the composer’s description and listen to a rap-
turous bath of sound whose luminescence and orchestral color and texture are more obvious than such structural elements as variations, fugue, etc. Reger’s influence is obvious in the variations both in tone and idea, though the latter is not taken quite to the limit Reger took it. Some of the mottos early in the work, as well as the use of the solo violin, suggest Strauss’s **Heldenleben**. Others in the variations recall **Til Eulenspiegel**. The opening theme is close to the mermaid figure in Zemlinsky’s **Seejungfrau**. All of those works precede Szymanowski’s Second Symphony, though it is with some sense in the 12 tones, naturally best of the ones I knew as an LP recording Writ, Valery Gergiev, and Jacek Kasprzyk. The spirit from the variations without being heavy worth noting that that the **Seejungfrau** motif was common in this period.

Over the years I found Szymanowski’s Second Symphony a little overheated or flawed in some other way. Now I think the problem was the recordings: Antal Dorati (J/F 1991), Antoni Wit, Valery Gergiev, and Jacek Kasprzyk. The best of the ones I knew was an LP recording led by Henryk Czyz that I should have listened to more often. Dorati was the best of the others, but it doesn’t quite come together or gleam like the Liebreich. Wit (J/F 2009) is OK but not as lush. Gergiev and the London Symphony do not produce enough opulence, and the variations are heavy-handed. Carl Bauman, who wrote the reviews cited above, among others, saved his highest plaudits for Botstein (J/F 2001) and Vassily Sinaisky (N/D 1996). I have not heard either.

This new recording is the best yet for me. It simply feels right: tempo, structure, pacing, color, sound—everything. It flows unerringly, is spot on in structure, and draws the right spirit from the variations without being heavy or brittle. The orchestra sounds like it was born to play this piece, and the sound is excellent, as it must be. This is no place for “historical” recordings.

Mating the Szymanowski with Lutoslawski makes sense geographically but not musically. These are very different composers. Like many people, I like one and for the most part not the other. I would much rather have Szymanowski’s Third Symphony as a coupling than these Lutoslawski works. **Livre pour Orchestre**, commissioned in 1962 by the city of Hagen, Germany, is in three “chapters” separated by interludes. It is a brilliant showpiece of orchestral techniques such as quarter-tones, glissandos, and aleatoric passages; but its musical expression eludes me. **Funeral Music in Memory of Bela Bartok** (1958) was a commission for the tenth anniversary of Bartok’s death and is one of the works that marked the transition to Lutoslawski’s late period. “What I have achieved in this work,” the composer wrote, “is...a set of ways which enable me to move with some sense in the 12 tones, naturally apart from the tonal system and dodecaphony”. He asserted that any similarities to Bartok’s music is unintentional, but its opening reminds me of **Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste**. Later on I hear a bit of Shostakovich’s 14th Symphony. **Funeral Music** suggests what an atonal work from Bartok might sound like, but it lacks that composer’s bite and richness. I am in no position to compare these performances with others, but from what I can tell, they serve Lutoslawski well.

**TATE:** **The Lodger**

Joseph Ward (Lodger), Johanna Peters (Emma), Owen Brannigan (George Bunting), Marion Studholme (Daisy), Alexander Young (Joe Chandler); BBC Northern Symphony/ Charles Groves

Lyrata 2119 [2CD] 119 minutes

“Phyllis Tate” was the nom-de-plume of English composer Phyllis Margaret Duncan (1911-87). She was expelled from primary school at the age of 10 for singing a lewd song! Already an adventurous soul, she taught herself to play the ukulele. She was discovered in 1928 by Harry Farjeon, a teacher of composition at the Royal Academy of Music, who encouraged her to study there—and she did: composition, timpani, and conducting.

A prolific composer, Tate was extraordinary, experimenting in many genres. She believed that music should entertain and give pleasure and composed several operas for and performed by children. She did not compose any large instrumental pieces, but concentrated her interest in atypical and more intimate instrumental combinations.

Other than a saxophone concerto (1944) and a sonata for clarinet and cello (1947), **The Lodger**, an opera in two acts, is the best known of her compositions. It was commissioned by the RAM and first performed there in July 1960. The performance heard here is a slightly revised version for the BBC, adding a spoken narration (Anthony Jacobs), broadcast February 2, 1964. The opera is quite extraordinary. There is a continual change of mood, juxtaposing tense, dramatic music with a tinge of dissonance with tuneful Victorian foxtrots and polkas. A cynical chorus of drunken Cockneys add to the nightmare of the plot—a tale of the infamous serial murderer Jack the Ripper!

**The Lodger** is set in a boarding house on the Marylebone Road, London. Emma Bunting, the landlady, gradually realizes that the quiet gentleman lodger, who saved Emma and her husband, George, from destitution, is actually the evil killer. The lodger is beset with religious and sexual mania. As the lodger sinks deeper and deeper into madness, Emma, see-
ing him as an insane, pitiable creature, can't
decide whether she should hand over to
the authorities a man with a mental illness. Libret-
tist David Franklin has preserved major ideas
from the novel of Mrs Marie Belloc Lowndes
(1913), creating fully realized sympathetic
characterizations of the Buntins and the
gang, mob mentalities of the crowds growing
more and more brouhaha, The Buntins's
daughter, Daisy, is fascinated by the lodger,
and he by her. A detective, Joe Chandler, gets
involved in the situation, adding more tension
to Emma's distress by asking Daisy to marry
him. The lodger confronts Emma, confirming
he is the Ripper, and although he throws her to
the floor he does not harm her. He disappears
into the night. An awkward epilogue reveals
that Emma will not aid the authorities in their
search for the Ripper and predicts that he will
not kill again. She finds an inscription by the
Ripper in the Bible that he borrowed from her:
"And now abideth Faith, Hope, and Charity
(Love), and the greatest of these is Charity."

Just as the opera is extraordinary in its
music, so the performance is extraordinary.
The singers not only squeeze every drop of
emotion from the text, but they sing with com-
plete clarity. Peters sings richly, full-bodied,
dark; Brannigan with a pompous intent.
Studholme is a bright, chirpy Daisy, a child-
like voice. The Lodger is wildly portrayed, and
Young is a sturdy, sincere, detective.

Fine notes and a complete English libretto
are included.

Parsons

Taverner: Western Wind Mass
with Audivi Vocom de Caelo; Dum Transisset
Sabbatum; In Nomine; Music for Henry VIII
Emily Van Evera, s; Charles Daniels, t; Robert
MacDonald, b; Taverner Choir & Players/ Andrew
Parrott—Avie 2352—79 minutes

In past ages the lines between sacred and sec-
ular art and music were less rigidly drawn than
they are today. The principal work on this
recording is the Western Wind Mass by John
Taverner (c1490-1545). This is clearly a litur-
gical composition, but it is the earliest mass by
an English composer to be based on a secular
cantus firmus instead of plainsong. Some have
conjectured that Taverner was seeking to
establish an English counterpart to the many
Homme Arme masses by continental com-
posers. The only other extant Western Wind
masses are by Christopher Tye and John Shep-
pard. Each of the four sections of Taverner’s
mass consists of a set of nine variations on the
melody, which appears in three of the work’s
four voice parts. The melody in the form used
by Taverner occurs in no earlier sources than
his mass. There is an anonymous ‘Westron
Wynde’ song from the early 16th Century, and
Taverner’s cantus firmus appears to have been
a counter-melody to it. The recording con-
cludes with Andrew Parrott’s conjectural com-
bination of the two melodies.

Also by Taverner are two office responds
that combine polyphony with plainsong.
‘Audivi Vocom de Caelo’ is in four parts for
Matins on All Saints’ Day. It is sung here by
high voices. ‘Dum Transisset Sabbatum’ is the
first of his two settings of this text for Matins on
Easter. The version sung here is in four parts
for men’s voices. The remaining work by Tav-
erner is a decorated keyboard transcription of
‘In Nomine’ from the Benedictus of his Gloria
Tibi Trinitas Mass, a work that gave birth to an
extensively cultivated genre of English consort
and keyboard music from the early 16th Cen-
tury to Purcell. The transcription is played on
the harpsichord by Steven Devine.

Apart from these works by Taverner, the
rest of the program consists of music, mostly
secular, that might have been heard at the
court of Henry VIII, including instrumental
performances of a song and an arrangement
by the king himself. A good deal of the music is
anonymous, dating from the late 15th to the
early 16th Centuries. Two of Taverner’s elder
contemporaries are also represented: Hugh
Aston (c1485-1550) by a well-known hornpipe
for keyboard, and William Cornysh the
younger (d1523) by an instrumental consort
piece and by a song for three voices. The song,
‘Yow and I and Amyas’, is a hauntingly wistful
piece exquisitely sung by the trio of Emily Van
Evera, Charles Daniels, and Robert MacDon-
al. It is in the form of a carol, with solo verses
alternating with a three-part refrain. It is one of
the gems of this recording.

The performances here, both instrumental
and vocal, are all first-rate. The Taverner Choir
is certainly one of the finest ensembles for this
repertory. 15 singers are listed for the record-
ing. Their sound is quite different from the
crystalline clarity of the Tallis Scholars
(Gimell), who achieve it without the dispass-
nionate iciness that is the pitfall of some early
music choirs. The Taverner Choir’s tone is
warmer and more conventionally choral in
sound, more like The Sixteen (Hyperion), but
perhaps even more intense.

I would not wish to declare one of these
ensembles absolutely superior to the others in
the music of Taverner—each is excellent in its
own way. My only misgiving is that the Tav-
erner Choir can sound a trifle too aggressive in cli-
maxes, and that is possibly more a conse-
quence of close recording than the perform-
ances themselves. But no one should be
deterred from acquiring this recording on that ground.

GATENS

Tchaikovsky, B: Violin Sonata; 2-Piano Sonata; Pieces; Preludes; Etudes; March
Marina Dichenko, v; Olga Solovieva, Dmitry Korostelyov, p—Grand Piano 716—64 minutes

Boris Tchaikovsky’s Piano Quintet (Naxos 573207, J/F 2015) was a delight to get to know. The sonata for two pianos, from 1973, is not a delight; it’s bracing, sometimes bitter, sometimes sarcastic, and full of demanding repeated notes and phrases in I. The first time through it, I had a “what fresh hell is this?” moment, but after getting to the end of the piece and starting over, it began to make a lot more sense. It consists mainly of odd Messiaen-like series of tangy, mid-tempo chords whose top notes form melodic contours. The pianists’ tone is almost harsh in I, suiting the music; but in this slow movement, it sounds square. Better phrasing would have done a lot of good. III is built out of hammered-out scales in eighth notes, and the thumping of one of the piano’s mechanisms is almost unbearable. But soon big chords crash through, then come crazy, psychedelic, minimalist arpeggios. Tchaikovsky whips the music around at the end, bringing it to a hinted-at but still shocking C-major cadence. The sonata sounds more like an experiment than a finished product, though.

The Five Pieces for piano are from 1935, and they’re tiny—less than a minute each. They’re very tonal and remind me of 19th-Century composers’ album leaves. Tchaikovsky was 10 when he wrote them, and they’re a strange mixture of naivety and forward-looking chromaticism. There are Five Preludes from 1936, and they already show musical growth and a talent for unusual but attractive melodies.

The Five Pieces (1938) are even more confident and inventive, though the harmonic language is still conservative. It’s a satisfying, beautiful handful of pieces, and Korostelyov plays them much more musically than he does the preceding preludes and pieces, even if his touch is always heavy. Short pieces from 1980, like the Etude in E and the Prelude in G, are stubbornly tonal and compellingly witty. The last of 1945’s Three Pieces is in 11/16 time, but where the accents fall in the last group of three can give you a small thrill trying to keep track of the downbeat.

In the Violin Sonata Dichenko has a disconcertingly thin, nasal tone and a childishly undeveloped vibrato. I had to stop listening partway through the piece. The sonics in general are pretty flat; the pianos sound graceless and nasal. Several of the pieces are premiere recordings, so Boris-hungry readers will want this, but I can’t recommend it for general listeners or even the mildly curious. Notes are in English and German.

ESTEP

Tchaikovsky: Nutcracker Suite; Capriccio Italien; Polonaise & Waltz from Eugene Onegin
London Philharmonic/ Leopold Stokowski
PentaTone 5186229 [SACD] 47 minutes

This is PentaTone resurrecting more old, analog Philips back-catalog material. It would be more welcome, and crucial to the current Stokowski discography, if it hadn’t been covered by a Decca two-fer from the Eloquence series. When the two-fer came out, I was mostly concerned with finally getting Stokie’s Francesca da Rimini and Serenade for Strings (with the London Symphony) on CD, since I’d been referring to them for comparisons in ARG for years. The Capriccio Italien and Nutcracker suite came along for the ride, and I didn’t give them a lot of attention. If nothing else, this new release got me to rediscover them and—wow!—I forgot how magical they were.

Stokowski was 91 when these recordings were made in 1973, but as with so many of those final stereo recordings from the 70s, he makes no concessions to age! These performances are as vital and lively and youthful as if they were being led by a conductor who’d just discovered their magic. Of course, there are the usual Stokowski touches. After a light, crisp, fairly straightforward traversal of the Nutcracker Overture, there’s an uproarious, almost loopy, take on the March that I don’t think Stokowski replicated in any of this other recordings. You’ll never hear the trumpet part played that way in any other recording! It is dizzying and marvelous fun, too. I hit the repeat button a few times.

In contrast, the ‘Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy’ is taken daringly slow, with the celeste solo sounding unusual, almost arpeggiated. Are those little “shivering” details from the violins and the woodwinds in other recordings and I just never noticed them? Stokowski reins things in with the ‘Russian Dance’. It’s lively and full of Slavic verve, but it doesn’t have the wacky trombone playing of the Philadelphia Orchestra recording from the 1920s. Everybody knows the ‘Arabian Dance’ is supposed to be sensuous and languorous, but how many conductors “get it” the way Stokowski did? The ‘Chinese Dance’ is conventionally perky, and the central, minor-key section of the ‘Dance of the Mirlitons’ has just the right amount of

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uneasiness bordering on menace. Few recordings of the ‘Waltz of the Flowers’—not even the classic Columbia Ormandy—have the Mozartean elegance of this one. My only regret, which I probably share with many Stokowski fans, is that he recorded only the short, 20-minute “standard” suite, rather than an extended set of excerpts like Reiner (RCA) and Ormandy (Columbia). But I’m grateful for what we have here.

I’m looking forward to the Des Moines Symphony doing the Capriccio Italien in a few weeks (what better label is there for the season-ending concert than ‘All Tchaikovsky’?), but good as the local band is, they won’t match this performance. I doubt anybody could. The Capriccio has always sounded to me like music meant to be played outdoors, and never more so than in this performance. The openness and the airiness of the brass fanfares at the beginning is almost never replicated in any performance—except by Stokowski—and while his 1920s Philadelphia recording has remarkably good sound for the period, this one has stereo (or Quad, if you can play it) and spectacularly rich SACD sound. Wait, I’m not done with the performance...listen to the snap and swagger of the final tarantella—remember what I said about these performances not sounding at all like the work of a nonagenarian?

Time to get down to brass tacks. If you have the Decca Eloquence reissue, do you need this one? That depends on how important sound quality is to you. For a standard CD, the Decca set has incredible sound, and if you’re on a budget, you’re not missing a whole lot. But you will miss something because the extended depth and higher resolution of the SACD format gives PentaTone an advantage. It certainly gives an extra margin of strain-free sound that encourages really cranking up the volume. I played it very loud and found the sound did not turn hard, the bass did not boom (once I dialed back on the subwoofer a bit), the upper mid-range and high frequencies did not grate on the nerves, and generally I could listen without hitting the pain threshold, which could be dangerous for one’s hearing if carried on for any length of time. In any case, I’m inclined to say these performances have never been heard in such spectacular sound.

**Hansen**

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**Tchaikovsky:** Piano Concerto 2; **Khachaturian:** Piano Concerto

Xiayin Wang, Scottish National Orchestra/ Peter Oundjian

Chandos 5167 [SACD] 76 minutes

I have loved this Tchaikovsky concerto all my life, while few had ever heard it. One develops ideas about a very familiar piece of music, and one can hardly point to any recording or performance as the origin of those ideas. It’s just the way you hear a piece in your mind once you know it well. I hear this concerto with a lot more majesty and emotion than I can hear on this recording. Tempos are too fast here, the pianist is perky but not sensitive, and the glorious second movement (uncut here) is not sweet and delicious. Conductor and pianist are just “business as usual” without any special feel for Tchaikovsky, who was such a sensitive soul.

There is an inadequate pause before we are thrown into the Khachaturian, which once again leaves me unmoved.

It is possible to point to details in both concertos that bothered me, but the general impression is the point. Nothing here matches the ones we have recommended in the past.

By the way, do not confuse this Wang with Yuja Wang. This one is less famous but a better pianist—and this one is from Shanghai, not Beijing.

**Vroon**

**Tchaikovsky:** The Seasons; Sonata in G

Freddy Kempf—BIS 2140 [SACD] 66:28

Jonas Vitau—Mirare 308—74 minutes

I have reviewed at least 15 recordings of The Months, starting in 1993; and ARG has covered another 10 or 12. It never ceases to amaze me that this music—forgotten and ignored for years—is now so widely recorded.

The first observation about these two recordings is obvious just from the listing above: Jonas Vitau takes almost 8 minutes longer for exactly the same music. You would expect that he takes almost everything slower—and that is true. That means, for one thing, that he is not using the music for a display of virtuosity or to impress the audience. No, he expects you to sink into it and dwell in it—and it’s a beautiful place to dwell. It need not be this slow—I have thoroughly enjoyed slightly faster recordings—but I also like it this slow.

Six of the 12 months certainly seem more appealing with Vitau’s tempos than with Freddy Kempf’s. In the other six there isn’t much difference in tempo or it makes little difference. Kempf sees “Allegro” and flies off;
Vitaud pays attention to the “moderato” or “non troppo” that often follows. In the ones I like best—January, May, June, November, and December—Vitaud takes the prize. In September, ‘The Hunt’ (one with the “non troppo”), Kempf sounds like a children’s game of tag. A hunt simply doesn’t scamper like that—at least not when it starts off. In general (that is, in most of the pieces) Vitaud breathes naturally and Kempf doesn’t. He pushes it too much, will not just let it unfold. And Vitaud likes rubato, as I do. It adds so much expression and emotion. I think Vitaud’s Seasons (Months) are among the best I have heard.

Both have wonderful sound. Kempf may have slightly richer sound from the engineers, but he often seems cooler and less involved in the music, so the engineering doesn’t make much difference.

Both give us the piano sonata as well—not mostly a winsome or attractive work. Right away you notice the composer’s typical “moderatos” and “non troppos” in the first two movements. The last two are allegros, but both with modifying adjectives: “giocoso”, which does not mean giggly or frivolous, and “vivace”, faster in I, more than 3 minutes faster in II, and which traditionally slowed down the allegro plays it like an unemotional Englishman with a stiff upper lip. Tchaikovsky was Russian, you know, and a very emotional man. Vitaud makes the Andante (II) more attractive than I remember it. Still, the sonata is less appealing than the other 12 pieces here, so buy the Vitaud for them and listen to the sonata every now and then.

It should be clear by now that the French pianist wins this one—and wins a place in my permanent collection, with only five others.

VROON

TCHAIKOVSKY: Serenade for Strings; Souvenir of Florence
Russian Virtuosi/ Yuri Zhisl in
Orchid 52—65 minutes

This is the debut recording of the Russian Virtuosi of Europe, a group of ex-pat Russian string players organized by violinist Yuri Zhisl in in 2004, when he yearned for the good old days when his violist step-father was a member of the Moscow Virtuosi and took him with him to rehearsals and on tour.

In Serenade for Strings Zhisl in’s pulse is limp, his pacing is on the slow side, phrases have little expressive shape (almost everything is played between mf and f), and the five lines of music are not sorted out—balances are all but non-existent. In the lyrical introduction to IV, each note in all the lines gets a pulse; the lines are neither lyrical nor integrated. Also, I had to turn down the treble to dampen the abrasive tone of the violins. In addition, the engineers seems to have added some artificial reverberation, giving the sound quality a canned electronic edge. In the fadeouts the orchestra’s mediocre tuning becomes clear as the overtones disappear and the pitch becomes a bit sour.

Souvenir of Florence is better, but that’s not saying much. In II the lead cellist is supremely musical in his few solos; I wish I could say the same for Zhisl in in his violin solos. As a conductor he is actually lyrical for once in IV’s second theme, and he gives the rest of the movement a lively pulse; but I suspect that’s because Tchaikovsky’s use of strongly rhythmic folk tunes forces him to. In fact, given all the folk tunes in this work, Souvenir of Florence should have been more accurately titled Souvenir of Russia. With those folk tunes come pungent rhythms and accents and the best fugue Tchaikovsky ever wrote. This arrangement for orchestra is the conductor’s own; still, I would have expected him to honor Tchaikovsky’s many expression marks, but he mostly ignores them, as he does in the Serenade for Strings.

Ormandy’s 1960 Sony recording of the Serenade with the Philadelphia Orchestra remains supreme, despite his wholesale cuts in the score. And both Scott Yoo with the Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra on Archetype and Christopher Warren-Green with the London Chamber Orchestra on Virgin are superior to Zhisl in. Even Philippe Entremont’s recording with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra on Naxos, while no great shakes, is superior in both works.

FRENCH

TCHAIKOVSKY: Songs
Nadia Krasteva, mz; Dora Deliyska, p
Gramola 99043—62 minutes

Interested in Russian song? Love the sound of a full, rich mezzo voice that has just enough edge to it? If the answer to either of those questions is yes, this is worth picking up. Of the programs that include Tchaikovsky songs (Romeo 7302, J/A 2014; Melodiya 2319, J/A 2015; Dux 940, S/O 2014) and the entire program of Tchaikovsky songs (Melodiya 2278, J/F 2015), this is my favorite, if for no other reason
earthly, elemental ritualism—oh what a difference a Russian makes! All the singers are Slavic—and Stravinsky said this work can only be understood by Russian speakers. I don’t know if I understand it as Stravinsky understood it, but I’ve always been deeply moved by *The Wedding*. This performance is very soulful, fierce and colorful, the low bass percussion hitting with especially resounding and rotund force.

Sony made a crucial mistake, though, with their otherwise very useful and perceptive booklet: there’s no libretto. It’s nearly impossible to follow the rapid-fire vocals, but it’s important to understand generally what everyone’s singing about. Synopses can be found on the internet, but only the original text conveys its frenzied, rustic flavor.

This is an essential disc that demands a hearing by every music lover. Bravo!

WRIGHT

**TELEMANN**: 6 Overtures
Anke Denner, hpsi—Genuin 16411—64 minutes

Anke Dennert plays these six three-movement *ouvertures* on the well-known and much-copied 1728 Christian Zell harpsichord. A writer in the booklet speculates that Telemann could have known this harpsichord because it was built in Hamburg while he lived there. The instrument sounds good here, without the distracting action noise that marred Bob van Asperen’s 1990 EMI recording of the Bach toccatas on it.

Telemann published these keyboard solo pieces in 1745, but they have not attracted much attention. They are in his imitation French-Italian-Polish blended style. The second movement of each has a “scherzando” designation, even though they are slow. The last movement of the E-minor has a very strange middle section, with an almost random-sounding sequence of harmonies. I had to look up the score to figure out what’s going on. All six of these pieces are good to play and to listen to, exploring different keys.

The temperament is a modified 1/6 comma scheme. They could have modified it a bit further to trim some weedy spots at the edges of Telemann’s most extreme modulations. It doesn’t sound bad, though. This music is not recorded anywhere else. Dennert has a fine modern-consensus style of playing the harpsichord. She doesn’t elaborate the music much, but plays cleanly what is on the page. I have said enough for you to make your decision.

B LEHMAN
Astral Circles is a collection of nine pieces by Augusta Read Thomas for a wide variety of performance situations, written from 2000 to 2013.

Radiant Canticles (2010), for orchestra, opens with slowly broken chords and continues with cadenza-like gestures overlaid with Ms. Thomas’s typical fanfares and fragments of lyricism. Some pounding timpani appear for a minute; some ostensibly happy faster music. Some introspection...activities that are now considered tedious in our fickle, ludic culture.

Astral Canticle
Yvonne Redman, s; Jonathan Keeble, fl; J. David Harris, cl; Robert Waters, Nathan Gnern, vc; Julian Hirsch, vc; Julie: Gunn, p; Third Coast Percussion; University of Illinois Women’s Glee Club/ Andrea Solya; University of Illinois Symphony/ Donald J. Schleicher
Nimbus 6306—65 minutes

Volume 4 of Nimbus’s survey of Augusta Read Thomas, a remarkable effort for a composer in midcareer (she is, however, exceptionally prolific). This most recent collection involves pieces written for strings from 1995 to 2010.

‘Incantation’ (1995), for solo violin, is romantic, sorrowful, and passionate—a fundamental example of what the composer refers to as her “lyricism under pressure.” It is brief, but beautiful.

In Passion Prayers (1999), for a septet of cello, flute, clarinet, violin, piano, harp, and percussion, the pressure is caused by the ensemble, mostly the violin and cello.

Spirit Musings (1997) is Ms. Thomas’s Violin Concerto I, set in the three standard movements (each with poetic descriptors). It was originally a flute concerto. The general language consists of searching gestures, occasional drifting, thoughtful meditations, fragmented lyricism, and bursts of passion. None of this will surprise listeners familiar with the academic music of its time; much of it could be considered cliche-ridden.

Jubilee (2010), the most recent piece here, may be considered a sinfonietta in four movements. I consists of typically stuttering fanfares, II speech-like recitations. III is a sensitive reverie for a departed friend, nearly tonal in a Barber-ish sort of way; and the finale gives America a nod with a dose of “bebop meets Varese.”


Capricci (2011), for flute and clarinet, is a wedding gift meant to represent the happy couple. It is very personal.

Twilight Butterfly (2013), for mezzo and piano, sets a sunset poem, this one by our hallucinating composer.

The following three solo pieces are pretty nondescript, and would fit on a dullish recital. ‘Bells Ring Summer’ (2000) for solo cello, is brief and declamatory, fading to nothing. ‘Euterpe’s Caprice’ (2008) for solo flute is a very short Syrinx imitation. ‘Pulsar’ (2003) for solo violin, is also declamatory and just as nondescript.

The title work, Astral Canticle (2005), a double concerto for flute, violin, and orchestra, is the longest piece on the program at 17 minutes. Hardly a concerto in the traditional sense, it’s really just an extended piece for the two instruments. It opens with a very short, pretty duet but bleeds into the usual fanfares, quasi-cadenzas, and blank meanderings. They don’t make a lasting impression.

I sat through the whole program dutifully in anticipation of tomorrow’s faculty meeting.

Quick and easy pleasures immunize people against worries and responsibility, allowing them to turn their backs on any self-knowledge that might be gained through thought and introspection...activities that are now considered tedious in our fickle, ludic culture.

--Mario Vargas Llosa

GIMBEL

July/August 2016
my network of which she is a and influential member.

GIMBEL

THOMAS: Of Being Is A Bird
Claire Booth, s; Nathan Giterm, Nathan Cole, v; Nichola Melville, p; Parker Qt; Spektral Qt; Third Coast Percussion; Aurora Orchestra/ Nicholas Collon—Nimbus 6323—73 minutes

Volume 6 of Nimbus’s Augusta Read Thomas series. These are mostly very recent pieces, with a few short ones produced slightly earlier. Helix Spirals (2014), the longest and most substantial work on the program, is a 23-minute, three-movement string quartet. Its inspiration is a 1958 DNA replication discovery; Ms Thomas’s composition involves assumedly related processes in development and transformations of its musical material. The work opens with an uncharacteristically jovial pizzicato dance, but mechanically fragmented. Bows enter about three minutes in. The materials are varied with a rather Bartókian flavor. II is a scherzo with a trio-like interlude. The slow finale is mournful, with some Beethovenian spirituality. This is among the composer’s strongest pieces.

Selene (Moon Chariot Rituals, 2014), for percussion quartet combined with string quartet, is a reinterpretation of material from Helix Spirals as if viewed through a new lens and created in tandem with the expanded ensemble. This version is telescoped, but eschews the Beethovenian aura of the former’s more resigned outcome.

Capricious Toccata (2015), for solo violin, is a free 7-minute fantasy juxtaposing jazzy angularity with episodes of stasis. It is one of three solo violin pieces on the program.

Of Being Is a Bird (2015) is a work for soprano and orchestra on two poems of Dickinson (with an intricate central interlude). The poet is a favorite of Ms Thomas. Both share an interest in aviary consciousness.

‘Caprice’ (2005), a relatively early work for solo violin, is a manic five phrases with bloody hairpins, seething trills, and agonized lines. The same could be said of ‘Rush’ (2004), an even earlier solo violin work. A hysterical fanfare, it is by no means built for comfort.

‘Love Twitters’ (2006) is a very flighty improvisation on Irving Berlin’s ‘They Say It’s Wonderful’ for piano solo. It actually makes an ideal introduction to Ms Thomas’s overall output. I would almost suggest new listeners might start with this and use it as something of a template for the rest of her work.

I would imagine all of the releases in this vast Nimbus project will be issued someday in a boxed set, but Ms Thomas still has much to write. She has won just about every important academic award and position, so many readers will not want to miss keeping up. Performances are consistently outstanding. Texts included. Concise but helpful notes.

GIMBEL

THOMAS: Ritual Incantations; see DVORAK

THOMAS: EOS,
MUHLY: Control;
NORMAN: Switch
Colin Currie, perc; Utah Symphony/ Thierry Fischer—Reference 719 [SACD] 70 minutes

This collection is called Dawn to Dust; it contains pieces that were commissioned by the Utah Symphony for their 75th birthday celebration.

The program opens with Augusta Read Thomas’s EOS (2015), a Ballet for Orchestra honoring the Goddess of the Dawn. In seven movements, the piece is written in a postexpressionist style most reminiscent of Debussy’s Jeux brought harmonically into the present century. The piece evokes mythology, with Debussian longeurs, playful gesturing, Francophile fanfares, drifting sleepiness, and natural wonder. The work would make a graceful dance. This is quite unlike most of Ms Thomas’s music I’ve heard.

Nico Muhly’s (b. 1981) Control (2015), subtitled Five Landscapes for Orchestra, describes Utah’s natural land formations (Messiaen’s From the Canyons to the Stars is an obvious influence). Like Ms Thomas’s work, the piece is written in 21st Century harmonic terms, but thoroughly ambiguous. There are towering mountains, wild birds, cosmic tranquility, abstract busyness, hallucinatory overlays, a nod to Copland, some mysterious red dust, a hint of prayer, and a poorly judged abrupt ending. The piece is of its (academic) time, for better or worse.

On another level, Andrew Norman’s (b. 1979) Switch (2015), for percussion and orchestra, is a breathless workout for all involved. The title refers to the turning on of rapidfire electronic devices such as pinball machines and video games. The piece, following a tranquil opening motive, explodes into a dizzying world of pings and pongs, invaded sometimes by dreamy visions (the dazed—or stoned—player?) The flashbacks are intended to be cinematic. The 30-minute work is effective and overwhelming, leaving the listener in the same shape as the purported player. I loved it; it continues to establish Ms Norman as one of our most exciting composers.

The Utah Symphony asserts itself as one of our major ensembles, and given its interest in contemporary music, it should be out there on
more records. The recording is spectacular. Notes by the composers.

GIMBEL

THOMSON: Songs, all
Sarah Pelletter, Lynne McMurtry, William Hite, Aaron Engebreth; Alison d’Amato, Linda Osborn, p; John McDonald, perc
New World 80775 [3CD] 198 minutes

The Florestan Recital Project is an organization “devoted to the art of the song recital in Boston”. Headed by Aaron Engebreth and Alison d’Amato, their work of championing and promoting the genre of the art song seems to place particular emphasis on music of the 20th Century. This release presents the most complete recorded collection of works for voice and piano by Virgil Thomson (1896-1989), one of America’s most important composers.

Some of the songs are unpublished and previously unrecorded. Florestan’s goal is to offer “a more complete understanding of his work”. Thomson remarked that his aim in writing songs was to make the music “not only of equal quality with the verse but also its mate. It gets inside a poem and stays there, interwoven unforgettably, never to be thought of henceforth as not a part of the whole idea.”

In an online video, Engebreth describes Thomson’s songs as a “cacophony of experience”. It’s a very kaleidoscopic assortment of musical styles and texts. As Engebreth points out, “You hear his upbringing. You absolutely hear his being brought up as a Baptist. You hear church music. You hear Americana band music. You hear marching music. And then you hear French minimalism and you hear homages to Satie, Honegger, and Milhaud and other composers that he was close with in Paris. And then in his later years you hear a New York sound.”

You can hear the weird, the wild, and the wonderful in these songs. Listening to this entire collection can be an endurance test. I found it helpful to listen sparingly at first. Everything here is interesting, but much of it gave me little pleasure. Thomson did not have what one could call a great gift for melody. After a second time through not many melodies linger happily in my memory. Significant exceptions are his Shakespeare Songs—especially ‘Take, O Take Those Lips Away’, which sounds like a Stephen Foster Song, and ‘My Shepherd will Supply My Need’, probably his best-known piece. Some of the songs that will endure best are Five Songs from William Blake; Tres Estampes de Ninez; Le Belle en Dormant; Shakespeare Songs; and Mostly About Love.

His selection of texts is amazingly eclectic and often eccentric. The longest song at 12:17—really an extended recitative—is a 17th Century eulogy: Funeral Oration for Henriette-Marie de France, Queen of Grande-Bretagne. Four very strange “lullabies” with short texts by the composer sound like the pleadings of stumped parents trying to get a child to sleep. Two by Marianne Moore show Thomson’s desire to wed text and music. His whimsical side comes out nicely in ‘The Courtship of Yongly-Bongly-Bo’ adapted from Edward Lear.

Thomson’s friendships with Gertrude Stein and Kenneth Koch gave rise to some very odd songs. The Stein songs are quirky. (Thomson himself noted whimsically about Koch, “He writes just like Gertrude except it makes sense. His poetry wants music.”) The collection ends with two sets of Koch songs, Mostly About Love and Collected Poems.

The repeated accompaniment patterns of these songs—often triple meter up-pa-pa or up-and-down-the-keyboard scales or arpeggiated patterns—get tiresome. Some of the songs are unaccompanied, and sometimes the accompaniment is almost non-existent. In Five Phases (1926) the accompaniment is supplied by drum or wood block or gong. A Mass for Solo Voice is spare and pointillistic in style.

Still, there is great variety to these songs, and these very fine performances make about as good a case for them as imaginable. I took particular delight in hearing William Hite, a Boston area singer I’ve appreciated for many years, who also gets many of the best songs. The other singers are just as good.

Texts and translations are included, but they are laid out in a way that often makes it hard to follow.

R MOORE

TOGNI: Hymns of Heaven & Earth: Solstice Nights; 3 Neruda Odes
Ilana Waniuk, Suhashini Arulanandam, v; Rory McLeod, va; Dobrochna Zubek, vc; Cary Ebli, Eng hn; Stacie Dunlop, s
Centrediscs 22416—57 minutes

A composer as eclectic as Peter-Anthony Togni is bound to write very eclectic music. He studied organ and improvisation with no less a figure than Jean Langlais, and composition with Alain Gaussin; in addition, he is a sought-after soloist, broadcaster, and composer. Judging from the program of his compositions here, I’d say that he favors triadic harmonies, scale-based melodies, and substantial content over cheap or garish effect.

Most effective is his string quartet, Hymns of Heaven and Earth, and in particular the ecstatic II and IV (hymns to Mary and to Light). A two-movement Solstice Nights adds English horn to the quartet—I’ve never heard a
Let's play it...
called the Aargau Symphony. British conductor Douglas Bostock has been its Music Director since 2001. The orchestra is good, though not world class, possibly a little small, with a warm Germanic sound.

This enjoyable program in good sound is most valuable for the Holst. As is often the case with a Bostock performance, the goodness of the VW and Elgar must yield to greatness from the likes of Boult, Barbirolli, and Previn.

Hebert Vazquez is a Mexican composer, a professor at Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo. His instrument is guitar, but he writes for a variety of media, with a variety of influences—I hear a fair amount of Stravinsky, Bartok, minimalism, some rock and jazz, and even Andean music. He has his own voice, though, and I found this performance quite enjoyable.

NOMAD is a contemporary music ensemble, led by guitarist and conductor Sato, based in Japan. They perform in various combinations and on Western and Japanese instruments. The notes don’t give their number—the photo shows 12 people.

Vanitas is my favorite, a three-movement work for guitar and string quartet. Rhythm is the primary element—it has a primitive drive, moving for long passages over a single harmony, yet it keeps variety with ever-changing sonorities. The pieces for mandolin and guitar are uneven. The first is a fascinating exploration of the sonorities of the two plucked instruments, but the second starts off with a bunch of rock and blues licks and never gets to much more. The same can be said for 'Pictures of the Floating World' for koto and guitar. I suppose the temptation to write for a rock koto was too hard to resist. The asymmetrical meters don’t make the material any more interesting.

The most ambitious work here is Proof of Life. The composer describes it as a four-movement concerto for guitar and chamber orchestra. The wind colors, woodwinds and trumpet, are used to good effect, with the same drive that was heard in Vanitas. III is for guitar alone, a huge cadenza; and the last movement is Andean music in 5/4.

New music, a new voice, and an attractive new set of works for the guitar—always welcome.

Ian Venables (b. 1955) composes in the pastoral style of English song, exuding nostalgia in a way reminiscent of Gerald Finzi yet without sounding derivative. The title cycle of this program, The Song of the Severn for baritone, string quartet, and piano, is a celebration of Venables’s home county of Worcestershire and the Severn River. With his settings of poems by Masefield, Housman, John Drinkwater, and Philip Warner, Venables recalls in five songs (1) Roman occupation, (2) Worcestershire native AE Housman’s unrequited love, (3) Elgar’s enduring presence, (4) the exuberant celebration of Severn life, and (5) the life of the river itself with its call to ‘remember me’. One critic accurately called this a ‘resplendently assured work’.

The Severn flows through Gloucestershire also. With The Pine Boughs Past Music Venables turns in homage to Gloucester-born poet and composer Ivor Gurney, whose work, as Venables writes in his notes, “is infused with the imagery of the Gloucestershire landscape”. The cycle pays poignant tribute to the genius of Gurney, who gave such eloquent voice to his own inner torment. Venables uses three of his most poignant poems and concludes the cycle powerfully with Leonard Clark’s ‘In Memoriam: Ivor Gurney’, a moving elegy that incorporates in the piano accompaniment the sound of the Gloucester Cathedral bells echoing through the Severn valley. It is extraordinarily compelling music.

With lyrical melodies and well-crafted construction, these are works of tenderness and beauty. The program also includes nine other songs, four accompanied by string quartet (in arrangements by Lloyd) and five by piano. Each is a gem. Venables picks gripping texts and sets them in ways that enhance their meaning and amplify their power.

Williams excels in 20th Century English song performance (Vaughan Williams, M/A 2006; Finzi, N/D 2006; Scott, J/F 2008; Ireland S/O 2008), and he is up to his high standards here. He has one of the loveliest baritone voices to be heard these days, and he uses it with consummate taste and sensitivity. His singing is thoughtfully nuanced, clean and clear, warm and expressive. His voice is supple and smooth as silk, but with enough heft for the more forceful passages. One or two top notes tend to lose their heft and feel forced at full voice, but otherwise his singing is exemplary.

Exquisite shaping of phrases, skilled use of dynamics, and exceptionally clear diction all

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contribute to making this a first-rate reading. There is no baritone I would rather hear sing English songs.

Lloyd and the Carducci Quartet supply consummate collaboration with accompaniment that captures the ebb and flow of the river.

The composer’s notes supply helpful background on each of the 18 songs. Texts are included, but are hardly necessary with such pellucid articulation by Williams.

**VICTORIA:** Motets
Musica Ficta/ Raul Mallavibarrena
Enchiriadis 2044—45 minutes

It seems to be evolving into a fashion to perform the polyphonic motets of Victoria in unusual ways. One relatively recent recording, using rather spurious arguments, combines solo voices with viols and other instruments (J/A 2004); and Carlos Mena, countertenor, released a collection accompanied by a vihuela (with a cornetto added to a few), but he at least had the foundation that a few of Victoria’s motets are actually preserved as solo songs with vihuela in some contemporary sources (S/O 2004).

For this new release, Mallavibarrena has chosen to use only solo voices in order to interpret religious polyphony in a style closer to the madrigal, and has added a harp “to envelop the voices with warm complicity”, whatever that might mean. It is an interesting concept, but this might not be its ideal realization. If Mallavibarrena was hoping to create a greater clarity in the polyphonic textures by using solo voices, the timbral difference between the single female soprano (with a prominent vibrato) and the other male voices (with a generally straight tone) unbalances the polyphony. The test piece would likely be for most listeners Victoria’s best-known motet, ‘O Magnum Mysterium’, which in this interpretation sounds like a soprano solo with a male back-up group and a harp rhythm section. Mena’s arrangement of it for solo voice and vihuela is both more historical and more effective.

**BREWER**

**VIVALDI:** Bassoon Concertos
in C, F, B-flat, A minor
Gustavo Nuñez; Academy of St Martin in the Fields/ Tomo Keller
Pentatone 5186539—60 minutes

Antonio Vivaldi wrote 39 bassoon concertos, which must set some kind of record. He appears to have liked the instrument, because all are fairly good pieces, not the kind of cookie-cutter product one might expect with such a generous output. This program of six was recorded in Super Audio format, and the sound is excellent. It gives the auditory impression of sitting in the same room with the superb musicians of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

Gustavo Nuñez, principal bassoonist of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, plays with a rich tone, flawless intonation, striking ease of technique, and fresh, delightful ornamentation. His reading of these works is so urbane and pleasing as to be understated, though, and misses out on some of the furioso quality for which Vivaldi is noted.

Listening to 5 concertos in major keys (3 of which are in C major) is a little tiring to the ear. There are so many terrific Vivaldi concertos in minor keys. Nuñez displays the most pathos and fire in the wonderful A-minor Concerto, though his performance of the final C-major Concerto (R 467) comes close. Overall, this is a fine addition to the library of Vivaldi concertos.

**PFEIL**

**VIVALDI:** 4 Seasons; see DAVIS
**VIVALDI:** Nisi Dominus; see BACH

**VIVALDI:** Gloria; Laetatus Sum; Magnificat; Lauda Jerusalem
Le Concert Spirituel/ Hervé Niquet
Alpha 222—51 minutes

In a brief introductory essay, director Hervé Niquet speaks of what he calls the common liturgical practice in convents and other ecclesiastical women’s communities of writing and performing music for choirs of women’s voices. He cites Pierre Bouteiller and Louis Le Prince among French composers who contributed to this repertory, but undoubtedly the best-known exponent of the art was Antonio Vivaldi as part of his association with the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice. Although his liturgical music is written in the conventional SATB format—possibly to make it more marketable to conventional church choirs of men and boys—it is conjectured that the women performed it with the tenor and bass parts transposed up an octave. That is how they are performed here, and Niquet goes a step further in having the soprano and alto solos sung by all the sopranos and altos. He claims that this too was a common practice in Vivaldi’s day.

The program opens with the familiar Gloria (R 589). The orchestra consists of strings and continuo only, omitting the optional parts for oboe and trumpet. The Magnificat is Vivaldi’s only surviving setting of the text, but it
exists in three versions. This recording gives the earliest version (R 610a). Two psalm settings for Vespers complete the program. 'Laetatus Sum' (Vulgate Psalm 121, R 607) is an extremely concise setting that appears to aim at covering the text in the least possible time. It is lively and cheerful but does not have the leisure to explore the expressive implications of the text. 'Lauda Jerusalem' (Vulgate Psalm 147, R 609) for double choir is somewhat more expansive, but still concise. Both the Gloria and the Magnificat present the text verse-by-verse as a series of short and varied movements.

This method of performance is quite effective, though I wonder how many listeners would prefer it to performances by mixed choirs. The instrumental bass anchors the choral sound securely and prevents unwanted inversions. There is less melodic and contrapuntal profile as the sopranos and tenors inhabit essentially the same pitch space, as do the altos and basses. The fact that there are no real solos or duets removes that element of variety from these performances.

