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

Spoletto Festival
MTT & San Francisco Symphony
Cincinnati Opera’s Fellow Travelers
Rzewski at the Library of Congress
New York Philharmonic Biennial
Seattle Symphony’s ‘Tuning Up’
Albany Symphony’s American Festival
Two Premieres in Cincinnati

Over 450 reviews
September 7-11 and Sept 30-Oct 1
Rod Gilfrey is the lone singer in the world premiere of The Loser, an opera by David Lang; Karina Canellakis conducts four performances Sept 7-11. Then Alan Pierson conducts soprano Katherine Manley, Irish folk singer Iarla O Lionaird, and Alarm Will Sound in Donnacha Dennehy’s opera The Hunger Sept 30-Oct 1. Both productions, part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival, are at the Gilman Opera House.

September 10-29
San Francisco Opera presents the world premiere of Bright Sheng’s Dream of the Red Chamber with English libretto by David Henry Hwang. George Manahan conducts an Asian cast in the leading roles at the War Memorial Opera House.

September 18-October 17
Conductor Simon Rattle does American triple duty. Sept 18 he leads the Orchestra of St Luke’s in Vaughan Williams and Elgar plus the St Thomas Choir of Men and Boys in Faure’s Requiem (with orchestra) at St Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue in New York. Sept 26-Oct 17 he directs Nina Stemme and Stuart Skelton in Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde at the Metropolitan Opera. And he conducts the Philadelphia Orchestra in Mahler’s Symphony No. 6 on Oct 6 at Verizon Hall in Philly and Oct 10 at Carnegie Hall in New York.

September 22-October 1
Two productions open Opera Philadelphia’s new season: the world premiere of Missy Mazzoli’s chamber opera Breaking the Waves with Stephen Osgood conducting Keira Duffy, John Moore, Eve Gagliotti, and David Portillo at the Kimmel Center’s Perelman Theater; and the US premiere by South Africa’s Third World Sunfight of composer Fabrizio Cassoli’s adaptation of Verdi’s Macbeth at the Prince Theater Sept 24-25, both part of the Fringe Festival.

September 30-October 4, 8-9, 14 & 16
A double-bill opens Virginia Opera’s new season. Ute Gfrerer and Gabrielle Zucker are Anna I and II in Kurt Weill’s Seven Deadly Sins, and Kelly Kaduce, Clay Hilley, and Michael Chioldi star in Leoncavallo’s Pagliacci. Adam Turner conducts both productions at Norfolk’s Harrison Opera House, George Mason University’s Center for the Arts in Fairfax, and Richmond’s Carpenter Theatre.

October 6-8
Gustavo Dudamel’s Simon Bolivar Symphony of Venezuela opens Carnegie Hall’s season with three programs: Stravinsky’s Petrouchka and Rite of Spring; works by Juan Carlos Nunez, Paul Desenne, Villa-Lobos, and two by Ravel; and Messiaen’s Turangalila Symphony.

October 9-10
Dirk Brossé opens the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia’s new season conducting Ching-Yun Hu in the world premiere of Red Cliff, a piano concerto by Taiwanese Yu-Kwong Chung. Also on the program at the Perelman Theater: Ibert’s Hommage to Mozart, Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 23, an overture by Arriaga, and Haydn’s Symphony No. 99.

October 13
The Danish String Quartet perform a work they commissioned, Norwegian Rolf Wallin’s String Quartet, fresh from its Aug 27 Edinburgh Festival world premiere. Also at Bing Concert Hall in Stanford: Janacek’s Quartet No. 2 and Beethoven’s Quartet No. 9.

October 14-16

October 29-30
Conductor Hannu Lintu leads the Detroit Symphony in two works by fellow Finns: Jaako Kuusisto’s Violin Concerto with soloist Elina Vahala (see review in “Finland Comes to the Buffalo Philharmonic” in Jan/Feb 2016) and Sibelius’s Symphony No. 2. The Orchestra Hall program opens with the Divertimento from Stravinsky’s Fairy’s Kiss.
The big news at Spoleto 2016 was the unveiling of David Herskowitz's beautiful production of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* in the city of its birth, in the renovated, acoustically vibrant Gaillard Center, offering what Spoleto's General Director Nigel Reddin called "unity, pride, and artistic achievement" after the racial massacre that engulfed the Emanuel AME Church a year ago.

*Porgy and Bess* celebrates Charleston's black community and the city's seductively decadent atmosphere. DuBose Heyward, whose bestselling novel was the basis of the opera, was a member of Charleston's faded aristocracy, described by a Charleston visitor as having "an aura of slow and beautiful death, a mellow decay". Charleston is now a chic New South city, with renowned restaurants and elegant clubs; yet, in its preservation of Southern ambiance, it is also the most traditional. There are moments when its 18th-Century houses, churches, plazas, and gardens shimmer in the humidity with light effects conjuring a lost magic. Gershwin fell in love with that magic, visiting Charleston and its surrounding low country and immersing himself in Gullah culture.

As the stage directions for *Porgy* indicate, Heyward viewed the Gullahs as part of "an alien scene, a people as little known to most Americans as the people of the Congo". The Spoleto production celebrated this "alien" quality, but in a positive light. Rather than a depiction of poverty and degradation, it offered a utopian vision of what might have been in the Gullah community, had racism and slavery not existed. This was reflected in Jonathan Green's vibrant sets and Annie Simon's vivid costumes (Sportin' Life's lurid pink suit, for example), all seen at the beginning and end through a gigantic Phillip Simmons gate.

The problem with this production was that most of the Gullah speech and song were incomprehensible, and no supertitles were supplied. Allyson Cambridge, who played Bess, told me that the next time she sings the role she will stipulate supertitles in her contract. Still, she was such a powerful singer and actress that the storyline was not entirely muffled. Such was the case with the entire cast, especially Lester Lynch's imperious Porgy and Victor Ryan Robertson's snakily charismatic Sportin' Life. Also outstanding were Sidney Outlaw as Jake, who conveyed an ordinary family man with gentle restraint, and Courtney Johnson as Clara, whose smoking ‘Summertime’ set the whole show in motion. We’ve heard this song a thousand times, but rarely like this, caressed by a full orchestra played with impeccable Gershwin style.

Indeed, the youthful Spoleto Festival Orchestra under Stefan Asbury, bursting from the pit in the new auditorium’s startling acoustic, threatened to steal the show, especially the terrifying lower brass in the killing and hurricane scenes, the distant horn when Porgy is suffering alone, the woozy strings and crooning trombone in ‘It Ain’t Necessarily So’, the sassy trumpet and blaring tuba in Sportin’ Life’s siren calls, and the hallucinatory spasm of the full ensemble when Bess collapses into a drug-induced stupor. We don’t often get to hear the piece with all the music and orchestration (certainly not in the pallid "reduced" orchestra of the recent Broadway version). It will be fascinating to hear what the Met, which
has a great orchestra, will do with *Porgy* when it presents it four years from now.

This *Porgy* was a sumptuous contrast to the experimental, disruptive spirit of so many other festival offerings, a striking number of which were hybrids, mosaics, mash-ups, and pieced-together fragments—a 21st-Century program if ever there was one. The most charming of these was the cabaret-operetta *Afram Ou La Belle Swita* by Charleston-born black composer Thornton Jenkins (1894-1926), a world premiere mixing jazz, ragtime, Broadway, Gilbert-and-Sullivan, and spirituals with a tinge of Debussy—all a decade before *Porgy and Bess*, for which this made a wonderful companion piece. Jenkins’s Orphanage Brass Band actually performed in early Broadway productions of *Porgy*, and, as a further authentic touch, Tufus Zimbabwe, the superb pianist in this production (and the pianist on "Saturday Night Live"), is Jenkins’s grand-nephew.

Stitched together from manuscript pieces, typed dialog, and hand-written musical sections and supplemented with contemporary transitions and interpolations, this fragment of Jenkins’s incomplete work is full of melody, harmonic invention (as in the wild harmonic twists in ‘Nobody Knows de Trouble I See’), and over-the-top absurdity, constantly making fun of racial stereotypes and its own operetta conventions. At one point the African King (performed with regal authority by Ivan Griffith) and his Princess (sung with sensuous rapture by Rebecca Hargrove) wondered aloud how they got to America from Africa in five minutes. "How did we get here?" the ensemble asks, "We were just in Africa!" Then the Prince shouts, "Bartender, I need a drink!" and rushes to the bar in the front of the house to get one.

The whole production was hilarious and sublimely entertaining. Happy-slave lies, typical of the period, were mercilessly lampooned ("Rejoice or else, that’s the American way"), but the show usually tipped into affectionate comedy. Everything came together in this production: the music with the lyrics, the casting with the concept, the show with the location (the 20s-cabaret-style Woolfe Street Playhouse), and the farcical aspects of the piece with what Nigel Reddin described to me as the "wonderfully tacky set" (giant blue curtains with stars). I hope Reddin brings this to New York, where it would be a hit and a marvelous surprise.

*La Double Coquette*, in its American premiere at the Dock Street Theater, was a hybrid of another sort, a reimagining by contemporary French composer Gerard Pesson of Antoine Dauvergne’s *La Coquette Trompée*. Pesson made 32 "additions" to the 1753 original, and librettist Pierre Alferi brought Charles-Simon Favart’s libretto up to date as well. The narrative was the kind of cross-dressing farce that is always popular at Spoleto (last year it was *Veremonda, the Amazon of Aragon*). Florise is in love with Damon, who is having an affair with Clarice, so Florise dresses up as a man to seduce his rival. The new version replaces what Alferi regards as the “far too conformist” ending with a more “logical” and “less respectable” one where “the handsome cross-dresser” succumbs to “the lure of Lesbos”.

Alferi’s tampering with the text was less egregious than Pesson’s fiddling with the music. Pesson’s creepily dissonant glissandos
and clusters didn’t mesh with the spirit of Dauvergne’s charming original; they only made the show less unified and less funny. (The exception was the swingy bossa nova in addition 29.) One could still enjoy the strong singing and deliriously overwrought acting by Mailys de Villotreyes, Robert Getchell, and Isabelle Poulenard, the surreal costuming by Annett Messager, and the elegant playing by the original-instruments band Amarillis, which performed on stage—a good choice, as the period instruments playing in the Dock Street pit for _Veremonda_ last year were hopelessly muffled.

The big piece on the annual choral-orchestral concert was another hybrid, Beethoven’s _Choral Fantasy_, an extravagant mish-mash of piano solo, piano concerto, vocal solos, and choruses. The Fantasy was performed with freedom and brio by pianist Lori Sims, the Westminster Choir and Charleston Symphony Chorus, and Spoleto Festival Orchestra led by Joe Miller. Beethoven’s seldom heard Mass in C was given the same treatment.

Miller also led the annual Westminster Choir concert, presenting Poulenc’s Mass in G not straight through but in a mosaic where its movements were interspersed with works by Byrd, Debussy, Paulson, Dawson, and repeating fragments of the bluegrass tune ‘Angel Band’. The idea seems odd on paper, but it worked because everything was sung with radiant confidence and because the Poulenc itself is a mash-up, juxtaposing celestial tonality with audacious crunch.

Each year Spoleto USA has a mission to produce at least one cutting-edge work that causes older Charlestonians to walk out. This year it was Helmut Lachenmann’s _Little Match Girl_, an opera with no action, no acting, and no text except pieces of words, presented with black-and-white videos, non-tonal spasms from an on-stage orchestra, and a chorus plus two singers intoning fragments of texts by Hans Christian Andersen, Gudrun Ensslin, and Leonardo da Vinci. Bleak, devoid of melody, and ostentatiously ugly, it’s a harsh (and deliberate?) rejoinder to David Lang’s _Little Match Girl_ presented at Spoleto last year, which had a morbid sentimentality more Victorian than modern.

At one of several well-organized festival events sponsored by the Music Critics Association of North America, a panel of producers, critics, and performers discussed the obsessive popularity of the Andersen story: videos, TV shows, games, and a dozen recent musical settings—a commentary, said various panelists, on the greed and cruelty of “the one percent”. Lachenmann’s little match girl is supposed to be “angry, not sad”. The music is severely modernist: the huge orchestra tapped, crunched, whistled, with slides, slats, and bangs, often with ear-splitting loudness, as two singers shrieked, chanted, gurgled, and hissed, all under John Kennedy’s tireless and meticulous direction.

Livia Sohn (violin), Benjamin Bielman (violin), Alisa Weilerstein (cello), Christopher Costanza (cello), Geoff Nuttall (viola), and Daniel Phillips (viola) performing at Spoleto.

Continued on page 13
San Francisco Symphony Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas can be at his best—and suffer some consequences—when he’s modeling Emile Zola. That famous Frenchman proclaimed, “I, an artist, am here to live out loud”—in other words, to be a champion of an extroverted, devil-may-care assertion of individuality. In concerts in May and June, the signal exuberance MTT brought to and extracted from his programming choices worked best when composers CPE Bach, Jörg Widmann, and Leonard Bernstein fit the Zola declaration. Not so Brahms.

The most recent concert, a set of three performances I attended on June 23, began with a work inhabited by “captivating strangeness”, as described by annotator James Keller. CPE Bach’s Symphony in D, W 183:1, was a product of the short but dramatic sturm und drang fashion in the arts of the 1760s and 70s that emphasized disruption of convention, powerful unisons in outer voices, concerted writing in middle voices, crescendos, sudden harmonic and rhythmic shifts, and wide intervallic leaps. The work begins with annoyingly persistent and syncopated multi-bar Ds in the first violins accompanied by ambivalent harmonies and moves on to one surprise after another, perfectly in line with CPE’s dictum that “a musician cannot move others unless he too is moved. He must of necessity feel all of the affects that he hopes to arouse in his audience, for the revealing of his own humor will stimulate a like humor in the listener.”

MTT emphasized all of the music’s eccentric peculiarities—a refreshing antidote to the standard late Haydn symphonies usually heard at concerts. While not quite on the Gesualdo level of weirdness, this symphony’s originality deserves far more currency; nationally it’s performed only two or three times a decade.

Next came the US premiere of Widmann’s Trauermarsch for piano and orchestra (2014) co-commissioned by the SF Symphony, the Berlin Philharmonic, and the Toronto Symphony. Yefim Bronfman was the soloist. “Devil-may-care” certainly was the watchword in this work. Over its 18-minute span (listed as 25 in the program), the piece reeled from moments of near silence to shrieking bursts of cacophony, from delicate mixes of an ever-changing variety of instruments to kitchen-sink mishmashes, some at full volume (many performers wore earplugs). Yet there was method to the madness. Two funereal tropes kept returning: the dotted rhythms so stereotyped by Chopin’s and Mahler’s funeral marches, and the mournful dropping of a note downward by an interval of a second, highly reminiscent of the opening movement of Mahler’s Symphony No. 9. Bronfman’s part was more suggestive than dominant. He would introduce a phrase or idea, and the orchestra would gradually take it over until the piano was no longer essential.

Jeanette Yu, the annotator for Widmann’s work, called it “effortlessly modern”. That lat-
ter word can hardly apply to today's music, which in its polystylisticism has yet to achieve a name. Nor was it serially modernist other than in its prevalent dissonances. Rather, its obsession with the motifs of the 19th Century and its criticisms of the piano concertos of the time (and Liszt's pianism in particular) places the music squarely in the post-modernist movements of the late 20th Century.

The noise-on-sleeve Zolaism of the Widmann, dramatically portrayed by MTT, Bronfman, and a well-rehearsed orchestra only moderately impressed the audience. Some refused to applaud; a handful gave a standing ovation. Interviews with many audience members afterwards indicated that, while a few found it "fascinating", "visually interesting", "jazz-influenced", and "amazing", many others likened it to a horror-movie score—"ominous", "wrenching", "forced on me", "full of errant ramblings", and stimulating thoughts to "run away screaming". Credit should be given to MTT for introducing contemporary European composers to California ears—far too few reach these shores (MTT prefers Americans)—yet I doubt that audiences will clamor to hear it again—unlike a major local critic, who wrote of the piece that it was "a major addition to the orchestral repertoire". A better work in the death-march contest would be Thomas Ades's Totentanz.

MTT's emphasis on the extremes, which served him well in the first two works, seemed less appropriate in Brahms's Symphony No. 1, which concluded the program. Every accent and occasional tempo being pushed to maximum, every forte to its loudest, grew deadening as the symphony wore on. Brahms was more an introvert than Zola; his music needs a more graduated approach and a more judicious choice of climaxes and tempos to emphasize. MTT's most effective move in his interpretation was a pronounced retard at the return of the brass chorale at the end of the finale; but much of the rest, despite excellent playing, seemed too breathlessly paced and insufficiently nuanced.

Unprecedented in my experience was the audience response to the earlier concert at Davies Hall, a semi-staged version of Bernstein's On the Town on May 26. Everything worked in MTT's favor. He had a chance to perform an excellent version he prepared, performed, and recorded in 1996. An even better cast was assembled, with superb dancersingers, a terrific dance-around-the-orchestra set design, evocative projections, and fun-loving narrators. I attended the second performance, by which time all participants were fabulously in groove, eliciting more than five minutes of standing, whistling, and shouting from an overjoyed crowd.

Kudos to all participants, especially director James Darrah, Tony Yazbeck as Gaby, Clyde Alves as Ozzie, Jay Armstrong Johnson as Chip, Alysha Umphress as Hildy, Megan Fairchild as Ivy, Isabel Leonard as Clair, Amanda Green and David Garrison as narrators, Emily Anne MacDonald and Cameron Jaye Mock for the scenic designs, Adam Larsen for the projects, and, of course, MTT for the inspiration to put it all together.

The condensed action of three sailors on 24-hour shore leave, who see the sights, find their temporary loves, dodge disasters, mop e, dance, and exuberate, but never sleep is accompanied by some of the most upbeat urban music ever composed. The most powerful moment of all for me, of shuddering significance, was when the sailors return at 6 AM at the end of their leave, say their goodbyes, flash on their one-day adventures, and head to war on their 1944 ship. Three new sailors emerge to go on their leave. Weren't the 24 previous hours nothing less than what our entire lifetime can be—lived to the fullest, a search for love and companionship, a dance of God-given vitality? And an extremely brief candle, to be quickly replaced with another generation of seekers, some of whom will we can hope live life ALOUD?
A wide spotlight on a park bench placed downstage was the first visual impression the audience got at the June 17 world premiere of Gregory Spears's *Fellow Travelers*, a two-hour opera that is a striking streamlining of Thomas Mallon’s political novel of the same name. The Cincinnati Opera production, in partnership with the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, took place at the Aronoff Center’s Jarson-Kaplan Theater.

The romantic organism that thrives briefly in *Fellow Travelers* develops from the single cell of a chance meeting in the nation’s capital. The opera's point of view couldn't help taking in the wider world as it examines a gay romance gone awry, set in the menacing environment of Washington at the height of Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade.

Timothy Laughlin (tenor Aaron Blake) is a naive, devoutly Catholic reporter who's come to town intending to get a government position. Eating lunch alone at Dupont Circle, he is noticed by a suave State Department official who walks by. "Gaydar" is clearly working in both directions as Hawkins Fuller (baritone Joseph Lattanzi) makes himself comfortable on the bench. Attracted to Laughlin and enjoying a chance to exercise his influence, "Hawk" succeeds in getting the newcomer a speech-writing job with a McCarthy ally. Charles Potter is a Michigan senator whose service in World War II cost him his legs and probably his sense of political balance as well. The role was impressingly sung by baritone Vernon Hartman.

Fuller is a switch hitter, charming to both sexes (as his assistant Mary, portrayed affectingly by soprano Devon Guthrie, warns Laughlin). That opens up both men to exposure in the McCarthy era's repressive atmosphere. Prejudice against homosexuality found a convenient outlet in the fear that gay federal workers were especially subject to blackmail and thus had to be rooted out, as the war against Communism went domestic and paranoid.

In a pre-performance talk moderated by Cincinnati Opera's Artistic Director Evans Mirageas, Spears said his compositional voice was influenced by renaissance and early baroque music. He also cited his admiration for Igor Stravinsky's writing for winds. Spears's style includes the repetitive structures of classic minimalism as well, though the influence is mainly evident in the overall texture of the music—a feeling that shifts should not be drastically signaled but tucked in.

The central relationship's triumphs are emphasized by orchestration and vocal writing that mirror the ornamental practices of early baroque music. A burst of grandeur a la Gabrieli animates the initial scene. Later, when Laughlin goes to Fuller's office to leave a political book he has bought for his benefactor, a brief trombone duet signals the bond that is soon to find sexual expression. The ensuing bedroom scenes were ardent, with Hawk the dominant partner.

The rhetoric and stylistic luster of the early baroque were definitely felt. There were decorative wind solos; and some of the string writing, especially in the second act, called for little to no vibrato. There was a stunning scene with Hawkins in the second act, set against a dogged string drone that supplied extra tension. There were also traces of Stravinsky's neoclassical style in the accompaniment. Some of the vocal writing may owe a debt to the late-neoclassical Stravinsky of *The Rake's Progress*, especially in the first act.

Spears avoids the division into "numbers" that Stravinsky deliberately revived. His long-breathed phrases generally avoid the tedious...
seesawing from *parlando* to *arioso* and back again found in many modern operas. Overall, the music wears its indebtedness lightly and projects a fresh personality.

A wonderful vocal ensemble for the main characters near the end has the dramatic and emotional heft of Verdi. The opera’s conclusion strikes a weak note, however, as Laughlin leaves the stage in silence after his love affair with Hawk has collapsed along with his Washington ambitions. The last music we hear from the orchestra has more sweetness, even senti-

mentality, than the dramatic situation warrants. More bite, asperity, a touch of sourness seemed called for. The set design at that point included a projected montage of black-and-

white headshots, presumably of blacklisted and cashiered victims of McCarthyism.

Without pressing the analogy too hard, the counterpart of the *Rake’s* unctuous demon, Nick Shadow, here becomes McCarthy himself: the senator, powerfully sung by baritone Marcus DeLoach, makes a thundering appearance in the second act. Roy Cohn, referred to several times in *Fellow Travelers*, orchestrated McCarthy’s grip on Washington in the early 1950s. Cohn, a deeply closeted, ruthless lawyer and effective devil’s disciple (whose clients late in life included mogul-in-the-making Donald Trump), fueled the general paranoia. A scene showing the ridiculous harassment of suspected gay men has interrogator McCarthy isolating Hawkins, whose nonchalant promis-

cuity makes him a target. Hawk eludes detection—typical of the kind of luck his lover will never enjoy.

The moral dimension of Stravinsky’s opera has parallels in this new work in two direc-
tions: homosexuality itself as a threat to conventional morality, as it is for the pious, con-

cflicted Laughlin; and political ambition as a temptation to commit sins of pride and greed according to how one decides which powerful men to latch onto. Hawkins, sung by Joseph Lattanzi with overarching self-confidence and brio, is a kind of villain mainly because cir-
cumstances force him to dodge victimization by any means necessary. Our sympathies are more consistently with Laughlin, whose nerv-

ousness, romantic notions, and eventual disillu-
sionment and despair were etched in poignant detail by Aaron Blake.

Mark Gibson conducted the adept orches-
stra and punctiliously coordinated with the singers. Stage director Kevin Newbury was unusually sensitive to the breadth of expres-
sive demands suggested by the score and Greg Pierce’s shrewd libretto. The device of having the cast manage scene shifts was less an intru-
sion than an oblique commentary on the action. It indicated that, on what the powerful columnist Drew Pearson called the Washing-
ton merry-go-round, everyone’s ride includes humble duties undertaken for the sake of sur-
vival. Such submissiveness allows up-and-
comers moments of self-assertion and angling for advantage in a competitive milieu. The payoff can be huge. Hawk and many like him could well endorse the lines Tom Rakewell sings in the first scene of *The Rake’s Progress*: “Laughter and light and all charms that endear, All that dazzles or dins, Wisdom and wit shall adorn the career, Of him who can play, and who wins.”

Washington remains the consummate operatic arena in the American universe. The musically engaging *Fellow Travelers* relives one of our most intensely toxic eras with its clear-eyed spotlight on a heart-tugging romance in a hostile environment.
Mention a series of concerts devoted to a renowned pianist-composer of Polish ancestry with a first name of Frederic, and the natural assumption is that another Chopin extravaganza is about to commence. But there is an American artist who matches this same basic description: Frederic Rzewski. He was given a much-deserved salute the weekend of April 29-May 1 at the Library of Congress and the Phillips Collection. Three days is scarcely enough time to dig very deep into his catalog, considering that three world premieres were involved and that other composers shared the programs. Yet the concerts, along with a pre-concert discussion with Rzewski on the second evening, supplied a decent, rudimentary sketch of his long career, while shedding some light on what makes him tick.

Rzewski’s respect for the past became apparent on the opening night at Coolidge Auditorium with the world premiere of his String Quartet (1955), a piece he wrote as a teenage composition student. It’s a treat to experience such a rare first-time event with the creator in attendance. He described the quartet as “this fossil of my youth” in the program notes, adding that he bluffed his way through some of the passages. One hears traces of Brahms and Bartok in the music, which sometimes settles somewhere in between—as in Schoenberg’s “romantic” period. The six-movement design proudly includes a mazurka. If anything, the quartet goes on too long; perhaps Rzewski wanted to avoid Bartok’s five-movement arch design. While he may find his excessive use of glissandos and sul ponticello effects cringe-worthy, the quartet is far better than a mere curio from a talented 17-year-old’s fertile imagination. The Del Sol Quartet gave the piece a spirited launch, with an attention to detail that showed great care and preparation. Rzewski spread the action around even-handedly; violist Charlton Lee and cellist Kathryn Bates took full advantage of their moments in the spotlight.

This work sat nicely alongside Ruth Crawford Seeger’s String Quartet 1931, a point reinforced by Rzewski at his pre-concert talk the following night. He spoke glowingly of her quartet’s taut second movement, while praising the Del Sol’s overall performance. He was supposed to discuss his piano pieces and the world premiere of his violin and piano duo. Claiming that he had explained everything in his program notes, Rzewski instead posed questions to violist Lee about the desire to learn new string quartets when many conservatories discourage students from playing them because it will ruin their technique. The Gloomy Gus theme continued when the composer said that he’s also found a low demand for new violin and piano music. And what does he think about current music? Not much. “Serialism was bad, minimalism worse,” he quipped. Classical music, in his eyes, has been in steady decline for more than 100 years. He’s spoken about this often; these aren’t new thoughts, but observations from a 78-year-old, straight-talking composer, who has found his own voice and avoided trends.

Rzewski described his instrument, the piano, in comic terms, calling it “a labor-saving device for playing lute music”. This Bach reference aside, he views the piano as a machine. So is he a machinist? If highly developed skill and precision are among the job require-
ments, then he surely is. In the first half of the program he displayed absolute mastery, capable of producing delicate colors and massive sounds with uncommon ease. He wrote *Winter Nights* (2015) for a pianist-friend’s 30th birthday. A Chopinesque gloom pervades the three nights. According to the composer, who is an insomniac, the depressing tone of the music is intended to have a soporific effect—a healthy alternative to sleeping pills. The absence of mass piano-induced doze-offs in the audience wasn’t a failure to sedate; rather, it suggested that the listeners wanted to see Rzewski find his way out of the darkness.

That didn’t happen with the follow-up, *Flowers* (2009), a request by a close composer-friend for a piece to honor his deceased wife. Rzewski, who is accustomed to performing in a speaking pianist capacity, chose an excerpt from Dickens’s “Little Dorrit” to underscore the sense of loss. Because of the deeply personal nature of the piece, this was the first time he played *Flowers* in public.

When violinist Jennifer Koh joined Rzewski on stage the mood brightened and the sparks flew in the LOC-Phillips commissioned *Satires*, an energetic five-movement exchange between two dynamic forces. The whimsical section-titles in this non-serious “serious” music are somewhat cryptic about what actually happens. Thus the middle movement ‘Wig Bubble’ came across as well-executed phrases and interesting ideas without sounding as though they were inspired by hallucinogenic substances. The concluding ‘Life Is a Riddle’ summed up the essence of *Satires*: we can enjoy something without being able to categorize or fully explain it. Koh and Rzewski saw to that.

The Del Sol Quartet finished the evening with Antheil’s Quartet No. 1 (1924-25) and Quartet No. 10 (1995) by Ben Johnston. They re-tuned to operate in “just intonation” for the Johnston quartet, a joyous work whose unbridled first movement feels like a finale. The scherzo was mixed-meter madness with violinist Benjamin Kreith the only non-plucker in the pizzicato crowd. ‘Danny Boy’ serves as the melodic centerpiece of the finale—a reflective, deeply expressive set of variations on the theme. Cellist Kathryn Bates reminded the audience that this was the first time that any of Johnston’s music had been performed at the Library of Congress. The Del Sol players did him proud. The composer turned 90 in March.

The final Rzewski concert at the Phillips Collection saw the return of Jennifer Koh and the addition of pianist Ursula Oppens. Once again Rzewski’s keyboard prowess and spoken interjections came to the fore in ‘The Same Old Story’ (2001), Mile 52 of *The Road*, an epic Russian novel-length work he wrote in eight books that contain nearly eight hours of music. Foot stomping, finger snapping, hand claps, and fist pounding on the piano body accompanied this journey, which included several rest stops. One foot-stomping-piano moment suggested a flat tire. Thanks to the various scenery changes, this was a stimulating Rzewski ride.

Rzewski and Oppens took a different excursion amid delicate suspended chords in Morton Feldman’s *Piano Four Hands* (1958). The performers determine the duration of this piece. It is relatively succinct—a rare instance perhaps of wishing that Feldman had written more and the players had lingered a bit longer.

Koh and Oppens brought the excitement level way up in Lou Harrison’s Grand Duo (1988), a work that combines traditional dance forms with a touch of Americana in the hoe-down fiddling of the ‘Stampede’ movement.

The Koh-Oppens partnership flourished as well in the world premiere of Rzewski’s *Nota-
sonata. This was a different animal from Satires; it’s constructed along more conventional classical lines with a thematic statement that proceeds through an orderly development. A logical plan need not be predictable, as the composer proved with plucked piano string harmonics and regular use of the violin mute.

In a world that thrives on the latest and the greatest, Rzewski has stayed true to his gut and his intellect. As he jokingly stated in the program notes, “Long live notasonatas! May there be more of them!” Great idea—as long as he’s the composer.

Lachenmann’s piece would have been twice as effective at half its 100 minutes, but it had an undeniable visceral power—the musical equivalent of a nervous breakdown or of being hit on the head with a hammer. Indeed, at the panel, the fearless soprano Heather Buck, who specializes in difficult avant-garde material, said, “When I agreed to do the piece I questioned my sanity.” One needs to hear the work in concert to savor its full sadomasochistic frisson. One certainly felt the coldness and slow death of the match girl, especially in the total darkness of the cavernous Memminger Auditorium. The Westminster Choir, spot-on as usual, had been rehearsing the piece all through spring semester. After the show, one singer said, “We did it, it’s the last performance, and thank God we never have to do it again.”

As usual at Spoleto, the smaller, more intimate concerts offered by chamber music ensembles were some of the most memorable, especially in Charleston’s atmospheric locations: a delightfully snarky Quintet by the young American composer Sean Shepherd, with a scherzo called ‘Hissy Fit’; a terrifying performance of Schubert’s ‘Erlkonig’ by baritone Tyler Duncan and pianist Inon Barnatan; a bold and bracing rendition of Messiaen’s Celestial City for percussion and winds; an enchanting performance of Ginastera’s underrated Varaciones Concertantes that floated and pulsed through St Matthew’s Lutheran Church. But what I still think about most were Alisa Weilerstein and Inon Barnatan tearing through Barber’s youthful Cello Sonata with go-for-broke passion. I don’t know what the fire laws are at the Dock Street Theater, but I’m sure this incendiary performance challenged them.
In only its second iteration, the New York Philharmonic Biennial has become one of the Big Apple’s biggest musical events of the year. For three weeks beginning in late May, new music flooded the city, drawing top performers, composers, and big audiences. On June 10, while the Philharmonic was gearing up for their final brace of concerts, a smaller orchestra and guests introduced six world premieres and several New York premieres in a gratifying and often exciting concert at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

The orchestra was the Knights, the superb Brooklyn-based collective founded by Eric Jacobsen, a cellist and the group’s conductor, and his brother Colin, a violinist and composer. Their inspiration was to incorporate two youth choruses: the San Francisco Girls Chorus and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus.

Writing for treble voices may have less cachet than for, say, a string quartet; but composers prize the flexibility of young voices, their clear timbres, ease in the upper register, and—thanks to expert conductors like Diane Berkun Menaker (Brooklyn) and Valérie Sainte-Agathe (San Francisco)—precise pitch, rhythm, and diction. Before the concert I worried that the sound of young trebles might cloy after three hours, but I needn’t have feared.

A 7 PM all-choral program presented mostly new works, exploring the process of finding one’s identity and voice. The San Francisco Girls Chorus, demure in long black dresses and hair worn straight, opened with the evening’s most conventional-sounding work, ‘Father Death Blues’ from Philip Glass’s Hydrogen Jukebox (arranged by Lisa Bielawa). The serene folk-like melody sung by young voices belied the grim lyrics. In Karla Kihlstedt’s Herring Run, alternating masses and eddies of solo voices played up the contrast between the group and the individual. Singer-composer Theo Bleckman added his own sampled vocals and electronic manipulation to the chorus in the world premiere of Final Answer, a sometimes rambling meditation on young people’s troubled questions about the future.

Then the Brooklyn Youth Chorus, all female but for one brave young man, took the stage, dressed in black and white. So Quietly, Carolyn Shaw’s sparkling third commission for the ensemble, enhanced primarily triadic vocal writing with effects like panting and whispering to express the process of finding one’s voice. Mary Kouyoumdjian’s extended Become Who I Am, backed by Hotel Elephant, an amplified string quartet, layered unison chanting over taped interviews in an earnest but too wordy essay. The combined choruses ended strongly with Gabriel Kahane’s commission, Back of the Choir, the piece I’d most like to hear again. Kahane deftly set Ann Carson’s enigmatic prose poem, with its repetition of the word “shade”, both as pure sound and as layered meaning.
The 8:30 Knights concert began with Bielawa’s *My Outstretched Hand* based on a remarkable Whitmanesque 1901 diary of a 19-year-old Montana woman. The piece reveals youthful emotions with voices soaring over pulsating instruments. Nico Muhly’s affecting *Impossible Things* (US premiere) works like a double concerto for tenor (the sensitive Nicholas Phan) and solo violin (Colin Jacobsen). CP Cavafy’s spare poignant verses of longing and grief are intoned in a Brittenesque arioso, while the solo violin has more expressive freedom. Colin Jacobsen’s *If I Were Not Me*, another world premiere, corralled the vivid emotions of two texts by Lydia Davis with formal rigor. The Brooklyn singers seemed particularly at ease with the straightforwardness of both words and music.

After intermission the world premiere of Aaron Jay Kernis’s substantial *Remembering the Sea—Souvenir de la Mer* occupied most of the second half. Kernis’s commission for the San Francisco Girls Chorus was a major work, written to commemorate the many terrorist attacks of the last six months, but by then intensity fatigue was interfering with my concentration. That was my main problem with the evening: the large doses of musical density and adolescent feeling made for too much of a good thing.

The final number, Timo Andres’s *Comfort Food*, supplied both levity and a bigger emotional payoff than one might expect from a grocery list. The encore was violinist Christina Courtin’s gospel-inflected ‘Love Is a Season,’ written and sung by the songwriter with choral-orchestral back-up. It was an unexpected and uplifting finish to an excellent and challenging evening.

Leslie Kandell

Alan Gilbert not only knows how to wrap up a festival, but he knows how to put one on. His second New York Philharmonic Biennial took over its hometown the way Wagner’s Ring Cycle periodically takes over Seattle. The concerts, which took place from May 23 to June 11, were more challenging than Wagner because the music was either brand new or new to New York.

Under the discriminating eye of Esa-Pekka Salonen, Philharmonic composer-in-residence, this Biennial was expanded from the one in 2014 to 28 events in Manhattan and Brooklyn (including museums) with 12 partners. More than 30 new and recent pieces were heard—instrumental, vocal, and dance—from a long roster of notable composers from Adams to Zorn.

The daring programs in David Geffen Hall June 10 and 11 included three concertos—a world premiere for trombone by William Bolcom, a recent one for percussion by John Corigliano, and one from 2004 for orchestra by the late Steven Stucky—as well as a 2011 symphony by the Danish composer Per Norgard, plus a brief memorial to former music director Pierre Boulez performed by seven cellists, none of them with famous names like Yo-Yo Ma. The large audiences were sophisticated and enthusiastic; nobody sneaked out, which could make one proud to live in New York.

One might wonder how the Philharmonic could do justice to so much new music at the end of a demanding season. A cynic would say, “The audience hasn’t heard any of this and won’t know if entrances are missed or dissonance is intended.” A loyalist would say,
“These are highly professional musicians, and they do the job they’re there to do.” It was some of both.

Gilbert, who will step down as music director after next season, has often fallen short of mastery, with oversized or nonspecific conducting gestures that don’t have any place in these unfamiliar scores, but here he rose to the occasion. Without baton, he carried himself with control, and his indications were clear, knowledgeable, and precise.

Bolcom’s new Trombone Concerto, eloquently played by Principal Trombone Joseph Alessi, is another work with a soloist that the composer occasionally produces for the Philharmonic. Gilbert, who introduced the pieces with the confiding air of a lounge emcee, mentioned that this premiere was taking place during an international trombone festival at the Juilliard School across the street. When he asked the trombonists present to stand, fully half the audience did.

The three-movement tonal piece, about 20 minutes long, was a Philharmonic co-commission with the Shanghai Symphony. It brought the trombone part gradually forward from an indistinct mist (suggesting distance, sackbut origins, and the trombone’s rarity as a solo instrument) through a familiar bluesy sound to a jaunty syncopated prominence. The trombone line sailed over harp and string texture in the muted first movement, tossing off little chromatic runs and becoming a firm presence at the conclusion. The middle movement had bent tones and lazy blues flavor, of the sort Bolcom can evoke so ingeniously. The solo line is not that attractive, but the concerto is a competent example of the form, with interesting moments. It will be heard again.

Alessi, in his quiet manner, dominated the solo part, though its fast soft puffs and elongated phrases must require skills that only trombonists understand.

Corigliano, who like Bolcom took the stage to say a few words about his piece, maintained that he was an unlikely choice to compose The Conjurer for percussion, string orchestra, and brass. His father had been concertmaster of the Philharmonic for 26 years, he noted, so he was more at ease with strings. (His 1997 Pulitzer Prize was for the film score of The Red Violin.)

But after much thought and (he said) “outrageous” compensation, he came up with a clever three-movement form dividing percussion into sounds on wood, metal, and skin. Written in 2008 for Evelyn Glennie (which means it has to be showy), the 37-minute piece (10 minutes too long) was introduced in Pittsburgh. Glennie had nothing on Friday’s guest percussionist, Martin Grubinger, a fleet-footed Austrian whose worthwhile discussion and demonstration are online at www.facebook.com/nymphilharmonic/videos/10153868842842293/. (This public link does not require a Facebook account.)
The Seattle Symphony marked the start of the northwest summer with “Tuning Up!”, an ambitious two-week festival of American music culminating on the Fourth of July weekend. American music of the populist-conservative stripe was a long-standing interest of the SSO under former Music Director Gerard Schwarz. Many ARG readers will be familiar with recordings produced during his long tenure.

Current Music Director Ludovic Morlot has a very different take on American music, persuasively demonstrating his perspective over the last few seasons. “Tuning Up!” is a big tent proposition encompassing a little bit of everything: concerts devoted to music from the silver screen, a big stadium Gershwin-fest, and Seattle favorite composer John Luther Adams.

Despite this variety, it’s clear that Morlot’s tastes run more to composers like Ives, Varese, and Feldman than the ones championed by Schwarz. Part of Morlot’s game plan is tucking contemporary works in with established favorites. He also makes the occasional bold move like the June 29 performance of Morton Feldman’s Triadic Memories (1981) at the Illsley Ball Nordstrom Recital Hall at Seattle’s downtown Benaroya Hall complex.

This was certainly the most extreme event of the festival; Feldman’s 90-minute work for solo piano stretches the idea of concentrated listening practically to its limits. His materials seem plain enough, “a simple and elegant
thread of chords that dissolve and mutate, all meshed together by the constant use of half-pedal to produce a shimmer of sustain” (SSO program note writer Aaron Grad).

*Triadic Memories* is unquestionably a masterpiece, but a passive-aggressive one that relentlessly demands that the audience re-think ideas of musical materials, compositional process, and time. For me its much vaunted length is the least of the aesthetic problems it raises. Rather, it is the absence of traditional formal—let alone pianistic—rhetoric that presents such challenges. There is content aplenty, but keeping track of the beautifully honed color and rhythmic mutations is no easy task over the long haul.

Much of this was fast-tracked by the astonishing abilities of pianist Alexander Melnikov, perhaps best known for his interpretations of Shostakovich. Obviously, this sort of work should only be tackled by a pianist of exceptional intellect and skill. Playing with his audience in near darkness and the piano dimly lit, Melnikov created a seance-like theatricality that mesmerized me. Not quite all of the 300+ listeners bought in: there were some noisy defectors (passive aggression of another sort?) during the course of the performance and a few angry words when the light of an electronic device erupted distractingly in the house. Feldman’s work perhaps inadvertently demonstrates the inability of modern adults to sit quietly for a while without conversation or toys (a skill that used to be taught in kindergarten).

The performance was a triumph for Melnikov. His sensitivity to the nuances of the score was laudable and his rendition of Feldman’s exquisitely wrought timbers astonishing. Given that the composer deliberately restricts the melodic material, the subtlety of his rhythmic invention is all the more remarkable. So are the changes in color and texture, which come with greater frequency and sometimes with less gentle preparation than the listener anticipates.

Most of the audience was enraptured. In an ideal world, I’d like a week or so to ponder my reactions, then go back for an encore.

The June 30 program, “The Light That Fills the World: A Meditation in Sound and Light”, proved a grander orchestral affair. The Governor of the State of Washington, no less, intoned the welcome and “please turn off your cell phones” announcement, then explained a singular bit of programming magic: Julia Wolfe’s 9/11-inspired *My Beautiful Scream* for string quartet and orchestra would be followed, without applause, by one-time Seattle resident John Cage’s *4’33"*. He suggested audience members might use the four-plus minutes to contemplate the victims of 9/11 and the recent Orlando massacre.

Wolfe’s piece juxtaposes blocks of sound, quietly ominous to begin, then growing in intensity toward frenzy—an impassioned heart-rending work that is as good a piece of ceremonial public music as I’ve heard in many a year. In keeping with the “sound and light” theme, there were lighting effects—too close to kitsch, perhaps, to be in keeping with the deep seriousness of Wolfe’s intent, but not without effect.

I’ve heard Cage’s infamous *4’33"* in any number of contexts at universities and in new music events. The notion of treating it as a ritualistic expression of mourning in a full symphonic concert proved original, symbolic, and moving.

The second half of the program began with John Luther Adams’s *Light That Fills the World* (1998-2000) for large orchestra with organ. Adams has been good for the SSO, and the SSO has been good to him, promoting his music at home in Seattle, on tour, and on records. I’m not impressed. His neo-primitive, eco-conscious work strikes me as crude. If there’s a plodding grandeur to *The Light That Fills the World*—a title “borrowed from an Inuit song that sings of the close relationship between beauty and terror, risk and revelation” according to the composer (who was present)—his artless approach to orchestral sonority makes for tedious listening.

There was nothing artless about Morton Feldman’s *Piano and Orchestra* (1975)
The word “Festival” is almost as over-worked and under-realized in the performing arts world as the term “gala.” So hand it to the Albany Symphony for tenaciously producing an American Music Festival and nurturing its growth year after year. Not that long ago the annual springtime festival consisted of three events or so. This year it finally took on a genuine mass with more than a dozen recitals, reading sessions, and concerts, plus walking tours and late night jams, spread out over the course of five days.

It was even better that the concluding concert of four works for full orchestra was so satisfying. There were two commissions, which always means a roll of the dice. But all of the music was engaging and shapely (nothing too long-winded either) and beautifully performed. On top of that, the works complemented each other, making for a thoughtful and coherent evening.

Music on the first half spoke to the overarching theme for this year’s festival: the natural world. Jessie Montgomery, one of this season’s resident composers, explained that her Caught by the Wind was inspired by a gnarled and weathered tree limb. Good enough, as an organic flow of melody coursed through the orchestra. It took on weight from the brass and a visceral texture from the strings. The final, fleeting phrase was like a leaf swept away by an autumn breeze.

The other resident composer this year was Steven Stucky, who died in February from brain cancer. Already scheduled for this concert was his Silent Spring from 2011. It borrows a name from Rachel Carson’s landmark book of environmental warnings; allegories to pollutants would be easy to identify in its dark and ominous writing. Though written for a Wagnerian orchestra, the music also has a rare mix of transparency and mass. Similar to Montgomery’s piece, the form felt natural and evolving, never choppy or deliberate. A recording of Silent Spring will be part of an all-Stucky album from the ASO.

Usually when Music Director David Alan Miller works with senior composers like Stucky, he asks for referrals to promising younger composers. Loren Loiacono, currently finishing her doctoral studies at Cornell, is one example. Stucky obviously passed along to her his skill at orchestration. Her new Sleep Furiously was vivid and colorful, though it spoke in her own voice. Here we left the earthly plain and floated into the skewed logic and almost cartoonish ramblings of the dream state. Her work had a cinematic breath of sound yet was full of detail with light percussion, rumbling basses, shimmering strings, and a brief duet of piccolo and bassoon.

One might expect the finale to a contemporary music concert— the send-off for the full festival, in fact—to be a grand climax. Instead, Aaron Kernis’s Simple Songs felt like a gentle benediction. It uses a modest sized orchestra and brought back the marvelous soprano Talise Trevigne, who performed Kernis’s Valentines at the 2012 festival. She sang the ecumenical texts with a ravishing clarity of tone and the lightest touch of operatic vibrato. Kernis wrote the piece in 1991 and explained that the final movement borrowed from Mahler to pay tribute to Bernstein. There’s no better patron saint of American music.

The busy festival schedule made it impossible for me to take in everything, but it was still a marathon 24 hours leading up to the final concert. My morning began with a ravishing duo recital from pianists Stephen Gosling and Blair McMillen in the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall.

At a downtown church that afternoon, all 13 composers who currently are enrolled with Kernis for graduate studies at Yale presented new works for voice and ensemble. Already a bit tired out by the day-long onslaught of music, I tended to admire those who could make a crisp and concise statement.

Actually Dylan Mattingly’s ‘Delphinium’ wasn’t crisp at all but instead mixed drones and vocal sounds akin to yodeling—something like a cross between Debussy and Meredith Monk. Benjamin Wallace gave himself a challenge in setting a large chunk of text from the Congressional Record. He pulled it off with tart humor that reminded me of Virgil Thomson. Molly Joyce’s ‘This River’ had a refreshing touch of Broadway that was accentuated by the performance.

The afternoon also turned out to be a fine showcase for the four young singers: sopranos Lucy Dhegrae and Molly Netter, tenor Corey Dalton Hart, and baritone Nathaniel Sullivan.
Concertos for Orchestra by Escaich and Zhou

Stephen Estep

The Cincinnati Symphony and Music Director Louis Langrée gave the premieres of three concertos for orchestra this season. Mary Ellyn Hutton covered the November performance of Sebastian Currier’s Flex (M/A), noting its wealth of color and saying it was “eminently listenable”. Thierry Escaich’s Psalmos debuted on May 6 and Zhou Tian’s Concerto for Orchestra on May 13.

Escaich is a composer and the organist at St Etienne-du-Mont in Paris, a post once held by Maurice Duruflé. Before Psalmos Escaich played an organ improvisation with a peppy opening theme with repeated notes and quick scales. References to Saint-Saens’s Organ Symphony, played after intermission, were mixed in as well. The improvisation sounded somewhat like a ‘Dies Irae’ combined with a Rossini overture. Psalmos itself uses three Bach chorales—’Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland’, ‘O Haupt Voll Blut und Wunden’, and ‘Ein Feste Berg’—as thematic material, so after the improvisation he played these three chorales. (By the way, his Concerto for Orchestra is for orchestra alone without organ.)

Psalmos comprises an Introduction, Vivacissimo, Andante, Allegro Giocoso (Scherzo), and Allegro. It begins with a Bach chorale, with ghostly dissonances soon overtaking the melody. For the movement proper, the opening theme has many repeated notes, similar to what were in the improvisation. Fast-moving strings built the music up in layers until the brass took over, loud but not too loud—Langrée seemed to be holding his forces back. The quick gestures quieted and began to fragment, then the disjointed chorale returned. The Andante has more of the ghostliness, but it is also more comforting. Other than the wisps of Bach, there is little in the way of strong themes. The movement ends with an impassioned cello solo punctuated by a quizzical final chord. The Scherzo is pretty serious, with driving but not overbearing 7/8 percussion rhythms. Both the music and the orchestra sounded uncertain of how aggressive they should be, and three notes from the xylophone made for an odd conclusion. IV, with a fortissimo ‘Ein Feste Berg’, sounded more assured if not more satisfying.

Escaich seemed uninterested in impressing us with volume or flashy colors; it was nice not to feel like we were getting mugged in broad daylight in the middle of traffic. Though the composer is clearly in the French lineage, influenced by Franck, Ravel, and others, his music sounded like no

Two Premieres by the Cincinnati Symphony

Timothy Lees (left) and composer Zhou Tian (right) take bows after the performance.
other composer I could name. Parts of his style fascinated me, though he is more interested in evoking a mood than in examining complex processes or in giving the piece a noteworthy thematic personality.

After intermission, musicians who'd been in the orchestra 25 years were honored, and then Langrée entered to conduct the Saint-Saens with Escaich at the organ. The opening was reverent, and the main theme was beautifully played and moderately paced with some judicious push and pull. The maestro brought out a feeling of discontent that I’d never considered before. If there wasn’t magic in the air, there were both tenderness and dignity. In II conductor and soloist were content to take their time. III had the energy it needed—Langrée resisted any temptation to overinflate it. He saved the power for a brilliant finale, helped by Escaich’s fine playing. There are surely performances taken to greater emotional extremes, but there’s room for an interpretation like this, and I’m glad I was there to hear it.

Zhou Tian (Zhou is his family name) was born in China in 1981, and he’s now on the faculty of Colgate University in Hamilton NY. All his teachers—Jennifer Higdon and Christopher Rouse among them—were Americans, and there was nothing in his concerto that sounded overtly Asian. Zhou’s writing, like Escaich’s, is tonally based, but phrases often follow themselves to their own conclusions, whether or not they butt up against another phrase. His harmonies have a Hindemithian punch to them. The first theme in the first movement is playful, with rippling woodwinds and hints of Stravinsky and impressionism. The lower strings introduce the second theme, slower and more romantic. Zhou makes his structures very clear. He is unafraid of monumental gestures, but at the same time he wastes nothing, whether notes or our time itself. A clarinet cadenza seemed out of place until the other winds joined in, reconstructing the opening theme around it for the recapitulation.

In II gauzy strings and then summery winds present themselves; Zhou’s sense of dissonance is almost rigorous, but he writes so smoothly and naturally that they gave no offense. The orchestra played like they’d known the piece all their lives; the musicians were the most united and expressive I’ve heard in a while. The strings’ luster made me wish I could stop writing and just listen. The last two movements are thematically weaker, though there are always touches of fine craftsmanship. In the final movement, Intermezzo-Allegro, the trumpet fanfare that marked the transition between the two parts was brought in with astounding deftness. I only wished the themes lived up to what came before.

My understanding is that all three concertos are coming out on disc at some point, and I’m looking forward to hearing them again. Maybe I’ll hear things in the last two movements that I didn’t the first time through. If it’s not a masterpiece, it is still a work to be proud of.

After intermission, Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3 sounded straightforward. The phrases in I danced weightlessly, and III had impressive vitality, but the symphony’s architecture didn’t come across. II felt interminable; there was an obscene amount of restless coughing when it ended, to the point where some of the audience started snickering. The triumph of the final movement seemed to come out of nowhere.

Other than the May Festival concerts the two following weekends, the Zhou and Beethoven marked the last time the orchestra will play in the current Music Hall. Time will tell how the major renovation will affect its aesthetics and acoustics.

Seattle—from page 18

performed on the heels of the magisterial Triadic Memories the night before. Though the two share a roughly similar aesthetic, the time frame of Piano and Orchestra, plus the use of a lot of carefully considered orchestral colors, makes the work more approachable.

The concert wound up with Philip Glass’s tone poem The Light accompanied by a light show and images sent in to the SSO by community members. In a telephone talk a few years ago, Glass offhandedly told me that Sibelius and Shostakovich were important in helping him define his symphonic style. (“Mahler once meant something to me. But I got over it.”)

And there is a sort of Sibelius-like richness in Glass’s sound—lots of rather dark brass and skittering winds. Of course it’s finally all Glass and instantly recognizable. And it made a fine, if unconventional, happy ending to a remarkable program.

Music in Concert 21
Yannick Nezet-Seguin, 41, signed a five-year contract in June to become music director of the Metropolitan Opera in 2020. At the same time he also extended his contract as music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra through 2026. As Met Music Director-Designate starting in 2017, he will be actively involved in planning programs; previous commitments will limit his conducting activities to two operas a season until 2020. Also, he continues at Montreal’s Orchestre Metropolitain, where he has been artistic director and principal conductor since 2000, but will step down from the Rotterdam Philharmonic in 2018 after 10 years as music director.

Jaap van Zweden, 55, music director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic since 2012, extended his contract in June for an additional three years until 2022. He becomes music director of the New York Philharmonic in 2018, the year he will be released a year early from the same position with the Dallas Symphony, where he began in 2008.

Brazilian Marcelo Lehninger, 36, signed a five-year contract and became music director of the Grand Rapids (MI) Symphony on July 1, succeeding David Lockington, who stepped down last year after 16 years. The 80-member orchestra has a 40-week season with 10 pairs of classical concerts.

Nicola Luisotti, 54, music director of the San Francisco Opera since 2009, has chosen not to renew his contract when it expires on July 31, 2018. He said, “I want the company’s General Director Designate Matthew Shilovick to be able to move freely into the future with his ideas, his artistic interests, and to take San Francisco Opera into a new direction.” Shilovick replaced David Gockley as SFO general director on August 1.

Conductor and pianist Constantine Orbelian, 60, was appointed artistic director of Armenia’s National Academic Opera and Ballet in Yerevan in June. Based in California, the San Francisco-born son of Russian and Armenian immigrants is also chief conductor of the Kaunas City Symphony in Lithuania.

First violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson, a founding member of the Pacifica Quartet in 1994, left the quartet at the end of last season to pursue other musical opportunities and to assume an expanded role at Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music, where the quartet has been in residence since 2012.

Yura Lee, who turns 31 this year, is the new first violinist of the New York-based Enso Quartet, replacing Maureen Nelson, who was a founding member in 1999 and is now a member of the St Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Dallas-born composer Rene Orth, 30, became a composer-in-residence on June 1 with Opera Philadelphia, a collaborative position with New York’s Opera-Theater Group. A graduate of the Curtis School of Music, she joins fellow OP composers-in-residence David T Little and David Hertzberg.

Conductor Emmanuel Krivine, 69, signed a three-year contract to become music director of the French National Opera in September 2017, succeeding Daniele Gatti, who held the position from 2008 until this year. Krivine was music director of the Luxembourg Philharmonic from 2006 to 2015 and the Lyon Orchestra from 1987 to 2000.
Daniele Gatti, 54, who was appointed an artistic partner of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra in 2015, was promoted to artistic advisor in May.

Santtu-Matias Rouvali, 30, will become chief conductor of Sweden’s 109-member Gothenberg Symphony in 2017, succeeding Gustavo Dudamel (2007-12) and Neeme Jarvi (1982-2004). Rouvali currently is chief conductor of the Tampere Philharmonic and principal guest conductor of the Copenhagen Philharmonic. (See J/A 2016 for Jay Harvey’s review of Rouvali conducting the Indianapolis Symphony.)

Cornelius Meister, 36, signed a six-year contract to become music director of the Stuttgart Opera and Orchestra in 2018, succeeding Sylvain Cambreling, 67, who will have held the position for six years. Since 2010, Meister has been chief conducting and artistic director of the Vienna Radio Symphony. Also, Deputy Artistic Director Eva Kleinitz will become the company’s general director in 2017.

Yoshikazu Fukumura, 69, conductor of the Philippine Philharmonic for the past four years, was appointed its music director in May.

Australian-born Gabriel van Aalst becomes president and CEO of the New Jersey Symphony in October after serving for three years as chief executive of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. At the same time Xian Zhang begins her inaugural season as music director.

Ian Derrer, 41, is the new general director of Kentucky Opera as of September 1, succeeding David Roth, who died suddenly from a heart attack last year. Derrer had been artistic director of Dallas Opera for two years.

Composer Tobias Picker, 62, became artistic director of Tulsa Opera on June 1. He also serves as artistic advisor to the newly revived New York City Opera and was founding artistic director of Opera San Antonio from 2009 to 2015.

Andrea Anelli, founder in 2006 of the Cleveland Opera Theater (originally Opera Per Tutti), resigned as executive director in June. Board Chairman Don Sciopone said it was time for the expanding company to shift “from a founder-driven to a board-driven entity” and named Artistic Director Scott Skiba to succeed her as executive artistic director.

Pierre Audi, who turns 59 this year, signed a five-year contract to become the next director of France’s Aix-en-Provence Festival in 2018, and is appointed deputy director as of this September 1 to plan for the 2019 festival. He succeeds Bernard Focroulle. Audi remains as artistic director of New York’s Park Avenue Armory, but he will resign as director of the Dutch National Opera in 2018 after 30 years.

Paul Hogle, 51, became president of the Cleveland Institute of Music in July. The Cleveland native was executive vice president of the Detroit Symphony from 2010 and was a key figure in returning the orchestra to a solid financial footing following its long, devastating strike in 2010-2011.

Paul Rosenblum will retire in 2017 from Caramoor, a music center and summer festival in Katonah NY that he has helped transform since becoming managing director in 2001.

Neil Edwards, 52, is the new president of Honens as of September 1. Every three years Honens sponsors the Honens International Piano Competition in Calgary. For the previous five years Edwards was CEO of the Newfoundland Symphony. He succeeds Stephen McHolm, who held the position for the past 12 years and is staying on as artistic director until the end of the year.

Shruti Adhar became executive director of The Knights on June 1. She was previously the director of development and engagement for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. The Knights is a Brooklyn-based orchestra collective.
Chris Lorway becomes executive director late this summer of Stanford Live and Bing Concert Hall, a concert series at Stanford University in Palo Alto CA. He comes from Toronto where he was director of programming and marketing at Roy Thomson and Massey Halls, homes of the Toronto Symphony and Toronto International Film Festival. Earlier he was founding artistic director of Toronto's Luminato Festival.

Lawrence Power, a violinist with the English Chamber Orchestra, becomes its artistic director beginning with the new season. In addition to continuing as soloist and chamber player, he now will work closely with composers in planning repertoires. He replaces Quintin Ballardie, who remains managing director and has been with the orchestra since before 1960, when the former Goldsborough Orchestra was renamed the ECO.

Composer Steve Reich, who turns 80 on October 3, was awarded the $100,000 Nemmers Prize in Music Composition from Northwestern University's School of Music. The prize, established in 2004, honors classical composers who have significantly influenced the field of composition. Previous winners have been J Adams, J Laud, Kernis, Knussen, Saariaho, and Salonen.

The Cincinnati May Festival, following the retirement of Music Director James Conlon this year after 37 years, is being restructured to include a permanent principal conductor (for whom the search continues) and a rotating creative partner who in 2017 will be Gerard McBurney, artistic program advisor and Beyond the Score creative director for the Chicago Symphony.

Graham Parker, 46, was named US President for Universal Music Group's classical labels DG, Decca, Mercury, and ECM in May. He came from New York's classical WQXR, where he was general manager for six years. He reports jointly to the presidents and CEOs of UMG and the Verve Label Group. (As Spike Jones said, "I've got to go away somewhere and figure this thing out").

Musicians and management of the Baltimore Symphony also agreed to a new contract in June without the use of attorneys. Their contract, however, which was to expire this September, is for only one year with a 1.33% raise this September and a 2.63% raise next May. They were intent on settling the contract before current CEO Paul Mechem left to become president and CEO of the Utah Symphony and Utah Opera on July 1.

The Calidore Quartet won the inaugural $100,000 M-prize in May at the University of Michigan's new M-Prize Competition, created to present the world's highest caliber chamber music ensembles. The Calidore Quartet are artists-in-residence at Stony Brook University-New York and on the roster of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center Two. They first achieved fame while studying at Los Angeles's Colburn Conservatory of Music.

Musicians and management of the Kansas City Symphony used a new approach to extend their contract to June 2021, doing so more than a year before the current contract expires: they did it without attorneys. The four-year extension calls for a 19.7% base salary increase from $51,537 to $63,315.

Meanwhile, it refuses to return unpaid inventory to labels and has allegedly failed to pay some of its suppliers for over a year.
Obituaries

Soprano Phyllis Curtin, 94, died on June 5 at her home in Great Barrington MA. She was esteemed as a performer of both large works and art song—and as a teacher. She created the title role in Carlisle Floyd’s *Susannah* and sang in the North American premiere of Britten’s *War Requiem* at Tanglewood. Among her students were Sanford Sylvan, Dawn Upshaw, Stephanie Blythe, Cheryl Studer, Dominique Labelle, and Simon Estes.

Conductor J. Reilly Lewis, 71, died on June 9 of sudden cardiac arrest at his home in Arlington VA. He was founder and artistic director of the Washington (DC) Bach Consort from 1977 and music director of the Cathedral Choral Society at the Washington National Cathedral from 1985, holding both positions when he died.

Robert W. Gutman, 90, who died on May 13 in the Bronx, was an influential scholar best known for his biographies of Wagner and Mozart. His 1968 book, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music*, was especially transformative, painting a broad picture of the composer, including the unsavory aspects of his life and his toxic anti-Semitism.

Violinist Anahid Ajemian, 92, died on June 13 at her home in Manhattan. In the mid-1960s she was a founding member of the Composers String Quartet and an advocate of the music of living composers.

Conductor Gustav Meier, 86, died on May 27 at his home in Ann Arbor MI, where he had been under hospice care for several weeks. He led the Peabody Institute’s graduate conducting program for almost 20 years until his retirement in August 2015. He previously was on the faculties of Yale University, the Eastman School of Music, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and the Tanglewood Music Center.

Lee Cioppa became dean of the Colburn School’s Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles. She came from New York’s Juilliard School where she as associate dean since 2003.

This just in...

Two founding members of the JACK Quartet, violinist Ari Streisfeld and cellist Kevin McFarland, left the nine-year-old contemporary-music ensemble in August. New members violinist Austin Wulliman (left) and cellist Jay Campbell (right; a 2016 Avery Fisher career grant recipient) will debut with the ensemble on October 30 at New York’s Park Avenue Armory.

Leon Botstein will become artistic director of the Grauenegg Campus and Academy in 2018, a part of Austria’s summer Grauenegg Festival of which Rudolf Buchbinder is artistic director. Botstein described his job “as creating innovative, thematic programs and events for rising artists, including members of The Orchestra Now (TON--his new training orchestra) and the European Union Youth Orchestra, and integrating those program with the larger festival”.

Botstein is also music director of the American Symphony Orchestra and president of Bard College in New York.

Lee Cioppa became dean of the Colburn School’s Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles. She came from New York’s Juilliard School where she as associate dean since 2003.
The much-awaited opera version of *The Shining*, the latest installment in Minnesota Opera's New Works Initiative, was premiered before a packed house at the Ordway Music Theater May 7. The evening’s chief question was, “Can a legitimate, engrossing opera be fashioned from an unlikely source, a popular horror-thriller tale by Stephen King?” The answer offered in this eye-filling multimedia production with its romantic score by Paul Moravec and deft libretto by Mark Campbell, along with a first-rate cast, was a resounding “Yes.”

The creators of the opera, a group that included the director Eric Simonson, who hatched the idea of an opera on *The Shining* back in 2010, wisely drew on the 1977 novel that made King famous rather than Stanley Kubrick’s 1980 movie for source material. The movie’s aim, with its scenery-chewing performance by Jack Nicholson, was simply to scare the bejabbers out of everybody. (King, we’re told, didn’t like the movie.)

The novel tells a deeper, more resonant story. Jack Torrance, a recovering alcoholic who with his family has taken a job as caretaker at the Overlook Hotel in the mountains of Colorado, was an abused child, as was his own father, Mark, who appears as a ghost—or, if one chooses, as a figment of Jack’s fevered imagination. Mark goads Jack to kill Jack’s son, Danny, in an effort to perpetuate the cycle of male-dominated violence that has poisoned the family for generations. Though Jack has gone over to the dark side by the second act, he realizes he still has the power of choice. In Campbell’s shrewd libretto, Jack ponders in a monolog whether to blow up the hotel, thereby saving his family but sacrificing himself. In the opera’s most moving moment, underscored by a passage of yearning sorrow in the orchestra, Danny, who is psychic—he has “the shining”—rebukes Jack: “You are not my father,” meaning that Jack has changed into someone unrecognizable. Broken-hearted, Jack falls to the floor in despair. Then, in what is the climax of the opera, Jack breaks his father’s cane, the symbol of patriarchy that his father had beaten his mother with many years earlier. Then he blows up the hotel.

Whereas Kubrick’s movie used jagged, edgy music by Ligeti, Penderecki, and other European modernists for its background, Moravec’s score for the opera incorporates propulsive, percussion-driven sounds for what could be called the “mad scenes” of Act II, along with appropriately eerie moments as tension-builders. But most of the music is tonal and romantic, yet doesn’t sound old-fashioned—the soaring, exultant lyricism, for instance, in the opening scene as Jack and the family anticipate (almost too eagerly) their...
Shalimar, a Muslim, is working on his tightrope act with a troupe of folk players in the idyllic Indian region of Kashmir. He falls in love with a Hindu dancer, Boonyi. A local teacher secretly films one of their liaisons and uses the evidence to try and force Boonyi to marry him. She vehemently refuses and the understanding town council takes her side, banishing the blackmailer and approving of this “mixed” relationship. Although she expresses some reservations, she and Shalimar are married; but when the womanizing American ambassador, Max Ophuls, arrives for a performance and shows an interest in her, she goes to California with him to realize her dreams for a more cosmopolitan life. There they have a love child named India. Shalimar is devastated, takes up with a terrorist group that decimates his village, and he becomes its most feared and efficient killer. After Boonyi returns in disgrace, the enraged Shalimar slits her throat—the same thing he did to Ophuls in California while posing as his driver. At the very end he returns to the US to finish off India as well. They are poised to kill each other, but the opera ends (too) abruptly in a sudden blackout, so what happens is unclear.

Salman Rushdie’s*Shalimar the Clown* is a complex Romeo and Juliet of a novel, a paradise lost, brimming with passion, revenge, politics, and magic that is tailor made as the basis for an opera. Opera Theatre of St Louis commissioned composer Jack Perla to write the music and Rajiv Joseph to do the libretto. Its world premiere was June 11.

Perla has supplied the scenes in California

**American Record Guide**

**Perla: Shalimar the Clown (world premiere)**

**Opera Theatre of St Louis**

Shalimar, a Muslim, is working on his tightrope act with a troupe of folk players in the idyllic Indian region of Kashmir. He falls in love with a Hindu dancer, Boonyi. A local teacher secretly films one of their liaisons and uses the evidence to try and force Boonyi to marry him. She vehemently refuses and the understanding town council takes her side, banishing the blackmailer and approving of this “mixed” relationship. Although she expresses some reservations, she and Shalimar are married; but when the womanizing American ambassador, Max Ophuls, arrives for a performance and shows an interest in her, she goes to California with him to realize her dreams for a more cosmopolitan life. There they have a love child named India. Shalimar is devastated, takes up with a terrorist group that decimates his village, and he becomes its most feared and efficient killer. After Boonyi returns in disgrace, the enraged Shalimar slits her throat—the same thing he did to Ophuls in California while posing as his driver. At the very end he returns to the US to finish off India as well. They are poised to kill each other, but the opera ends (too) abruptly in a sudden blackout, so what happens is unclear.

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**Music in Concert**

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with an insistent, raucous, jazzy energy—kind of An American in Paris on steroids, with the chorus chanting phrases like “Cars—the color of steel like a blade” and with black-and-white movie projections of freeway traffic behind them. When the scene switches to the rustic setting of Kashmir, the sound becomes more Asian, including ragas and rhythms of northwestern Indian music, reinforced by the addition of a sitar and tabla percussion to the instruments in the pit. This effect is paralleled by the singers, whose melodic lines are sung with the same melismatic quality so characteristic of the sitar. I am not alone in wishing both instruments had a more prominent part.

The many solos, duets, trios, and interactions with the chorus soared with gentle lyricism as well as cries of pain. Andriana Chuchman was first among equals in the cast as both Boonyi and India. Her voice was athletic, rich, and brimming with resonance; her dancing was suave and idiomatic. It was surprising (but not disappointing) that her character had more stage time than the namesake of the opera. Sean Panikkar as Shalimar was also convincing, whether as a sweet apprentice to the folk troupe or the angry terrorist. He had an untrained projection that would fill any room and such convincing acting chops that he made me afraid of him at several points.

Nor were there any weak voices in the minor roles. Especially outstanding were Gregory Dahl as the ambassador, Katherine Goeldner as his jealous wife, and Aubrey Allcock as the insistent terrorist leader. Conductor Jayce Ogren supplied strong leadership from the pit with the St Louis Symphony, while the fluid stage direction by James Robinson made good use of a rotating stage and a catwalk along the back wall. Several times he made a compelling case for the West Side Story dance-at-the-gym technique where the chorus froze (or moved in slow motion) while the principals sang in normal time in a spotlight.

The scene where the terrorists ravaged the village and raped its women came off as awkward—even silly—and the sorrowful litany of who was killed in the attack (“Who killed the fathers? Who killed the mothers? Who burned the houses?” etc) went on much too long. Having Shalimar viciously kill Max in the first minutes of the opera and then suddenly flashing back to his innocent younger days in Kashmir was jarring and distracting. It raised too many questions about Shalimar’s transformation from cute acrobat to ugly terrorist—a change that seemed abrupt and insufficiently motivated. In Rushdie’s book it is clear that India is proficient with a bow and arrow, but as a stage device the new bow that Max gives India for her birthday in the first minutes of the opera merely came off as a weird gift for a modern California girl.

But there were mostly good moments. One of the best was a duet between a crestfallen Shalimar highlighted on the catwalk and a lonely and betrayed Boonyi below on a bed in California. She read a note from him, then tore it into pieces and sang, “Don’t ask for my wandering heart; it is broken.” The sitar and tabla were heard softly in the background, and the entire stage was lit with falling flakes of projected paper. It was one of the most touching moments in the opera.

As a friend of mine put it, “With a little more adjusting, this opera has a much deserved future.”

JOHN HUXHOLD
In a definite break from the routine of its main stage, Los Angeles Opera went down to the basement of Walt Disney Concert Hall (officially known as REDCAT) on June 16 for something new, weird, and different to close the 2015-16 season. Goodbye Butterfly, Boheme, Norma, Pagliacci, and Magic Flute; hello David Lang’s macabre new opera Anatomy Theater (like all of his recent works, he spells it entirely in lower case for some reason).

How different? Upon entering the REDCAT lobby, the audience was offered free beer and sausages as it gathered around a hangman’s noose in the gallery, replicating the carnival-like practices of public executions in the early 18th Century. There, with the audience standing around, the opera began, launched by a 10-minute prologue where the condemned triple-murderess, Sarah Osborne—sung with plush-voiced intensity by the rising, courageous mezzo Peabody Southwell—offered her confession and rationale for her actions.

Then, during a long pause, the audience was ushered into the main REDCAT theatre, where Southwell lay naked and inert on an operating gurney as the remaining 48 minutes of the work played out. She was being dissected so that we witnesses could see what body parts were responsible for unleashing the evil in this woman. Ambrose Strang (tenor Timur) wielded the knife, the bewigged Baron Peel (bass-baritone Robert Osborne) supervised and pontificated about the procedure, and Joshua Crouch (Broadway baritone Marc Kudisch) acted as a sort of ringmaster both in and out of the theatre.

How weird? The set amounted to a dark chamber of horrors, with vivid spotlighting of the characters, anatomical parts projected on a scrim, and lots and lots of blood. At one point, after lying perfectly still for 34 minutes, Southwell began to stir a bit as she sang about her heart. This was definitely not for the squeamish.

With all of this going on under Bob McGrath’s direction, Lang’s score served as a mostly neutral counterpoint to the madness, relying sometimes on his usual practice of having the voices sing a short phrase, then a pause, then a short phrase, then a pause, and so forth. But there is more continuity and thrust in this Lang piece than usual, rising to a dramatic fortissimo toward the close. In the gallery, a five-person ensemble in period costumes accompanied Sarah Osborne’s march to the gallows, while inside the theatre Christopher Rountree vigorously led his nine-piece Wild Up ensemble from a location in back of and slightly above the action.

As an event designed to get opera out from behind the proscenium into the laps of an audience that skews younger, this worked very well. Yet I don’t think the libretto, co-authored by Lang and Mark Dion, reached any conclusions, nor did it achieve anything deeper than a Grand Guignol show for people who get their thrills from that. In any case, what we heard did not require supertitles to clarify, so good was the cast’s diction over the excellent REDCAT sound system.

RICHARD S GINELL

David Lang: Anatomy Theater (world premiere) Los Angeles Opera

American Record Guide
The affable yet confrontational Dutch composer Louis Andriessen has been encouraged (some would say indulged) by the Los Angeles Philharmonic to a degree unmatched in this country. Over the last decade Walt Disney Concert Hall has become Andriessen Central with one work after another, big and small, old and new, parading across its resonant stage. I cannot say that subscription audiences have warmed much to Andriessen’s eclectic, sometimes harsh, rhetoric, but the music keeps coming anyway.

So, hot on the heels of the US premiere of Mysterien in October (Jan/Feb 2016) came a massive world premiere on May 6 of a “grotesque stagework” (in Andriessen’s words) called Theatre of the World, which amounts to his fifth opera. The subject is the Jesuit scholar-scientist-author Athanasius Kircher (1601-80), a far-sighted, ever-curious polymath who was a scientific luminary during his lifetime but generally ignored by history until recently. But if you were anticipating a useful crash course through his wide-ranging scientific, historical, and religious pursuits in this piece, forget it.

What Andriessen’s librettist Helmut Krausser had in mind was a fantasy, elaborated and obscured by stage director Pierre Audi’s weird production. A writhing, snarling Kircher (Leigh Melrose) is led by the hand by a 12-year-old Boy (soprano Lindsay Kesselman) through a surreal journey over 3,000 years. Pope Innocent XI (Marcel Beekman) goes along for the ride but mostly just wants to go home. An actual Mexican historical contemporary, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz (Andriessen’s loyal muse, Cristina Zavalloni), offers reflective commentary from on high with angel wings attached, and Kircher’s uncouth publisher, Janssonius (Steven Van Watermeulen), is another hanger-on.

Eventually the Boy, who may or may not be the devil but in any case sometimes has a Batman logo on his shirt, presents Kircher with a portfolio of diseases that will do him in, after which Voltaire, Descartes, Goethe, and Leibnitz decide that maybe he should be remembered after all. It took 110 uninterrupted minutes to get to this point. People who didn’t read the detailed synopsis would have had little or no idea why Kircher matters. The Quay Brothers decor and video team contributed dim video images on a black screen above the stage that added nothing informative.

What is interesting and worthwhile about this piece is Andriessen’s score. Like Mysterien, it is less confrontational than many in his past, yet just as free-wheeling, with journeys into big-band jazz, Mexican pastiche, Renaissance allusions, lyrical interludes for an out-of-place pair of young lovers, even the catchy old rock ‘n roll hit song ‘Tequila.’ Everything Andriessen tries to throw into the mix is more tightly integrated than ever, as if the 76-year-old composer is starting to sum up his experiences. Led by Andriessen expert Reinbert van Leeuw, the Los Angeles Philharmonic played the music with stunning clarity; they’ve got his idiom down pat.

The whole thing next went to the Holland Festival in June, and a recording was made of the LA performances for future release. An audio recording will make this work more intelligible than this production did.

RICHARD S GINELL
Jake Heggie’s *Great Scott*, with an original story and libretto by Terrence McNally, has such an abundance of musical styles and characters that I was severely challenged when trying to encapsulate the experience in a review. San Diego Opera presented its West Coast premiere, directed by Jack O’Brien, at the Civic Theatre in May.

*Great Scott* concerns American mezzo-soprano Arden Scott (Kate Aldrich), an internationally renowned opera star specializing in bel canto. At the pinnacle of success she returns to her home town to help the floundering American Opera, run by her early mentor, Winnie Flato (the estimable mezzo Frederica Von Stade). Tucked under Arden’s arm is Vittorio Bazzetti’s long lost bel canto opera written in 1835 that she discovered in Russia. It is titled *Rosa Dolorosa, Figlia di Pompei* (Sad Rosa, Daughter of Pompei). If the opera is a success, the future of American Opera is assured, though the people in Winnie’s part of the world—an unspecified American city—are more obsessed with football than with fioritura. (The world premiere was in Dallas in October—M/A 2016.)

Winnie’s husband owns the Grizzlies, who are set to play in the Super Bowl in another part of town the very night Arden opens as Rosa. The action switches between *Rosa* rehearsals at American Opera with Arden-Rosa’s luscious aria ‘Cosa M’Importa di una Vita’ and the football stadium, where Eastern European mezzo Tatyana Bakst (soprano Joyce El-Khoury), Arden’s former protege and now her arch rival, sings the National Anthem before the big game. Tatyana’s “variations” are so unique that, as she hoped, she becomes America’s new operatic sweetheart.

This reminder of the ephemeral nature of fame and her meeting her high school sweetheart Sid Taylor (Nathan Gunn) and his 11-year-old son Tommy (Ezra Dewey) cause Arden to question whether she has wasted her life on what might not matter; she has sacrificed marriage and family on the altar of artistic achievement. When she is given yet another visit from the Ghost of Bazzetti (bass-baritone Philip Skinner), she performs a Mad Scene worthy of Donizetti or Bellini.

Act I introduces Winnie’s American Opera principal singers and staff, including the stage manager Roane Heckle (countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo) and director Eric Gold (Skinner). Tenor Garrett Sorenson and baritone Michael Mayes portrayed stereotypical spotlight hogs Anthony Candolino and shirtless barihunk Wendell Swann. Cellphones and gossip at the ready, the San Diego Opera chorus embodied Winnie’s dedicated chorus. Joseph Mechavich conducted. Costanzo, using his vocal and acting skills in a splendidly written role, simply stole the show.

*Continued on page 37*
Tafelmusik’s “Leipzig-Damascus Coffee House”
Toronto

Since the early 1980s, Toronto’s Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra has presented an annual season of performances in a traditional concert format. But in recent years Tafelmusik has also been doing something else. In 2009 the period ensemble presented its first multi-media show, called The Galileo Project, combining visual images, spoken text, and music. Conceived and scripted by Tafelmusik bassist Alison Mackay, it was a hit in Toronto and on tour. So it’s not surprising that the ensemble has returned to the trough, creating more shows in a similar vein. Following The Galileo Project, Mackay created House of Dreams in 2012; Circle of Creation in 2015; and this year, from May 19-22 at Toronto’s Koerner Hall, Tales of Two Cities: The Leipzig-Damascus Coffee House.

All four of these shows have common, even formulaic qualities. In each, the stage is dominated by a large projection screen, which, as the evening progresses, is filled with beautiful art and photographs—portraits of composers, historical European images, and the like. Below, the Tafelmusik musicians play and move about—a feat that requires them to memorize every note they play. For this reason, musical selections tend to be short. And there’s always a narrator or two, presenting scripted content.

Mackay has a curious fascination with trade goods and manufactured commodities and how they were obtained and created in the baroque era. Audiences for her shows have been informed about telescopes, raisins, mirrors, linen, ink, candles, and, in her latest show, coffee. She also has an abiding interest in the city of Leipzig, which was both a center for European commerce and a very musical place. In Circle of Creation she examined the origins of all of the materials JS Bach and his contemporaries would have used to write and perform music, everything from the paper composers wrote on to metals for harpsichord strings and woods for violins.

With Tales of Two Cities, Mackay returns to Leipzig. But musically this show is strikingly different from the previous three. By underscoring Leipzig’s connection with Damascus in far-away Syria through the two cities’ coffee houses, she created a showpiece for both Western and Eastern music. In addition to Tafelmusik playing Bach, Telemann, Handel, etc, Tales of Two Cities also has music from Arabic, Turkish, and Persian traditions. The Middle-Eastern selections were performed by Trio Arabica: Maryem Tollar sang in Arabic and played the qanun (a zither), Naghmeh Farahmand was the trio’s percussionist, and Demetri Petsalakis played the oud (a lute).

The narrator for the show was actor Alon Nashman, assisted by Tollar, who sometimes spoke in Arabic. Nashman’s script included excerpts from popular literature of the era—selections from Don Quixote and Arabian Nights.

I got the impression that Tales of Two Cities attempted to establish a connection between Eastern and Western musical styles, implying that they share common roots. But the evidence suggested the reverse: the monadic, elaborately inflected music of the
La Gloria di Primavera, a newly discovered occasional piece by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), had its East Coast premiere on May 6 at Carnegie’s Zankel Hall in a sparkling performance by Music Director Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra. Without elevating it to the rank of “lost masterpieces,” Scarlatti’s tribute was filled with ingratiating, well-crafted music worthy of revival.

In April 1716 the Austrian Imperial court welcomed the birth of Leopold, the long-awaited son of Charles VI, Holy Roman Emperor. This happy event came not long after the Hapsburg emperor had lost the brutal war of the Spanish Succession, launched because the King of Spain died without an heir. Though Charles lost his claim to Spain, the Treaty of Utrecht granted him sovereignty over the Kingdom of Naples. The Neapolitan prince found it politic to commission a celebratory work from his court composer, Alessandro Scarlatti (not to be confused with his prolific son Domenico), the day’s preeminent composer of opera seria, occasional pieces (like this one), and chamber cantatas. In a remarkable burst of efficiency, barely five weeks elapsed between the imperial birth and the serenata’s performance, including creation of the libretto, the music, and probably costumes and elaborate stage machinery. It proved so popular that it was performed twice more, and then laid aside until Nicholas McGegan’s recent revival and recording.

The text, by Abbate Nicolo Giovo, secretary to the Neapolitan princess, is rich in florid imagery, if weak in drama. The work consists primarily of a string of recitatives and da capo arias (I cringed to see 58 numbers listed in the program), but they flow smoothly in orderly pairs, sung by a quartet personifying the seasons. In the first half, each takes several turns to

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express joy over the birth and relief at the end of war. In the second half the seasons welcome the god Jove to earth and vie for principal credit for helping the birth (Spring wins). Florid metaphors apt to each season supply the pretext for pretty word painting, like undulating strings in thirds representing gentle breezes, or extended woodwind passages to invoke flowing waters. Attractive sinfonie and choruses punctuate the sections. Though drama is thin at best, the music is pretty and written with consummate skill that belies the speed of its composition.

The vocal soloists were well matched and comfortable with the high baroque style, all embellishing their da capo repeats with inventive variations that showed off their strengths. The lead part of Primavera (Spring), originally performed by the star castrato Matteo Sassano, was sung by mezzo Diana Moore. Her agile and evenly produced voice was effective both in sustained sections and fast passage work. Soprano Suzana Ograjensek’s sunny, quicksilver timbre was perfect for Estate (Summer). A slight hootiness in the middle register of countertenor Clint van der Linde’s Autunn o (Autumn) suggested chill winds; his musical embellishments allowed him to show off a strong top register. Tenor Nicholas Phan as Inverno (Winter) tore into his blistering arias with gusto if not always accuracy; this expressive singer appears to be changing to a larger voice type. Countering the high-pitched quartet was suave-sounding bass-baritone Douglas Williams as Giove (Jove), who injected humor with his mild impatience with the seasons’ jockeying for supremacy.