The orchestra delivers an uncompromising early music sound with an edgy and lean string tone. Niquet favors very fast tempos to the extent that the music sounds aggressively driven most of the time and never seems to have a chance to breathe. The intention, no doubt, is to produce excitement, but the effect here is more frantic, and at worst, perfunctory. There are moments where the balance is odd. In some movements it sounds as if the listener is seated in the midst of the orchestra, right next to the theorbo player.

More than 20 years ago I reviewed a recording by Andrew Parrott and the Taverner Choir and Players of a very similar program performed by a choir of women’s voices (Virgin 59326; M/A 1995). The Gloria includes the wind parts in the orchestra. The Magnificat is given in its second version (R 610b). Parrott’s program includes ‘Laetatus Sum’ but instead of ‘Lauda Jerusalem’ he includes ‘Laudate Dominum Omnes Gentes’ (Vulgate Psalm 116, R 606) and ‘In Exitu Israel’ (Vulgate Psalm 113, R 604). Some plainsong and liturgical instrumental music complete his lengthier program. Parrott’s orchestra uses period instruments, but it does not produce as severe a sound as Niquet’s. Parrott’s tempos are more relaxed and his performances more genial and nuanced.

GATENS

Serialism is the perfect musical language for the tenured academic class: falsely intellectual, completely incomprehensible, and utterly unmemorable.

--O’CONNOR

VIVALDI: Recorder Concertos
Dan Laurin; IB1/ Jan Bjoranger
BIS 2035 [SACD] 70 minutes

Crisp, often percussive playing comes from the accompanying ensemble, but the nuance in the interpretation takes away from its hard edges. The strummed theorbo or baroque guitar of Jonas Nordberg contributes more emphasis than the harpsichord of Anna Paradiso. The often straightforward writing permits the freedom with which it’s given here, and that keeps the music fresh. Laurin credits his approach to “an operatic treatment of the concerto form which is rarely brought out in recordings of the recorder concertos”.

Anyone who knows these recorder concertos knows several are stunningly difficult. As a result, bad recordings are hardly ever made. You can check our index for many others, including some I’ve praised in the past few years. Dan Laurin’s reputation precedes him, and here he dazzles and sings. One more reason to get this release is the portrait of all the players across the centerfold, happily holding up their music.

And this program has R 92, a concerto for violin as much as recorder, and not always heard. The woman’s red hair on the cover may need to be explained to a general audience, but you probably know Vivaldi had red hair himself. The last page of the booklet lists several sponsors, but no shampoo makers among them. Perhaps this was a lost opportunity. Make sure you don’t forget yours.

GORMAN

VIVALDI: Concertos & Sinfonias for Strings
L’Archicembalo—Tactus 672259—65:43

The Ryom catalog of Vivaldi’s works lists some 60 items written for strings and continuo that are given, somewhat indiscriminately, the labels of either “concerto” or “sinfonia”. They are generally very brief works for four-part ensemble in three short movements (fast-slow-fast), a form familiar as overtures for Italian Baroque operas. It is thought that Vivaldi may have used some of these in performances of his own operas. At any rate, these pieces stand apart from his output of chamber solo or group concertos as a curious category of their own.

Many of these have been sampled before in Vivaldi programs, and there have even been a few releases exclusively devoted to them. Here we find 13 of them, in a nicely rounded selection. That they are lively examples of Vivaldi’s writing seems to have particularly inspired this ensemble. They have chosen a spare instrumentation—four violins, but only
one each of viola, cello, and violone, plus harpsichord. The doubling of the bass line with the violone (an early double bass) gives particular strength to the lower line. The playing is exceptionally robust and energetic and is aided by sound of analytic clarity and vivid directionality.

This strikes me as the most attractive and effective program of these Vivaldi miniatures I have yet encountered. Whether you listen selectively or just take it all on at once, it is irresistible.

BARKER

VORISEK: Rhapsodies
Biljana Urban, p—Grand Piano 672—75 minutes

How lucky can I be? After I praised Volume 1 of this series (J/F 2015), here is the final volume, and it contains all 12 Rhapsodies of Op. 1.

The short lived Vorisek (1791-1825) arrived in Vienna in 1813 and immediately won the approval of Beethoven with his forward thinking compositions. Caught in music’s between years, his compositions straddle the classical and romantic periods. In that respect he is much like Hummel. The rhapsodies were composed mainly in Prague, before he sought his fortune in Vienna. They are fairly big compositions, and their “most striking legacy are the two Rhapsodies, Op. 79 by Johannes Brahms”, according to the notes.

What one notices immediately are the uneven accents and strange handling of his materials. Early on, here is a composer who clearly points towards Schumann and the romantic world. Each piece is a unique entity and reuses to be locked into a formal straight-jacket rhythmically, harmonically, or melodically. Beethoven mixes with Mendelssohn, Brahms, Chopin. They actually do fit together, if not like a glove, then like some strange, but satisfying mold of a creature with disparate parts.

If the melodic content does not melt you with its beauty, as Chopin often does, the ideas are arresting and unexpected enough to keep you attentive. Each rhapsody is a gem and—no disrespect to pianist Urban—would make interesting fodder for Marc-Andre Hamelin. We are thankful to Biljana Urban for giving us an alternative to Radoslav Kvačil’s three-disc survey. Both are excellent and, if Urban can claim to have the slightly better recording, the differences are relatively small. Kvačil is somewhat smoother and more impetuous. Urban’s perceptive notes add an extra attraction to this release.

BECKER

WAGENSEIL: Cello Concertos in C+A;
Symphonia in C
Christophe Coin; Le Phenix
Coviello 91518—50 minutes

Georg Christoph Wagenseil (1715-77) was one of the early classical composers whose music set the stage for Haydn and Mozart. It is finely crafted and full of beauty and life, yet it has been relatively forgotten over the years. These two cello concertos have been recorded only once before to my knowledge (by Reiner Hochmuth on Thorofon 2068, N/D 1996) in mod style mit lots of vibrato and a rather unvaried rhetorical style in the orchestra that annoyed me a bit, though it was not unmusical otherwise. I consider this new reading better geared to the music. Coin is a fine player and the orchestra is suited to his early music approach. The two concertos are the same ones recorded by Hochmuth. The symphony is different from the C-major one on Hochmuth’s disc. The sound of the recording is clear and warm, as is Hochmuth’s. We could have used more music here. Still, I am glad to have this finely played and recorded program.

D MOORE

WAGNER: Orchestral Excerpts
Overtures: Rienzi, Lohengrin, Tannhauser, Meistersinger, Tristan; Siegfried’s Rhine Journey & Funeral March; Parsifal Good Friday Music; Liebestod
German Opera, Berlin/ Christian Thielemann
Orfeo 8791321 [2CD]

I don’t keep up with recordings of orchestral excerpts from Richard Wagner’s operas because I am more interested in the operas themselves. The only two extensive collections I know are a great series from Otto Klemperer and a decent one from Adrian Boult, both on EMI. Our Wagner Overview mentions many others. It favors Ormandy, Walter, Bernstein, Lopez-Cobos, and Karajan (J/A 2002).

The recording under review is from a 2004 concert in the Vienna Musikverein, the home of the Vienna Philharmonic. It is similar to a program Thielemann recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra that I have not heard. Mr Hansen reviewed that and made several comments (S/O 1998). Die Meistersinger: “hardly a match for the crisp, exuberant Reiner”. Parsifal: Stokowski and Walter find “a rich glowing orchestral tone far beyond what Thielemann and the Philadelphians draw from this music”. Lohengrin: “doesn’t shimmer with the aching beauty and ethereal glow of Bruno Walter’s”. The Overview added, “Good, clean, gimmickless performances without much warmth or depth or originality”. Both were crit-
ical of the Philadelphia Orchestra, which Hansen said sounds “so ordinary, so plain”.

To a large extent, Hansen’s observations apply to the conducting of the recording under review. I have not heard a Thielemann recording of a Wagner opera; but from the evidence here, he is from the “loving” and sweeping school of Wagner interpretation. Another way to think of it is lyrical and expansive, as opposed to weighty and muscular. His tempos are slow—sometimes very slow—and textures are blended to the point of engulfment in a bath of a large, lush string section. What is missing is bite.

Hansen’s remarks apply to this Meistersinger Overture. Rienzi Overture is mostly slow, noble, and lacking in incisiveness, though the dancing Weberian section is fast. Tannhaeuser Overture sometimes seems to hurry through a phrase, but that big string section makes its mark in the complex passages, as does an excellent, slow clarinet solo. The trombones are blasty in their first rendition of the Pilgrims’ song but do better at the end when the meter broadens from 3/4 to 2/2. Thielemann’s slow, flowing approach to Siegfried’s Rhine Journey portrays an image of that river very well. His Funeral March is more funereal than march—to impressive effect. The Tristan pieces benefit from Thielemann’s slow, leisurely tempos, but the lack of bass power is a drawback. And so it goes.

My guess is that the Orchestra of the German Opera served Thielemann better than Philadelphia did, particularly with those warm Germanic strings and excellent woodwinds. The horns and low brass are set back and sit in the texture more than they come out of it. German rotary trumpets tend to sound mellower than their piston valve counterparts, but here they sound raw in a way that calls attention to itself. The recording may be a major factor. It is distant, not all that clear or detailed, and lacking in bass. You can wallow in it for a while, but those elements get old. This might have been a grand concert in the Musikverein, but for home listening the Overview’s recommendations are safer.

WEINER: Ballad; Csongor & Tunde
Mate Szucs, va; Jubilate Girls’ Choir; Budapest Symphony/Valeria Csanyi
Naxos 573 491—67 minutes
The Hungarian Leo Weiner (1885-1960) was a good composer and educator. His students included Antal Dorati, Janos Starker, and Georg Solti. As a composer, he wrote in an approachable language with, as one would expect, Hungarian seasoning. His Rhapsody can use either a clarinet or viola soloist. This performance has the latter, to its benefit: the writing skillfully shows off the special areas of that instrument’s range. It’s an ingratiating piece; the melodies combine imaginative ornamentation over a substructure of real backbone.

Apparently, Weiner regarded the ballet Csongor and Tunde his magnum opus. I’ve read he also said that about his epic 65-minute tone poem Toldi, (Hungaroton 32608). The ballet scenario comes from the poet Mihaly Vorosmarty, whose ode to Liszt led him to compose the symphonic poem Hungaria.

In 1913 Weiner wrote incidental music to Vorosmarty’s play and in 1916, a suite (Hungaroton 31740, M/J 1998). He made a ballet from it in 1930, revising it for a final time in 1959, which is the version here. Csongor and Tunde are a prince and a fairy who fall in love. Their lives are complicated in an involved rigmarole by a witch, Mirigy, three goblins and Leder, Mirigy’s daughter who also loves Csongor. As is SOP in fairy tales, love eventually wins out, a women’s chorus of fairies singing its praises.

Weiner’s music is consistently appealing and tuneful, the colorful scoring using the women’s chorus especially. Being a ballet, there’s naturally some break in continuity and sometimes pantomimic bits, but Weiner keeps this to a minimum. Overall, the work sounds like a superior movie score—not a knock in my book. Both recorded sound and playing are good. Maestra Csanys keeps a firm grip on proceedings.

WEINGARTNER: Die Dorfschule; see ORFF
WILDER: 4 Songs; Suites
Elizabeth Pfaffle, hn; Jonathan Fowler, tu; Ron Stabinsky, p—Mark 50890—48 minutes
As someone who knew Alec Wilder (1907-80) and was the grateful recipient of one of his works, I perk up when a new Wilder recording comes my way. It doesn’t happen often, but it happens much more often than it did a while back. Here two West Chester University colleagues—horn player Elizabeth Pfaffle and tuba player Jonathan Fowler—team with versatile pianist Ron Stabinsky in an unusual program of Wilder pieces.

Four Songs of Alec Wilder is a collection by four arrangers: Wilder’s most famous song, ‘I’ll Be Around’ (arranged by Max Siegel), ‘Where is the One’ (Dave Miller), ‘The Winter of My Discontent’ (Zachary Fischer), and ‘I See It Now’ (Andrew Zozvian). They are far from simple song settings; rather, they are carefully
crafted compositions based on the songs. Most striking is the dark and dramatic 'Winter'.

Also included are the Suite for horn, tuba, and piano (1971) and a suite of 12 horn-tuba duets (1978). All of the music is played with skill, lots of heart, and conviction. Ms Pfaffle's horn tone seems a bit thin at first, especially next to Fowler's big tuba sound, but it didn't take long for their committed playing to win me over. And the excellent pianist walks the ideal line between the classical and jazz styles.

KILPATRICK

WOLF-FERRARI: Il Campiello
Roberta Canzian (Gasparina), Diana Mian (Lucieta), Oatrizia Cigna (Gnese), Cristina Sogmeister (Orsola), Max Rene Cosotti (Dona Cate Panziana), Nicola Pamio (Pasquin Polegana), Giacomo Patri (Zoreto), Maurozio Leoni (Astolfi), Italo Proferisce (Anzoleto); Veneto Philharmonic/ Stefano Romani—Bongiovanni 2478 [2CD] 108 min

Just as stage performances of Wolf-Ferrari's operas are rare, so are recordings of his music. I reviewed the Fonit Cetra recording of Il Campiello from Trieste (N/D 1993). It is excellent. Now 15 years later we have a new recording.

Wolf-Ferrari was inspired by the music of Mozart and by the 18th Century Italian dramma giocosa. For this particular expression of his inspiration he set the text of a play by Carlo Goldoni (as arranged by Mario Ghisalberti). It had a favorable premiere at La Scala, February 11, 1936, made the rounds of a few European opera houses, then passed from view. While this isn’t a work I would want to see with great frequency, it is certainly worth occasional revival.

Il Campiello actually means The Town Square, but the opera should more appropriately be called The Arguing Neighbors. It’s a rollicking comedy with a who-loves-whom attitude, confusion supreme, and nobody agreeing with anybody else until the happy ending. There are few set pieces, mainly short melodic fragments imbued with a gentle melancholy. It’s all elegant and graceful. The music is apt, appropriate, enjoyable at the moment, but finally not memorable.

It all begins with a tender, romantic prelude, so evocative of a lazy Venetian afternoon. We are confronted with Gasparina, "an affected young lady" who pronounces the letter S as Z. After confrontations, confusion, and chaos, a brief ballet of cooks and servants with a steaming bowl of polenta at an off-stage banquet finally gives the audience some memorable tunes.

The tempo picks up considerably with Act 2. More concertato ensemble singing speeds up the action and the enjoyment too. Concluding Act 2 another vocal ballet (for all the soloists and chorus), sort of a dance contest for singers, brings a large measure of tunefulness. Two tenors en travesti as old women actually sing well without the broad distortion it would be so easy to slip into. A brief arietta-lament for Lucieta leads to a touching ensemble. The comedy concludes with a farewell aria for Gasparina full of delicate niceties. All through the show delightful characterizations are realized by the entire cast, a wide variety of types—old, young, smart, stupid—a gamut of interesting people.

The date and exact location of the performance is not given. Guessing from the orchestra's name it must have been somewhere in the Venice area. The earlier recording was from nearby Trieste. This new one is almost the other's equal. An Italian-English libretto is included.

PARSONS

WORTHINGTON: Orchestral Pieces
Czech Philharmonic/ Robert Ian Winstin; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky; Russian National Philharmonic/ Ovidiu Marinescu
Navona 6025—53 minutes

Seven years ago I reviewed a set of dreamlike piano pieces by American composer Rain Worthington that grabbed my attention and wouldn’t let go (North/South 1049, J/F 2010, p 270). Here was a composer who was able to write short pieces that stretched time mysteriously and seductively, who was not afraid of melody, and who used minimalism to maximum effect. Now an album devoted entirely to Worthington’s orchestral music has arrived, and it too is beguiling.

Worthington has an instantly recognizable sound, an austere sensuality not quite like anyone else, though there is a Hovhaness-like Eastern quality to some of her intervals and a Satie-like repose in her chordal loopings and repetitions. Her orchestral pieces (at least the ones here) share certain signatures such as trembling strings, spare but imaginative percussion, floating wind chorales, and a tendency to ascend toward a culminating minor-key chord that offers closure without real resolution. Worthington describes one of piano pieces, ‘Always, Almost’, as expressing yearnings that “remain unfulfilled, seemingly out of reach”, and that describes these orchestral works as well.

Indeed, the seven pieces in this album (from 2001-13) have such a similar profile that they resemble seven sequences in a single, restless dream. In ‘Of Time Remembered’, chromatic strings drift downward and a lonely tuba grows under percussion tinkling in elegant patterns. In ‘Yet Still Night: A Nocturne for Orchestra’, insistent timpani sound a heart-beat under gently whirring strings. There is a

American Record Guide
deep interiority to this music, which seems directly in touch with a private dreamworld that the composer makes universal. 'Tracing a Dream', which flies into the listener's imagination like a dark bird, reminds me of the poet Theodore Roethke's 'Night Crow: "Over the gulls of dream/Flew a tremendous bird/Further and further away/Into a moonless black/Deep in the brain, far back." Most of the pieces sustain a single, rapt mood, but 'Shredding Glass' is more varied, balancing sinister orchestral chords against a harp soliloquy of singular delicacy.

The performances here by three Eastern European orchestras all sound atmospheric and committed, but the Czech Philharmonic is a more refined ensemble than the Moravian Philharmonic or the Russian Philharmonic, and it shows in the all-important wind playing. Certainly the performances are good enough to introduce listeners to a composer of considerable imagination, emotional expressiveness, and poetic sensibility—one who needs to be heard more widely.

SULLIVAN

YOUNG: The Uninvited; Gulliver's Travels; The Greatest Show on Earth; Bright Leaf
Moscow Symphony/William Stromberg
Naxos 573368—70 minutes

This recording was originally released in 1998 on Marco Polo. Victor Young was probably Hollywood’s most prolific composer, scoring more than 350 films as well as composing several concert pieces and popular songs. He had his own orchestra during a 30 year creative period. He is probably best known for his score to Around the World in 80 Days (1956). The Decca soundtrack LP, succeeded by MCA CD 31134 (one of my desert island recordings) was a best-seller and available for over 30 years. It’s currently available in an expanded version on the Canadian label Hit Parade (13502).

Young’s other well known films include Samson and Delilah (1949), For Whom the Bell Tolls (1943)—reportedly the first film music recording ever released, Johnny Guitar (1954), Golden Earrings (1947), the instrumental score for Three Coins In the Fountain (1954), and several Cecil B DeMille epics. The bulk of his output was as house composer for Paramount pictures from the 1930s to the 1950s. His health declined in the mid-1950s (he recommended Elmer Bernstein for DeMille’s Ten Commandments) (1956). He was only 56 when he died from a heart attack in 1956.

Young is often regarded as a good workman and overlooked as a major film composer. With so much output, he often wrote some excellent music for notable films, some good music for unforgettable films, and some uninspired music for other films. He developed a signature style with a heavy emphasis on strings where a single note might be held for several bars while an underlying theme is played. This added grandeur and gave the score a sweeping, cinematic sound. He also used short atonal brass sections to point up an important movie moment. Above all, he could write melodic scores, often with melodies that became popular songs (including 'Around the World'). Another excellent example of his use of melody is the beautiful India Countryside music from that film.

The Uninvited (1944) is considered one of Young’s best scores and is a good example of his style. He wrote a ballad that became the popular romantic song 'Stella by Starlight'; it was used in the film in various ways to emphasize the growing romance between some of the characters. He also wrote menacing music (those short brass sections) to add atmosphere to this haunted house ghost film, and comic music to add a light-hearted tone when required. Repeated hearings of The Uninvited score reveal Young’s expert skills.

The ‘March’ from DeMille’s Greatest Show on Earth (1953) opens the film and is a spectacular and lyrical circus march. The background music to 1939’s Gulliver’s Travels is used in the dramatic scenes in the animated film (other composers wrote the songs). Separate from the film, the music is skillful if not particularly memorable. The music to Bright Leaf (1950), a rather turgid movie about tobacco growers, sounds like imitation Max Steiner (who originally had the assignment). There’s not much Young can do based on the scenario.

John Morgan arranged most of the score reconstructions where the original arrangements could not be found. William Stromberg conducts all the music; the playing and the sound are excellent. The booklet is the same as the Marco Polo release, with lots of information about the films, the music, and Young’s biography, but you’ll need a magnifying glass to read the incredibly small type. This is a good introduction to this composer.

FISCH

Ysaye: 2-Violin Sonata;

Prokofieff: 2-Violin Sonata;

Manzoli: Petite Suite

PimaDuo—Dynamic 7738—60 minutes

PimaDuo is violinists Matteo and Maddalena Pippa.

Eugene Ysaye’s Sonata for Two Violins was written in his earlier style before he wrote the six solo sonatas. Earlier Ysaye is Symbolist in character, with long melodic lines and very chromatic harmonies. I like the Ysaye of the six
solo sonatas, but I find this work uninteresting and a bit of a chore to listen to at 31 minutes. I don’t like the frequent close harmonies and the fact that two violins just don’t supply enough tonal contrast.

The Prokofieff Sonata is a bit better written, but I still don’t like the sound of two violins. The Petite Suite Pour Tonio Cavilla was composed in 2011-12 for PimaDuo. It is an avant-garde work, apparently atonal, and too disjointed for me to enjoy. Avant-garde techniques, no matter how startling, are simply not enough to make a composition interesting. The Pippas are fine, musical violinists. I wish they had been recorded in sound that isn’t so dull and boxy.

Zemlinsky: Clarinet Trio; see BRAHMS

Zemlinsky: Songs of Night & Dream; Chamber Symphony
Jenny Carlstedt, mz; La Pland Chamber Orchestra/ John Storgards—Ondine 1272—62 minutes

The works on this album, at least in their format here, are all premiere recordings. Composer Richard Dunser arranged them for chamber orchestra.

He selected the songs by topic—thay all deal with night, loneliness, and dreams—from Zemlinsky’s earlier lieder. Every one is a melodic beauty, even more polished in Dunser’s scoring. Though he uses small forces, his accompaniment seems to put exactly the right emphasis on key syllables, whether through color, harmony, or both. The songs themselves are Mahlerian, especially in how compactly Zemlinsky expresses his emotional message.

Mezzo Jenny Carlstedt makes a solid case for the music, singing with beauty of tone and a clear sympathy with the words. She movingly expresses varied emotional stases.

The Chamber Symphony is actually an arrangement of his Quartet 2 for roughly the same forces Schoenberg used in his Chamber Symphony 1. Dunser felt the quartet cried out for orchestral scoring. The notes could be clearer on instrumental specifics, but the results are effective. The Zemlinsky isn’t as relentlessly contrapuntal as Schoenberg’s Chamber Symphony; it’s often a more relaxed piece. Some of my response is personal; the Schoenberg in its chamber dress always strikes me as 20 minutes of steadily mounting hysteria as five strings try to balance double that number of winds. The Zemlinsky has its share of highly emotional passages, but some of the music is even whimsical. Still, there are times when it’s apparent how the idioms of the two composers play fast and loose with tonality.

Dunser’s work doesn’t sound like an arrangement. If you’d never heard the original, I doubt if you’d wonder how the symphony would sound as a quartet. Storgards paces the music flexibly while maintaining its coherence.

Ondine’s sound is, per normal, first-rate. If like me you can never get enough of fin-de-siecle Vienna, expect another treat.

O’CONNOR

ZIEHRER: Die Landstreicher
Daniele Behle (Roland); Thomas Dewald (August Fliederbusch); Maria Leyer (Berta Fliederbusch); Karl Fath (Gratwohl); Anneli Pfeffer (Anna Gratwohl); Cologne Radio/ Helmut Froschauer
Capriccio 5261—56 minutes

Carl Ziehrer wrote several popular operettas around the turn of the 20th Century, of which Die Landstreicher (The Vagabonds, 1899) is the only one still occasionally performed. Ziehrer was celebrated for writing many popular waltzes, marches, and polkas, and had his own orchestra and band that played at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. In 1907 he was appointed by Emperor Franz Joseph as the Court Ball Music Director, a position that had previously been held only by members of the Strauss family. Ziehrer’s music is compelling, constantly active, and melodiuous. Die Landstreicher has several waltzes, gallops, and polkas that are performed with gusto by the cast and chorus. This is only musical highlights with no dialog.

The plot is interesting. The leads, August and Berta Fliederbusch, are thieves. They have stolen a pearl necklace which they hide, but it is then stolen by others, replaced with a fake pearl necklace, then replaced with the real thing. Or is it real or fake? I thought the plot would slowly reveal itself, but Ziehrer accelerates the action to almost breakneck speeds with fast temps. The 56-minute score, including an overture and three acts, zips by so quickly I was surprised when it ended. I wanted more. The performances are effervescent.

If you like operettas that move along briskly and have a very melodious score, you’ll enjoy this. The English and German booklet only offers a brief outline of the plot, a biography of Ziehrer’s life, and performer information—no libretto or translations. The sound is excellent.

FISCH

WORD POLICE: ILLITERACY
We were eating at an expensive and sophisticated restaurant. Within one minute we heard the waitress at the next table say “we are one of the only restaurants that offers that” and a waiter nearby ask people, “Is everything tasting well?” This is in one minute n one day.
Collections

Pollini & Abbado DG Recordings

BEETHOVEN, BRAHMS, SCHOENBERG, SCHUMANN: Piano Concertos, all; BEETHOVEN: Choral Fantasy; BARTOK: Concertos 1+2; NONO: Como Una Ola de Fuerza y Luz

Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio, Chicago Symphony

DG 482 1358 [8CD] 460 minutes

This is the latest repackaging of concert recordings made from 1973 (Nono) to 1997 (Brahms 1), and can be had for about $30—a great bargain. Pollini’s pianism is masculine, leonine, spontaneous, with an especially virile left hand, yet he never bangs. Wherever Pollini got a reputation as a cerebral performer, it wasn’t from anything here. Slow movements don’t dawdle, but are never rushed or impatient.

All the orchestras under Abbado are gutsy, hot-blooded, alert and responsive to him, an ideal match to Pollini, conductor and pianist in full agreement on how these pieces go. I like more poetry and delicacy in the Brahms (like the great Gilels) and Schumann, but I appreciate these forthright and virtuosic interpretations. Pollini hums a bit in the Beethoven concertos, but not elsewhere; and he plays Beethoven’s long, audacious cadenzas. Audiences applaud after each Beethoven concerto, but are otherwise silent.

Since this is the complete Pollini/Abbado DG recordings, we get the Brahms 2 twice, recorded 20 years apart, in 1976 with the Vienna Philharmonic and 1995 with the Berlin Philharmonic, and they’re almost identical—even the timings for each movement. The 1976 analog recording is better—warmer and richer; the later digital is clearer but also a bit shrill, and forte strings radiate an uncomfortable glare.

Pollini is just as convincing in the modernist works of Bartok, Schoenberg, and Nono, again intense and unrestrained, not the least bit analytical or coolly calculated—he approaches these works warmly, expressively, not as experiments in avant-garde composition.

If you already have these on CD, they have not been remastered. This package is a slim box about one inch thick, each disc in its own cardboard slip, so it won’t take up much space on your shelf.

Russian Dances

TCHAIKOVSKY: Swan Lake Excerpts; GLAZOUNOV: 2 Concert Waltzes; SHOSTAKOVICH: Age of Gold Suite; STRAVINSKY: Circus Polka

Suisse Romande Orchestra/ Kazuki Yamada

Pentatone 5186557 [SACD] 71 minutes

Although many Pentatone releases are reissues of items from the old Philips catalog, like the Stokowski Tchaikovsky program reviewed in this issue, this recording is new, made in July of last year. It’s a grab-bag of late 19th and early 20th Century music; if the program appeals to you, the performances are likely to satisfy you. The orchestra was recorded a lot in the 1950s and 60s under its founder, Ernest Ansermet, but far less often these days. They play very well for Mr Yamada, without some of the technical limitations of the old SRO, though perhaps with a bit more reserve than one would like to hear in this music.

The Swan Lake excerpts are the standard suite of loose chunks: the Act I-to-II Scene, the Act I waltz, Dance of the Cygnets, the Andante from the Act II Grand Pas de Deux, and the Czardas, Spanish Dance, Neapolitan Dance, and Mazurka from Act III—not even a bit of the finale of Act IV to cap it off and give some dramatic closure. Yamada does not take the opportunity to delve into any dramatic or interpretive depth, but I can find no real fault in any aspect of the performances—sensible tempos, faster than one would hear in a staged performance of the ballet, and playing that brings out the evergreen details of Tchaikovsky’s orchestration.

Sturdy and well-paced as the performance is, Ormandy (Sony), Stokowski (Decca), Jarvi (Chandos, complete ballet), and Dorati (Mercury) plumb much more musical and dramatic depth from the score. The present program, as a whole, is meant to be more of a pops concert sampler, so perhaps I expected too much.

The Glazounov Concert Waltzes are fairly well known, at least among aficionados of Russian romantic music not by Tchaikovsky. I hardly dislike them as music, though I have to say they’re not works I have ever eagerly sought out. If they do show up on a program, any competent performance will satisfy me, and these certainly do.

The Chicago Symphony/Stokowski (RCA) is of course a classic recording of the suite from Shostakovich’s ballet The Age of Gold, and this performance doesn’t match it. Stokie conveyed a lot more cheeky irreverence than Yamada, who makes the music rather square and plain. He keeps it lively, but where’s the

WRIGHT

Music, the greatest good that mortals know and all we have of heaven below.

--Addison

July/August 2016
naughty wit? It’s not surprising that today’s Suisse Romande Orchestra is not the Chicago Symphony of 1966, but what is surprising is how close it comes. The quality of orchestral playing all over the world has risen a lot in the last half century.

If you think other recordings of Stravinsky’s Circus Polka get carried away and become too crass and noisy, Yamada’s straight and sober account may be just what you want.

The recorded sound is impressive, but not quite demo quality. There’s plenty of firm, solid, un mushy bass and good orchestral detail; but the strings are a little gray and lacking in sheen. I don’t know if that comes from the engineering or it represents the actual sound of the orchestra. It’s only a matter of a slight degree, but the Stokowski disc—from 40-year-old analog tapes—is far richer, fuller, and more vibrant.

As I said at the beginning, if the program grabs you, go for it, but... If you want to hear this orchestra in Russian music, led by a conductor of unique talent who was music director for Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes from 1915 to 1923, you may want to spend the money instead on a Brilliant box called Tchaikovsky: The Great Ballets with the SRO and Ansermet.

The sound is not quite as good as Pentatone’s, but in the long run it may bring more musical satisfaction.

HANSEN

Young Spirit of Serenades
Bruch, Kilar, Mozart, Tchaikovsky
German String Philharmonic/ Wolfgang Henrich
Genuin 16414—71 minutes

The Tchaikovsky is almost 30 minutes, and it is not like any other recording. Does it make sense to say that it is very conducted? By that I mean that no one would play it this way—no group of musicians left to their own devices. It is heavily interpreted; nothing is natural in flow; nothing is left alone. It also never sounds Russian—even the famous waltz sounds pris-sy, not earthy enough. It is probably good that the conductor has ideas about the music and isn’t just going thru the motions, but I’m afraid his ideas are not compatible with mine. I have never heard a better recording than Svetlanov’s, and this is nothing like that—but nothing like anyone else’s either.

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik is rather German and a bit perfunctory. It’s not bad, but I think it lacks charm, and I am convinced that Mozart must have charm.

The Bruch Swedish Serenade is very good music from 1916—richly romantic. But the CPO recording (777385, M/J 2009) is warmer and more appealing to me—maybe it’s the sound. It’s a 15-minute work in five movements, and the Andante is a little slower on CPO—which I like. The other works on the CPO are a wretched and dull Russian Suite and two Swedish dance suites that are not easy to find together but that Mr Haller felt were not done well.

The leaves the 9-minute Kilar piece, called Orana. It is a kind of minimalism tied to folk rhythms. Both can be monotonous, and they are here. Yes, it gets wild and frenetic; but that is where you would be watching the folk dancers and ignoring the music—and there are no dancers here.

This is a good orchestra, based, I think, around Dresden and Eastern Germany. It is not a small group with a thin sound, but a large group with a robust sound. I was glad to hear them, and I would go to hear them in concert. I just have no interest in hearing this program again.

VROON

Stokowski Transcriptions
Bournemouth Symphony/ Jose Serebrier
Naxos 578305—61:28

All reissues. This is a sampling of discs reviewed in five ARG issues (S/O 2005, J/F 2006, N/D 2006, J/F 2008, M/J 2009). Steven Haller really liked the Moussorgsky disc and the Tchaikovsky ‘Solitude’ and Slavic Christmas music. I reviewed the Bach transcriptions, suggesting that the Stokowski-conducted ones were better than Serebrier’s—still so. The Wagner pieces (here ‘Entrance of the Gods’ and ‘Ride of the Valkyries’) were reviewed by Mark Koldys, who thought (as I do) that Stokowski himself did them better, and the Phase 4 sound was as good as this. Tom Godell sounded the same note when he reviewed another Naxos album of mostly Bach transcriptions—pale imitations of the master himself. Carl Bauman reviewed the same Moussorgsky as Mr Haller—and just as enthusiastically. That reissue was in SACD sound—one of the few Naxos produced.

This selection is too mixed to be of interest to me, and the things I really like here I liked better when Stokowski himself conducted them. But if the original discs didn’t attract your attention (or the set of four with Serebrier’s comments) you may want to sample them here.

VROON

American Romantics
Gowanus Arts Ensemble/ Reuben Blundell
New Focus 166 — 56 minutes

This includes first recordings of underperformed music by immigrant and US composers at the turn of the 20th Century. Many of
the composers were born in Europe and were heavily influenced by the European romantic and Pastoral schools. If you like Delius’s diaphanous, pastoral music, you’ll enjoy this recording. The subject matter is American; some of the music is based on New England folk songs or Native American themes. The 12 selections, by almost as many composers, are dreamlike and very pleasant to listen to. The playing by the all-string Gowanus Arts ensemble makes the most of these beautiful short pieces.

Most evocative of the pastoral themes are three selections by Carl Busch from his Four North American Legends. The ‘Omaha Indian Love Song’ opens the program, and it is enchanting. There are waves of gorgeous music that sound similar to Delius’s Summer Night on the River. Other music in a similar style includes Paul Miersch’s Pleasant Memories, Carl Hillman’s ‘Lullaby’, and Frederick Converse’s Serenade.

Not everything is dreamlike: Horatio Parker’s Scherzo, Eugene Dedé’s Bees and Bumblebees, and two selections by Arthur Foote, ‘Air’ and ‘Gavotte’, are more energetic. Foote and Parker are the only composers I was familiar with and these new recordings are an important addition to their discography.

I was completely mesmerized by this lovely recording, one of the best I’ve heard in some time. The selections are carefully chosen, they are all interesting, have beautiful melodies, and are expertly performed. The sound is excellent. The booklet has explanations about the composers and selections.

BYRON ADAMS wrote his Serenade for nine instruments in honor of Karel Husa, his teacher at Cornell. It is tonal, warm, and summy, and it sounds like a British pastoral piece. The first two movements get a little long for the material, but the work as a whole is refreshing. The Caplan is an unremarkable piece for strings. Corigliano’s gentle, nostalgic Snapshot: Circa 1909 was written for string quartet, but here it’s played by string orchestra.

Piston’s three-movement Divertimento is similar in tone to the Adams, but the more restrained emotions, the dissonances, and the counterpoint make it rather academic. It would be more interesting if weren’t so spread between intellect, warmth, humor, and counterpoint. Zwilich’s piece is a drama, and the opening needs to be imbued with more subtlety and mystery than it is here. The Sinfonietta plays better in the livelier variations, but the writing is rhythmically uncreative, and Zwilich relies too much on an ominous, unchanging three-note figure.

These are concert performances, but the producers were merciful enough to cut out the applause, and audience noises are few. The sound is fine; notes are in English.

The London Symphony’s Panufnik Composers Scheme is a good idea, one that other orchestras could and should copy. Each year for the past 10, six composers were chosen to write three-minute pieces, and the orchestra had a workshop on them and performed them. Some of the works on the program are longer, later commissions.

Colin Matthews is the director of the program, and for the Panufnik Variations, he orchestrated Andrzej Panufnik’s ‘Universal Prayer’ and wrote Variations 1 and 11. Several variations are stereotypical noisy neo-tonal pieces, heavy on the percussion. Some are mellower, and Anjula Semmens’s Variation 9 is luxurious.

The rest of the pieces are generally atmospheric and expressive, but there’s an inescapable feeling that the composers are experimenting, not creating. Leo Chadburn’s Brown Leather Sofa stands out, simple but deep. This is a work that sounds fully formed, as if it’s a point of arrival for Chadburn. I’d imagine the composers are happy to have fine performances of their music, but the audience for this release is going to be pretty tiny.

Pinchas Zukerman

This is mostly pretty lush music, beautifully played. Mr Zukerman plays the violin in The Lark Ascending and in ‘Salut d’Amour’ and the viola in ‘In Moonlight’—a first recording of a setting from In the South. The other miniatures here are the two chansons—Matin and Nuit. He conducts all the pieces. The Tallis Fantasia has to be played with the volume up high to hear the gorgeous string sound to best advantage, but most of the others can be heard at quieter levels.

There have been a lot of excellent record-
ings of the Tallis piece, and I am fondest of ones by Ormandy, Slatkin, Stokowski, and Atlas. This belongs among the best, and the rest of the program is very compatible. I have a Chandos recording of Elgar miniatures led by Norman Del Mar that I still enjoy—a much wider selection than the few we have here (M/J 1992). Barbierioli and other great English conductors made wonderful recordings of the Serenade for Strings and the Introduction and Allegro. (I have never cared for the latter, but I know some people really like it. It seems too abstract to me.) If you like Zukerman as much as I do, he will not let you down in this beautiful recording.

**Britannia**

BRITTEN: Cello Sonata; KNUSSEN: Prayer Bell Sketch; WATKINS: 2 Chorales; WOOLRICH: Farewell; BIRTWISTLE: Movement; TURNAGE: Slide Stride

Ulrike Nahmacher, Martin Roth, v; Werner Dickel, va; Susanne Muller-Hornbach, vc; Gerald Hacke, cl; Florence Millet, p

Craig Foundation—59 minutes

Knussen’s ‘Prayer Bell Sketch’ is a piano piece written in memory of Takemitsu; the title describes it well, and it’s effective if not enduring. Huw Watkins’s Two Chorales are for clarinet and piano, and they’re fairly dissonant but expressive and easily grasped. I particularly like the sober, churchly atmosphere of the second one. A Farewell, by John Woolrich, is for clarinet, viola, and piano. As the composer himself said, it is “quiet and oblique,” though the opening has some fast-moving figures. Much of the time the instruments play a few notes and then hold the last one; this is usually an annoying affectation, but it works well here.

Birtwistle’s Movement for string quartet is like bright, stabbing lights. Turnage’s Slide Stride is an aggressive, cluttered piano quintet with a marked jazz influence. The Britten is given a vigorous if cool reading; in fact, the performances overall are on the chilly side. I’ll be the first to admit that the sonata’s allure escapes me entirely—most Britten does—but the finale smacks more of busy-ness than of vitality. The Turnage sounds constrained; it should be more freewheeling—some of the stride-jazz parts are heavy and stodgy. The sound is good if a little recessed; notes are in English and German.

**Danzas**

Dora Deliyska, Luca Monti, p; Nora Romanoff-Schwarzberg, Yury Revich, Florian Willeitner, v; Georg Breinschmid, db

Gramola 99099 — 61 minutes

The theme is music written as dances, based on dances, or re-arranged as dances. The variety is very interesting, though not every piece will appeal to everyone. What makes the program interesting is the excellent performances. Even if you don’t like some of the music, you won’t question the commitment and affinity for the music the performers have—in particular, Ms Deliyska.

Greg Anderson’s Carmen Fantasy is based on music from Bizet’s opera. Many composers have re-arranged or re-thought Bizet’s music over the years, but these arrangements are probably the most inventive I’ve heard. Concentrating on four famous dances from the opera, including the ‘Habanera’ and ‘Danse Bohème’, Anderson’s arrangements are constantly changing and always interesting. This 15 minutes makes the disc worth purchasing.

The CD has a lot more to offer, including Piazzolla’s interesting if somewhat abstract Grand Tango for violin and piano. I can’t imagine anyone dancing to it. Then there are two collections by Bela Bartok: Three Hungarian Folksongs from the Czik District and Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm, both in his semi-abstract style. If you’ve never heard of the Bulgarian dances, they are actually arrangements for solo piano of selections from Mikrokosmos, Series 7. They mostly sound like someone playing scales. If you took piano lessons as a kid, you probably played some part of Mikrokosmos as piano exercises. Until now, I never knew there was such a thing as “Bulgarian Rhythm”.

Also included is Stravinsky’s ‘Tango’, arranged for piano and violin by Samuel Dushkin. Ginastera is represented by his alternately cacophonous and melodic four Danzas Argentinas. Ms Deliyska plays the challenging and interesting music very effectively. Finally, there is ‘Balkandrom’ by George Breinschmid (one of the performers), which sounds like an abstract free-for-all with little musical direction.

Most of the program is very good and well played, with excellent sound.
In 1993 at the Brussels Conservatory, a group of students—a string quintet, flutist, clarinetist, and harpist—created Oxalys. Here’s a condensed quote from the 2015 liner notes that don’t have an ounce of hyperbole: “The fact that we have since then each built our own careers has done nothing to diminish the experience and artistry we have continued to invest unremittingly in Oxalys, our first love. It is that dedication that enables us to take risks that are perhaps beyond the reach of more occasional ensembles.”

"Journey to a Land of Tenderness and Fright" opens with the Debussy, and the performance says everything you need to know. I can’t imagine another recording as good as this; it presents Debussy’s truly radical ideas with such seductive beauty. The playing is warm, sumptuous, flowing, balanced, highly expressive, and integrated. The engineering is superb. Every expression mark registers: for example, vil et joyeux is exactly that—light but rhythmic, and even the marque (emphasis) over an accompanying figure in a gracieux passage is given just the right accent. All this is done not in a slavish manner but in a way that reveals a rainbow of colors from just three instruments. In II the viola and flute evolve out of one another seamlessly, almost hauntingly, revealing a ripple of colors. And, indeed, colors are precisely what this album—a study of impressionism—is all about.

Frank Martin’s Couleurs du Temps is a six-minute pavane with echoes of Ravel’s famous one. Here Oxalys adds a string bass to a string quartet. Their tuning and blend are incomparable, and their balances make the music seem like a constant revelation.

André Caplet’s 18-minute Fantastic Tale was inspired by Edgar Allen Poe’s “Masque of the Red Death.” This is the work where Annie Lavoisier’s harp really shines. Tone poem, ballet, and movie music are wrapped into the sound world of Ravel with a bit of Schoenberg’s Five Orchestral Pieces (Caplet conducted its Paris premiere). There are two versions of this work, one for harp and orchestra (originally called Legende) and this one for harp and string quartet; both were published around 1924, and I can’t determine which came first. Despite Lavoisier’s exceptional playing, this work is the least satisfying on the album because it comes across as the least integrated. For a complete experience, try the stunning orchestral version with harpist Elizabeth Hainen and Michael Stern’s IRIS Orchestra on the Avie album called “Les Amis”. Georges Pretre’s EMI recording with the Monte Carlo Philharmonic is awful.

Pierné’s Free Variations and Finale is a veritable waltz (think La Valse) for flute, harp, and strings. The performance is so lyrical, seamless, and floating that it took me four minutes to realize that much of it is in 5/4, not 3/4 time. Libres indeed! Journey to a Tender Land for flute, violin, viola, cello, and harp also is a sort of short theme-and-variations—not the most memorable selection on the album, but the tuning of the five instruments is absolutely exquisite!

Joseph Jongen’s Two Pieces, Op. 80, are for flute, cello, and harp (not to be confused with Two Pieces for violin, cello, and piano). In the first piece—slow, pastoral, expansive, yet soothing—the warm mellow sounds are like perfumes in the night. Indeed, the breadth of tone colors from Toon Fret’s flute are nonpareil. The second piece is a bright, fleet Allegro, performed here with a buoyant perpetual motion kind of pulse where lyricism is paramount. Once again, the array of colors, especially in the liquid quasi-cadenza interlude, is remarkable.

Only when I was finished writing this review did I notice that this album, released in 2015, was recorded in 2004, just a year after Oxalys formed! (It was then released on Fuga Libera 511 in 2005.) I can only hope that, if they were this incomparable as students, they remain as good in 2016.