Many of the 34 members of the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra would be familiar to audiences who follow other baroque ensembles, and more than half of the string section played instruments built before 1800. After 30 seasons under Nicholas McGegan, these seasoned barochisti played as if born to the style: no bleeps or squawks, no precious deconstruction of the phrasing. While the elegant score may lack the invention of better-known works from the era, the ensemble gave a committed and persuasive reading that made the two-and-a-half hours fly.

For anyone who had read the program, the final plea that Jove grant the child long life was particularly poignant, as baby Leopold died in his seventh month; small wonder that the piece was put away for posterity.

SUSAN BRODIE
Most listeners associate piano virtuosity with grandstanding athleticism, which is why Marc-André Hamelin abhors the word. Indeed, virtuosity, as it applies to this pianist’s playing, conveys something close to the original meaning of the word, where the pursuit of virtue is a given. As the superb Montreal-born Boston-based pianist told me in a recent interview, "It really is a heightened capacity to use all means given you, whether physical or emotional, to the fullest extent in order to reach your artistic aims."

Sure enough, in the immensely satisfying recital that today’s great anti-virtuoso of the keyboard gave at Chicago’s Orchestra Hall on May 22, Hamelin used his formidable technical arsenal to engage with the composers’ intentions on the deepest level of musical understanding and poetic empathy.

The pianist, who has built a career out of playing the seemingly unplayable, continues to march to his own drum in terms of programming. Along with mainstream repertory by Mozart, Debussy, and Schubert he presented two knuckle-busting solo works of his own, along with a super-rarity by early 20th Century Russian pianist-composer Samuil Feinberg as the second of his two encores. In everything, Hamelin revealed himself to be a musician’s musician. Hands that New Yorker critic Alex Ross once reckoned “among the wonders of the musical world” tore through thickets of notes with ease, while his upper body remained almost motionless on the piano bench.

For openers, Hamelin reminded the audience of his classical-era bona fides with a crisp and stylish reading of Mozart’s final piano sonata (No. 18, K 576) that evinced clarity of musical intention and articulation working in pristine unity.

In Debussy’s three Images, Book 2, Hamelin was the subtle colorist, operating in his impressionist element. In ‘Cloches a Travers les Feuilles’ (Bells Sounding Across the Leaves) he spreaded delicate sprays of arpeggios over finely controlled washes of piano pastels. Both the second piece of the set and ‘Poissons d’Or’ (Goldfish) were object lessons in applying soft dynamic gradations without any loss of tonal presence.

In certain respects Hamelin is a throwback to a golden age of the piano when legendary pianist-composers such as Sergei Rachmaninoff, Ignaz Friedman, Leopold Godowsky, Moriz Rosenthal, and Josef Hofmann dazzled audiences with their superhuman feats of derring-do at the keyboard, playing their own music along with the standard repertory.

In his own pieces, ‘Pavane Variée’ and Paganini Variations, Hamelin copied the heroic feats such keyboard giants achieved in their music. Both works—the first based on a French Renaissance dance attributed to Thoinot Arbeau, the second on Paganini’s famous (infamous?) solo violin Caprice No. 24—are of transcendental difficulty. They gave his phenomenal technical and pianistic arsenal a workout, and the results were jaw-dropping.

Hamelin’s Paganini opus amounts to both a celebration and a sly sendup of previous sets of variations on that particular caprice—and a witty sendup of the genre, with cheeky references to the Beethoven Fifth and Liszt’s ‘Campanella’ and even a couple of blue notes thrown in. Taking the tune into harmonic reaches Paganini would hardly have recognized, Hamelin played the living daylights out of his own piece. With it he effectively declared a moratorium on all future sets of Paganini variations. After this riot of a piece, why should anyone else want to bother?

In Schubert’s four Impromptus, Op. 142 (D 935), his rippling evenness of touch, superb tonal finish, and elegant turning of phrases reminded one that beneath Schubert’s simple surfaces lie worlds of profound feeling.

The pianist offered some more Debussy at encore time: ‘Feux d’Artifice’ (Fireworks) was...
exquisitely played, as subtly glittering and evocative as could be imagined. This was followed by the sort of forgotten gem Hamelin has made a specialty of unearth ing and championing. Feinberg’s compact Sonata No. 1 (Op. 1; 1915), revels in the bravura manner of early Scriabin and falls most attractively on the ear. Hamelin’s splendid account made you wonder what other worthwhile Feinberg esoterica are gathering dust in the shelves of the Moscow Conservatory.

JOHN VON RHEIN

Martinu:
The Epic of Gilgamesh
(Midwest premiere)
Grant Park Music Festival Chicago

Some of my British colleagues have advanced the assertion that The Epic of Gilgamesh, the 1955 oratorio that was among the final works by the hugely prolific Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu, is his masterpiece. That it is less than a masterpiece but far from musically negligible was apparent at the stirring Midwest premiere with Carlos Kalmar conducting the Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus on July 1 at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Chicago’s Millennium Park.

The Festival’s ever-enterprising principal conductor and artistic director likes to introduce the local concert public to big rarities like this—pieces that are unlikely to be performed at any other summer music festival, or, for that matter, more than once during the average listener’s lifetime. With one of the nation’s superior symphony choruses at his disposal, along with a capable orchestra and a strong team of vocal soloists and narrator, Kalmar argued the merits of Gilgamesh with a taut dramatic fervor that carried considerable power at the Frank Gehry-designed outdoor concert pavilion.

The original “Gilgamesh” is the oldest work of literature known to humankind, dating from the third millennium BC, some 1,500 years before Homer. The epic survives in only fragmentary form, from which Martinu drew various sections to make up his three-part oratorio. The work originally was composed to a rather archaic and stilted 1928 English translation by British scholar Reginald Campbell Thompson. Following the composer’s death in 1959, the music was outfitted with a Czech translation that is more commonly heard in performance and on recording. Kalmar chose the rarely performed English-language version (has anybody ever done it in the US before?).

Martinu’s version of the Babylonian epic tells of Gilgamesh, the legendary demigod-king of Uruk, an arrogant tyrant to whom the gods seek to teach humility by creating Enkidu, a Tarzan-like primitive who lives among the animals. The gods send a courtesan to seduce Enkidu, who loses his innocence and is befriended by Gilgamesh. They quarrel and engage in a fight that neither wins.

Further adventures ensue in parts II and III, which concern, in turn, the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh’s grief, his plea to the gods to revive his lover, and his own search for immortality. These are the more musically interesting sections of the oratorio, where Martinu’s music takes on an otherworldly mystery and atmosphere as vivid as the text. In other respects Gilgamesh feels episodic, lacking dramatic coherence. Despite Kalmar’s (and the sound engineers’) best efforts, some subtleties of scoring failed to emerge. Yet here fortunately was another case of a powerful performance overcoming inherent musical weaknesses.

Martinu rose to some of his finest late invention in the big section-closing choruses; the most striking of these is the furious clash of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, punctuated by martial bursts of brass and percussion. Hardly less gripping was the invocation of the shade of Enkidu, the bereft Gilgamesh imploring the heavens, his pleas intercut with the voices of the other vocal soloists, narrator, and chorus, over the remorseless rhythmic pulse of the orchestra. The work winds down to a quiet,

Carlos Kalmar

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unresolved close where Gilgamesh’s questions about the afterlife go unanswered.

Diligently prepared by chorus director Christopher Bell, the Grant Park Chorus, numbering slightly more than 100 voices, sang beautifully and expressively. Absolute technical security, judicious balance, lucid diction, and close attention to word meanings were always in evidence.

Of the soloists, Gidon Saks stood out with his firm, powerful bass and riveting declamation of the text. David John Pike displayed a potent baritone in the spiritual torments of Gilgamesh. Angela Meade’s opulent dramatic soprano was made to order for the courtesan’s seductive strains. Dane Thomas brought a bright, plangent timbre to the tenor solo. The eloquent narrator was Bernard Jacobson, a distinguished former Chicago music critic turned author, poet, lecturer, and program annotator.

Kalmar began the program with another Grant Park first by a Czech composer: Dvorak’s symphonic poem, The Golden Spinning Wheel. However gruesome the folk tale the score is based on, the music’s irresistible melodic charm and folk color made it a welcome change from the Dvorak chestnuts that turn up so persistently. The Grant Park Orchestra made very agreeable work of it. The merry chirping of the resident avian population brought a welcome touch of the Bohemian forest to the performance.

JOHN VON RHEIN

Heggie—from page 31

Long before Rosa threw herself into the volcano to save Pompei (projections by Elaine McCarthy, set and costumes by Bob Crowley, lighting design by Brian MacDevitt), I cared about each one of McNally’s characters—even sympathized with the preeners and overweeners who weren’t necessarily admirable.

Great Scott ends with a deliciously written Rosenkavalier homage, ‘It’s Always Been the Song,’ sung by Arden, Winnie, Tatyana, and Roane. The opera is much more than a pastiche or a send-up of characters and artists one encounters in the world of opera and theater; it becomes the story of each striver’s life, no matter what he or she hopes to achieve. Creative people can identify with Arden and question whether our little lives and artistic contributions matter. That’s what makes Great Scott so compelling and satisfying.

CHARLENE BALDRIDGE

Pascal Dusapin: 
Outscape 
(world premiere) 
Chicago Symphony

It is nothing short of scandalous that the Chicago Symphony should have been reduced to playing only one world premiere during its 125th anniversary season—a season otherwise devoted to celebrating old music, specifically symphonic works given their US premieres by the orchestra in the first half of the 20th Century.

That lone world premiere fortunately turned out to be rewarding music of both substance and importance: French composer Pascal Dusapin’s Outscape, a cello concerto that had its first performance May 26 at Symphony Center with the Chicago Symphony conducted by Cristian Macelaru. The CSO had commissioned the piece for the extraordinary American cellist Alisa Weilerstein, who gave it the kind of debut most composers can only dream of. The composer attended, clearly elated by the performance and the audience’s enthusiastic reception.

Dusapin is one of the leading European composers, well represented on recordings, though relatively little of his music has been heard in the US thus far. Having so eloquent an advocate of his music as Weilerstein can only help to remedy the situation. Outscape is the latest in a series of recent concertos the adventurous cellist has championed, and she’s scheduled to perform it with co-commissioning orchestras in Stuttgart, Paris, and London this year and next.

Outscape dispenses with the traditional concerto game plan of pitting a solo voice against many orchestral voices. Structured as a single-movement arch, this half-hour concerto is given to role-switching: the orchestra becomes the protagonist and the cellist the "orchestra." Much of the solo cello writing is ruminative, interior, almost neoromantic in its expressive trajectory, gradually intensifying in dramatic feeling as the rhythmic interaction between cellist and orchestra heats up.

The metaphor of escape and return (implicit in the title) is ever-prominent in the composer’s deployment of cello and orchestra,
along with imagery of remote northern landscapes. Subtly deployed tubular bells, gongs, and woodblocks produce a kind of hieratic quality, as if the cellist were the high priestess in a mystic ceremony.

The long gradual crescendo that is Outscape gathers incidents and intensity before bursting forth in an exciting climax, as if the orchestra were releasing pent-up energies over the cellist’s skittish exertions. (“Yes, I know it is very fast,” the composer waggishly notes in one of his score markings.) Having gone their separate ways much of the time, the individual and its orchestral “id” finally merge as one. The rest is resonant silence.

Clad in a voluminous gown of flaming Chinese red, Weilerstein was as striking to look at as she was to hear. Could any other cello virtuoso dispatch Dusapin’s daunting cello writing with such technical mastery or searching interpretive commitment? The concerto has her intense musical personality written all over it. No doubt more of its instrumental subtleties will become clearer in later performances. Weilerstein, Macelaru, and the orchestra deserved huge credit for having argued its considerable merits at such a high level of proficiency and dedication.

Dusapin uses the orchestral resources with the conspicuous restraint Gustav Holst employed with flat-out brilliance in The Planets. Show of hands: how many music lovers know that the CSO gave Holst’s “Greatest Hit” its US premiere? The date was New Year’s Eve 1920, little more than one month after its world premiere in London. Macelaru and the orchestra gave each section a little bit more than it normally is given—more implacable fury for ‘Mars, the Bringer of War’, more tenderness for ‘Venus, the Bringer of Peace’, more roast-beefy juntiness for ‘Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity’. For the final section, ‘Neptune, the Mystic’, the offstage women’s voices of the Chicago Symphony Chorus were so well balanced against the orchestral forces as to make the slow fade to cosmic nothingness sound ethereally beautiful.

Jacques Ibert’s Bacchanale (1956) also is a crowd pleaser and drew a spirited performance—slam-bang spirited, as a matter of fact. But this brash, jazzy, and noisy curtain raiser is trivia, a kind of amiable Gallic rip-off of Aram Khachaturian’s ‘Sabre Dance’. At least it set the seriousness of the Dusapin piece in high relief.

JOHN VON RHEIN

Alisa Weilerstein

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Much of the programming for the Chicago Symphony’s 125th anniversary season recalled scores the ensemble introduced to America and, in some cases, have since figured prominently in its repertory. Music Director Riccardo Muti brought that retrospective to a close at the end of the 2015-16 subscription series.

For the season finale he reserved two big works by Anton Bruckner that had their first US performances by the CSO under Theodore Thomas, the orchestra’s founder and first music director: the unfinished Symphony No. 9 and the Te Deum. I sensed the presence of history looking over Muti’s shoulder in the strongly committed performances I heard on June 23.

The Chicago Symphony has held an almost proprietary claim on the magnificent torso that is Bruckner’s Ninth ever since 1904, when the orchestra gave the American premiere, but in an inauthentic, truncated, and harmonically sanitized version perpetrated by a Bruckner student, Ferdinand Lowe. Thomas and his newly formed Chicago Orchestra introduced the Te Deum to these shores at the Cincinnati May Festival in 1892. There was method to Muti’s pairing: when the dying Bruckner realized he wouldn’t have the strength to complete Symphony No. 9 beyond the Adagio (III) he suggested the Te Deum as a possible finale. But he rightly gave up that ill-considered notion, leaving three completed movements of the symphony and a pile of sketches for a fourth.

Nobility, lyrical feeling, and dramatic thrust were keys to Muti’s Symphony No. 9. Other notable Bruckner conductors such as Carlo Maria Giulini and Daniel Barenboim have brought a greater sense of hushed mystery to the opening pages and a more serene resignation to the sublime coda that emerges from the anguished final climax of the Adagio. But Muti’s “vocal” approach worked in a different way, like a quiet and controlled church ritual that suddenly burst forth in powerful glory. When listeners might have felt that way, but the evidence indicated a command of the score’s inner fiber that could not be denied.

The sound Muti elicited from one of the world’s great Bruckner orchestras was lean and incisive, drawing its hard directness from the dry Orchestra Hall acoustics as much as his conducting. The forward-moving pulse of the opening movement, undergirded by rock-solid brass sonorities, was maintained, even when countermelodies were allowed to expand into heartfelt song.

Driven by pounding timpani, the Scherzo carried a sinister, truculent drive, counterbalanced by the chirruping flute and oboe in the delicate trio. Muti built the sublime Adagio, Bruckner’s farewell to earthly things, methodically but with strong feeling. Certain measures he barely beat at all with his baton, allowing the long lyric paragraphs their breathing space. Climaxes were scaled with the long view in mind, the final climax affording a terrifying glimpse of the abyss Arnold Schoenberg would cross a decade or so later. The formidable Chicago brass choir, augmented by four mellow Wagner tubas in the finale, was especially glorious.

Even with an intermission inserted between the symphony and the Te Deum, one was aware of the huge stylistic gulf separating these pieces. Here the Almighty is praised with the most pious humility and a simplicity characteristic of Bruckner, the devout church musician. Director Duain Wolfe’s superbly trained Chicago Symphony Chorus gave it a resplendent statement. Their sound was full and rounded regardless of dynamic level, the Latin text clearly and expressively articulated, the large choir well balanced against the orchestra. Matching the precision and discipline of the choral and orchestral work was a sturdy quartet of vocal soloists. Steve Davislim was especially impressive in the prominent tenor solos; admirable as well were soprano Erin Wall, mezzo-soprano Okka von der Damerau, and bass-baritone Eric Owens.

JOHN VON RHEIN
Leshnoff:
Symphony No. 3
(world premiere)
Kansas City Symphony

Wartime poetry invariably contains much of the drama, spectacle, and tragedy that a composer needs to create a powerful musical setting, and history is ripe with such statements. Letters from the battlefield, on the other hand, written in dire conditions to far-off loved ones, present a different kind of challenge. Their raw immediacy is sometimes so heartbreaking one has to figure out how to keep a musical setting from going completely over the top.

Jonathan Leshnoff has struck a gratifying balance in his Symphony No. 3, the third movement of which sets excerpts of letters by American World War I combatants. Leshnoff pored over letters in the archives of Kansas City’s National World War I Museum and Memorial—a world-class institution (built in 1926) that has been the center of international attention for the Great War’s centennial commemorations.

Commissioned by the Kansas City Symphony, the half-hour work was given a beautifully detailed premiere on May 20 at Kauffman Center with Music Director Michael Stern and the orchestra joined by the magnificently clear-voiced baritone Stephen Powell. The epistolary settings in the final movement, which included a letter from a young man who would later become an influential figure in Kansas City’s own financial and cultural scene, contained such idiomatic, deftly contoured writing for voice and such poignant, transparent orchestral textures that I found myself wishing for a whole song cycle of such settings. There would certainly be no shortage of material.

The symphony pans over a landscape that includes tenderness, judgement, love, forgiveness, and resignation. The strongly tonal opening (Slow) calls to mind the opening bars of Verdi’s Requiem, perhaps, but was shot through with a sort of mesmerizing, Pärt-like mysticism. A central section introduces disharmony and a Sibelius-like luminescence; the movement’s big clangorous finale includes two offstage anvils that sounded so “present” it seemed as if they were emanating from the earth.

The second movement (‘Gevurah’, fast and with burning intensity) is driven by a vigorous, almost Bartokian rhythmic energy. Long-breathed melodies in the bass are enlivened by continuous filigree in the winds and upper strings. Blats from the brass perhaps represent cries for mercy, and an arching violin ascent leads directly into the final movement (also labeled Slow). “I nearly drowned trying to inspect the submarine lookouts”, wrote James Kellogg Burnham Hockaday in June 1918 to his mother, as he described turbulent seas and pondered whether it was possible “that the same moon was shining down on you there in Missouri”.

A tender clarinet solo serves as transition to the next letter (and perhaps evokes the moon as well), a harrowing account by West Virginia dentist Charles Irons of survival on the Siberian front. “My Darling Wife, should the God of all call on me and I never see you again, know that I died with your name on my lips.” Powell’s diction was so crisp that one could hear nearly every word; and Leshnoff’s gleaming, Britten-like textures kept the orchestra at the right level.

This Baltimore-based composer’s frankly sentimental harmonic language, which mostly avoided becoming treacly, grabbed me right to the well-judged climax (“If I could have my greatest wish...
Beneath its vast, amorphous surface, Julian Anderson’s Incantesimi is driven by a basic principle of pre-modern tradition. An English horn must contend with the looming, unpromising forces of a full-scale orchestra, where growling brass and violent percussion thwart its quest for peace.

The about eight-minute work was nevertheless out of place in an all-romantic program, as premiered by the Berlin Philharmonic under Simon Rattle on June 8. A co-commission with the Boston Symphony and the Royal Philharmonic Society, it arrives stateside in January after traveling to the BBC Proms this September.

While Anderson creates a clear narrative, he is above all interested in exploring sound itself. The British native, who has studied with everyone from Alexander Goehr to Tristan Murail, is clearly drawn to the European modernist tradition that seeks the next frontier in instrumental innovation. There is a sense of post-Mahlerian catastrophe, where woodwind melodies try to bloom but cannot dig roots in the wasteland. Colorful orchestration evoking a French tradition (there are brief shades of Stravinsky and Debussy) cannot last long, countered as they are sometimes by violent shades of grey.

In the end, the English horn must wander alone above the ruins to the faint afterglow of the double-basses, percolating mini woodblocks, and a single trumpet blast. Given the movement toward apocalypse, Incantesimi seems to warrant a longer run than eight minutes. Even though Rattle led the Philharmonic and soloist Dominik Wollenweber in a sensitive, meticulous performance, Anderson’s images were not fleshed out enough to stay in the imagination.

This was only reinforced by the choice to program Dvorak’s Slavonic Dances, Op. 46, immediately afterward. Rather than allow the listener to reflect on Anderson’s eerie sound world with its spiritual ambiguity and ominous premonitions, the orchestra suddenly broke out into a celebration of folk rhythms and tonal splendor.

The sheer length of the eight dances (almost 40 minutes) further served to overwhelm Anderson’s composition.

While the orchestra played with high energy and elegant phrasing, not every number made me want to jump on my feet—though the C-minor ‘Skocna’ (No. 7) managed to evoke a rousing town gathering. Rattle exuded natural authority while allowing the players of each section to bring their personal touch.

The sense of ensemble was even stronger in the first half of the program. Rattle drew a
Los Angeles Philharmonic Music Director Gustavo Dudamel has been thinking lately in terms of pairs when coming up with ideas for festivals. This past spring, as the 2015-16 season neared its close, he combined Mozart with Arvo Pärt. Next spring the pairing will be more intuitive—Schubert and Mahler.

The duo of Mozart and Pärt presumably was supposed to create a musical oasis of peace and tranquility at a time of violence and nasty politicking in the outside world—and, not incidentally, give a boost to the box office at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Nevertheless, the darker aspects of the music of both composers dominated Dudamel’s programming choices May 28, with Pärt’s Greater Antiphons (a Los Angeles Philharmonic commission in its world premiere) placed between a G-minor sandwich of Mozart symphonies—25 and 40.

The term “world premiere” should be applied rather loosely in this case, for Greater Antiphons is actually a string arrangement of Seven Magnificat Antiphons, an a cappella choral piece that has been around since 1988. As in the original version, the work has seven short parts and lasts about 15 minutes. The sections are invocations to Wisdom, Adonai, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Morning Star, King of All People, and Emmanuel. The idiom is typical of Pärt, who embraced his inner mysticism some four decades ago.

But the most memorable performance of the evening was Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 with Krystian Zimerman as soloist. Not unlike in Incantesimi, the piano enters into a confrontation with the orchestra. Zimerman showed that the soft-spoken demands the most attention. In the inner slow movement, famous for evoking the image of Orpheus taming the wild beasts, I could only think of an argument between a woman and her angry husband. Against the orchestra’s interjections the piano pleaded calmly, eventually forcing the interrogator to make his demands more quietly.

It is a shame that the continuity between Beethoven and Anderson was not made clear by programming a mid- or late-20th Century work. Alas, in Boston, Incantesimi will be flanked by Schumann and Schubert.

REBECCA SCHMID
Greater Antiphons emitted plenty of the radiance the composer is famous for. Dudamel tempered the solemn ambience with warmth, using 7 double basses and 10 cellos from the Philharmonic to color the bottom end. Pärt, now 80, was there and took his bows.

Mozart has been a major fetish for Dudamel in recent years. He recently completed an ambitious, semi-staged cycle of the Da Ponte operas here. Now this concert, part of a mini-festival. At first his performance of Symphony No. 25 made me wonder whether he was beginning to tire of Mozart; it sounded routine, heavy, and not exactly immaculate in execution. But everything came alive in No. 40. The playing was more animated and cohesive, with tempos right on the money, plenty of impassioned power and grace, and no period-performance tics in this modern-instrument treatment. This was a splendid No. 40. And yes, the hall was almost full that afternoon.

RICHARD S GINELL

Bendix-Balgley:
Fidl-Fantazye
(world premiere)
Mahler: Symphony No. 5
Pittsburgh Symphony

Noah Bendix-Balgley, first concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic, returned June 17-19 to the Pittsburgh Symphony, where he had been concertmaster from 2011-15. This time he was appearing in the dual roles of guest soloist and composer, playing the solo part in the world premiere of his Fidl-Fantazye: A Klezmer Concerto. It was the closing concert of the 2015-16 season in Heinz Hall, an unusually long program where Music Director Manfred Honeck led a powerful rendition of Mahler’s Symphony No. 5 on the second half.

Warming up with a five-minute Rondo by Mozart, K 373, Bendix-Balgley immediately established his credentials with exquisitely sweet tone (he plays a 1732 Bergonzi instrument), on-the-mark intonation, and elegantly sculptured phrasing. These characteristics would carry over into the concerto.

The new work might be described as a classical-style concerto inspired by klezmer music. Bendix-Balgley’s father, Erik Bendix, is a dance teacher who specializes in Eastern European folk dancing. In the son’s words, “As a child I often listened to recordings of klezmer music or heard bands play where my father taught.” He decided to compose his own tunes rather than use existing klezmer melodies. The result is a solidly written, very listenable piece that evokes Jewish music with reminiscences of cantorial singing and stereotypical melodies along the lines of Fiddler on the Roof. Some of the most enjoyable moments at the premiere were the improvised cadenzas, which made me wish Bendix-Balgley had included more such flights of fancy in the course of the work’s three continuous movements. For the orchestration he called on older composer Samuel Adler, who attended the event and participated in pre-concert discussions. Honeck conducted the new work with care and precision.

The music director came into his own, as did the orchestra, in Mahler’s Fifth. The assertive brasses and luscious horn sounds are among this orchestra’s biggest assets, and they were an all-important factor in its success. The opening funeral march, an apotheosis of Beethoven’s so-called “fate motive”, was driving and properly disturbing, leading logically into the turbulent quasi-sonata movement that followed. The moment in the recapitulation marked by Mahler as “highpoint” was electrifying, but just as significant was Honeck’s warm, humane approach to the sections with smaller instrumental combinations. He inflected these quieter passages with songful subtleties, balancing coloristic niceties with a broader view of Mahler’s message of the triumph of life over death. The swirling central Scherzo was less meticulous in detail but very much alive and teeming with energy.

The fourth-movement Adagietto was long-bowed and smoothly drawn out, with manifold expressive dynamic nuances. Particularly felicitous was the clearly projected, penetrating harp work of Gretchen Van Hoesen. In context this movement—familiar to many for its inclusion in Luchino Visconti’s 1971 film Death in Venice—served as a necessary preparation for the affirmative exuberance of the Rondo-Finale.

ROBERT CROAN

Robert Croan is a senior editor (formerly classical music critic) of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.
Mahler and Mozart

Buffalo Philharmonic

The star of the May 7 performance at Klein-hans Music Hall of Mozart’s Violin Concerto No. 5 was not soloist Mayuko Kamio but JoAnn Falletta and the Buffalo Philharmonic. Before the downbeat I was taken aback seeing that the music director was to conduct the Mozart with the same number of strings she would be using in Mahler’s Symphony No. 5 after intermission. But the orchestral introduction erased those doubts. Rhythms were so upbeat, ensemble so sharp, and balances so transparent that the 16th notes in the second violins and violas made the textures ripple.

Kamio should have tuned with the orchestra. Higher notes, whether held or leapt to at the end of phrases, were tuned so low they sounded sour. Her rhythm, flow, and balance were excellent; yet she lacked any distinctive quality, perhaps because her tone and manner was constantly proper, like people who are never offensive but, when they leave, you can’t remember much about them. She was also only the second soloist I’ve ever heard who bit off more than she could chew in an encore. She had a number of missed, out-of-tune, and wrong notes in Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst’s ferociously difficult solo violin arrangement of Schubert’s ‘Erlkönig’.

Meanwhile, Falletta displayed her typical skill as an accompanist: hand-in-glove partner (not for Falletta the disagreeable habit of reducing an orchestra for concertos), crystalline textures, and superb balances that always supported but never covered the soloist, while making sure every note in the orchestra was projected, heard, and enjoyed. This can be accomplished in Mozart only by orchestras with superb discipline, rhythm, and ensemble.

These qualities were on parade from start to finish in Mahler’s Symphony No. 5. When Falletta became music director of the BPO in 1999, some of its principals were poor and often downright embarrassing; it took years for them to resign and be replaced. And she had inherited an orchestra of musicians soured by years of cutbacks and strife. As she said, it took the orchestra’s 2010 tour (its first in 25 years) to Florida, allegedly to play for the BPO’s “snowbirds”, for orchestra members to discover that they really did like one another, as they helped one another with their daily personal, let alone musical, needs when touring.

Here was an orchestra playing Mahler for 70 minutes with consummate professional concentration. The players’ total ensemble through the frequent huge shifts of tempos and dynamics was not just flawless but balanced with transparent textures and delicate details. They were like an organism that inhaled and exhaled as one. Most glorious of all was the third movement, the most difficult one to put across. Falletta never lost the rhythmically upturned, dancing-on-the-head-of-a-pin waltz-like style that underpins it, and Polish Principal French horn Jacek Muzyk made it unforgettable with his rich, assured, and unique tonal character; making his returning solos more and more gripping. It was here too that the relationship between the BPO’s viola and cello sections became not just aurally but visibly evident.

That worked to Falletta’s advantage in the stunning Adagietto. No Gilbert Kaplan eight-minute quickie here; this was an old-fashioned, heartfelt, seamless, integral performance, enhanced by the leadership of Dennis Kim, in his first season as concertmaster, who has given the violins a more projected presence and seems to have galvanized all the strings into a tighter unity.

It was in the first and last movements that I had trouble with Falletta’s interpretation. Following the opening trumpet’s funeral-march theme, she immediately accelerated the tempo, so much so that I finally just wondered, “What’s the rush?” The second movement, expertly begun with just a breath of a pause, was taken at a furious pace; deeper heaving expression in the strings was needed, but Falletta’s grip on rhythmic precision was superb, and the profound tonal quality of the trombones was solid as granite. In fact, the entire brass section was absolutely solid in all movements. I wish Falletta had saved some of her high octane from the first movement for the final one; despite all the qualities already mentioned, its fugal textures never quite attained a leaning-forward kind of inner tension that would make the finale a triumph. Perhaps it was at the second performance the next afternoon.

Jo Ann Falletta

GIL FRENCH

44 Music in Concert

September/October 2016
The Montreal Symphony wrapped up its 2015-2016 subscription season at the Maison Symphonique with three performances of a monument of the 20th-Century repertory: Britten’s War Requiem. (I heard the first of these on May 25.) Orchestra and chorus had obviously been prepared by different conductors.

Kent Nagano seemed incapable of bringing any significant emotional involvement to the score. Tempos were traditional, yet momentum flagged at every turn, as if he had lost his way. “Cautious and reserved” were the words that floated through my mind as the performance wore on. There were beautiful solos from flutist Timothy Hutchins and bassoonist Stephane Levesque, but also too many moments of insecure brass playing, particularly noticeable at the beginning of the ‘Confutatis’ and the ‘Hosanna’.

The MSO Chorus, on the other hand, turned in some of the finest choral work I have ever heard in this city. Prepared by Andrew Megill, it delivered razor-sharp attacks, ethereally beautiful quiet releases, a huge dynamic range that spanned breathless whispers to frightening roars, and an overall level of emotional involvement lacking in the orchestral playing.

The “boys choir” was actually a contingent of girls billed as the Princeton High School Women’s Choir from Princeton, New Jersey. Positioned high above the stage, nearly invisible in the shadows, and singing with the same lofty quality as the MSO Chorus, the girls sounded as if coming from another world.

For the world premiere of the War Requiem in 1962, the three vocal soloists were deliberately chosen as symbols uniting nations that had been enemies in World War II—England, Germany, and Russia (Galina Vishnevskaya was denied permission to travel from Russia, and was replaced by Heather Harper from England.)

For the Montreal performances, the three were all allies. English tenor Ian Bostridge and Canadian baritone Russell Braun (replacing an indisposed Thomas Hampson) stood side by side in front of the chamber orchestra at stage left, while American soprano Catherine Naglestad was placed on a towering platform above the trombones and tuba at stage right. Her voice had great tonal richness; intonation was perfect, the tone even in all registers. The ‘Liber Scriptus’ lacked much of the shrillness and stridency others bring to the role, yet it was projected powerfully and nobly; and the ‘Lacrimosa’ was heartbreaking in its radiant beauty.

Bostridge lived up to his reputation as one of England’s finest singers. It would be difficult to imagine anyone since Peter Pears delivering a more vivid interpretation of Owen’s poems. Bostridge rendered all the anguish, fear, terror, and biting sarcasm of the texts with the immediacy and searing intensity of someone who had actually experienced the horrors of trench warfare. By comparison, Russell Braun’s performance sounded tame and uninvolved; nor was his diction as clear as Bostridge’s.

The overall performance had me wishing I were back at home listening to the first studio recording from May 1963 conducted by Britten himself. That performance was a triumph.
The innovative northern outpost of the Ojai Festival at the University of California Berkeley got off to a ringing start with the rare phenomenon of a lobby full of animated attendees quite spontaneously staying after opening night to discuss the concert. This response emanated from a 21st-Century monodrama music-theater piece, *The Passion of Simone* by the highly esteemed Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, 63, who is based in Paris.

Saariaho is a subtle colorist whose mildly dissonant enigmatic orchestations kept me transfixed as they grew out of the nebulous environments of Debussy, Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, and early Stravinsky, almost devoid of brass. Instead of emphasizing melodies, her scores are textures and effects, constantly shifting like the sunset light. Virtually all of the 20 orchestra members had separate parts to play. Elusive content wrapped in a paradox? Yes, much like Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle in physics, which says you can examine and absorb but cannot fully put your finger on it.

Saariaho’s *Passion* is a nebulous poetic allusion and reflection on Simone Weil (1909-43), a French writer, political activist, factory worker, humanist, mystic, and patriot. The work also draws parallels of Weil (who was at various times an agnostic, a Jew, and a Catholic) to Jesus Christ, referring to the 14 Stations of the Cross. The texts, delivered by a “sister” in song and word, reflect great compassion toward Weil—this “fragile flame” who was largely overlooked until the posthumous publication of her writings.

The piece is built around an actress-narrator-mezzo singer interacting with the orchestra, with occasional interjection by a four-member Greek chorus. Even though Julia Pollock’s French diction was imperfect, she was an impressive presence on the stage with its shifting colored lights, whether she was standing, emoting, or just supine.

Directed by the mercurial idea man Peter Sellars, who was music director of the 2016 Ojai Music Festival and who had originally suggested the project to Saariaho, *Simone* was accompanied by the crack New York-based ICE ensemble directed by Joanna Carneiro, best known around here as music director of the Berkeley Symphony. She shaped the music adroitly and cued components carefully. Even though the confines of Zellerbach Playhouse on the university campus are intimate, microphone amplification was used for the singers. The program was only 75-minutes; a curtain-raiser by ICE would have been very welcome.

This year’s three touring Ojai programs opened here June 16 and concluded with Pollock returning for impressions of singer-dancer Josephine Baker, the alluring American expat who had been the toast of 1920s Paris. Is this the year of the woman in serious music? Carneiro will be one of the rare woman conductors at the San Francisco Symphony next season. Saariaho’s *Amour de Loin* is scheduled at the Metropolitan Opera this season. And the newest Pulitzer-Prize-winning composer is Caroline Shaw, a graduate student at Princeton. Apart from Sellars himself, his entire Ojai program this year was dominated by women’s creativity.

PAUL HERTELENDY
James Conlon has been Music Director of the May Festival since 1979, and this year’s festival—his 37th—is his last in the post. It was his predecessor, James Levine, who recommended him for the job. All these years, as he has gone from orchestra to opera company (he is now Music Director of Los Angeles Opera), his contract has always included two weeks in Cincinnati in May.

A booklet was printed in his honor listing the 350 musical works he has conducted here. It begins with Dvorak’s Stabat Mater, the first piece he conducted here, a year before he became Music Director (1978). He conducted it again three more times, including his last festival here, this year.

The work he conducted most is Haydn’s Creation (six times), followed by Carmina Burana, the Mahler Symphony No. 8, and Mozart’s Requiem and Mass in C minor (5 times each). That Mozart mass was again on this year’s festival program. So was Mendelssohn’s Elijah, which Mr Conlon calls “the essence of what this festival was when it was formed in the 1870s”. Indeed, this chorus and orchestra have performed it 17 times at Music Hall, 4 of them under James Conlon. This year’s festival opened with Mozart’s Exsultate, Jubilate, the work that opened Mr Conlon’s first festival in 1979.

There have been at least 40 works each by Mozart and Verdi on these festivals—two Conlon favorites. This year’s program included Verdi’s Otello with Gregory Kunde in the title role.

It was James Conlon who hired Robert Porco to direct the chorus in 1989, and the two have been a model of good teamwork ever since.

Lisette Oropesa was the fine soprano in Exsultate and in the mass. The all-Mozart program also included three overtures and the gorgeous Ave Verum Corpus. The mass itself is disappointing in many ways. It is Mozart’s most “operatic” sacred music, which may be why he left it unfinished. The Credo ends with the Incarnation, and there is no Agnus Dei. Yet it takes almost an hour to get thru the parts that are left. I don’t think it is an easy work for chorus or audience.

Mr Conlon has championed Dvorak’s Stabat Mater (who else conducts it?) and he reveals its beauty every time. Elijah is a favorite of the audience here and also of this music critic. The soloists who stood out from the others were mezzo Sara Murphy and bass-baritone Egil Silins as Elijah. Mr Silins is Latvian and has sung in dozens of opera houses in Europe. The operatic power of his voice was an asset for Elijah. Sometimes it was amusing to hear his accent—but it was also amusing to hear the choir’s collective accent in words like “chariot” (they pronounced it “chatriot”—more “midwestern” than usual for Cincinnati). Mendelssohn’s music never fails unless the conductor rushes it—and James Conlon never does that.

I have been here for 31 of Mr Conlon’s 37 years. I think we rather took him for granted: a lot of work goes into those five choral programs every year, and he is obviously well organized and persuasive with the musicians. The result is almost always polished and accurate and musical. Sometimes he does not seem wildly inspired, but neither is he quirky and unpredictable. He has been Mr Dependability for a long time, and he can handle a huge range of music more than competently. He has conducted more than a quarter of the concerts in the festival’s entire history. The people who will miss him the most are the ones who worked with him and saw how fully he entered into the music, understood it, and was able to get them to put it across.

DONALD VROOM

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Music in Concert 47
Christopher Houlihan, organist
Rome NY

An organ and the room where it resides must truly fit one another for the instrument to bloom acoustically. That certainly was true of the organ in First Presbyterian Church in Rome NY (population 32,800) when Christopher Houlihan, who turns 29 on October 6, celebrated its restoration: a new digital control system, rewiring with fiber optic cable, rebuilt console, and revoicing of problem ranks of pipes. The organ was built in 1944 by Austin of Hartford CT and was rebuilt by Kerner and Merchant of East Syracuse NY.

First Presbyterian reminds me of the Old St Louis Cathedral in downtown St Louis near the Gateway Arch. Its rectangular sanctuary, which seats about 650-700 people, is spacious but not large. Its appointments are elegant in their simplicity. And on a beautiful early evening on June 3, with an orange-rose sun beginning to color the west as a low-humidity breeze rather than fans or air conditioning cooled the room, its clarity, airiness, and quiet were tangible.

The organ itself with three manuals is not a virtuosic instrument; rather, it fits the bill for a moderate concert and is ideal for a service’s preludes, hymn accompaniment, interludes, and postludes. Whether choosing string, reed, or brass settings, its 7 great, 10 choir, 13 swell, and 11 pedal pipes have a basically mellow tone, like many ordinary Catholic parish organs I remember over the years. Yet its textures are clear; one keyboard doesn’t drown out another, and even the electronic 32’ subbass doesn’t become oppressive when filling the room with its rich, ennobling sound (think “thrilling Elgar”). Indeed, the floor and pews vibrate with the instrument. In brief, the instrument and the place are a perfect fit—at least this was true with Houlihan’s registrations.

What I found disappointing were Houlihan’s interpretations, but that I confess was colored by my background: my favorite instrument is the orchestra, and that is how I listen to an organ. In Leo Sowerby’s Toccata (1941) Houlihan’s moderate tempo (which tended to lose steam) and rhythmic evenness took the edge off what should have been an exciting concert opener.

In Bach’s famous Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue that followed, the Toccata’s phrasing was “as written on the page” rather than enlightening, and Houlihan rushed rather than articulated the 16th notes that give Bach’s line its punchy character. The Adagio felt studied, without soul. Its long-lined melody was not sustained; long gaps in the phrasing made it hollow, and Houlihan played it like a drone without a single change of keyboard or registration (the organist and keyboard were projected on a screen in front), until the transition-like ending where his stop selections sounded like a Hammond organ. The Fugue was rhythmically upright, without inflection or swing, killing its propulsive quality, until the very end when, as in the Sowerby, he upped the volume for a corny ending and held the final chord well past its expiration date.

By the end of the 19th Century organ music was indeed symphonic. Cesar Franck’s Chorale No. 2 is in essence a passacaglia but with a long-lined lyricism that builds dramatically. Here Houlihan constantly broke up the lyrical line with rubato here, rushing there, and perhaps some mechanical interference as he adjusted dynamic levels and registrations.

Continued on page 254
New Music

For 2016 I have made it my task to sample almost all the “new” music that comes to us. I must say I am surprised how boring and cliched 90% of it is. Almost every piece could be titled, Midnight in the Swamp. They all seem to do the same thing, whether it’s for an orchestra, a choir, or a saxophone: slurs, out-of-range screams and squeals, loud thumps (way too much obnoxious percussion—the composers probably grew up listening to rock), sudden crescendos, outrageous (and dizzying) portamentos, off-pitch yelling, endless repetition. The typical composer defines his music as “driven by rhythm and timbre” or some such thing. They all want to have an original twist somewhere that will set them apart as “creative”, but they all sound very much alike. There is seldom anything new about new music—it’s all the same bag of tricks they’ve been using all my life. There is no originality or inspiration, but there is piles of learned craft that must impress their teachers.

The musicians sound like they have a hangover or are on drugs, and their pictures look like they were dumped here from another planet. I guess that’s another influence of rock—you have to look alienated, loutish, disaffected; you certainly may not smile. You are not playing friendly music, so don’t appear friendly.

Why do they expect us to review new music? What can we say? I reject at least half of what I listen to, and our new music reviewers reject almost that much of what I send on to them. And even though they specialize in new music, they seem to like very little of what they do review. It’s just not likeable music, and I guess it’s not supposed to be. The composers take themselves very seriously—you can hear that and read it in the booklets—but they are not geniuses. In fact, they have little imagination and an almost total lack of ability to communicate emotion, except in the narrowest and most depressing range.

The only melody in new music is borrowed. I was listening to something as I typed this and said to myself, “nice melody”. A minute further on I realized it was a negro spiritual. When was the last time you heard a good melody from a living composer? It’s very rare.

Yet, of course, the music keeps coming—in huge quantities, because these people are good at getting grants. Think of the standard arguments, such as “if no new music is written, music is dead”—none of those arguments make any sense, but they seem to make people open their wallets.

If we play only music that has proved itself we have a much better chance of connecting with an audience and moving people deeply. What I’m saying (and have said before) is, We don’t need new music! That’s the clear and simple fact. And, of course, as composers themselves will tell you, at least 9/10ths of what is being written will sink without a trace anyway, because it cannot stand up to the music we already have. Even when it’s bearable or even fairly nice (as a recent Concerto for Orchestra by Zhou Tian was), it almost never passes from well-crafted to downright inspired. Only really memorable music will last (almost by definition), so I can’t see the point of these endless commissions and premieres.

The “new music” lobby is very strong—but utterly wrong.

New “Operas”

I have enjoyed a few of them and hated a few of them, but I try to see them to see if opera is still a viable category for today’s composers. I have to admit that I don’t think it is. To put it simply, they are writing plays with music. They are writing music to accompany a play. Often it is obvious; often the only beautiful and appealing music in a new “opera” is what the orchestra is doing. The orchestra underlines the emotions, and it is obvious that the composer spent a lot of time on the orchestral writing. In a recent opera in Cincinnati (Fellow Travelers) the orchestra not only introduced the opera but also played a sort of postlude—extremely beautiful, actually—after stealing the show (musically) all the way thru the two acts. What in the past might be glorious arias are now mere parlando—the words are what matters. That was not so in traditional opera—and no one thought it was so until those pernicious surtitles came along. Now everyone expects to understand all the words. Going to an opera these days involves an awful lot of reading! Almost none of the “juice” or thrill is in the sung parts. My advice: when you go to hear a new opera, listen to the orchestra—that’s the key.

What makes a new opera a success is the
play—the play’s the thing! Usually you could dump the music and the audience would be just as involved—wrapped up in the dialog. New operas are very good at that—at theatre—and not very good at anything that was traditionally thought of as opera. “Opera as drama” became a watchword in the latter half of the 20th Century—maybe because no one was writing opera as music. No one was inspired to do that. The winning formula for a long time now has simply been to take a good play (drama) and write piles of recitative and nice orchestral backing and interludes. I don’t think anyone has written a memorable aria in 50 years.

Diversity
The League of American Orchestras announced their 2016 convention with a big splash. The headline was, “Diversity is the focus of the League’s 2016 conference”. We are promised all kinds of workshops on how to get more black faces on our boards, in our orchestras, and in the seats—“multiple sessions focusing on diversity and inclusion in orchestras”—ugh (yes, four trendy cliches in one sentence!).

This is nothing new; it has been going on since at least the 1980s. I went to a couple of their workshops in the 1990s where nice black women wrung their hands over “how to get more people of color” to our concerts. Once in a while they agonized over how to get more young people in. I have to be honest about this. I have heard all the arguments, and I am still convinced that all this talk about “diversity” is hot air and utterly misguided. Who cares? Does it matter to serious classical music lovers whether the players of their music have black skin or white or yellow? Certainly the Asians are invading our orchestras in a big way. They have adopted European music, and they are willing to work like dogs at learning to play it well. Another “minority” (a joke!) is women, who now amount to about half of the players in American orchestras. The orchestra league has moved on in that department. The latest issue of their magazine has sob stories about instrumental stereotyping—how few women trumpeters and percussionists there are! That article reveals that from the age of 4 children illustrate the stereotypes. That’s not cultural bias! Little boys are just different from little girls. The latter might find delight in a flute or harp, but the boys just want to make a lot of noise.

So hundreds of people attended the 2016 conference to learn about “diversity”—as if they haven’t learned far too much about it already. (Or, as was said in the past, “a sucker is born every day”, so they keep finding new people eager to swallow their propaganda.) It has no place in a field like ours, where all that counts is excellence. And why should people in any field think they have to have a balance of skin colors or races? How many black physicists are there with PhDs? How many Asians? How many Asian basketball players? People sort themselves out by their interests, and since orchestras have been holding blind auditions since the 1970s, there is absolutely nothing legitimate we can do to add more black faces to the orchestra.

As for blacks in the audience, that has always been a losing battle. Apparently they just don’t respond deeply to classical music. (The exceptional ones who do—musicians and audience—can be very good!) Something motivates the Asians in their interest and involvement that simply doesn’t motivate blacks. And this seems more than a “cultural” matter. (Well, everything is; culture is simply a manifestation, not a cause—and more and more it is clear that things we thought “cultural” are in fact genetic.)

A recent issue of the league’s magazine naturally has a big article on orchestral diversity programs. Such programs are legion and win many grants for the orchestras. They also become a badge of morality in a world where “diversity” is considered godliness. It often seems that the goal of these programs is to bypass the blind auditions, because blacks don’t do well enough in them. But the question remains, why should it matter to ANYONE whether there are black-skinned players on stage or how many? Where did the insane idea arise that all races and groups must be represented proportionally in every thing we do? (Unless it’s sports—you don’t see “diversity” initiatives there—partly because blacks are so well represented. What about Jewish football players or Asian basketball players? C’mon folks; get with it!)

I might add that the summer 2016 issue of Symphony magazine brags about the latest trend: hiring “rappers” to perform with the orchestra. Apparently it’s about time that our orchestras broadened their repertory and included black music. “We Belong Here” is the title of an article about “hip-hop at the symphony”. Heaven help us!

I drove to Philadelphia in June. What struck me above all else is that there is loud, obnoxious music everywhere. Stop for some
“food” on the Turnpike and you will be subjected to it. You hear it even in gas stations—and in elevators and lobbies. So-called “art events” have it—to the point where you simply want to get out of there as fast as you can. Even classical concert halls have idiots playing in the lobby before and after the concert—maybe even at intermission. Every restaurant blasts you with horrible music. We who hate all that crap seem to meekly put up with it.

I tell them I want silence. I am so miserably old-fashioned that I like to eat in silence and I like to be able to hear everything my dinner companions say. (Yes, I actually listen to other people!) If a restaurant chain would open called “A Silent Place” and advertise no music and no TV, they would have my business (if the food were acceptable). I tend to eat early, so I go into a restaurant when almost no one else is there; and the first thing I ask is that they turn down the music. Do that! Make a habit of it! Don’t let all these brainless idiots take over all public spaces! This is a kind of war—for silence, for quiet, for peace. We simply don’t want to be beaten down by loud noise! A true music lover HATES NOISE! Don’t put up with it!

I have never owned a television, so I am not used to constant bombardment with in-your-face ads. But I think most Americans are used to it—it’s in the same category as loud music: it’s everywhere. But because I don’t watch television I find advertising obnoxious, and I feel attacked and beaten up by its aggression in this country. I get really angry when I get pop-up ads on my computer or even advertising e-mails.

Suppose you want to travel—say to the Carolina coast. There are essentially no travel agents any more, so you are forced onto the Internet, where it will take you a whole evening of sifting thru hype to put together a sane preliminary plan for a trip. Every site you looked at will then nag you for the next few weeks with e-mails and pop-up ads, until you are screaming. It is hard enough to make these travel decisions with all the hype you find on the Internet, but once I have made some decisions I want to be LEFT ALONE. I HATE being nagged. I will never go back to a place (site) that has nagged me. Do they think all Americans are saps—submissive, passive consumers who listen to sales pitch after sales pitch and go for the best pitch? Don’t some of us know our own minds?

Because I hate being nagged, ARG has never nagged our subscribers: we send one notice ahead of time, one just in time, and then a final reminder. But most magazines not only nag you incessantly, but when you don’t renew they send you nagging letters for months, even years, trying to change your mind. Leave me alone!

Our bank used to call once a month to ask “how are we doing?” I told them repeatedly—and eventually angrily—that if I had a complaint I would complain! Finally they are leaving me alone—but it took years to get them off my back. Often nowadays you are called with or sent a survey every time you buy anything: “Tell us about your experience! We want your feedback!” (I hate that word “feedback” even more than the word “experience!”) Again, I just want to be left alone. Stop bothering me. If I have something to say to you I’ll say it. I hate being asked my “feedback”, my opinion of the service, and so on. Let me buy something without weeks of nagging afterward. Much of what I buy is one time—or at most once a year. No matter how they nag me I won’t be buying more. But the nagging makes me so angry I often decide never to buy anything from those people again.

What used to be salesmanship has become quite unbearable in this country. More than half the advertising in the whole world is here, in the USA. We are drowning in it—because apparently it works. Certainly businesses believe they have to do it. Sometimes it’s the “wheel that squeals gets the grease” principle. Sometimes it’s the idea that somehow people will think of your company if you have battered their brains enough with its name. Everything is commercials, nagging, sales pitches. Even the orchestras are doing it—they think that’s “normal” marketing—and in this benighted country it is, I’m afraid. The AAA does it (I have never shown the slightest interest, but they send me thick mailings all the time). Amazon does it (buy a book and they nag you for months to buy more books).

Why do Americans put up with all this crap? To save a few cents? It may be that heaps of advertising reduces the cost of internet service and searches, but I would rather pay!
Guide to Records

ADAMS: Hallelujah Junction; see MESSIAEN

ADLER: Symphony 6; Cello Concerto; Drifting on Winds and Currents
Maximilian Hornung, vc; Scottish National Orchestra/ Jose Serebrier
Linn 545—59 minutes

Samuel Adler is an American composer born in Germany in 1928. His music is strongly expressive and full of sonic variety and imaginative instrumental blends.

It is surprising that this is the first recording of his Sixth Symphony. It was composed in 1984-5 to commemorate Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky, but owing to various monetary and political matters it was not performed until now. It is a three-movement work in an attractively varied and very listenable idiom, basically tonal and exciting in its orchestral sound. So is the four-movement Cello Concerto, written a little later, and the tone poem that commemorates the wife of Dr Lewis Aronow in a description of life in our present world. This music runs the emotional gamut between meditation and hyperactivity.

The performances of this highly detailed and demanding music are quite convincingly handled by Serebrier and the orchestra, as one might expect. Hornung is a 30-year-old cellist who plays with sensitivity and works beautifully with the music and the musicians. The latter is important since this concerto requires close synchronization of both rhythms and instrumental balances. The recording is fairly distant but clear and well suited to the variety of colors in this fine music.

D MOORE

ALBENIZ: Piano Concerto; Spanish Rhapsody; Spanish Suite; Magic Opal Suite
Martin Roscoe; BBC Philharmonic/ Juanjo Mena
Chandos 10897—80 minutes

Rapsodia Española, originally for piano, is presented in Enesco’s brilliant 1911 version for piano and orchestra. It is a single movement of dances strung together, rather like one of Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies, and it is vibrant and dramatic. The only fault is the weakness of the themes—they don’t live up to their setting.

The Magic Opal is one of Albeniz’s four completed operas, all of them first written with English librettos. The composer had been quite a hit in London, and he lived there for a short time. The opera is about a magic ring that has the power to make anyone of the opposite sex fall in love with the wearer. Although its text is in English and the music Spanish-flavored, it’s set in Greece. The suite is pleasant enough but not very thematically interesting. Albeniz relies too much on pentatonicism, and the final movement is terribly anticlimactic.

The Piano Concerto, Concierto Fantastico, keeps the ethnic flavor light. I has a somber first theme and a touching, gentle second theme. II starts with a pastoral section that’s both dreamy and melancholy; but the second half of the movement is a quick, minor-key, triple-meter dance, and it makes me think Albeniz couldn’t think of how to develop the first part. III starts with a minor-key, triple-meter dance, though it has brighter moments as well as a chromatic low-string part that reminds me briefly of the first movement of Borodin’s Second Symphony. Things sparkle pleasantly all the way to the end, but—at the risk of sounding like a broken record—my inescapable conclusion is that the concerto isn’t Albeniz’s best work, nor does it stand up to the better romantic piano concertos.

The Suite Española is Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos’s fine orchestration of five movements from the original four-movement Suite and from Chants d’Espagne. It’s the best piece on the program for its emotional effect and the quality of the melodies.

The sonics are sumptuous. Roscoe and the orchestra play elegantly; they’re at their finest in the slower passages—the livelier parts are slightly underpowered, some even tepid.

ESTEP

ALBERO: Recercatas; Fugues; Sonatas
Alejandro Casal, hpsi
Brilliant 95187 [2CD] 109 minutes

Alejandro Casal deserves admiration for learning and presenting this fourth-rate music by Sebastian de Albero (1722-56); few other keyboard players are likely to spend much time on it. The recercatas are meandering single-line pieces without much for the left hand to do. The sonatas have some crunchy cluster harmonies like Soler and Scarlatti. The third fugue has a funny subject full of acciacaturas and it
Albinoni was a composer who wrote much more than that Adagio arranged by someone else. These sonatas (6 of the 12 of the Op. 6 set) have strong ideas and pleasant tunes. The performance is well done, with the continuo support handled competently by Giordano Pego- rara, cello, Francesco Tomasi, lute, and Enrico Bissolo, harpsichord. The sonatas are performed on an old recorder here, a thoroughly historical idea as the liner notes suggest—and indeed the recorder can orchestrate these works with a unique color.

This is a good if not spectacular record. Ms Putica’s work is certainly very good, though one might wish for a bit more forward momentum and a more flamboyant gesture. In the allegro movements one might like a little more drive and abandon. It is still very enjoyable, and the recorded sound is beautiful.

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of musicianship and virtuosity he has always delivered: gorgeous tone, absolutely fluent playing no matter how technically demanding the music becomes, and he always gets to the heart of whatever he’s playing. The strings, all fellow Greeks, play with perfect ensemble, intonation, and expression. A treasurable recording.

KEATON

BABADJANIAN: 6 Pictures; see MOUSSORGSKY

BACH, CPE: Burgercapitainsmusik 1780
Barockwerk Hamburg/ Ira Hochman
CPO 555 016—63 minutes

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach’s final years in Hamburg represented the longest, happiest, and most productive phase of his career. Among his duties and functions was the composition of music for various private, ecclesiastical, and civic occasions. Some of these have already been revived for CPO by Ludger Remy (777 108: S/O 2006; 777 594: M/J 2011) and by Martin Haselbock for ORF (306: J/A 2007).

Like his predecessor, Telemann, CPE was called on—though nowhere near as often—to supply music for a major civic event held annually to celebrate the city’s civic guard (Captains), a powerful and security and regulating agency. Such compositions were cast in two parts. The first was an oratorio, performed before the lavish banquet, and then a serenata as an evening entertainment. The work recorded here was composed for the festivities of the year 1780. CPE wrote another such for 1783.

The two parts are cast in the idiom of the allegorical confections of Baroque background but still fashionable this late. In the first half, the oratorio, Hammonia (a personification of Hamburg itself) banter with Menschenliebe (Philanthropy), Patriotismus (Patriotism), and Dankbarkeit (Gratitude), while backed by choruses of Virtues and Patriots, extolling all the wonderful things about the city. The following serenata continues the allegory: the Virtues and Patriots are coached by Freude (Joy), Die Vaterlandsliebe (Love of Fatherland, or Patriotism), Eintracht (Unity), and Redlichkeit (Honesty) to resist triumphantly the menaces of Arglist (Deceit), Neid (Envy), Aufruhr (Revolt). Oj happy, happy Hamburg! Tribute is also paid at the very end to the Austrian Emperor Joseph II.

There is wide variety in the music. Most of the personifications have solo arias, often of intense feeling or expressiveness. The choral writing is quite stirring, with major movements opening and closing the two parts. The choral forces here consist of only nine singers, who also are assigned the solo roles. Though there are no stellar names among them, they perform their solos with handsome tone and style. The composer uses his arsenal of instruments with interesting ventures in color, mostly in those choruses. The scoring comprehends, in full, woodwinds, brass, and strings with continuo, and is brought off with panache by an ensemble of 22 players, led from the harpsichord by Hochman.

Typically excellent recording sound. The booklet gives the German text in full, with English translation—an absolute necessity for understanding this music. Unfortunately, though, the bulk of the notes consist of an imaginary interview of CPE and his librettist, Pastor Christian Wilhelm Alers—more fatuous fantasy than information.

An important revelation of the civic side of the composer’s output.

BARKER

BACH, CPE: 3 Cello Concertos
Julian Steckel; Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra/ Suzanne von Gützeit
Hanssler 15045—61 minutes

JS Bach’s second son is his best known in the composing field. His three cello concertos are highly energetic works that test both technical and stylistic aspects of the cellist. This has resulted in relatively few complete recordings, notably by Anner Bylsma in a 2-disc album containing five symphonies as well (Virgin 61794) or by themselves (Virgin 90800, S/O 1990, Laird) and by Hidemi Suzuki (BIS 807). Truls Mork is also very fine (Virgin 69449, S/O 2011).

Those have been my favorite performances to date, but Steckel and company are right up there. He plays with fine technical expertise and he and the orchestra work together remarkably in terms both of phrasing and dynamics, making this music sound rich and full of variety, as if the cellist and orchestra had written it themselves. The recording is notably well balanced and clear.

D MOORE

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On paper this is a good bargain at Brilliant’s low prices. It’s not a treasure, though. CPE Bach was a phenomenally creative composer, but he wasn’t at his best in these pieces. They sometimes sound more like finger exercises than music. The third set of variations, based on a tune named ‘ich schleif, da traumte mir,’ is banal and too long. Parts of it are painfully flat, chiefly from four notes per octave (B, F-sharp, C-sharp, and G-sharp) that are tuned grossly too low. These problems of the unspecified temperament ruin some of the other variation sets as well. It makes the melodic figures sound ungraceful, like singing with a tin ear or improper breath support. A few notes have spoiled unisons, further exacerbating the overall ugly effect where too much of the music is out of tune.

At the end of the program, ‘Colin a peine a seize ans’ is the same tune as the French Noel, ‘Ou s’en vont ces gais bergers,’ familiar from settings by Charpentier, Balbastre, Corrette, and others. Along with that one, the popular Folies d’Espagne does best at holding my attention. Coen gives fluent and reliable performances with few surprises. It sounds like a valiant effort in a lost cause. He contributes tasteful dynamic nuances while holding together the sprawling shape of these long and repetitive pieces. There are 135 tracks, wearing out a CD player’s navigation buttons. Who needs all those extra access points for music that isn’t compelling anyway?

The most attractive thing here is Coen’s fortepiano, a modern Silbermann copy by Kerstin Schwarz, which has a pleasant delicate tone. It helps me listen past the other problems, a little. Jermaine Sprosse (S/O 2015) plays Les Folies better than Coen. He makes the music more exciting and beautiful.

The Savaria group has slightly more nuance. They, too, sometimes sound a little unsynchronized. Here and there they add a detail in phrasing that’s interesting (in the subject from 3:III, for example). Their tempos are slower in 6 and almost but not quite approach the majestic quality I always associate with the piece. The trumpet soloist for 2 is much better. Between the two recordings, I’d probably go with Neumeyer and simply skip the sixth concerto.

Of course, I don’t need to make that decision. There’s Pinnock and English Concert (DG Archiv), Alessandri and Concerto Italiano (Naive, M/A 2006), even the second recording of Karajan and Berlin (DG, Overview in M/J 1990)—all available, and many more besides. Each has much better playing and an abundance of little touches that make the performances more memorable: I’m thinking, for instance, of the gentle, almost humorous ending for 2 in the Concerto Italiano release.

For my comparisons, I listened to Karajan, which I recently bought, and Pinnock. I bought Karajan because I’m becoming increasingly irritated with certain idiosyncrasies and affectations of the period instrument movement—the insistence on playing everything as fast as possible and as consistently as possible; the mechanical backing away from or complete cessation of suspension notes just before the ear can register them fully as dissonances (yes, I know the treatises
advise this, but I no longer care); the snooty at-pitch violone used in some of the concertos (yes, I have read Dreyfus’s *Bach’s Continuo Group*, but I no longer care). The results too often seem only like lip-service, not music.

Sometimes we need to rely on intuition and the inexplicable. For period instrument performance now, this is such a time. Much could be learned by re-examining older recordings with care and an open mind. In Karajan, at least, we have style and something more like traditional musical expression. How starved I have been for it. And when I listened again to Pinnock, I was surprised how well his recording stands up after so many years (30 or so, I believe!) without indulging in some of the same scholarly foolishness: tempos are appropriate, never overdone; and, quite important, the music-making is simple, sweet, but also very expressive. Maybe it’s time for non-period orchestras to champion these works again—I cannot believe Bach, who called again and again for a singing tone in keyboard playing, could countenance some of these maniacally fast, emotionally barren performances that remind me these days, more than anything else, of the Whack-a-Mole game.

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**BACH:** *Brass arrangements*

German Brass—Berlin 720—77 minutes

These are recycled but very beautiful recordings, most from a wondrous 2010 DVD. The level of virtuosity, musicality, and ensemble intricacy is amazing. My favorite is the splendid reading of the Harpsichord Concerto, S 972, which includes a lovely solo by arranger Enrique Crespo on what looks like (in the video) a four-valve alto trombone. Also terrific are Toccata & Fugue in D minor, Brandenburg Concerto 3, portions of the Easter Oratorio, a suite cobbled together from three orchestral suites, and ‘Jesu, bleibet meine Freude.’

**KILPATRICK**

**BACH:** *French Overture; Partita 1; English Suite 4*

Fabrizio Chiovetta, p

Aparte 126—71 minutes

I’ve loved Bach’s French Overture for a long time; I came to know it through Ralph Kirkpatrick’s colorful and highly expressive performance for DG Archiv. As I get older, I find myself listening to it often, my impressions of it deepening each time. Performers sometimes forget that Bach was in his late 40s when he wrote the piece and 50 when he published it and the Italian Concerto as part of his *Clavierübung 2*. And while the freshness and vitality of the concerto belies its late composition date, the French Overture seems suffused in an autumnal chill. Nowhere do I feel this more strongly than in slow section of its opening movement—this is music that cries out for probing interpretation, for rubato, for expressive variety.

And that—almost miraculously—is what I hear in Fabrizio Chiovetta’s performance of it. He takes his time in the opening, pulling the tempo back a bit as it heads into its modulation to F-sharp minor (a moment, I always feel,
of renewed melancholy). The remaining movements, all less weighty, get their due as well. In short, he plays it so beautifully that he makes me want to perform it again myself.

The other performances are fine, too—intelligent and, above all, lyrical. Non-legato playing appears sparingly, and when it does (as in the minuet from Partita 1) it’s leavened with a bit of legato here and there; it’s also not overdone, turned into the machine-gun fire I’ve heard too often. I’m particularly glad to have a lovely piano performance of the F-major English suite, a work that is rarely played on its own and, as far as I know, never performed on its own as beautifully as it is here.

After Chiovetta’s release, it would be difficult for me not to be disappointed by another Bach piano recording, and I am disappointed but at least not irritated. Günther’s a fine Bach pianist, as I observed in my review of his WTC I (J/F 2014). His interpretations hardly ever descend into the automatic-pilot way of playing Bach that is still often favored (exceptions here are Duets 2–4; the first is exquisite—slow and almost pedantic in a way that suits it perfectly). And yet I often feel as if he is afraid to be too expressive, and the music suffers a bit as a result. In the French Overture he often brings out inner voices much as a good Schumann pianist does, to good effect. The final movement of the Italian Concerto has light and shade—almost enough for what I want, and it is joyous yet serene. But I now find I want more in my Bach performances—perhaps because I’m getting older myself.

HASKINS

**BACH: Viola da Gamba Sonatas**
Kate Dillingham, vc; Jory Vinikour, hpsi
Affetto 1503—46 minutes

This is not a very convincing reading of these three great works. We have become accustomed to hearing them played with an early music approach and on the instrument they were composed for. Here they are played on a cello with vibrato and with a modern type of phrasing that sometimes works but often seems to distort the composer’s intention. Furthermore, Dillingham’s technique is not bad but sometimes clumsy where one would expect better concentration. Altogether, this is not as polished as I would like, particularly considering the competition. Consult the Cello Overview (March/April 2009) or our index for other possibilities.

D MOORE

**BACH: Goldberg Variations**
Pascal Dubreil, hpsi
Ramée 1404—81 minutes

Well, one should resist the temptation to say “yet another Goldberg recording”? There are at least 100 of them. What is special about this one? One thing about this performer is that his teachers include Kenneth Gilbert and Gustave Leonhardt. His playing does remind one sometimes of Leonhardt, in the agogic accent and subtle rhythmic inflections and “harpischord” inequality between hands—Leonhardt was the master at that kind of thing, though Mr Dubreuil certainly has his own voice. The tuning or temperament is not stated, but sounds like something fairly tame. Pascal Dubreuil’s interpretation is marked by flowing musical thought, elegant phrasing, and clarity of voices. All repeats are taken.

The harpsichord—a French instrument after Couchet by Titus Crijnen—has clarity of voicing and a liquid beauty. Mr Dubreuil writes a very thoughtful introduction in the liner notes, basing his thoughts on the original title page (questioning the Goldberg myth) and is interested in expressing what Bach meant in his world, through rhetoric and the art of public discourse, rather than imposing his own meaning onto the music. Technically, this is very impressive playing, sounding very assured and secure. Sound is just right. All in all, a very impressive and enjoyable recording, with an interpretation that comes from Bach’s world. Yet another Goldberg recording? Yes and a great one.

HAMILTON

**BACH: Goldberg Variations**
Zhu Xiao-Mei, p
Accentus 30372—76 minutes

Zhu Xiao-Mei’s 2014 DVD performance of the Goldberg Variations (Accentus 20313, M/J 2015) was filmed in the St Thomas Church, Leipzig, right in front of Bach’s grave. This was a most reverent and completely engrossing performance. She has been playing and performing this work for many, many years and has an earlier recording (Mirare 48, 2007, not reviewed). Her new recording has all of the wonderful qualities of the earlier ones, with a quieter, more subdued Aria and first half (15 variations). The virtuosic aspect of this work is clear from Bach’s writing, including the liberal

**BACH: Goldberg Variations**
Marie Rosa Günter, p
Genuin 16435—77 minutes

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use of two manuals, hand crossings and large leaps. With only one tempo indication (Variation 15: Andante) we don’t know exactly how fast the extroverted variations were meant to be played, but almost all pianists tend to agree on which ones are quick. Xiao-Mei has a grand plan for this work, and every part is a piece in the larger whole. Don’t look here for anything outlandish, out-of-place, or breaking tradition with accepted performance practice. Do expect to be caught up in her magic and the need to hear her whole performance at one sitting.

Marie Rosa Günter delivers a more extroverted, traditional performance. I like the snap in her ornamentation (both ones notated by Bach and her own additions in the repeats). Her phrasing and accents, especially in the bass lines, give new life to well-known variations. She clearly enjoys the virtuosic elements, especially in variations 14, 20, 23, and 26.

If I were introducing the Goldbergs to young pianists, Günter would be a natural choice. For the connoisseur with in-depth knowledge of this masterpiece, Xiao-Mei is the one. I feel quite fortunate to have spent enjoyable time listening to each over the past month, sometimes back-to-back. Both have excellent booklet essays and recorded sound. In keeping with the performances, the Accentus piano sound is clear and warm, the Genuin brilliant and up close.

HARRINGTON

BACH: Harpsichord Pieces
Toccata 1: Suite in E minor; Prelude & Fugue in A minor, S 894; Partita 4
Fritz Siebert—Cybele 31517 [SACD] 73 minutes

Now in his 30s, Fritz Siebert is a fine harpsichordist who has performed with NeoBarock and Concerto Cologne. With the exception of Partita 4, all these works are early virtuosic showpieces. Even so, Partita 4—probably the most extroverted and formidable of the 6—fits very well here, particularly for the rapid tempo he takes in the second half of the Ouverture. Elsewhere tempos are not as speedy as I’ve heard in a number of performances, such as Andreas Staier on German Harmonia Mundi (N/D 1996). And that’s fine, because it allows for more give and take, more playfulness in the courante, more convincing musical shape in the Gigue. The fantastic-style elements that appear so often in the Toccata could appear more vividly. (This is not a problem in the prelude from the suite.) The punishing S 894 sounds easy in his hands. He plays a Burkhard Zander harpsichord (after an Antwerp Ruckers-Couchet from the 17th Century).

HASKINS

BACH: Inventions & Sinfonias
Thomas Ragossnig, hpis
Solo Musica 236—52 minutes

Bach’s Inventions and Sinfonias, otherwise known as the Two- and Three-Part Inventions, are staples of keyboard and compositional pedagogy. Bach intended them as such, preparing them as a textbook for his children and his Leipzig pupils. The lessons include a “singing” touch, independence of lines, and contrapuntal workout of ideas. Ragossnig plays them on harpsichord, but recordings are available on every other keyboard instrument and in arrangements for strings, winds, guitars, and more.

His approach is recognizably similar to Gustav Leonhardt’s, a convenient point of reference, in the way the personality seems aloof. Within that overall character, most of Ragossnig’s tempos are faster and he uses more aggressively separated articulation. He plays with some extreme hesitations to make the surprises or downbeats more emphatic. His E-minor Sinfonia stands out as special, where he plays more slowly and has worked out extensive ornamentation for all three melodic lines. In the E-flat Sinfonia he plays the bass line on a second manual with buff stop. The harpsichord is a modern copy of one by Mietke, c1700.

The novelty here is that Ragossnig has resequenced all 30 pieces, instead of going upward chromatically twice, as we usually hear it from Bach’s last versions. His scheme is largely based on root movement by fifths, going through the flat keys first and ending in the sharp keys. He groups the pieces in pairs or in mini-suites of four. An earlier draft by Bach had a different order, going up through the natural keys and then back down through the keys with more sharps or flats. Ragossnig’s notes claim, “I have here followed an alternative order for the first time on CD.” That is an overstatement. Glenn Gould’s 1964 piano recording (LP, reissued on CD) had a completely different order. Gould’s CBC Radio performance from 1955 and Moscow concert performance from 1957 (both only the Sinfonias) have two other personalized sequences, and are also on CD. Ragossnig says further, “I have also given attention to making my arrange-
ment dramatically exciting and diversified, taking the various affections and characters into consideration." His plan does achieve that, but I am merely pointing out that Gould was more than 50 years ahead of him in such experimentation with the dramatic shaping of the set.

Ragossnig plays very well, but it is difficult to beat my older favorites on harpsichord. Christiane Jaccottet’s recording has exceptionally strong melodic flow and an exquisite E-flat Sinfonia. Peter Watchorn’s set is ecstatic, with a wide variety of intense moods. Pieter-Jan Belder’s performance is plain-spoken and simple, like Leonhardt’s, letting the listener notice different subtleties of the compositions each time.

BACH: Transcriptions by André Isoir
Sinfonia from Cantata 29; Suite 3: Overture; Sonata in G minor: Preludio; Fugue in D minor S 539; excerpts from 2- and 4-Harpsichord Concertos; Mass in F: Quoniam; Wachet Auf; Cantata excerpts

Michael Bouvard, Francois Espinasse, org
La Dolce Volta 26—65 minutes

André Isoir is currently head organist at St-Germain-des-Pres in Paris. In 1965 he won the St Albans improvisation competition and then won the Haarlem improvisation competition three years in a row. His recording of the complete organ works of Bach (1975-1991) remains a benchmark.

Isoir, like Bach, has been interested in the art of transcription, producing metamorphoses of Bach pieces that sound as if they were written originally for the organ. Here he exploits one of Bach’s favorite organ textures, “Trio ... 2 clave Ped”; in several inventive ways, transforming arias from cantatas into effective organ music, much as Bach did with his Schübler chorales. Isoir created a continuo realization for Bach’s original organ version of Wachet Auf, which Espinasse then superimposes over Bouvard’s earlier recording of Bach’s chorale, using headphones to keep everything together.

The two performers, both students of Isoir, have produced a delightful recording of these transcriptions, most of which have never been recorded or published. Most effective is Vivaldi’s Concerto for four violins, which Bach transcribed for four hapsichords then Isoir for organ.

The star of this recording is the large, 2-manual organ built in 1990 by Georg Westenfelder in St Macre Church, Fere-en-Tardenois, France. It sounds absolutely splendid and I want one. The whole production, notes-booklet-sound-photos, is outstanding.

BACH: Orgelbüchlein
Joan Lippincott—Gothic 49297—78 minutes

Disclaimer from this reviewer: I have played this music for many years, so of course I come to it with decided preferences. Still, one must approach new performances with an open ear, hoping to learn something and be refreshed by a new look at repertoire that is eternally new. There is much in this recording that is delightful, and Bach never seems to lose his organic freshness.

This is certainly a fine recording, but one
where there will be no major surprises. The organ sounds good, though one would perhaps wish for a little more color in some of the individual flute stops, and a little more reverberation in the chapel. Tempos are on the brisk side. As a matter of fact Lippincott gets through the entire book in 78 minutes. One might prefer a little more repose, adoration, and wonder perhaps with some of the Nativity chorales; and sometimes details are glossed in some of the more contemplative chorales, such as 'Gelobet Seist du,' where a little more space might prove effective. There are places in these pieces that would benefit from rhetorical or articulate pauses. The chorale 'Von Himmel kam der Engel' is just too fast. Finally, at 'O Mensch Bewein dein Sünde Gross' we get a tempo that seems suitably Adagio, and we can enjoy the details.

Fine in this organ (a Fritts in the Princeton Theological Seminary chapel) is the wonderful fagott 16 in the pedal and its blend with the tutti. Much of the registration seems pretty middle of the road. So, if you like your Bach organ straight up, with an urtext approach, directness, and little extra fuss, get this disc—the organ and performer make a good team.

As far as comparisons, I think the gold standard is still Ton Koopman (Teldec). By the way, there is a tendency with cutting-edge technology to create more surgically accurate digital recordings, and I confess I do not understand that. A recording is a completely artificial project, so what is the point of that kind of "accuracy?"

HAMiLTON

BACH: Psalm 51; Trauerode; Cantata 53
Joanne Lunn & Carolyn Sampson, s; Robin Blaze, ct; Gerd Türk, t; Dominik Wörner, b; Bach Collegium Japan/ Masaaki Suzuki
BIS 2181 [SACD] 79 minutes

On the disc itself this recording is named Volume 6 in the series of Bach's secular cantatas performed by Masaaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan. It is not so designated on the booklet cover or jewel box inlay. Of the three works recorded here, only one would justify such a designation: the Elegiac Ode (Trauerode, S 198) for Christiane Eberhardine, the wife of Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. The memorial service took place on October 17, 1727, at St Paul's Church in Leipzig (the University Church). The electress was especially admired in Lutheran Saxony because she retained her Protestant affiliation when her husband converted to Catholicism in 1697 so as to be eligible for the Polish throne.

The driving force behind the memorial came not from the city or university authorities, but from an aristocratic student, Hans Carl von Kirchbach, who delivered the eulogy and commissioned Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-66), a literary figure and university teacher, to write the text and Bach to compose the music for the memorial cantata. The text of the cantata is secular, with no passages from scripture, no chorales, and only oblique references to the Christian faith. All of the recitatives are accompanied, sometimes crossing over into arioso. It is hardly surprising that Bach reused material from this one-off composition in the funeral cantata (now lost) of his former employer Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen in 1729 and the St Mark Passion of 1731 (also lost, but reconstructed to some degree).

The funeral aria Schläge doch, Gewünschte Stunde (Cantata 53) is probably not by Bach at all, but by Georg Melchior Hoffmann (c1679-1715), who held a church position in Leipzig before Bach's arrival there. The unusual feature (or gimmick) of this piece is the use of two bells to illustrate the opening line of the text: “Strike, then, desired hour”. The bells here sound like dull-toned handbells.

The adaptation of Pergolesi's Stabat Mater to a free paraphrase of Psalm 51 has the anonymous German text rendered in the metrical and rhyme scheme of the Latin poem. For the most part, Bach adheres closely to Pergolesi's original composition, but he does not hesitate to elaborate the vocal writing where the original tends to be static. Bach also modified the string writing, giving a more independent part to the viola. He reverses the order of the second and third movements from the end and repeats the final minor-key setting of "Amen" in the major. Bach's adaptation probably dates from the mid to late 1740s.

The Pergolesi adaptation was recorded in 2005. The other two pieces were recorded in February of 2015. As we have come to expect from Suzuki and BCJ, the performances are technically unimpeachable. The choral and orchestral forces are taut and disciplined, and the vocal soloists are some of the most accomplished in this repertory. At the same time, Suzuki brings an expressive warmth to the music without subjective excess. Ordinarily the BIS engineering is just as impressive, but there are places here where I think the sound unpleas-
**Bach: St Mark Passion**

Lars Eidinger, narr; Ulrike Eidinger, s; Ulrich Weller, ct; Samir Bouadjadja, t; Ensemble Wunderkammer/ Peter Uehling

Coviello 91605—65 minutes

Bach's *St Mark Passion* is often referred to as a fragmentary work—Peter Uehling refers to it that way in the notes with the present recording—but that is misleading insofar as it implies that we have authenticated but incomplete musical material from the composer. It is more accurate to refer to it as a lost work, but one that is capable of a conjectural reconstruction based on surviving clues.

We know that the work was performed in Leipzig on Good Friday of 1731. The printed libretto by Picander (pseudonym of Christian Friedrich Henrici) survives. In 1873 musicologist Wilhelm Rust pointed out the congruence between the meter and rhyme scheme in the texts of three arias and the opening and closing choruses of the *St Mark Passion* with movements of the funeral ode composed by Bach in 1727 (see above). With so many movements involved, this congruence could hardly have been accidental, so Rust concluded that the greater part of the *St Mark Passion* was a parody: the reworking of musical material to texts of the same structure as the original, or written to fit the existing music. Charles Sanford Terry in the 1920s and Friedrich Smend in the 1940s identified most of the chorales with the help of a collection compiled by CPE Bach. The proportion of chorales (12) to arias (5) is far greater than in either the *St John* or *St Matthew Passion*.

Recitatives and crowd choruses pose the greatest challenge to reconstruction, as they may well have been newly composed for the performance of 1731. There have been more than 22 attempted reconstructions of the *St Mark Passion*. Most take Rust-Smend as their point of departure as far as arias, chorales, and the framing choruses are concerned; but they vary a great deal in their treatment of recitatives and crowd choruses. The earliest serious attempt at a reconstruction was by Diethard Hellmann in 1964, but it was only the arias, chorales, and other choruses. Other reconstructions, like the one recorded here, have the recitative texts spoken rather than sung. Others borrow recitatives from the *St Mark Passions* of other baroque composers. Some presume to compose new recitatives in the baroque style, while still others give the recitatives in a modern musical idiom.

Here all narration, including the words of individual characters and the crowd, is declined by actor Lars Eidinger. His delivery is appropriately dignified: expressive but not histrionic. A practical problem that arises from spoken narration is that most of the "recitatives" are followed directly by chorales, and the choir needs some way of getting their pitches. The solution adopted here is for the spoken narration to be accompanied by the lower strings in a manner flexible enough that it does not interfere with the pace of the actor's delivery. There is no attempt to emulate baroque style in these accompaniments. They are often pungently dissonant, and I find the oscillation between them and the reconstructed Bach rather incongruous. The spoken narration also affects the proportions of the work, and not for the better. It leaves insufficient space between the musical numbers, severely reduces the contrast of the different musical idioms, and eliminates the dialog of the minor characters as well as the drama of the crowd choruses. Uehling defends this as indicating "the fragmentary nature of the work", but as I said at the outset, fragmentary is a misleading term in the present context.

Since a definitive reconstruction of the *St Mark Passion* is not possible, a strong case can be made for fleshing out the Rust-Smend framework so as to make an aesthetically pleasing whole that resembles the format of the *St John* and *St Matthew Passions*. That is the approach taken by Alexander Grychtolik, who worked with a later version of the libretto, hand dated 1744 possibly by Bach himself and discovered only as recently as 2009 in a Russian archive. That version of the libretto contains two arias not found in the 1731 version, and there are other minor text variances. Grychtolik stays as close as possible to Bach in his reconstruction. Recitatives are based on the *St Matthew Passion*, even to the point of having a "halo" of strings accompany the words of Jesus. Crowd choruses are based on corresponding examples in *St Matthew* and *St John*. It may seem odd to hear snippets of the
other Bach Passions in this context, but at that time the recirculation of existing musical material was quite commonplace, and much of the St Mark Passion is parody anyway. Markus Teutschein recently directed the first recording of Grychtolik’s version (Rondeau 6090; J/A 2015).

This is a concert recording made April 1-4, 2015. I take this to mean that it assembles the best takes from several concerts. The performance standard is high. If it is not quite as high as the best of today’s early music ensembles, it is not far behind them. The 15-voice choir and small instrumental ensemble produce the feel of chamber music. Balances are generally good between solo voices and instruments, in contrast with so many recordings—especially concert recordings—where the voices are overbalanced. Uehling treats the chorales with the dignity they deserve.