**FRENCH**

**Portuguese Trios**

by Costa, Carneyro, Azevedo

Trio Pangea—Naxos 573402—60 minutes

The best music and performance here is of the last work on the album, the Hukvaldy Trio (2013) by Sergio Azevedo (b 1968). It’s based on 1912 piano fragments by Leos Janacek. Janacek’s distinct melodic and harmonic contours really do define the stylistic character of this one-movement 20-minute highly dramatic work. The writing is so strong and eloquent for the violin, cello, and piano that each of them is consistently interesting, while blending together perfectly.

This I found rather startling because the music, the performances, and especially the engineering of the other two works is really inferior. Each of the four movements in Trio, Op. 15 (1937), by Luis Costa (1879-1960) is based on motifs so narrow that they quickly wear out their welcome, despite the 19th-Century romantic style of writing. Also, the music is stuck mostly in the midrange, making it seem even duller. In the Opus 24 Trio (1928),...
Music is the answer to the mystery of life. It is the most profound of all the arts; it expresses the deepest thoughts of life and being in simple language that nonetheless cannot be translated.

—Schopenhauer

Perfect Landing
Bach, Mozart, Henderson, Crespo, Hudson, Holborne, Lara, Padilla, Tarrega
Canadian Brass
Opening Day 7450—52 minutes

Canadian Brass keeps on keeping on, with tubist Charles Daellenbach the only remaining founder, but with the newer members fully on board with the group’s heritage: skilled and tasteful brass playing, showmanship, humor, white sneakers with black suits. The album begins with ‘Perfect Landing’, a nod to Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto 5 with former CB member Brandon Ridenour as harpsichord soloist. It flows smoothly into III of Brandenburg 2, which is followed by the finale of Mozart’s Quartet 14. It’s only about four minutes long, and it’s barely mentioned in the notes, but it is a marvel. Composed at age 26 and among the six quartets dedicated to Haydn, the work abounds in Haydnesque harmonic surprises. And in this ingenious finale, Mozart combines fugal procedures with sonata form. Although CB takes it at a tempo string quartets would consider genial, it is lively and well played.

Three selections from Well-Tempered Clavier are turned into ‘Dixie Bach’, ‘Cool Bach’, and ‘Bebop Bach’ by arranger Luther Henderson. Ugh—but as with everything else, very well played. Works by Crespo, Lara, Padilla, and Tarrega add Spanish flavor to the program. And trumpeter Caleb Hudson’s ‘White Rose’ is a beautiful original. Bach’s Passacaglia & Fugue in C minor, with synthesized organ adding low octaves, ends the program.

The engineers were as important as the players in his finely honed and buffed product. It’s a little too perfect to seem real.

KILPATRICK

Round Midnight
Purcell, Johnson, Bohme, Saint-Saëns, Beaser, Scearce, Monk, Lane, Fauré
German Symphony Brass Quintet
Capriccio 5202—56 minutes

Night music is the theme of this brass quintet album, which begins in standard fashion with transcriptions of baroque music: the overture from Purcell’s Fairy Queen and a ‘Satyr’s Dance’ by Robert Johnson. Next comes Oskar Bohme’s two-movement Nachtmusik, which doesn’t really grab me, but at least the notes taught me that Bohme (whose works for trumpet are widely known) was a victim of Stalin’s Great Terror of the late 1930s. This fine quintet is at its best in the pyrotechnics of Saint-Saëns’s Danse Macabre.

It has been a long time since I last heard Robert Beaser’s 2-movement, 17-minute Brass
Quintet (N/D 2003: 216). It took a while—well into the 10-minute I—to warm up to it here, and the warming didn’t last long. Based on fanfares, it is tough and flinty, with stark harmonies. J Mark Scearce’s 4-movement, 9-minute Enchanted Forest Suite is warmer and easier to like. Thelonious Monk’s ‘Round Midnight’, Burton Lane’s ‘Old Devil Moon’, and Fauré’s ‘Pie Jesu’ (Requiem) complete the program.

**Bassoon Faggott Bassoon**

**SCHUBERT**: Arpeggione Sonata; **WEBER**: Andante & Hungarian Rondo; **HINDEMITH**: Bassoon Sonata; **SCHULHOF**: Hot Sonata

Hanno Dönneweg, bn; Stuttgart Radio/ Gregor Bühl—Coviello 91517—63 minutes

Hanno Dönneweg is the principal bassoonist of the Stuttgart Radio Symphony, which accompanies him on this recording. Only the Weber Andante and Hungarian Rondo is presented in its original form. The others are transcriptions, either of music written for bassoon and piano (the Hindemith Sonata) or for other instruments. This grouping really works because of Dönneweg’s confident and exuberant musicianship. I have heard Schubert’s Arpeggione Sonata transcribed for various instruments, but never for bassoon and orchestra. The soloist plays with lovely phrasing, a rich, dark tone, and really outstanding articulation. I was surprised at how convincing this was. In the Weber, the soloist again shows off his flawless technique. The Rondo is witty and clever, with graceful trills, liquid slurs, and outstanding technical facility. Unfortunately, this otherwise fine performance is marred by some iffy intonation in the bassoon, and the orchestra lacks crispness.

The Hindemith Sonata is a fine piece, one of the staples of the bassoon repertory, but this arrangement for bassoon and orchestra is brilliant. The writing for harp and strings in the opening movement is haunting, unsettling, and a little creepy sometimes. Dönneweg plays the softest passages with a luscious, covered sound. The use of brass and woodwinds in the march is very effective, and the accented forte sections are full rather than forced. The orchestration is riveting, possibly better than the original.

The program finishes with a bang. Erwin Schulhoff’s Hot Sonata was initially composed for alto saxophone and piano, but you’d never guess it from this recording. The playing is just fantastic, with beautiful orchestral colors and soulful bassoon writing. This is jazzy, jaunty music, and it sounds like everyone is having a great time. The shifting rhythms and tricky accents are perfectly coordinated, and both soloist and orchestra are polished and confident. II opens with a long line for the bassoon with bent tones, blue notes, and harmonies that call Gershwin’s second piano prelude to mind. This is unexpectedly convincing and unselfconscious. The entire sonata is clever, witty, lyrical, and thoroughly enjoyable, displaying hints of Ravel and Poulenc as well as Gershwin. The bassoon playing is terrific in all respects. Intonation problems are completely absent, so nothing takes away from Dönneweg’s delicious cantabile legatos, thorough technical mastery, dancing accents, and sheer exuberance.

Despite the tuning difficulties, I must recommend this release because of the incredible orchestration of the Hindemith and the marvelous performance of the Hot Sonata.

**Bassoon plus**

**MOZART**: Bassoon & Cello Sonata; **DEVIEENIE**: Bassoon Quartets in C, F, G minor

Matthias Racz, bn; Alessandro D’Amico, v; Mary Ellen Woodside, va; Rafael Rosenfeld, vc
Ars 38194—108 minutes

The transparency of the Mozart Sonata for bassoon and cello leaves no room for errors, but bassoonist Matthias Racz and cellist Rafael Rosenfeld play with perfect intonation, fine balance, and well-matched phrasing. This is a lovely little piece, unique in the repertory. The duo brings out its perky crispness, lovely cantabile lines, and sunny clarity. Devienne, who was a virtuosic performer on the bassoon as well as the flute, was known as “the French Mozart” because of his clear and elegant compositional style. He wrote 21 flute quartets before turning his hand these quartets for bassoon and strings. They are uncomplicated works written with a light, cheerful touch and emphasize the bassoon’s solo qualities with cantabile solos and impressive cadenzas. Although this is not music of profound depth, it is affable and enjoyable. Racz and his colleagues give them graceful phrasing, nicely aligned articulation, and cohesive musical gestures.

**20th Century Romantics**

**GLIERE**: 4 Pieces; **PIAZZOLLA**: Kicho; **BLOCH**: Nigun; **MONTAG**: Extreme; **BOURGEOIS**: Sonata

Nicholas Bayley, db; Geoffrey Duce, p
Nimbus 6308 — 69 minutes

The appearance of a large number of recordings of works played on the double bass is an interesting characteristic of the new century. We discover that the composers of this time 100 years ago actually wrote music for the bass. Reinhold Gliere (1875-1956) wrote these four fine pieces—a Praeludium, Scherzo, Intermezzo—July/August 2016
zoo, and Tarantella—from 1902 to 1908 for bassist Serge Koussevitzky (later conductor of the Boston Symphony). They are quite lovely and it is great to have them available again. Then we have a seven-minute piece by Astor Piazzolla from 1969, written for bass player Enrique Kicho Diaz. This work was originally performed by violin, viola, piano, electric guitar, bandoneon, and bass, though I presume from name that the soloist was Kicho on the bass. It is an attractive somewhat tango-based composition.

Now we move off into the transcription area with the ‘Nigun’ movement from Ernest Bloch’s violin suite Baal Shem. This one puts Bayley under rather a strain technically, what with all the double-stops he tries to keep in tune with varying degrees of success. Then one Lajos Montag (1906-97) steps in with a tiny 3-minute ‘Extreme.’ Extreme it is not, but it tune with varying degrees of success. Then one Lajos Montag (1906-97) steps in with a tiny 3-minute ‘Extreme.’ Extreme it is not, but it is enjoyable.

Finally we have a considerable half-hour 1986 sonata by Derek Bourgeois from England. The notes tell us that it was written “to address the dearth of large romantic works for the instrument.” This is a strong statement about a strong work with a jazzy scherzo for the middle movement and an impressive set of variations for a finale. This program goes out with a quiet bang.

Bayley and Duce work well together, and this is consistently interesting. I think we would all find it satisfying, not just for its general romanticism but for the prevalence of real bass pieces. The recording is clear and so is the playing.

D MOORE

Inspired by Bach

BACH: Wenn ich einmal soll Scheiden; Gottes Zeit ist die Allerbeste Zeit; Es ist Vollbracht;
BACH-KODALY: Prelude & Fugue in D minor; 3 Chorale Preludes; SCHACHTNER: Relief 3; Ich Schrei aus Tieter Not; BRAHMS: Cello Sonata; Variations; BEETHOVEN: Cello Sonata 3: 1;
REGER: Sonata; Aria, op 103a:3
Julius Berger, vc; Oliver Kern, p
Nimbus 6302 [2CD] 2:11

This is a very interesting study of influences on composers carried out by a cellist with his mind on research as well as playing his instrument. (You will find another example of his work listed under Beethoven in this issue.) This centers on Brahms and Reger, with significant swipes at Kodaly and Beethoven and a five-minute work by Johannes X. Schachtner based on a Bach prelude.

Besides the colorfully scored works by Kodaly and Schachtner, we have early versions of Brahms and Beethoven to reckon with. The Brahms Sonata is played in four movements rather than the usual three since Berger’s research has resulted in the discovery that the slow movement of the Second Sonata, Op. 99 was originally intended for the First but was moved partly because Op. 38 seemed too long with it included. Berger and Kern emphasize this aspect by playing it and the first movement at slow and thoughtful tempos, thus leaving it to the listener to determine which is best. They make an interesting case for the original version.

Then there’s Beethoven. The first movement of the A-major Sonata is played here in its original form, significantly different in detail from the one we know and love. It is quite fascinating to hear the differences, though again, the later Beethoven is more polished. If you would like to hear the later one played by Berger, he does it on his Inspired by Mozart disc found here under Beethoven.

The only work played in its original form here is Max Reger’s fine Sonata, Op. 116. In his liner notes, Berger relates it closely, not only to Bach but to the Beethoven sonata. The program ends with a transcription of a Reger aria that was played at his funeral and that employs the bass line from Bach’s Air on the G string. It makes a lovely finale to an unusual and fascinating program.

Berger and Kern work together well. These performances are sensitive and original, as is the concept underlying this recital. They are not the most exciting readings available, but they make their points in a most fascinating way. The Kodaly arrangements of Bach’s music are an unusual addition, as is the Schachtner piece. This project is clearly worth investigating.

D MOORE

American Record Guide

Shuffle. Play. Listen

HERRMANN: Vertigo Suite; JANACEK: Pohadka;
MARTINU: Slovak Variations; STRAVINSKY: Suite Italienne; PIAZZOLLA: Le Grand Tango;
MCLAUGHLIN: The Dance of Maya; A Lotus on Irish Streams; ARCADE FIRE: Empty Room; In the Backseat; RADIOHEAD: Pyramid Song; Weird Fishes/Arpeggi; COCTEAU TWINS: Athis Brose; Fozzepolitic; Heaven or Las Vegas; BLONDE DE REDHEAD: Misery is a Butterfly; Melody; A PERFECT CIRCLE: 3 Libras

Matt Haimovitz, vc; Christopher O’Riley, p
Pentatone 5185 546 [2CD] 2 hours, 13 minutes

Now here’s a new approach to making a cello recording! The two CDs divide the program into contrasted parts. The first disc consists of well-known 20th Century works notable for their use of folk idioms and dances, each work separated from the next by a movement from Bernard Herrmann’s suite from the film Vertigo. The result is a very listenable collection including Leos Janacek’s A Fairy Tale, Bohuslav Martinu’s Variations on a Slovak theme,
Igor Stravinsky’s excerpts from his ballet *Pulcinella* as arranged by Gregor Piatigorsky, and Astor Piazzolla’s biggest tango.

This prepares us for the second disc, which is entirely arrangements by pianist O’Riley of popular songs and other easy-listening music. The liner notes consist of a 20-page discussion between the players and Daniel Levitin, the author of *This is Your Brain on Music*, where various reasons for recording this program are presented.

So what is the effect of this collection? It depends partly on your taste in music. The playing is outstanding. Haimovitz is one of the best cellists around, with remarkable accuracy of intonation in high registers and a very musical sense of phrasing. He and O’Riley work together very well, and their sensitive sense of balance is caught in detail by the recording. If you can stand the program on both CDs, you will be very happy with it. The material on CD2 gives the effect of a sort of improvised romp through the present world of popular idioms with an emphasis on the theme of love and the high register of the cello—an area that Haimovitz handles with surprising ease and expressive warmth. I am not sure how effective all of this would be for someone who is more of an expert in that idiom than I am. I tried it out on my son Ian, who is up to date on popular music and he liked it. I was moved by parts of the program, but O’Riley’s arrangements seemed to me rather alike. I remain impressed with the job Haimovitz did on them. It is a beautifully individual collection, played to the hilt.

D Moore

The Sound of Double Bass

**SCHUMANN:** *Adagio & Allegro; Brahms: Cello Sonata 1; Reiner: Sonata; Nishida: Reincarnation; Bottesini: Elegy 1*

Ryutaro Hei; Yu Kosuge, p

*EigenArt 10500 — 67 minutes*

**Sonatas**

by Brahms, Hindemith, Vasks, Gubaidulina

Niek de Groot, db; Catherine Klipfel, p

*Nimbus 6312 — 70 minutes*

The double bass has grown a lot in my lifetime. No, it is no larger than it was when I was told they didn’t have one my size when I applied for one at the age of 8. It has become a highly listenable solo instrument since then, as these entertaining releases show.

The first program begins with an attractive work by Robert Schumann, originally for French horn and piano and often played on the cello. It sounds perfectly fine here, and the technique required for the Allegro is handled with seeming ease. The following Sonata by Czech composer Karel Reiner (1910-79) is even more virtuosic and a very attractive three-movement work that we should hear more of. Reiner is usually avant-garde in style but this sonata is not; it is full of life and humor.

Japanese composer Yumiko Nishida (b. 1951) wrote a study of life before and after death played with gravity by solo double bass. This leads us on to Brahms, whose First Cello Sonata sounds good on the bass at first, being in a low register, but gradually becomes less and less effective as the second and third movements appear, despite a bit of re- octavization on the part of transcriber Gerd Reinke. Then it’s back to the real instrument with bass-player Giovanni Bottesini (1821-89), whose Elegia is a fine and lyrical piece to go out with.

Hei is a player with a fine tone and good fingers. Stylistically, he can be a bit matter-of- fact in his interpretations; but this is a satisfying program except the Brahms. Of course, this is a cellist speaking, so I’m likely to be critical in that area. The recording is generally clear; but again, not in the Brahms where the bass gets drowned sometimes.

Niek de Groot’s recording begins with the same Brahms sonata, this time less revised in octave disposition, the arrangement having been made by the player. This is more stylistically satisfying than Hei’s performance, though the balances are similar and I would be hard put to say that one player is more technically accomplished than the other. Groot is just a little more in control of his phrasing, and Klipfel joins him effectively in moving the music along.

Now we get back into the real double bass repertoire with Sofia Gubaidulina’s rather amazing 1975 sonata, where each instrument gets its own say for a considerable time without interruption. The idiom is meditative and full of sonic variety, not tonal but full of feeling and adventures underground and in the water, occasionally rising into the sky.

After this, Paul Hindemith’s 1949 Sonata sounds decidedly normal, almost classical. There are a number of recordings of this work available, and this one shows up well among them. There is one by bassist Dan Stacy that includes effective readings of both the Gubaidulina and the Hindemith Sonata (Simax 1157). The present program ends with the 1986 Solo Sonata by Peteris Vasks. This is an adventure in sounds and gestures of many kinds, the last movement a lovely melody ending in a vocal groan. This has been recorded previously by Bjorn Malmqvist on Baltic Bass (Nosag 115, March/April 2007), also an effective performance.

Both programs contain a variety of materi-
al and would be especially interesting to bass players and people interested in unusual sounds on any instrument. I am inclined to wish that the Brahms had been dispensed with in both cases; it takes up nearly half of both discs and is not really effective on the bass. The recording qualities are similar, a bit lacking in high frequencies in the bass sound but richly resonant otherwise. The pianists are excellent.

D MOORE

New for Double Bass

PROTO: Sonata 3; DUBUGNON: Sonata; SHANG: Fantasy Higgs Boson; MEIJERING: Ultimate Workout I
Szymon Marciniak; Evan Mitchell, p
Red Mark 200316—62 minutes
(2832 Spring Grove Ave Cincinnati 45225)

Here is a curious release. These recent works for double bass and piano consist of two major sonatas by Frank Proto and Richard Dubugnon and a 12-minute Fantasy by Lu Shang. They are all rather improvised-sounding music, pieces that seem to deliberately ignore comprehensible formal structure while combining lyrical expression with moments of jazz and virtuosic adventures. All of these composers play the double bass themselves and are very aware of its possibilities. The program ends with an encore by Chiel Meijering.

Marciniak and Mitchell work together with great unity and technical polish. Their relationship and background might remain a mystery since there are no printed liner notes to this release. What we have instead is a DVD containing not only interviews with both players and three of the four composers but the entire contents of the CD filmed imaginatively and recorded well. One could do without the CD, in other words. It is a fascinating project carried out with care and should give us a nice introduction to the state of music in the 21st Century.

D MOORE

First Day

BRAGATO: Gracida & Buenos Aires; MARTINU: Slovak Variations; BURHANS: Phantasie; GINASTERA: Pampeana 2; ENESCO: Sonata in F minor; VISCONTI: Hard-Knock Stomp; MARAIS: La Folia Variations; POULENCE: Chemins de l’amour
Laura Metcalf, vc; Matei Varga, p
Sono Luminus 92201 — 59 minutes

Here is an unusually relaxed cello program where all the works share a sort of "I don’t care" attitude that is quite attractive when played with the care and feeling that these artists bring to it. Nothing lasts longer than ten minutes and only two are shorter than seven. Metcalf and Varga are old friends and work together smoothly and warmly. What more can one say?

Well, I don’t mean to suggest that this isn’t a serious program. It is both passionate and dancey by turns. One of the unusual pieces is the Sonata by George Enesco. This is not one of his numbered sonatas but a single movement written in about 1898 when he was studying at the Paris Conservatory. It is an exciting piece.

The works by Bohuslav Martinu, Alberto Ginastera, and Marin Marais are well known, the one by Jose Bragato less so but just as attractive. The rest are transcriptions of catchy tunes that serve to make this a joyful program. Dan Visconti’s Hard-Knock Stomp is just that, played on cello alone.

Now how do you fit the variations by Marin Marais into this atmosphere of semi-popular emotion? They play him literally but with a straightforward and passionate attitude that makes him fit well into the crowd, even eliminating vibrato sometimes. Finally we have a song by Francis Poulenc that finishes us off with a surprise as the cellist sings the song quite beautifully.

D MOORE

David Pia

D’ALBERT: Cello Concerto; BRUCH: Kol Nidrei; Canzone; DOHNANYI: Konzertstuck
Munich Radio Orchestra/ Oif Schirmer
Farao 108089 — 65 minutes

David Pia is new to the recording world. This debut release contains some relatively little-known works along with the famed setting of Kol Nidrei by Max Bruch. The program opens with Eugen d’Albert’s 1899 Concerto, a beautiful and lyrical work played with fine style and technical polish by both soloist and orchestra. This is followed by a poetic reading of Bruch’s Kol Nidrei. Ernst von Dohnanyi’s 1904 three-movement work seems to grow out of it and in answer to it. This is another little-known but very attractive composition that makes the mood of the program full of poetry and the feeling of the beautiful world we live in. Happy Spring, everybody! The program concludes with another lovely, little-known piece, Bruch’s ‘Canzone.’

This is a relatively unassuming program that adds up to a good deal. Pia is a polished performer who never misses a note or a meaningful phrase, and the orchestra blends with him beautifully. All is recorded with a highly realistic balance and warmth of tone that makes for a satisfying experience for the ears and the heart.

D MOORE

American Record Guide
Transition

SCHUMANN: Cello Concerto; Er, der Herrlichkeit von Allen; TCHAIKOVSKY: Rococo Variations; Nocturne, op 19:4; SAINT-SAENS: Romance; FAURE: Apres un Reve; GLAZOUNOV: Chant du Menestral

David Stromberg: Hamburg Philharmonic Wind Quintet—Ars 38 534 — 56 minutes

No, I didn’t write it wrong. Here we have the Schumann Cello Concerto and Tchaikovsky’s Rococo Variations played with the accompaniment of a wind quintet. Stromberg plays well and so do they, so if the idea attracts you, by all means go for it. The cellist’s arrangements of the orchestral backing result in considerable clarity of voices but all in all, no. I need more variety of tone color in this music.

Stromberg’s playing is not recorded close enough to be clearly heard, even against a chamber group. Also, how many times do you want to hear these works this way? The shorter transcriptions are entertaining, but the concertos are an experiment that doesn’t come off.

Hungarian Cello Concertos

SEIBER: 3 Pieces; DORATI: Concerto; BARTOK: Viola Concerto

Raphael Wallfisch, BBC Wales/ Gabor Takacs-Nagy—Nimbus 5919—78 minutes

Here are three seldom-heard mid-century (1945 to 1977) Hungarian works for cello and orchestra that will interest cello aficionados and devotees of 20th Century Hungarian music. Matyas Seiber’s 1956 Tre Pezzi, three compact movements that total 20 minutes, is a cello concerto, or at least concertino, in all but name. I is a brooding, meditative, sparsely orchestrated fantasy with a contrasting and much faster agitated middle section; II a skittish and sometimes clunky capriccio rolled by loud, bumpy drum-beats pounding out a three-note tattoo; and III a slow, introspective, wispy elegy for Seiber’s friend and fellow composer Erich Itor Kahn, who died as a result of a car accident in 1956. (In a cruel twist of fate Seiber himself was killed in a car wreck just four years after writing the piece.)

I like Seiber’s Tre Pezzi but concede that his idiom—a curious and sometimes incompatible mix of Bartok and Schoenberg (with touches of Roberto Gerhard)—is probably an acquired taste. It’s often mournful in character and seldom offers melodic or sensuous appeal. His best works are his Elegy for viola and small orchestra (from a London LP, reissued on a Lyrita CD) and Third Quartet, Quartetto Lirico, which has been recorded twice, once by the Amadeus Quartet on EMI (reisued on CD) and much later and less persuasively by the Edinburgh Quartet on Delphian.

Antal Dorati (1906-88) was as everyone knows a great and much-recorded conductor but also, as not everyone knows, a composer who wrote a couple dozen works (including a piano concerto and two symphonies besides the cello concerto here) in a style that he describes as “recognizably contemporary but not afraid of melody”. His 1977 Cello Concerto is a full-scale effort of three movements lasting 34 minutes. It was issued on a Louisville LP with Janos Starker as soloist but never made much of an impression on me. Maybe I wasn’t paying attention. At any rate it comes off on this Nimbus disc as a lively and tuneful piece, very much in the tradition of Dorati’s teacher Kodaly, less rarefied or pensive than Seiber’s Tre Pezzi but more immediately and openly appealing. It’s richly scored for a big orchestra and offers lots of romantic warmth, much bravura display for the solo protagonist, and even, in places, the larger-than-life sense of cinematic spectacle. II, a theme with five variations that range from flowing lyricism to robust dances, is especially pleasing for its variety and color.

Finally there’s Bartok’s Viola Concerto, completed by Tibor Serly (in versions for both viola and for cello) from sketches left at the composer’s death and played here, with cello soloist, in a revised edition by Peter Bartok. There’s little difference between the viola and cello solo parts—mostly just octave transpositions—though the cello’s deeper timbre adds bite and power but sacrifices some of the viola’s dusky inwardness and mystery. As with the Dorati concerto, Starker was again the path-maker, first recording the work in the cello version for RCA in the 1980s (still around on CD).

Wallfisch, Takacs-Nagy, and their Welsh accomplices play these concertos with energy and aplomb, and the recording is good. Their accomplished rendering of these works makes me wish they’d present a second and more urgently needed volume of modern Hungarian cello concertos to include the one by Andras Mihaly. There’s been but one recording (by Miklos Perenyi, on a Hungaroton LP) of this glorious 1953 masterpiece, which sounds something like what a young Samuel Barber might have written had he been Hungarian instead of American. It was reissued on a CD that was deleted after about ten minutes; and unless you’re still playing LPs or have gone the other direction and will accept downloaded MP3s, this wonderful concerto, much superior to either Seiber’s or Dorati’s, is terra incognita.

M. LEHMAN

July/August 2016
**Clarinet Quintets**
Mozart, Reicha, Spohr
Josep Fuster; Alia Voronkova, Guerassim Voronkov, v; Eric Koontz, va; Lluis Sedo, vc

Columna 343—71 minutes

Hailing from the Catalonia region of northeastern Spain, clarinetist Josep Fuster enlists the Glinka Quartet for a concert of clarinet quintets of the late classical and early romantic periods. The rarely played Anton Reicha Quintet in B-flat is a substantial four-movement work that requires half an hour to perform. Fuster borrows from the prolific clarinet catalog of Ludwig Spohr with the single-movement ‘Fantasy on a Theme of Danzi’. The great Mozart Quintet in A concludes the program.

Fuster performs with a clean and attractive woody tone, and the Glinka Quartet plays with awareness and sensitivity. Still, the quartet too often sounds wispy and timid, and Fuster’s conservative phrasing encourages them to keep the music in safe and strict boundaries. While this approach works in the simple and unpretentious Reicha, it is disappointing in the more romantic Spohr and the autumnal Mozart, rendering them plain and sluggish.

**Clarinet Concertos**
Mozart & Weber
Jorg Widmann, German Symphony of Berlin/
Peter Ruzicka—Orfeo 897151—60 minutes

German clarinetist-composer Jorg Widmann (b. 1973) releases his first recording of the Mozart Concerto, paired with the Weber Concerto No. 1 in F minor. He adds one of his newest unaccompanied clarinet pieces, ‘Drei Schattentanze’ (Three Shadow Dances, 2013). Dusseldorf composer-conductor Peter Ruzicka leads the German Symphony of Berlin.

Widmann owns the stage with great vigor and sincerity, and he takes very interesting risks with dynamics and tempo. He offers a delightful palette of colors in the Mozart, some of which are surprising and unexpected; and he brings to the Weber a highly theatrical persona that pushes the envelope. His temporal manipulations in the lyrical transitions of I will stir some talk—namely his slowing of the music to a crawl to heighten the mystery and tension. Some clarinetists will point out that Weber already constructs the suspended time and that such decisions are overriding it; others will think that Widmann’s ideas are fresh, genuine, and a welcome addition to an old favorite.

The ‘Three Shadow Dances’ is the odd duck on the program, but it gives Widmann an opportunity to show off his skill as a composer and performer of ultramodernist music. His disjunct themes, abstract harmonies, and extended techniques won’t reach everyone, but his creations have a weird charm, and his commitment is admirable.

Even so, the serious soloist requires a professional and attractive sound, and here Widmann falls short. His tone is extremely uneven, going from pure and pleasant to reedy and coarse in a matter of seconds; and sometimes these wild fluctuations make his legato, intonation, and articulation muddy. He does his best at soft dynamics and in the clarion register; outside of these boundaries he can lose sonic control.

The German Symphony of Berlin know these scores well, matching Widmann’s energy and fire in every measure, but the ensemble can be patchy as well. The woodwind playing is strong, but the violins are often thin and scrappy, and the brass players sometimes allow their enthusiasm to distort their timbres.

**The Way Things Go**
FESTINGER: The Way Things Go; HALLE: Gaze;
KAMINSKY: Duo; MACKEY: Crystal Shadows;
MOE: All Sensation is Already Memory; REYNOLDS: Share;
WOOLF: Righteous Babe
Tara Helen O’Connor, fl; Margaret Kampmeier, p
Bridge 9467—74 minutes

These selections were written from 1985 to 2006, most for the players here. This survey of music written lately by American composers East and West varies in personality and quality. All the composers have contributed a short description of their pieces. I’m a guy but I would love to play Randall Woolf’s Righteous Babe (2003), if only it had a different title. It boogies along with an infectious modern energy; perhaps for a male player he would tolerate altering the name to Righteous Dude, which keeps with the California surfer slang?

Some other pieces amount to a surplus of difficulty and trends. Everything is played to the hilt, and these two can certainly do it; they’re among the finest players of their generation. But some writing is the kind of busy garbage that gives flutists a bad reputation and amounts to little more than the salon music of the 19th Century even though it’s more complex. Were these composers paid by the note? Don’t answer that; it won’t make any difference.

Other pieces offer more than superficial statements. Eric Moe (b 1954) presents a dyad with proportions like the Lieberman Sonata but based on writing of French philosopher Henri Bergson. As he says, “time flows in markedly different ways in these two movements” and you hear how it does. The work by Belinda Reynolds (b 1967) stands apart from
the others for its almost stark simplicity. Share has a lot of relatively high writing for a piece for alto flute. This makes those parts sound much like a piece for concert flute but with a tinge of longing. The alto flute and concert C flute playing the same note in the same range are not identical sounds, though they’re quite similar. Laura Kaminsky’s 12-minute Duo (2006) is also an addition to the repertory I’m pleased to meet.

If you find a need to cleanse your soul after listening to some of these, hear Margaret Kampmeier’s recording of the Beaser Variations on Bridge with the flutist they were written for (N/D 2014: 193), then turn to the Arc Duo on Azica (J/F 2013: 185) for more contemporary American flute pieces that will offer you something quite different from parts of this program. Even from the 1980s to now, this isn’t necessarily the way things go.

Hansgeorg Schmeiser

Honegger: Romance; Martinu: Sonata; Milhaud: Sonatine; Poulenc: Sonata; Roussel: Aria; Flute Players; Schuhoff: Sonata
Matteo Fossi, p—Nimbus 5933—68 minutes

Hansgeorg Schmeiser has a dense, lush, full-bodied flute sound that you won’t tire of hearing. He and Fossi play these pieces with absolute mastery. So it’s familiar repertory played very well, which makes it worth hearing again no matter how many times you’ve heard it before. The lowest tones of the piano can be dark and otherworldly, adding something to these pieces you may not have heard before. The rather businesslike performance of the first two movements of Poulenc’s sonata is the only low point, leaving me thinking of what Anne-Catherine Heinzmann brought to it not long ago on Audite (N/D 2013: 148) with a very different approach.

Gorman

18th-Century Mandolin

Cocchi, Gervasio, Barcella, Anon.
Chris Acquavella, Stephanie Acquavella-Rauch, mand; Ruben Valenzuela, hpsi; Heather Vorwerk, vc—Centaur 3466—65 minutes

I’ve often thought that Baroque solo and trio sonatas are more interesting to play than to listen to. Indeed, that is the intent—the music was mostly for home music-making rather than for public concerts, to be performed by amateur players rather than professionals. The music comes from the Gimo-Samlung, a collection housed in Sweden of mandolin music from the mid-1700s. Authorship is not definite—some identical music is presented in different sonatas attributed to different composers. Most of it is charming, but not more than that.

The two Acquavellas play well, with a nice range of dynamics (for mandolin) and expressive phrasing. I can only fault them in that passages played together in the trio sonatas are often not locked in rhythmically. This is difficult, given the nature of the mandolin attack, but it is also necessary. Valenzuela’s and Vorwerk’s continuo playing is perfectly competent, if not especially interesting—but a continuo really should not draw attention to itself. Though Vorwerk’s Baroque “cello” is so quietly mixed that it is often barely audible.

Primarily for mandolin lovers.

Images from the South

Castelnuovo-Tedesco: Sonatina Canonica; Fuga Elegaica; Carulli: Serenade; Montes: Surama; Garcia: Lorca Fantasy; Villa-lobos: Bachianas Brasileiras 4, Prelude; Rodrigo: Concierto Madrigal (excerpts); Zenamon: Casa-blanca; Tarrega-Sagreras: Recuerdos de la Alhambra

Amadeus Guitar Duo
Naxos 573442—61 minutes

Another fine recital from the Amadeus Guitar Duo, Dale Kavanagh and Thomas Kirchoff. The theme, music from southern Europe and South America, came from Alfonso Montes’s Surama, dedicated to the Amadeus and the real find on this recording. It’s just such delightful music, I kept thinking that I must play it! It’s worth the price of the disc.

But there are other pleasures here. The Castelnuovo-Tedesco pieces may not be quite as sparkling as Duo Pace Poli Cappelli (J/F 2015) or the Brasil Duo (M/A 2009), but they are still beautiful, compelling performances. Carulli’s music for solo guitar is some of the most boring, predictable stuff I’ve ever encountered; but somehow when he writes for two or more guitars he breaks out of that mold. The Serenade is one of his best for guitar duo. It’s not particularly substantial, but it is charming and beautifully executed.

Federico Garcia Lorca was not only a poet and playwright, but also a composer, though I only know his arrangement of Andalucian folk songs for guitar and voice. They are rarely performed, but they are delightful, and Gerald Garcia’s Lorca Fantasy is based on several of them. It’s an impressive work, an expansion of the original folk material, again performed with drama and intensity.

The Amadeus recently recorded Rodrigo’s Concierto Madrigal with orchestra (S/O 2015). It’s a wildly challenging work, so I suppose they wanted to get more from the investment by playing three of the movements here with-

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out orchestra. If you don’t know the original, you may find these duo arrangements satisfying, but I kept hearing the missing sounds in my imagination—and I wanted them. I recommend their recording with orchestra—or, better yet, hear Pepe and Angel Romero on Philips. The work was written for them.

I didn’t care at all for Jaime Mirtenbaum Zenamon’s Casablanca. The work opens with some experimental sounds, then becomes quite tonal, before launching into a straight arrangement of ‘As Time Goes By’ from the Humphrey Bogart film. It was just odd. Nor am I fond of the Julio Sagreras arrangement of ‘Recuerdos de la Alhambra’ for two guitars—it’s like too much makeup on a beautiful woman.

Still the Amadeus’s performance of both of the works is just fine, and the best here far outweighs any objections I may have about the last two pieces.

KEATON

Sephardic Journey

THOMAS: Trio Sefardi; WILLIAMS: Isabel; RIVERA: Plegaria y Canto; LEISNER: Love Dreams of Earth; ASSAD: Sephardic Suite

Cavatina Duo; David Cunliffe, vc; Desiree Ruhstrat, v; Avalon Quartet

Cedille 163—76 minutes

Hats off to the Cavatina Duo, flutist Eugenia Moliner and guitarist Denis Azabagic. This well-filled disc is the result of grants from several benefactors and a host of Kickstarter contributors to commission composers to write works for the duo and strings, all inspired by or based on Sephardic songs. The Sephardim are the Spanish Jewish community, speaking Ladino, which is to Spanish what Yiddish is to German. Over the centuries they often had to hide their identity in the face of persecutions from Christians, Muslims—and, more recently, Nazis. They have created an uncommonly beautiful song tradition, and this is a set of uncommonly beautiful pieces performed with high artistry.

The combinations vary. Alan Thomas’s three-movement Trio Sefardi is for flute, guitar, and cello. Carlos Rafael Rivera’s Plegaria y Canto (al Bodre de la Mar) is for alto flute, guitar, and violin. After a long introduction, with each player getting something like a cadenza, the work builds powerful rhythmic momentum to an exciting conclusion.

David Leisner’s Love Dreams of Earth and Clarice Assad’s Sephardic Suite are both three-movement works for flute, guitar, and string quartet. Both composers supply quite original music—this doesn’t sound like anything else I know—and both pieces are really attractive.

The one piece for flute and guitar alone, Joseph Williams II, was another composition, by Austin classical Guitar. ‘Isabel’ was a medieval woman, martyred by the Inquisition. Though seemingly a love song, it is in fact a resistance song, decriing the tyranny of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, both proudly known as “the Christian”—expressing their faith through torture and death.

Each piece is quite tonal, since each is based on Sephardic music, either quotations, paraphrases, or stylistic imitations. It’s really delightful stuff, and it’s all beautifully played—each of these musicians are real artists; there’s not a weak link among them. It’s one of the most delightful chamber recordings I’ve heard in quite a while.

KEATON

Latin American Guitar

JOSE: Romancillo Infantil; Sonata; LAURO: 4 Valses Venezolanos; MONTANA: Suite Colombiana 4; GINASTERA: Sonata; TRADITIONAL: Korean Folk Song

Deion Cho, g—Brilliant 95094—70 minutes

A remarkable debut recording from Korean guitarist Deion Cho. Now just into his mid-20s, Mr Cho has already won several international competitions, including three in 2014. This recording is part of the prize for the Concurso Internacional de Guitarra Clasica Gredos San Diego. He presents four major works, each with four movements, from four composers, from four countries.

The recital begins with a simple work by Antonio Jose, his first for guitar; it ends with Cho’s arrangement of a tender, lovely Korean folk song.

The program is eminently satisfying. Cho’s execution is nothing short of amazing. Even at this young age, he plays with maturity and depth. His technique is perfection—he handles the most demanding passages without any strain. And his sound is simply lovely—no matter how demanding the passage, he seems incapable of making an ugly sound.

Two of the large works are from composers steeped in their country’s folklore. Cho gives us a superb performance of Antonio Lauro’s Valzes Venezolanos, those charming pieces so many of us cut our guitarist teeth on. If he doesn’t quite get the 6/8-3/4 alternation that is characteristic of the Venezuelan waltz, he more than makes up for it by tying the four works together, attacca, into a single movement—inspired! Much of Julio Gentil Montana’s music celebrates his native Columbia, and this is the fourth of his Colombiana suites. The four movements—Pasillo, Danza, Bambuco, Porro—have their own rhythmic character, and Cho captures this like a native.

The other two works are more substantial.
Antonio Jose (as he was knonw in his brief life—his full name is Antonio Jose Martinez Palacios) left only two works for guitar before he was executed by Franco’s Falangist followers. It has often been described, accurately, as the closest we have in the repertory to a work by Ravel; and Cho’s reading is exquisite—every bit as beautiful as Irina Kulikova’s gorgeous performance (J/F 2010).

Then there’s Alberto Ginastera’s thorny sonata. I heard this work back in 1976, performed by Carlos Barbosa-Lima, who commissioned it. I didn’t like it then, though I’ve grown to respect it more over the years—but Cho makes me love it. He shows what you need for this to work: sonority. Every note has to count, and everything about the notes has come together—dynamics, tone quality, articulation—all need to be perfectly balanced. And Cho has more mastery of this music than anyone I’ve ever heard. The virtuosic parts have no terrors for him. He even gets the joke of the scherzo, quoting Beckmesser’s failed Prize Song from Meistersinger. For the first time, I laughed out loud!

So get this—and hope for more from this remarkable young artist.

KEATON

Nocturnos de Andalucia

PALOMO: Nocturnos de Andalucia; RODRIGO: Concierto de Aranjuez; MALATS: Serenata Espanola

Christoph Denoth, g; London Symphony/ Jesus Lopez Cobos—Signum 444—68 minutes

I don’t think I’ve ever seen a disc for guitar and orchestra where the Aranjuez was presented as a secondary work. Denoth is convinced that Lorenzo Palomo’s Nocturnos de Andalucia is “one of the best guitar concertos ever written”. I am not.

The work is massive—six movements that run around 40 minutes. The orchestra calls for 80 players (vs. 38 for the Aranjuez). It’s so big and flashy that the guitar will need amplification in any performance out of the studio. That’s not necessarily a bad thing. Koshkin’s Megaron Concierto (N/D 2012) also runs 40 minutes, with a large string orchestra, and is performed with an amplified guitar. I found that work among the most exciting for guitar and orchestra I’d ever heard.

My problem with the Palomo is that it is filled with cliches—it sounds like it was composed by someone trying to sound Spanish (though Palomo is, in fact, Spanish). And the guitar part never really catches fire. If you have a splashy orchestra, you should have a guitar solo that matches it, and this just doesn’t. As for the Aranjuez, Denoth just doesn’t have the technique demanded by this work. It’s been recorded by so many guitarists (every major figure but Segovia, and lots of minor ones), that this just isn’t competitive. Williams recorded it three times, all now available on a massive retrospective Sony just released, a set of 59 discs with a great price. Otherwise, go for Pepe Romero on Philips; or, my current favorite, Xeifei Yang’s incandescent performance on EMI (M/J 2011).

I did like his arrangement of the Malats old warhorse ‘Serenata Espanola’ for guitar and orchestra, though I can’t imagine how you’d get a conductor to program it, except perhaps as an encore with another concerto.

I’ve reviewed Mr Denoth twice before, in a Dowland program (N/D 2014) and in a mixed recital (M/A 2015). As a guitarist, his playing is consistently beautiful and tasteful. He is not virtuosic, but he has ample technique and in the right repertory can be counted on for musicianly performances. He is perfectly matched for the Palomo and the Malats—just not the Rodrigo, particularly with all the competition in that work. You may find the Palomo more interesting than I did, and there’s always a welcome for works for guitar and orchestra.

KEATON

Paisiello in Vienna

Variations on Nel Cor Piu Non Mi Sento

Bortolazzi, Hummel, Giuliani, Beethoven, Vanhal

Izhar Elias, g; Alon Sariel, mand; Michael Tsalka, p—Brilliant 95301—80 minutes

80 minutes of variations of Paisiello’s ubiquitous ‘Nel Cor Piu Non Mi Sento’ would not be my first choice. But there are a few interesting things here, particularly the Beethoven works. He never published them (Wo—without opus), but they are clearly crafted by a composer of real imagination, even with such banal material.

For guitarists, the piano and guitar version of Giuliani’s quintet may be of interest—I used to play this in an arrangement by Moscheles. The notes don’t say who did the piano part, but it sounds very much like the same one. The most impressive work for guitar here is the Hummel Pot-pourri Op. 53, with touches from various operas, including Don Giovanni.

The guitar and mandolin playing here (all on period instruments) is generally solid and expressive, but the real disappointment is the sound of the fortepiano—it sounds only slightly better than Schroeder’s toy piano from Peanuts. Still if you’re interested in some unusual combinations from the early 19th Century, you may find some pleasures here.

KEATON
Japanese Guitar 2

TAKEMITSU: Song of Early Spring; HARA: Canto Funèbre; MIYOSHI: Epitase; 5 Poems; IKERE: Guitar Bears; She Keeps Hoping; Theme of Katja; HOSOKOWA: Serenade; 2 Japanese Folk Songs

Shin-ichi Fukuda, g
Naxos 573457—61 minutes

I first reviewed Mr Fukuda in an impressive Giulianci recital on a period instrument that, mercifully, in his hands sounded like a modern instrument (J/F 2007). I also reviewed the first of this series, devoted to the music of Takemitsu (S/O 2014). Here he presents a varied recital of his countrymen, with uniformly fine results.

I was surprised to see that the two most different works were by the same composer. Akira Miyoshi’s ‘Epitase’ is abstract, non-tonal, and angry. Composed ten years later, his Five Poems is delicate, quite tonal—and quite beautiful. Each short piece follows the form of the Japanese haiku. It’s interesting to see how composers develop over time.