GATENS

Bach: St Matthew Passion
Hannah Morris, Sophie Harmsen, Tilman Lichdi, Peter Harvey; Christian Immler (Jesus); Stuttgart Chamber Choir & Baroque Orchestra/ Frieder Bernius
Carus 83.286 [3SACD] 164 minutes

This is a St Matthew Passion without gimmicks. We have standard soloists: women rather than boys or countertenors for soprano and alto, a single tenor for both the arias and Evangelist, plus two basses: one for the arias, one for Jesus. The two choruses are of moderate size (about 16 each) and balanced, rejecting the theory that the first chorus should be larger than the second (as in the Van Veldhoven recording) or placed in front of the second chorus (as in the Jacobs recording). To be sure, this is a period instrument performance, but the tempos are never pushed, and we have time for some expressive detail. (Jacobs’s recording is a full 11 minutes faster, which is quite a lot—it is spoiled by excessive speed.)

The soloists, led by Tilman Lichdi’s nimble Evangelist, are all top notch. Conductor Bernius gives them time to sing shaped phrases with a modicum of expressivity. I could quibble with a few choices, such as ‘Erbarme dich,’ which I prefer with more pathos, or ‘Gebt mir meinem Jesum wieder,’ which here sounds too much like an aria of triumph! Bernius takes the chorales fairly straight, much as a congregation would sing them; I would prefer them with more variety in pace and dynamics.

In general, though, there is much here to admire. The chorus is very well prepared, and their singing is clear in texture and ardent in expression. They really seem to know what the piece is about. The most credit, though, belongs to Bernius for conveying his vision of the piece so convincingly to singers and orchestra alike. Add to this the excellent sonics from Carus, and you have a recording equal to any among the period cohort. It comes with good notes and text and translation.

ALTHOUSE

Bach: Solo Violin Sonatas & Partitas
Mark Kaplan—Bridge 9460 [2CD] 146 minutes

After all these years, we finally have a recording of Bach’s music for solo violin by Mark Kaplan. These are sage performances, and they have a delicate intimacy that befits chamber music of this intimate character. Kaplan shows that he has thought long and hard about this music, and though his interpretations are not highly individual, he occasionally inserts a slight pause or agogic accent that shows his understanding of the music’s structure. He even wrote the booklet notes, and they reveal his deep understanding of the music.

This is one of the more thoughtful recordings of this music that has come my way, though not as dramatic or playful as others, and I enjoy it. Kaplan plays the “Marquis” Stradivarius made in 1685.

MAGIL

Bach: Italian Concerto transcriptions
Simon Borutzki, rec; Lea Rahel Bader, vc; Magnus Andersson, lute; Clemens Flick, hpsi, org
Klanglogo 1517—69 minutes

Even if you’re not thrilled to hear more Vivaldi, the spirited and imaginative playing will win you over. These are short pieces; most of the concertos are under 10 minutes. There are five by Vivaldi, one by Marcello, one by an unknown composer, and Bach’s Italian Concerto. This last one will sound a little less familiar as presented here on ultra-high soprano recorder in its outer movements and a soulful tenor recorder for the central Andante. A total of seven recorders combine with organ or harpsichord plus cello and lute to make delightful transformations of these transcriptions for keyboard instruments from around 1714.

Vivaldi’s originals permit stunning virtuosity among all the players, and Borutzki’s three-part ensemble takes a free and recitative-like
approach to this music. An incipit in the booklet compares Vivaldi’s and Bach’s notation of a Largo passage; that is, it shows how Bach takes something plain and makes it saucy. If you could serve this over pasta, the guests wouldn’t stop talking about how good it is! Earlier this year, Peter Loewen praised another Borutzki album (J/F 2016: 185), and the Italian content here goes well with more from Hasse later this issue. Bravo to all four!

GORMAN

BALFE: Satanella
Sally Silver (Satanella), Catherine Carby (Leila), Kang Wang (Rupert), Quentin Hayes (Hortensius), Anthony Gregory (Karl), Trevor Bowes (Arimanes); Victorian Opera Orchestra/Richard Bonynge—Naxos 660378 [2CD] 112 minutes

Michael William Balfe (1808-70) wrote many popular operas, the best-known of which is The Bohemian Girl. This work, Satanella, was his 23rd, and for a time it apparently enjoyed much acclaim in Europe and even on an international tour. Like many 19th Century operas and operettas, it has a rather preposterous story involving a demonic woman named Satanella who learns the power of love and repents her evil nature, thus achieving salvation. However un-modern the story, it has much tuneful, enjoyable music, some of it very beautiful.

Balfe’s music was written for the likes of Maria Malibran, whom Balfe (apparently a fine singer) sang with at La Scala. Most of the cast of this recording cannot measure up to that standard, but their singing is satisfactory. Best of the lot is Sally Silver. She has a bright, clear soprano with enough range and flexibility to meet the coloratura demands of the title role. The soprano Catherine Carby displays a pleasant voice in the role of Leila. The men don’t fare so well. The tenor Kang Wang is challenged by the fairly high tessitura of some of Rupert’s music. He reaches the notes, but he often sounds very uncomfortable. His final act aria shows this problem the most. The bass Trevor Bowes simply does not have the voice for the devil figure. Above a certain point his voice shows considerable strain. Some of the minor roles have singers with similar problems.

The orchestra and chorus perform well under Richard Bonynge, who apparently oversaw this project. This is an entertaining score. If you are interested in English opera in the 19th Century, both the disc and the booklet essay are enlightening.

SININGER

BARTOK: Concerto for Orchestra; Violin Concerto
Augustine Dumay; Montreal Symphony/Kent Nagano—Onyx 4138 [2CD] 82 minutes

Any program with a mediocre performance coupled with a great one is going to cause a problem for collectors. Such is the case here. We begin with a Concerto for Orchestra that never seems to get itself together. The promising opening is slow, dark, and mysterious; but legato execution of the trumpet entrance is emblematic of the lack of bite that is to plague this performance. As we proceed, attacks are soft, and the trombone solo is swoopy. The brass fugue is slow and, again, lacks bite. In time, we can add odd balances to the mix. Trumpets are a little too far back, the oboe is too loud in its duet with the harp, and so on. The parts are there, but it is not exactly clear what the performance wants to be. In II, the clarinets are blarey (for clarinets), the trumpets lackadaisical, and the chorale heavy. III has the same general problems that plagued I, e.g., the trumpets’ matter-of-fact accented passages, the muted horns’ lack of nastiness, etc. IV lacks rhythmic spring. V starts well in some respects but is monochromatic, pedestrian, and too slow—ridiculously so as it approaches the end. The orchestra seems rudderless. The sound is not great either. There is a strange graininess to the violin tone, and the great trumpet canon is so buried in the texture that it is barely audible, to name two problems.

The violin concerto, on the other hand, is either the best recording of the work that I have heard, or it is close. French violinist Augustin Dumay has the perfect tone for the piece: bright enough and yet still warm and Hungarian. Not everyone manages to get that sound, and yet a sound like that is really necessary for this piece to work all the way through, to the point where passages often heard as let-downs in inspiration sound quite fine. The quiet spots are lovely, the trills are clean, and the fast parts and pyrotechnics convince without seeming showy. Nagano’s pacing is good, too. The opening to II is eerily blended with impressive multi-stopping. Everything is well put together as the movement proceeds, and the end is touching. III is just as good, and the coordination between soloist and orchestra is tight. Even the sound is better. The balance between orchestra and soloist is fine, and that string graininess is gone.

What to do? One ameliorating factor is that the two discs are priced as one. From there, it
depends on how devoted you are to the Violin Concerto. I discussed other performances in my review of the same program with Emmanuel Krivine and the Luxembourg Philharmonic (J/F 2016), but this is one of the best. The hard cover book is CD-sized and more impressive in appearance than in its rather average content.

HECHT

BARTOK: Piano Pieces
Mikrokosmos 6; 15 Hungarian Peasant Songs; Suite; Out of Doors; 3 Burlesques
Cedric Tiberghien, p
Hyperion 68123—77 minutes

Tiberghien’s Bartok is measured and controlled. The Suite is the only work here without folk melodies and is performed with plenty of verve; in Bartok’s words, a “style more of bone and muscle.” While Out of Doors is not as ferocious as I would have liked, he emphasizes the knotty, angular dissonances with percussive force. The Hungarian Peasant Songs offer a more lyrical change of pace. The final book of Mikrokosmos is extremely difficult, but he is able to create a small world out of every phrase.

KANG

BARTOK: Viola Sonata 2; Solo Sonata; Rhapsody 1
Vidor Nagy; Peter Nagy, p; Divertimento Budapest
Toccata 351—61 minutes

I have loved these works since I was a boy. Bartok spoke to me then like few other composers, and he still does. I have also been impressed by the musicianship displayed by the Hungarian violinist Vidor Nagy in some of his earlier discs. This is not as convincing, mainly because the works here are arrangements of music originally written for violin. Bartok wrote very clearly for the qualities of the violin and was guided by some of the finest violinists of his time: Jelly d’Aranyi, Zoltan Szekely, Joseph Szigeti, and Yehudi Menuhin. Although Nagy shows a great deal of sympathy for the music of his countryman, he cannot overcome the differences in timbre and register of the viola.

I can’t accept these arrangements. The viola has a very special character and sonority, and music that works on the violin or the cello can fail on the viola regardless of its technical suitability for the instrument. Perhaps others will not feel the same as I do, and I also may be too familiar with the original versions of these works to be able to judge these arrangements on their own merits. I must stress that the performers are more than competent as musicians and technicians and that I look forward to hearing more from Vidor Nagy.

MAGIL

BAZELAIRE: Cello Pieces
Morten Zeuthen; Daniel Blumenthal, p
Simax 1355—74 minutes

Paul Bazelaire (1886-1958) was a French cellist and pianist who made a number of recordings and arranged a number of works for cello and piano, mostly by Baroque composers. Those arrangements are not included on this program. We concentrate here on his original pieces, most of which are under three minutes long. There are no specific dates given for the cello compositions, but their opus numbers run from 109 to 115, 117, 120, and 122 to 127. All of these are included here, played in order; and they vary from amusing in mood to amazing in virtuosity. They are all relatively light in substance (Bazelaire apparently never wrote a cello sonata or a concerto) and they vary greatly in their demands on both instruments. A somewhat surprising element is the frequent use of a mute on the cello.

Zeuthen and Blumenthal run through this material with varying degrees of success. The cellistic demands are a bit much on several occasions, but in the main these are effective interpretations. I confess that I am particularly pleased that the collection is relatively complete, particularly since I only had a recording of the 8-minute Suite Francaise up to now. I rather admire Zeuthen for recording so much of Bazelaire’s music, even if it is not perfect. The feeling behind these performances is very positive, and I enjoyed this project very much, as I’m sure he did. He also writes nicely informative liner notes.

D MOORE

BECK: Piano Pieces
Gabrielle Beck-Lipsi
Toccata 301—77 minutes

Swiss composer Conrad Beck (1901-89) adds a mild French tint (picked up from his days in Paris in the 1920s and 30s) to a style that’s basically midway between Honegger and Hindemith. He wrote quite a bit but very seldom showed up on LP or, so far, on CD either. Toccat now attempts to begin rectifying that by issuing Beck’s complete works for piano, here played by an excellent and very sympathetic
pianist who also happens to be his daughter-in-law.

The eight works that make up this 77-minute program are sensibly presented in chronological order: Two Piano Pieces (1928), Sonatine (1928), Dance (1929), Piano Pieces I (1929), Piano Pieces II (1930), Sonatine 2 (1941), Ten Piano Pieces for Home Use (1945), and Prelude (1948). As these titles suggest, this is not the music of a dreamy Impressionist or Messiaenic visionary. Allegros are hard-edged and angular, with aggressive, often syncopated rhythmic accents and occasional use of jazz-influenced harmonies and dance forms. Still, as Walter Lambert points out in his astute commentary, although neo-Baroque and neoclassical elements are central to Beck’s music, one finds also an inwardness and nuance in his chromatic inflections that reveal a probing, thoughtful sensibility. This side of Beck is most evident in his slower movements, and these I found more interesting than the ostinato-driven or contrapuntally unwinding allegros.

Though I think there’s value in Beck’s music, my guess is that most listeners will hear it here as drab and matter-of-fact. The fault for this lies, I think, in Toccata’s clunky recording, which muffles and blurs a piano that should have a bell-like clarity and delicacy. Take that away and even Mozart droops. I realize that a company like Toccata may have to contract out its engineering, but that’s no reason it shouldn’t implement strict quality control. I’ve heard many Toccata recordings that have outstanding sound, and most are at least satisfactory. This one doesn’t make the grade, and neither Beck’s music nor the pianist is well served by it.

Leotta is also careful to avoid sounding precious or too wound up in attempting expressive devices that call attention to themselves. Sound engineer Carlos Prieto deserves full praise for giving us a natural perspective of the Steinway D that, while close, does not place you inside the mechanism. Since everything has conspired to place this recording among my favorites, I will list my other favorites: Anderszewski, Brendel, Demidenko, Kovacevich, Pollini, Schnabel, and Serkin. Since no respectable collector can have just one, it is time to make room for this newcomer. Even the creative notes by Robert Rival give us more to think about than usual.

Beethov en: Egmont;
Consecration of the House
Bernarda Bobro, s; Vienna Academy/ Martin Haselbock—Alpha 472—56 minutes

When you buy this you will actually get two discs. One is in German, the other in English. The one in English still has the songs in German, but John Malkovich does the narration. The German narration is by Herbert Föttinger, the current director of the theatre where it was first performed in 1822 and was recorded in 2014. I don’t like Malkovich, who sounds weary and jaded and more than a little sentimental. His tone is almost entirely the same from beginning to end—driving me crazy. He does not express the meaning of words, but sing-songs like a politician. At “Es war nicht” he finally comes alive and starts to shout, but it’s too little too late and ends with a whimper.

This is part of a series of “authentic” recordings—not that anyone should care. The place it was recorded is where it was first performed (so what?), and the orchestra is small and undernourished and plays in “period” style. Surely anyone who heard them both would prefer George Szell’s recording for Decca with the Vienna Philharmonic—a far

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better orchestra than this one. Its narration is in German and wild—but understanding every word is utterly unnecessary. I am bored by the English narration here. I suppose that Goethe's text really needs to be in German to be beautiful. The German is surely more "authentic"!

The instruments sound weak and unable to convey the power of the music. The lack of vibrato is annoying, too. The notes often use the word "authentic", which I thought everyone had agreed to disregard. Well, disregard it and go for Szell.

**BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonatas 9, 10, 11, 12**
Martin Roscoe
Deux-Elles 1164 — 71 minutes

Volume 4 of Roscoe’s complete Beethoven piano sonatas delivers, as usual. I’ve mentioned in my previous reviews that his recordings of early and middle period Beethoven are precise and impeccable, and this is no different. Sonata 9 is brilliant; the third movement has driving force without rushing. 10 has a graceful first movement. It could so easily sound choppy, with its short staccato notes, but he maintains the phrasing. Excellent, clean recording.

**BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonatas 11, 15, 19, 20**
Claudio 5576—73 minutes

Beethoven describes his 11th sonata as a "grand sonata"; in this performance, originally released in 2004, the Portuguese pianist Sequeira Costa takes his time, making the piece very grand indeed—and unlike any other performance I know. Our index lists a review by Mr Linkowski of Sonatas 1-3 as well as 22, 23, and 27 (M/J 2000) where the word "plodding" describes the middle-period works in general; he calls the performance of Sonata 21 "one of the stodgier readings I have encountered", offering a number of other choices including Annie Fischer’s reading of 23 (“gripping and powerful”) along with Kempff, Serkin, Schnabel. I do agree with him about Kempff. Schnabel I frankly find too fast and too literal too much of the time. I’m not sure about Serkin, but I often find myself disappointed with his Beethoven, as if he presents a number of parts that don’t always work well together. Costa’s slower performances (especially in all of Sonatas 11 and 15 and the finale from the *Moonlight*) allow me to breathe and to think; I’m grateful for that and find myself looking forward to repeated hearings. The tone is fine (though not extraordinary). I’ll purchase the rest of the discs in the collection if I can readily find them.

**BEETHOVEN: Sonatas 23+27; Bagatelles, op 119; Rage Over a Lost Penny**
Donka Angatschewa, p
Ars 38200 [SACD] 60 minutes

Sporting an attractive coiffure, and looking similar to petite actress Dany Saval in the 1962 Disney film "Moon Pilot", Donka is a stunning beauty in four photographs. This Bulgarian pianist can also play.

Attempting to sell us yet another recording of the *Appassionata* is no easy trick, but she manages to hold our attention with subtlety of phrasing that is both arresting and beautiful, especially with the roundness and clarity of her Bosendorfer as caught by the engineers in resplendent sound.

The Andante con moto is kept flowing and never drags, and the closing movement generates considerable excitement without sacrificing tone. It is near impossible these days to produce something interpretively new in such a well-known piece, but there is great satisfaction in hearing everything done correctly, yet sounding fresh. This is also the case with the two movements of Sonata 27. Of course every performance of Beethoven is an opportunity to seduce one anew with the genius of the music. That so many fail can be seen by an overabundance of the ordinary. In this respect I’d place Angatschewa among the top third of performers.

The *Lost Penny* has been witness to more demonstrative rages, but this one will do nicely if you do not insist on manic interpretations. The 11 Bagatelles are all sound and sane, allowing for normal blood pressure to be maintained. They are quite lovely and fully expressive, yet never dull. I would have liked to hear all of the Bagatelles, but that would mean sacrificing the sonatas. Sara Grossert’s notes continue the high quality of this excellent entry into the catalog.

Becker
BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata 29; Bagatelles
Nelson Goerner—Alpha 239—63 minutes

In food terms, the best way of describing Goerner’s sound is a medium-rare steak rather than meatloaf. Goerner’s Hammerklavier has a massive range of sound, declaring the explosive opening chords. He constructs the knotty, tangled architecture of the piece. The fugue is effortless, but one has to grasp the sense of struggle with one’s demons—or of mastering late Beethoven.

The Bagatelles are warm. His ability to produce a warm, singing tone is second to none, apparent in Bagatelle 3. The fiery Bagatelle 2 contains notes of Bach in its precision and metricality.

KANG

BEETHOVEN: Quartets 1-6
Cypress Quartet—Avie 2348 [2CD] 2:38

After a 20-year career, the Cypress Quartet played their last concert on June 26, going out at the top of their game, as Paul Hertelendy testified in his review of a March concert (J/A 2016) and as I testify in this review of their final installment of Beethoven’s complete quartets. It was recorded just a year ago at Skywalker Sound with mellow tone, ideal balance, and warmth.

I surrender completely to the Cypress’s beauty, musicality, and technical perfection in Quartets 1, 3, 4, and 5. They feel so completely comfortable with the music, as if it flows in their very blood. They play with easy unforced pacing, rhythmic alertness, and attention to every—and I mean every—one of Beethoven’s expressive markings in a naturally flowing, musical manner without ever sounding slavish or exaggerated. All four instruments taper and shade phrases into an integrated whole. I can’t recall another string quartet recording where all four instruments are so equally present and audible, allowing the second violin and viola to do their jobs in shaping each quartet’s harmonic flow.

In 5 listen to the natural placement of the viola’s melody line near the start of II, or in 1 hear the fluid linking of the fast 8th, triplets, and 16th notes in IV—the players weight the rapid notes so perfectly that the rhythms simply dance. Their naturalness makes everything sound so simple, yet we know it’s not. Or listen to the opening of 3—has one ever heard more comforting musicality? The players’ clear enunciation of notes is wrapped in exquisite softness. One secret in II to their expressively shaped phrases is the way they vary their vibrato from a completely flat tone to a rich poignant one. In 4 the pacing of I is typically steady, yet it never feels on autopilot. And in V their buoyant lyricism, accents, and contrasts between legato and articulation keep the theme-and-variations movement interesting right to the end.

With six quartets on two discs, each running 79 minutes, one can wonder whether they either rush or cut some of the repeats. They never rush in 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. And they take all the repeats except the long repeats of the second half of 4 and 6’s opening movements (both wise decisions lest the music wear out its welcome). Also, as customary, they skip the repeats in the recaps following the third movement trio sections in all six quartets.

My problem in 2 is with the first two movements where the slow pacing and character don’t fit the music. The Cleveland Quartet on Telarc is peerless here. And in 6 all the movements feel just an edge pushed forward; p markings sound mf, and the players’ usual exquisite nuances are missing. III is not playful enough, and they don’t maintain the melancholy character of the introduction to IV, though the Cypress’s musicality does return in IV’s allegretto sections. These quartets were recorded over a three-week period, and this one sounds a bit like horses feel after a long trip as they get near the barn. In 6 the Tokyo Quartet’s 1992 RCA recording is better.

Ah, but the other four quartets here are not to be missed!

FRENCH

BEETHOVEN: Serenade, op 25; Mozart Variations; MOZART: Flute Quartets in D+A; BACH: Air on the G String
Aralee Dorough, fl; others
Dorough 0—65 minutes

Serenade: SCHUBERT: Variations; SCHUMANN: 3 Romances; 3 Songs
Ransom Wilson, fl; Peter Frankl, p
Nimbus 6309—64 minutes

Aralee Dorough has played with the Houston Symphony since 1985, and she plays with elegance, ease, and impeccable intonation. The three string players, two wind players, and pianist who join her are also superb. In addition, luscious sound immediately wows you from the very first track of this release. This assortment of chamber music demonstrates a

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new development that allows the flute to be played vertically like the other wind instruments. The change in orientation is made possible by a headjoint developed by Sanford Drelinger called the UpRite. It does not change any of the keys on the instrument or anything downstream of the headjoint. This distinguishes it from the vertical flute developed by Carlo Tommaso Giorgi (1856-1953) in 1886, which has a different key system and acoustics from the modern concert flute. In appearance it is merely a modern flute with a bend you’ve never seen. Regardless of the engineering involved, it sounds splendid and perfectly familiar here. You can see it played at araleedorough.com and you can hear it presented admirably well on this release.

Ransom Wilson always plays with a full sound, even at a soft dynamic level, and can make even the bad notes on the instrument sound as good as all the rest. Peter Frankl has recorded the complete piano works of Schumann and Debussy. If all you did was listen to this rendition of the Schubert, you’d never know that measures and sections of Variation 5 are marked forte and piano, or that Variation 5 ends forte and Variation 6 begins pianissimo.

It’s practically all the same here, and texture and range seem to be determining how loud or soft something is. This is otherwise a very precise and accomplished performance in clear sound. The Beethoven seems to have more energy and certainly has more contrast. The Schumann selections are dark and delicious, with all the beauty and mystery you’d expect.

Since this program was recorded in March 2014, the program notes on Beethoven and Schubert were among the last writings of Malcolm MacDonald, who would die that May. Adrian Farmer adds the background about Schumann. Although the Beethoven and Schumann are the best played, they are also slight enough in interest and common enough that most readers have other recordings already.

GORMAN

Beethoven: Symphony 9
Benita Valente, Janice Taylor, Richard Leech, William Stone; Atlanta Symphony/ Robert Shaw
Telarc 1007—66 minutes

This release celebrates the centenary of Shaw’s birth in 1916 and also documents his final concert on May 21, 1988 as Music Director in Atlanta. Back in the years after WW II Shaw was acknowledged as America’s pre-eminent choral conductor, mainly with the Collegiate Chorale and later with the Robert Shaw Singers. It was Shaw who prepared the chorus for Toscanini’s Ninth with the NBC Symphony in 1952. A little later his interests branched out toward the symphonic repertory. His orchestral positions included Music Director of the San Diego Symphony, Associate Conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra (under Szell), and Music Director in Atlanta, beginning in 1967. He was undoubtedly a fine orchestral conductor, but many of us felt he never reached the heights he had achieved with choral music. I remember writing many years back that I wish someone would lock him up with some singers to do the complete Brahms choral literature.

The finale is where we would expect Shaw to shine, and indeed this is the high point. He begins dramatically with a strong sense of urgency; the quotes from earlier movements and the opening exposition (variations for orchestra alone) are done with dispatch. Then come the soloists. All are good, though they don’t balance well; tenor Richard Leech projects over the rest, and mezzo Janice Taylor is hard to hear. And finally the chorus. No matter how often you’ve heard this piece, there’s nothing quite like a hoard of 200 singers, trained by Shaw and sensing an “occasion”. They really sing their hearts out. For his part Shaw shows little interest in broadening the last few minutes of the piece. Rather, he keeps the tension high and pushes to the very end. I’m sure no one who was there has forgotten it.

Splendid as the finale is, I am less pleased with the earlier movements. The opening movement is paced fairly quickly, but lacks a sense of mystery, and loud sections sound heavy-footed. The scherzo is plenty fast, but again it sounds heavy, lacking in finesse. The slow movement is slow enough for me, but it would be much nicer were it softer and more expressive. I’m afraid I find this movement prosaic and too metronomic.

Dedicated Shaw fans will surely want to hear this, if only the last movement, and the applause goes on and on for nine minutes!

ALTHOUSE

Beethoven: Trios 3+5; Kakadu Variations
Swiss Trio
Audite 97.694—76 minutes

This series presents the Beethoven trios not in chronological order, but as integral concert programs. This release has a very lovely ambience and sound, something that I think is
overlooked in many recordings. The Swiss Piano Trio has a fine pedigree and has won many awards.

There is certainly some stiff competition from other giants such as the Vienna Trio (MDG) and Perlman-Ashkenazy-Harrell (EMI), but these performances stand up well and are noteworthy for their attention to dynamic detail, beautiful timbre, and expressive sensitivity. Nothing is lacking here, and these recordings perhaps have a little edge in that the performers have studied historical information, such as metronome markings as noted by Czerny.

HAMILTON

**BEETHOVEN: Violin Sonatas**

Andrew Dawes; Jane Coop, p

Skylark 101 [3CD] 229 minutes

Andrew Dawes played first violin in the Orford Quartet (1965-1991) and in the Tokyo Quartet (1995-96). He is professor emeritus of music at the University of British Columbia, where Jane Coop also teaches.

These are fine performances of the sonatas. Dawes and Coop are obviously partners, and neither eclipses the other. I would like a more aggressive, explosive approach to this music, though, with more contrast of moods, not only between movements but even in a single phrase. Beethoven’s music must be explosive, and he seems to have been the composer aware of the uses of gunpowder (it was the age of Napoleon, after all). Dawes and Coop are a bit too polite for this music, and my top recommendation for a complete set remains Augustin Dumay and Maria Joao Pires (M/J 2003) followed very closely by Gidon Kremer and Martha Argerich (J/F 1998).

MAGIL

**BEETHOVEN: Duo; see HOFFMEISTER Piano Sonata 14; see MOUSSORGSKY**

**BERG: Songs**

Julia Bentley, mz; Kuang-Hao Huang, p

Centaur 3459—69 minutes

Yes, Berg wrote songs other than the 7 Frühe Lieder and here, finally, is a program of 46 of them. The songs are wonderfully varied. Notes suggest that the growing independence of the voice and piano parts is reminiscent of Wolf, and it’s not hard to hear that, especially in the later songs.

Most of the songs are short—under two minutes—so if you don’t like something (hard to imagine, to be honest, as this is pretty great), it will be over soon. Because of their brevity, many songs come across as brief, but meaningful, musical asides. Sometimes it feels like an idea just gets going when it ends. It’s therefore interesting to consider that this composer will go on to create extremely complicated music with overlapping musical ideas of great depth.

The performances are excellent. Bentley’s voice is just warm enough, clear, and full of color, especially in the few moments in the extreme low register. Huang’s playing is sensitive and wonderfully warm, bringing harmonic depth to even the shortest musical idea. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL
BERNSTEIN: Touched; Anniversaries;
TAN: Traces; 8 Memories in Watercolor
Warren Lee, p—Naxos 970252—60 minutes

When I was growing up, lots of second- and third-rate pianists recorded contemporary music. This at least made it possible to hear the music, but often led to the mistaken assumption that the music had little value or importance. Well, there still are some second-rate pianists recording contemporary music, but they are better players than the ones of yesteryear.

Warren Lee is a first-rate artist, and this program of miniatures by Bernstein and Tan is exquisite in every respect. The pairing of the two composers is ideal in that both attempt an alchemy of various musical traditions in their work, and both write very well for the piano. The music is attractive, expertly made, and not well represented in the catalog. (The Bernstein works, for instance, have appeared only a handful of times; and Tan’s Traces seems absent save this release.)

Lee’s playing responds imaginatively to the music, and he has a masterly range of colors—very important in programs of short works like this one. One footnote: Lee’s headshot includes a Henle edition of Beethoven, but we haven’t had any Beethoven recordings from him. I hope some show up before too long.

HASKINS

BOWLES: Piano Pieces
Invencia Duo—Naxos 559786—59 minutes

Paul Bowles (1910-99), the distinguished novelist (The Sheltering Sky and others) was also a composer: in fact, he considered it his primary avocation. Naxos is releasing his complete piano music on two discs, and this is the first. These pieces are very short, with the notable exception of the 2-Piano Sonata, a 13-minute, three-movement effort that closes the program. The remaining 8 pieces bounce around various topics. They were written between 1933 and 1947, thus reflecting the years preceding and including WW II. His language is “polytonal”, as one would hear in so much French-inspired music of the time. Thematic material is amorphous, there’s a little jazz influence, and the effect is improvisational and personal to the point of obscurity. Poulenc and the lesser known members of Les Six come to mind. A few pieces reflect Bowles’s interest in Latin America. Some are portraits of friends and colleagues, two of whom contributed little sketches (Virgil Thomson and Leonard Bernstein); most of them will be unknown to the rest of us.

In spite of Mr Bowles’s deserved reputation, the music is really unworthy of serious consideration. Most of these are solo pieces (with the obvious exception of the 2-Piano Sonata, which is hardly “one of the best-kept secrets of American piano music”) The fine pianists are Andrey Kasparov and Oksana Lutsyshyn.

GIMBEL

BRAHMS: Cello Sonatas
Marie-Elisabeth Hecker; Martin Helmchen, p
Alpha 223—53 minutes

The two Brahms cello sonatas are some of the greatest ever written. They are different in mood from each other, though it seems that the slow movement of Sonata 2 may have originally been intended for Sonata 1, which does not have one (doesn’t need one). There have been so many great recordings of them that finding a place for a new one is always a question. This one has its points of interest that may attract us.

Now in her late 20s, Marie-Elisabeth Hecker has become one of the outstanding cellists of her generation. Her husband Martin Helmchen clearly works very well with her, making this new recording sensitive and musical. The sonic balances and unity of timing between the players are impressive. The phrasing is sometimes unusual, causing me to think that there is a certain difference between a man’s and a woman’s approach to life (I can’t imagine where I got that idea!). That doesn’t mean that the phrases sound wrong to me; they merely differ from my own conception. The recorded balance is excellent.

D MOORE

BRAHMS: Clarinet Quintet;
BRUCE: Gumboots
Julian Bliss, cl; Matthew Denton, Michelle Fleming, v; Eoin Schmidt-Martin, va; Emma Denton, vc
Signum 448—58 minutes

British clarinet soloist Julian Bliss continues his feverish recording activity with the UK-based Carducci Quartet, a globe-trotting ensemble that hosts festivals in both Gloucestershire and Castagneto-Carducci, Italy, the town that gave the Quartet its name.

While the Brahms Clarinet Quintet is the headline work, Bliss aims to promote a recent piece for clarinet and string quartet by Ameri-
can-born British composer David Bruce. It is titled *Gumboots* and takes its inspiration from Gumboot dancing, which was born in the Apartheid era in South Africa. The labor class who toiled in the gold mines endured dangerous and inhuman conditions and cruel bosses who chained the workers together and didn’t allow them to talk to each other. When the mines flooded, the company preferred giving the workers Wellington boots, or gumboots, instead of draining the water.

Over time, the miners developed a system of secret communication through stomping feet and rattling chains; and when this message ritual reached the surface, it was instantly popular. Some of the mining companies even took their workers on tour, where in front of knowledgeable audiences they would mock their employers and pass on important information. Today, Gumboot dancing is a living cultural practice in South Africa, and some troupes dress in the old miner uniforms as a reminder of the tradition’s brutal origins.

The performances are solid, rendered with outstanding clarity, technique, and teamwork. Bliss is right about the Bruce; it is a superb and exciting contribution that immediately deserves a place in the repertoire, and the recording is very convincing. Bliss and the Carducci Quartet tackle the composer’s folk idiom with relish, crafting the haunting prelude with a raw and organic soundscape and filling the five dances with rhythmic thrust and breathtaking virtuosity.

The Brahms is nicely played, too, but the interpretation doesn’t seem to fit the composer. The textures are too gossamer, the array of color is too narrow, the slow movements are too hurried, and the general music making stays too much at the surface.

**BRAHMS & GERNSHEIM: Piano Quintets**

Formosa Quartet; Reiko Uchida, p

Delos 3497—72 minutes

It was a good idea to couple one of Brahms’s best chamber works with one by a loyal Brahms follower—the more so as the Gernsheim is itself a fine piece. In the Gernsheim (1897) I begins forcefully, with a striding piano figure cleverly blended into a limpid, dance-like theme worthy of a good Strauss waltz. The movement is full of ingratiating stuff, contrastng likeable melodies with dramatic writing of resounding richness. Gernsheim’s skill handling key-changes gives the material constant freshness. It begins with intimate music till the piano brings in a more forced passage reinforced with agitated strings. After it subsides there’s a calmer theme with transparent accompaniment. In the closing the piano has some tart dissonances. Gernsheim manages their resolution with a sure hand. III, the scherzo, has a good tune over some perpetual-motion rhythms. It’s so spontaneous in mood and seamless in construction that it sounds like the composer wrote it complete in one sitting.

**BRAHMS: Piano Concerto 1; Ballades**

Paul Lewis; Swedish Radio/ Daniel Harding

Harmonia Mundi 902191—72 minutes

Paul Lewis, now in his 40s, is one of our finest pianists. He has been impressive in recording all of Beethoven’s sonatas and concertos, but I have particularly liked his Schubert, whose music suits his gifts of color and lyrical phrasing.

Since Lewis is primarily a master of nuance, it might seem that Brahms’s first concerto would not be a good vehicle for him, but my fears were unfounded. The opening movement, taken rather broadly and heavily by Harding and his orchestra, has plenty of strength and spine; Lewis matches this approach very well. In this movement and also the finale he is easily the match for the power of the orchestra. That said, the slow movement (and the more poetic sections of the outer movements) are probably the most memorable and special.

This recording will do nothing to diminish Lewis’s reputation, but I prefer the pacing of the Kovacevich recording (with Sawallisch), which has long been my benchmark. There the opening movement is quicker and less bombastic (plus Sawallisch’s LPO is a better orchestra), the slow movement is a full minute slower, and the finale is a minute faster. So, while I could easily live with Lewis, it’ll be Kovacevich’s Brahms that’ll get thrown on the pile for the desert island.

The four *Ballades*, also early Brahms, play to Lewis’s lyrical strengths. He does play them rather quickly, which works well for me since the music maintains its shape and still doesn’t sound rushed. My only objection would be with the opening of the second ballade, where I would prefer more lingering. These performances do not sound anxious, but the pianist has no interest in dawdling.

A fine recording, if not quite top of the heap.

ALTHOUSE
The final movement has a heavy, stamping rhythm then a songful melody. Another important element is an ascending theme with swirling strings all around it. The piece ends in a mood of elation. It gives an idea of the Gernsheim’s value to note that it holds its own against its discmate.

The Formosa’s reading of the familiar Brahms is thrilling from end to end. It’s a personal quirk, but I’ve always felt that Brahms’s work and this one especially, benefits from vigorous rhythms, clear phrasing, and a solid, gritty string tone. It certainly gets them here. The scherzo—a movement even Brahms-haters enjoy—is a knockout, irresistible in its precision and verve. I’ll presume the Gernsheim is as excellent an interpretation. There are many great readings of the Brahms, but the genius of this one, plus an off-beat and valuable coupler, slides a thumb onto the scale.

O’CONNOR

Brahms: Piano Quintet; Quartet 1
Natacha Kudritskaya; Brodsky Quartet
Chandos 10892—77 minutes

The Brodsky Quartet has been around since 1972, though only two members are original (violinist Ian Belton and cellist Jacqueline Thomas). They have an impressive resume of more than 3000 concerts and 60 recordings, though they may be best known for their crossover collaborations with musicians like Elvis Costello and Paul McCartney. They are joined in the quintet by Natacha Kudritskaya, a pianist from the Ukraine.

These are worthy performances with no disqualifying factors. All tempos are in the normal range, and the Brodsky plays musically, stressing the more lyrical sides of the quartet. In the quintet Kudritskaya, who is both young and trained in the Russian school (Tchaikovsky Academy in Kiev), brings strength and a fiery spirit to the whole ensemble.

The quintet, then, seems better than the quartet, but in truth I did not find anything distinctive enough to dislodge other recordings from the shelf. The recorded sound is fine, but first violinist Daniel Rowland emerges with too wiry a sound. So I’ll stick with others: the Chimara Quartet in the quartet (M/J 2014) and perhaps the Emerson with Fleisher in the quintet (an interesting, nuanced reading, S/O 2007).

O’CONNOR

Brahms: Piano Sonata 1; Pieces
Nada—Mei 0—64:33

Another pianist who thinks she only needs one name. She also thinks she can write her own notes, but she can’t. I guess she can play the piano, but I don’t like her playing at all. It is stiff, graceless, even spastic. She claims the underpedaling is deliberate, because Brahms played lighter pianos in Hamburg. O dear.

The sonata is chaotic and makes no sense. The Hungarian Variations that open the program don’t hang together at all. And where did she get the idea that you could play organ chorale preludes on the piano—”first time recorded on the piano”, she tells us. Well, there’s a reason for that.

VROON

Brahms: Serenade 1; Dvorak: Serenade
Boston Symphony Chamber Players
BSO 1601—72 minutes

Scholars have postulated an original Nonet for the Brahms Serenade in D, so Alan Boustead has made a nonet arrangement of the serenade, and that is what we hear here. Besides the scholarly excuse, the notewriters invoke the further excuse that the orchestral version—the only one Brahms approved and allowed to survive—is never played. (But there are wonderful recordings by people like Leonard Slatkin and Istvan Kertesz.)

Sorry, but I hate this kind of second-guessing on the part of musicologists. Brahms never even suggested a nonet version and published and promulgated the orchestral serenade. I will continue to listen to that with great joy but will never listen to this again, no matter how fine the Boston musicians are.

And the Dvorak was written and published as a Serenade for Strings, but again the scholars (witchdoctors) have posited an original for clarinet, bassoon, horn, two violins, viola, double bass, and piano. It sounds really weird; and again, I have no use for these scholarly constructs; they are sheer fantasies, and they do not represent the wishes of the composers.

So the only thing to say is that you may like arrangements by others of what the composers wrote—and you are welcome to them.

VROON

72
September/October 2016
Brahms: Songs; Piano Pieces
Donna Brown, s; Jane Coop, p; Yariv Aloni, va
Skylark 1501—72 minutes

A conductor I worked with once referred to himself as a “Mozart freak”; in the same vein I suppose I would call myself a “Brahms freak”. I’ve been somewhat enamored of the music and the man since graduate school, and I was happy to see an entire album of his music that included so many of the songs. I’ve heard all the famous criticisms of the songs (they’re not interesting, he didn’t set the best poetry, etc.) and they all sound like musicological snobbery to me. The music is compelling, and one doesn’t have to like a poem to appreciate what a composer has to say about it.

This program is all the more interesting because it doesn’t include the sort of songs we consider “greatest hits”. Instead, we get the ethereal ‘Lerchengesang’, the playful ‘Blinde Kuh’, the nostalgic ‘O Wüst Ich Doch den Weg Zurück’, the golden ‘Meine Lieder’ (but with a couple of wrong notes), and the hopeless ‘Es Hing der Reif’.

The Op. 117 intermezzi for solo piano and the two Op. 91 songs for alto and viola round out the program. The latter is an odd inclusion on a recording sung by a soprano. Brown manages them well, as have other sopranos, but I miss the timbre of a lower voice.

The performances aren’t bad, but nothing stands out. There’s little to suggest that these songs that don’t get much attention should. I love the feeling of gentle intimacy I get from so much of Brahms’s music; but there isn’t much of that here, either. No notes, texts, or translations.

Brahms: Symphonies 3 & 4
Brandenburg Orchestra/ Howard Griffiths
Klanglogo 1514—72 minutes

Unobjectionable.

I realize nobody is very happy with one-word reviews like that, but it fits. I listened with pleasure to music that I like and that doesn’t seem distorted in any way—this despite the fact that the notes claim a special “authenticity” for these performances. (Ugh!)

In each case when the symphony was over I thought of better recordings—readings with more majesty, more sensitivity, more richness, more expression. There are many.

The orchestra (from Frankfurt near Berlin) sounds very good and is recorded beautifully. I just think that since this music has been recorded so often by almost every conductor, this would have to be special to deserve a recommendation. It is not special, but it’s not bad either.

Vroon

Brahms: Trios; Double Concerto
Shaham-Erez-Wallfisch Trio
Nimbus 5934 [2CD] 121 minutes

Brahms wrote three piano trios, but the one you can’t live without is No. 1 in B. It starts right out as one of the most beautiful pieces of music you will ever hear. And its recording history is glorious, because it seems to affect musicians the way it affects music lovers: they can’t bear to rush thru it or treat it as if it’s just so many notes. They love it, and so we love the way they play it. (By the way, Brahms revised it later in life, which improved it immensely; never bother with the “original version”)

The first recording I knew was by Stern-Istomin-Rose (Columbia, later Sony, 1966). It is still wonderful, though Stern doesn’t sound as good as some later violinists. Then in 1989 the Fontenay Trio—a German group—recorded it for Teldec, and I had a new favorite. In 2008 a Dutch group, the Storioni Trio, recorded it in SACD sound for Pentatone—and that may be the best ever.

But the one at hand (2015) is also very good. The Shaham here is Hagai, not Gil, but he sounds good and is also Israeli. I like his smooth, laid-back, unneurotic sound very much. (The violin can certainly be too high-strung for me!) Everyone knows Rafael Wallfisch, the excellent English cellist, and no one ever heard of Arnon Erez, the pianist—but the three together are wonderful.

I will not add this to the three I already have—one mustn’t be greedy and compulsive about collecting—but if I had only one recording of this I might want this for a second.

Trio 2 has a nice Andante, played more beautifully by the Storiano on Pentatone. Trio 3 (C minor) is more concise than the other two. Its slow movement is III; it’s an Andante and takes only four minutes. (In Trio 1 the Adagio takes twice as long, but you never want it to end.) I prefer Trio 3 to 2—always have, but I’m not sure I could explain why. It’s nicely played here.

Vroon

American Record Guide 73
BLAHMS: Piano Sonata 3; see FRANCK
Violin Sonata 2; see Szymanowski

BRANDMAN: Firestorm Symphony; Undulations; Lyric Fantasy; Binna Burra Dreaming; Love Brings Change; Eastern Spinebill; Autumn Rhapsody; Jucaro Rhumba d’Amor; Spirit Visions
Vit Muzik, v; Lucie Kaucka, Margaret Brandman, Marcello Maio, p; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky—Navona 6041—80 minutes

Margaret Brandman is an Australian composer and piano pedagogue. Her writing is mostly tonal, and her harmonies are the only relatively interesting part of the program. The rhythms are stultifying. Everything sounds like it was written at a computer—in fact, I had a very hard time convincing myself that the Moravian Philharmonic itself isn’t just a big synthesizer, since the attacks, releases, and dynamics are so flat and the ambience so shallow.

Love Brings Change is a syrupy adagio for strings, and it’s pretty in the same way that the scoring in a 1950s pop ballad is. Binna Burra Dreaming, for violin and piano, shows some promise, though it’s constantly interrupted by clichés and hindered by Brandman’s halting phrases. Vit Muzik’s tender violin makes a good case for it, even if it and the nasal piano seem to have been recorded in two different halls. He and Kaucka have no clue what to do with ‘Jucaro Rhumba d’Amor’; it’s so neutered and unidiomatic that it’s almost comic. Spirit Visions, with the composer and Maio at two pianos, is even worse—no more than a square-phrase John Tesh rip-off. I’ll admit to having flayed a lot of composers for a lot of reasons over the last several years, but rarely have I heard music so distinctly amateur in style and unambitious in design.

BRAUNFELS: Mass
Simone Schneider, Gerhild Romberger, Christian Elsner, Robert Holl; Berlin Philharmonic Chorus, Singakademie, Konzerthaus Orchestra/ Jörg-Peter Weigel—Capriccio 5267—75 minutes

I guess you’ll be forgiven if you’ve never heard of Walter Braunfels (1882-1954). He had achieved considerable popularity in Germany in the 1920s, but his Jewish identity sent his music into eclipse. After the war he was ignored by the musical establishment because his style (basically tonal) was no longer current. Recent performers have hardly been more kind; the ARG index shows about a dozen reviews of his music over more than a quarter century.

This mammoth setting of the Mass was premiered in 1927 under Hermann Abendroth; it was given a few performances and then not heard again for more than 80 years. In 2010 Manfred Honeck conducted it in Stuttgart, followed by this 2013 performance, done in Berlin by Jörg-Peter Weigel.

Braunfels’s style has been compared to many composers, most commonly Mahler and Strauss, but you wouldn’t mistake him for either. The music is constantly inventive with nicely varying textures, and the orchestration is very effective. Though it is basically tonal, it is never syrupy triadic; the lengthy fugal section in the Credo (“Et vitam venturi...”) is particularly impressive. After the heat and complexity of the Gloria and Credo the music takes a long period of conciliation. Both Offertory and Sanctus are fairly tranquil, after which Braunfels inserts a short Interlude for organ and then a long orchestral introduction to the Benedictus. The Agnus Dei is particularly lovely, the oft-repeated “Dona nobis pacem” serving as a cruel reminder of what his future would entail. Anyone interested in post-romantic oratorios should know this piece.

The performance itself, recorded in concert in the Berlin Philharmonie, gives an excellent account of the piece. Among the soloists Robert Holl sounds very nasal, but the others are very good. Likewise the choruses, joined occasionally by a children’s choir, are well prepared and spirited, particularly in the unbuttoned Gloria. A fine tribute, then, to a composer who deserved a better fate.

ALTHOUSE

BRIDGE: Violin Sonata; see Collections

Britten: Serenade: Instrumental Pieces
Allan Clayton, t; Richard Watkins, hn; Mate Szucs, va; Aldeburgh Strings/ Markus Daunert—Linn 478—55 minutes

In the summer of 1942 Britten met the brilliant young horn player Dennis Brain and began to imagine writing a horn concerto for him. Britten’s publisher, Erwin Stein, suggested he write an orchestral song cycle with horn obbligato for tenor Peter Pears and Brain. The resulting Serenade, Op. 21, become an instant success and has continued to be one of his most popular works. His settings of texts by Charles Cotton, Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Blake, Ben Jonson, and John Keats reflect on
the dying of the day and metaphorical themes of loss, guilt, fear, dread, and troubled sleep.

Pears and Brain recorded the Serenade in 1953 with Eugene Goosens and the New Symphony of London (J/A 2011). Pears recorded it again for Decca in 1963 (reissued by London in 1993) with Barry Tuckwell and the London Symphony conducted by the composer—the benchmark recording.

Many fine tenors have recorded the work, including Schreier (J/F 1996), Butterfield (M/A 1999), Bostridge (J/F 2000), Johnson (N/D 2004), Toby Spence (J/A 2005), Langridge (J/A 2005), and Padmore (S/O 2012)—all reviewed by Mr Parsons.

I find much to like in each. Each of them has a more felicitous sound than Pears's "strangulated, drowning-the-cat timbre" as David Mellor describes it in the Daily Mail of March 2016—though it must be granted that Pears had a great sensitivity to the texts.

This recording has the advantage of first-rate sound; a superb horn player who is at least the equal of Brain or Tuckwell with an even greater range of tonal nuance, and a singer who simply has a more pleasant sound than Pears. His voice is lighter and softer than others, but he tempers it to fit the text—restful and serene in the opening 'Pastoral'; splendidly declamatory in 'Nocturne'; appropriately spectral and rising to near panic before subsiding in 'Dirge'; nimble and "excellently bright" in Hymn; and clearly conveying the sense of letting go in 'Sonnet' as he "seals the hushed casket of the soul".

Clayton’s articulation of the melismatic passages in 'Hymn' shows agile technique with a carefully moderated aspired articulation of the passage, which is entirely preferable to a blur of sound. Each time I listen to his singing I find more to like. This is another exceptional performance of the Serenade, and it stands up well against the competition. The string playing is brilliant in the Serenade—light, nimble, and ethereal—just as it is in the works that begin the program: Young Apollo; Lachrymae; and Prelude and Fugue.

Britten composed Young Apollo on commission from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and was pianist in its first performance in August 1939. With words from 'Hyperion' by John Keats, this tone poem for solo piano and strings describes the transition of power from the old gods to a new order of youthful deities. After only two performances Britten withdrew the work and it was not heard again until 1979, three years after he died. It is now known that he suppressed the work because of criticism over his infatuation for the son of German conductor Hermann Scherchen at a time of war between his nation and Germany.

Prelude and Fugue was composed in 1943 in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Boyd Neel String Orchestra with a separate part for each of the orchestra's 18 players—a piece, as the notes remark, that finds Britten "indulging in the exuberant technical wizardry of his youth".

The more substantial and mature Lachrymae (subtitled "Reflections on a Song of Downland") was composed in 1954 for the Scottish violist William Primrose in the form of a seamlessly evolving set of variations. Mate Szucs gives a fine performance that is both virtuosic and poetic.

The Aldeburgh Strings is an ensemble of musicians-in-training of Aldeburgh Music’s Britten-Pears Young Artist Program, which continues the composer's work of developing young musicians. Mentoring is supplied by members of prominent European orchestras. Their wonderfully vibrant, secure, and searching playing is beautifully recorded.

Violinist and director Markus Daunert is leader of both the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. Mate Szucs is principal viola of the Berlin Philharmonic.

Notes and texts.
guitar should be amplified. Apparently, he’s finally thrown in the towel and given up orchestrating carefully so the guitar can be heard on its own.

And, I suppose, I have, too. I really enjoyed this work, which reminds me a bit of El Decamerón Negro. It was written to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Tarrega’s birth, though it has little to suggest any of his influence. Even the tremolo in the third movement cadenza is not at all like Tarrega’s. And the orchestra part is not only particularly colorful, but brilliantly executed. The orchestra sounds terrific, and Díaz’s conducting is beautifully matched to the music.

Another discovery is the orchestral arrangement, by the composer, of Frank Martin’s Quatre Pieces Breves. The work was intended for Segovia, but was too “modern” for his taste, so he never played it; and it was only popularized when Bream recorded it in the 60s. He later made a piano arrangement, and still later this orchestral version, called Guitarre. I’m not surprised I had never heard of it—this is the world premiere recording, though the arrangement was done in 1934. It works beautifully, and I was amazed how Martin changed his somewhat spare, neoclassical guitar solo into a highly colorful and frankly dramatic orchestral work. It’s a fascinating and effective transformation. Be aware that this is only for orchestra—there’s no guitar. Any guitar-like passages are given to the harp.

The disc is filled out with a really fine Aranjuez. The competition is fierce in this work, of course, but Trapaga is as fine as any but the very finest—for me, Pepe Romero on Philips with the ASMF and Weifei Yang with Barcelona (M/J 2011). And, again, the Galician orchestra sounds superb.

Two fascinating world premieres and a first-rate Aranjuez, excellent performances, wonderful sound, and a Naxos price. You can’t beat that.

A study published in Psychological Science in 2014 reveals that musical ability is certainly genetic. No matter how many years you practice intensely, if you don’t have the innate genetic talent for music it won’t do any good. Playing an instrument or singing well is a physical skill and takes years of study, but only people with inherent musical ability can master it. And even the ability to concentrate and practice is essentially inherited.

BROUWER: Concerto Elegiaco; see Collections

BRUCE: Gumboots; see BRAHMS

BRUCH: Chamber music
3 Quartets
Diogenes Quartet—Brilliant 95051—80 minutes

Quartet, op 9; Piano Quintet; Swedish Dances
Goldner Quartet; Piers Lane, p
Hyperion 68120—78 minutes

The news here is the early Quartet in C minor, which was discovered only in 2013. This is very likely its first recording. He wrote it when he was 14, and it was never published. He wrote the two numbered quartets when he was 18 (Opus 9) and 22 (Opus 10); he never went back to the string quartet.

He is always a likeable composer; there’s always real melody and good rhythms. And he never sounds purely imitative. I hear some Mendelssohn, some Schubert; but it’s all Bruch. Since he never published the early quartet, he felt free to use the Scherzo and the melody of the Adagio again in Opus 9. You would think the later work better, more mature—but I prefer the unpublished quartet for its simplicity and naivete. Scholars knew there had been an earlier quartet, but I’ll bet some are surprised at how good it is, now that it has surfaced.

Opus 9 is on both of these discs, and the two published quartets have been recorded before (N/D 1998, for example). Perhaps my usual prejudices are operating here, but I prefer the German group (Diogenes) to the English (Goldener). The English are finely tailored and technically immaculate, but the Germans have more soul. I usually feel that way. If you prefer the English style, help yourself. I admit that especially in IV of Op. 9 the English are very good, but you’ll need the Diogenes recording to hear the early quartet.

The Hyperion recording adds the Piano Quintet and Swedish Dances. The latter are modeled on the Brahms Hungarian Dances, and as is the case with them, we are more likely to hear orchestral versions. Bruch loved the orchestra, so he made the orchestral versions, as he did the two-piano versions. But he wrote them first for violin and piano, and that’s how you can hear them here. Dene Olging, first violinist of the quartet, plays them—and leaves me bored. It’s not entirely his fault; I never liked them orchestrated either. But most listeners will prefer the orchestral dances (on
The piano quintet is a nice piece; Carl Bauman called it "high-spirited romanticism in full flower" (J/A 1992). He was reviewing the recording by the Piitipudas Quintet on EDA. That group is Finnish and much more down to earth than the English group on Hyperion. Again, if you value slick, brilliant, playing and sound over the continental warmth and atmosphere, you may prefer this. I thought I might, because some of the tempos are slower—but tempos are not everything. This is cold next to the Finns. Ulf Hoelscher's recording for CPO is also warmer than this one, and he has an unruffled playing style that appeals to me (J/A 1999).

This program is from Christian Thielemann's inaugural concert that marked his assumption of the Music Directorship of the Dresden Staatskapelle in 2012. It is also my introduction to Thielemann's Bruckner. Until now, I had known it only through a few favorable, though not ecstatic, reviews in ARG (S/O 2005, N/D 2010, M/J 2013). My response to this Seventh is similar: good, solid, thoughtful, but not among the great ones. For the most part, it moves along lyrically, with control firmly in the hands of the conductor. It is shaped and laid out in a way that is cerebral more than powerful, warm, and heartfelt. Thielemann also tends to pull back sometimes rather than drive into the music. For example, when the middle and low strings reply to the opening Wagner tuba passage of the Adagio—a great time for cellos to pour out sound for all they are worth—they hold back a little. Even the brass seem to do that sometimes. There are a few other quirks here and there, mostly odd ritards, but nothing daunting.

The booklet notes speak of the difficulty of recording in the Frauenkirche, and the results bear that out. The hall perspective is from the middle, but perhaps a few rows too far back. Far more serious is a weakness in the bass that creates the sensation of building from the top down rather than bottom up as it should be with this composer. The result is a slightly lean Bruckner that on one hand adds a rarefied nature to the performance but on the other lacks body and weight. The conductor and orchestra could also be at fault, but given the sound problem, they get the benefit of the doubt.

All that is in sharp contrast to the rich, robust performance Eugen Jochum recorded with the Dresden Staatskapelle in 1976. The recording site was St Paul's Church, not Frauenkirche. That EMI reading is one of the stars of Jochum's Bruckner set with Dresden, with its great playing, sensitive conducting, and big warm sound. Thielemann's Dresden Staatskapelle may be a bit more refined, but Jochum's power, mass, and phrasing are superior. My plaudits for the Jochum are reserved for the German or British LPs, which sound rich and dark in comparison to the rather lame Angel LPs and EMI CD reissues. That should dampen the enthusiasm of most people for Jochum's effort in Dresden, but fear not. There are many good Sevenths out there. Our Bruckner Overview recommends quite a few (N/D 1996), and I could add several more. In fact, I find it hard to find a bad recording of this symphony.

The main appeal of this set is Wagner's rarely performed Liebesmahl der Apostel (Love-Feast of the Apostles, but strictly speaking, The Feast of Pentecost). Wagner wrote it in 1843 between Flying Dutchman and Tannhauser. The first two-thirds of its half-hour length is for a capella male chorus; the orchestra joins in for the last third. The premiere, with a huge orchestra and 1,200 singers, went well enough; but Wagner was disappointed by the lack of power it generated. The a cappella section may be hard going for some people, but the music is attractive and typical of the composer at that time. It builds very well, and the entrance of the orchestra signaling the appearance of the saint to quell the disquiet of the apostles is thrilling. So is the remainder of the work, with the orchestra at full bore most of the way. The performance is a very good one, and the sound works well for this piece.

If you do not know the Wagner, this is an excellent way to discover it. It helps that the attractive booklet comes with several interesting essays on Bruckner, Wagner, the works performed, and the Wagner text with English translation. The problem is that, despite the relatively short length of the Wagner, Profil is treating this program as two full-priced discs. That stings if you have one or several Bruckner Sevenths as good or better than this one. One
Imagine that you were watching a performance of Hamlet and the action stopped, the Prince came forward and a soliloquy started: "I don’t know whether it’s worth staying alive. I feel abused by the arrogance of my uncle. I don’t believe that I am being treated properly. But if I died, my consciousness might be darkened by the memories of what led to my suicide. And there is no chance that I know of that I could come back to life from that terrible place and deal with what life has thrown at me.”

You’d likely be startled.

If you know Bruckner 8 only from the commonly performed modern editions and put this disc on without looking too carefully, you could expect a similar experience. The music would seem wordy and discursive. Some of the harmonies would feel not-quite-cooked. The general orchestral sound would be more lean. And wait until you get to the end of the first movement...

Welcome to the 1887 edition of Bruckner 8. Every neglected work of art has its champions, and now the 1887 Bruckner 8 is getting its chance to shine. This is not its first recording: it’s been recorded by a number of conductors, some more than once. But this is the best one that I’ve heard and makes a good starting point for a look at what’s different about the early version.

When Bruckner finished this first version of his 8th, he sent it to Hermann Levi, a great conductor and devoted supporter. Levi, unable to understand the symphony, sent it back with a suggestion that Bruckner consider reworking it. Bruckner duly set to work on his revisions.

The revised symphony was published in 1892, but there were two (unpublished at the time) intermediate versions: 1888 (with substantial changes to the Adagio) and 1890 (with more extensive changes). 1892 is essentially 1890 with some minor cuts (and one major one).

1890 is the basis for almost all modern performances. But since this is Bruckner, things aren’t quite that simple. The 1890 publication led to two different editions. One by Robert Haas (1939) restored some of the material from 1887 that had been cut for 1890, but kept the new orchestration and the reworking of the themes and harmonies. The other, by Leopold Nowak (1955), omitted Haas’s restorations. Whether Haas or Nowak was right is a debated point. I’m content with either, though I prefer Haas because I like the extra measures of music.

What changed between the 1887 and the modern Haas and Nowak editions? Three basic things: Bruckner tightened his themes and reworked his harmonies; he changed the sound of his orchestra by going from double to triple woodwind in the first three movements (both finales have triple woodwind); and he got rid of the out-of-nowhere C-major conclusion that he had originally tacked onto the haunted minor-key wind-down of the first movement coda.

To my ears, all of these are improvements. Once you get to know it, the revised 8th is a remarkably tightly-constructed work. Even the finale, which some find discursive, holds together and builds well in good hands. The triple winds round out the orchestral sound nicely and balance the brass and strings more equally than the doubles in 1887. The revision of the first-movement coda is also a touch of inspiration.

Luisi begs to differ. He says that he prefers the austerity of the double winds, the longer version of the Adagio, and even likes the old ending of the first movement. “It’s perfect” he explains (not very helpfully).

Perfect or the beginning of a process toward a later, more perfect work? That’s a call for each listener to make.

Luisi’s conducting sounds committed and, though I’ll stay with Haas, I have to admit that he makes a case for his view. He underplays the coda to I, which means that it’s more modestly ridiculous; and he finds his way through the chattery first versions of Bruckner’s themes with grace. I don’t think the double wind sound is an improvement over the triple wind. The rich sound of the triple wind and the more terse, almost epigrammatic nature of the reworked themes both add to the forward movement of the music.

Luisi’s orchestra is the concert version of the Zurich Opera House ensemble; and, as recorded here, it sounds fine. The strings aren’t as rich as Berlin or as sweet as Vienna, but the winds and brass are a pleasure.
This version is a supplement to Haas and Nowak, not a replacement. When I want to hear this piece, I will still put on Furtwangler, Karajan, Giulini, or Wand.

**Butterworth**: Symphonies 1, 2, 4

BBC Scottish Symphony (1+2); BBC Northern Symphony/ Arthur Butterworth (1); Christopher Avey (2); Bryden Thomson (4)

Lyrita 1127 [2CD] 107 minutes

Arthur Butterworth (1923-2014) was a trumpeter in the Scottish National and the Halle orchestras. A lover of animals, he served as chairman of his local RSPCA. He eventually settled in Embsay in the Yorkshire Dales. Among his more than 150 works are seven symphonies. His idiom is tonal—his harmony can be quite mellow—but he's savvy in non-tonal expansions as well. His orchestration, especially the percussion, shows the touch of someone who's experienced what works from the heart of the orchestra itself.

In Symphony 1 (1957) I uses pulsing percussion rhythms to drive to an orchestral peak before a clear theme emerges. High woodwinds with violins take over. The ending is inconclusive. II further develops material from I. It begins with ghostly sounds, supposedly representing the composer’s walks in nearby Rothiemurchus Forest. As the music proceeds, its independent melodic lines sometimes clash. For all its variety of color, the movement leaves a unified effect. III begins with bass stirrings, then adds the snare drum and timpani. It resembles the start of the Berg Three Pieces for Orchestra, where the music assembles itself from the void. A flute melody establishes a triple meter rhythm. There's a fragile waltz with augmented harmonies and some spectral sounds over a contrabassoon solo before a frantic end. IV has rushing string passages with whooping horn calls. The strings keep up the momentum with random pulses in the percussion, then with added brass. The music modulates upward in half steps through the chromatic scale, heightening the tension. Thrusting figures from the lower brass are capped with rising and falling slurs from the trumpets. The motion seems to taper down, then speeds up to the finish with the whooping horns from the movement's start.

Symphony 2 (1964) explodes onto the scene with an orchestral outburst. A chordal trombone theme has an important role, and constant chugging rhythms underpin the movement. II is an elegy occasioned by the accidental death of Butterworth’s dog. I can sympathize. An ascending theme in the bass, picked up by other instruments, accumulates to some tremolo passages. A solo flute enters, and again the orchestra increases the heavy-hearted mood. The music has a moving close, the chimes sounding over syncopated dragging chords. The final movement has a rapid bassoon theme then a dotted violin phrase of matching speed leading to a brass motif. The conclusion is a bit dissonant. The dotted rhythm resumes until, rather than ending, the symphony just breaks off.

Symphony 4 (1986) has a brooding opening; the interval of a tritone is significant. The music has the mystery of a later Bax tone poem. A major part of the symphonic argument is the conflict between the tonalities of B minor and F minor—a tritone apart. A snare drum ostinato adds a relentless note. The hushed ending is unresolved, the strings largely in B major, with an English horn and harp still in F minor. In II, as described in Paul Conway’s excellent notes, the astringent harmonies of Berg’s Wozzeck lurk under the calm surface of the music like “nightmares waiting to claim a troubled sleep”. When they separate, the movement ends in a mix of both B minor and B major. III is absolutely ingenious in the way Butterworth combines atonal and tonal music. As usual, the tonal side can’t miss because of the underlying organization it adds to the music. It starts with a rotating theme in triple meter, containing all 12 tones of the chromatic scale, played over a G-natural pedal. The trio is a delicately scored waltz. The movement ends on a G augmented triad before moving right into the last movement. This starts with a poignant English horn solo against 12-tone cluster chords. The mood becomes more threatening; the composer wanted it played as fast as the players could handle. Florid ascending lines from woodwinds and trumpets add to the momentum. With its constant ostinato patterns, the music sounds like Sibelius’s Tapiola brought up to date. The strings continue their swirling motion, recalling themes from the other movements in an elusive, yet triumphant finale.

These are all concert performances, but the audiences are quiet till the pieces are over. The conducting sounds accomplished, and the playing, minus a few rough spots, is spirited and sympathetic. Symphonies 1 and 2 are monaural; the finale of 1 has a brief blur from its original taping. Symphony 4, here getting its
The premiere performance, is in stereo. The monaural sound is good and the tape blip minor. Compared to the high quality of these works plus the slim chance of another recording in the near future, these problems are trivial. The symphonies are anything but.

O’CONNOR

CARALHO: L’Angelica
Joana Seara (Angelica), Lidia Vinyes Curtis (Medoro), Fernando Guimaraes (Orlando), Maria Luisa Tavares (Licori), Sandra Medeiros (Tirsi),
Concerto Campestre/ Pedro Castro
Naxos 573554 [2CD] 151 minutes

Joao de Sousa Carvalho was one of the foremost Portuguese composers of his generation. After he was made court composer by Queen Maria I, he composed several works including ten “courtly serenatas”, and L’Angelica (1778) was the first. In deference to the queen, he includes in the Serenata a reference to her daughter, Princess Maria Beneditta, to whom L’Angelica is dedicated. Sousa Carvalho was recommended to the Portuguese court based on earlier works he composed in Rome and for the Spanish court.

This is a world premiere recording of this seldom heard work. The English and Portuguese booklet has explanations about Sousa Carvalho’s place in Portuguese music. The performing edition is by conductor Castro from a manuscript found in the Biblioteca do Palacio National in Lisbon. Rather than Portuguese, L’Angelica is performed in Italian.

The Serenata was performed in the royal court rooms where the nobility and a 35-piece orchestra sat on chairs, the many ladies-in-waiting sat on the floor, and everyone else stood. As this was not performed in the court theater, there were no costumes or scenery. Scene changes are abrupt—no music between the scenes. The libretto by Pietro Metastasio is based on Ludovico Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso, which inspired several other works. A libretto (in Italian, Portuguese, and English), can be downloaded, but it does not indicate where scenes begin and end, track points, recitatives, songs, or dialog.

The plot concerns the rather racy love affair between Angelica and Medoro. Angelica has already been promised to Orlando, who still loves her. Two shepherds, Licori and her boyfriend Tirsi, scheme with Angelica to hide Medoro when Orlando returns from a war. Angelica confirms to Orlando that she loves Medoro and flees the kingdom. Orlando angrily swears to heaven that he will incur vengeance on the lovers. Realizing he has blasphemed, Orlando abruptly changes his mind, asks forgiveness, and swears allegiance and thanks to Princess Maria. How the suggestive dialog and blasphemy made it past the church censors is unknown. None of this is very dramatic until Orlando’s final aria, which is lightened by a final chorus by the five players, again praising Princess Maria.

The music is very pleasant and often interesting. Although the libretto’s action is quite short, the song sequences are sometimes very long (more than 10 minutes) expanded by extensive repetition and ornamentation. If you like ornamentation, with lots of note singing with no words, you’ll enjoy this. Although more than one character may be in a scene, each character sings his part one after another so that the words are clearly heard. There is only one brief duet. As was the custom, Angelica is played by a soprano and Medoro by a mezzo. Unusual is the secondary couple’s roles. Licori (a female) is played by a mezzo-soprano, and Tirsi (a male) is sung by a soprano. Orlando is a tenor.

The performances are very good—particularly the females, who perform the music and difficult ornamentation with excellent tone and control. Less effective is Fernando Guimaraes as Orlando. He struggles with the ornamentation, often becoming breathless—the notes only approximated. In the sections without ornamentation his sound is firm and his acting compelling. The small period instrument orchestra plays beautifully under conductor Castro’s sensitive direction. The sound is excellent.

The problem with L’Angelica is that the music, characters, and scenario are not compelling, and character motivations are not made clear. The scenes changes have no leads; the characters just begin singing with little reference to the previous scene or that the scene has even changed. Orlando’s final aria of anger seems out of place considering his indifference in previous scenes. His repentance is so sudden it makes you wonder if the censors required the scene to offset his blasphemous tirade.

If you want to hear some interesting music and like ornamentation, then this is a good presentation of a court serenata of the period. Music composition had progressed far beyond the limitations of Carvalho’s Portuguese court in the operas of Gretry, Gluck, Handel, and the serenatas of Scarlatti. The booklet includes a
track list and timings, a plot synopsis and composer background in English and Portuguese. The performer biographies are only in English.

**FISCH**

**CARTER**: Clarinet Concerto; see Collections

**CERHA**: Nacht; Orchestral Pieces
SW German Radio, Cologne Radio/ Emilio Pomarico, Jukka-Pekka Saraste

Kairos 15005—64 minutes

Distinguished Viennese composer Friedrich Cerha (b. 1926), associated with Schoenberg and contemporary German music, is probably best known as a conductor and musicologist involved with creating a performing edition of Berg’s *Lulu*. This program contains two recent works for orchestra, “Late Style” par excellence.

*Nacht* (2012-13) is a 20-minute tone poem on the subject, saturated with dark night sounds and fearful gloom. The vastness of space, meteor showers, spooky atmospherics, and ubiquitous silence frame moody thoughts of resigned sadness (a touch of fear enters briefly). Bells are heard in the distance. The work ends with what seems like defeated disgust.

The Three Orchestral Pieces (2008, 2010-11) taken together are a cycle of life. The first deals with birth, in this case of stars. The central Intermezzo (the longest) depicts the motions of life with its frenetic bombast and abstract busyness, as time passes in march-masquerade like fashion. But there is always quiet mystery to be confronted, until death has the last word in a ‘Tombeau’ finale. The dreary sludge ends with bells and sleep.

**GIMBEL**

**CHARPENTIER**: Stances du Cid
Cyril Auvity, t; L’Yriade
Glossa 923601—59:32

This collection of *airs de cour* by Marc-Antoine Charpentier is a significant addition to his discography, which has been mostly recordings of his sacred music. These short secular songs demonstrate Charpentier’s ability to mirror in music the natural declamation of the texts (tender love poems). This is evident in the care he takes with the first three stanzas of Don Rodrigue’s monolog from Act I, Scene VI, of Pierre Corneille’s “tragicomedy” *Le Cid* (1637, H. 457-9) as a short song cycle, effortlessly moving from a recitative-like declamation to an aria-like use of ostinato for Rodrigue’s lamentation, much as you might expect from Monteverdi.

Three of the *airs de cour* on this new release and the *Stances du Cid* were recorded by Henri Ledroit in 1987 and reissued in 2009 (Ricercar 278). While the earlier recording was made in a drier acoustic, both Ledroit and Auvity have very similar high tenor voices, very effective in the French repertoire for *haute-contre*. While Ledroit’s recording includes two of Charpentier’s longer cantatas (*Orphé Descendant aux Enfers*, H 471, and *Épitaphium Carpentarii*, H 474), Auvity includes two *airs de cour* by Michel Lambert (‘Ma bergâtre’ and ‘Vox mepris chaque jour’) and interlaces selected movements from François Couperin’s *Nations*, creating short groups like separate vocal scenes. Both singers are supported by sensitive accompanying ensembles (for Ledroit, the Ricercar Consort). Either recording would be an important addition to any collection of French Baroque music, though the new one includes an informative essay and complete texts and idiomatic translations.

**BREWER**

**CHOPIN**: Mazurkas
Rem Urasin—Brilliant 95215 [2CD] 156 minutes

Rem Urasin was born in 1976 in Kazan and studied at the Moscow Conservatory. From his teenage years he has been recognized as a great Chopin pianist—and he is! I played the whole set twice before I knew anything about him (there is nothing in the notes), but I kept saying to myself, “here’s a great Chopin player—why haven’t I heard of him?” He has actually played everything Chopin ever wrote in concert. It might all have been written for him.

“All” the mazurkas includes a few Chopin never published and may have even suppressed. It is probable that he didn’t want all of Opp. 67 and 68 published—and to me they seem inferior to the others. He wrote mazurkas all his life, and some of them were personal tributes to specific musicians, not intended for public performance.

Chopin never played more than a few mazurkas in succession—and usually chosen from different opus groupings. He would be amazed that I can sit spellbound for 2-1/2 hours listening to all of them at once. But they are endlessly varied and fascinating—and wonderful in these performances.

I have liked mazurka sets from Michel Block, Antonio Barbosa, and Vassily Pri-
makov—and not much else on records. But this has to be added to the list of top sets. It is more chipper and alert than most—brighter and brisker—but still sensitive, with plenty of rubato where it does the most good.

CHOPIN: Piano Pieces
Barcarolle, Sonata 3, Prelude in C-sharp minor, Polonaise-Fantasy, Berceuse
Jane Coop—Skylark 9902—58 minutes

In this program of late Chopin, Jane Coop plays with poetic refinement and subtle shades of color: listen for example, to the misty opening to the Polonaise-Fantasy, played with a pastel quality I have not heard since Richter. The Berceuse is exceptionally languid, with little of the inner tension Michelangeli brings to it, but her relaxed reading has its own pleasures. Her hushed reading of the C-sharp minor Prelude is striking and soulful. Everything is lucid, civilized, unrushed, yet Coop is not afraid of the big gesture.

She is commanding in the B-minor Sonata, especially in the overtly melodic sections, articulating the big tune in I with genuine rapture, and she brings considerable fireworks to the finale. In the Polonaise-Fantasy she holds her formidable technique in reserve for the grandiose moments, and she goes for an extreme contrast in the ending. This is a satisfying release, well worth repeated hearings.

SULLIVAN

CHOPIN: 6 Polonaises; Polonaise-Fantasy
Pascal Amoyel, p
La Dolce Volta 25—64 minutes

This is one of the most attractive releases to ever come my way. The music is well known and readily available in many guises. This packaging and design make this a very special disc in ways beyond good performances and sound. French is the primary language, but translations are into English, Japanese, and German. Amoyel is in his mid-40s and a winner of various awards over the past 10 years, including a Grand Prix du Disque from the Chopin Society in Warsaw for his recording of the complete Nocturnes.

The seven Polonaises here represent all of Chopin’s mature pieces in this genre. There are three additional early ones, assigned Op. 71 after the composer’s death, composed in Poland five years before the first great Polonaise was written in Paris in 1835. There are a number of others, both extant and lost, that date back to 1817 when Chopin was 7 years old.

Amoyel takes an unusual approach to these works, and the result is similar to his Nocturnes. There are a few big moments in the Nocturnes and even some marked rhythms, but they are first and foremost lyrical and melodic. Typically we expect the opposite in the Polonaises, lyrical central sections surrounded by much more powerful music. Heroic and Military are the well-known titles for the Polonaises that Chopin only marked Maestoso and Allegro con brio. Amoyel underplays these by most standards. Tempos are more relaxed; and brilliance, while not missing at the appropriate times, is toned down in favor of melodic lines. He gave me many moments to reflect on the melodic content far more than I ever did playing these two as a teenager. I still prefer Pollini, Ashkenazy, and Horowitz, to name a few that I have heard play some of these in concert and on records; but the approach here is quite valid and should be required listening for pianists who tend to overplay. There is a lot of subtlety and nuance to be heard in these works, and no one gets more of that out of the great Polonaises than Amoyel.

HARRINGTON

CIMAROSA: Maestro di Cappella;
see PERGOLESI

CIMMARUT

&C MARCHAND: Harpsichord Pieces
Yago Mahugo—Brilliant 94790—77 minutes

This pairing of French Baroque composers is apt and fits neatly onto a single disc. All of their other harpsichord music is lost, leaving only these few suites by each from 1699-1704 and a few isolated pieces. It’s a pity, because the compositions that did survive are very satisfying to play and to listen to, near the top of the French harpsichord repertoire.

Mahugo’s performance has some impatient and skittery rushing through the Courantes and Marchand’s D-minor Gigue, making me tense as a listener. Apart from these pieces, he shapes the rest of his delivery well with a graceful manner. The harpsichord’s tone is adequately smooth, but nothing special. The meantone tuning goes awry in Marchand’s D-minor Gavotte, with messy fifths that are not a problem in the other pieces.

On the Plecrrum label, Davitt Moroney’s recording of this same program is magnificent and a clear first choice—but also much more
In many ways, Corelli was a key player in the history of western music. His development of harmony helped define the "common practice" of the Baroque. This is an enjoyable program. There is imagination in texture, ornamentation, color, tempo, and expression. Right away in the Folia variations we are hearing variety and virtuosity from the performers. Such an imaginative approach to such a piece is so necessary, since the harmony is three chords!

Enrico Onofri creates a beautiful and lyrical tone with his anonymous early 18th Century violin, so expressively played. Of note is the great variety of vibrato in different contexts: I've never heard a violinist use vibrato in such a convincing and varied manner. This is what the old treatises were talking about. The variety of expression that Onofri brings out of his instrument is a wonder. And the continuo band is rich, with violone (a large Roman cello), guitar, theorbo, and harpsichord.

The liner notes, well written by the violinist, contain an interesting discussion on the ornamentation. I think it interesting that artists speak about their interpretive choices; I wish more liner notes would have this information, rather than dry historical essays that can be googled anyway. The first volume is Passacaille 988 (M/J 2014—John Barker discusses many recordings there).

It is easier to work for the improvement of the world than to work for the improvement of oneself, though the world would profit immensely if the inverse order were followed.

RUTH ANSHEN

CORIGLIANO: Ghosts of Versailles
Patricia Racette (Marie Antoinette), Guanqun Yu (Rosina), Lucy Schaufer (Susanna), Stacey Tappan (Florentine), Patti LuPone (Samira), Lucas Meachem (Figaro), Christopher Maltman (Beaumarchais), Robert Brubaker (Begearss), Joshua Guerrero (Almaviva), Brenton Ryan (Leon); Los Angeles Opera/ James Conlon
Pentatone 5186 538 [2CD] 156 minutes

This opera is now 25 years old. In that span it has been produced in several places, usually in versions not as complete and elaborate as the original. Here, in its 2015 Los Angeles production, is a production very close to the original work seen at the Met in 1991. If one follows the libretto given here while trying at the same time to follow the libretto published by the Met at its premiere, one can find some cuts, but generally they are small changes with no major alterations in characters or plot. Some of the productions have, for example, cut the role of Samira, written originally for Marilyn Horne as a kind of cameo appearance. The role is not an easy one, and finding a mezzo with both the ability and the willingness to sing it must be difficult. In the LA production it falls to the Broadway star Patti LuPone (a longtime friend of conductor James Conlon). The switch from one kind of superstar to another works very well. So this is the first new production of the work as it was originally written.

It is quite an eclectic score. It begins with the very effective electronic sounds that represent the world of the ghosts. Later we meet Figaro in an aria that echoes the 'Largo al Factotum', only this time for an older, more experienced Figaro. There is the gorgeous quartet (or double duet) of Cherubino and Rosina joined by Beaumarchais and Marie Antoinette. As a total contrast, the villain Begearss sings his 'Song of the Worm', as cynical an outpouring as Iago's 'Credo'. Act I ends with the raucous scene in the Turkish Embassy presided over by Samira. In Act II after harrowing scenes of revolutionary violence, the composer gives us one of the great ensembles in opera, where the imprisoned Almavivas pray to God to "thank You for this moment of peace".

One of the problems in producing this original version is the huge cast. The very best singing comes from Guanqun Yu, whose soprano simply gleams in Rosina's lyric music. Also very impressive are Lucas Meachem, an excellent Figaro; Christopher Maltman, in the important role of Beaumarchais; and Lucy Schaufer as the always quick-witted Susanna. Veteran Patricia Racette sings well as the
Queen, but hers may be the most difficult assignment, following the overwhelming performance of Teresa Stratas in the original. Robert Brubaker makes an evil Beogaris, but he also has a tough act to follow. I can still feel the sense of revulsion at Graham Clark's original villain. Brenton Ryan and Stacey Tappan make a good pair of young lovers; Joshua Guerrero gives a good account of the flawed Almaviva; and Patti LuPone's Broadway razzle-dazzle seems right at home here. James Conlon is at his best in this kind of modern opera, and the LA Opera orchestra and smaller roles are all fine.

The booklet contains the text and some good articles about the work and its history.

**SININGER**

**CRUMB: Little Christmas Suite;** see FELDMAN

**CRUSELL: Wind Trio;** see SCHUBERT

**CSANYI-WILLS: Songs**

Ilona Dommich, s; Nicky Spence, t; Jacques Imbrailo, bar; Chris McKay, hn; Londamis Ensemble/Mark Eager

Toccata 329—62 minutes

This is a stunning program of orchestral songs by English composer Michael Csanyi-Wills. The first group, *Three Songs: Budapest, 1944* for soprano and orchestra, is an incredibly moving setting of two letters and one diary entry from the Nazi occupation of Hungary. The texts are from family papers of the composer. The second and third songs set a diary entry describing the occupation and a farewell letter from the composer’s great grandmother to her children “before disappearing from her flat in Budapest in October 1944”. The music is generally tonal but harmonically interesting, emotionally understated, and never sentimental. It simply lets the text and its heartbreaking history speak for itself. This is one of the most moving pieces of music on the theme of the Holocaust that I have heard.

The Housman cycle is dark and introspective in scope, though the settings for tenor are slightly warmer. The *Elegy For Our Time* is setting of text by Italian American poet Jessica D’Este in memory of her granddaughter. The piece, like the poem, wavers between the memories of love and the cold reality of those left behind by profound loss. Woodblocks on either end of the piece recur briefly in the middle—a dark reminder of the ticking clock of mortality.

Don’t miss this compelling program. Performances are excellent. Notes by the composer, texts, and translations.

**HEISEL**

**CZERNY: Piano Concerto in A minor; pieces**

Rosemary Tuck; English Chamber Orchestra/ Richard Bonynge

Naxos 573417—66 minutes

This disc is evidence that the fame of a composer is not necessarily related to the quality of output. I reviewed two other releases this issue by two composers I have never heard of: Fredrich Theodore Fröloch and Johann Wilhelm Hässler. Both seem to be at least as good as Czerny—at least I felt more engaged by their music. Clearly Czerny is a technically skilled and “professional” composer; but I just can’t get excited about this music. There is a certain predictability that is hard to get past. Also, the music seems derivative, with splashes of imitation Beethoven.

But I realize that some people would like this music, and the A-minor Concerto here may be the best performance currently on records. It also contains the first recording of the Rossini Variations. The performances are first rate, and Ms Tuck is fully up to this difficult music.

**HEISEL**

**DEBUSSY: Quartet; Syrinx; Cello Sonata; Flute, Viola, & Harp Sonata; Violin Sonata**

Kuijken Ensemble—Arcana 392—71 minutes

In the 1990s I listened most days to the “Afternoon Concert” from a college radio station back when I was first discovering classical music, and the announcer-programmer played mostly well-worn LPs shorn of their high frequencies, the needle requiring an occasional nudge when it stuck in a groove. I assumed he played decrepit records because they were classic, definitive recordings—why else suffer through compromised sound quality? So this digital disc recorded in 1999, with its curious lack of high harmonics, provoked instant nostalgia in me and a perhaps unjustified feeling that these, too, must be classic performances thanks to the dull sonics. But repeated listening made me respect and enjoy their deeper qualities, like the gutsy, even gritty intonation of the strings and all-around freewheeling spontaneity of the performances. This is enhanced by the restored straight-strung 1894Erard piano’s hollow, woody bass notes and brittle, chiseled middle register that
cuts through the sustained notes of violin and cello. This is Debussy most rude and rustic, casting aside any notions of French suavity or refinement.

If you like the sound of a much-played LP minus the crackle and hiss, plus rollicking performances, this is for you.