Hiroshi Hara’s ‘Canto funèbre’ is a lovely piece, though it just doesn’t sound funereal. Shin-ichiro Ikebe’s ‘A Guitar Bears and She Keeps Hoping’—the oddest title I’ve encountered in a while—was inspired by a trip to Auschwitz, where he saw a preserved violin and reflected that even in the face of the greatest horror, people still need music.

The least effective material here is from Toshio Hosokawa. His two-movement Serenade falls flat. The first section, ‘In the Moonlight’, with its bent notes and harsh sonorities, seems to have been inspired by Pierrrot’s lunatic full moon. II, ‘Dream Path’, is so repetitive that I wanted to throw something at the speakers. He also gives us two folk song arrangements—a deadly dull lullaby and a setting of ‘Sakura’ that’s so slow, it’s painful.

But there’s much to enjoy and discover here, and Fukuda plays with consistently high artistry and a thorough technical command. If the only Japanese composer you know is Takemitsu, here’s a chance to expand your experience.

El Aleph

PEYROT: Preludes; BARRIOS: Prelude; Las Abejas; Aire de Zamba; Danza Paraguaya 1; PONCE: Variations; KOSHIN: Toccata; HICKEY: Tango Grotesco; EESPERE: Tactus Spiritus; RAK: Temptation of the Renaissance; GREGORIADOU: El Aleph

Smaro Gregoriadou, g; Open Source Guitars/ Helmut Oesterreich—Delos 3490—59 minutes

Gregoriadou has released two previous discs, both titled Reinventing Guitar. I reviewed both warmly (N/D 2012 & N/D 2009). She is a thoroughly virtuoso, expressive and inventive. The solo part of her program here combines modernist pieces (Fernande Peyrot and Hans Werner Henze) with more traditional material (Barrios and Ponce), and she is comfortable with each voice. Her Ponce Variations is even more inventive that Judicael Perroy’s (reviewed in this issue in the composer section), though she only plays the 1928 version.

Her own piece is fascinating—almost a theatre piece for narration (in the first movement) and Open Source Guitar, the 10-member guitar ensemble for the National University for Music in Trossingen, Germany. It has a minimalist influence, with a wide range of sounds that the various guitars can produce—one of the most interesting such works I’ve heard.

I’m still at a loss to explain what a “pedal guitar” is. I understand that the pedal can change the shape of the sound box for subtle acoustic reasons, but no more. I also believe she uses guitars of different tunings—one a fourth higher, another a fifth higher—to good effect in works like Barrios’s ‘Danza Paraguaya 1’. And she uses different tunings, with A as either 428 or 438—not that this can make a difference in works for a solo instrument. Perhaps all this can make a difference in person—or perhaps on really sophisticated (and expensive) playback equipment. But it’s just not audible on this recording.

Still, understanding what the differences might be is not really important. Gregoriadou is a first-rate artist who presents a fascinating, varied program, executed at a consistently high level.

KEATON

Georg Gulyas

TARREGA: Capricho Arabe; Recuerdos; Las dos Hermanitas; ALBENIZ: Cordoba; Tango; TURI-NA: Sevillanas; MOMPÚ: Suite Compostelana; PONCE: Sonatina Meridional; VILLOLDO: El Choclo; RODRIGUEZ: La Cumparsita

Proprius 2030 [SACD] 64 minutes

Mr Gulyas is based in Sweden. I had not encountered him before, but he has an active career, mostly in Europe, and several CD releases. This program is a fairly standard collection of Spanish music—and in most of the pieces there is a great deal of competition. Each of the performances is perfectly fine—interesting and expressive—but nothing really stands out among all the competition. His Ponce is quite good, but came to me the same month as Judicael Perroy on Naxos, which is far better.

Nothing stands out—except Mompou’s Suite Compostelana. As I listened, I simply felt
warm and happy—I don’t think I’ve ever heard it done better. That includes Segovia’s original recording, Bream’s later one, and all the ones I’ve reviewed: Joan Carlos Martinez (J/F 2013), Thomas Flippin (S/O 2013), and Ermanno Brignolo in his massive recording of the Segovia Archive (M/A 2014). I’ve always loved this music, and Gulyas plays it the way I would want to.

Get this for the Mompou. You won’t be disappointed in any of the rest.

Alex Lubet

LUBET: Aria; Ein Keilbeinuma; Slow Blues; Eliyahu Hanavi; Ma Yafeh Hayom; RADOVANLIJA: Macedonian Dream; Los Biblicos; Semi-Improvised Nostalgic Study

with Maja Radovanlija, g

Big Sound 8943—42 minutes

Mr Lubet describes himself as a “classically-trained composer and (largely) self-taught acoustic guitarist”, and Ms Radovanlija as “a classically-trained guitarist and self-taught composer”. They should have sought out teachers. This is a performance that I might have found pleasant to accompany coffee-house discussions about the Meaning of Life in my college days—music to set a mood rather than something that repays careful listening.

They combine Balkan elements with blues, jazz, and rock; but what emerges is a mix, not a real synthesis. Most of the pieces just mean-der. And what Lubet does to Puccini’s ‘O mio babbino caro’ earns him a special ring in the musical Inferno. If you like some exotic sounding stuff on occasionally out of tune instru-
ments, go for it.

Favorites

PAGANINI: 3 Sonatas; GIULIANI: Gran Duo Concertante; FALLA: 7 Spanish Folk Songs; PIAZZOLLA: Histoire du Tango; LACALLE: Amapola

Alberto Mesirca, g; Daniel Rowland, v

Orlando 18—79 minutes

I had thought that Duo Sonidas’s performance of the Falla and the Piazzolla (M/J 2012) would never be beaten, and it’s not here—but this is as good. Rowland and Mesirca supply sparkling, virtuosic performances of the two sets. I somewhat prefer Duo Sonidas in the Falla, Rowland and Mesirca in the Piazzolla, but both performances are some of the finest chamber music on guitar you can expect to hear.

If you must choose, consider the other works on the two releases. Duo Sonidas has two more modern works, a world premiere by Eduardo Morales-Caso and a delightful neo-classical work by Salvador Brotons. Rowland and Mesirca offer four works by Paganini and a Giuliani Duo—the finest performances I’ve ever heard.

The Paganini works belong to violinist Rowland, and he plays them magnificently—again, I’ve never heard them better. But Mesirca, one of the finest guitarists of his generation, is wasted with these—there’s not much for him to do but allow the violinist to shine. To his credit, he never tries anything more. Giuliani wrote four big, multi-movement works for guitar and violin (or flute). I’ve played all four, and this is the best of the lot—the most virtuosic, the most attractive melodies, and the best distribution of material of interest to both violin and guitar. This performance is, again, as fine as any I’ve encountered.

I’ve reviewed Mr Mesirca many times, and he is reliably excellent. Mr Rowland has an impressive career—first violin with the Broad-

sky Quartet, founder and director of the Stift International Music Festival, frequent soloist with orchestras and in chamber music, and an impressive list of artists he has collaborated with, from Heinz Holliger and Dawn Upshaw to Elvis Costello. This is a remarkable perform-

Harp Concertos

RODRIGO: Concierto de Aranjuez; CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: Concertino; DEBUSSY: Danses Sacrée et Profane; TURINA: Theme & Variations

Naoko Yoshino, hp; Auvergne Orchestra/ Roberto Fores Veses—Aparate 113—56 minutes

This is not a remarkably performed album, but the repertoire includes two rarities that are worth hearing. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s 15-minute Concertino for harp and chamber orchestra, Op. 93, is one of the more charming works of a prolific composer whose music often strikes me as shallow and tiresome. The lovely first movement doesn’t sound like a ‘quasi-passacaglia’, and the last movement, a “Spanish finale with jota rhythms” is absolute-

ly delightful. And Joaquin Turina manages to make his inventive nine-minute Variations, Op. 100, sound like anything but the usual theme followed by variation 1, then 2, 3, 4, etc.

In fact, of all the performances here, the Turina is the one with the best balance between the harp and what sounds like a small chamber orchestra used in all the works.

The Rodrigo, of course, was originally written as a guitar concerto. Here it is in the 1974 transcription the composer himself made for Nicanor Zabaleta. (This album incorrectly states that Zabaleta wrote the transcription, and the Valois album mentioned below incor-
made her Carnegie Hall debut in 1999. Roberto Fores Veses, chief conductor and artistic director of Orchestre d’Auvergne since 2012, takes I and III at a bright, lively clip. Part of the problem is that both soloist and orchestra are recorded very close-up and in a very dry space; in all movements the soloist and orchestra’s sections aren’t blended into a seamless ensemble. I find Isabelle Moretti’s performance with Edmon Colomer and the Royal Seville Symphony on both the Valois and Naive labels far better played and engineered, with I and III more relaxed (the album also has Rodrigo’s real harp concerto, the *Concierto Serenata*).

The engineering is also a problem in the Debussy. The lack of air and space around the performers destroys the work’s marvelous inherent atmosphere. Also, some inner details remain buried—amazing in such a sparsely orchestrated work. The performance also borders on the literal and stiff, without liquid flow, especially in the ‘Danse Profane’, a waltz that requires a good dose of being “swept away”. For that, Elizabeth Hainen with Michael Stern’s IRIS Orchestra on the Avie album titled “Les Amis” is supreme. Emmanuel Ceysson with Jun Märkl and the Lyon Orchestra on Naxos (Volume 7 of Debussy’s Orchestral Works) is very good too.

**Katerina Englichova, harp**

**BRITTEN: Suite; SLAVICKY: Music for Harp; HURNIK: Tombeau de Köchel; SLUKA: Suite in Classical Style; KABELAC: Lamenti & Risolini; GEMROT: Trio**

with Carol Wincenc, fl; Vilem Veverka, ob; Martin Kasik, p—Supraphon 4185—84 minutes

Englichova, 47, studied at the Curtis Institute, played with the Philadelphia Orchestra, and made her Carnegie Hall debut in 1999.

Four of these performances are world premiere recordings. The best of them is the Trio for oboe, harp, and, piano (2010) by Jiří Gemrot (b 1957). True, the engineers place the oboe so far forward that it’s hard sometimes to be aware of the other two instruments. Also, the oboe has a nasal quality that I can’t help associating with the duck in *Peter and the Wolf*. Nonetheless, in the course of five movements in 18 minutes I became completely engaged by the music. Yes, this is a very traditional work, but what drew me in was the increasing drama, a soulful Largo, and a playful final movement. The oboe, not the harp, is clearly the star here. It probably helps too that Gemrot wrote this work at the encouragement of these three soloists.

Of the five Czech composers, Miloslav Kabelac (1908-79) is the most famous. His *Laments and Smiles* (1969) are eight bagatelles in 15 minutes for flute and harp. The bagatelles have been played individually for decades, but it was not until 2009 that Katerina Englichova and a friend played all eight as a set; this is the debut recording. They sound like ruminations, like eight separate studies or experiments; they’re neither serious statements nor clever moments of fun. They’re not obstinate or forbidding but simply are not engaging as a suite. A strong forward placement makes the flute occupy so much prime space that it’s hard to attend to the harp. Especially distracting is Carol Wincenc’s commonplace tone, neither rich nor warm—like the tone quality heard in regional orchestras or community groups. When she holds a pitch, it inevitably begins to waver unsteadily; her vibrato is restricted mostly to the ends of phrases, where it seems like an unavoidable habit rather than a matter of expression.

The title *Tombeau de Köchel* (2008) by Ilja Hurnik (1922-2013) refers to the man who catalogued Mozart’s works—thus the use of Wolfgang’s themes as its basis, though I must admit it took more than four minutes into this eight-minute work for me to recognize one. The work feels like a succession of quick variations without a basic theme. The flute line sounds like occasional wrong notes are thrown in just to be modern; much of the time it seems detached from what the harp is playing. The sound level here is lower than in the album’s other five selections. The flute sounds like it was recorded in a different acoustic than the harp.

**Lubos Sluka** (b 1928) is best known as a film composer. Englichova plays his 12-minute, 5-movement *Suite in Classical Mode* (2007) for solo harp with a broad use of tone colors and sensitive expression. It’s a shame though that she clutters her palette with excessive pedaling. The music itself is very traditional harmonically, like music written by a film composer trying to do something more “classical”.

The remaining two works are not world premiere recordings, and both are for solo harp. Britten’s 17-minute Harp Suite (1969) is the most famous work here. In it Englichova seems proficient and exact rather than musical. This is clearest in V, where one passage has four eighth notes playing against five eighth notes; she is precise rather than waltzing—just a bit stiff. She makes the Toccata sound accurate rather than seductive. In the Nocturne she...
projects the melody but not the all-important chords that support it. Also, her instrument is not especially rich; the bass notes are not clearly projected. Britten is at his most obtuse in this work, so the details matter greatly in making it musical and palatable.

Music for Harp (1972) by Klement Slavicky (1910–99) is written without bar lines. I and II sound like long cadenzas; III is more melodic. But all three are based on endless repetition—with variations, of course—but the basic material isn’t substantial enough and wears out its welcome. I lost interest in each movement, even though Englichova’s playing here is much more sensitive.

FRENCH

Fitzwilliam Virginal Book 4
Pieter-Jan Belder, hpsi
Brilliant 95254 [2CD] 133 minutes

Belder’s project of recording the entire Fitzwilliam Virginal Book started in 2010. This Volume 4 is up to his reliably high standard. It is an automatic purchase if you have been following this recording of the 298 pieces, issued as two-disc sets. These are discs 7 (Giles Farnaby) and 8 (John Bull). Belder has sequenced the pieces for variety. He plays 24 of the 54 Farnaby pieces from the book, and 17 of 44 for Bull, so there is much yet to come. Several of the Bull pieces were also in Belder’s Volume 1, re-recorded here; he explains his reasons. There is one Farnaby duet with harpsichord builder Gerhard Boogaard.

Belder’s sweep through this music is impressive, and so is his meticulous fingerwork at the smallest levels. Something I always appreciate in Belder’s musicianship is the way he makes every phrase sound confident and inevitable. He is not pedantic with the details, but moves or deletes some of the manuscript’s ornamentation in ways that sound appropriate. Some of the digital editing needed a bit closer attention, especially in the last two Bull pieces.

The direct expressivity in Farnaby’s music especially moves me when I play and listen to it. It puts him up there with Byrd and Philips as my favorites among the composers in this book. John Bull was more like a 16th Century Franz Liszt, with music that is extravagant, bizarre, and remarkably difficult. The booklet essay also makes him out to have been quite a cad. Bull’s famous hexachord fantasia on ‘Ut re mi fa sol la’ goes through all the keys. Belder’s moderate circulating temperament has just enough paprika to show us that the music is doing something odd with its enharmonic modulation. The rest of the set is in meantone. All three harpsichords used here have attractive tone.

Will non-specialists want this? My guess is yes; samples the catchy ‘Rosasolis’ and melancholy ‘Maske’, tracks 18 and 7 on the Farnaby disc.

B LEHMAN

British Harpsichord
Christopher D Lewis—Naxos 573668 — 71 min

Christopher Lewis’s Naxos series of modern harpsichord music continues. I was enthusiastic about the previous one (M/A 2016), where he performed music by Martinu and French composers. This one is a British collection.

The obvious selling point here is music by Herbert Howells not otherwise available on harpsichord. This Flemish double by Kevin Fryer brings greater immediacy to the pungent harmonies than John McCabe’s piano and John Paul’s Lautenwerk do, in the other two recordings. Both Paul and Lewis omit about a third of the book’s pieces that are too overtly pianistic, but they make somewhat different choices. I agree with Lewis: there is plenty of Howells here to enjoy for 49 minutes, almost overstaying its welcome, and the missing ones don’t sound as good on harpsichord. There apparently has not been a recording on clavichord since a limited-edition LP of 8 of the 20 pieces played by Ruth Dyson in 1981. I have played through them all on clavichord and found that it is difficult to make them sound musically coherent. They are abstruse, full of fussy details marked on every few notes, and they rely on pianistic resources to balance single notes against chords. Clavichords can do that varied weighting, too, but the challenge becomes projecting all those nuances audibly beyond the vicinity of the player’s own head.

At the end of the program Lewis repeats the first of the Howells pieces, ‘Goff’s Fireside’, on a muselar. His dreamy flexibility in this encore is even better than in his main take on harpsichord. The music by Lennox Berkeley, Gavin Bryars, and John Jeffreys is played on the same Pleyel harpsichord that Lewis used on the French-Martinu album. The Bryars piece was originally for Maggie Cole; it starts with languorous arpeggiation and builds up powerful tension through ostinati and tremolos. The pieces by Jeffreys and Berkeley are charming and witty neoclassical trifles.

B LEHMAN

Masterworks & Miniatures
Renaissance Venice
Richard Lester, org, hpsi
Nimbus 5931 — 78 minutes

The music is by Willaert, Buus, Padovano, Merulo, Guami, and both Gabriels: ricercars, canzonas, toccatas, and intonations. Richard Lester is a good organist. I am not as con-
vinced by his harpsichord style, which is stiff without much staggering of attack between notes in different voices. The organ has weak bass, with only one independent pedal stop, and its mixtures are screamy. I’d welcome more breathing space and more freedom from the meter. The booklet overflows with historical information jammed into essays that need a copy editor.

Despite those complaints, I admire this album for the way it presents plenty of rarely-played music. This is a didactic package worth having if you are interested in this repertory. There is a companion book, not included, with Lester’s fingerings for others to try. Organists might find here some new composers to explore. Some of the quietly-registered pieces are charming.

**Journey**  
Trevor Pinnock, hpsi  
Linn 570 [SACD] 68 minutes

Trevor Pinnock at age 70 takes a “Journey” through 200 years of harpsichord music. It is like his mixed recital “The Harmonious Blacksmith” of 1983 (DG), and on his same all-purpose touring harpsichord, which was new at the time. That album was recorded in Tokyo. This is from Canterbury, where his father lives. Compared with his 1986 recording of Scarlatti sonatas for DG, again on the same David Way harpsichord, the acoustic and Linn’s miking give less emphasis to the high frequencies in the timbre. Part of that is Pinnock’s playing, too—he sounds less driven now (gentler touch on the keys?), and he gives more time for the instrument’s tone to bloom. There is some viscerally thrilling bass that drew a “wow!” from my child.

The Scarlatti sonatas here are outstandingly good. He recorded these same three Scarlatti sonatas in D (K 490-492) when he was half his age, on a different harpsichord, for his 1981 CRD album. The remarks are more playful and have a better easygoing flow. The CRD of Sonata 491 was missing a melody note in a prominent spot.

The Handel Chaconne in G and ‘The King’s Hunt’ by Bull also catch him at his best, as if the music is being conducted with big gestures for a theater full of enthusiasts. The E-major French Suite by Bach has a porcelain-like daintiness until the Gigue, which has some fire. Pinnock plays the E-major prelude from WTC 1 as a prelude to the suite. ‘The Carman’s Whistle’ by Byrd is hectic. ‘O ye tender babes’ by Tallis is solemn and restrained. The performance in the three pieces by Frescobaldi sounds confident and brilliant, but Pinnock’s style and this harpsichord don’t match the music. The Sweelinck and Cabezón variations are bland. Overall, this album is essential for the Handel and Scarlatti.

The booklet is available free at Linn’s website.

**Oboe Pieces**

**SCHUMANN:** 3 Romances; **LUDWIG:** Pleiades; **POULENC:** Oboe Sonata; **HAAS:** Oboe Suite

Katherine Needleman, ob; Jennifer Lim, p  
Genuin 16407—65 minutes

Katherine Needleman is the principal oboist of the Baltimore Symphony. On this program of works for oboe and piano, she displays fine music-making and remarkable soft playing even in the unwieldy lowest register of the oboe. This is a very intimate performance, a picture of refined lyricism, but it falls a bit short in the loudest passages.

Both oboe and piano are refined and sensitive in the Schumann Romances, with perfect balance. Ms Needleman has a clear and singing tone, with lovely phrasing. Her interpretation is thoughtful and lucid, if a little light on the emotional fervency that is Schumann’s trademark. Tempos err on the slow side, with some odd pauses that interrupt the flow of the melodic lines.

Pleiades by American composer David Ludwig is a depiction of the seven sisters from Greek mythology (written for Ms Needleman). Each brief movement has a distinctive character, brought out well by the soloist, who handles the technical challenges with virtuoso ease. Again, her pianissimo playing is phenomenal.

The Poulenc Sonata is the strongest part of the program. The players capture the neoclassical austerity, pointed declamations, and tuneful nostalgia admirably. The balance is exactly right, with Ms Lim displaying strong, capable technique and artistic perception, never overwhelming Needleman’s astonishing pianissimos. The shape and color of the softest passages is simply exquisite. The Haas Suite doesn’t fare as well as the Poulenc, as it is too restrained in both dynamics and expression, depicting intense introspection rather than terror, rage, and grief.

The Schumann, Haas, and Poulenc have been recorded many times, so any addition to the library must struggle to stand out. Few oboists can compete with the likes of Goossens, Holliger, Bourgue, and Mayer. This disc is recommended for fans of Ms Needleman’s fine musicianship and outstanding pianissimo playing and people interested in the Ludwig piece, which makes a nice addition to the recital repertory.

**American Record Guide**

PFEIL
Robert L. Marshall reviews the music of Paul Dukas and his students. "Transport de joie" together an interesting program of music by Dukas and his students. "Apprentice and the Fanfare from his ballet La Peri;" are probably the most familiar of his works. 19-year-old Sebastian Heindl has put together an interesting program of music by Dukas and his students. 'Transport de joie' from L'Ascension has to be the fastest since the legendary recording by Jeanne Demessieux (Festivo 141).

His transcription of the complete ballet La Peri is certainly effective and sounds marvelous on the stunning 2008 Schuke organ in Magdeburg Cathedral. Particularly noteworthy is the array of reed stops, used to great effect. His notes on the music are wonderfully perceptive, and the booklet also contains pictures and the specification of the organ. A fine production and I look forward to more from this talented young player.

This recording celebrates the rise from the ashes of the Somers Congregational Church in Somers, Connecticut, following a disastrous fire in 2012 which destroyed the church and its organ. The new organ was built by Richards, Fowkes, & Company in 2014, and the well-crafted program demonstrates the versatility of the 2-manual 15 stop organ.

Rakich is a fine player whose clean, clear, musical performances demonstrate that tonal variety and musical interest can be achieved on a small instrument through intelligent, thoughtful programming. The Woodman and Elgar pieces show the chamber possibilities of this fine instrument. Notes on the music, photos, and specification.

Christa Rakich, org; Greig Shearer, fl; Kathleen Schiano, vc.—Loft 1146—75 minutes

This is a recording for the intrepid listener who seeks a comprehensive survey of avant-garde organ music. The booklet offers extensive notes on the music and organ specifications.

DEL CAMP

Lower Friuli Organ Competition

These are performances in the semi-final and final rounds of the Fourth International Competition for Young Organists held from September 30 to October 3, 2014 at three churches in the Lower Friuli region of northeastern Italy.

Two of the organs heard here were built in the 18th Century. The organ at Muzzano del Turgnano was built by Pietro Naccini of Venice in 1750. It is a modest instrument of a single manual. The organ at Marano Lagunare dates from 1774 and is the work of the Venetian builder Dacci. It is a two-manual instrument with a generously proportioned "Grand Organo" and a smaller positif division. The third organ is a modern tracker at the abbey of Santa Maria in Sylvis at Sesto al Reghena. It was built by Francesco Zanin in 1957, then rebuilt and enlarged by the same firm in 2000. It is a modest two-manual instrument with a rudimentary pedal division of only three independent stops.

No first prize was awarded in the 2014 competition. Susanna Soffiantini, a graduate of the Luca Marenzio Conservatory in Brescia,
won the second prize. The third prize went to Attila Vadasz, who pursued his musical studies in Amsterdam and his native Hungary. Alberto Barbetta, a graduate of the Conservatory in Vicenza, was awarded the special Franz Zanin prize, named in memory of the organ builder, for the player with the highest combined scores in the works of Bach and Frescobaldi.

As the instruments themselves would suggest, the repertory for the competition consists mainly of early music for manuals only. Bach is represented here by his keyboard transcription of the oboe concerto by Alessandro Marcello, a work generally classed among the harpsichord pieces. The only modern work is a set of three short pieces by Andras Gabor Viragh (b 1984) played by Attila Vadasz at Sesto al Reghena. These pieces seem to have been influenced by Messiaen, especially the concluding Vivace.

The playing here is all very solid, but I cannot say that there are any striking epiphanies, and apparently the jury for the competition felt the same way and declined to award a first prize. The repertory will undoubtedly seem obscure to the general listener. Admirers of historic instruments will be grateful for the aural documentation of the two 18th-Century organs.

New Generations
Glass, Bahr, Stanton, Hanks, Floyd, Moody, Gallagher
Paul Barnes, p
Orange Mountain 107 [2CD] 98 minutes

Paul Barnes’s New Generations project is a logical outgrowth of his extensive professional relationship with Philip Glass, who—Barnes’s charming notes tell us—he met purely by chance on a plane from Lincoln, Nebraska to Chicago. In a series of concerts and this recording, he programmed Glass’s most recent etudes along with new music by younger composers (one of whom, born in 1993, graduated from his undergraduate studies only in May, 2016); the gesture reminds me of Glass’s own long-standing interest in younger composers.

As I’ve said elsewhere, pianists of Barnes’s great technique and musicality are a boon to new music, which in recent years seems both more active and sometimes more vital than it has been in a while. The 1993-born Jonah Gallagher contributes a short character piece, ‘Ad Infinitum’ (2013). It draws on minimalism in its pattern-based content and shows fine promise, but the work does not yet speak clearly with a distinct compositional voice, and its expressive message is not fully persuasive. Lucas Floyd’s (b. 1988) Piano Thoughts, Vol. II is more evocative and exploits a wider emotional range. N. Lincoln Hanks (b. 1969) is closer to my generation, and his Monstre Sacre accomplishes the sorts of things that appeal to me as a listener (and also, I suppose, as a music historian): it seems part of a tradition but extends that tradition in unexpected ways. For instance, the second movement (‘Jeux et theorie: connexion libre avec Bach’) serves up a masterly paraphrase of a number of Bach keyboard gigue: there are a number of references to the ones from French Suite 5 and the second and sixth English Suites, but they are extensively re-worked and turned into new music. Here’s a composer that could have made a wonderful contribution to Simone Dinnerstein’s misguided Bach Reinvented project (N/D 2013).

All these works make for a stunning comparison with the Glass. He is often maligned for writing nothing but patterns in his music, and yet the patterns are wonderfully shaped and sequenced so that they produce stunning, emotionally evocative works. The somber, Schubertian Etude 5 is one great example. Of course, it’s quite easy to play these pieces in a very monochromatic manner, attempting to give them expression through a kind of virtuosic (but actually shallow) elan. Barnes, however, is a reflective and musical pianist who pays attention to every note in Glass’s music and makes it speak (as, for instance, in the inner lines that he carefully brings into relief in the technically challenging Etude 6—a detail that I’ve never heard before, and one that infinitely enriches the music). I’m inclined to think that new composers must understand their art well enough to make every note count, and new-music performers must attend to these details if ever they will connect with a large public. Paul Barnes is a pianist who can do this, and Mr Glass is very lucky to have him—along with any other composers lucky enough to have him as an advocate.

Lullabies for Mila
Alessio Bax, Lucille Chung, p; Southbank Sinfonia/ Simon Over
Signum 439 — 66 minutes

Canadian pianist Alessio Bax has selected 17 different short piano pieces by various composers (Grieg, Rachmaninoff, Bach, Brahms, Scriabin, and Mozart) as lullabies for his daughter Mila. The selections are from other Signum recordings made by Bax either as a soloist or with other performers. Mr Bax plays all the selections beautifully with a lot of style, enhancing the selections with delicate and sometimes exuberant playing.

Some of the selections could be used as lullabies, though none is actually a lullaby
Luca Buratto: Honens 2015

SCHUMANN: Fantasy; Davidsbundlertanze 14;
LIGETI: Etudes 15+16;
PROKOFIEFF: Sonata 7; VIARDOT: Madrid;
Aime-moi; LOPREDORS: La mi Sola; El Vitó; LU-
TOSLAWSKI: Dance Preludes; MOZART: Kegel-
statt Trio; HINDEMITH: Viola Sonata; BRAHMS:
Geistliches Wiegenlied
with Isabel Bayrakdarian, s; James Campbell, c;
Hsin-Yun Huang, va
Honens 1601 [2CD] 121 minutes

The Honens Piano Competition seeks what they call the “Complete Pianist”, described on their website as a “21st Century artist for 21st Century audiences”. To be otherwise would be impossible, one would assume, but this competition is one of the most valuable. The Laureate (only one winner is chosen) is awarded $100,000 (Canadian) and is given the resources to launch a career.

Italian pianist Luca Buratto was named 2015 Laureate at age 22. He was also the youngest competitor out of the 10 international semifinalists. This recording collects two of his performances for the competition, which include a solo recital and a collaborative recital. Listening to the recording, I expected someone older, because he shows incredible depth and maturity. He has a knack for the 20th Century works, especially the Prokofieff and the Ligeti. The Ligeti Etudes demonstrate a wonderful control of tension and are eerie and disquieting. The Prokofieff Sonata 7 has incredible fire; the finale is both pristine and spontaneous, to the point that one would be surprised to hear that it was recorded in concert.

L’Isle Joyeuse has crystalline clarity and fine voicing. With the collaborative works, Buratto has no trouble balancing with soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian (and she has a beautiful full-bodied sound, too). I was unfamiliar with Lutoslawski’s Dance Preludes, but thoroughly enjoyed it. Clarinetist James Campbell worked seamlessly with Buratto.

I enjoy the 20th Century works more than the Schumann. Though all the elements of a great performance are present, especially in the slow movements, III sounds rather bare for my tastes.

On the Honens website interested listeners can find video recordings of the solo recital and the semifinals. An interview is also posted; Buratto seems very charming and self-effacing.

What’s forthcoming for Buratto? A Wigmore Hall debut in 2017. It is not clear whether or not Honens will release recordings of the two concerts he played for the competition, but I hope so.

Robert Cassidy

DEBUSSY: Preludes II; CHOPIN: Barcarolle; FEI-
GIN: 4 Elegies
MSR 1604 — 65 minutes

Cassidy’s playing hits all the right notes, so to speak, but remains finally unmemorable. Chopin’s Barcarolle is fairly conventional, but needs more fluidity and clarity in the left hand, not to mention cleaner pedalling. The coda drags; it lacks the dramatic arc that makes Pollini’s or Argerich’s so unforgettable and haunting. The Debussy Preludes need more clarity: he muddles through ‘Brouillards’. Though he has the right dynamics, the acoustics in ‘General Lavine’ ring too much, and the piece misses energy. This ringing is more evident in ‘Feux d’artifice’ because of the fast notes.

Joel Feigin’s 4 Elegies are expressive, with moments of harmonic beauty. The acoustics are lamentable. Too bad.

Maximum, Minimum, Modern

CORGIANO: Fantasia on an Ostinato; IPPOLI-
TO: Distance of the Moon; ADAMS: China Gates;
LIEBERMANN: Nocturne 7; REICH: Piano
Phase; CARTER: Catenaires; RAKOWSKI:
Etudes 21+30

Sung-Soo Cho, p—Albany 1617—60 minutes

Sung-Soo Cho graduated from the Seoul National University and the Manhattan School of Music; he’s working on his DMA at the Cleveland Institute of Music and is an adjunct faculty member at Notre Dame College. He is technologically accomplished and has a fine tone, but his playing in the first four pieces is too careful and unadventurous. Many of the qui-
eter passages have poetry to them, but pieces like Corigliano’s *Fantasia on an Ostinato* need more vivid colors.

The last half of the recital is better: the Reich is urgent and driven, and the Carter is the stand-out, thrilling and wild. David Rakowski’s two études, ‘12-Step Program’ and ‘A Gliss is Just a Gliss’, are dissonant and untamed, closer to the Carter than to any of the other pieces, but they are loose and jazzy. I’d never heard of Rakowski before, but I’d like to hear the rest of the études. Judging from these two, it sounds like they’re the American answer to Ligeti. Pianist Amy Dissanayake has recorded two volumes of them for Bridge (9121+9157, J/A 2003 & M/A 2005), and our reviewers enjoyed them mostly.

The sonics are clear and spacious, but there is an occasional intrusive noise from the piano’s mechanism, I believe. Notes are in English.

**Tribute to Silvestrov**

CPE Bach, Schubert, Silvestrov, Scarlatti, Wagner, Schumann

Vladimir Feltsman, p—Nimbus 6317—68 min

More often than not, I’ve found it difficult to agree with people who think Vladimir Feltsman’s playing is amazing, revelatory, earth-shattering—add the superlative of your choice. In fact, I often find him eccentric, willful, sometimes even precious. Hearing this recording, I find myself thinking all of this again and yet now I’m astonished and transfixed. For this program collects a variety of short pieces as counterpoints for several works by the ineffably wonderful Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937): *Kitsch Music, Melodies, Two Waltzes*, and *Messenger*, along with arrangements of Schubert and Wagner.

If you haven’t heard any of his music, you might get a sense of it with this oft-cited quote: “I do not write new music. My music is a response to and an echo of what already exists.” It does indeed sound like music you’ve heard before—tender, moving, and evocative—and yet you are hard pressed to say exactly where you’ve heard it before. In other words, Silvestrov has a way of creating new music from the old almost by sheer force of will: never merely quotation (Crumb), never merely a clever imitation of an older composer (Rochberg), but utterly original to him and yet utterly familiar at the same time.

To play music like this requires a pianist who has the most beautiful sound imaginable and a composer’s gifts to shape familiar phrases in a completely novel, unforgettable way. And that is exactly what Feltsman does, both for these works and for perfect companions from the classical repertory: Scarlatti’s B-minor Sonata (K 87), a CPE Bach Andante, Chopin’s E-flat minor Etude, some of Schumann’s *Davidsbundlertanze*—all these performances are expert and sound almost like standard interpretations, but when I begin to pay more attention, it seems to me as if Feltsman’s trying to create the impression that he’s trying to reproduce the sound of music that one is imagining, not hearing: the memory is faulty and somehow insubstantial, the struggle to recall the exact sequence of notes and harmonies palpable: the echo, perhaps, “of what already exists”. If this was Feltsman’s intent here, then he is an incredible pianist. Even if not, this program is unforgettable and should be heard by everyone I know.

**Emancipation of the Consonance**

Arzumanov, Desyatnikov, Byabov

Lukas Geniusas, p—Melodiya 2409—69 minutes

In his notes the pianist identifies these pieces as examples of “the new simplicity” that took hold in the 1980s. All the pieces are miniatures—fairly straightforward arrangements of Russian folk songs, bitonal evocations of circus music, and kitschy salon pieces. It sounds like bad Kabalevsky to me.

This stuff isn’t worth one measure of Silvestrov, no matter how well it’s played or recorded.

**Dance Passion**

Leticia Gomez-Tagle, p

Ars 38183 — 79 minutes

Ms Gomez-Tagle is a Mexican pianist with considerable technique. For this program she selected 17 pieces by European and Central and South American composers that are dance related. The wide range of music includes Liszt, Chopin, Brahms, Falla, Albeniz, Ginastera, Ponce, Marquez, and Gluck—tangos, boleros, waltzes, mazurkas, polonaises, malambos, and others.

*Dance Passion* is an appropriate title. She performs each piece with amazing dexterity and expressiveness. Where the music requires a discreet approach her playing is delicate and sensitive. When the music requires energy and passion her playing can only be described as pyrotechnic. Most impressive is ‘Danzon No. 2’ by Marquez—quite amazing, with an appropriate propulsive Latin beat and astonishing skill. Other high points include Brahms’s Hungarian Dances 1 and 2, Falla’s ‘Farruca’, Ginastera’s ‘Malambo’, and Ponce’s ‘Habanera’, but all 17 pieces are satisfying. All the music is played flawlessly with intensity and sensitivity.
where required, always displaying remarkable technique.

The sound is also amazing—clarity unlike anything I’ve ever heard. The piano used is not mentioned, but it is an instrument where every note is clearly heard with just the right amount of resonance. Whether the Super Audio surround is necessary for a single piano is questionable, but it probably added to the overall excellent sound. The English and German booklet describes each of the selections.

**Ute Hielscher**

**CHOPIN:** Ballade 1; Waltz; Impromptu 1; Scherzo 1; **BACH:** Partita 1; French Suite 1

Oehms 1835—66 minutes

Uta Hielscher was born in Tokyo but studied and makes her home in Germany. Her biography (and a bit of internet browsing) suggests that she has recorded extensively as a chamber player and vocal accompanist, and that this is her first solo release. It’s a beautiful performance organized, as many projects are these days, around a gimmick or theme: this time, first compositions in various piano music genres by Bach (the first partita and first French Suite) and Chopin (first Ballade, Scherzo, Impromptu, and waltz—the breathless Valse Brillante in E-flat).

Hielscher is a pianist first and foremost, with a real feel for the technical resources of the instrument, abundant technique, and a willingness to shape music without becoming too precious or intrusive. The Bach is always effective with appropriate tempos, judicious (but not always convincing) ornamentation on repeats, and gorgeous tone. No feeble playing here, no endless staccato in either hand. Of the Chopin works, the best is the Ballade, where subtle rubato (mostly an occasional pushing of tempo at the beginning of a phrase) gives the music a pensive but anxious quality that suits it very well. The sound is exquisite.

**Evgeni Koroliov**

Handel, Mozart, Haydn

Profil 15021 [4CD] 306 minutes

Mr Koroliov says he has a particular affinity for Bach. Having spent a lot of time with this lovely collection, I would love to hear his WTC. He is an aristocratic player with beautiful tone, fine technique and musicianship, and—best of all—nothing to prove and no axe to grind. Expect from his playing reliable, luminous, and often quite compelling readings with minimal eccentricity and a compassionate musical sensibility.

Two discs are devoted to Haydn (the F-minor variations and Sonatas 11, 20, 23, 35, 44, 48, 50, and 52). In general, I like the performances but find them a little too lyrical and understated. I want the playing to have more bite, the interpretations a little more grit. Still, I’m gratified that he never plays Haydn flip-fantly, for cheap laughs, as too many pianists have. Every now and then there’s a beautiful surprise: a sudden wash of pedal in Sonata 50 makes a superb tonal effect that’s wholly in keeping with the sentiment of the slow movement where it appears. His performance of Sonata 23 has one of the best slow movements I’ve ever heard.

His Mozart is exquisite. He includes a near-revelatory performance of the little-played Sonata 4 (K 282 in E-flat) with a heavenly first movement and a dignified minuet. The great Fantasy and Sonata in C minor is fine, and Koroliov’s lyric strengths serve the fantasy and slow movement particularly well. Then follows the unforgettable A-major Sonata, with its expressive variations first movement and an incisive rondo (the famous “alla turca” one); having heard Lang Lang play it at breakneck speed with relentless brio, I must say it was refreshing and reassuring to hear it at Koroliov’s more appropriate pace.

Enthusiasts for Baroque music will be thrilled by his Handel; the selection is unusual but effective, including the D minor and G minor suites from the so-called Great set and the lesser played suites in G and D minor. The lyrical approach makes Koroliov refuse the merciless, sempre staccato bass lines and mechanical phrasing that one hears too often in these pieces. The sonics are wonderful. This set, in sum, will give much pleasure and repays close, repeated hearings.

**Catherine Lan, piano**

**BACH:** Prelude & Fugue in A minor; **SCHUMANN:** Faschingsschwank aus Wien; **BRAHMS:** 2 Intermezzi; **WEBER:** Sonata 1:IV; **GRANADOS:** Goyescas excerpts

Centaur 3457—59 minutes

This unedited concert recording has the feel and repertory of a senior recital sans the usually requisite modern piece, unless Granados counts as modern at Ms Lan’s alma mater. She’ll make a fine faculty pianist and chamber player, assuming she plays well with others like your typically well-rounded conservatory-trained musician, as she displays neither electrifying technical prowess nor penetrating interpretive insight. This disc is as satisfying and diverting as the dozen or so senior recitals I attend at local colleges every year; and, like those recitals, it’s nothing I need to hear more than once.
After writing the above, I read the booklet that confirms Ms Lan is on the faculty of Palm Beach Atlantic University, where this recital was recorded (it’s not a senior recital) and is cofounder of Chrysalis Chamber Players. The one thing I missed is that she also appears as soloist with many regional orchestras around the US and Canada. If you have a chance to see her in concert, this will make a lovely souvenir of the event.

WRIGHT

Imago
Couperin, Furt, Satie. Lo Bianco
Moira Lo Bianco, p—Steinway 30060—53 min

Pianist Moira Lo Bianco combines classical rigor with a flair for improvisation, both in her performance style and repertoire. In this free-wheeling collection she plays Couperin’s D-major Sonata with remarkable rhythmic freedom. Satie’s Veritable Preludes Basques are wild, unpredictable pieces that sound amazingly contemporary, especially the way Lo Bianco plays them. In the remainder of the album she paraphrases other sources, from Lady Gaga to Gregorian Chant, in a series of free form compositions, caricatures, and improvisations by herself and others. Some sound like surreal versions of pop; others are quite formal and classical despite their freedom of form.

The most quiet, reflective pieces, based on Eastern modes, are a bit like Bartok, a composer who has greatly influenced her. The finale in her own works, ‘Gregorian Effects’, sounds a bit like pseudo-Medieval Respighi at the beginning, then goes its own way into increasingly exotic territory. The album’s finale, Arvo Part’s ‘Fur Alina,’ is the longest and one of the most fluid of all the richly varied repertory here—a dreamlike work that somehow sums up this pianist’s gift for creating an environment of mystical plasticity. As usual, Steinway & Sons offers seductive, realistic sound.

SULLIVAN

Sordino Pedal Piano

BACH: Final Choruses f St Matthew Passion;
MOZART: Conzattis & Lacrimosa f Requiem;
Puccini: I Crisantemi; LISZT: Mephisto Waltz I;
Schumann: Wenn Ich in Deine Augen Seh’;
SHOSTAKOVICH: Toccata & Passacaglia f Symphony 8; SAYAT NOVA: Melodie-Elegie; MOUS-SORGSKY: Night on Bald Mountain

Jura Margulis & Martha Argerich, p
Oehms 453—66 minutes

Margulis performs his own arrangements and adaptations of the works by Bach, Mozart, Liszt, Schumann, Puccini, and Shostakovich on a Steinengaber piano fitted with a sordino pedal of his own design. He also plays an arrangement of an Armenian folk melody by Babadjanian. At the Lugano Festival in 2014, Margulis joined forces with Martha Argerich to perform his two-piano transcription of Moussorgsky’s Night on Bald Mountain on a pair of Steinway pianos. Argerich also supplied an endorsement of Margulis’s Sordino Pedal. That is reproduced in the booklet, where we also get a detailed description of the Sordino Pedal and its historical predecessors.

The music was selected to show off the new sounds the pedal can allow the pianist to produce. Based on the old fortepianos of Mozart and Beethoven’s time, the sordino pedal moves a thin layer of felt in between the hammers and strings. When engaged, there is a clear change of color and definition of each note. It might be likened to having two sets of hammers, one normal and the other freshly loosened and very soft. The older pianos typically called this pedal (more often knee than foot) a moderator, and most instruments of that period had them. It stands to reason that their music would have made regular use of this pedal effect, and I can’t help but wonder why no classical period piano piece was selected for this recording.

Margulis is more than a capable pianist, though nowhere in the same league with Argerich. His transcriptions are good and worth hearing a couple of times. His unique adaptation of the Mephisto Waltz includes a combination of the Liszt original, Busoni’s version derived from Liszt’s orchestration, and a number of his own Horowitz-inspired alterations.

This program on a regular piano would probably only create some interest because of Argerich’s involvement in the slam-bang two-piano performance of A Night on Bald Mountain, recorded in concert in 2014. I was taken aback when, as the work got into the quiet section at the end, there was a regular tolling of a real bell. Playing a work with Argerich brings out Margulis’s best pianism. His transcription of the Moussorgsky yields much the same results as Vovka Ashkenazy, who enlists his father for their superb two-piano recording (Decca 478 2940). Elsewhere in this issue I review a six-piano arrangement of this music. I suppose I should also mention that in some box in my attic there are about 10 handwritten pages of my own aborted piano duet transcription of the work. Everybody loves A Night on Bald Mountain. The Argerich-Margulis version is the most exciting, but it does have that damn bell at the end.