WRIGHT

DEBUSSY: Quartet; Girl with Flaxen Hair; Jimbo’s Lullaby (arr. for string orchestra);
TAKEMITSU: Film Scores I+II; Nostalghia
Scottish Ensemble/ Jonathan Morton
Linn 512—55 minutes

I think this might be the first recording of Debussy’s Quartet by a string orchestra; at least my scouring of the internet turned up no other. The 17 strings of the Scottish Ensemble play Jonathan Morton’s arrangement with pure, shimmering, glassy timbre and minimal vibrato—antipode to the Amaryllis Quartet’s fierce concentration that I reviewed ecstatically earlier this year (March/April; Genuin 15373). I like the beefy bass notes of the chamber orchestra—not possible from a single cello—and the interpretation is superficially beautiful but doesn’t plumb very deeply the music’s expressive depths. The two arrangements of Debussy piano pieces take the same approach: beautiful, serene, detached, bloodless.

Like Debussy, Takemitsu was inspired by imagery, especially by movies. The two Film Scores pieces are from his own movie scores, and Nostalghia is a tribute to a director he admired. The latter, last piece on the program, is bleak and expressionistic, a depiction of homesickness—but it’s the anguish of missing one’s home, not a sepia-hued sentimental reminiscence. The language is chromatic, Bergian, with a jagged, wandering solo violin part all through. The movie pieces are more conventionally evocative: funeral music for post-World War II Hiroshima and training day and recuperation music for a Puerto Rican boxer, depicted by a swaggering tango.

The recorded sound is cold, pure, and pristine; the booklet notes are thorough.

WRIGHT

DEBUSSY: Jeux; see Collections
Quartet; see FRANCK & SZYMANOWSKI

DECKER: Songs
Katherine Byrnes, mz; Pamela Decker, p
Albany 1621—66 minutes

This is a new song cycle with texts and music by American composer and organist Pamela Decker, titled Haven: Songs of Mystery and of Memory. The music is reminiscent of American musical theatre in terms of tonal and harmonic scope, and the color of jazz-blues vocalist Katherine Byrnes adds to that.

The vocal line is nearly always doubled in the piano—a shame when you consider all the other interesting things that could be happening. There is a lot of repetition in each song, and among songs, of melodic ideas; if you like the ideas, you’ll be thrilled. If you long for some more ambitious development, like me, you’ll find it frustrating. The poetry has interesting moments and a compelling theme, but the predictable and constant rhyming make it feel sing-songy and trite.

I want so much to like this but it’s too boring. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

DEL TREDICI: A Field Manual;
Magyar Madness
Courtney Budd, s; Michael Kelly, b; David Krakauer, cl; Orion Quartet; Fireworks Ensemble/ Steven Mercurio—E-One 7786—76 minutes

In the late 1960s, California-born composer David Del Tredici ceased his experiments with serialism and took up the torch of American neo-romanticism. From that point through the early 1990s, his series of opulent vocal-orchestral works on the two Lewis Carroll Alice in Wonderland novels steadily ensured his place in music history; and as he nears his 80th birthday, he shows no signs of slowing down.

Here are two of his recent chamber works performed by New York musicians. The first is the clarinet quintet Magyar Madness (2006) written for Klezmer enthusiast David Krakauer and the Orion Quartet, currently in residence at the Mannes College and Lincoln Center. The second is his song cycle A Field Manual (2008), a setting of five poems by Greenwich Village poet Edward Field for soprano, baritone, and the Fireworks Ensemble, a classical-pop octet.

People who have yet to encounter the work of Brooklyn native Edward Field will marvel at his introduction to poetry. Drafted into the United States Army in early 1942, the 18-year-old Field had just completed basic training and boarded a train when a Red Cross worker handed him an anthology of verse. All through

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his service as a Army Air Corps navigator over the dangerous skies of Germany, he yearned to be a poet, and after the war he used his G.I. Bill to enroll in New York University.

In 1948 he tired of academia and moved to France, where he intended to sharpen his own voice; in the 1960s he began to publish his verse. Like Walt Whitman’s, Field’s poetry runs the gamut of raw human experience, from deep yearning and loneliness to strange humor and hair-raising sexual subjects, which depending on the reader’s personality can be tacky and distasteful or outrageously funny. In the liner notes Del Tredici writes “What I love about Ed Field’s poetry (and about Ed himself) is his fearlessness in ‘going there.’ Ed Field gets away with murder, executed with the grace of a swagger, and Budd and Kelly sing with great point—the ‘Grand Rondo’ finale is a staggering conviction and presence, even if Budd’s dic- 22 minutes. The song cycle far es better: the son g cycle far es better: the tacky and distasteful or outrageously funny. In composer’s romantic pathways; and Del Tredici is his fearlessness in ‘going there’. Ed Field gets away with murder, executed with the grace of a master criminal enjoying his poetic license.’ The composer goes there, too: two of the five poems in the cycle are certain to offend.

The presentation, though, is rather mixed. All of the performers delight in the vitality and immediacy of the music; and Del Tredici is generous with color, melody, and quirky rhythms.

The opening clarinet quintet, though, is somewhat of a chore: Krakauer plays with a thin, spread tone and a relentlessly quivering vibrato that detracts from the music; the Orion Quartet is a little too transparent for the composer’s romantic pathways; and Del Tredici tends to wander long after he has made his point—the ‘Grand Rondo’ finale is a staggering 22 minutes. The song cycle fares better: the Fireworks Ensemble plays with crispness and swagger, and Budd and Kelly sing with great conviction and presence, even if Budd’s dic- tion is hazy in her high register. Moreover, the composer’s setting of ‘The Countess and Sweet Gwendolyn’s Tale’ is excellent, weaving a tight dramatic structure and creative scoring through 13 minutes—a near tone poem.

DETT: The Ordering of Moses

Latonia Moore, Ronnita Nicole Miller, Rodrick Dixon, Donnie Ray Albert; May Festival Chorus, Cincinnati Symphony / James Conlon

Bridge 9462—49 minutes

R Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) was born into a northern, middle-class black family. His mother ran a boarding house, his father was a railroad porter, and his uncle graduated from law school. He had formal musical studies as a youngster and went to Oberlin, graduating in 1908. He continued with his studies, including work at Harvard and with Nadia Boulanger, finally earning a Master’s from Eastman in 1932. His career was spent as a teacher and choral conductor, mainly at African-American colleges; his longest appointment was at the Hampton Institute, where he taught for two decades.

The Ordering of Moses was his graduation thesis from Eastman in 1932; he revised it over the next few years until its premiere in 1937 at the Cincinnati May Festival with Eugene Goossens conducting. The text deals with the divine calling (“ordering”) of Moses, the parting of the Red Sea, the pursuit of the Egyptians, and the rejoicing of the freed Israelites; sources include passages from Exodus and Lamentations, along with words of traditional spirituals, notably ‘Go Down, Moses.’ The music is attractive and very well constructed, but the style is decidedly conservative and thoroughly tonal. It is worthy of occasional performance. The choral parts are singable by any decent chorus, though the solo parts are challenging.

The performance here, from a 2014 concert in Carnegie Hall, presents Dett’s work in a most favorable light. The choral work is alert and exciting, and the soloists are up to the demands of the score, which is often written in high registers (high Cs at the end). Conlon does a fine job at holding things together and bringing excitement to the piece. This is certainly a major milestone in African-American classical music—a fine piece, very well done!

ALTHOUSE

DONIZETTI: L’Elisir d’Amore

Rosanna Cartieri (Adina), Luigi Alva (Nemorino), Rolando Panerai (Belcore), Giuseppe Taddei (Dulcamara); La Scala/ Tullio Serafin

Urania 121 187 [2CD] 111 minutes

This 1959 studio recording from La Scala was originally issued by EMI. It’s an absolute delight and an absolute must-have. Cartieri is brightly chirpy, not quite the best Adina (save that for Kathleen Battle). But the men! There must be something in the air of the Peruvian Andes that produces remarkable bel canto tenors. Currently there is Juan Diego Florez. But 50 years earlier there was Luigi Alva. What a beautiful voice: stylish, personable, with a unique timbre. I have long favored Panerai and Taddei. Both have a unique timbre. Panerai’s is dark, a bear-like growl, with a charming personality. Taddei is a master of text and characterization. Just listen to Dulcamara’s opening sales-pitch ‘Uditе! О rusticі!’ There is great strength in his colorful voice. With the veteran

September/October 2016
Serafin on the podium a terrific performance is assured. It’s in good stereo sound too.

No libretto.

PARSONS

DONIZETTI: Maria di Rohan
Virginia Zeani (Maria), Enzo Tei (Riccardo), Mario Zanasi (Enrico), Anna Maria Rota (Armando); Teatro San Carlo/ Fernando Previtali
Myto 320 [2CD] 113 minutes

Maria di Rohan is one of Donizetti’s best operas and one of his least known. Yet there are four recordings. Only one of them was recorded in the studio (Opera Rara). Now comes this hair-raising performance of March 24, 1962 from Naples.

Zeani is a vocal powerhouse! She storms her way through the music, her voice dripping with emotion, each word seemingly a mini-drama. The rather obscure tenor Tei is exciting as well; a voice of squillo. Zanasi upholds the honor of the baritones in high style; Rota, in the pants-role of Armando, turns in her own excitement. Previtali gives the singers their own way, keeping the orchestra in line with them. Nothing can help those out-of-tune horns, though.

A bonus of Zeani and Nicolai Rossi-Lemeni (her husband) in a duet from Bellini’s Puritani and the Adina-Dulcamara duet from Donizetti’s Elisir d’Amore (RAI Torino, October 11, 1958, Fabio Vernizzi conducting) is quite a show. But I still do not like Rossi-Lemeni’s wooly voice.

The sound is good. No libretto.

PARSONS

DUFAY: Masses
Cut Circle/ Jesse Rodin
Musique en Wallonie 1577 [2CD] 137:29

This new release of Dufay’s tenor masses could also be called a “greatest hits” recording: it has four of his best known settings of the Mass: Se la face ay pale, L’homme Arné, Ecce Ancilla Domini-Beata es Maria, and Ave Regina Caelorum. Also included are the source pieces for two of the masses, the three-voice chanson, ‘Se la face ay pale,’ and the chant and Dufay’s third setting of ‘Ave regina celorum.’ While there have been excellent earlier recordings of these masses (M/A 2009, S/O 1998, M/A 1995, M/J 2004), this new collection is among the best.

Cut Circle is an ensemble of eight singers (two women and six men), led by a rising scholar of this music, Jesse Rodin, from Stanford University, where he helps maintain a website where the scores for all the works on this recording are available.

There is nothing radical about this recording; tempos are well judged (though perhaps a bit faster than some of the oldest recordings, though Rodin does not break Thomas Binkley’s speed record in ‘Se la Face ay Pale’), and intonation and balance are excellent (though some may find that the two sopranos sound a bit too much like women in comparison to the all-male earlier recordings). The hardbound booklet includes an extensive and detailed essay by Rodin presenting much of the most recent research of these works and a discussion of his interpretations, many full color illustrations of the original manuscripts, along with texts and translations. There is very little to criticize and much to enjoy.

BREWER

DUMONT: Motets & Elevations
Ensemble Correspondances/ Sebastien Daucé
Harmonia Mundi 902241—71:18

While Henry Du Mont was born in today’s Belgium, he was one of the composers who helped develop the unique French style of sacred music at the court of Louis XIV, who disliked sung masses but wished to hear motets and elevations to cover up the liturgy. While the motets were based on biblical or traditional liturgical texts, many of the elevations were compilations taken from older texts, such as ‘Jesu dulcis memoria,’ devotional literature, such as Jeremias Drexel’s meditations on eternity (‘O aeterne misericors Deus’), or neo-Latin poems by Pierre Perrin, specifically written for the King’s chapel and published in 1665.

This new recording includes five motets that were posthumously published in 1686 and six published in 1668 and 1681 for the elevation at the celebration of the mass. Daucé has extensively researched the records for the King’s chapel, the musical problems of the posthumous edition of the grand motets, and created performances that are not only fully historically informed, but quite musical and dramatic. The most noticeable difference from an earlier recording of two motets (‘Memorare’ and ‘Super flumina Babylonis’) by Philip Herreweghe (J/A 1989) is the smaller ensembles on this new release, reflecting the performance of these works in the small chapels of the king and queen. There are also small differences between the two recordings in the corrections made by the editors of the editions used by Daucé. The pacing and phrasing are
very effective, and the extensive booklet notes, with the complete texts and translations, make this a significant recording.

**BREWER**

**Dvorak:** Cello Concerto;  
**Martinu:** Concerto I  
Christian Poltera, vc; German Symphony, Berlin/Thomas Dausgaard  
BIS 2157 [SACD] 63 minutes

German Symphony, Berlin is about 100 strong, with more than 40 strings, so more than twice the Prague Philharmonic, which also recently recorded the Dvorak cello concerto on a Pentatone SACD (N/D 2015). The Editor was little pleased with the chamber proportions of the Prague orchestra or the soloist's close-miked, meandering performance. This new BIS is the polar opposite, the cellist miked naturally in relation to the large orchestra and a more driven, forthright, alert performance. Pentatone’s chamber orchestra doesn’t bother me as much as it does the Editor, but there’s no denying that the Berlin strings are much smoother and warmer. Also, typical of BIS, their recording has a wider dynamic range than Pentatone’s.

BIS’s choice of Martinu’s Concerto I is inspired, much better than the Lalo on Pentatone, and sounds great after the Dvorak—you’ll want to keep the disc spinning. Where the Dvorak ends in a haze of wistful, radiant spirituality, the Martinu is earthy, full of energy and bumptious high spirits, with a tranquil but searching and soulful slow movement (one of Martinu’s best, I think) with a long elegiac solo cadenza, then a scampering, bustling finale of complex irregular phrase lengths (a Martinu hallmark) that pauses for a reflective cadenza just before closing with a restlessly triumphant, surging coda. If anything, Poltera and Dausgaard play this with more infectious energy and enthusiasm than the Dvorak, and so you might get this for the Martinu alone. The only other recording I’ve heard, from Wallfisch and Belohlavek (Chandos) is OK, but not as fresh and exciting as this new BIS—and its soundstage is a bit two-dimensional.

Speaking of the sound, it is magnificent: the strings and brass positively glow, and the resin and grit of Poltera’s every bow stroke are palpable. And like the best SACDs, it seems like you can turn up the volume forever without ear fatigue.

**WRIGHT**

**Dvorak & Schumann:** Piano Concertos  
Stephen Hough; Birmingham Symphony/Andris Nelsons—Hyperion 68099—73 minutes

I’m surprised this isn’t Volume 68 of Hyperion’s venerable “Romantic Piano Concerto” series. Hyperion included Mendelssohn, Saint-Saëns, and Tchaikovsky in the series, so why not these two—one a warhorse, one on the periphery of the repertory?

Mr Hough gives us a frisky and scintillating performance of Dvorak’s least popular concerto. It’s not as profound as the great cello concerto or as soulful and fiery as the violin concerto, but it is exciting and entertaining, even if its charms are superficial and derivative (the main theme of I is swipe from Mendelssohn’s Octet). The uncomfortable piano part certainly doesn’t help its case—most of Dvorak’s piano music lies uneasy beneath the fingers, especially the concerto. The orchestral part is substantial and magisterial under the watch of Mr Nelsons, in contrast to Mr Hough’s athletic and spontaneous way with the solo part. Hough keeps all the passagework clear and glittery, and his rhythms are clean in the awkward syncopated compound meters of the finale. He never makes it sound too suave and slick, doesn’t smooth out the ungainly and unidiomatic solo writing; so you hear him sweat, but he seems to smile all through the struggle, especially in the muscular and brilliant finale.

The Schumann is serviceable, Hough choosing clarity and power over poetry, and I heard some left-hand details for the first time that I’m not sure Schumann wanted us to hear so well. There’s not much to justify including this work alongside the Dvorak, though the last two movements don’t have the same profundity of I (written 5 years before) and instead are more superficial and amusing like the Dvorak. It’s not essential, but I doubt it will disappoint anyone either.

The orchestra is clear and rich, and sound is full, dynamic, and plush, with strong bass—as good as the best volumes of the Romantic Concerto series. And Hough plays Dvorak’s original uncut piano part, as usual these days.

**WRIGHT**

**Dvorak:** Rusalka Fantasy; see Tchaikovsky  
Serenade; see Brahms  
Trio 4; see Schumann
**ELGAR:** Organ Pieces  
*Sonata; Nimrod; The Kingdom Prelude; Gavotte; Vesper Voluntaries*  
Benjamin Nicholas  
Delphian 34162—68 minutes

Yet another recording of Elgar on the organ. He wrote only one real organ work, the Sonata in G. Everything else is a transcription or arrangement by someone else. Even the Vesper Voluntaries was originally scored for harmonium (or piano), with no pedal part. One wishes that Elgar had written more for the organ.

Nicholas plays on the new Dobson organ in Merton College Chapel in Oxford. The debut recording (M/J 2015) contained much information about this organ, the first American organ installed in England since 1945. More can be found on the Dobson website (dobsorgan.com).

Nicholas is an excellent player and delivers a very convincing performance of the sonata. The Gavotte, originally for violin and piano, transcribed for organ by Edwin H Lemare, is a delightful discovery. Nicolas faces stiff competition from Challenger (Regent) and Van Oosten (MDG) in this music—and they have the advantage of the magnificent Salisbury Cathedral organ. Extensive notes about the music and specifications of the organ.

**DELCamp**

**ELGAR:** Violin Concerto;  
**HAYDN:** Violin & Piano Concerto  
Igor Oistrakh, v; Natalia Zertsalova, p; Moscow Philharmonic/ Valentin Zhuik  
Melodiya 2384—68 minutes

The booklet claims Igor Oistrakh is the first Soviet violinist to perform Elgar’s violin concerto, the more coherent but less popular of Elgar’s two concertos, and I have no reason to doubt that. Added to a close recording, Mr Oistrakh delivers a searing, eloquent performance, supported by a disciplined and committed orchestra, in warm, clear analog sound (recorded in 1984). The orchestra and engineers can’t compete with the astounding detail, clarity, and depth of Tasmin Little with the RSNO under Andrew Davies on a 2010 Chandos SACD (5083, March/April 2011), but the sound is good and Mr Oistrakh’s intensity isn’t matched by Ms Little. An old Classics for Pleasure on EMI with Hugh Bean on violin and Charles Groves conducting is a soupy snore compared to these Soviet artists. This fantastic performance is more than just a historical “first” and will interest aficionados of closely-recorded violin pyrotechnics, even in a work not generally thought of as a display vehicle.

The Haydn concerto is played by a chamber group drawn from the full orchestra, and the pianist plays a modern piano. I much prefer this to harpsichord because it too often sounds like a hyperactive continuo player—the clarity and dominance of the Steinway works wonders. Still, like most Haydn concertos, I’m not convinced this chipper piece matters much. The only Haydn concerto I really love is the one for trumpet. The Soviet musicians indulge no “period” performance pieties, playing with ample vibrato and classical grace. The soloists here are also recorded close, so it’s like a violin-piano sonata with light string accompaniment.

This will please fans of the violinist and anyone bored by stiff, restrained renditions of the Elgar.

**Wright**

**ELGAR:** Violin Sonata; see Collections

**ELIINGTON:** Sacred Concerts  
*In the Beginning God; Will You Be There; Ain’t But the One; Come Sunday; David Danced; Something Bout Believing; The Lord’s Prayer; Father Forgive; The Shepherd; It’s Freedom*  
Claudia Burghard, mz; Joachim Rust, bar; Felix Petry, tap dancer; Gary Winters, narr; Hanover Youth Vocal Ensemble, Fette Hupe Big Band/ Jorn Marcussen-Wolf  
Rondeau 6112—71 minutes

Duke Ellington became drawn to matters of the spirit as he grew older. In the final ten years of his life he composed three Sacred Concerts, each of them a combination of jazz, gospel, and a more generic choral idiom. This program recorded in Germany last year reflects the great composer-pianist’s spiritual turn. You can feel those connections at work in the joyful ‘Ain’t But the One’, which is tinged with gospel flair; in a sultry ‘Come Sunday’ crooned stylishly by the mezzo, and in extended portions of ‘In the Beginning God’, which was premiered at the opening of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco in 1965. (The recurring theme in that latter work hearkens back to the opening recitative of Haydn’s Creation. Same words, too!)

The rest of the way, though, I respond more to the irresistible energy of Ellington’s writing than to any overt spiritual message the music seeks to convey. I like the up-tempo ‘Shepherd’, for example, but don’t get the metaphysics at all. (Are the muted trombone
licks supposed to represent the baaxing of us earthly sheep?) Then there are the sounds of a tap dance we obviously can’t see, which makes ‘David Danced’ a bit strange as well.

The singing and playing are excellent, and the engineering is as good as the performance. I remember an episode of MASH where Hawk-eye insults someone by telling them they have “the light touch of a German jazz band”. Unlike the series itself, which will remain fresh forever, the joke is dated. There’s nothing unidiomatic about the way Germans play jazz these days, and if you don’t believe it, give this a try.

**GREENFIELD**

**EOTVOSS: DoReMi; Cello Concerto Grosso; Speaking Drums**

Midori, v; Jean-Guihen Queyras, vc; Martin Grubinger, perc; Radio France Philharmonic/ Peter Eotvos—Alpha 208—71 minutes

As one might anticipate from the nature of the titles, Peter Eotvos (b. 1944) is a composer with a sense of humor. DoReMi relates both to notes and to the name of the soloist for whom it was written (and who plays it here), and the music portrays many different aspects of orchestral relations—to each other and to the soloist. This intimate relationship is even more marked in the Cello Concerto Grosso, where the soloist works even more closely with the members of the orchestra, creating a world of conversation and strange events and sonic relationships. In all of this the musical language is totally understandable and almost folk-like, holding onto one’s ears in a pleasurable and amusing fashion.

Then we meet the percussion concerto, which carries all this a step or a leap further: the percussionist sings, yells, whispers, and shrieks in poetry by Sandor Weores. In the last movement the poetry is in Sanskrit. The player also employs both hands and feet. So why don’t we get a video?

All of these works are performed with conviction. Eotvos is to be praised for both his lively and lovely music and also for his conducting polish. The soloists are excellent, particularly the percussionist, who performs with amazing energy. That is not to denigrate Midori and Queyras, whose polish and involvement are evident. This is a really special release, beautifully recorded as well.

**FALKENHAGEN: Lute Concertos**

**Galanterie**

Hanssler 15048 [2CD] 104 minutes

Adam Falckenhagen (1697-1754) was a lutenist who followed a career path through some of the same small German courts (Weissenfels and Weimar) as JS Bach had done about two decades earlier. He finally obtained a position at Bayreuth, a provincial court that was friendly to musicians. This collection of six chamber concertos for transverse flute, lute, and cello were written for Frederick the Great’s sister, Wilhelmine (a composer who also played harpsichord and lute) and her husband, Frederick of Bayreuth, who played flute and was occasionally given the privilege of instruction by Johann Joachim Quantz. Falckenhagen’s music is very much in the galant style of Quantz and his generation, and his concertos are all in a rather conservative four-movement form, with two pairs of slow and fast movements.

The three members of Galanterie—John Schneiderman, lute; Jeffrey Cohan, flute; and William Skeen, cello—play period instruments in a pleasant though subdued manner. But I think that with a little more care in phrasing and pacing, these would be much more effective performances; as Quantz wrote, a sensitive performer can even “improve a poor composition through his execution”. In any case, this new release is better than the only other complete recording—with guitarist Agustin Maruri (Emec; N/D 1997) in terms of execution, sound quality, and worth.

**BREWER**

**FALLA: Nights in the Gardens; see Collections**

**FELDMAN: Palais de Mari; Intermission 5; Piano Piece 1952; Extensions 3; CRUMB: Processional; Little Christmas Suite**

Steven Osborne, p

Hyperion 68108—63 minutes

After I heard Steven Osborne’s revelatory performances of the Tippett Concerto and his four sonatas (Hyperion; M/A 2008) I had a passing thought that I would like to hear him perform other contemporary works. A Messiaen Vingt Regards (M/J 2003) escaped my notice; I will acquire it soon.

This release of Crumb and Feldman is, in a word, extraordinary. Both composers are obsessed with sonority—not only in the sense of tonal beauty for its own sake, but also as an integral component of a musical work. Osbor-
ne has a marvelous tonal range; he also knows how to use his remarkably wide color palette in a creative way. Both composers also have a certain predilection for contemplation—it’s possibly more consciously spiritual in Crumb’s case, but each writes works where the listener experiences himself alongside the sounds, and only a sensitive pianist like Osborne can bring that aspect out in performance. (That’s why I imagine his Messiaen is superb.) Osborne makes a great case for Crumb, who can sound gimmicky in lesser hands.

And his performance of the Feldman *Palais de Mari* is the best I have ever heard—the piece sounds familiar and utterly different at the same time, and it is also quieter and more tender than most other performances out there.

FISCHER: *Vespers, op 3*

Exsultemus/ Shannon Canavin; Newton Baroque/ Andrus Madsen—Toccata 364—63 minutes

What the directors have assembled for their first recording is a complete Vespers, as it would have been performed in Germany at the time of Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer (1655-1746). From Fischer’s *Vespers* of 1701 they have selected 5 of his 16 psalm settings and one of his two Magnificats. Instrumental music was usually interjected between or even sometimes even substituted for the sung parts of the Vespers, and so between the psalms Madsen performs Preludes and Fugues from Fischer’s *Ariadne Musica Neo-Organoedum* of 1702. A Violin Sonata in G minor by Johann Christoph Pez (1664-1716) takes the place of the hymn, and then after the Magnificat Newton Baroque performs a five-part sonata by Pez. The program concludes with the ‘Salve Regina’ from Fischer’s *Lytaniae Laurentaneae VII* of 1711. Madsen notes that Vespers concerts were often so long in Fischer’s day that they ran into the hour of Compline, where Marian antiphons, like ‘Salve Regina’, were regularly sung.

It is a lovely program of late-Baroque music, and perhaps just a little more galant sounding than the music of Fischer’s contemporary JS Bach. Madsen writes extensively about the problems of preserving authenticity when performing continuo in the German Baroque tradition. Newton Baroque uses a violone, played by Douglas Kelley in the eight-foot register, and a Baroque-style tracker organ, rather than a smaller portable organ.
The violin playing of Susanna Ogata and Julia McKenzie is expressive and refined, with delicate ornamentation.

The small number of singers in the Exsultemus ensemble makes it possible for them to expose more readily the slight nuances in Fischer’s psalms ‘Beatus Vir’, ‘Confitebor’, ‘Credidi’, ‘Nisi Dominus’, and ‘Lauda Jerusalem.’ Individual contributions are obvious in every psalm: sopranos Shannon Canavin and Margot Rood, altos Thea Lobo and Gerrod Pagenkopf, tenors Charles Blandy and Jason McStoots, and basses Ulysses Thomas and Paul Max Tipton. A striking moment comes in the ‘Nisi Dominus’ when the voices come together to sing a sinuous stretch of chromatic polyphony on the words “Qui manducatis panem doloris” (Ye who have eaten the bread of sorrows). Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

FRANCK: Piano Quintet; DEBUSSY: Quartet
Marc-Andre Hamelin; Takacs Quartet
Hyperion 58061—62 minutes

I’d become disenchanted with Marc-Andre Hamelin’s pianism years ago because he too often sacrificed beauty and expression for velocity and articulation. He was always prov- ing he could play faster than anyone else and with minimal pedal so you can hear every note. This is the first time I’ve heard him play chamber music, though, and I am impressed.

After the wailing and desperate first subject of Franck’s quintet, played by quartet alone, Hamelin’s entry is very languorous and calm, the lamb soothing the lion, and he draws attention to himself not by articulating every note, but through delicate, subtle, and sensitive weighting and coloring of his theme and its textures. Hamelin’s presence is as welcome in the busy and dramatic virtuosic passages as well, where he teases out essential details of the piano figuration, bringing both left- and right-hand thunder that never buries the quartet or hogs the spotlight to concerto-ize the work—he always remembers this is chamber music. The imaginative attention to details, clarification of structure, and gorgeous colors remind me again why I love his Medtner and Scriabin sonata cycles so much.

Lawrence Hansen noted in his review of Shostakovich’s quintet by these same musicians (N/D 2015) “[The Takacs] seem to have compared notes carefully with pianist Hamelin.... He fits in almost perfectly with the rest of the group.” I’d take it one step further: Hamelin seems to inspire the Takacs, and whenever he doesn’t fit perfectly into the group he only enhances and elevates the interpretation. This is a deeply moving and exhilarating performance thanks in no small part to Hamelin.

The Takacs sounds bored by the Debussy, their phrasing lumpy and careless, brusquely skipping from section to section with no breathing room. I listened to it once in isolation—not after the erotic heavy-panting of the Franck—and my perception didn’t change. It’s easy to imagine the audience, after a raucous standing ovation for the quintet, hustling out to the lobby for Hamelin’s autograph, accompanied by the all-but-forgotten quartet. If you get this, and you should, it’s for the Franck.

Gorgeous, sonorous recording with ample close detail so textures don’t sound too smooth and homogenous in the Franck. Too bad about the wan discmate, but maybe the monumental quintet really ought to stand alone.

WRIGHT

FRANCK: Prelude, Chorale, & Fugue; BRAHMS: Piano Sonata 3
Sunwook Kim—Accentus 303552—58 minutes

These works make a very good pairing, and will help challenge people who think that Franck is a second-rate composer not in the league with Brahms. Franck comes out quite well in the comparison; after all, he was professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire from 1872 to 1890. It is interesting to listen to this work in relation to the Franck organ chorales—they are of the same family, as it were, and pianists and organists have been exchanging these pieces among themselves for quite some time. In all these works called “Chorale” there is that goose-pimple moment when the Chorale appears, and Mr Kim makes a lot of it, with lovely expression, balance in the registers, and a rich piano sound. It’s very organ-like, as it should be!

The Brahms is powerful, brooding, penetrating. Certainly it can very hold its own with performances by more famous pianists. Mr Kim has a wide repertoire of color and touch, his playing is well thought out and consistently engaging. This is a superb disc, and it is clear that Mr Kim has a very clear idea of where he wants the music to go. And one can’t complain about the brevity of the liner notes: the booklet is 60 pages long!

HAMILTON
**Froberger:** Harpsichord music, all
Bob van Asperen
Volume 3: Aeolus 10064 [2CD] 97 minutes
Volume 4: Aeolus 10074—75 minutes

Froberger was one of the best early-keyboard composers for the intensity of personality he expressed. These are middle volumes from Bob van Asperen’s landmark set of all of Froberger’s music, which will be completed by the release of Volume 8 this summer. Volumes 1-4 have most of the harpsichord music and 5-7 the organ music. Volume 8 has more harpsichord and organ toccatas, along with Froberger’s few non-keyboard pieces. Volumes 4 and higher are hybrid SACDs. The present reissues of volumes 3 (2000-1) and 4 (2004) are filling in for parts of the series that were deleted in the intervening years since the start. The booklets have thorough documentation, including new scholarship about this essential composer and his work. I’d like bigger print, but the booklets are already very thick. It appears that Van Asperen won’t be including some other recently-discovered manuscripts that offer alternate readings; those have been recorded by Ludger Remy and Siegbert Rampe.

I had missed the Van Asperen series the first time around, as my Froberger shelf already looked full enough. I have the complete set by young Egarr (Globe, 1994), plus individual discs by Karttunen, Cates, Verlet, Leonhardt, and dozens of others. Many of those albums cover the same small set of Froberger’s greatest-hits pieces. Only a few of them branch out to the rarities. Thurston Dart’s recording (from 1954 and 1961) is the only one I know on a clavichord. With all of these plus Remy’s “Strasbourg Manuscript” set, I thought I was well stocked with recordings, along with playing the music myself. I stopped collecting Rampe’s after two discs that had awful intonation. It was a mistake to have missed Van Asperen’s through these years, because the performances and the booklets are so good.

Volume 3 gives us Suites 7-12, 15, 17, and 21. Volume 4 has Suites 20, 27, and 30, a toccata, and several often-recorded character pieces, plus two newly-discovered suites. Both albums include previously-unknown pieces or new versions not available in other recordings; the booklet describes the recently-found sources. Volume 4 includes spoken introductions in German and French for three of the melodramatic compositions about misfortunes and deaths. The narration is well done and interesting, but you’ll probably want to program those spoken parts out after the first several times through them. The texts are printed in the booklet (German, French, and English), along with manuscript illustrations of two of these pieces.

The temperaments are more moderate than most other players have used. The antique French and Italian harpsichords are in great shape.

It is tempting to play this sublime music for histrionics, giving it an intensified visceral expression, as Enrico Baiano does. Van Asperen makes the musical figures vivid, but sounds more intellectually controlled and dignified. He has a varied touch in his complete control of releases and attacks, carefully reserved in overall character. I find this satisfying. It’s like Leonhardt’s pioneering approach (in four albums from 1962, 1970, 1989, and 1996), remade in better sound.

On the strength of these two terrific volumes, where everything including the pricing is deluxe, it appears to be time to pick up the whole thing. I’ve seen an advertisement for a reduced-price complete box on Aeolus’s web site, but that appears to be for the European market (so far). They also offer new “bundles” of volumes 1-4 and 5-8.

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**Frohlich:** Quartets
Rasumovsky Quartet
CPO 555 017 [2CD] 125 minutes

Why is this music not played more often? It is very high quality stuff, consistently inventive, interesting and engaging. The ideas are fresh, and the developments of the ideas are creative. One hopes that this recording will do something to change this, so that we might hear more of Fröhlich in the future. The music sounds quite a bit like Schubert and perhaps middle-to-late Beethoven, but the composer projects his own personality. The performances are all one could ask, the ensemble very tight, the sound gorgeous and rich. Explore early romantic chamber music and sample some almost unheard repertoire.

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American Record Guide 93

Clever people are impatient. Things are so easy for them that they don’t realize they’re difficult for other people.

**Anthony Gilbert**
FRUMERIE: Sonatas (2); Sonatinas (2)  
Mats Widlund, p  
DB 171—47 minutes

ARG reviewers have happily welcomed programs devoted to chamber and orchestral music of Swedish composer Gunnar De Frumerie (1908-87)—Caprice 21400 (M/A 1995) and Phono Suecia 713 (N/D 2004). Here now is a disc of Frumerie’s sonatas and sonatinas for solo piano on a label that seems to picking up where labels like Phono Suecia left off. 

Frumerie has been somewhat overshadowed by more celebrated Swedish composers of his generation, especially Larsson, Wirén, and Rosenberg. True, these three are more pugent personalities. Frumerie is a bit more old-fashioned, and, once he found his own style, didn’t evolve and explore as they did, instead maintaining his personal mixture of Nordic romanticism, Brahmsian dignity and warmth, tonal harmonies lightened with modal and Impressionist tints, and use of 18th Century forms (fugue, toccata, chaconne, sarabande, etc.) powered along by a steady and vigorous rhythmic pulse. The result is, as David Moore put it in his above-cited review of Frumerie’s orchestral works on Caprice, that the effect of this music “is not so much in the strength of his themes or the individuality of his harmonic language but in the integrity of his overall concept and the way his harmonic language maintains the listener’s interest without making a point of itself”.

The logic of Frumerie’s progressions and large-scale formal proportions generates a sturdy, deliberate forward-driving deliberation that sweeps us along, pushing aside all doubts about where the music is taking us and why it’s a worthwhile journey.

So it is that the conventional (but always idiomatic and effective) figuration in Frumerie’s piano works doesn’t bother the listener. Not everything sounds fresh and new, but everything works together perfectly. The clever and tuneful sonatinas, from 1950, adopt the traditional fast-slow-fast three-movement pattern. Both their pianism and claims to signficance reflect the neoclassic aesthetic favoring clarity, concision, economy of means, and modesty of intention. The sonatas, from 1968, are not more ambitious but more robust, larger in gesture, wider and heavier in dynamic scope, more various in tempo and mood, more taxing on the performer, and more imposing in cumulative emotional power. I’m pleased to have made the acquaintance of these four skillfully made and often quite impressive piano works, especially in Mats Widlund’s magisterial performances and the superb sonics.

LEHMAN

FUCHS: Symphonies 1+2  
Cologne Radio/ Karl-Heinz Steffens  
CPO 777 830—70 minutes

Robert Fuchs (1847-1927) as a teacher had a more distinguished list of students than even Boulanger or Schoenberg. The roster included such world-class entries as Enesco, Korgold, Mahler, Schmidt, Sibelius, and Zemlinsky. As a composer, he was a master of the serenade genre, winning the approval of even a churl like Brahms (J/A 2011). And his Symphony 1, for all its suavity, sounds more like an orchestral serenade, with some reminiscences. I pays homage to Raff’s Lenore. II, with its ceaseless rapid passage-work looks back to the scherzo of Schumann’s Symphony 2. Generally, it’s all a bit too laid back. Steffens takes all the repeats—a must in II, where, even with them it runs less than four minutes.

In Symphony 2, the first movement at 18 minutes is about half the work. Nor is there any reason for such a lopsided distribution. There are attractive passages, but their development is flaccid and repetitious. III, a quasi-minuet, is the best in the work. The initially bland theme Fuchs subjects to a sonorous working-out. The trio looks back to its counterpart in the Beethoven Seventh. The finale begins with a questioning motif before continuing in the line of Schubert. About two minutes before the end there’s an innovative modulation that introduces new and worthwhile material.

The performances are good, the orchestra playing accurately and always with pleasing tone. The tempos should be faster, but some of that is the composer’s doing. In Symphony 2 he marks I Allegro moderato, ma energetico. Such contradictory directions must leave the conductor in a quandary. As we’re unlikely to get any other readings, these will certainly please anyone fond of pleasant, well-crafted work.

O’CONNOR

GAL: Piano Concerto;  
MOZART: Concerto 22

Sarah Beth Briggs; Northern Sinfonia/ Kenneth Woods—Avie 2358—69 minutes

Hans Gal’s piano concerto of 1949 has the wrong-note melodic acidity of Prokofieff, the insouciant neoclassical harmonic pique of
Poulenc, and even the plush, refulgent pianism of Rachmaninoff sometimes. His orchestration is gorgeously clear and colorful, almost hyperactively full of detail, evanescing woodwind solos flitting through the sparkling and idiomatic piano lines woven by the composer-pianist. The slow movement is perhaps most memorable and moving, a wistful bitonal canonic conversation among solo winds, violin, viola, and piano, interrupted by a macabre and nervous scherzo section likely inspired by Rachmaninoff’s own adagio-scherzo hybrid in his Concerto 3. The finale is a zany, almost flippant rondo with a main subject that you’ll have a hard time dislodging from your ears.

In all, this isn’t a deep work, but it’s very entertaining and so full of felicitous details that you’ll hear new things with every spin of the disc, plus references to other composers’ music that will challenge your memory and have you reaching deep into your collection to solve all its riddles. Very stimulating.

Mr Woods bravely makes the case for including Mozart’s 22nd concerto on this disc instead of Gal’s piano concerto and cello concerto, which he frustratingly mentions in his booklet notes. I’m not convinced. This is a good Mozart 22nd, radiant and poised, though with too little string vibrato in II, but I’d much rather hear the concertinos—and I’m sure most readers already have plenty of Mozart concertos in their collections.

Avie has been a dogged advocate for Gal—this is its 15th release of his music—and they did this before, recording Gal’s symphonies on four discs paired with workaday performances of Schumann symphonies. Then later they re-released just Gal’s symphonies on a budget two-disc set. They might do the same with his piano concerto, so you might want to wait.

The bright and detailed sound befits Gal’s intricate orchestration familiar from his symphonies and violin concerto. Ms Briggs displays complete mastery of and gives her all to the Gal, a first recording. If you like the piano concertos of Poulenc, Saint-Saens, and York Bowen, you’ll like Gal’s too.

GERNSHEIM: Piano Quintet; see BRAHMS

GERSHWIN: Songs
Mary Carewe; Swoonful Orchestra/ Philip Mayers
Coviello 91606—62 minutes

Don’t miss this program of brilliant new arrangements of Gershwin tunes by Philip Mayers, sung with pizzazz by British recording artist Mary Carewe.

There are so many new and clever ideas here, from the Mozart-like piano introduction to ‘How Long Has This Been Going On’ to the actual quotation in the arrangement of ‘Do It Again’ for string quartet. ‘The Man I Love’, in particular, has its delicate longing set against a risky, experimental accompaniment that moves between romantic post-tonal music and early movie music. I loved it! Although it will undoubtedly disappoint listeners expecting a more traditional interpretation, I thought it was clever and fresh.

If you love Gershwin tunes and want to hear a whole new take on the standards, this is the recording for you. The Swoonful Orchestra sounds terrific, and Carewe sings each piece with sensitivity and charm. Notes by Mayers explain the development of the program and arrangements. No texts, but you probably already know all the words.

HEISEL

American Record Guide
**Gilbert & Sullivan:**

*HMS Pinafore highlights*

John Mark Ainsley (Sir Joseph Porter), Elizabeth Watts (Josephine), Toby Spence (Ralph Rackstraw), Hilary Summers (Buttercup), Andrew Foster-Williams (Captain Corcoran), Tim Brooke-Taylor (narr); Scottish Opera/ Richard Egarr

Linn 522 [2CD] 85 minutes

There must be some reason why this August 2015 *HMS Pinafore* from Edinburgh was recorded. Does *Pinafore* need a narrator to explain the action instead of using Gilbert's easily understandable script? It’s like listening to Milton Cross on the old Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts telling us when Carmen is about to be stabbed. The narrator also makes some rather snarky comments that get laughs from the audience but fall short of Gilbert’s wit. The narration is not on separate tracks so it cannot be edited out.

As it is, there is very little dialog, and the recording takes 85 minutes on two discs—not much shorter than complete recordings with dialog. The performances are half-hearted, the conducting sometimes very slow, and characterizations mostly absent. The only standouts are Toby Spence’s beautifully sung but characterless Rackstraw and Hilary Summers’s Buttercup—she puts some meaning into her character. John Mark Ainsley plays Sir Joseph Porter as a fop (rather than a snob) with a pinched tenor that is only occasionally musical.