HARRINGTON

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What we have here is a reasonably well known pianist accompanied by an electronic orchestra. To be fair, Stephen Ware's program is a very sophisticated one and goes far beyond what one envisions as synthesized sound. The notes give us a reasonable description of the process.

For long stretches one hears the music in a world of sound that might even be mistaken for genuine (with things slightly off kilter). Other times brass chords (for example) sound finally come down to computer geeks and technical abilities; I would go out of my way to plenty of personal style, backed by superior computer-generated music.

PROKOFIEFF: people fascinated by the possibilities of computer accompanied by an electronic orchestra.

RACHMANINOFF: Concerto 2; SAINT-SAENS: Concerto 4; ADDINSELL: Warsaw Concerto
Frederick Moyer; East West Quantum Leap Orchestra/ Stephen Ware
JRI 140—60 minutes

Only the Rimsky-Korsakov is a recent recording (2010); all the others are from 1988 to 1991. Pierce often performs in a duo with Dorothy Jonas, but he's been very active as a soloist—he has well over 30 entries in our Index.

Tchaikovsky’s First is scintillating and mentally alert; the Third is warm and vigorous, but the orchestra sounds recessed and congested. The Khachaturian is colorful. The first movement of Shostakovich’s Second is energetic, and II is beautifully paced; there is an unfortunate thumping from the sustain pedal that mars II and III. The Shostakovich and Prokofieff’s First suffer from congested sound, also, and the ensemble is shaky in the latter. So, a mixed bag. I'll keep it for the Khachaturian, but I'd be disappointed if I'd plunked down much money for it.

This is a wonderful recital of 20th Century music inspired by a late Beethoven opus. Orloff writes that the Bagatelles were a springboard to show how various composers used small motifs to great and profound effect. The Beethoven seems a little out of place, placed as the last 6 of 42 tracks.

An excellent performance like this is always welcome. I enjoyed the variety of touch and wonderful control of dynamics that Orloff exhibited. I like the mix of familiar masterpieces by Prokofieff and Bartok and rarely heard Copland combined with brand new discoveries, all given captivating performances.

The recording was done in Germany, and the sound is exceptionally good for a small label. I was surprised that nowhere was there any notation of timings. Orloff is a pianist with plenty of personal style, backed by superior technical abilities; I would go out of my way to hear her in concert. A piano teacher for 40 years, she also gives us extensive booklet notes that are very well written and round off a release that has been a pleasure to hear at least half a dozen times in the past month.

HARRINGTON

Russian Piano Concertos

Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Khachaturian, Shostakovich, Prokofieff
Joshua Pierce; Slovenian Radio, Berlin Radio/ Paul Freeman; Slovak National/ Kirk Trevor
MSR 1464 [2CD] 126 minutes

Estonian pianist Mihkel Poll dispatches these East European works from the modern and contemporary period with plenty of punch and drama. Bartok’s Out of Doors Suite has a straightforward “barbaric” drive, unlike the more ruminative version by Murray Perahia. Nonetheless, ‘Night Music’ has a spooky poetry, but it sounds more percussive than ever, as does Poll’s terrifying version of ‘The Chase’.

Enesco’s meaty and dramatic F-minor Piano Sonata is a reminder that this composer wrote a lot more than the popular Romanian Rhapsodies. Especially gratifying is the deeply expressive Andante finale. Unlike his violence in the Bartok, Poll’s tone is warm and resonant here; the ending sounds like a dark clanging bell.

Tuur’s 1985 Piano Sonata was actually influenced by the bell-like sounds a piano can make. It’s a riot of color, restless and soulful, full of surprise and suspense. This colorful, well-conceived program ends with an imaginative piece from the younger generation, Tonu Korvits’s magisterial, polytonal ‘Hymn to Wind Harp’, played with generous pedal. I have never heard Poll before, but he is a pianist to watch; he has passion, technique, and a wide range of colors.

SULLIVAN
Half the program is a remarkably good performance of Bach's French Ouverture, S 831. The rest is an assortment of short French Baroque pieces by D'Anglebert, Royer, Marais, and Rameau, played with Schlosberg's compelling musical insight but infected by miscalculations. He plays one piece down a half step because he learned it from an old harpsichord recording at a lower pitch. In two other pieces he puts putty or chains onto the piano strings—both awful.

There are production glitches. Someone has mis-attributed both the Rameau pieces to Couperin and misspelled another composer's name, though Schlosberg got it right in his essay. The engineering is disappointing: the piano’s tone lacks warmth, sounding rather like some recordings from the 1950s. I'd like to hear his way with other Bach suites.

B LEHMAN

Vladimir Sofronitsky

Melodiya 2312 [5CD, DVD] 319 minutes

The famed Russian pianist died in 1961. This treasurable set contains recordings of his piano recitals between 1951 and 1960. The DVD has a 45-minute documentary by the director Andrei Konchalovsky. There is, of course, plenty of Scriabin (he was married to the composer’s daughter), much Schumann, and an inspiring variety of other music as well. The three-language booklet (Russian, English, French) is interesting, though it does not attempt to discuss each piece.

Disc 1 dates from 1959 and contains Schumann’s Fantasy in C, Symphonic Etudes, and Arabeske. With sound that is clear and undistorted, but a little too raw for many listeners, the Fantasy hurtles forward with unforgettable sweep and passion. The style of playing may be too unbridled for some, but both energy and subtlety are hallmarks of the playing. The Symphonic Etudes include the posthumous variations inserted at various points. Once again the sweep and passion of the playing throws all caution to the wind. It can sound exhausting. The Arabesque gives some relief from the tension, but continues the many excellences this pianist is noted for.

Disc 2 from 1960 includes Schumann’s Sonata 1, along with two Schubert Impromptus, two Chopin Nocturnes and Scherzos, and Mozart’s Fantasia in C minor. As with the other discs there is some applause. Since Sofronitsky is an emotionally intense player the Schumann is given the full treatment. The Chopin grouping shows the pianist’s affinity for the Polish master. While still intense, rubato is well judged, and phrasing is all one could wish for. Demonic-like Scherzo 1 is an exhilarating wild ride and Scherzo 2 a model of clarity, especially the rippling left hand. If the Mozart seems sometimes less than idiomatic, the Schubert leaves one breathless in its virtuoso abandon. Nothing is ever dull.

Disc 3 (1959, 1960) returns us to Schumann again for his ever-popular Carnaval. It is an impetuous reading, but he plays with a light, expressive touch. Schumann is not an easy composer to perform correctly, but Sofronitsky has staked out his claim as a master of the idiom, though with a few caveats. Many will be thrilled by his driving tempos and masterly rubato. Others may find it overpowering. Also included is a sensitively played ‘In the Evening’ from Fantasiestucke and a stormy Romance, Op. 28:1.

Scriabin’s ascetic but characteristic Sonata 4 is played with all the mystery and tension one could wish for. The Poeme Tragique, Waltz in A-flat, and Etude Op. 8:11 are dream performances, as fine as any; and two of Rachmaninoff’s Moments Musicaux are breathtaking in execution.

Disc 4 (1951, 1955) includes Liszt’s Dante Sonata, Mozart’s Fantasia in C minor, and Prokofieff’s Sonata 7 in addition to several short pieces by Debussy, Liadov, and Shostakovich. While the sound is not as good as the later recordings, it is decent save for some shattering in loud passages. The irony of the Prokofieff is well caught and fits the pianist’s skills like a glove. The Liszt is (dare I say it) a shattering experience, and the two Shostakovitch Preludes and Fugues are emotionally exhausting.

Disc 5 (1951, 1955) is all Scriabin, with Sonatas 5, 8, 9, 10, nine Preludes, and a miscellany of short works, closing with the stirring Etude Op. 8:12. Sofronitsky had a special affinity for Scriabin’s music; and, while many excellent stereo recordings exist, these are still something special. Collectors that already have Volume 91 of the “Great Pianists of the 20th Century” need not worry about much content duplication.

Disc 6 contains the 44-minute DVD documentary from 2007 by Andrei Konchalovsky called “Geniuses: Vladimir Sofronitsky”. I suggest watching this first; it serves as a pretty good introduction and tribute to this great artist. Yes, it has its share of talking heads and superfluous information, but it has a sincerity and much that will probably be enlightening. Since none of the narration is in English, there are subtitles.

Each of these treasurable discs comes in a

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cardboard sleeve adorned by a photograph of the artist. Typical of Melodiya, we have each disc looking like a miniature record—a delightful idea that would be hard for any collector to resist. Full praise to Melodiya for not only issuing this set, but for doing it so well.

BECKER

Michał Szymanowski Recital

CHOPIN: Barcarolle; Nocturne, op 27:1; 3 Mazurkas; Etudes; Polonaise; Waltz, op 42; PADEREWSKI: Nocturne, op 16:4; Polonaise, op 9:6; SZYMANOWSKI: 2 Mazurkas; WENIAWSKI: Concert Waltz

Accord 219 — 70 minutes

Polish pianist Szymanowski devotes his program to Polish composers. Unlike Robert Cassidy’s Barcarolle (J/A 2016), Szymanowski (not sure who/what is related to the composer) demonstrates an understanding of the piece. He has a good feel for the pacing of the work, which demands a carefully timed left hand. This interpretation lies between Cassidy’s disorganized playing and Goerner’s bolder rendering. I prefer his colorful yet restrained approach. The Paderewski Polonaise is graceful and sumptuous. Szymanowski has credible subtlety. The ‘Valse de Concert’ that concludes the program has rippling runs and shows a fine sense of drama.

One quibble: sometimes the tempo in the Barcarolle slows down too much, breaking the flow; the end also slows down too much, losing its dramatic punch. This tendency to slow down is related to his tendency to be a little too careful in his interpretations, as in Nocturne, Op. 27:1. The work is very sensitive, and he plays the lyrical lines brilliantly, but the piece sounds tentative and drags. Chung is more fearless with her Szymanowski Mazurkas, and I would have liked to hear more boldness to match his rich sound and lovely details.

But too much care is not necessarily a bad thing, and it is better to slow down and attend to the finer nuances than to rush through on technique alone. Restraint is refreshing.

Liner notes in both Polish and English.

KANG

Orford 6 Pianos II

KHACHATURIAN: Gayaneh Movements; Mascarade; PROKOFIEFF: Classical Symphony; TCHAIKOVSKY: Romeo & Juliet; MOUSORGSKY: Night on Bald Mountain

Sandra Murray, Claire Ouellet, Marlene Panenaude, Francis Perron, Pamela Reimer, Louis Domenique Roy—ATMA 2733—74 minutes

Six pianists who were simply colleagues in Quebec formed a unique group ten years ago. I have no doubt that their concerts with six pianos on stage arranged in a semi-circle and roughly corresponding to an orchestra are effective. They play quite well together—very accurate ensemble, with plenty of color and technique. Their choice of orchestral transcriptions (done by Perron and Roy, plus former member Olivier Godin) defines exactly what you are getting and whether or not this is for you. Good performances, recorded sound, and booklet notes make this Russian recital tempting, but probably for its uniqueness.

I found the Khachaturian works most effective—generally percussive and loud with driving rhythms. Everyone has heard arrangements of the ‘Sabre Dance’, so it does not sound at all out of place here. The light, sophisticated, and popular Classical Symphony has as a solo piano transcription by Prokofieff (Verzhanov, Con Brio 28454, J/A 2009). It is more in keeping with the style of the work than this six-piano version. Orford Six Pianos just make too much and too complicated a sound for this one. The Tchaikovsky and Moussorgsky work better the Prokofieff. While I know I would enjoy seeing this group in concert, the CD is not something I will return to very often.

HARRINGTON

Piano Celebration

DOUCET: Chopinata; MULLER: Nostalgia; HOROWITZ: Carmen Variations; BARBER: Hesitation Tango; RACHMANNINOFF: Polka Italiane; KAPUSTIN: Variations; POULENC: Edith Piaf Improvisation; WILD: 2 Etudes on Gershwin Songs; BRAHMS: 2 Hungarian Dances; RZEWSKI: Down By the Riverside; MILHAUD: Le Boeuf Sur la Toit; GINASTERA: Danza de la Moza Donosa; LECUONA: Ante et Escorial; Maleguedina; Mazurka en Glissando; PIAZZOLLA: Libertango; ARLEN: Over the Rainbow; MANGINI: Moon River

Carl Patrick Bolleia, Soyeon Park, Erikson Rojas, Reed Tetzloff, Ming Xie, Min Kwon, p

MSR 1559—76 minutes

This is a most aptly titled collection with 20 tracks, 16 composers, and 6 pianists performing 14 piano solos and 6 duets. If we take the nationalities of both composers and pianists, 17 countries are represented here. Most of the selections are in a light-weight, popular style that make for an enjoyable recital. The duets are all some form of dance, and the solos are mostly of the encore type. These are all technically demanding pieces, some (Kapustin, Horowitz, Wild) true virtuoso works. Each piece is expertly played and recorded, with interesting booklet notes completing a delightful package.

This is the debut recording from the New Jersey based Center for Musical Excellence, a
non-profit organization dedicated to moving musicians forward through training and performance opportunities. Director and founder Min Kwon is one of the excellent pianists here, as well as the driving force behind the organization and recording.

It is labeled Volume 1, so I will watch for Volume 2.

HARRINGTON

**Perpetuum Trumpetum**

Skjelbred, Hvoslef, Tosse, Aagaard-Nilsen, Olsen, Vaage

Erland Aagaard-Nilsen, tpt; Jarle Rotevatn, p

LAWO 8—66 minutes

New Norwegian works played by the fine Norwegian trumpeter Erland Aagaard-Nilsen. Most include pianist Jarle Rotevatn. Bjorn Bolstad Skjelbred’s ‘Resisting Gravity’ (2011) begins with very fast trumpet double-tonguing and relentless piano patterns and then ends with several minutes of long, slow, quiet music that seems to float weightlessly. Ketil Hvoslef’s ‘Perpetuum Trumpetum’ (2010) consists of variations over a smoothly played piano ostinato. In Elliott Tosse’s ‘Signals’ (2010), the trumpeter often plays into the piano, making the strings vibrate sympathetically.

Torstein Aagaard-Nilsen is represented by four pieces: a little ‘Mill Fanfare,’ ‘Elegy for Broken Hearts’ (muted trumpet and piano, 1996), ‘Orpheus Lament’ (trumpet and spooky electronics), and a lively ‘Festoso.’ Sigurd Fischer Olsen’s *Three Lamento Movements* calls for unorthodox sounds: the trumpeter’s breath through the instrument and plucked-string piano effects in I; wah-wah mute and rubbed strings in II; and quarter-tone pitches in III.

The big piece is Knut Vaage’s 18-minute *MultiMORF IV* (2007) for trumpet and electronics. The sounds are varied, the piece interesting, though the meeting of human-created and electronic sounds is always a little uneasy.

KILPATRICK

**Rojak Rocks**

Gale, Sacco, Lynn, Ross, Raph

John Rojak, b trb; James Miller, Andy Malloy, trb; Antoine Perry, Russ Kassoff, p; Joe Bongiorno, db; Ray Marchica, perc; New York Chamber Symphony; Gerard Schwarz

Navona 6019—62 minutes

John Rojak’s biography is a bass trombonist’s success story—longtime membership in the American Brass Quintet and Orchestra of St Luke’s; 16 years in the Broadway pit for *Les Miserables*; new works composed for him by Eric Ewazen and others; solo and chamber recordings; teaching at NYU, Juilliard, Hartt, Aspen. Here he presents pieces that have jazz or commercial flavors.

Jack Gale’s Three Pieces for bass trombone with rhythm section is a 12-tone, non-improvisatory jazz piece that has Rojak sounding quite comfortable with pianist Russ Kassoff, bassist Joe Bongiorno, and drummer Ray Marchica. Rojak teams with pianist Antoinette Perry in Steven Sacco’s 3-movement, 15-minute Bass Trombone Sonata, a mostly classical work that is tinged by jazz harmonies and rhythms. It has a wistful Romance, melancholy Adagio, and exuberant Scherzo.

In Brian Lynn’s tuneful, 5-movement, 10-minute *Ba-Dee-Doo-Dup* for trombone trio, Rojak lays down the bass line for tenor trombonists James Miller and Andy Malloy. These are people who always sound good individually and together.

The big piece is Walter Ross’s 3-movement, 24-minute Bass Trombone Concerto 2. Ross (b 1936) has composed many pieces for brass instruments, all in abstract melodic and harmonic languages but with a rhythmic vitality that makes them fun to play. That style is on full display here, and I must say that an energetic reading by a full orchestra adds much to my enjoyment.

The album ends with Alan Raph’s infectious little unaccompanied ‘Rock.’ I was going to complain about the excessive ambience someone must have added in the recording studio when I read the notes and looked at the cover photos and realized that Rojak recorded it in Hunter Canyon (Moab, Utah). I’ll bet it was the first time the local critters ever heard a bass trombone.

KILPATRICK

**Virtuoso Ophicleide**

Demersseman, Caussinus, Glinka, Kummer; Klose, Corbin

Patrick Wibart, Corentin Morvan, Oscar Abella Martin; Adrien Ramon, cornet; Lucie Sansen, p

Ricercar 362—60 minutes

Ah, the ophicleide, that fabulously named, 19th-Century instrument that looks like a bari-tone saxophone impersonating a bassoon— with brass mouthpiece, of course. The excellent notes for this terrific album tell the instrument’s story: the experimentation with bass-voiced instruments at a time of technological advancement, of Adolphe Sax trying a brass mouthpiece on a saxophone, of the inadequacies of other bass instruments like the serpent, of the ophicleide’s creation in 1817 by the one-named inventor Halary, of Berlioz’s love-hate attitude toward the instrument, and of its eventual replacement by the more reliable bass tona (as a very funny typo calls it in the notes). But today, because of interest in hear-
ing old instruments, new life has been breathed into the old ophicleide.

If you listen to an ophicleide and don’t know what you are hearing, you would probably guess it is a euphonium—if you know what that is. In the hands and on the embouchure of Patrick Wilbart, it has a beautiful sound and is capable of remarkable virtuosity. All of these pieces are quaint old things that won’t inspire deep thoughts, but they do sound very good here. His intonation is always good and his tone is always beautiful. Lucie Sansen is a fine piano collaborator.

Let’s all remember to celebrate the ophicleide’s 200th birthday next year!

KILPATRICK

Viola Concertos
Hoffmeister, Stamitz, M Haydn
Andra Darzina, Urban Camerata
CPO 777986—75 minutes

This is a very small orchestra (about 20 players) and makes little use of vibrato, so you have to like scraping in the strings. The Hoffmeister is a boring piece that could have been written by almost anyone in the classical period.

The Michael Haydn piece lasts half an hour and has an organ in it, but the organ only uses three registers and sounds like a musical clock.

The Stamitz (Carl) is the best piece here, and it has been recorded often before—even by Pinchas Zukerman, if I remember right. I have a Helios recording by Tabea Zimmermann (88015) that I prefer, mostly because the orchestra sounds healthier.

VROON

Viola Pieces
BLOCH: Suite; GLINKA: Sonata; BOWEN: Phantasy
Bradley Parrimore, Uzeiyr Makhmudbayli, Matthew Cohen; Vivian Fan, p
Soundset 1074—61 minutes

This is one of the more unusual releases I have had to review. All of the works here are for viola and piano, but the only performer to play all three works is the pianist, Vivian Fan, an instructor at the Colburn Conservatory in Los Angeles. Bradley Parrimore plays the Bloch, Uzeyir Makhmudbayli the Glinka, and Matthew Cohen the Bowen. Parrimore is a young African-American violist who is currently studying at the Manhattan School of Music, Makhmudbayli is a young Azerbaijani violist who is currently studying with Paul Coletti at the Colburn Conservatory, and Matthew Cohen studies at Juilliard with Heidi Castleman and Cynthia Phelps. This appears to be a showcase for the talents of these three up-and-coming violists.

The most striking work here is the Bloch, and Bradley Parrimore makes the strongest impression on me of the three violists. This may be partly because the Bloch makes the strongest impression on me of the three works. The Glinka is the least interesting work, and Makhmudbayli makes the weakest impression on me, possibly because of his choice of music. Matthew Cohen comes across better, and the Bowen is a lovely work. We have three fine young violists here, none with any weaknesses that I could notice. I would like to hear all three in separate, complete recitals.

MAGIL

Soul of Lady Harmsworth
Violin Encores
Kristof Barati; Gabor Farkas, p
Hungaroton 32760 — 70 minutes

The “Lady Harmsworth” is the name of a 1703 Stradivarius violin currently owned by the Stradivarius Society of Chicago. It is named after an English aristocrat who owned the instrument in the 19th Century. The violin is currently on loan to violinist Kristof Barati, who performs the 13 short compositions with pianist Gabor Farkas. The well-known selections are by Sarasate, Wieniawski, Ernst, Tchaikovsky, and Paganini; they have been recorded numerous times and by some very famous violinists. You can take your pick of the violinist you like the most—they’ve probably recorded these pieces—and you’ll probably like their interpretations.

The “Lady Harmsworth” has a rich, mellow, and beautiful sound that seems descended from Heaven. Mr Barati makes good use of the violin’s ultra-smooth tone, but not its versat-ility. These showpieces need some bite and spark to make them effective, and only the violinist can add those effects. Mr Barati plays all the pieces pretty much the same way—note perfect, but lifeless. I’ve never heard this music with so little interpretation from the performer. There are no fast attacks, no speed-ups or slowdowns, and the difficult passages are just another set of notes. I expected much more from Mr Barati, who has won many international contests and performed with most major orchestras. Mr Farkas plays the accompaniments to match Barati’s inert performances.

The sound is outstanding. The English and Hungarian booklet offers information about the composers and compositions, performer biographies, a track listing with timings, but no information about the violin.

If you want to hear rather tepid performances of this beautiful, challenging, and sometimes fiery music played on a magnificent
Stern, Oistrakh, Perlman, or Bell. Interpretalist Barnabas Kelemen and pianist Zoltan Kocsis (J/F 2015). Certain Gypsy slides and interesting variations of the music I would choose Heifetz, but they give the music the life-blood it needs.

**Miranda Cuckson**

**BARTOK:** Violin Sonata 2; **SCHNITTEK:** Sonata 2; **LUTOSLAWSKI:** Partita with Blair McMillen, p—ECM 24847—62 minutes

Bela Bartok’s Violin Sonata 2, written in 1922, is a mature work. It is mysterious and seems to track the trajectory of life itself. Many performers do not convey the mystery, but Miranda Cuckson and Blair McMillen do. That said, they don’t quite match the energy, drama, and variety of mood of other performers. This is a good performance, but the best available are still the definitive recording made in concert in 1940 at the Library of Congress by the composer playing piano and violinist Joseph Szigtet (J/F 1989) and the superb recent SACD by violinist Barnabas Kelemen and pianist Zoltan Kocsis (J/F 2015).

Alfred Schnittke’s Violin Sonata 2, subtitled *Quasi una Sonata* (Like a Sonata), dates from 1967-68. Schnittke began to abandon serialism in this work, alternating that technique with tonality and beginning his move into polystylism. The piece is mostly gestural and dissonant, with only snatches of what might be called melodies.

Witold Lutoslawski’s Partita for violin and piano was written in 1984. It has three main sections separated by two brief aleatoric sections. It is not as abrasive on the ears as the Schnittke and has more melodic material.

Cuckson and McMillen play the Schnittke and Lutoslawski very well and are obviously comfortable with and steeped in their avant-garde idioms. Good sound.

**Ivry Gitlis**

**PAGANINI:** Violin Concerto 2; **BRAHMS:** Sonata 3; **DEBUSSY:** Sonata; **SAINT-SAENS:** Introduction & Rondo Capriccioso; **BLOCH:** Nigun; **WIENIAWSKI:** Polonaise; **HINDEMITH:** Concerto; **HAUBENSTOCK-RAMATI:** Sequences; **BARTOK:** Concerto

SWR 19005 [2CD] 156 minutes

Ivry Gitlis (b 1922) is a violinist of the old school. A flaming virtuoso, he also has an outsized personality and is not afraid to sound eccentric. Certain Gypsy slides and interesting variations in his vibrato show up in places where others wouldn’t dream of putting them.

These recordings were made from 1962 to 1986, and the remarkable thing is that the earliest recordings, the Hindemith Violin Concerto and the avant-garde Haubenstock-Ramati Sequences, are the most stylized. Gitlis’s eccentricities apparently developed later and can be heard in the recording from 1972 of the Paganini Violin Concerto 2. The rest of the works were recorded in 1985 and 1986, and then Gitlis’s personality had become very distinct.

It seems that Gitlis gradually shed the self-effacing literalism that was current in the mid-20th Century and turned back to the great virtuosos of the late 19th and early 20th Century. He is fascinating if sometimes odd, but I always enjoyed listening to this set. There is good sound in the recordings from 1962, which are conducted by the great Hans Rosbaud. The performance of the Hindemith is one of the best.

**Corelli’s Legacy**

Violin sonatas by Corelli, Visconti, Geminiani, Somis, Mossi, Castrucci Szabolcs Illes; Dalibor Pimek, vc; Ondrej Macek, hpsi—Hungaroton 32765—62 minutes

When I was a boy, one of my prized possessions was Eduard Melkus’s LP set of the Corelli violin sonatas. My violin teacher had performed with Melkus, and that gave them an added allure. What I liked most about them was the sense of joy that Melkus projected. He played this music with almost tangible relish. Many in the period performance practice movement ridiculed Melkus as a middle-of-the-road. He used a steel E string and a chinrest, he used continuous vibrato, etc. There is something that makes any performance of music most authentic, though, and that is conveying the spirit of the music—and Melkus is the best I’ve heard in the violin music of the baroque.

This joy is just what is lacking in Szabolcs Illes’s playing. He doesn’t have much of a soloist’s personality either. With the emphasis on historical scholarship in the PPP movement, it is easy to forget that the great musicians of the past were charismatic soloists. Many of the PPP performers today sound bookish rather than exuberant. These works are well played, but the performances are pedestrian. If Corelli were alive today, maybe he would decide to use a steel E string and a chinrest. Would that make him less of a musician? Does eschewing these make you more of a musician?

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On Fire
Piet Koornhof, v; Bernarda Vorster, p
Delos 3479 [2CD] 101 minutes

This selection of 20 short violin and piano pieces includes some well known and often recorded items by Wieniawski, Kriesler, and Taneyev that in all cases have had better renditions. Even with varying interpretations, Heifetz, Stern, Perlman, and Grimi aux—to name a few—make these difficult showpieces impressive and melodic. Mr Koornhof does not. Although technically competent, he has a grating violin sound that is unpleasant and tiresome. Rather than On Fire the performances are "low boil", at best.

Fortunately, most of the program is of less-known pieces by Kabalevsky, Skoryk, Kroll, Rota, Karayev, Toldra, and others. Most enjoyable is the Six Sonnets by Spanish composer Eduard Toldra, though Karayev’s ‘Waltz’ from the ballet The Seven Beauties, Glazounov’s Meditation, Ysaye’s Solo Violin Sonata, and Rota’s Improviso are all very pleasing. These all have attractive melodies and are impressively performed. The violin playing is smooth and assured, with none of the grating heard in the more familiar pieces. Ms Vorster’s piano accompaniment is skillful.

Disc 1 is 71 minutes, Disc 2 30 minutes. The booklet is in English only and includes performer biographies, a track listing, and timings. Although they are not sung, there are English translations to the Toldra Sonnets. The sound is excellent.

Sophie Rosa
FRANCK: Violin Sonata; Andantino Quietoso;
RAVEL: Sonata; Piece in the Form of a Habanera;
YSAYE: Child’s Dream

Sophie Rosa is a young British violinist. She won second prize and the audience prize in the 2nd Manchester International Violin Competition in 2011 and performs in the UK and Europe. She has a pleasant manner and manages to bring off the Franck, not in the large-scale manner of David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter, but in a more intimate, scaled-back style. Intimacy and tenderness reign rather than drama and mystery. She does justice to Ravel’s Violin Sonata, though without the grotesquery and sense of fun that Gilles Apap brings to it. She brings out the intimate tenderness of the Ysaye quite well. This almost all-French (Ysaye was Belgian!) recital suits her well. Rosa is not a big talent, but she is a warm, intimate one.

La Voix
POULENC: Violin Sonata; FAURE: Sonata 1;
RAVEL: Tzigane; Habanera

Smart is a young violinist who’s won some competitions and performed with some orchestras. I hate to sound that blase about it, but I feel silly when I think about typing out another list of accomplishments. And of course that’s about all the labels give us in the way of introductions. Even if a musician is really good, it makes him look one-dimensional.

Anyway, this is Smart’s second album, and it opens with an ear-catching burst of energy. But not halfway through the first movement of the Poulenc something started to sound off. His tone is on the thin side and a shade too bright, even with a Strad, and he sounds spiritually disconnected from the music. I didn’t even have to dig out another recording for comparison to realize that—his own accompanist sounds more involved. There are dynamic changes but absolutely no subtlety of expression. The Fauré is distinctly unimpressive. I had higher hopes for Tzigane, but the opening, other than one or two brief measures, soundedrote-learned. Joseph Magil said almost the exact same things about Smart’s debut, except that he “finally (came) alive in the Franck”. Smart and Uttley play together quite well, and they have impressive technique, but Smart in particular needs to grow musically.

We have entered a spiritual limbo. Our educational institutions are no longer bearers of high culture, and public life has been deliberately moronized. But here and there, sheltered from the noise and glare of the media, the old spiritual forces are at work.

--Roger Scruton, Modern Culture

July/August 2016
Valse Blanche’ for violin and piano and ‘Valse Verdi’s and admiring nods to the masters of the salon ‘Largo’ from Handel’s style.... The result is a diptych comprising principal themes of my opera of ‘Solenne in quest’ ora’ from Verdi’s original). Newest of all is Hagen’s piece, which he describes: “I have long desired to craft a pair of fairly short, virtuosic character pieces replete with sentimental expression and admiring nods to the masters of the salon style.... The result is a diptych comprising ‘Valse Blanche’ for violin and piano and ‘Valse Noire’ for cello and piano. ... ‘Valse Blanche’ is an operatic paraphrase based on the two principal themes of my opera A Woman in Morocco. The rhapsodic variations that explore the doomed relationship between two lovers at a Tangiers pension in October 1958 are by turns lubricious, chaste, tormented, and doomed. The piece climaxes with a tune called ‘Love Comes with a Knife.’ The violin takes the role of Lizzie, a young American journalist; the piano portrays Ahmed, the Moroccan major domo of the hotel. It may, of course, be the other way around. The duo was written for (and dedicated to) violinist Livia Sohn and pianist Benjamin Loeb.” It is a lovely piece.

Violinist Sohn lives up to the demands of the music. She plays with abandon and captures the ear of the listener. Pianist Loeb is a competent partner. Violist Nuttall joins in for the Forza piece.

Let us leave the listener to the Steinberg Duo FRANCK: Violin Sonata; Andantino Quiestoso; DVORAK: Romantic Pieces; GRIEG: Sonata 3 Nimbus 6294—68 minutes

The Steinberg Duo is violinist Louisa Stonehill and pianist Nicholas Burns. Stonehill can play on a professional level, but she doesn’t seem quite good enough to be a soloist. Her tone is often not full and sustained and often hoarse, and her vibrato is not consistent. She does play in tune and she phrases musically, but she just doesn’t have enough of the qualities that I expect of a soloist.

You will find much more satisfying recordings of these works elsewhere. My top recommendations are, for the Franck: David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter or Jacques Thibaud and Alfred Cortot in their 1923 acoustic recording; for the Dvorak: Itzhak Perlman and Samuel Sanders; and for the Grieg: Augustin Dumay and Maria Joao Pires.

Baroque Inspirations TARTINI: Devil’s Trill Sonata; VIVALDI: Prelude; STAMITZ: Concerto in B-Flat; KREISLER: Concerto in C; VITALI: Chaconne Hideko Udagawa, v; Scottish Chamber Orchestra/ Nicholas Kraemer Nimbus 6299—58 minutes

The Tartini is Udagawa’s first recording of her own transcription for solo violin based mostly on Jean-Baptiste Cartier’s 1798 version. This is also the first recording of a Russian version for solo violin of the prelude from Vivaldi’s Sonata in C minor, the 7th of the 12 sonatas from Opus 2. Even though I listened to Stamitz’s Concerto in B-Flat with a 1971 Breitkopf & Härtels score from the Eastman School of Music library, the album claims this is its debut recording. The Chaconne for violin and orchestra by Tomasso Vitalle is in G minor.

And the Kreisler! As the thorough liner notes say, he published a volume of violin concertos called “Classical Manuscripts” that he claimed were written by early composers like Vivaldi. Even his publisher, Schott, fell for the lie. Critics forced Kreisler to admit the deception. Indeed, the music with its romantic melodies and harmonic progressions straight out of 1920s pop songs speaks the truth. (In fact, Kreisler was ahead of his time—the harmonies here sound more like 1940s Broadway.) There is an entertainment factor here: The 1927 Carl Fischer score I borrowed from Eastman says, “In its present newly arranged form, this concerto, derived as it is from authentic sources, constitutes an original work, and as such is the exclusive copyright property of the editor. Re-arrangement or transcription, which, in any way imitates this edition, will constitute an infringement and will be prosecuted in accordance with Copyright Law. Mr Kreisler’s name must appear on all programs and whenever this transcription is played in public.” This nonsense is reminiscent of the laughable threat sent to radio stations on June 28, 1996, concerning Iso Briselli, then 83, who was supposed to have premiered

Opera Fantasias for Violin 2 Livia Sohn; Geoff Nuttall, va; Benjamin Loeb, p Naxos 573403—62 minutes

Opera singers love to indulge in virtuosic display. So do violinists. Here we have a happy combination of the two. Four of the ten fantasias heard here have never been recorded before: Bohuslav Martinů’s Variations on a Theme of Rossini, pianist Loeb’s arrangement of ‘Solenne in quest’ ora’ from Verdi’s Forza del Destino, Jonathan Berger’s Fantasy on Theme from The War Reporter, and Daron Aric Hagen’s ‘Valse Blanche’.

Of more traditional bent are arrangements by famous violinists: Sarasate’s Faust Fantasy, Kreisler’s ‘Melodie’ from Orfeo ed Euridice, Leopold Auer’s Lenski Aria from Eugene Onegin, and Jeno Hubay’s variations on themes from his own opera The Violinmaker of Cremona.

Lesser known are August Wilhelmj’s ‘Largo’ from Handel’s Xerxes and pianist Loeb’s arrangement of the prelude to Act 3 of Verdi’s Lombardi (already a violin display in Verdi’s original). Newest of all is Hagen’s piece, which he describes: “I have long desired to craft a pair of fairly short, virtuosic character pieces replete with sentimental expression and admiring nods to the masters of the salon style.... The result is a diptych comprising ‘Valse Blanche’ for violin and piano and ‘Valse Noire’ for cello and piano. ... ‘Valse Blanche’ is an operatic paraphrase based on the two principal themes of my opera A Woman in Morocco. The rhapsodic variations that explore the doomed relationship between two lovers at a Tangiers pension in October 1958 are by turns lubricious, chaste, tormented, and doomed. The piece climaxes with a tune called ‘Love Comes with a Knife.’ The violin takes the role of Lizzie, a young American journalist; the piano portrays Ahmed, the Moroccan major domo of the hotel. It may, of course, be the other way around. The duo was written for (and dedicated to) violinist Livia Sohn and pianist Benjamin Loeb.” It is a lovely piece.

Violinist Sohn lives up to the demands of the music. She plays with abandon and captures the ear of the listener. Pianist Loeb is a competent partner. Violist Nuttall joins in for the Forza piece.

American Record Guide
Barber’s Violin Concerto in 1941! Briselli’s lawyer threatened them with “commencement of a defamation action against you on behalf of our client” if they broadcast that he never played it because the last movement was too difficult.

To cut to the chase, there is certainly no entertainment value on this album. Udagawa’s playing is literal in every work. She exhibits no depth of expression and shows no imagination whatever; even when repeating extended passages, she offers no new ideas. Her tone color is unvaried, her pitch often flat, and her pacing metronomically dull. Indeed, when she plays the grave section of the Tartini, the plodding pace is deader than the grave.

And the Scottish Chamber Orchestra plays without authority or style; it’s as literal and plodding as Utagawa, except that she plays a bit behind Nicholas Kraemer’s metronomic beat. What did the SCO use, one string bass and two cellos? Even they are not finely tuned. As for that Stamitz premiere, it is an empty work with no harmonic interest in I and II; III is a bit catchy but not worth the wait.

**FRENCH**

**Hideko Udagawa**
Glazounov, Tchaikovsky, Chausson, Sarasate, Saint-Saëns
London Philharmonic/ Kenneth Klein
Nimbus 6316—64 minutes

These are 1989 recordings, once released on the Pickwick label. She was a pupil of Nathan Milstein, and her sound is very much like his. There is a beautiful silkiness to it, combined with an aristocratic restraint. The violinist has lived in London most of her life, and this was the perfect orchestra to accompany her. Its violins seem to make her kind of sound.

Milstein himself did a fine recording of the Glazounov concerto, and she lives up to her teacher’s style. It’s a beautiful recording. The Tchaikovsky is the complete **Souvenir d’un Lieu Cher**, and the most beautiful movement of the three is the ‘Melodie’ (song). Glazounov’s orchestration is used. I think I’ve heard better recordings of this. The same is true of the Chausson Poème. The Sarasate is also much recorded, but this is very nice (5 mins).

The Saint-Saëns piece is a caprice in the form of a waltz, from his Opus 52 piano etudes, transcribed by Ysaye. The transcription really works: it sounds as if it were written for the violin, and it’s “violinistic”—which means, you have to like the violin and its tricks to appreciate it, because it is nothing much as music.

**Woodwinds of the Concertgebouw**

**JANACEK**: Mladi; **MARTINU**: Sextet; **VERESS**: Woodwind Sonatina; **POULENC**: Sextet
with Jeroen Bal, p—RCO 15008—60 minutes

The Concertgebouw woodwinds, outstanding in the context of the orchestra, are also superb as chamber musicians. In this release of wind quintets “plus”, they are joined by pianist Jeroen Bal and horn player Fons Verspaandonk. They play together splendidly, with perfectly matched style and articulation, excelling both as soloists and collaborators.

They offer a fine reading of the Janacek Mladi, with beautiful shading and musical rapport. The Martinu Sextet is the high point of this program, a real gem, sparkling, dancing, jaunty, and exultant. I’ve never heard a better performance of it.

The Sonatina by Sandor Veress is the least-known work here. He was an influential teacher (both Ligeti and Kurtag studied with him). These 3 miniatures foreshadow Ligeti’s 6 Bagatelles in their organization, piquant dissonances, and use of Hungarian folk elements.

The performers capture the wit, insouciance, irony, and bittersweet nostalgia of Poulenc’s wonderful sextet for winds and piano. The rollicking finale, which should careen nearly off the rails, is bit reserved, but this is otherwise a fine performance of a masterpiece of the literature.

**PFEIL**

**Light-Distance**
Portuguese Wind Quintets

**TINOCO**: Light-Distance; **SANTOS**: Scherzino; **LOPES-GRAÇA**: 7 Memories of Viera Da Silva; **VARGAS**: 3 Fragments; **TINOCO**: The Drift of the Waters; **DELGADO**: The Panic Flirt; **TINOCO**: Autumn Wind; **AZEVEDO**: Aspetto; **CARRAPATOSO**: 5 Miniatures

Galliard Ensemble—Deux-Elles 1084—65 min

This is a real find. Portuguese music for wind quintet is a rarity in itself, and to have the excellent Galliard Ensemble performing it is fortunate indeed. This recording is anchored by three works by Luis Tinoco—Light-Distance, for which the disc is named, The Drift of the Waters, and Autumn Wind. His deft use of minimalist and modernist vocabulary to suggest contrasts of motion and stasis is quite effective. Autumn Wind, which was written for the Galliard Ensemble, is especially evocative, with echoes of John Adams’s harmonies in the first movement and astringent counterpoint in the second. Joly Bragas Santos’s sweetly lyrical Scherzino offers a nice contrast with the dissonance of the other pieces.

7 Remembrances of Viera Da Silva by Fernando Lopes-Graca suggests the influence of

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Brazilian folk music as well as Stravinsky and Bartok. Da Silva, a contemporary of the composer, was a Brazilian artist and leading advocate of cubism, and this homage captures the pithy angularity of her style. The Vargas Fragments are for clarinet solo, well-played by Katherine Spencer. The first is an interplay of mechanical, accented ostinato patterns and quiet, legato statements; the second is contemplative and reflective and recalls some of the quieter bits of the Stravinsky Octet. III, with its outbursts of trills and technical passages, brings to mind the bird-call music of Messiaen.

The Panic Flirt refers to Pan and his pipes, and is a pyrotechnical tour-de-force for flutist Kathryn Thomas, who handles the many extended techniques with ease and conviction. Aspects, by Sergio Azevedo, is a stringing expressionistic, with jagged melodies and strident sonorities. In contrast, the modal harmonies, clear textures, and playful character of the 5 Miniatures by Eurico Carrapatoso call to mind Darius Milhaud’s well-known wind quintet La Cheminee du Roi Rene.

The Galliard Ensemble is known for its finesse and artistry, and the players exhibit their trademark musical unity and elan in this impressive performance.

PFEIL

The First Beauty
Klein, Kvandal, Yun, Am
Oslo Chamber Academy/ David Strunck
LAWO 1093 [SACD] 75 minutes

Wind octets here, each with the standard instrumentation of pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns, plus double bass in three of the pieces.

To read the life story of Gideon Klein (1919-45) is to wonder what the talented Jewish composer might have accomplished had he survived the Holocaust. His 4-movement, 16-minute Divertimento (1939) was rediscovered in a suitcase in 1990. It speaks a dense harmonic language. A march is the very noisy opener, the Allegretto is rowdy, the Adagio is beautiful but has some impish moments, and the final Allegro is rambunctious.

I find Johann Kvandal’s 4-movement, 18-minute Night Music (1981) more easily enjoyable because of the genial harmonies, and I also love the references to Mozart’s Grand Partita, especially the pulsating chords in III.

Politics played a big part in the life of Isang Yun (1917-93), who promoted Korean reunification but, because he was considered by South Korea to be a North Korean sympathizer, was kidnapped in Germany by South Korean agents. Convicted of espionage, he was imprisoned, then released after strong international protest. He returned to Germany, became a professor, and continued to compose. None of this can be detected in his 19-minute Wind Octet (1993). It is a lively, free-flowing work with tonal but often dissonant harmonies, some odd moments of pitch bending, and an inconclusive ending.

This ensemble commissioned Magnar Am’s 3-movement, 20-minute First Beauty (2012), which treats the instruments not as pairs but as individuals, and which has the ensemble split into two spatially separated quartets with string bass in the middle. The work begins coherently but becomes increasingly chaotic.

Oslo Chamber Academy is an excellent ensemble; they play with conviction at all times. Strong readings of challenging works.

KILPATRICK

Gruppo di Tempera

POULENC: Sextet; MILHAUD: Chimney of King Rene; IBERT: 3 Brief Pieces; FRANCAIX: L’heure de Berger

The members of Gruppo di Tempera work at some of the best conservatories and in some of the finest orchestras in their native Poland. Here they offer their first release, a program of 20th Century French music for wind quintet.

The effort has merit. Tempera boasts robust colors, great clarity, superb balance, stunning intonation, and marvelous teamwork; and much of the recital is a good model for young wind players. At the same time, the range of emotion is somewhat small, and the fast movements are restrained in tempo. The Poulenc seems rather cautious, and while Tempera follows Ibert’s metronome markings, his piece drags. The Milhaud is very good until the flute and the clarinet rush through their expressive hemiola in the closing measures of the ‘Madrigal-Nocturne’. Why hurry through such beautiful music? The Francaix is the best performance; everyone jumps into the energy and the humor of the score, and it makes for a satisfying close.

HANUDEL

The great majority of humanity does not engage with, produce, or appreciate any form of culture than what used to be considered by cultured people, disparagingly, as mere popular pastimes, with no links to the intellectual, artistic, and literary activities that were once at the heart of culture. This former culture...still survives in small social enclaves, without any influence on the mainstream.

--Mario Vargas Llosa
Portals
Gorb, Pitts, Stolzel, Dooley, Daugherty, Pann, Ferran
GIA 986—77 minutes

Pathways
Higdon, Camphouse, Navarro, Sweelinck, Daugherty, Harlin, Danyew
GIA 987—72 minutes

North Texas Wind Symphony/ Eugene Corporon

Two more additions to the large library of releases by the North Texas Wind Symphony and by its conductor, Eugene Corporon. Both were recorded in 2014-15, and they offer evidence that this is an era of amazing growth in wind band literature. Some very good composers are writing lots of pieces. Only time will tell how much of it will become part of the repertory, but much of it is interesting, varied, and enjoyable.

Most of the works on GIA 986 were written since 2013. Adam Gorb’s lively 5-minute ‘Bells Across the Atlantic’ (2013) contrasts a bell theme with a chorale in a sonata form with subdominant recapitulation. I like William Pitts’s 13-minute Auguries of Innocence (2014), a tribute to conductor Corporon on his 20 years at UNT. It is a multifaceted melange of styles and sections and textures, with some lovely solos. Paul Dooley’s 9-minute Meditation at Lagunitas (2014), inspired by a Robert Hass poem, is spectacular—no mere meditation, to be sure. Also spectacular is the 3-movement, 12-minute Vulcan (2014), where Michael Daugherty deals with the very rational Star Trek character Spock and his home planet. Daugherty’s music usually includes pop culture references, and this is no exception. It’s amusing to hear fragments of the old television show’s theme music in this very entertaining piece.

Carter Pann’s 3-movement, 12-minute Three Embraces (2013) is a moving tribute to his colleague Allan McMurray, longtime director of bands at the University of Colorado. Ferrer Ferran’s dramatic, drumming-filled Jungla (2006) is a 15-minute study on African tribal dances. The one piece of old music is Paul Leenhouts’s fine arrangement of Gottfried Heinrich Stolzel’s Concerto Grosso for four instrumental choirs. Against all this very new music, it is like a study in symmetry and boundaries—cleanly delineated phrases, precise melodies, confined harmonies, neat and tidy forms. The performance by the four groups and the tutti ensemble is excellent.

GIA 987 offers a similar program of new works surrounding a single old one. Jennifer Higdon’s 7-minute ‘Fanfare Ritmico’ (2000) is the rousing opener. Mark Camphouse’s somber, emotional, 8-minute ‘Homage to the Dream’ (2013) was composed for the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech. In ‘The Fly’ (2013), composer Oscar Navarro hopes that in 5 minutes the listener’s mood “will change into a state of wrath caused by the tediousness of this fly” as it buzzes around the various instruments in the wind band. It didn’t work on me—the piece is too varied and funny.

Ramon Ricker’s 1975 setting of Sweelinck’s Variations on ‘My Young Life is at an End’ gives each instrumental section numerous opportunities to show their skills. There are unusual ensembles, too, such as the low-pitched flute with harp and soft-voiced celeste (?). Excellent intonation makes this a pleasure to hear.

It has been a decade (M/J 2006: 208) since I last heard Michael Daugherty’s 4-movement, 28-minute Brooklyn Bridge (2005), which depicts the sights a visitor sees when facing East, South, West, and North. It is a solo vehicle for clarinet; this fine performer is UNT faculty clarinetist Kimberly Cole Luevano.

In the 10-minute Rapture (2012), Patrick Harlin attempts to portray the feeling (“exponentially worse than a panic attack”) experienced by people who explore the deepest, most isolated and pitch-black caves on earth. Steve Danyew’s 6-minute ‘Magnolia Star’ (2012) combines railroad rhythms and sounds (Magnolia Star was a train that ran between Chicago and New Orleans in the steam era) with elements of the blues scale. It is yet another confident and enjoyable new piece for wind band, and this is yet another excellent album by Eugene Corporon and his North Texas Wind Symphony.

KILPATRICK

Finding a Voice
Evolution of the American Sound
BARRER: Canzone; BAUER: Trio Sonata 1; BOWLES: Flute Sonata; COPLAND: Threnodies 1+2; ROREM: The Unquestioned Answer; Trio; THOMSON: Serenade

Walden Chamber Players
Walden 0—62 minutes [CD Baby, 800-289-6923]

The purpose of this program is to gather a lot of chamber music not heard often from composers who usually are. It fits a general theme of Americans acting on outside influences, with works spanning from the early 1930s to Copland’s attempts in the 1970s to write music that was of his time to Ned Rorem’s recent work from 2002.

Marion Bauer’s 1944 trio is very French, and Virgil Thomson wrote his Serenade for flute and violin (1931) while living in France. Thus the “Boulangerie” and French influence are involved as much as Stravinsky and Ameri-
can sources of inspiration, such as the reference to Ives. Each composer certainly has personality, and we meet this motley assortment in committed, sympathetic, and professional performances.

Marianne Gedigian is the center of this program and a founding member of the Walden Chamber Players. Flute professor at the University of Texas in Austin for many years, she is one of the greatest players of her generation and keeps excellent company here. The notes are printed in red, white, and blue, and worth exploring just so you can read what Rorem has to say about the creative title for his second piece.

GORMAN

Dreamtime
Danielpour, List, Mackey
Zodiac Trio; Ariel Barnes, vc
Blue Griffin 391—55 minutes

Founded in 2006 at the Manhattan School of Music, the Zodiac Trio enjoys a busy international concert schedule punctuated by the group’s music festival in southern France. Their first album (M/J 2013) had renowned modernist works by Bartok, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich protégé Galina Ustvolskaya. This second release goes in a different direction, casting a spotlight on several new compositions written expressly for the group.

The program consists of Curtis Institute and Manhattan School of Music composer Richard Danielpour’s Lamentations (2013); Berklee College of Music composer Andrew List’s Klezmer Fantazye (2013) and Visions From the Aboriginal Dreamtime (2011); and Zodiac: Across the Universe (2013), a multi-movement work with scores by 12 different composers, assembled as part of a multimedia piece for the group’s tour of China. Rising Canadian cellist Ariel Barnes joins the Trio on the Danielpour and Ohio-born composer John Mackey’s Breakdown Tango (2000).

Zodiac continues to sport good energy, technique, and style, but the ensemble’s overall playing and teamwork still need more polish. The violin is somewhat thin, the clarinet has a cloudy and spread quality, and the piano is rather passive, always taking a back seat to the extroverted treble instruments. Intense moments have more prudence than abandon, and sometimes each member of the group comes across as pursuing individual aims instead of agreeing on a common vision. Barnes is a solid guest artist, adding weight to the Danielpour and the Mackey, but Across the Universe has too many cooks in the kitchen to be effective.

GORMAN

Nostre Dame
Sanstierce—Talanton 90016—55 minutes

This is a curious collection, subtitled “the monophonic repertoire of the famous Notre-Dame School.” Some of the works do have clear connections with the music of the late 12th and early 13th centuries, such as ‘Beata Viscera Maria Virginis’ (though neither the extremely brief notes nor the texts you can download from the ensemble’s website indicate the connection of the words with Philip the Chancellor or the music with Perotinus), the conductus ‘Sol Oritur’, and the two rondelli, ‘O Summi Regis’ and ‘Salva nos, Stella Maris’. Two of the sequences (‘Ave Gloriosa Virginum Regina’ and ‘Salve Mater Salvatoris’) are not so directly associated with the Notre-Dame School, though the melodies for both are taken from a French manuscript that also includes songs by Philip the Chancellor. In the case of ‘Salve Mater Salvatoris’, the text used is not from the manuscript but is based on a later shortened Dominican text, though medieval Dominican missals from France do contain the complete sequence.

Maria Jones is the sole singer on this recording, even in compositions that would have more likely been choral compositions, such as the sequences and the rondelli, medieval refrain songs that may have been used for dancing. Even in the chants she is accompanied by the two instrumentalists, Dominik Schneider (gittern and medieval flute) and Bassem Hawar (Iraqi fiddle and percussion). Both of these performers based their interpretations on the traditional styles of Middle-Eastern music, with extensive ornamentation and non-Western pitch inflections. While this is certainly a style that has been used in other recordings, the problem I hear is that Jones sings in a very strict Western style, with little ornamentation and no pitch inflections, so that there is a dissonance of styles between the members of the ensemble.

In between the vocal selections are an instrumental version of a Notre-Dame conductus (‘Vanitas Vanitatum’) and three new compositions (one by Schneider and two by Hawar). These are three skilled and talented musicians, but this is not the best repertoire for their abilities.

BREWER

Carolus IV
Schola Gregoriana Pragensis/ Hana Blazikova
Supraphon 4193—69 minutes

The domains of Charles IV (born Wenceslaus, 1316-78) straddled the entire continent of Europe. As the son of Count John of Luxembourg and Elizabeth of Bohemia, he had deep
family connections in both Western and Eastern Europe. His election as King of the Romans in 1346 consolidated his power over much of Europe. This music, beautifully performed by Blazikova and the Schola Gregoriana Pragensis, emphasizes Charles's Eastern- and Western-European ties, with music from France and Bohemia and from the University of Prague, which he founded in 1348. Notes and texts are in English.

Part I of the program concerns “Charles and France”, including chants from the French sphere and a three-part motet by Guillaume de Machaut, whom Charles may actually have met. Part II is devoted to “Charles and Relics”, as he was an avid collector, especially of relics related to the crucifixion. Not long after he acquired the nails and lance from the crucifixion, Charles commissioned chants for a feast day of Holy Lance and Nails. The antiphon ‘In Splendore’, a reading from a homily of St Augustine, responsory ‘Vibrans Miles’, and hymn ‘Pange Linguæ Gloriosi’ come from the Antiphonal of the Archbishop of Prague, codex P. VII (c. 1363). Part III covers the music of “Charles at the University”. It includes chants and another piece of Ars Nova polyphony—the virelai ‘Sois Tart’—preserved in the university archives.

Not all of the musical connections at the court of Prague ran toward the French, as Blazikova shows in Parts IV and V of the program. German courtly song deeply influenced Czech composers, and so Hana Blazikova has programmed ‘Nu Sieht Man Aber Beide’ by Müllich von Prague, and three courtly lyrics composed in Middle Czech. ‘Otep Myrhy’ and ‘Drevo se Listem Odieva’ are sung to a gothic harp accompaniment, and the short sacred lyric ‘Anjeliku Rozkovhany’ is sung by the ensemble in a chant-like fashion. In 1347 Charles founded a monastery in Prague in the hope that the monks would promote the Old Slavonic liturgy. The chants in Part V come from fragments preserved in the Ljubljana National Library that scholars believe originate at the monastery. The program concludes in Part VI with the motet ‘Ave Coronata’ and chants venerating Charles’s ancestors Charlemagne, Wenceslaus, and Sigismund.

Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) was among the foremost writers in late medieval France. In addition to her longer poems, such as The Book of the City of Ladies (1405), she also wrote shorter lyrics, as did her predecessor, Guillaume de Machaut. Only one of these lyrics survives in an original setting: Gilles de Binchois’s ‘Deuil Angoisseus’ (Anguished grief). The other pieces on this recording are adaptations of Pizan’s words to music by Bernart de Ventadorn, Guillaume Dufay, Guillaume de Machaut, and Gilles Binchois, among others. The arrangements encompass direct retexting of the medieval originals, the addition of elaborate instrumental accompaniments, and vocal harmonizations of monophonic melodies. Aside from the Binchois setting mentioned above (effectively performed by only a single voice and harp), perhaps the combination of selected stanzas from Pizan’s extensive poem on Joan of Arc to a freely adapted Machaut composition will be of the most interest.

The four women of VocaMe, whether solo or in ensemble, effectively match the challenges of these arrangements; and Michael Popp sings one song and offers the imaginative accompaniments on various medieval or Middle-Eastern instruments. Overall, this is an interesting attempt to give a musical voice to Pizan’s writings.

Sephiric Journey
Apollo’s Fire / Jeannette Sorrell
Avie 2361—63:39

Voces de Sefarad
Spanish & Sephardic Songs
Romina Basso, mz; Alberto Mesirica, g; Turkish Ensemble/ Fahrettin Yarkin
Brilliant 95222—79:51

Recordings have played a long and continuing role in reviving interest in the song traditions of the Sephardic Jews, or Sephardim, exiles from Sefard (Spain, in Hebrew). Spreading in diaspora around the Mediterranean, they preserved their songs, in their Spanish-derived Ladino language, from the 15th Century down to the present. Many recordings have drawn on those traditions in a range of ways: from straight singing by dedicated solo vocalists, through varied arrangements for solo or ensemble singers, to mingling them with other literature.

Of the two releases considered here, one uses a combination of the second and third approaches, the other the first and third. Neither offers strictly Sephardic literature.

Jeanette Sorrell has made a highly effective concert program of “Sephardic” music, and that is the basis for her recording. Soprano Nell Snaidas and baritone Jeffrey Strauss are the principal vocalists, with a 21-member choir and some 12 instrumentalists. Of the 20 selections, 9 are “traditional” Sephardic songs, as arranged by Sorrell. There are also 4 “traditional liturgical chants” in Hebrew, also
arranged by Sorrell, and there is one instrumental improvisation.

On the other hand, 6 items are questionable. They are works of Salamone Rossi Ebreo (c.1570-1630). Rossi was a Jewish violinist and composer who served the court of Mantua, publishing a number of significant instrumental collections, and, in 1623, Hashirim asher Lishlomo (Songs of Solomon), an extraordinary setting of Hebrew texts in polyphonic style.

Rossi was a very important figure, both as a musician and as a Jew. But there is no evidence whatsoever that he was of Sephardic descent. He might have been, going back to Spanish Jews who resettled in Italy; but we do not know that, and I would bet that he was rather of the Jewish communities that had been in Italy for at least 1600 years. To be sure, his music here is beautiful to hear, though I have the feeling that the playing of the three instrumental pieces has sometimes slipped into just a bit of "Jewish" inflection.

Generally, the performances are excellent, some rendered with tub-thumping enthusiasm. The booklet contains an essay by Sorrell and full texts with translations. But this is really an anthology of Jewish Renaissance music, and should more honestly be promoted as such.

The other release contains 26 selections. Of them, only 3 are "traditional Sephardic", plus a song arranged by our guitarist. There are 9 instrumental improvisations. The rest are compositions by a succession of Spanish (non-Jewish) composers: one by Alonso Mudarra (c.1510-80), 5 by Jose Marin (c.1619-99), one by Juan Hidalgo de Polanco (1614-85), 2 by Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936), one each by Joaquin Rodrigo (1901-99) and Frederic Mompou (1893-1987), and 3 by Manuel de Falla (1876-1946).

There is one added singer (Vittoria Giacobazzi) in one selection, but otherwise the vocal work is done entirely by Basso. A respected singer in recordings of early music, she has a soft, sweet, and quite beguiling voice. Her accompaniments vary between straight guitar playing by Mesirica and some discreet support from some of the Turks. But be prepared to find the Sephardic material completely submerged in a range of Spanish song and Middle Eastern playing.

There is an extensive booklet essay by Mesirica (who seems to be the organizing force of this venture). There are no texts or translations; only the copout of directing us to fight with the computer for 8-1/2 x 11 printouts.

Neither of these releases can fairly be called a "Sephardic" program.

Las Ciudades de Oro

Harmonie des Saisons/ Melisande Corriveau & Eric Milnes—ATMA 2702—63 minutes

From the bounty of music preserved in the archives of Puebla, Antigua, Bogota, Lima, and the like, Corriveau and Milnes have culled a wonderful program of vocal and instrumental music by Spanish and indigenous South American composers active in the 16th and 17th centuries.

'Fuer, Fuera, Haganles Lugar', by Roque Jacinto de Chavarria (1688-1719), about Indians on the way to Bethlehem, sets the tone for the recording with its dance-like rhythms and jubilant nonsense refrains "Ha ha ha hay", and "Achalay, achalay". 'Ay Andar, Andar a Tocar, a Cantar, a Baylar' also strikes a joyful tone, as the title itself suggests, 'Go Now! Play, Sing, and Dance' to celebrate the resurrection. With its references to Spain and Portugal, and an accompaniment that includes castanets and guitar, the villancico evokes the colors of Juan de Araujo's (1646-1712) Iberian homeland. Araujo came to Lima at a young age and ended up composing polyphonic music for the cathedral in La Plata (Sucre). 'Convidando Esta la Noche', by the Mexican composer Juan Garcia de Zespedes (1619-78), is also a villancico; but, according to Daniel Zuluaga, its integration of the Afro-Cuban dance rhythm known as a guajira evokes music of the New World.

Perhaps the most famous piece on the program is 'Hanacpachap Cussicuinin' (1631), because it is considered to be the earliest known polyphonic work composed in the New World. It appears at the end of the Ritual, Formulario e Institucion de Curas by the Franciscan friar Juan Perez Bocanegra, but it is uncertain whether he actually composed the piece. Bocanegra was a linguist, and so having composed the Marian lyric in Quechua should be considered a special achievement.

Works like 'A del Dia, a de la Fiesta', by the Peruvian composer Jose de Oreojon y Aparicio (1705-65), fit more in the tradition of the Baroque cantata, as do 'Ventezillo Traviesso', by Manuel Blasco (1628-96), chapel master at the cathedral in Bogota, and 'Jesus, Jesus, y lo que Subes', by Manuel Jose de Quiros, chapel master at cathedral in Antigua, Guatemala, with their emphasis on solo voice with continuo.

This must be one of the best recordings I have reviewed in recent months. The performances are so energetic and virtuosic that it will take your breath away. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

American Record Guide
Saxon Sonatas
Passamezzo Moderno; Josh Lee, gamba; John Lent, theorbo
Passamezzo 0—65 minutes (800-529-1696)

The program includes 6 of the 12 sonatas in Johann Michael Nicolai’s Erster Theil Instrumentalischer Sachen (Augsburg, 1675). With sonatas by Antonio Bertali, Matthias Weckmann, Biagio Marini, and Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, the ensemble gives one a fairly clear impression of the stile moderno at work in early German-Baroque music. Italian musicians were all the rage in 17th-Century Germany and Austria; every nobleman wanted one in his service. Bertali found employment at the imperial court of Vienna; and although Marini spent most of his career in Italy, he, too, spent a period of time in Neuburg, Germany before returning to Milan and then Venice.

These are multi-sectional sonatas, which shift often from one rhythm, tempo, harmony, and melody to another to allow performers ample opportunity to present a broad range of emotions. Beginning with Bertali’s gorgeous Sonata a 4 sets the standard from an authentic Italian point of view. The rest of the program then shows how well German composers like Nicolai could adapt the model. Much of the excitement in his sonatas derives from the quick alternation of motives between the two violins, typically leading to a song-like duet. Occasionally the dulcian will break from the continuo to engage soloistically with the treble parts. The two violinists, Edwin Huizinga and Adriane Post, work together beautifully to bring out the subtleties in this repertory. A sensitive continuo, consisting of dulcian (David Granger), bass gamba (John Lee), theorbo (John Lent), and harpsichord or organ (Jonathan Davis), offers the perfect support.

Scattered Ashes, Josquin’s Miserere, Savonarola Legacy
Magnificat/ Philip Cave
Linn 517 [2CD] 84 minutes

At the height of his power, the Dominican monk Girolamo Savonarola had managed to take control of the city of Florence, following the death of Lorenzo de Medici in 1492. Through the help of his devout followers, he suppressed the aristocracy by instituting hard-line policies against vice and vanity, the trappings of which were often put to flames following his incendiary public sermons. But for his lack of fealty to Pope Alexander VI and penchant for spouting heretical prophecies, Savonarola paid the bitter price of excommunication and, finally, public execution.

The unifying principle for this program is the body of devotional commentaries on Psalms 51 and 30 that Savonarola composed while awaiting execution in 1498.

The singing is gorgeous. Voices are well balanced and clear. Discs 1 and 2 begin with motet settings of Miserere Mei, Deus (Ps. 51) by Josquin des Prez and Jean Lheritier. Nicolas Gombert’s setting of In Te, Domine, Speravi (Ps. 30) appears on Disc 2. Savonarola’s specific commentary on Psalm 51, beginning ‘In Felix Ego’, appears in motets by Orlando de Lassus on disc 1 and by William Byrd on disc 2.

‘Tristitia Obsedit Me’ are the opening words of Savonarola’s meditation on Psalm 30, which appears in motets by Claude Le Jeune on disc 1 and Jacob Clemens non Papa on disc 2.

Each of these motets is a masterpiece in its own right, though Josquin’s ‘Miserere Mei, Deus’ was recognized already in his own time as a tour de force. It has been the subject of numerous studies, not least of which is Joachim Burmeister’s 1606 analysis of its rhetorical properties. Josquin reconstructs the text so that the first words, ‘Miserere Mei, Deus’, return like a refrain; and it descends by a step each time it recurs, so that the tenor descends an entire octave by the time one reaches the end of the first part. The ensemble brings off these subtleties beautifully, breathing life in the depth of Josquin’s despair.

The music of Gombert, Clemens, and Byrd is more relentlessly contrapuntal than Josquin’s, and Lassus exhibits more of the declamatory style of the Counter-Reformation. Texts and notes are in English.

Invisible Frontier
Capella Iberica/ Manuel Torrado
Enchiridiadis 2043—53:21

This new release is an anthology of renaissance Spanish and Portuguese motets and secular songs. While some of the composers are relatively well known, such as Cristobal de Morales, Francisco Guerrero, Juan Esquivel, and Duarte Lobo, others will be familiar only to specialists in this repertoire: Estevao de Brito, Juan Vazquez, Manoel Mendes, Estevao Lopes Morago, Juan Esquivel, Diogo Dias Melgas, and Manuel Machado.

Capella Iberica is a chamber ensemble of seven voices and bajon (dulcian), played with great sensitivity by Marta Calvo. This small ensemble is most effective in the more secular works, such as Guerrero’s Christmas villancico, ‘Apuestan Zagales’, or Morales’s trio, ‘Si no os Hubiera Mirado’ (Had I not beheld thee), which is particularly effective sung by two of the men with the bajon playing bass. While the addition of the bajon adds gravity to the interpretations of the motets, these would sound
better with a larger group. That said, some of the motets can be quite beautiful, such as the ‘Salve Regina’ by Melgas, where the blend and balance of the solo voices effectively clarify the intricate contrapuntal texture.

The booklet offers very brief information about the composers and the context of Spanish and Portuguese relations around 1600, but more important, includes complete texts and translations. Overall, this is a very useful introduction to this relatively unknown renaissance repertoire.

**Wild Men of the Seicento**

Piers Adams, rec; David Wright, hp

Red Priest 13—64:16

This collection of music for recorder and continuo is rather archly titled “Wild Men of the Seicento”, and the notes begin “They came from the south, these crazy musicians, from sun-drenched cities in Italy and Spain; their inspired ideas spread through the continent like wildfire.” Some of the selections are readily adaptable to performance by this ensemble, such as Marco Uccellini’s Sonata 9 and Dario Castello’s Sonata 2, but other selections required more radical alterations.

The most controversial is the opening composition, Adams’ arrangement of the Biber Violin Sonata 3 from the collection of 1681. Not only are many of the original double stops obviously eliminated (though at one point he does play two recorders simultaneously, and in another passage they are played by the harpsichord), but the elaborate passagework is filled with transpositions and rewriting to fit the narrow range of the recorder, and he ignores many of Biber’s dynamic and interpretive markings.

Adams has great technical mastery of his instrument, but these are not even the most elegant performances of these or similar works (I would recommend Maurice Steger, J/A 2009: 237).

**Carnival Oriental**

Pera Ensemble/ Mehmet C. Yesilçay; Arte del Mondo/ Werner Ehrhardt

Capriccio 5263—55:37

The concept for this anthology of 17th Century music is the multinational celebrations of carnival in Pera Quarter in Istanbul, where most of the foreign delegations lived in this period. Given the close relations between France and the Ottoman Empire, the first selections are excerpts from Jean Baptiste Lully (the ‘Pas-sacaille’ from Armide) and the ‘Canaries’ from Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme and André Campra (airs and dances from Carnaval de Venise).

The remainder of the recording has a few instrumental pieces (Lorenzo Allegri’s ‘Canario’, Marco Uccellini’s ‘Bergamasca Aria 5’, and a “mash-up” of Arcangelo Corelli’s and Antonio Vivaldi’s Folias), and a selection of Italian arias and duets (sung by Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli and Charlotte Quad), many from operas with “oriental” subjects, by Claudio Monteverdi, Antonio Cesti (three selections from L’Argia and Oronte), Alessandro Scarlatti (‘Se il mio dolor’ from Griselda), and Antonio Sartorio (two arias from Giulio Cesare) and Handel (‘Se teco vive il cor’ from Radamisto).

Combining the talents of the Pera Ensemble, many of whose members play traditional Turkish instruments (such as the ney and kanun) and the period-instrument ensemble, L’arte del Mondo, the performances are a mixture of styles (traditional Turkish and classical) and timbres (especially prominent is the Turkish kanun, a zither-like instrument). While the combination is perhaps more spicy than would have been heard in Istanbul, only occasionally do the glissandos of the ‘Turkish ney’ (an end-blown flute) and oud (the Arab ancestor of the lute, without frets) conflict with the more controlled intonation of the western instruments.

While I would not recommend this as a “historically informed performance” (the combination of Corelli, Vivaldi, and Turkish instruments offers opportunities to display great virtuosity), the melody of Sartorio’s ‘Ogni bella’ sounds perfectly natural when played as a prelude in a Turkish manner. There are a few high points, including Mazzulli’s interpretation of ‘Alma mia’ from Cesti’s L’Argia and a slow-tempo version of Uccellini’s enchanting ‘Bergamasca’ (about two minutes slower than the other recordings I know—N/D 1994 & M/J 1996: 250). The only real fault of this recording is that the booklet only contains the original texts without translations.
This is certainly not passive music. Just listen to the fearlessness in Scarlatti’s ‘Plorans Ploravit’, a riveting, powerful tour de force of virtuosity, for one example of the inherent strength and force of this music.

It’s no surprise that the Escadron Volant De La Reine ensemble won both the first prize and the audience prize at the 2015 Loire Valley early music competition. There are eight musicians: soprano, male alto, two violins, cello, bass, theorbo, keyboard. The ensemble name (The Queen’s Flying Squadron) honors the ladies-in-waiting to Catherine de Medici. These accomplished composers and modern interpreters bring the Holy Week reflections to vibrant life. The music is thrilling to hear, and there is a gorgeous warmth, depth, and power in the recorded sound.

In the spirit of clever fun—and in keeping with the ensemble’s name—an insert with the CD offers a flight plan to 17th-Century Naples with safety elements to guide the airborne listener. For example, should there be any “depressurisation [sic] of the music, counterpoint and dissonance will fall [automatically] just before you”.

Notes, bios, texts, translations. This is the first recording by L’Escadron Volant De La Reine. More, please!

C. MOORE

Vidala, Argentina, & Roots of European Baroque
Bach Consort Vienna/ Ruben Dubrovsky
Gramola 99064—59 minutes

Ruben Dubrovsky was guided by two overarching principles when selecting his program: to examine the legacy of Iberian music in South America and to draw back the curtain on South American influences in the Baroque music of Europe. The program begins with Vivaldi’s Folia, which Dubrovsky insists incorporates the “vidala” rhythm—a combination of duple and triple meters that characterizes indigenous music of Argentina. As he rightly notes, the music of South America mingles the musical styles and forms of various cultures: European, African, and indigenous peoples. The interaction of meter, style, and form is nowhere clearer than in the three dance forms that would take Europe by storm: the Sarabande, Chaconne, and Passacaglia.

To make the connections as clear as possible, Dubrovsky alternates works by European and South American composers. The ‘Chaconnes in Partite Variate’ by Alessandro Piccinini (1566-1638) precedes the traditional ‘Bolivianna’ and a vidala titled ‘Te’i de Olvidar’. An Argentine ‘Chacerera’ by Hermanos Simon, and ‘Cuando Nada te Debia’, which uses a traditional Argentine dance rhythm known as a

Nottorno
Caressana, A Scarlatti, Veneziano
L’Escadron Volant De La Reine
Evidence 21—52 minutes

This excellent program gives voice to the “theatricality of grief” depicted in Lamentations settings for Holy Week by three Neapolitan composers: Cristofaro Caressana (c. 1640-1709), Gaetano Veneziano (1665-1716), and Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725). In their time Naples was renowned as a center for theatrical and instrumental music; and the pieces in this program demonstrate the emotion, reverence, devotion, tragedy, and hope of Holy Week. This is certainly not passive music. Just listen

This program makes a convincing case for trans-Atlantic acculturation. It helps that the performances are so strong.

**Chaconne, Voices of Eternity**  
Ensemble Caprice/ Matthias Mauve  
Analeka 9132—49 minutes

The chaconne was one of the most popular forms of dance in the Baroque period, judging by the sheer number of works. It originated in Spain, but was quickly adopted by other European cultures, perhaps because its simple progression of chords afforded opportunities for virtuosic display. This program gathers together some of the most famous Baroque chaconnes (also called passacaglias) by Monteverdi, Stefano Landi, Antonio Vivaldi, Andrea Falconieri, and JS Bach. Several of them have been arranged to suit the recorders and violins of Ensemble Caprice.

Mauve notes that the doleful character of Monteverdi’s ‘Chi Voi Che m’Innamori’ and the folk origins of the chaconne reminded him of several Czech folk songs of the 16th Century. They are performed instrumentally in the middle of the program. Mauve brings the program into the contemporary context through his own choral settings of texts by Angelus Silesius (1624-77); he calls them Chaconne I-VII. Notes and the texts for his chaconnes are in English.

**Ballads & Legends**  
Musica Bohemica/ Jaroslav Krcek  
Supraphon 4191—72 minutes

Musica Bohemica celebrates its 40th anniversary with this re-release of music selected from two of their albums of folk music. From their first album, titled *Wood Attired in Music* (1979), come Krcek’s settings of several Czech songs that venerate the woods. The program is rounded out by several Moravian folk ballads and legends, originally recorded in 1987.

It is an appealing repertory of music, full of rhythmic excitement and exotic musical language (augmented seconds and the like). The songs are sung to an accompaniment of mostly modern stringed instruments. Like Bartok, Kodaly, Stravinsky, and many others before him, Krcek draws his harmonic language from the folk melodies to create settings that invoke contemporary musical idioms. One only wishes the booklet had the texts and translations.

**Psallite**

**MANIANO:** Doxology; **SWEELINCK:** Chantez a Dieu; **BRYARS:** Psalm 141; **FOSTER:** Hard Times;   
**arr BARNETT:** By and By; **PALESTRINA:** Exultate Deo; **ESENVALDS:** Psalm 67; **GRIGORJEVA:** Bless the Lord, O My Soul; **BANNISTER:** Psalm 96;   
**arr HOGAN:** Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?; **arr APPLING:** We Shall Walk Through the Valley in Peace

Cor Cantiamo/ Eric A Johnson  
Divine Art 25133—61 minutes

Cor Cantiamo is a touring chamber choir in residence at Northern Illinois University, and a versatile lot they are. I liked them in a program of works by Jaako Mantyjarvi ([J/A 2015], and they come across nicely here as well. Palestri- na sounds terrific under their care, as do contemporary works by the likes of Eriks Esenvalds, Ily Matthew Maniano, and Galina Grig- orjeva. Best of all are the three spirituals, which tingle with ethnic flair: (‘We Shall Walk Through the Valley’ might even bring forth a tear or two.) Not every work here is a master-piece, but the choir does its commendable best to make them sound that way.

Stephen Foster’s ‘Hard Times’ appears in a very interesting arrangement by Craig Hella Johnson. (I’d be curious to hear your reaction. I rather like it.) Maestro Johnson is the Director of Choral Activities at Northern Illinois, and if I were a choral musician in need of training I wouldn’t hesitate to seek him out. He obviously knows what he’s doing.

**Invisible Stars: Irish & Scottish**  
University College Dublin/ Desmond Earley  
Signum 436—62 minutes

Don’t expect a string of Guinness-friendly hits gussied up into choral arrangements. ‘Danny Boy’ isn’t here either. 7 of the 16 selections here are choral versions of traditional songs—several of them arranged by conductor Desmond Earley. I didn’t list the titles in the heading because a few of them are in Gaelic, and the only ones I recognized were ‘The Parting Glass,’ ‘Black is the Color,’ and ‘The Skye Boat Song.’ The other selections are by contemporary composers with ties to the choral traditions of Ireland and Scotland.

This is a gorgeous program. The traditional songs will have you mourning the death of Bonnie Prince Charlie (‘Mo Ghille Mear’), being rocked to sleep by a ‘Gartan Mother’s Lullaby,’ debating the wisdom of marriage (‘Si do Mhiamo i’), lamenting lost friends (‘The Parting Glass’), and contemplating the black-
ness of your true love's hair. The contemporary works are a pleasure as well—especially a pair of gentle songs by Ivo Antogini, who puts the plaintive sound of the oboe to work in both, and Bill Whelan's 'Sun and Moon and Stars,' which pairs Emily Doyle's handsome soprano voice with Emma-Jane Murphy's just as handsome cello playing.

All the soloists sing beautifully, as does the choir from University College Dublin. Close-up miking makes the music sound more plastic than it should but, overall, the experience is a delightful one. If the Emerald Isle is in your blood, here are some reasons to fall in love with your ancestry all over again.

GREENFIELD

Oceana

BENNETT: Sea Change; GOLIJOV: Coral del Arrecife; NYSTROEM: 3 Havsvisioner; BANKS: These Oceans Vast

Esoterics/ Eric Banks

Terpsichore 1715 —64 min

All of this is inspired by poetry of the sea. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Anthony Marvell wrote the texts that Richard Rodney Bennett incorporated into the four songs of Sea Change. 'Coral of the Reef' is the final movement of Osvaldo Golijov's Oceana, a set of seascapes from the pen of Pablo Neruda. Swedish composer Gosta Nystroem (1890-1966), who contemplated the power of the Baltic from his seaside village south of Gothenburg, set verses by three different Swedish poets to come up with his Visions of the Sea. And Eric Banks chose the poetry of Herman Melville to tell a maritime tale of impressionability, prayer, courage, inebriation, loneliness, longing, and return.

The most memorable work is the conductor's own, which has the choir running a gamut of emotions and musical styles so Melville's story can be told. Bravo! Bright, youthful sounds from The Esoterics pull some of the punches packed into Richard Rodney Bennett's trenchant harmonies, which—believe me—is not a bad thing. Golijov's watery minimalism and Nystroem's waves of dissonance I can live without. The engineers produce cool, clear, attractive sound for the singers. If you dig deeply enough into the skinny cardboard packet containing the disc, you'll find an also skinny booklet with texts and notes.

GREENFIELD

Amuse-Bouche: French Delicacies

POULENC: Hotel; 7 Chansons; Un Soir de Neige; FRANCAIX: Ode a la Gastronomie; DANIEL-LESUR: Cantique des Cantiques; MILHAUD: Poèmes; SATIE: Gnossiennes 4, 5, 6; RAVEL: Adagio Assai

Anna Markland, p; I Fagiolini/ Robert Hollingworth—Decca 4789394—81 minutes

The amuse-bouche title would suggest that these are all short bursts of musical flavor selected to whet the aesthetic appetite. Well, it's that way sometimes. Take Poulenc's 'Hotel' as an example—a languid ode to smoking and indolence that lasts all of two minutes. But the Ode a la Gastronomie crafted in 1950 by Jean Francaix is a set of 3 songs running a full 17 minutes. Clever wordplay, nonsensical patter, close harmonies, and all manner of noises from the composer's musical kitchen are whisked together into a tasty concoction that's a lot more substantial than a one-bite appetizer.

Ditto Jean-Yves Daniel-Lesur's 7 entries from the Song of Songs, which are richly complex and full of harmonies that really move—in both senses of the verb. The Poulenc sets—while made up of short bits of song—are laden with heavy sadness. Milhaud's Poèmes and the Gnossiennes by Satie supply some ballast from the lighter side. Occupying a middle ground is a fascinating version of the slow movement from Ravel's G-major Piano Concerto arranged for solo piano and voices.

As you might have gathered, then, the main selling point here is the opportunity to encounter worthy music you seldom (or never) hear. The performances are quite something in every respect; but, frankly, one-or-two-to-a-part Poulenc doesn't sit so well with me. If you want to hear the Sept Chansons and Un Soir de Neige performed with a depth of feeling and sound that all but obliterates the division between the sacred and profane, try Daniel Reuss and the RIAS Choir (Harmonia Mundi 901872, N/D 2005). Daniel-Lesur's Cantique des Cantiques might also be able to tolerate more weight; but I don't know the music, have fewer preconceptions about it, and am so tickled to hear it sung this well that quibbles are rendered moot. Decca sweetens the pot even further with texts, translations, and good notes. Bon appetit.

GREENFIELD

WORD POLICE: EXISTENTIAL

This has lately been used way beyond its normal meaning. Starvation, poverty, disease, and war are not existential threats. Nor is "global warming" (a fancy term for the warming of the earth). Something existential is not a threat to your existence but an unavoidable part of existence itself. For example, as any existentialist will tell you, angst (anxiety) is existential. It just goes with being alive as a human being and is expected.

People who try to impress us by using big words usually impress us with how little they know.
Schola Aeterna

Songs to the Virgin
Franck, Ladmirault, Berthier, Alain, Ropartz
Marie Jaermann, Helene Pelourdeau, s; Jonathan Spicher, t; Manuel Rebelo, b; Lausanne Ensemble/ Michel Corboz—Mirare 262—77 minutes

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries there was a flowering of religious music in France. Aided and abetted by the Schola Cantorum in Paris, many French composers committed their talents to the sacred texts of Roman Catholicism. That spiritual renewal through music is in evidence here in a pair of sumptuous masses for women’s voices and sacred songs for mixed choir crafted by three generations of French composers.

The music is glorious; elegant, sensual, and deeply felt in its spiritual aspirations. Though all of it is religious and most of it is lyrical and meditative, there is variety in the repertoire. Franck’s warm and flowing ‘Domine non Secundum’, ‘Ave Maria’, and ‘Dextra Domine’ are complemented by a gutsy ‘Quae est Ista’ that changes the mood completely. Paul Ladmirault (1877-1944), a student of Fauré, contributes a set of Breton hymns; three of them unfold in lilting 6/8 rhythms.

Paul Berthier (1884-1953), referred to in the notes as “a direct heir of the Schola”, crafted four lovely motets that make use of plainchant and folk melodies. (His ‘Tantum ergo’ gives us the loveliest three minutes of the program.) And though the two masses are sung side by side, not a moment of either is routine or repetitive. Guy Ropartz’s Messe Breve en l’honneur de Saint Anne for women’s voices and organ was composed in 1922. In accordance with the Schola’s reverence for Europe’s choral traditions, portions of the mass tip their caps to 16th Century counterpart. By contrast, Jehan Alain’s mass is a modal affair that flirts with both medieval plainchant and attractive neo-baroque elements given voice by solo flute and a small complement of strings. (The work was unfinished at the time of the composer’s death in WW II and was completed by his brother Olivier and his sister, the great organist Marie-Claire.)

So there really is an attractive mix of styles here. Nothing sounds like anything else, save for two pleasantly innocuous performances of Franck’s ‘Panis Angelicus’—one by a solo soprano, the other by the tenor. (I hate to be dismissive, but with Luciano, Renee, Juan Diego, Dame Kiri, et al available for that one, you get spoiled.)

What is truly memorable is the Lausanne choir, which sounds radiant under Corboz’s baton. The conductor is 82 now, but still active. Plush sound and a helpful booklet with translations clinch the deal on a handsome release.

Rhine Maidens: Women

Richard Wagner was not the only composer inspired by the German myths and legends said to have taken place in or near the Rhine. That great river also flowed through the imaginations of Schubert and Schumann. Even Johannes Brahms—Wagner’s polar opposite—was nudged along by muses emanating from its waters. That’s why this program intersperses celestial fare by Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms with excerpted arrangements from Wagner’s Ring. The lieder are arranged thematically, with sections of the program subtitled ‘Daughters of Morpheus’, ‘Mermaids’, ‘Serenade’, ‘Mourning Women’, ‘Love’s Grief is Monotonous’, and ‘Rhine Maidens’. Each subdivision is assigned a brief Wagnerian interlude played by the horns—sometimes by themselves and sometimes joined by the voices and harp. The opening few minutes of arpeggios from Das Rheingold sound kind of strange rendered by 4 horns, 1 harp, 2 double-basses, and 24 female voices. (Talk about an abrupt ending! But when the juxtapositions work, they work very well. I am moved by the way Schubert’s mournful ‘Coronach’ is followed up by Siegfried’s Funeral March, and how other bits from Gotterdammerung set up the angelic ‘Es tont ein Voller Harfenklang’ from the Op. 17 Songs of Brahms. (“The sonorous tone of a harp rings out...It pierces deep into the anguished heart and brings tears to the eyes.”)

The singing by the women from Raphael Pichon’s Ensemble Pygmalion is sweet-toned, immaculately phrased, and never dull. As is customary for the Pygmalion orchestra (it’s a period performance group) the four French horn players are playing 19th Century instruments or copies of same. That makes their virtuosity even more stunning. Notes are supplied to explain in detail that Wagner was not the only German composer eager to explore the connection between nation, nature, and myth.

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Only a Singing Bird

HEAD: The Bird of Morn; Under the Bower of Night; Little Foo; Love Offerings; Only a Singing Bird; Spring Grass; King Ra: A Funny Fellow; Ships of Arcady; Little Road to Bethlehem; The Robin’s Carol; Star Candles; Ave Maria; CARPENTER: Food Love 2; JOHNSTON: Bonnie Wee Thing; The Wind That Shakes Barley; DEAZLEY: The Circus
Karen Cargill, mz; Phillip Moore, p; Scottish National Youth Choir Girls/Christopher Bell
Signum 440—55 minutes

Two things stand out. One is the capable and enthusiastic musicianship of the young women from Scotland. The other is the attractive choral fare of Michael Head (1900-76), which dominates the program. Head began composing as a teenager during The Great War and soon after joined the Royal Academy of Music as a Scholar for Composition. Like Gustav Holst, he had a gift for writing for young female voices—a talent that is on display in his Christmas songs and in his set of seven songs called Snowbirds. Several entries in that musical aviary will get your attention—none more so than 'Under the Bower of Night,' the loveliest three minutes of the program. The singing is caught in clear, cool sound; and texts are supplied. If you have an interest in the British choral tradition and don’t know Michael Head’s music, this would make a pleasant introduction.

GREENFIELD

Romantic Moments

LISZT: Ave Maris Stella; Pater Noster; ABT: Nun ist der Laute Tag Verhallt; KLEIN: Wie Liebliech ist deine Wohnung; Der Herr ist Mein Hirn; Ich Hebe die Augen zu dir; BLIED: Aus der Tiefe; STEIN: Bis Heiter Hat der Herr Geholfen; ETT: Ave Maris Stella; Vogler: In Allen Meinen Taten; FAURE: Ave Maria; CORNELIUS: Mitten Wir in Leben Sind; Requiem Aeternam; KREUTZER: Stille ist das Haus der Klage; BORTMANSKY: Lob, Preis, & Dank
Sonntraud Engels-Benz, org; Taipei Male Choir/ Frieder Bernius—Carus 2602—53 minutes
Taipei? Taipei? Yes, the choir singing these extravagantly romantic songs is indeed from Taiwan. What’s more, they’re exceptionally good, demonstrating commendable technique and tone and a lovely sense of style and phrasing in this swoony, croony idiom. Have a look at the conductor: they learned from one of the best. Sometimes I wished the group were larger so the sonorities could be deeper. But what handsome singing this is.

To me, these songs are like polkas and hymns in that the minute the next one starts, I forget what the last one sounded like. But the whole program is greater than the sum of its parts, and you’d have to be made of stone not to be moved by the mellifluous sounds and sentiments. English texts and translations are included. They’re supplied in Chinese, too, in case you were wondering.

GREENFIELD

French Connection

Berkeley, Poulenc, Heggie, Britten
John Mark Ainsley, t; Malcolm Martineau, p
Linn 477—69 minutes

This collection of 30 songs explores the personal and musical “French connections” of four 20th Century song writers. The connections are interesting, but it is the splendid performances by Ainsley and Martineau that make this such an engaging program.

While studying in Paris with Nadia Boulanger from 1927 to 1932 Lennox Berkeley became acquainted with leading French composers of the time, including Francis Poulenc. Though he seemed more at home setting French texts, Berkeley turned in the 1950s to texts in his native English and composed Five Poems of WH Auden, the poet who had been so important to his friend Benjamin Britten.

Poulenc turned to one of his favorite poets, Paul Eluard, for Tel Jour, Telle Nuit, a cycle of nine songs. Jake Heggie composed Friendly Persuasions as an homage to Poulenc, acknowledging the “transformative friendships” of Wanda Landowska, Pierre Bernac, Raymonde Linossier, and Paul Eluard in Poulenc’s life.

Britten composed The Holy Sonnets of John Donne after having been introduced to the poems by Auden. The liner notes report that Britten returned to London from America after the war and was horrified to find so much death and destruction there. With Yehudi Menuhin he visited the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. “The poems suited Britten’s mood. On his return—delirious in bed from a post-trip typhoid vaccination—Britten composed the cycle, working feverishly to make sense of Donne’s tortured attempts to reconcile his belief in God with the terror and destruction around him.”

Berkley’s Auden songs have been recorded by Langridge (J/F 2004) and Gilchrist (N/D 2009). Both have sweeter voices than Ainsley, but Ainsley gives strong accounts of these songs, with nicely shaped phrasing and tender soft singing.

I have not heard a better recording of these Poulenc songs by a tenor. Ainsley has a wonderful light touch needed for them; and Martineau, who has already demonstrated his aptitude for Poulenc’s songs in his excellent Signum project (N/D 2011, J/F 2012, M/A July/August 2016
**King Tut's tomb might have for an Egyptian recording has the same allure that the discovery of a new legion of Bjorling fans, the availability of a series of indispensable operatic recordings for RCA in the latter part of that period. For the Peterson-Berger, Alfven, Sibelius, Grieg, Giordano, Tosti, Strauss, Firestone, Speaks, Puccini, Opera in the 1940s and 50s and the tenor star Dubbed "the Swedish Caruso", tenor Jussi Bjorling was a mainstay of the Metropolitan Opera in the 1940s and 50s and the tenor star in a series of indispensable operatic recordings for RCA in the latter part of that period. For the legion of Bjorling fans, the availability of a previously unreleased Bjorling recording has the same allure that the discovery of a new King Tut's tomb might have for an Egyptologist. This recording has not one but two such gems; a full-length recital by the Great Swede in Falconer Centret, Copenhagen, Denmark on October 15, 1959 and a previously unreleased appearance on the Voice of Firestone broadcast of March 10, 1952.

The Copenhagen concert marked his last appearance in Denmark and occurred less than a year before he died (September 9, 1960). The unmistakable sweet yet sometimes clarion voice, the thrilling dynamics, and the consummate musicianship are all vintage Bjorling. He sings a full program of 16 items ranging from Tamino's Aria sung in Swedish, at a somewhat slower tempo, through lieder of Brahms, Liszt, and Schubert. His singing is sensitive and perceptive, and I especially enjoy his lilting performance of Schubert's "Trout".

He is thoroughly at home in a set of six songs by Scandinavian composers Peterson-Berger, Alfven, Sibelius, and Grieg. His beautiful rendering of Peterson-Berger's "Jungfrun under lind" with its pianissimo opening stands out. There are two showpieces from works that he did not perform on stage, but had previously recorded: the 'Flower Song' from Carmen and 'Come un Bel Di di Maggio' from Andrea Chenier. The concert concludes with encores by Tosti and Richard Strauss. Bjorling's long-time accompanist Bertil Bokstedt ably and sensitively supports the singer to form one artistic whole.

The last segment of the recording consists of Bjorling’s portions from the March 10, 1952 “Voice of Firestone” broadcast, including the announcer’s introductions. The contrast with the Copenhagen concert is instructive in several ways. The broadcast occurred seven years before the concert, but little vocal deterioration is apparent. The unmistakable voice is the same. Moreover, he gives the same ardent and intelligent treatment to lesser materials such as the introductory and concluding songs by Firestone and the somewhat insipid 'Sylvia' by Speak as he does to far worthier materials.

**In Memoriam - Ralph Lucano**

Ralph Lucano died the night of April 1 of pancreatic cancer. He would have been 70 years old this year. His career was teaching high school physics and math on Long Island. His true love was music and especially opera. He was a very quiet person, but very kind, and his students loved him. He was also an immaculate writer, which as an editor I deeply appreciated. I seldom touched his reviews; they came in utterly refined and finished. He was bright enough to choose his words wisely and express himself convincingly (and sometimes with wry humor), and he seemed to be able to write freely but still grammatically.

I attended a few operas with him, and I understood how deep was his appreciation and critical ability. He was an enthusiastic traveller to Europe. He loved England, but I remember most his joy over Norway.

He is survived by a 100-year-old mother and two sisters.
The gem of the broadcast is Bjorling’s impassioned singing of the ubiquitous ‘Nessun Dorma’ from *Turandot*, a role he memorably recorded for RCA with Birgit Nilsson but never performed. For some reason, although the excellent Firestone Chorus is on hand, the choral entry in the final part of ‘Nessun Dorma’ is omitted. The broadcast also includes a song by Tosti and a rarity sung in English, ‘Neapolitan Love Song’ from Victor Herbert’s operetta *The Princess Pat*.

The sound quality is somewhat muffled at spots and not of the best. This is to be expected considering the vintage of the recordings and the techniques involved. There is a useful and informative 24-page book that includes discussions of the two concerts and program notes. There are no texts or translations, but there is a reference to an internet site where these might be found.

This is a “must have” for any Bjorling aficionado and a wonderful introduction for people just making the great man’s acquaintance.

**Canciones Vasca**

_Zulaika & Igarzabal_

_Arantza Ezenarro, s; Juan Carlos Rodriguez, p_

Capriccio 5209—66 minutes

An interesting collection of music by two Basque priests who were also composers, Father José Antonio de Donostia (birth name, Jose Gonzalo Zulaika, 1886-1965) and Father Francisco de Madina (Francisco de Madina Igarzabal, 1907-72).

_Zulaika’s short songs have haunting, vaguely French harmonies. His piano music is dark and lyrical. I didn’t hear it as complex, as the notes suggest, but it was certainly interesting.

_Madina’s music is more complicated and lyrical. ‘Agur’ has broad lines, and ‘Krixkitin, Krakkitin’ is playful and dramatic. ‘Udaberri’ has an interesting vocalise-like section. His Toccatinas for solo piano are lively, harmonically rich pieces that seem to merge Basque folk music with traditional gestures. The notes call them “Basque Classicism.”_

_Performances are very good. Rodriguez is a confident and supportive collaborator and plays the solo piano pieces with nice energy. Ezenarro’s voice is dark and clear. The only thing missing is translations. Notes and texts._

Divine Karina

_Purcell, Handel, Boismortier, Vivaldi, Porpora, Mozart, Bach, Mahler, Britten, Williams_  

_Karina Gauvin, Nathalie Gauvin, s; Daniel Taylor, ct; Louis-Phillipe Marsolais, hn_

ATMA 3017—75 minutes

This is a collection of performances recorded with several ensembles. Karina Gauvin’s silvery voice is full and clear in every piece, and contributing performers are all strong. The program includes well-known favorites, like Purcell’s ‘Strike the Viol’ with Montreal early music ensemble Les Boreades, led by Francis Colpron, as well as a few rarer goodies. There is a gentle aria from the cantata _L’Hyver_, from the *Four Seasons* cantatas by French composer Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755), an aria from Neapolitan composer Nicola Porpora’s (1686-1768, teacher of Farinelli and Joseph Haydn) opera _Adelaïde_, and a contemporary duet by Tyler Williams, performed with Gauvin’s sister, soprano Nathalie Gauvin, who collaborated with Karina on the text. It’s a charming ending to a terrific album.

A nice touch here is that, in the program listing, album information for each excerpted track is included. No doubt it’s to inspire you to buy more recordings of Gauvin—and I can’t think of a good reason not to. No notes, texts, or translations.

**Folksong Arrangements**

_Haydn, Britten, Beethoven_

_Christian Gerhaher, bar; Gerold Huber, p; Anton Barachovsky, v; Sebastian Klinger, vc_

BR 900131—54 minutes

This program of folk song settings from the British Isles includes 6 by Haydn, 8 by Britten, and 5 by Beethoven, recorded in performance in 2013. To begin the program Gerhaher chose to sing Haydn’s music to German texts that were published in 1927. (Substituting texts is not inappropriate. When George Thomson hired Haydn to write arrangements of folk tunes, he gave Haydn only the tunes. Thomson added the texts later.)

On first hearing I wondered why Gerhaher sounded different than I had expected. Then I read the notes. His decision to use the German texts was done in tribute to Fritz Wunderlich, who first recorded the German text versions. In the notes Gerhaher writes, “I hope I will be forgiven here for the degree to which I have enthusiastically adjusted my own voice to match his.” I can applaud anyone who pays tribute to Wunderlich, so I turned to Wunderlich’s wonderful recording to hear if I could discern whether Gerhaher had captured some of his unique sound. (It’s a wonderful record-
ing that includes one more of the Haydn songs to German texts plus songs of Beethoven and Strauss.) How much tonal warmth surges into each note Wunderlich sings is astonishing. Gerhaher’s tone does surge and swell a bit more than usual, but what he achieves doesn’t sound much like Wunderlich—or like himself.

The set of Britten songs is wonderful and was the best part of the recital for me. The piano accompaniment is largely what makes them special, but Gerhaher’s singing is so good that it makes the vocal line also special. He employs a terrific brogue in ‘Ca’ the Yowes’. His diction and enunciation are excellent, and he sounds at home with the texts. He knows how to put the right stress on syllables. His ability to convey the sense of text is exceptional. From the first time I heard him, I knew that his voice is one I am not ever likely to tire of hearing.

Gerhaher sings the Beethoven songs with brio, whether employing a brogue or impeccable English. The notes do not seem to indicate, but evidently the audience was invited to join in the chorus of the high-spirited drinking song ‘Come, Fill My Good Fellow’. Like the Haydn settings, this music sparkles with wit. His instrumental partners are first-rate. Gerold Huber is his steadfast and reliable long-time collaborator. Anton Barachovsky and Sebastian Klinger are principals of the Bavarian Radio Symphony. They supply unsurpassed playing as a trio. The enthusiastic audience response is a fitting indicator of how fine a program this was.

The recorded sound is strikingly good. Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

**A Maiden’s Heart**

Strauss, Thuille, Wolf
Mirella Hagen, s; Kerstin Mörk, p
Guinen 16415—58 minutes

After the many albums of Strauss songs (recently Oehms 1833, J/F 2016; Delos 3473, N/D 2016; Berlin 566, N/D 2015) and two all-Thuille programs (Thorofon 2618, J/A 2015; Champs Hill 63, N/D 2014), it’s nice to see a project pairing the two composers. Thuille and Strauss were friends, meeting when the former was 16 and the latter 13. Strauss, the more celebrated musician, was a strong advocate of Thuille’s music. The program also includes songs by Hugo Wolf, just a year older than Thuille.

Thuille’s music is interesting and dramatic, though not as harmonically engaging as Strauss’s. Wolf, with sometimes haunting harmonies and plenty of nuance and fire, is the perfect complement. The theme of the program, “young girls and their feelings”, sounded trite until I considered the vast and rich amount of poetry and music written on the subject. The programming here is great; it makes sense musically, thematically, and historically.

The performances are also terrific; Hagen’s voice is silvery, full, and clear and Mörk’s playing is rich and supportive. A great addition to your lieder library. Notes and texts but no translations.

HEISEL

**Nocturnal Variations**

Schubert, Berg, Britten, Mahler
Ruby Hughes, s; Joseph Middleton, p
Champs Hill 98—60 minutes

The music is beautiful and the performances are good, but the program just doesn’t work. There simply isn’t any “variation” here. Most of these songs explore introspective experiences of night. I love Berg, but by the time the fantastic *Vier Gesange* came up, I was having trouble concentrating.

The Britten settings of Ronald Duncan’s ‘Evening’ and ‘Night’ offer a brief respite from all this solitary melancholia, but it doesn’t last. By the end, I was aching for a sprightly serenade. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

**I Heard You Singing**

Ben Johnson, t; James Baillieu, p
Opus Arte 9032—64 minutes

In this Rosenblatt Recital Johnson and Baillieu explore 21 English Victorian and Edwardian ballads by well-known composers (Elgar, Stanford, Sullivan, Vaughan Williams) and lesser known ones (Eric Coates, Thomas Dunhill, Amy Woodforde Finden, Edward German, Samuel Liddle, Michael Head, Muriel Herbert, Wilfrid Sanderson, Liza Lehman, and Ivy Mason Whipp).

To our sensibilities today these sentimental songs can be dismissed as camp or be hilariously parodied (e.g. ‘The Lost Chord’). Johnson bestows on these songs the kind of honor they had in their day. (Sullivan wrote ‘The Lost Chord’ at his brother Fred’s death bed, and it was honored and cherished for its heart-on-its-sleeve emotion.) His tastefulness and restraint allow us to hear the songs’ sentiment more than their sentimentality, their magic more than their mawkishness.

Several of these songs are excellent by any standards (e.g. Dunhill’s ‘Cloths of Heaven’). The program opens with Edward German’s fine setting of Shakespeare’s ‘Orpheus with His Lute’ and closes with Vaughan Williams’s finer setting of the same text.

With his sublimely lustrous voice John-
son’s singing is spellbinding. He avoids crooning when he reduces to mezza voce (as in Lehman’s ‘If I Build a World for You’). He has a great sense of the musical line and shows careful attention to dynamics (as in Elgar’s ‘Pleading’). His breath control is impressive as he spins out a long line to a slender thread of sound while maintaining tonal quality and bringing the line to an exquisite release (as in Lehman’s ‘Ah, Moon of My Delight’). I actually gasped at the end of Coates’s ‘Bird Songs at Eventide’ when I heard him leap an octave to a soft high B-flat that he then reduced to a mere whisper. Baillieu also grants these songs dignity with prudent accompaniment—as well as energy when it is needed.

The sound quality is warm and expansive. Despite what can be considered less than top drawer material for some of the program, it is sung so well that it is hard for me to stop playing this over and over.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

Goethe Lieder
Katharina Magiera, a; Christopher Brandt, g
Oehms 1839—57 minutes

The performers selected lesser known settings of poems by Goethe (and some once credited to Goethe but actually written by Marianne von Willemer with whom Goethe had been romantically connected) and adapted them for alto and guitar. There are 9 songs by Wolf, 5 each by Mendelssohn and Schumann, 3 by Josephine Caroline Lang, and one each by Fanny Hensel and Johanna Kinkel. Almost all of the songs are new to me.

Magiera is listed as an alto, but lacks the darkness of tone. Her pleasant voice is light and rather monochromatic, and she sings with little variety of dynamics or nuance until a very fine and nicely shaped performance of Schumann’s ‘Wandrer’s Nachtlied—Ein Gleiches’ concludes the program. Brandt’s accompaniment is fine, but the use of guitar in too many of the songs, especially in the Wolf songs, didn’t make a good case for itself.

The biggest disappointment here is the liner notes, with scant information about the songs and—worst of all—no English translations of these lesser known songs. I suppose the performers deserve credit for selecting them, but Oehms should have supplied translations. This is a pleasant enough program but not one I am likely to return to again.

R MOORE

Culture has little to do with quantity, everything to do with quality.

--Mario Vargas Llosa

Saimir Pirgu: Il Mio Canto
Verdi, Puccini, Gounod, Strauss, Cilea, Donizetti, Massenet
Florence May Festival/ Speranza Scappucci
OpusArte 9041—63 minutes

The 34-year-old Albanian lyric tenor Saimir Pirgu in his debut recording of operatic arias. With the exception of The Italian Singer’s Song from Rosenkavalier, which itself is sung in Italian, the selections are all from the Italian and French mid to late 19th Century bel canto and early verismo standard opera repertory.

Pirgu is the most represented composer. Pirgu opens the program with an ardent rendition of Gabriele Adorno’s big scene from Simon Bolocanegra beginning with the recitative ‘O inferno! Amelia qui’, an emotional roller coaster. Pirgu as Adorno switches moods from overpowering anger to acceptance of his perceived helplessness against the Doge of Genoa, whom he incorrectly believes to be his romantic rival. This music was recorded separately and in a complete recording by the young Placido Domingo, who has been one of Pirgu’s mentors, and the pedigree shows. Pirgu sings the recitative, aria, and later cabaletta from the opening of the second act of La Traviata, demonstrating a command of the role of Alfredo, which he first sang at the Met in 2013. He takes the repetition of the cabaletta. There is an aria for the Muslim prince Oronte from I Lombardi—the only number in the whole recital that could be characterized as a rariety. Pirgu enters young Domingo territory again with ‘Quando le Sere al Placido’ from Luisa Miller. He shows the enamored side of the Duke in Rigoletto with ‘Ella Mi Fu Rapita Parmi Veder le Lagrime’ and the character’s libertine personality with ‘La Donna e Mobile’. The latter number is slightly too restrained and almost introspective—not quite rakish enough for my taste, but that is a quibble. Pirgu hits the right mixture of anguish, guilt, and thirst for revenge in Macduff’s ‘O figli Ah, la Paterna Mano’ from Verdi’s first Shakespearean opera, Macbeth.

Puccini is represented by a thoughtful, incisive rendition of ‘Che Gelida Manina’. Pirgu gets the maximum effect from each word and makes the aria appear as what it should be—a narrative to an available young girl, and not a tenor showpiece.

The remaining Italian numbers include the earliest work here, Edgardo’s tomb scene from Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor, and another tenor favorite, ‘E la Solita Storia del Pastore’ from Cilea’s Arlesiana, once again giving careful thought to the meaning of each word. The final number sung in Italian, though hardly by an Italian composer, ‘The Italian Singer’s
Song; is breathtaking, with some gorgeous legatos.

The French repertory is represented by three of the absolute standards, omitting only the Flower Song from Carmen. From Gounod’s Romeo and Juliet we hear ‘Ah! Leve-toi soleil!’ and ‘Salut! Demeure Chaste et Pure’ from Faust. Pingu sings an impassioned ‘Pourquoi Me Reveiller?’ from Massenet’s Werther, flower ing into heartbreaking anguish.

Pirgu has a somewhat small-sounding lyric tenor voice, which he uses intelligently, with special attention to dynamics and diction. Conductor Speranza Scappucci draws some beautiful and supportive playing from the orchestra. There is a 31-page book with texts and translations. Each number from this thrice-familiar repertoire has been memorably recorded by a great many illustrious predecessors, including Schipa, Gigli, Gedda, Bjoerling, Domingo, and Pavarotti. But it is beautiful singing from someone who may be one of tomorrow's important artists.

Viaggio d’Amore
Arianna Savall; Hirundo Maris
Carpe Diem 16307—69:32

This is the latest vehicle that Arianna, daughter of Montserrat Figueras and Jordi Savall, has contrived for herself. She uses the collaboration of her ensemble, Hirundo Maris, which consists of Norwegian tenor Petter Uland Johansen and four instrumentalists, two of whom contribute some singing.

The “Voyage of Love” is carried out in 16 selections, most of which have been arranged by Savall (though one piece is her own composition). She sings in most of them, sometimes joining with, or ceding to, Johansen. The material begins with Renaissance Spanish selections, running thereafter through Catalan, Galician, Italian, French, English, Norwegian, and Chilean items, mostly traditional songs, done with varying appreciations of their styles. Some are by well-known composers. Savall is utterly shameless in her distorting arrangements of Monteverdi and Pierre Sandrin. Johansen adds little to our appreciation of Schubert’s ‘Heidenroslein’ with his eccentric treatment of it (with guitar accompaniment).

Full texts and translations.

At least one gets many samples of Savall’s lovely voice. And that’s what it is all about, rather than about music.

Dimitra Theodossiou Recital
Elda Laro, p—Bongiovanni 2567—0 minutes

A few months ago (S/O 2015) I reviewed a Macbeth in these pages starring Dimitra Theodossiou as Lady Macbeth. The review was generally favorable; I wrote that I had heard better interpreters of the Lady, but several who were not as good. I feel much the same about this recording of arias. Ms Theodossiou sounds often like a very exciting and artful singer; but I would not rank her, as the booklet writer does, with Maria Callas or other great singers of the past.

This is not to minimize her talents. According to the booklet, she has had a major European career since the 1990s in a wide range of soprano roles, apparently nearly all in the Italian repertoire. The writer mentions many roles of Verdi but also roles from the Bel Canto era, including Norma. And she has ventured into Puccini and the Verismo composers. This recital sticks to three composers: Verdi, Mascagni, and Puccini. The only Bel Canto music is an over-elaborate piano arrangement of ‘Casta Diva’ from Norma plopped in the middle of the program.

One of Theodossiou's talents is her ability to lighten her sound when necessary. We hear
the notes give the reader a better sense of

This is a pretty good recital of arias. Ms

Lovers of Schubert’s Shepherd On the Rock

Most of the other composers aren’t performed much. Andreas Spath (1792-1876) was an organist and composer who wrote five operas and a lot of clarinet music. Konradin Kreutzer (1780-1849) was a talented clarinetist and wrote some 40 operas. Austrian conductor and voice teacher Heinrich Proch (1809-78) composed at least 200 songs as well as opera and operetta. Czech composer and conductor Johann Baptist Wenzel Kalliwoda (1801-66) was also prolific, writing pieces for orchestra as well as piano and chamber music, songs, and two operas. The program includes two pieces by Schubert’s friend Franz Lachner (1803-90), both from Frauenliebe und -Leben, settings of the Chamisso texts Robert Schumann and Carl Loewe also used. Lachner’s ‘Seit Ich Ihn Gesehen’ is decidedly more optimistic than the Schumann setting. Czech composer Johann Sobeck (1831-1914) was the principal clarinetist of the Court Orchestra in Hanover for 50 years. German composer Peter Joseph von Lindpaintner (1791-1856) was a conductor who wrote 20 operas. In addition to Schubert’s Shepherd, the program also includes an aria with clarinet obbligato from his one-act comic singspiel Die Verschworenen.

Much of the music is light and delicately rhythmic, but I wasn’t bored. The performances are excellent; Elena Xanthoudakis has the perfect voice for this repertoire. Her bright, clear, even tone and terrific diction balance the gentle warmth of Jason Xanthoudakis’s clarinet. Clemens Leske’s accompaniment is clear and supportive in every piece. If you like this combination or are simply curious, don’t miss this. It’s a delight from beginning to end.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Nicolai Malko

TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony 2; SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony 1; HAYDN: Symphony 83; MOUSSORGSKY: Khovanschina Prelude; RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: Tsar’s Bride Overture; Antar Suite; BRUCKNER: Symphony 7; KODALY: Szekelyfonó

Elizabath Simon, Norma Proctor, Kathleen Joyce, Duncan Robertson, Denis Dowling, Owen Brannigan, BBC Symphony

Lyrita 2120 [4CD] 4 hours

Nicolai Malko (1883-1961) was a Soviet conductor before making a mid-career move to the West in 1929; thereafter he led a wandering life, conducting in America, Denmark, the UK, and Australia. He did not have the opportunity to make high profile recordings, and he was of a generation where great conductors were thick on the ground. But he has always commanded the attention of record-collectors—with a pedigree like his, how could he not?—who will welcome this important addition to his discography.

There are a couple of caveats. The conductor was on the far side of 75 years of age when these performances were broadcast between 1957 and 1960, and the BBC Orchestra of the era was not a world-class ensemble, especially when rehearsal time was short, as appears to have been the case with the Tchaikovsky symphony—a potentially great performance is sabotaged by uncertainty about rhythms and phrasing. But it has its moments—and Russian sonorities. The first Shostakovich symphony, of which Malko had given the premiere long before, is also effective by fits and starts. Was the conductor’s irregular beat difficult to follow?

But the other Russian works—my goodness, how wonderful! Malko had studied...
under Rimsky-Korsakoff, and perhaps for that reason he was determined to get them just so. In the Antar Suite especially, the results are as perfect as might be achieved in a studio with all the time in the world. Malko’s Haydn, if hardly so idiomatic, pulses with energy; and the Bruckner is performed in the grand romantic manner Karajan was rendering obsolete by 1960. To the Kodaly operetta, sung in English, the conductor contributes a necessary dollop of rural earthiness.

There is something very moving about these broadcasts, a case of the right man at the wrong time in the wrong place pushing the limits of the possible. Such imagination—would that EMI had turned him loose on the Russian classics a decade earlier—but life is not fair and one is grateful that Richard Itter of Lyrita had the prescience to record these late Malko efforts and got the BBC to allow their issue in this fine production.

**BBC Broadcasts**

**Benjamin:** Ballade; **Stevens:** Sinfonietta; **Panufnik:** Lullaby Kolysanka; **Bax:** Faure Variations; **Berkeley:** Sinfonietta

Boyd Neel Orchestra, London Chamber Orchestra/Boyd Neel, Anthony Bernard
Lyrita 1117—70 minutes

Richard Itter (1928-2014) of Lyrita recordings has left an unexpected legacy in the form of off-the-air recordings made with state-of-the-art equipment between 1952 and 1966. Heard here is a Boyd Neel broadcast from 31 January 1961 supplemented with the Lennox Berkeley Sinfonietta performed by the London Chamber Orchestra broadcast on 20 March of the same year.

Admirers of Lyrita will rejoice in the repertoire. The Arthur Benjamin and Bernard Stevens works are pleasing in the usual sweet-and-sour vein of British modernism; and the little Panufnik Lullaby, composed in 1947, is a delightfully eerie confection, more Addams Family than Walt Disney. The works by Bax and Berkeley are both more substantive and more brilliant. The Bax Variations (1945) was a late work, seldom performed; it recalls the more romantic strains in composer’s repertoire. The Berkeley Sinfonietta is both elegant-ly neoclassical and chromatically adventurous. The Boyd Neel Orchestra, the best ensemble of its kind, is of course completely at home with music like this, and Anthony Bernard is just as good. Long live Lyrita!

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**British Violin & Cello Concertos**

Benjamin, Moeran, Bax, Walton

Derek Collier, Alfredo Campoli, André, Gertler, v; Gregor Piatigorsky, vc; BBC Northern Orchestra, BBC Symphony/Stanford Robinson, Rudolf Schwarz, Malcolm Sargent

Lyrita 2115—119 minutes

These are all monophonic recordings from radio broadcasts. Just that information was enough to require a straitjacket for me before listening; I recalled not only the awful sound of American orchestral and Metropolitan Opera broadcasts even into the 1990s but the even more excruciating sound of British films in the 1940s and pre-stereo 1950s at a time when American movies had much better sound.

Arthur Benjamin’s pentatonic 20th-Century tonal Violin Concerto (1932), recorded in 1961, has not only clear, superbly balanced sound with a decent dynamic range but is the best performed of the four. The highly musical, rich-toned Derek Collier and Stanford Robinson’s BBC Northern Orchestra play with exquisite ensemble; and the flow in all three movements is liquid, integral, deeply expressive, and utterly true to the score without sounding mechanical. The finale contains a rhythmic tribute to William Walton, the work’s dedicatee. (For a stereo recording, see Mark Leman’s review in M/J 2012.)

EJ Moeran’s Violin Concerto is ultraromantic from the opening note, with a touch of Irish melancholy or folk music in each of the three movements. The rich-toned Alfredo Campoli’s playing is very intense and superbly balanced with Rudolf Schwarz and the BBC Symphony. The flow in each movement is eminently musical and ensemble between soloist and orchestra superb. My only criticism is that in II and III Campoli’s violin begins going a bit flat.

In Arnold Bax’s Violin Concerto André Gertler (the most famous of the three violinists) has a leaner, less seductive tone. Malcolm Sargent typically is rather dramatic when necessary but quite bland elsewhere, with slurred passages that bury orchestral details—he’s not particularly perceptive. The concerto itself is rather repetitious, and between the movements I kept wondering if Gertler was going to retune his instrument—to bad he didn’t. There’s plenty of coughing at this February broadcast.

Gregor Piatigorsky, Charles Munch, and the Boston Symphony performed the world premiere of William Walton’s Cello Concerto on January 25, 1957. Three days later they recorded it for RCA. Recorded here a month later is the broadcast of the European premiere with Piatigorsky, Sargent, and the BBC Symphony, and it is excruciating. It sounds like a cautious rehearsal without prior consul-

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*American Record Guide*
tation between soloist and conductor. The orchestral introduction has no buoyancy, and articulation is poor. Piatigorsky’s heavy touch has square rhythms with frequent swooping and poorly executed portamentos. The playing by both soloist and orchestra is painfully labored, and Sargent’s rhythms are really sloppy. The hooty engineering is the final nail in the coffin.

**WAGNER:** *The Ring*

Birgit Nilsson, Astrid Varnay (Brunnhilde); Hans Hopf (Siegfried); Otto Wiener (Wotan); Otakar Kraus (Alberich); Eric Klaus (Mime); Grace Hoffmán (Frica); Marga Hoffgen (Erda); Peter Roth-Ehrang (Fafner); Fritz Uhl (Siegmund); Jutta Mayfarth (Sieglinde, Gutrune); Gottlob Frick (Hunding, Hagen); Marcel Cordes (Gunther, Donner); Margarethe Bence (Waltraute); Bayreuth 1962/ Rudolf Kempe

Rheingold: Myto 323 [2CD]
Walkure: 324 [3CD]
Siegfried: 325 [3CD]
Gotterdammerung: 326 [4CD]

By 1962, Wieland Wagner’s New Bayreuth was finished. The festival was going in other directions. Many of the old rep company of singers were gone, and new or not-so-new replacements had arrived. This Ring is a good example of post-Wieland Bayreuth. It offers a strong and poorly executed portamentos. The playing where he has to growl and hope to get the bottom notes. Many of the old rep company of singers (at last) lots of recorded Varnay Brunnhildes available. This Ring is a good addition to them.

Nilsson was young on the international stage in 1962 and is in fresh voice. Her high notes gleam like stars (even if she overshoots the high C at the end of *Siegfried* and is last heard in the vicinity of C-sharp). Her reading of the character is more or less as it was for Solti and Bohm, who both have better sound.

But Brunnhilde in this performance is out of the ordinary. She goes to sleep as Astrid Varnay and wakes up as Nilsson. Varnay, of course, is a holdover from the old regime and sounds lovely. The dark vibrancy and bright edge of her voice are welcome here, and she is a vocal actress in the Callas league. There are (at last) lots of recorded Varnay Brunnhildes available, and this is a worthy addition to them.

Wotan is Otto Wiener, a bad miscast. Although he has good top notes that actually ring on the high pitches that Wagner used for emphasis—something that only Thomas Stewart among Wotans in modern complete cycles accomplishes—his voice is very light for the role and doesn’t have much of a low register. In the big *Walkure* monolog there are parts where he has to growl and hope to get the bottom notes. He’s nowhere in Hotter’s or Uhde’s league as an interpreter of the role, so we have a Ring with a vocal and dramatic placeholder for Wotan—not an ideal situation.

Hopf’s Siegfried is as much a joy as Wiener’s Wotan is a disappointment. Like many people, I know Hopf only from the 1960 or so EMI *Tannhäuser*, where he was in spectacularly bad voice and appeared in a terribly unflattering cover photo. His voice here is great. Even more than with Suthaus or Lorenz, his voice shows that *heldentenor* is really a distinct type of voice fitted for certain roles and not for others. Let’s leave aside the question of whether Wagner created his heroic tenor writing for this kind of voice or his writing led to the development of it. The sound of this voice is wonderful. It’s dark and resonant, like the deep barking of some German dogs or the sound of a Wagner tuba, but it has a nice ring on the high notes. Listen to his entreaty to Brunnhilde, “sei mein” in the Act III duet in Siegfried and try to resist what you hear. There’s nobody else who sounds like this in recordings except perhaps the great Ernst Gruber, the *Tristan* on the shamefully unknown 1967 Philadelphia Grand Opera performance led by William Smith. Dramatically, Hopf is fine, nothing extraordinary, but he knows his character and does him justice.

The next surprise is Fritz Uhl. We all know Uhl as the sacrificial victim in Solti’s *Tristan*, where, between the racket that Solti and Cullshaw create out of the orchestral part and Nilsson’s power and charisma, he more or less disappears. When you can hear him in that recording he has a fresh, pleasant voice, a little light for the role, and some good ideas of what he’s doing. Here he is in a different world. Kempe is as considerate and skillful a partner as one would want; and Siegmund, the tragic hero, has some of Wagner’s most beautiful writing, both words and music. He is a fine, lyrical Siegmund and more than adequate for the part. I wish he hadn’t held the cries of “Walse” so long, but others may approve.

Sieglinde and Gutrune are Jutta Mayfarth, a generic German lyric soprano; she’s adequate and pleasant in both parts. No lasting impression, positive or negative.

Gottlob Frick is his usual black-voiced self. His Hunding seems more dour than sinister, but his Hagen exudes malice and danger.

Gunther (and Donner) is Marcel Cordes. Cordes, born Kurt Schumacher in 1920 and died in 1992, had an interesting career. He went back and forth between tenor and baritone early in his career and finally settled on the latter. The German cognoscenti classed him with the slightly older Josef Metternich, but there’s little evidence for that here. Metternich had a medium-weight voice with a beautiful upper register and a fine way of shaping

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*SIEGFRIED:* 324 [3CD]

**FRENCH**

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phrases—perhaps a more refined Eberhardt Wachtler. Cordes, as recorded here, has a pleasant light voice with little heft and not much range of color. Uhde's reading was a harrowingly written trip, fueled by greed for power and prestige, from complacency to moral ruin; Cordes, like most Gunthers, doesn't quite match that.

Another new voice to me was the American contralto, Margarethe Bence (1930-92). She had a lovely voice with an amazingly dark and solid low register. Her Waltraute is powerfully presented, going from exhaustion through the power of her narration to ultimate desperation. She's among the best on records. I hope I hear more of her singing. She sounds like a major artist.

It's striking to notice how Gotterdammerung is all about the degeneration of characters (except for the Rhinemaidens, who are outside of the process that makes degeneration possible—they are unsullied, unchanging Nature spirits, who would be the same seductive beings to Siegfried's great-grandsons as they were to Siegfried himself). The collapses of the other characters are all expressions of their weaknesses: Siegfried is unable to see darkness, Brunnhilde cannot free herself from Wotan's abandonment and her fear of annihilation through insignificance, Gunther and Gutrune have no substance behind their protected façade and nothing to fall back on when they are manipulated into crisis, Waltraute cannot comprehend Brunhilde's human love for Siegfried except as a betrayal of her loyalty to her godly origins, Hagen's battle for power devours his entire being and finally his life, Alberich has become a ghost in a nightmare. The Norns have no wisdom that can withstand the chaos and malice of the Ring and its curse. They vanish into the earth.

Schopenhauer died in 1860 and so didn't live to see the Ring, but it's easy to imagine him listening and watching and nodding. (I was going to add "smiling" but I don't believe that Schopenhauer was big on smiling.)

Otakar Kraus's Alberich is a known quantity. He's in fine (malicious) shape here. His brother Erich Klauss (I will be grateful forever to the puckish soul who cast Kraus as Alberich and Klauss as Mime) is a fine Mime in the style of Paul Kuen. Marga Hoeffgen is her usual wonderful self as Erda. The smaller roles are all well cast, and Pitz's chorus and the Bayreuth orchestra are their usual splendid selves.

Kempe, as we know from other performances, is a very good Wagner conductor. He can build up the natural world in the Prelude to Rheingold and incinerate it and regenerate it in the coda to Gotterdammerung. And he can handle whatever comes along in between. The storm preceding Act I in Walkure, the huge end of Act II of that opera, the assembly of the Valkyries, the huge spaces opened up at the end of that opera, the strange colors in the Prelude to Act I of Siegfried, the different worlds opened up in the Riddle Scene with the Wanderer, the huge power of the forging of Nothung, the dark and oppressive opening of Act II, the furious storm preceding Act III, the transition from darkness to shining C major in that act, the parallel process of that transition in the prolog to Gotterdammerung, the wonderfully propulsive Rhine Journey (complete with a Rhine that flows forward with power and pulse, like Boult's) and so on. He has great control over the colors of the orchestra, most notably in the tapestry behind the Norns' Scene at the beginning of Gotterdammerung and the ghostly representation of the stricken state of Walhall accompanying Waltraute's Narrative. I also loved the full-speed ahead appearance of the Rhine in Siegfried's journey. That always sounds so much more powerful than the broadening that most conductors do at that point. The sheer power of the river music appears when the conductor doesn't slow down (or slow down much). In general, Kempe is deeply attuned to the nature music that runs through these operas, as you would expect if you know his Richard Strauss.

With an inadequate Wotan and mediocre sound, this can't be anyone's first choice of a Ring, but if you have a good mainstream performance—Karajan, Haitink, Jankowski I, or maybe Solti—and want to move on from there, this is a worthy alternative to the Konwitschny Covent Garden cycle or to the 1953 Krauss Bayreuth cycle. This set deserves to be listened to carefully. The more I listen to it, the more I like it.

The release is rather minimal. It has cast lists and breakdowns by acts in the notes. Otherwise it has nothing to say about the performances or the performers who gave so much of themselves. The recorded sound is decent monaural with enough accuracy that the sonic power of the music can register. Very little hiss. Some stage clumping around. Some vocal and orchestral mishaps that don’t matter, though they will become more annoying with repeated listening.

This is not a first Ring, maybe not even a second. But if you know this music and want another look into it, don’t write this off.

CHAKWIN
Mikka & Other Assorted Love Songs

BOULEZ: Anthemes; CARTER: Riconoscenza; SUZUKI: Sift; SCELSI: L’Ame Ouverte; LACHENMANN: Toccatina; XENAKIS: Mikka; DURAND: Roman; ALCORN: Crossing The Threshold; LOEVDIE: Dance

Eric Rynes, v—Albany 1614—62 minutes

Violin Futura

BAHR: Ephemeral Rhapsody; DILLON: Mister Blister; COOMAN: The Doors in the Sky; KELLOG: Sizzle; HARRINGTON: Respite; BATES: Blue Berceuse; JUUSELA: Red Bull 3; WILLIAMSON: Homecoming; GREY: Left for the Dogs; ALCORN: Crossing The Threshold; LOEVDIE: Dance

Eric Rynes, v—Albany 1614—62 minutes

Fresh Dimensions

MORRIS: Violin Concerto; STANBERY: Robert McCloskey: The Life for Me

Frank T Bestesan, v; Hamilton Fairfield Symphony/ Paul John Stanbery

Navona 6026—56 minutes

Eric Rynes tackles highly atonal, difficult, solo violin pieces on his recording without also including any safe, traditional standards. The opening flourish of Pierre Boulez’s ‘Anthemes I’ is seven notes that serve as the basis for much of the violin solo’s material. The seven sections in the piece are connected by textures and contours rather than themes. Space is rare, though delicate harmonics sometimes split up the many trills, plucks, and runs. Koto- ka Suzuki’s Sift uses far more space as it examines noise and pitch. These two elements of sound are assigned voices in the piece. Digital sounds are presented as noise with the violin embodying pitch. While ‘Anthemes I’ lacks traditional themes Sift tosses many more musical elements aside as it considers the relationship between noise and pitch. ‘Mikka’, by Iannis Xenakis, is a strange, short work based in part on the paths taken by a single gas particle in a...
group as well as fleeting imperfections in sound we miss. The resulting sound is a violin sliding all over its range for about 4-1/2 minutes with almost no punctuation of any kind.

Piotr Szewczyk’s program concentrates on 21st Century solo violin works. The Violin Futura project is actually the basis for Szewczyk’s doctoral thesis. Every piece is a solo violin miniature composed in a five year period: and he analyzes and categorizes the works, cultural contexts, and possibilities for programming them. It is both novel and a bit much. I’m still not sure the 21st Century has its own voice, but Szewczyk posits it is “an era of ‘post-isms’ where anything goes, embracing eclectic and expressive music languages of various styles and aesthetics for deeply personal expression.” The pieces vary wildly in difficulty, harmonics, tonality, and expression; but on the whole it is more approachable than Mikka and Other Assorted Love Songs.

Continuing from violin solos to piano solos, Lisa Moore’s program includes works by the two most recent Pulitzer Prize winners for music. Julia Wolfe’s banging, crashing, rhythmically and emotionally intense ‘Compassion’ is barely offset by the endearing, but somewhat annoying ‘Earring’. The two lines in ‘Earring’, one a steady theme of beauty and the other a repetitive stream of high piano strongly opposed to the former, vie for attention; but they somehow add nothing to each other. The three works of John Luther Adams echo more of the brash, clanging nature of Wolfe’s ‘Compassion’ but without the contrary material she includes. Adams’s Among Red Mountains is large, heavy blocks of sound that oscillate between harsh dissonance and hidden moments of harmony. The sounds throb forward with the steadfast nature of the mountains themselves, posing as immediate danger and hopeful conquest. Moore also sings on Martin Bresnick’s ‘Ish’s Song’ and Kate Moore’s Sliabh Beagh. They are the lightest works on the program.

Joseph Bertolozzi turned the Eiffel Tower into an instrument. By recording himself hitting the famous tower all over the place with different mallets and objects—one photo appears to include him preparing to use a wooden battering ram—he generated 10,000 samples. These were pared down to 2,800 usable sounds and assembled into a virtual instrument. The good news is that his release is not 30 minutes of a person banging on metal several hundred feet up in the air. The bad news is that the assembled pieces aren’t distinctive. The novelty of the sounds using only the Eiffel Tower is extramusical. That novelty disappears when a person listens to the pieces and many of them sound like computer-generated, electroacoustic works. Viewed outside of the method where the sounds were generated, the pieces are hip and contain solid grooves.

It’s hard to get a better resume than Michael Norsworthy if you are a contemporary-music-loving clarinetist. He teaches at Boston Conservatory, advises for Henri Selmer Paris, and he was taught by Opperman, Stoltzman, and Mandat. Michael Finnissy’s compositions put Norsworthy’s credentials to the test with rapid changes in expression, articulation, and tone. The 19-minute Clarinet Sonata follows a familiar four-movement form but, harmonically, is far from familiar. The piano is often an aggressor in the piece, with the clarinet emitting placating, soothing long tones in the latter half. ‘Mike, Brian, Marilyn, and The Cats’ brings recordings of meowing cats into the clarinet repertoire and allows the clarinetist to shuffle five of its six pages of notated music. The quarter tones and poorly recorded cats don’t mix well. Wam has both Michaels playing percussion in addition to their instruments and adds a violin. The clarinet and violin also perform from “off stage” while the piano begins loud and boisterous but slowly retreats to softer and slower material.

Navona’s Ripples program has a more meaningful integration of percussion with other instruments. Mathew Fuerst’s ‘Broken Cycles’ is a charming chaconne that concentrates on matching and pairing colors. The ABA format is also fast, slow, fast—and bright, really dark bright. Fuerst’s continuous motion in his outer sections of ‘Broken Cycles’ is only an occasional facet of Heath Mathews’s Digressions. The saxophones, alto and soprano, used by one performer, trade motives and build material with malt percussion. William Thomas McKinley’s Different Drummer takes almost half of the program at 25 minutes. It travels through several sections and moods with flute, clarinet, and piano leading the way. Chromatic material returns, is altered, and layers while various percussion instruments copy, accent, and offset the chamber ensemble.

The Wave Quartet’s program, Loco, is guided by the tango. This is a percussion ensemble created to perform Baroque harpsichord works on four marimbas, and they see the tango nuevo championed by Astor Piazzolla as grounded in dance but containing so much more material to digest. Piazzolla’s ‘Muerta del Angel’ sounds full and robust across the marimba range. Carlos Gardel’s famous ‘Por una Cabeza’ is dynamic and playful. As a softie for the warm, earthy tone of well-played marimbas, I find the program highly enjoyable and approachable. Their arrangement of pop singer Josh Groban’s
‘Wandering Kind’ is particularly well done. The program is not the most demanding; Piazzolla’s Tangueda I is the only real meat.

Michael Touchi’s Tango Barroco is darker and broader than Piazzolla, though it shares a major theme from I with the hook from Ti’s rap song ‘Rubberband Man’ and no amount of English horn could get that out of my head. If it is straight ahead and somewhat dull, but III is spirited and filled with sequences. Michael Ching’s Piano Concerto is a solid work that looks to the classical concerto repertoire for inspiration and delivers 15 minutes of impassioned piano and strings. The melodies are fairly simple, though not so much as to be immediately memorable. The strings swell and climb just high enough to get the point across without reaching into the stratosphere. Motion is mostly stepwise and, while there are moments of dissonance, tensions are resolved nicely. Ching’s piano concerto is like the most immediately memorable. The strings swell and deliver 15 minutes of impassioned piano and strings. The melodies are fairly simple, though not so much as to be immediately memorable. The strings swell and climb just high enough to get the point across without reaching into the stratosphere. Motion is mostly stepwise and, while there are moments of dissonance, tensions are resolved nicely. Ching’s piano concerto is like the most recent Star Wars film: sure it rehashes a lot of material in a familiar way and avoids risks, but most people won’t be able to help liking it.

Taking the last step up in size from solo performers to full orchestra, Craig Madden Morris’s Violin Concerto is chromatic, yet light. It mixes a chromatic sweetness with rustic energy. It is lush strings and a melancholy violin offset by pyramids of tension. Paul John Stanberry’s Robert McCcloskey: The Life for Me is one of the first pieces on a Navona release where the score isn’t available. A highly programmatic piece in contrast to Morris’s abstract concerto, it follows the life of Robert McCloskey from his ‘Simple Life, in Hamilton’ to the ‘Rocky Coast of Maine’ where several of his books take place. The music is idyllic and calm, with allusions, references, and the kind of manufactured, heart-string pulling climaxes that happen in romantic movies.

Lastly, Asamisimasa plays the works of Oyvind Torvund. The program deals with extremely interesting concepts but is a mixed bag of implementation. Wolf Studies is animals as music, while instruments attempt to become animals. The side-by-side presentation, often at the same moment, blurs all lines and presents the idea of animal-taught melodies in a fresh light. Plastic Waves further examines the natural and the synthetic. It breaks down waves into components and inspects all aspects. The piano part becomes ruthlessly ardent and an electronic hiss follows its rapid rises and falls. The collection-based Willibald Motor Landscape is filled with snippets, designs, and motives cobbled together. To Torvund, the act of collecting, once necessary for survival, is both natural and culturally important. The varied sound events occurring simultaneously represent this dichotomy while also presenting us with the aspect of every collection that becomes too much, more “than the ear may ask for.”

LAMPER

BJORNSTAD: Images
Grappa 4515—57 minutes
Shimmering
Grappa 4516—61 minutes
Ketil Bjornstad, p

DELLAIRA: The Death of Webern
Frost School of Music/ Alan Johnson
Albany 1613—64 minutes

FRID: Viola Pieces
Elena Artamonova; Christopher Guild, p
Toccata 330—63 minutes

KOYKKAR: Double Takes & Triple Plays
Todd Welbourne, Jeri-Mae Astonfi, Ilia Radoslavov; Relache Ensemble; Chicago Saxophone Quartet
Ravello 7925—66 minutes

SHEFFER: The Conference of the Birds
Joyce DiDonato, narr; Moravian Philharmonic/ Jonathan Sheffer
Navona 6037—52 minutes

WOOD: Sonnets, Airs, & Dances
Lesley-Jane Rogers, s; John Turner, rec; Harvey Davies, hps; Heather Bills, vc; Jonathan Price, vc; James Bowman, ct; Manchester Camerata Ensemble
Divine Art 25131—71 minutes

Ketil Bjornstad is a Norwegian pianist, composer, and author who has been an ECM recording artist for over 30 years. The surface of his music is very simple and repetitive and sounds at least partly improvised. (The question of how much is actually written out almost doesn’t matter because he performs all of his own music.) Everything is very consonant and triadic, if not completely tonal. His piano cycle Images is a set of 16 short pieces that don’t seem held together by much more than stylistic similarity. Short themes are repeated many times and adapted to fit over simple chord progressions. The harmonic rhythm reminds me quite a bit of Philip Glass’s solo piano music, though Bjornstad’s approach is considerably less severe and thus less interesting. There is one break in the constant flow as he reaches into the piano to swipe his fingers along the strings (in No. 11), but this is quickly answered by more of the same sentimental noodling. There is also the occasional extended chord—Bjornstad likes jazz—but always in the conservative container.
of these pieces. No. 16 is a reprise of No. 1, bringing everything full circle at the end.

Shimmering is a collection of miscellaneous piano works that resemble Images but aren’t tied together in a cycle. I don’t think it’s a coincidence that these individual pieces tend much more toward the jazzier side of things; they are not written to fall in line with one another. Here the improvisational—if not improvised—sound comes to out as Bjørnstad for viola and piano: two sonatas and a set of six things; they are not written to fall in line with

...
some of the modern ensembles in New York in the 1960s and 70s. Harmonies are also triadic and tonal (or modal), while melodic phrases tend to break up into small chunks or dissolve into rapid leaps. I have to admit this isn’t my favorite music, but I cannot deny its energy and the composer’s dedication to crafting such lively work. It makes perfect sense that Koykkar is on the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Dance Department faculty—the music on this record would make for perfect accompaniment.

Jonathan Sheffer’s Conference of the Birds is both a cute set of orchestral imitations of bird calls and a very odd story about overcoming differences. There are two versions of the work on the record, one instrumental and one narrated. The narrator tells the listener a story of many species of birds brought together despite their quarrels by threats to their habitat. A hooper assumes leadership and persuades the rest of the cardinals, chickadees, ducks, owls, etc., to travel in search of a benevolent king who can solve their problems. Millions perish on the journey, leaving only 30 survivors, who realize that salvation lies not in some far-away savior, but in themselves—and that all living things are actually very similar in this way. (It’s too bad they couldn’t have realized this before all the casualties.) The music that supports the tale is mostly unremarkable, though many of the bird calls are nicely done. I recognized a few of them in the instrumental version, and DiDonato—who, by the way, seems overqualified for this role—helped with the rest. The work really only holds together for me with her narration; but even then, this is a trip I’m perfectly happy to make only once.

Sonnets, Airs, and Dances is a collection of music by Philip Wood that also includes songs, motets, a concertino, a partita, and an aria, recitative, and rondo. All of it is pretty basic, neoclassical, and light. The instrumentation for everything is limited to voice, recorder, harpsichord, and cello—which, along with Wood’s general style, helps to delimit the affective range. The harpsichord and recorder together, for example, make a playful, somewhat timid sound that lends itself nicely to a pastoral feel in the ‘5 Spring Songs’. Almost everything is tonal and triadic, except perhaps the two motets: ‘Ave Verum Corpus’ and ‘Ave Maria’. These are for a solo voice in an interesting modern take on the old, chant-based variety of motet. Some passages fall in the bounds of what one might expect from 14th or 15th Century examples—at least in terms of melody; other parts of Wood’s motets take some turns and include some notes that clearly mark them as products of the 21st Century. I would have preferred a cleaner, looser performance and maybe a more flattering recording space. But I also prefer to listen to recordings of that older music rather than return to this. While Wood shows compositional craft, there isn’t anything here that makes this music stand out from the crowd enough to warrant repeated listening.

Dancing in Daylight
Bodley, Buckley, Clarke, Johnston
Contemporary Piano Trios from Ireland
Fidelio Trio
Metier 28556—52 minutes

Dancing in Daylight is, as its subtitle says, a collection of recent piano trios by Irish composers. More specifically these four composers belong to Aosdana, an Irish state-sponsored academy of artists. None of them takes an extreme approach to composition, but there are plenty of stylistic differences to make for an interesting program.

John Buckley’s piece begins with long, creeping tones that sift through dissonances, accentuated by sliding harmonics and flourishes from the piano. The end of the work earns its name, ‘Music Box’, with light, ethereal plinking that sounds more like a toy piano as it fades away. Fergus Johnston’s trio opens with low, ominous, murmuring piano that eventually gives way to a more active and playful second movement. III holds a descending melodic half step repeated twice quickly. It crops up in different guises, but is always recognizable and helps tie the form together. Rhona Clarke begins her trio with bold piano chords, one slowly following the last, which are joined by long, mournful lines in the strings. The texture reminds me a bit of Messiaen’s carousel-like accompaniments in chamber works, but with far more singable melodies. The cooperation between instruments really makes things work, especially in the slower first movement. II (the final movement) is rhythmically driven and choppy, a nice contrast to the drawn-out themes of I.

Seoirse Bodley is the Saol—the leader or the head—of Aosdana and contributes the title work to this record. Dancing in Daylight is a bright, optimistic piece that stays closer to traditional British musical roots with some folk-like melodic rambling and simpler, consonant harmonies. Bodley’s is a far more conservative style that offers a listener like me little to dig into. Still, it’s nice to hear some music by contemporary Irish composers that I wouldn’t have heard otherwise.

Many of our ways of training the intellect tend to disable the imagination. Music can enrich both.
Christopher Cerrone’s very pretty and insistent exploration of call-and-response. Shimmering bells and chimes are punctuated by repeated piano chords that often seem to set off a chain response in the rest of the group.

Ted Hearne’s *By-By Huey* has characteristically stark stylistic contrasts, but also settles into a sustained stretch of a deep, rolling piano riff that eventually runs itself into the ground. Between this work and Jacob Cooper’s *Cast* is a track called ‘Crossfade’, which serves as a two-minute link between pieces and as a thinly veiled allusion to the variety of this gang of composers, who are nevertheless drawn together by their creative spirit. *Cast* is a gorgeous, delicately constructed sonic mural that is easily my favorite piece here. A constant murmuring of vibraphone serves as the backdrop for a number of isolated musical events: a harmonica in and out, the scraping of a violin’s bow, a lone pizz and slide on a cello. These are analogous to Leonardo Drew’s paper casts of ordinary objects that, in an art gallery, look like fossils of everyday life. The whole program is a refreshing reminder that there is plenty of interesting music left to be written. I continue to enjoy music by members of the “Sleeping Giant” collective, even if I still think their name is goofy.

**ADAMS**

**VIDEOS**

**GESUALDO: Death for 5 Voices**
Il Complesso Barocco/ Alan Curtis; Gesualdo Consort of London/ Gerald Place, Werner Herzog
Arthaus 109209 [Blu-Ray] 60 minutes

This blu-ray conversion is a reissue of Werner Herzog’s film for German television about Don Carlo Gesualdo, first issued as a DVD in 1995. This is not a documentary on the composer but approaches the fiction seen in many Hollywood biopics. Herzog himself was quoted as saying “Most of the stories in the film are completely invented and staged, yet they contain the most profound possible truths about Gesualdo. I think of all my ‘documentaries,’ Death for Five Voices is the one that really runs amok, and it is one of the films closest to my heart.” The film includes performances of five compositions by Gesualdo: three madrigals from Book VI (‘Deh, come in van sospiro’, ‘Belta, poi che t’assenti’, and ‘Moro, lasso’) by Il Complesso Barocco, led by the late Alan Curtis, and ‘Io tacer’ (a madrigal from Book IV) and the Tenebrae responsory, ‘Plange quasi virgo’, by the Gesualdo Consort of London, directed by Gerald Place, who also offers the occasional biographical summaries. The performances are acceptable, but even the ones led by Curtis lack the balance and clarity of his other recordings.

The blu-ray conversion unfortunately lacks the clarity of the earlier DVD release, even adding some background video flutter in the process, and has merely copied some of the poor sound quality also found on the DVD. The cover even includes a specious statement that the blu-ray includes as a “Special Feature” a “German and English Audio Commentary by Werner Herzog”. This “Commentary” is nothing other than Herzog’s loose translations of what is spoken by the Italian actors in the film. There was also a lost opportunity to add subtitles with translations for the madrigals and responsory. And the DVD included chapters for each of the musical compositions, but these have all been changed for this new release. Gesualdo deserves better than this.

**BREWER**

All true and deeply felt music, whether sacred or profane, journeys to heights where art and religion can always meet.

--Schweitzer

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**Gluck: Iphigenie en Tauride**
Juliette Galatian (Iphigenie), Rodney Gilfry (Oreste), Deon van der Welt (Pylade); Zurich Opera/William Christie
Arthaus 109192--108 minutes

This production of Gluck’s *Iphigenie en Tauride* was given in Zurich in 2001. The stage director, Claus Guth, used several large masks, supposedly to accent certain elements of the story. For example, the masked figures at one point illustrate the chain of killing that occurred in the family: Iphigenia killed by Agamemnon (but here saved by the goddess Diana), who is killed by Clytemnestra, who is killed by Orestes. This particular scene is effective, but some others are not. Especially obnoxious is a mask with a disgusting sneer on its face. I don’t know whether it is making a sarcastic comment on the whole scene or not, but this production would be better without it. The masks don’t add that much, and they often upstage the singers in the action of the opera.

Musically this is a very strong cast. The Armenian mezzo Juliette Galatian makes a beautiful Iphigenia, both physically and vocally. She has a creamy, rich sound that fits Gluck’s vocal writing perfectly. As her long-lost brother Oreste, American baritone Rodney Gilfry looks and sounds like the perfect young Greek hero. He projects both the nobility of his lineage and the guilt that haunts him, and his voice at this point in his career was one of the best lyric baritones on the world operatic scene. As his beloved friend Pylade, the late South African tenor Deon van der Welt sings very well and shows the devotion he holds for Orestes. William Christie leads a nearly-perfect musical performance.

There’s very little in the way of accompanying material--only a short essay that attempts to cover Gluck’s career and a paragraph on the jacket that tries to describe it all. There’s no synopsis, bios, text, or production background.

**Hasse: Artaserse**
Animo Zorzi Giustiniani (Artaserse), Maria Grazia Schiavo (Mandane), Sonia Prina (Artabano), Franco Fagioli (Arbace), Rosa Bove (Semira), Antonio Giovannini (Megabise), Orchestra Internazionale d’Italia/Corrado Rovaris
Dynamic 37715 [2DVD] 189 minutes
7715 [3CD] 178:30

Far more than Handel and even Vivaldi, Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783) stood as the supreme master of mid-18th Century opera. He was a prime user of the librettos of the influential Metastasio. Active in Dresden, Venice, and Vienna, he is credited with creating some 60 full-length examples of *opera seria* and almost a dozen intermezzi, plus piles of sacred music. But the popularity of his works, and his reputation, waned after he died. A slow process of scholarly attention and some performance revivals have begin to hint at some degree of reinstatement. Nevertheless, recordings have been very few. So it is something of an event when a high-quality mounting of one of his operas is achieved, as in this production of July of 2012 at the 38th Valle d’Itria Festival.

Using a Metastasio libretto set in a never-never-land Persia, Artaserse was the ninth of his operas, first presented in 1730, then revived with revisions in 1734, and essentially rewritten for a production in 1760. Essentially the original 1730 version is employed here, in a modern edition by Marco Beghelli.

It takes a while to sort out the characters, since many of the names are similar, and their relationships take some memorizing. The process is not helped in this staging, where all the male characters are dressed in the same vaguely modern military uniforms, while the two female characters are outfitted in parallel dark-colored gowns.

Once the mists fade, we have a plot that is outwardly a typical tangle of frustrated love, political intrigue, and conflicted loyalties. The ambitious noble Artabano has assassinated King Xerxes, the father of the title character, at a time when his son Arbace is in love with Prince Artaserse’s sister, Mandane, and Artaserse is in love with Arbace’s sister Semira. The last of these, as well as eventual power, is bestowed after by the villainous Megabise. All clear so far?

Artabano furthers his crime by persuading Artaserse to kill his brother Dario, who is falsely blamed for the regicide. But then Arbace is mistakenly perceived as the murderer. He virtuously refuses to exonerate himself by blaming his father, who in his turn protects himself from guilt by acquiescing in the condemnation of his own son. Most of the ensuing action strains loyalties and escalates anguishes. In the end, Arbace is vindicated, the villain is killed, the broken Artabano is exiled, and the two loving couples can be united.

The plot really serves to test the love between pairs of characters, and all this leads to expressions of tortured feelings. And all that makes for a string of brilliant arias (and one duet), composed for some of the finest singers of the day. Artaserse was written for tenor—the lowest voice in the cast—with Mandane a soprano and Semira a contralto. The other three male roles were all intended for castratos of varied ranges. The part of Arbace, made famous by the superstar Farinelli, and the role of Megabise are here taken by countertenors.
while mezzo-soprano Prina must convince us as the paternal muddler Artabano.

Hasse gave all of these roles some daunt-ingly virtuosic music, and this excellent cast brings it all off admirably. Prina is the best-known singer here, and my long admiration for her may color my praise this time, but heranguished scene at the end of Act II is truly moving. Fagioli, whose character perhaps may be seen as the real hero of the piece, likewise fulfills the possibilities of several crucial scenes. But they are all fine, and they make genuine drama and musical fire out of this seemingly murky melodrama. Rovaris, who directs vigorously from the harpsichord, imparts propulsive momentum all the way.

The set is a rather bare and nondescript single unit, certainly not to be identified with ancient Persia (or anywhere else), but it serves unobtrusively.

At the same time as Dynamic has issued this video edition, it has also released an audio one of the same performance. Which you might prefer depends on tastes, though I think one gets much more out of the production with the visual dimension. Both releases have booklets with the same background essay, track lists, and reasonably detailed synopsis of the action. We long ago gave up hope for a libretto in a video album, but the lack of it in the audio format remains inexcusable.

BARKER

Mozart: Marriage of Figaro

Rene Pape (Figaro), Dorothea Rüschmann (Susanna), Roman Trekel (Count), Emily Magee (Countess), Patricia Risley (Cherubino), Rose-marie Lang (Marzellina), Kwangchul Youn (Bar-tole), Peter Schreier (Basilio), Yvonne Zeuge (Barbarina); Staatskapelle Berlin—Daniel Barenboim—Arthaus 111111-191 minutes

This 1999 production from the Berlin Staatsop-er Unter den Linden appears to be set in downtown hell. The simple backdrop sets are a gar-nish red. At least Act 4 is blue-black with a jar-ring red phone booth for Barbarina’s aria. But the red returns upstage as a backdrop just in time for the finale. The costumes by Yoshio Ya-bar are period, but what period? And no two costumes seem to be of the same period! In acts 2 and 3 most costumes are a basic black of questionable design. What is that draped over Bartolo’s grey business suit? A piano scarf?

There is nothing new or surprising about Thomas Langhoff’s staging. All the usual stag-ing cliches are there.

I guess because I have seen Pape as so ma-ny bass old men I was surprised by his youthful appearance (sans beard), buoyant acting, graceful singing, and smiling presence. Trekel’s Count in a dark leather coat (a Nazi?) bears a scary resemblance to Vladimir Putin, but sings with a vicious presence. Rü is a delightful part-ner to Pape. She’s all pert cuteness and wit, and she sings with vivacity. Risley’s Cherubino is first-rate, top-drawer. Was Magee having an off night? She looks and sounds uncomfortable. The rest of the cast is competent.

It has long puzzled me that often the non-smiling Barenboim gets such a light-hearted performance here and deeply dramatic per-formances in serious operas (Wagner). At least he smiles during the curtain calls.

Parsons

Mozart: Requiem

Edith Mathis, Trudeliese Schmidt, Peter Schreier, Gwynne Howell; Bavarian Radio/ Colin Davis

Arthaus 109180 [Blu-ray] 60 minutes

Outstanding in every way! Davis’s interpretation is slow and reverent. The 60-minute running time is all meat, no extras, bonuses, or fillers. There’s no mucking about with period performance practices, which was refreshing enough in 1984 when this performance was videotaped in the Herkulessaal in Munich and is even more so 30+ (is it really?) years later. Davis treats the work as what it is: one of the greatest masterpieces of the choral literature about the profoundest mystery of human existence—death. There aren’t a lot of fast tempos in the piece anyway, and he lets the opening ‘Requiem aeternum’ play out at just the right pace for the text to come off with exceptional clarity and power. The ‘Kyrie’ fugue is also unhurried but tight and concentrated, and then Sir Colin pushes the pedal to the firewall in the ‘Dies irae’ with plenty of fire and brimstone. Later on, he hammers home the ‘Confutatis’ at a dangerously slow pace that makes the music all the more dramatic. In the ‘Lacry-mosa,’ just as I thought he couldn’t draw any more volume from his singers, he deftly ratch-eted it up yet another notch.

And one should have no doubt, Davis is mouthing every word with his singers, expressing the emotion of the moment on his face—a true-born choral conductor, if there ever was one. I think the only conductor I’ve seen more wrapped up in a choral perform-ance was John Nelson, who’s one of the best ever. That gives you some idea of where this performance fits in. Back in 1984, I probably would have been impatient with Davis and wanted him to just get on with it, but I’ve come to appreciate the value of suspending time for a few moments...and the talents of Colin Davis. Then, he was just one among many good con-ductors plying his trade. Sure, he was already one of the all-time greatest Berlioz conductors.

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who’d given us the definitive recording of Les Troyens (a LOT of choral music in that opera, too), but a few of the larger-than-life Greats were still around to absorb a lot of attention. By the early 2000s, the field had thinned a lot and the less flashy leaders like Davis (Haitink is another one) started to stand out for their superb musicianship, and for the last decade of his career I made a point to seek out Colin Davis recordings and concert broadcasts. But I never saw him conduct in person. So I’m doubly grateful to Arthaus for making this available to help listeners like me fill that gap.

The video quality is very good, for a restored 30-year-old TV recording. The aspect ratio is 4:3, and while the back of the booklet says you can upscale the resolution to 1080i, which I did, it is still an old source. Contrast is a bit harsh, and the colors are somewhat faded, though they probably never were as vivid as something from a modern HD source. It doesn’t matter a bit! It helps that the sound is also excellent—not quite up to the state-of-the-art of commercial audio recordings of the time, but very open, with good spatial definition between the chorus, orchestra, and soloists. It’s so clear, in fact, that for once I could hear the organ part through the whole piece.

The chorus responds marvelously to their conductor, and one can detect a great deal of respect for them in the twinkle in Davis’s eyes when he smiles at them. They are, perhaps, not in the same rank as the top choral groups of the time—say, the Chicago Symphony Chorus—but this is a small quibble. The soloists, all experienced hands at this repertoire, acquit themselves very well. (Schreier was in another video of the Requiem, led by Karl Bohm, and actually conducted a recording of it around the same time, with the Dresden Staatskapelle and the Leipzig Radio Chorus.)

Indeed, it is often observed that this is as much an oratorio as an opera, and long ago I saw a production staged in Copenhagen where the chorus was treated that way, fixed on risers. Yet this is a powerful drama. David is a gifted and promising young guy, but the portrait of the anguished and unstable Saul is extremely powerful and really commands the drama. And a lot of the music is wonderful.

For this production (May 2015) stage director David Pountney has brought a heavy dose of fashionable “relevance” to the work. He has placed things in present-day Israel—his claims at making the setting neither Israeli or Palestinian are belied by both text and costumes—with lots of modern uniforms, fatigue, and weaponry, plus backdrop video projections. But the general Abner goes to battle in a business suite, while the uniforms of Saul and Jonathan look clean and well-pressed on the battlefield. The transformation of the Prophet Samuel into a religious fanatic and the villain of the whole piece is offensive. Pountney’s solution to the chorus’s stasis, at least for the first two acts, is to place it in tiers of “apartment” boxes where the citizens follow the news on TV. The magnificent Prelude to Act II and the introduction to Act III are both “dramatized” as zany meetings at the United Nations, with frenzied pantomime and choreography. The interlude in Act IV is used for endless nighttime aerial bombing strikes. The witch of Endor is a sleazy fortune-teller who smokes cigarettes and drinks. The final scene, where Saul despairingly curses God, is almost unbearable to watch, it is so cheapened.

The two leading characters are undercut visually. The Saul here looks more like a handsome businessman than a seasoned old warrior, and the “young” shepherd David is a burly, heavily bearded, bearlike chap who tries hard to act like a silly teenager. (I could not help thinking of Reuter as resembling a kind of harried Jose Van Dam and Riis as a goofy Pavarotti.)

As singers they are quite accomplished vocally, and all of the cast is idiomatically attuned to this music. Schowandt, who is Denmark’s anointed Nielsen specialist of the day—he conducted the Dacapo Maskarade as well—leads a well-paced performance, with choral and orchestral forces who know this music well.

The booklet includes an apologia by Pountney that I find annoying, and a decent synopsis. There may be some desperate for a video realization of this opera. I can only say that this is NOT the one they may have been waiting for. I think the work is better appreciated by listening to a good audio recording while you visualize it for yourself.

BARKER

July/August 2016
We Want the Light
Gurzenich Orchestra/ Vladimir Ashkenazy;
Jacqueline du Pre, vc; Israel Philharmonic/
Daniel Barenboim—Nupen 16—330 minutes

We Want the Light is Christopher Nupen’s
award-winning 2002 documentary about
musicians who were forced to perform in
the Nazi concentration camps. The film’s title is
from a poem by 12-year old Eva Pickova written
in the Theresienstadt camp. The one-hour
film explores the place of music in the camps,
how the inmates survived, and how music and
composers influenced the rise of Anti-Semitism
in Europe. This fascinating documentary
may influence your opinion of certain com-
posers, your appreciation of music, and per-
haps your listening habits.

The Jews in Europe began to find accept-
ance and some assimilation in Germany in the
early 1800s if they changed their religion and
were baptized. This also involved changing to
less "Jewish" sounding names. Jews gained full
emancipation in Germany with the founding
of the German empire in 1871, though there
was still anti-Semitism. Wagner’s combination
of hatred, envy, and racial purity fomented
into his famous 1850 diatribe Das Judenthum
in der Musik (The Jews in Music). Wagner’s
later operas furthered these themes, in partic-
ular Parsifal, though most of today’s audiences
probably don’t realize the connection.

A good deal of the film is spent relating
Wagner’s influence on the Third Reich and
Hitler’s anti-Semitic rants (though some
experts in the film dispute this), leading up the
“final solution” which included exile or impris-
onment and the death of many Jewish com-
posers and performers. Some of the survivors
are questioned about their experiences and
their feelings. Interspersed through the film
are short musical excerpts of music by Bach,
Mahler, Schoenberg, Mendelssohn, Bloch,
Wagner, and others. As a secondary feature the
music soundtrack and video are repeated with
the same short musical excerpts.

Although the film is the main reason for
viewing this, the producers have added 18 in-
terviews (over four hours, mostly on the second
DVD) with musicians, survivors, and historians.
I found the interviews fascinating. They include
Vladimir Ashkenazy, Zubin Mehta, Daniel
Barenboim, Itzhak Perlman, Leon Botstein,
Pinchas Zukerman, and Michael Hass.

There are also extended interviews with
the camp survivors. Most interesting is 98-year
old Alice Sommer (in 2002), who flawlessly
plays Schubert’s Impromptu in A-flat. She died
in 2014 aged 110, just before another film
about her life, The Lady in Number 6, won an
Academy Award. The interview section con-
cludes with an expert and sensitive perform-
ance by Evgeny Kissin of the slow movement
from Brahms’s F-minor Piano Sonata.

This was filmed in 2002, and this expanded
version with interviews was released in 2012.
The 16:9 picture quality is excellent as is the
LPCM stereo soundtrack. This is an amazing
documentary of a horrific period. The booklet
includes short explanations in English, Ger-
man, French, and Spanish. Subtitles are avail-
able on the discs. Most of the film and inter-
views are in English.

FISCH

PART: Adam’s Passion
Michalis Theophanous, Lucinda Childs; Tallinn
Chamber Orchestra; Estonian Philharmonic
Chamber Choir/ Tonu Kaljuste
Accentus 20333—98 minutes

The Lost Paradise (documentary)
Accentus 20321—56 minutes

I’ve loved Robert Wilson’s work since I saw Ein-
stein on the Beach (with Philip Glass’s music)
in 1984 when it was remounted by the Brook-
lyn Academy of Music. His extraordinary vision
for the stage—one that depends less on words
than on a painterly use of light and human
bodies (often evoking classic Greek sculptures)
moving in very slow motion—made it possible
to imagine, along with the work of Merce Cun-
ningham and John Cage as well as many other
choreographers of that time, very new and
exciting possibilities for theater.

In Adam’s Passion we have a stage work
conceived to occur alongside four works of Ar-
vo Pärt—a new work from 2014, Sequentia,
followed by three older ones: Adam’s Lament
(2009), Tabula Rasa (1977), and Miserere
(1992). Some introductory text by Wilson leaves
the subject of the work shrouded in ambiguity,
but Pärt’s short blurb (for that is exactly what it
is) on the back of the packaging is more sugges-
tive: “This is our common story. The story of
Adam is the story of all mankind. And it is one
of tragedy.” Yet the suggestion is often (and pro-
bably justly) difficult to wed to what we see. To
start, a naked man (Michalis Theophanous)
stands with his back to us, holding what ap-
ppears to be a large stone with his arm outstret-
hed; then he slowly turns; eventually he drops
the stone abruptly. Then he walks out into the
hall on a long, narrow structure like a catwalk,
picks up a large branch with a few leaves on it,
circles in place, slowly, and then slowly returns
to the stage where, meanwhile, a dressed wo-
man (Lucinda Childs) appears, slowly moving
across the stage with outstretched arms and
moving her fingers mysteriously. These are just
a few of the images that appear, and I don’t
mean to make fun of them with my description.
As performed--especially by the heavenly Childs--they are mesmeric.

Their marriage with music is not always so felicitous. Although I am by no means an irreligious person, I find Pärt's texted choral works since the Te Deum of 1992 more than a little pretentious and gimmicky. The content of his music now seems assembled from a few stock gestures that no longer evoke the depth they once did. In the context of Wilson's action, they distract from the serene contemplation that his images invite. It is only in the central section, set to Tabula Rasa, that everything comes together--mostly because that work has no text and is a much better piece of music.

The performers (also including Trevor Matias Sakias as a Boy) are all marvelous; the music is as well performed as it can be. The design and direction for video is well conceived and executed. The capacity audience seems riveted for over 20 years Tajo taught at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, passing on tradition to young singers.

I liked this enough to watch it several more times than strictly necessary for review purposes. Then on a trip home to visit my family, I played it for my mother and brother. We all agreed on this: it's a spectacular performance with superb dancing in the grand, vigorous, bold Bolshoi tradition.

It comes from a single performance in Moscow on 25 January 2015. Since the Bolshoi now has a broadcast-to-movie-theaters program (www.bolshoiballetincinema.com), like the Metropolitan Opera, I’m assuming this came from one of those broadcasts. It appears to have been dropped onto disc, warts and all, with minimal editing. The box refers to this as a "high-definition recording", which isn’t exactly true; but BelAir has also issued it on Blu-ray. The picture quality is extremely good for a standard DVD.

Any performance of Swan Lake requires leads who are both technically superb and can polish off the bravura moments, at the same time not short-changing the work’s emotional depth. A lot of Swan Lakes deliver one or the other but not both. Here there is a palpable, exciting chemistry between Zakharova and Rodkin. The long, taxing Act II Pas de Deux is exquisite--nearly flawless. Rarely has it seemed to go by so quickly. Then they transform into two very different dancers for the smashing Black Swan Pas de Deux in Act III. Dancers have said that it’s difficult to be in top form as both Odette and Odile in the same performance because the characters are emotionally so different. But I’m inclined to say Zakharova actually achieves the same high level as both Odette and Odile.

One problem with recording a single performance: Zakharova has an “oops” with the stone to tears. There is fine work from Pacetti, Quilico, and Dickson. Ghiaurov, Freni’s husband, does a star turn as a rich-voiced Colline. At this stage of his career Tajo had taken on the great comic comprimario roles and some major ones too: Don Pasquale, Dr Dulcamara. His deeply detailed acting and singing are outstanding. For over 20 years Tajo taught at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, passing on tradition to young singers.

One might have to adjust the color of the video--otherwise it is terribly red and a bit blurry. Even so this is a Boheme to cherish.

PARSONS

**Tchaikovsky: Swan Lake**

Svetlana Zakharova (Odette & Odile), Denis Rodkin (Prince), Artemy Belyakov (Rothbart), Igor Tsivirko (Jester), Yekaterina Barykina (Princess Mother), Bolshoi Ballet/ Pavel Sorokin

BelAir 119—2 hours

I liked this enough to watch it several more times than strictly necessary for review purposes. Then on a trip home to visit my family, I played it for my mother and brother. We all agreed on this: it’s a spectacular performance with superb dancing in the grand, vigorous, bold Bolshoi tradition.

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One problem with recording a single performance: Zakharova has an "oops" with the
32 fouettés at the end of Black Swan. She appears to get a bit off center and has to end prematurely, not quite landing where she’s supposed to. Conductor Sorokin tries to hurry up the orchestra to end with her (that’s very noticeable), but when she lands she can’t hold the position and has to take a couple of steps to stay upright. That isn’t a big deal. Things don’t always go right in a performance (part of the thrill of being there), and the rest of her dancing is so superb, one can hardly hold it against her. But it seems unfair to a marvelous dancer to preserve a misstep for posterity.

Rodkin’s performance matches Zakharova’s in almost every way; he is not overshadowed when he’s with her. And let’s not forget Belyakov’s Rothbart (called the “Evil Genius” here), with a frantic, almost nervous evil energy and plenty of athleticism in his solo turns, including the struggle with Siegfried in the finale. He gets an extra, very welcome, solo moment, backed by half a dozen black swans and supremely executed, just before the Black Swan Pas de Deux.

Mr Sorokin’s tempos are straightforward; sometimes the pace is quite bracing, when the dancers can handle it. Sometimes he makes the necessary concessions to accompany a danced performance. So Tchaikovsky’s score doesn’t make its full musical effect, as it could in an audio recording.

The choreography is by stalwart Bolshoi choreographer and former artistic director, Yuri Grigorovich. I’m normally not a big fan of Mr Grigorovich’s unimaginative, unsubtle style; but here the results are almost completely pleasing. There are some clumsy touches, like the guys in Acts I and III with huge, oversized fake trumpets that they sometimes swing to and fro to the music. Grigorovich retains the part for the jester common to Russian productions (or did he originate it?). It’s spectacularly danced with almost defiant athleticism by Igor Tsvirko, who makes gravity look like an option.

Another element that’s not strictly necessary but comes off very well here is a Pas de Trois in Act I for Siegfried and two lady soloists, neatly choreographed and beautifully danced—and a great way to make use of some music that’s often dropped from modern productions.

In fact, we get more than two hours of the score here. Complete recordings that include every scrap of music Tchaikovsky wrote run about 40 minutes longer.

The biggest oddity of this performance is at the very end. The last act begins as one expects with some dances for the swans—and particularly elegant and intricate work for the ladies of the glorious Bolshoi corps. Odette arrives, explains her betrayal with the barest minimum of mime (common to Russian productions), the storm builds, Siegfried arrives and starts his final tussle with Rothbart, while Sorokin whips the orchestra to ever greater levels of frenzy, and then...everybody leaves the stage except for Siegfried, as the music abruptly shifts gears to the end of the prelude to Act I. Was it all just a dream? Did Siegfried have a bit too much to drink in Act I, and all of the rest of the ballet was a drunken hallucination? It’s not clear—and it’s a disappointing anti-climax.

Back in the 1980s, Grigorovich did a production that had a blatantly happy ending, for which he took a fair amount of critical heat. Perhaps he wanted to atone by not providing a neat, tidy, conventional ending. The original ending with Odette and Siegfried dying but going on to an afterlife together is suitably romantic and tragic, with a positive feel to it.

The applause also struck me as a bit odd. The camera never does show the audience. Maybe it had to be done without much of an audience—the time of day for theatre transmission?

Still, the performance is very good, in places superb.

But, issued about the same time is a Blu-ray of the Royal Ballet production by Anthony Dowell (Opus Arte) with Natalia Osipova—the stunning Lise in the video of La Fille Mal Gardee I reviewed last issue—as Odette-Odile and Matthew Golding as Siegfried. If there is one new video of Swan Lake to have, that is it—a breathtaking production with heart-stopping dancing. It makes this Bolshoi production seem just a bit provincial. The electricity between Osipova and Golding is even stronger, sparking and crackling with a white-hot emotional intensity.

HANSEN

VIVALDI: Orlando Furioso

Marylin Horne (Orlando), Susan Patterson (Angelica), Kathleen Kuhlmann (Alcina), Sandra Walker (Bradamante), Jeffrey Gall (Ruggiero), William Matteuzzi (Medoro), Kevin Langan (Astolfo); San Francisco Opera/ Randell Behr ArtHaus 109201--147 minutes

Joan Sutherland brought Baroque opera to the stage for modern audiences. Marilyn Horne often appeared with Sutherland singing the big mezzo roles (often written for a castrato). Here we see Horne in manly garb: plumed helmet, fake armor, shield, and sword to the ready.

It’s a 1989 performance from San Francisco Opera. The production and singing, except for the lighting, would have made a 16th Century audience and sponsor proud. Pier Luigi Pizzi’s 1979 production has been revised for the smaller War Memorial House, cut down from the gigantic Arena of Verona. The smaller theater is far better for recreating Baroque opera.
The intimacy is very important. Pizzi and associates have lovingly recreated full Baroque magnificence. The costumes are dazzling with color and design details. Gowns swirl, capes swish in a riot of color. The mini-chorus is off-stage--no pretty costumes for them.

Across a shiny black floor doubling as a lake upstage (framed by blazing white columns and arches) glide small ships with "living sculpture" (ballet dancers) which come alive to participate in the action, much to the audience's amazement. One ship is big enough to accommodate "sculpture" and singers, including Ruggiero on a huge "gold" horse, and the solo obbligato instruments accompanying the arias. The living statues are back in Act 2 as headboard for a bed and as mirror holders. Staging is of the "park and bark" school with stylized gestures.

The singers park, but do not bark. What singing! Horne is now legendary for her unique vocal coloring, easy coloratura, understanding of style, and personal charisma. If you think a countertenor is weird, look at this. Jeffrey Gall is quite masculine looking and his dark voice soon convinces the listener. He too is astounding in his coloratura bravura. The is a tenor in the cast, the amazing William Matteuzzi, master of the Baroque and bel canto styles. Kathleen Kuhlmann is ferocious as Alcina, practically spitting at the audience. Sandra Walker in the male role of Bradamante is quite lovely. Susan Patterson is the charming, much put-up-on Angelica, Kevin Langan a bit frayed vocally. The reduced orchestra sweeps along with great elan under Randell Behr's cogent direction.

Vivaldi composed more than 25 operas. Orlando is one of his best. It is said he was particularly inspired by the subject matter: an episode from Ludovico Ariosto's epic poem, Orlando Furioso (1532). It has a first-rate libretto by Grazio Braccioli. As an example of Vivaldi at his prime (1727) the opera is ablaze with tunes. Even the recitatives are ear-catching.

There is no track list, but there are entry points.

**BOOKS**

Classical Listening
20 Years of Reviews in American Record Guide
by Rob Haskins
Rowman & Littlefield, 211 pages, $80

This collection of Rob Haskins's CD reviews from the American Record Guide was difficult to get through. These reviews, which are informative, written with amiable energy, and clearly reveal their underlying musical values, had me putting the book down after about every two or three reviews and heading to my computer to hear a sample of what he had just praised--or check the purchase price. In the essential role of critic as advocate, Haskins makes everything that matters to him interesting and attractive to the reader.

The question of his critical values is vital to consider, because while people generally listen with their hearts and talk about music as something they love--as they should--a critic must listen with the head as well. Good criticism is not the what ("I loved it"), but the why ("because of"). Haskins's taste--what he loves--is on clear display through the review subjects, which are predominately Bach, Cage, and minimalism. But he does more than just love; he expresses his values through his criticism. And when the music is new to his ears, or not yet generally known, he reports on how the piece works and what it does--its own values, in other words.

Haskins is experienced and informed. He is a musician and musicologist teaching music history at the University of New Hampshire. He plays piano and harpsichord and writes about Bach as one who has not only played the music but thought deeply about how it can be realized at the keyboard, especially the harpsichord.

One of his academic specialties is 20th Century American music, especially John Cage, and he has already written the single best introduction to Cage's life and work (John Cage, Reaction Books Critical Lives, 2012). These reviews are fascinating to read just from the standpoint of his experience, which adds a foundation of specific and meaningful details to the standard evaluation of expressive and performing choices.

He points out how tuning, "sustain", and registration have an effect on Bach when played on the harpsichord that is both barely noted and massively important. The question of recordings of Bach's keyboard music is not just whether the harpsichord is a better choice than the modern piano, but what the qualities of that harpsichord are. And also, what exactly is the temperament used on that set of the Well-Tempered Clavier? Then there is how the music is played, and again Haskins is sensitive to the details. Writing about Bradley Brookshire's harpsichord playing of Bach's French
Suites, Haskins not only praises the recording
but informs the reader: "His halting, effective
rubato both helps to solve unusual perform-
ance problems in these pieces (for example,
the Courante from the D-minor) and lends
some movements a novel and compelling
expressivity (Allemande, same suite)." The
Brookshire recording ("fabulous") goes on the
shopping list, and this detail about the French
Suites is filed away in the mind, to be recalled
while reading following reviews of recordings
of the piece. That excerpt also encapsulates
Haskin's trustworthiness; having studied the
music, practiced it, he knows ways to make it
work and he can hear the solutions other
musicians bring that he had not considered.

Recording reviews are not just objective
evaluations, but recommendations on how--
and how not--to spend your money. Haskins,
with a great eye and an appreciation for budg-
et and value, steers you in the right direction.
This is particularly important with Cage. The
Cage discography is huge, his name ubiqui-
tous, but knowledge about what makes his
music work is still relatively sparse, even
among interested listeners. Praising a realiza-
tion of Ryooanji by saxophonist Ulrich Krieger,
Haskins says that "Cage's music can have a
kind of blankness, an emptiness that some
may find overwhelming." Cage challenges a
performer’s intellect and expressive values
(that word again), and not many can bring the
music to life while keeping their personality
from intruding in the performance, as Haskins
writes in another review. He is fully open to
the possibilities for aesthetic beauty in Cage,
and therefore attuned to the difference
between a superficial and meaningful per-
formance. This is all easy to enjoy, even relish,
when Haskins and the reader’s taste and val-
ues are sympathetic. When they differ, his rea-
soning is upfront. He and I have drastically dif-
ferent opinions on The People United Will
Never Be Defeated by Rzewski: he calls it "a
crashing bore.--in short, postcolonial perni-
ciousness masquerading as postmodern poli-
tsics". I think it is a masterpiece of variation
form and that the political content, such as it
is, is entirely outside of the kind of pre-defined
ideology that Haskins listens through.

But by this time in the book his way of list-
ingen is so clear and impressive, that there is
nothing intimidating about disagreeing. And
there will inevitably be disagreements. For
example, I am less impressed with Philip
Glass’s entire body of work; I think there are
more lesser works there than Haskins hears.
Others will likely be amazed--even appalled--
at his high enthusiasm for Wendy Carlos's
Switched-On Bach, but his reasons are clear
and, in the book as a whole, inevitable: techni-
cal skill, historical understanding, and an
imagination true to the nature of the music
makes for excitement and satisfaction.

GEORGE GRELLA

The Meaning of Music
Leo Samama
University of Chicago Press,
paper, 240 pages, $24.95

This could just as well be titled, The Nature of
Music. At one point he says, "Nothing can
touch us more deeply. No other art form is
capable of moving us so directly." This tells
you right away that this author is not a profes-
sor of music theory--he is a music lover. He
has experienced music the way we do. He has
taught at Utrecht University and Conservatory,
but he has also programmed music for the
Dutch Radio. This book was published by
Amsterdam University in the Netherlands, but
is distributed in this country by the University
of Chicago Press.

He talks about inspiration, musical nota-
tion, and composers conducting their own
music (not always a good idea!), about listen-
ing to music (the triangle of composer, per-
formance, performer as necessary to music), about
bad music (Plato warns us against it--music
has power, and it can be dangerous), about
vocal music and the place of the text, about
"period performance" (he’s very skeptical),
and about specific composers and pieces.

It is all light reading about a deep subject!
You can read a chapter each night before going
to sleep (as I did) and come out of it refreshed
and with a sense that he has helped you order
your thoughts about music.

Very occasionally the English is not up to
ARG standards. ("Beethoven’s music had a
huge impact on him, while the majority of the
audience had trouble with the eccentricity and
complexity of this symphony.")

The final paragraph of this review is from
early in the book:

Fortunately a substantial amount of music is
elitist...we look up to it; it occupies an exalted
plane above us.... Let the best music remain
elitist and let us all--composers, musicians,
artistic directors, and radio programmers--
expose as many people as possible to its
exceptional qualities.

Who knows who is in the right--the young
man who sees the best in all and trusts all, or
the old one who suspects all until he has
investigated? The one may stumble into a
snare now and then, but at least he enjoys
sunshine along the way, between falls. The
other may never miss his footing but seldom
finds joy.

--after Ellis Peters
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