The sound is good. A libretto and performer backgrounds are available as downloads.

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**Giordani:** 6 Sonatas, op 4

Marco Ruggeri, hpsi, fp, org; Lina Unskyte, v

Brilliant 95149—55 minutes

Joseph Haydn and Tommaso Giordani must have crossed paths. Not only do their life spans coincide, but their travels took them to the same cities. Giordani was born in Naples around 1730. When he was a teenager he departed with his family of musicians on a European tour, which eventually led them to settle in London. Thereafter they appear to have commuted between London and Dublin.

Giordani’s six Op. 4 sonatas, published in 1773, consist of two movements in fast to moderately fast tempos. Both movements exhibit the kind of clear harmonic support one generally associates with mid-century composition. The best opportunity to examine lyrical design occurs in the only real slow movement—the ‘Aria Andante’ of the Sonata in G. The concluding minuet in the first two sonatas evokes a courtly air. The remaining fast movements consist largely of ebullient passagework over triadic (often arpeggiated) harmonies in the keyboard.

Unskyte manages the technical demands of this repertory with ease. Her crisp articulation and tasteful ornamentation produce a delectable sound. Her partnership with Ruggeri is perfect.

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**Glass:** The Hours; Modern Love Waltz; Notes on a Scandal; Music in Fifths

Nicolas Horvath, p—Grand Piano 692—61 mins

This fourth installment in Horvath’s survey of Glass’s music continues the pattern established in the earlier ones. The pianist adopts an expressive approach much like a performer of Chopin or Schumann; there is rubato, unabashed feeling, and—when required—a full-throated virtuosity.

Best here is the ruminative account of Glass’s film score *The Hours*; worst (in that it makes absolutely no sense) is an all-too-brief performance of Glass’s important *Music in Fifths* (six minutes!): the early minimal works are intended to unfold over a much longer period of time, giving the listener opportunity to attend to something not unlike the direct experience of Buddhism. I’m sure Horvath knows this as well as I do, so why did he turn it into a bagatelle?

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**Glazounov:** String Quintet; see TANEYEV

**Goldmark:** Rustic Wedding Symphony; Prometheus Bound

Schumann Philharmonia/ Frank Beermann

CPO 777 484—59 minutes

Carl Goldmark’s *Prometheus Bound* at 18 minutes is a symphonic poem in all but name (it’s called an “overture”) and compares favorably with some of the best efforts of the type. Its integrity of construction and the classical nobility of its rhetoric further reinforce its majesty. It is the greatest symphonic movement Goldmark ever wrote, and its monolithic tutti passages give it the seriousness of Brahms. Beermann’s interpretation is a couple of minutes longer than most, but rather than dragging, it magnifies the music’s grandeur. This has always been my favorite Goldmark work and I’ve never heard it led and played so supremely. Goldmark is justly esteemed for his fertile melodic gifts, but audibly he was more than that.
Though currently five recordings are available of the *Rustic Wedding* Symphony, the piece is rarely played in concert. It once was popular, done by conductors as renowned as Beecham and Bernstein. Yet another instance of where the record-buying public is streets ahead of the brain-dead concert-planners. (After all, we are talking about people who asked a Boston conductor—*Boston, not Bzzard’s Beak, Nevada—why he never did any of Chopin’s symphonies?*) It’s a beautiful work, full of good tunes, but this has sometimes caused conductors to handle it like a cozy little suite. It’s a 40-minute symphony and one with plenty of development. ‘Wedding March’ (1) is a superb set of variations. Beermann’s reading here also tops my list. While he by no means ignores the sweetness of the score, his overall view is that first and foremost it is a symphony whose form has value in itself, shaped by its melodies. The resulting performance will please anyone who enjoys the work at all and maybe convert people who haven’t heard it.

The Schumann Phil’s playing is sensitive and sympathetic, but also packs a punch, as in their snappy accents of the main theme of the finale. CPO’s sound is, as usual, first class.

Gimbel

**Gothé: Autumn Diary; Apotheosis of the Dance; Symphony 2**

Vasteras Sinfonietta, Helsingborg Symphony/ Fredrik Burstedt—DB 172—64 minutes

Swede Mats Larsson Gothé (b. 1965) writes in a conservative but modern tonal style with personality and imagination. He studied with Kalevi Aho, which should give an idea of his craftsmanship and integrity. *Autumn Diary* (2013-14) came about as a result of a break from composing his latest opera. It is in one 22 minute movement, and the segments form a unified but improvisatory symphonic whole, akin to a continuous suite of ballet excerpts. This likely accounts for the piece’s episodic structure. But it is engaging and makes one want to hear its origins.

*Apotheosis of the Dance* (2012) is a 9-minute fantasy on Beethoven’s Symphony 7 with an extended spacey slow section in the middle, joining Michael Gordon in the Beethoven 7 transformation sweepstakes.

Symphony 2 (2009), subtitled *Sunt Lacrimae Rerum* (“This is a world of tears”, from Virgil’s *Aeneid*) reflects a depressive episode experienced by the composer. The 30-minute single movement certainly expresses his travail in spades with its mournful songs, turgid drama, and inconsolable longeours. It will test the patience of even the most sympathetic listeners, though Mr Gothe is certainly deserving of your attention.

O’Connor

**Händel: Tenor Arias**

Allan Clayton, Classical Opera/ Ian Page

Signum 457—59:40

The endless succession of programs presenting some singer in a run of Handel arias has now shifted to profiles of his music for a specific singer. And so we come to a singer who was of great importance to Handel, and indeed his “favorite tenor” from 1734 on—John Beard (c.1715-91).

The program is cleverly chosen, with 11 arias or airs (several with preceding recitatives) representing music that Beard sang, mostly in roles he created. From the Italian operas, we have samples from *Il Pastor Fido* (1734), *Ariodante* (1934), *Alcina* (1735), and *Berenice* (1737). From the English works, *Esther* (1720-32), *Alexander’s Feast* (1736), *L’Allegro, Il Penseroso, & Il Moderato* (1740), *Samson* (1743), *Judas Maccabeus* (1746), *Semele* (1744), and *Jephtha* (1752).
But Clayton has taken the interesting step of including three selections from English works not by Handel but by contemporaries whom Beard also served: **Solomon** (1742) by William Boyce, *The Fairies* (1755) by John Christopher Smith, and *Artaxerxes* by Thomas Arne. These are appealing pieces, and they add perspectives on Beard’s long and productive career.

Clayton has a strong, virile, and commanding voice. Those qualities are well suited to most of the material here. He has some lyric dimensions, best shown off in the final track, the famous ‘Where’er you walk’ from *Semele*—whose opening words are used as the big-print title for this album. That selection also shows off Clayton’s capacity for embellishment.

What does give me a little pause, however, is the frequent bugaboo in programs of this sort: a weakness in distinguishing among the characters represented in the selections. For the most part Clayton’s forthrightness, even aggressiveness, works well. But a crucial test is the monolog of Jephtha—built around the familiar air, ‘Waft her, angels’—delivered rather blandly here without any hint of the title character’s tension, anguish, or resignation.

There is one duet (‘As steals the morn’ from *L’Allegro*), where Clayton is handsomely joined by soprano Mary Bevan. And the small chorus (of nine singers) participates in two other items. There are also two short orchestral bits.

Page directs his strong-period-style ensemble of some 20 players with vigor and style. The booklet has a fine essay by David Vickera and the vocal texts and detailed notes on each selection by Page himself.

In all, a stimulating addition to the growing line of “Arias for . . .” albums.

**BARKER**

**HANDEL: at Vauxhall, Vol. I**

London Early Opera/ Bridget Cunningham

Signum 428—48:14

This ensemble has already launched one series, “Handel in Italy, Vol 1” for Signum (J/F 2016) and now ventures to stake out a second one.

The theme here really is the importance of the Vauxhall Gardens as a summer pleasure garden for Londoners. It functioned from 1661 to 1859, but its heyday was the mid-18th Century. One of its elements was an extensive program of musical performances in specially constructed facilities, both outdoor and indoor. The literature involved some of the important composers and performers of the day and might be described as “light”—short and entertaining things, but often drawn from the best compositions of the day, especially theatrical ones.

Handel was an important figure in the Vauxhall of his day. It should be remembered that the famous statue of him by Rubillic was created for this complex. And Handel’s music was regularly presented, even after he died.

Here we have an organ concerto (Op. 4:2); and there are excerpts from his dramatic works: the Sinfonia and an air from *Acis and Galatea*, the Dead March from *Saul*, and a duet from *L’Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato*. In addition, there are two solo vocal pieces: a song whose words were fitted to a bit of Handel’s music; and ‘The Melancholy Nymph,’ one of the composer’s authentic but little-known pieces with English texts.

But the people who prepared this program realized the value of including music by some other composers of Handel’s day for perspective. So we are given a charming pastoral for three singers by Thomas Arne and a concerto for strings and continuo by John Hebdon.

There are six singers. Soprano Eleanor Dennis seriously spoils the wonderful duet, ‘As steals the morn’ from *L’Allegro* with a woolly and unsteady voice. The others are really fine, though the persistent interjection of bird whistling into the *Acis* air detracts from the appealing work of soprano Kirsty Hopkins. Cunningham’s pool of 20 players is fully up to the best period-instrument standards.

In all, an attractive program and a promising start for this series. But both this and the earlier Italian program run well under 50 minutes, truly short-changing their customers. There is ample material that could fill in the space, and I hope all involved will consider giving proper measure in the future.

The booklet contains admirably extensive notes and texts.

**BARKER**

**HANDEL: Coronation Anthems; Esther Choruses**

NDR Choir, Götttingen Festival/ Laurence Cummings 0151—Accent 2645—55:13

Handel was one of the greatest of all choral composers, and that category of his music is the crown of his creativity, even if not always fully acknowledged as such. Here we have a
most interesting and curiously appropriate package of it.

A chief glory of the choral category is the set of four anthems that Handel composed for the coronation of George II in 1727. (Odd that that date is nowhere mentioned in any part of this new release.) Quite a few recordings of this set have been made over the years. For me, the long-standing classic has been the first one, made in 1963 under David Willcocks and kept alive over the years through various reissues by Decca. Willcocks made a second recording in 1996 that proved to be totally inferior, and that has needlessly been kept alive (reissue J/A 2013). The most recent recording, under Lars Ulrik Mortensen for Obsidian (711: S/O 2014) is disappointing. There have been more important recordings going back some years: under Simon Preston (DG Archiv 410 030), Harry Christophers (Coro 16066: J/A 2009), and—my favorite among these—Robert King (Hyperion 67286: M/A 2002).

This new recording was made in concert at the Göttingen Festival in May 2012. The conductor is a Handelian of impeccable credentials. With a choir of 42 singers and 25 players (led from the harpsichord by himself) Cummings is able to work up performances of each anthem with a consistent musical vitality. His secret is careful attention to the rhythms and nuances of the texts, aided by choral singers seemingly little burdened by any accents in their English.

It might seem at first that inclusion in the menu is simply a matter of adding filler. In fact, the combination with the anthems is quite proper. The five excerpts—the Sinfonia and five choruses—are drawn not from the original version of *Esther*, composed in 1718 for the Earl of Carnavon, later Duke of Chandos. Rather they are taken from a London revival in 1732, with additional music. Most of those insertions were “parodies,” that is to say pieces from previous works of his own, which he fitted out with new texts. Lo and behold, what became the oratorio’s new final chorus was nothing less than the music for *Zadok the Priest*, the first of the *Coronation Anthems*, with some adjustment of the text. So it is that, by this device, the record begins and ends with the same music, the disguise notwithstanding. (The booklet notes make no mention of this specific transformation.)

With only some slight changes in choral and orchestral personnel, Cummings leads idiomatic and vital performances of these *Esther* excerpts, in a concert performance in June 2014.

A most appealing release, then—one Handel collectors will want to investigate. And this performance of the anthems seems to me quite a worthy addition to the best ones made so far.

BARKER

**Handel: Flute Sonatas**

Dorothea Seel; Luca Gugielmi, hpsi
Hanssler 16005—48 minutes

The flute is a copy of an instrument by Jacob Denner (1681-1735) and the harpsichord is a modern copy of a Ruckers. The harpsichord sound is a little closer than the flute, but otherwise this is a very enjoyable program. Ornamentation is minor and done with discretion. Tempos are well chosen and appropriate, so if the balance here might put you off, check our index for many other options.

GORMAN

**Handel: Rodelinda**

Sonia Ganassi (Rodelinda), Franco Fagioli (Bertarido), Paolo Fanale (Grimoaldo), Gezim Myshketa (Garibaldo), Marina De Liso (Eduige), Antonio Giovaninini (Unulfo), Orchestra Internazionale/ Diego Fasolis
Dynamic 7724 [2CD] 156:38

First produced in 1725, *Rodelinda* is one of Handel’s finest operas, full of wonderfully beautiful and moving music. It offers some compelling dramatic characters: a devoted and loyal leading couple, a black villain, and an ambivalent sort-of-evil chap.

This opera’s values have been attested by a procession of recordings. By my reckoning, this is the tenth. Others have been reviewed thoroughly in these pages over the years: in the Handel Overview (J/F 2003) and since (N/D 2005).

This new one is not a studio recording, as were most of the others. It was recorded in staged performances in August 2010 at at the Valle D’Istria Festival, as recurrent (and well justified) audience applause testifies.

Taking the recording on its individual merits, it offers a very effective performance, strongly keyed to theatrical values. The cast contains no stars, but a very able team of singers. Ganassi does have some reputation already, and she creates a poignant, suffering character with a voice of well-rounded richness—if perhaps without some of the lyric sweetness of the title role’s creator, Francesca Cuzzoni. The part of Rodelinda’s husband,
Bertarido, was written for the castrato Senesino; countertenor Fagioli’s voice is a little fluttery, but he is fully credible as the wronged hero. Another castrato role, the secondary one of Unulfo, Bertarido’s loyal supporter, is given depth by Giovannini. Casting of both these roles fully justifies the practice these days of assigning castrato roles to confident countertenors.

De Liso sounds a little matronly as the cast-off fiancée Eduige, but makes her dramatic points. But the show is almost stolen by the Grimaldo. This part was written for Francesco Borosini, whom Handel had used so powerfully in the title role of his recent Tamerlano. Having recognized what could be done with the usually underrated tenor voice, he employed it to create not a hero (that was for castratos) but an ambivalent character: a character of mixed motives, too complicated to be a true villain, who eventually makes honorable decisions. Fanale brings this interesting character to vivid life.

All singers are fully up to the often extremely virtuosic dimensions of their music, and there are fine ventures in embellishment. In all that they have doubtless much stimulation from Fasolis, who conducts with truly propulsive power and notable insight.

This new recording might take its place in the top levels of Rodelinda releases, save for two factors. First, the score is somewhat cut. There is no truly critical edition of it, given Handel’s regular introduction of substitute or alternative or added numbers in the revivals. For a lively public performance such as this, such trimming and streamlining makes sense. Still, this recording runs some 25 or more minutes shorter than its most serious predecessors (mostly on three discs), at the cost of some valid content. The generally good booklet notes say nothing about decisions made on that count.

Second, though there is a decent synopsis, no libretto is supplied—an example of applying the Law of False Economy to disastrous effects. You simply have to know the words in a work of this kind.

While this recording offers very enjoyable artistry and listening, for critical collectors it must yield to Alan Curtis’s set (DG Archiv 477 539).

Tibor Harsanyi (1898-1954) studied with Kodaly in his native Hungary then moved to Paris where he became associated with a group of expatriate composers that included Martinu, Tansman, and Tcherepnin. Like them, and like other such contemporaries as Kurt Weill and Erwin Schulhoff, he combined a fascination with jazz and other American vernacular music with bracing harmonic astringency, clean-lined (often contrapuntal) neoclassic textures, and traditional formal procedures.

The only things by Harsanyi I’ve seen recorded until now are his popular musical setting of a Grimm fairy tale, The Little Tailor and a nonet on Gallo 729 (S/O 1994) that David Raymond found “dark, dissonant, [and] haunting”. Not surprising: very few of his works have been recorded, and, as his long-lived pal Alexandre Tansman pointed out, this neglect is a shame.

As this new Naxos release makes clear, Harsanyi’s music ranges widely in genre, form, style, and emotional character. This is apparent right off the bat in the first piece here, a three-movement, 19-minute Sonatina for violin and piano in C-sharp minor written in 1918 when the composer was 20. I is languorous and dreamy, with a tender melody that pervades the whole movement. Its mix of sensuous harmonies, motive saturation, and romantic effusion creates the very pleasing effect of a sort Hungarian Cesar Franck. But II and III are quite different: tuneful, jaunty, light-on-their-feet but frankly superficial allegrettos.

By 1926, when Harsanyi wrote his 23-minute violin sonata, he had enlarged his compositional resources to include chromatic and textural innovations that add a volatile, probing restlessness to his music. Especially memorable are the spiky, rhythmically offbeat fugal sections in I and the violin’s nocturnal sighs over achingly dissonant piano chords in II—which go on, perhaps, rather too long. The sonata is concluded by a skittish vivace that interweaves Stravinskian ostinatos (reminiscent of The Soldier’s Tale) with Bartokian flurries. Still the sonata as a whole remains infused with Harsanyi’s distinctive personality and emerges as an interesting (if not entirely persuasive) product of its era.

Three Dance Pieces (1928) is a set of minia-
ture essays in popular dance rhythms for solo piano. I is an airy little tango with a delicate melody over stuttering pastel tone-clusters. I keep listening to it over and over again, and it continues to enchant me while remaining elusive and mysterious, like the face of a lovely girl briefly glimpsed but never quite forgotten. It is a sultry and slowly swaying Boston (a dance popular in the 1920s), III a ragtimey Foxtrot—both cute items. But that tango is the prize.

Finally, there's the 1954 viola sonata, Harsanyi's last composition. As in the first two sonatas this is another moderate-slow-fast three-movement structure that lasts about 20 minutes. Though with its share of activity and agitation, this is more contemplative, more refined, more self-possessed music than the earlier sonatas. The slow movement is particularly touching when it momentarily breaks out into a sweetly sad little waltz, calling forth the pathos of an old man looking back on his lost youthful vitality and, just for a minute, imagining himself again the dancer he once was.

Violinist (and violist) Charles Wetherbee and pianist (also annotator) David Korevaar are expert, sensitive, and committed performers who bring this forgotten music to vivid life. The recorded sound is close to ideal. Harsanyi's very substantial output seems worth exploring and I'm grateful to these musicians, and to Naxos, for their part in initiating its rescue from obscurity.

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**Harvey: Choral Pieces**

I Love the Lord; Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis; Toccata for Organ and Tape; Come, Holy Ghost; Praise Ye the Lord; Missa Brevis; The Royal Banners Forward Go; Laus Deo; The Annunciation

Edward Picton-Turbervill, org; St John's College, Cambridge/ Andrew Nethsingha

Signum 456—60 minutes

The Brits love the music of Jonathan Harvey (1939-2012) and they have given him their best here. I can't quibble about the musicianship, but I can't profess undying affection for Harvey's music, either. Some of it I like, and some of it causes me to shut down. 'I Love the Lord' is a fine piece. I like the plainchant that opens 'Come, Holy Ghost' and admire how the chant line splays across the different voice parts of the choir. The buzzing organ and off-center rhythms of 'Praise Ye the Lord' also have their appeal. But the jumpy, dissonant Magnificat does nothing for me. Nor does the Nunc Dimittis, which seems to bid the Lord's servant to depart amid utter chaos. However commendable the singing, my enthusiasm for this music waxes and wanes.

**Hasse: 3 Cantatas; Bach: Arias & Pieces**

Stefan Temmingh, rec; Benno Schachtner, ct; The Gentleman's Band—Accent 24315—63 minutes

I can't recommend highly enough the joyous rendition of Handel opera excerpts made by Temmingh and a varied ensemble on Oehms (J/F 2011), so I came to this release with high hopes. Hasse's only piece for solo recorder is here. Although called a cantata, it's a 13-minute sonata in three movements: Fast-Slow-Fast. Hearing it with lute-harpsichord is a treat since this instrument is encountered so rarely.

In the actual cantatas, countertenor Benno Schachtner sings in the range of a woman but with the depth of a man, floating out notes effortlessly and shaping syllables with exquisite beauty. The sound is plain and clear, rendering everything distinctly, but not dressed up. A booklet connected to the case has a listing of instruments, program notes in the form of an interview, and the German and Italian texts with English translations. Enjoy!

**Hasse: Solo Cantatas I**

Jana Dvorakova, s; Veronika Mrackova Fucikova, mz; Rozalie Kousalikova, vc; Ondrej Macek, hpsi

Toccata 228—68 minutes

The first volume of this projected complete recording of Johann Adolf Hasse's solo cantatas includes six works: Credi, O Caro, Alla Speranza, Ah, Per Pietade Almeno, and Lascia I Fior, l'Erbette, e'l Rio, for soprano, all of them in the three-movement form; and Parto, Mia Fili, e Vivo, Oh Dio! Partir Conviene, and Tanto Dunque e si Reo for mezzo-soprano, using a four-movement form. These Italian chamber cantatas explore the familiar pains of parting, wounded, and faithless lovers, often in Arcadian contexts. All of the cantatas for mezzo-soprano open with a lengthy recitative that sets up the dramatic context for the arias to come, while the shorter cantatas for soprano launch directly into the aria.

The hallmark of Hasse's writing—exciting coloratura and delicate lyricism—are on view in every cantata. Some of the most breathtaking passages occur in 'Cervetta Piagata,' the final movement of Ah, Per Pietade Almeno, 'Ah, se Potessi Almeno' from Oh Dio! Partir Conviene, and 'Ma le Guiste Mie Vendette' from Lascia I Fior, l'Erbette, e'l Rio. The last of
these is especially noteworthy for the way Hasse brings out the turmoil of a mind torn between compassion and vengeance. The lament that opens the same cantata is just as magnificent for Hasse’s languid expression of sorrow.

The singing is excellent. Jana Dvorakova and Veronika Mrakova Fucikova have very different kinds of voices. Dvorakova’s timbre is light and agile, and Fucikova’s voice has an intensity that stems, perhaps, from a faster vibrato. Rozalie Kousalikova’s cello playing is often fine, though she does sometimes lose control of the intonation, particularly in leaps to the high register. Notes and texts are in English.

LOEWEN

HASSLER: Piano Pieces
Anthony Spiri—Oehms 12421—52 minutes

Here is a very interesting project. The pianist Anthony Spiri recorded several works of William Johann Hassler in 2004, but they were falsely attributed to WF Bach. It’s a bit hard to understand that, since Hassler seems much further along the road to romanticism. But no matter, now we have a number of additional works making a complete program.

So is this good music? Yes, and it is very worth listening to. One can hear some echoes of Beethoven (not sure what Hassler knew of Beethoven) and Haydn, whom he performed with. The opening work, the Grand Gigue Op. 31, seems to sit astride Bach and Beethoven, with echoes of the gigue from the Bach B-flat Partita. But he goes further along the romantic expressive road, with a real development section in the second half. The same goes for the Sonata in C, Op. 4. It’s as as if Hassler is saying, “I’m going to play with the opening of the Bach Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, and then inject my romantic impetus into it.” III is called ‘Recitativo’. I can’t recall a solo piano work with this title, and it is a rather clever realization of a recitative-scena-aria from an opera, unique and hard to describe.

This disc does celebrate a real find, a practically unknown composer—and a very talented one. Mr Spiri is a versatile musician, and the music is beautifully and thoughtfully played.

HAYDN: Piano Sonatas; Variations
Lars Haugbro, fp—LAWO 1094—67 minutes

This is a recording on an early piano, which is not mentioned on the cover of the CD. Could it be that we are moving into an era of performance where the choice of an “historical” instrument is not unique or special? In any case, these are engaging performances, sometimes a little eccentric. We are indurated by colorless performances of this repertoire by pianists on modern instruments. Mr Haugbro is not afraid to say something bold. The fortepiano, by Paul McNulty is gorgeous and perfect for the witty utterances of this most elegant composer. The cover art and liner notes suggest that this is going to be a dramatic reading, emphasizing the strum und drang aspect of these works.

HAMILTON

HAYDN: Quartets; op 50
The London Haydn Quartet
Hyperion 68122 [2CD] 149 minutes
op 76—Doric Quartet
Chandos 10886 [2CD] 147 minutes
opp 77+103—Maggini Quartet
Claudio 4627—60 minutes

It’s nice to be back to Haydn quartets. Here are three new releases that are different from one another.

The London Haydn Quartet uses old instruments and plays with a very light, almost wispy, style. If you liked the Mosaiques Quartet performances, these will please you: they’re just as secure and better voiced. I have found the Mosaiques performances lacking as I have returned to them over time. The approach to the music is too light and generic. It misses the music’s spirit. The London Haydn players have the same shortcoming. Too often it sounds as if their main expressive tool is the swelling of tone that seems to be an inescapable part of some schools of old-instrument playing.

The swell has two parts: “diamond-shaped” notes that start at a dynamic level, swell into the middle of the note, and then subside; and phrases that are the same thing written large. This style sounds mannered after a while and comes here with a ghostly violin-like tone. The busy finales give less room for the squeeze-box style to get in the way and more room to show the players’ skill and wit.

There are other ways to play old instruments. For example, the Festetics Quartet,
which recorded almost all of Haydn’s quartets, showed that a more detailed and colorful performance style was possible. Those are the old instrument performances I recommend.

I wrote about my frustration with the Doric Quartet’s combination of musical insight, technical brilliance, and the HIP virus in my review of their Op. 20 (M/A 2015). Well, it’s back here in force: vibrato-free passages, terraced dynamics, etc. in between oases of dramatic and beautiful lyric playing. To my ears this stylistic affectation gets in the way of the music.

Last, the Maggini taking on one of the toughest challenges in Haydn recordings—recording Op. 77 in the wake of the great EMI disc from the Alban Berg. (Well, actually not quite “in the wake of”: the Berg recording was made in 1993 and released in 2003, while the Maggini was recorded in 1996, but seems to be released for the first time now.)

After the ghostly music-making of the London Haydn and the perversity of the Doric, I had no idea of what to expect. The basic sound of Op. 77:1 was encouraging: it marched along with a nice combination of rough jauntiness and finish. There were four individual voices, blending and diverging as needed. Rhythms were springy. Tempos were forward-moving. Ends of the big sections, the exposition and the recap, sounded rushed. As I listened the good aspects persisted and the rushing disappeared.

These are excellent performances. I like the roughness that the players apply when needed—for example, the trio in the middle of the swirling Minuet in No. 1, that quartet’s Finale, and the outer movements of No. 2. The strolling, stream-of-thought quality of Op. 77:2’s slow movement is just the right combination of movement and reflection, and the ticking of Time’s (Death’s?) clock in the Op. 77:2 Minuet is perfect: sinister but with a tinge of irony.

The two orphaned (they were left on their own by the death of their parent) Op. 103 movements are as good as the full quartets.

Also, without any disparagement of his first-rate colleagues, I have to single out cellist Michal Kaznowski for special praise. The sheer mastery of his playing, his sensitivity to when his voice needs to growl and when it needs to croon, are a special joy here. I haven’t heard anything like this since Bernard Gregor-Smith of the Lindseys (now of the Dante Quartet).

If you are a confirmed old-instrument or HIP fan, your response to the London Haydn and Doric recordings will be different from mine. Both are superbly played and recorded.

Also, the Maggini recording was made in 1996 (I haven’t been able to tell if it’s a reissue). The first violin here is Lawrence Jackson, who left the quartet in 2006 to become concertmaster of the City of Birmingham Symphony and is now concertmaster of the West Australian Symphony.

The Maggini recording is very much worth hearing, though I’m still partial to the Alban Berg.

CHAKWIN

HAYDN: Piano Concertos; see LIGETI
Violin & Piano Concerto; see ELGAR

HAYDN, M: Symphonies
15 in A, 16 in G, 19 in C, 21 in D
Czech Chamber Philharmonic/ Patrick Gallois
Naxos 573497—71 minutes

Carl Bauman has over the years reviewed almost all the Michael Haydn symphonies. He favored three or four series: Bamert on Chandos, Czepiel on Koch, Farberman on Vox, and Warchal on CPO. Carl is no longer with us, so he cannot compare this newcomer (the beginning of a series) with those. Neither can I, but I can tell you what this is like.

These are bright and cheerful performances, but they are not brisk or rushed. Tempos are reasonable; Andantes are andante. Farberman takes much slower tempos, if you prefer that; I think he also had a bigger orchestra. This orchestra has about 36 players, and they sound like a chamber orchestra; but so do most of the others. The strings don’t seem to scrape, but neither do they overdo the vibrato.

My one complaint would be “too much harpsichord.” It’s not really irritating, but it is certainly obvious, and one wonders why it should be. If there was a keyboard part, it was to keep the other instruments together, not to be heard as such. (This was before conductors.) You almost never hear a harpsichord in his brother Joseph’s symphonies, and everyone accepts that—so why here?

Nos. 16 and 21 are among his best symphonies, and I like the others here too, though they are not “best”. No two discs of this man’s symphonies have the same pieces, so it is hard to compare on that basis; but if you just want a healthy serving of his symphonies and are not collecting all 40 or so of them, this strikes me as delightful and reasonable in price.

VROON
**HEINIO: Evening**  
Henna Jamsa, cl; Erkki Lahesmaa, vc; Key Ensemble/ Teemu Honkanen  
Fuga 9409—54 minutes

Turku, the sixth largest city in Finland and the third largest urban area, sits on Finland’s southwest coast at the mouth of the Aura River. In addition to being a vital commercial and passenger seaport, Turku is also an important cultural center. On this album, Finnish composer Mikko Heinio (b. 1948) enlists the musical talents of the city for his song cycle *Evening* (2014), a set of 11 poems for mixed choir.

Inspired by a work by the Nobel Prize winning Italian poet Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-68), *Evening* borrows verses in Finnish, Swedish, English, German, Spanish, and French in the quest to capture the dreamy and supernatural sensations of the twilight hours. Among the poets represented are Walt Whitman, Federico García Lorca, Joseph von Eichendorff, Heinrich Heine, Charles Baudelaire, and Finland’s own Aleksis Kivi. The 11 selections appear in five sections—Entrance, Love, Darkness, Sleep, and The Last Waltz—and after Entrance, a short intermezzo for clarinet and cello introduces each remaining section.

The Key Ensemble, a semi-professional chamber choir in Turku known for recording projects, performs the entire cycle with music director Teemu Honkanen. Turku Music Academy faculty members Henna Jamsa and Erkki Lahesmaa add the clarinet and cello hues to the music.

Although choral aficionados may seem to be the only logical audience, the album really has something for everyone. The music scholar will find Heinio’s score a remarkable fusion of sweeping romanticism, eccentric modernism, and the kind of holy minimalism led by Eastern European composers in the 1970s. Meanwhile, the casual listener will enjoy the directness of expression that transcends the half dozen languages of the words. Vocalists will appreciate the flexibility, balance, and blend of the Key Ensemble; and instrumentalists will marvel at how Jamsa’s covered clarinet tone and Lahesmaa’s resonant cello enrich the texture.

The presentation has a few snags. While Heinio’s scoring produces some magnificent colors, it works only with small vocal forces. When he calls for the cello and the clarinet to play with the entire choir at a full volume, the instruments are lost no matter the register, articulation, or dynamics. Diction could be stronger and more pronounced all through, and while Jamsa and Lahesmaa work well together, especially with regard to phrasing, the difference in clarity between their timbres is often noticeable. Overall, though, the effort is solid, and readers interested in discovering Heinio will find his music worthwhile.

HANUJDEL

**HELLER: Variations**  
Biliana Tzinlikova, p—Paladino 65—64 minutes

Two new recordings of the piano music of Stephen Heller are new this month, by pianists Biliana Tzinlikova and Luigi Gerosa. Much of this music is enjoyable and engaging. The Tzinlikova recording is apparently of all pieces that have not been recorded before. It’s hard to believe that the Beethoven Variations, Op. 133, have not been issued on CD before; the theme is from the *Appassionata* Sonata, and it is a wide-ranging work that mines the theme with many moods and textures, from dramatic to humorous and scherzo-like.

Ms Tzinlikova is fully in command of this repertoire and draws the listener in with a committed performance.

Mr Gerosa takes a slightly different tack, as he presents less virtuosic works oriented toward the “kinder”—the *Kinderszenen*, Op. 124, and the *Notebuch für Klein und Gross*, Op. 138. Are these works to be played by children, or reflecting the world of the child? The listener can decide, though it would be a very talented child who could play these. Heller was so much more than a “salon” composer and won the approbation of Schumann and Berlioz. These two discs are welcome additions to Heller on records.

HAMILTON

**HENZE: Symphony 7; Boleros; Overture for a Theater; Blue Hour**  
Gurzenich Orchestra/ Markus Stenz  
Oehms 446—66 minutes

Symphony 7 (1983) is in the traditional four movements and is, in the composer’s words, “about German things.” Its muddy expressionist style easily recalls the language of Schoenberg and Webern, both of whom were on the program at the work’s 1984 Berlin Philharmonic premiere. The sizzling opening ‘Dance’ is Teutonically violent and smeared with mud. The notes tell us that Beethoven (Symphony 7.
rhythms) and quotes from Mozart operas appear, but they are hardly obvious. II is a mournful elegy. III is a sort of scherzo, ending with a hysterical climax. The finale takes a gloomy poem by Hölderlin as its subject. In Henze’s setting, springlike haze is overtaken by martial tramping, blaring climaxes, and, following more mourning, an episode of torture, complete with whips and chains. It ends abruptly. The overall effect of the work is quite black and fits the composer’s political views of the world.

Seven Boleros (1998) are in marked contrast to the symphony. This is a relatively cheerful suite of Spanish dances and scenes set, nevertheless, in gloppy German modernist style. It’s as bizarre as it sounds, but not entirely surprising given Henze’s compositional history, which includes many Latin-influenced topics.

Overture for a Theatre (2012), Henze’s final work, was written for the 100th anniversary of the German Opera in Berlin. Opening with a fanfare, the little five-minute piece drifts into a few unrelated segments ending with a violent slam.

Blue Hour (2001), a very brief Serenade for 16 instruments, is meant to depict twilight in the Mediterranean. Its description by the composer can be taken as a useful approach to so much of his music: “a large number of multiple shapes and symbols that appear to come into view as the light continues to change. Clearly, not unclearly—so only then can they be communicated and understood.”

As far as I can tell, these are all first recordings.

GIMBEL

H ERBERT: Cello Concertos; Irish Rhapsody
Mark Kosower; Ulster Orchestra/JoAnn Falletta
Naxos 573517—64 minutes

Put away the idea that Victor Herbert was merely a writer of operettas. He was also a substantial composer of cello concertos (the cello was his instrument, after all) and a brilliant orchestrator as well.

Both Mark Kosower, the principal cellist of the Cleveland Orchestra, and JoAnn Falletta are excellent in Concerto 1, the more lyrical and sparkling of the two. Their unhurried but forward-leaning pace capture its lyricism beautifully. Falletta is a hand-in-glove accompanist who never squelches the orchestra but always assures that the soloist is in the limelight. In II, an Andante that brackets a scherzo, they capture both its tunefulness and its symphonic character. The final movement is especially buoyant with easy but infectious rhythms.

The substantial structures of both concertos show that, although Herbert was born in Ireland, he grew up in Germany. I was written in Germany in 1884, 2 in 1894 after he had moved to New York and was on the faculty of the then new National Conservatory of Music, of which Dvorak was then director. (He went on to be conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony from 1896 to 1904—talk about a man for all seasons!)

2 is a darker, more dramatic and serious work with angular themes. In the two outer movements Kosower retains his superb technical qualities and musicianship, yet doesn’t unleash himself with enough bravado, and the orchestra seems smaller or, rather, not ample enough to project the full drama. But they do gorgeously capture the lyricism and tenderness of the Andante Tranquillo (II, played without a break).

The Irish Rhapsody is a fully symphonic 16-minute collage of Irish tunes, starting with ‘Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms.’ Falletta is at her best in the outer parts. The middle section here seems to link too many melancholy tunes in a row; whether that’s the composer’s fault or Falletta-on-slow-burn I cannot tell. But the finale is a big fat Irish romp with dueling tunes at full volume—a fine wrap to a really good album.

When Falletta was principal conductor of the Ulster Orchestra from 2010 to 2014, the sound on her recordings always made me ask, “What happened to that big, luscious, major-sized orchestra that used to record for Chandos under Vernon Handley and Yan Pascal Tortelier?” Engineer Tim Handley made it sound small and distant with strings that barely registered. This album, recorded in 2015, has a different engineer. While the 63-member orchestra still sounds mid-size, the sound is now full and satisfying, and the balance between soloist and orchestra couldn’t be better.

FRENCH

Word Police: Edgy; Cutting-edge

In classical music criticism "edgy" is not a compliment. It usually means jagged (clashing) as opposed to smooth and well-integrated. In colloquial usage it seems derived from "cutting-edge", and popular culture loves anything new and radically different. So you will not read either in ARG.
Higdon: *Cold Mountain*

Isobel Leonard (Ada), Emily Fons (Ruby), Nathan Gunn (Inman), Jay Hunter Morris (Teague), Kevin Burdette (Blind Man, Stobrod Thewes), Roger Honeywell (Solomon Veasy), Deborah Nansteel (Lucinda); Santa Fe Opera/ Miguel Harth-Bedoya

Pentatone 5186 583 [2CD] 146 minutes

In 2015 the Santa Fe Opera produced the world premiere of *Cold Mountain* with music by Jennifer Higdon to a libretto by Gene Scheer based on the popular novel by Charles Frazier. This recording demonstrates the excellent production that the company lavished on the new opera. Though we don’t have a DVD, the fast-moving production gives us a good idea of the effectiveness of the work.

Following the recording with the text allows one to see the effectiveness of the libretto. The story concerns a Confederate deserter who tries to return home to the woman he loves. Changes from scene to scene move quickly, giving a cinematic effect. The deserter “hero” is pursued by Teague, a vicious man who has only one goal—to capture all deserters and make life miserable for anyone who cares about them. He is as relentless as Javert in *Les Miserables* with a savage dose of sadism thrown in. Thus our sympathy lies with Inman, the deserter, his love Ada, and the plucky mountain woman named Ruby who shows up to help Ada survive as a lone woman trying to run a farm, as well as the several characters who help or are helped by these three main characters.

With such a strong story, one has high hopes for this opera. Unfortunately, the music, while generally effective, does not measure up to the excellence of the libretto. The more violent scenes are well pictured by Higdon’s orchestral music, but in the more lyrical or introspective moments, the music fails to move the listener. For example, the scene near the end where Ada and Inman are finally—if only briefly—reunited could have the emotional power of the great recognition scene from *Elektra*. Perhaps that is expecting too much, but in this case the two lovers merely utter each other’s name; the moment the hero has lived for through the entire work simply occurs, without the musical enhancement that makes an operatic scene unforgettable.

There are some effective passages—the duet for Ada and Inman in Act I, the scene where Inman helps a young mother named Sara, and a very short quintet in Act II—but most of the vocal line seems to be recitative in search of a tune or orchestration to give it heightened effect. Probably the best numbers are choral pieces where dead soldiers sing lovely music representing memories. Ms Higdon seems to write more emotional music for the chorus than for her principal singers. Another effective scene occurs near the end when the memories of Inman’s journey crowd on his consciousness in a somewhat overlapping ensemble.

Even though I’m not excited about all the music, the opera is an effective piece of theatre. The cast of this performance is excellent. In the central roles, Nathan Gunn and Isobel Leonard make a splendid pair of lovers; and Emily Fons is perfect as the wily Ruby, perhaps the work’s most interesting character. Jay Hunter Morris makes a villainous Teague, and Roger Honeywell sings well as the morally-challenged Solomon Veasy. Kevin Burdette is an excellent Stobrod (Ruby’s father), and Deborah Nansteel makes an excellent impression in the brief but important role of a runaway slave.

The Santa Fe chorus and orchestra perform well under Miguel Harth-Bedoya. The package contains the full text, plus several short articles about the work and its creators.

SININGER

Hildegard: O Eterne Deus

Shira Kammen, vielle, hp; Vajra Voices/ Karen R Clark—Music & Arts 5291—50 minutes

The blurb about the ensemble, describing their name Varja as derived from the Sanskrit symbol for the “thunderbolt of clarity” and “the indestructible nature of the diamond”, did make me wonder what I might be in for. Since New Age mystics discovered Hildegard’s music in the early 1980s, ensembles have been enhancing its ethereal properties using various instruments and unusual recording techniques. My colleague Jennifer Bain wrote an article about it in the Spring 2004 issue of the journal *Echo* (http://www.echo.ucla.edu).

I have encountered a number of recordings by ensembles that use Hildegard’s chants as a bridge to New Age mysticism or to fantasy worlds in film and television that evoke a medieval or vaguely Celtic atmosphere. See, for example, “Divina Musica” (Pilfink 51; S/O 2011), and especially “Marriage of the Heavens and the Earth” (Jade 36351; S/O 2008). But this recording of Hildegard’s music is traditional—that is, following in the tradition paved by pioneers like Gothic Voices (Hyperion 66039) and
Barbara Thornton (German Harmonia Mundi 20248; J/F 2013). In fact, Vajra Voices, under the direction of Karen R. Clark, offers a very fine survey of nearly every genre of chant represented in Hildegard’s repertory—antiphons, responsories, hymns, and sequences. Clark herself has a beautiful voice that shows flexibility and nuance through the very broad range that Hildegard covers in her chants. Her performance of the antiphon ‘O Quam Magnum Miraculum Est’ to Shira Kammen’s vielle accompaniment is gorgeous.

As far as the ensemble goes, I am especially attracted to their performance of the Marian hymn ‘Ave Generosa’. The notes indicate that they wished to bring out the exuberant and intimate side of Hildegard but juxtaposing the physical and spiritual aspects of her music. This is achieved by alternating stanzas between individual singers, projecting a dramatic setting akin to Hildegard’s ‘Ordo Virtutum’. Adding drones in the course of their performance increases the intensity of the melody itself; yet as the octaves and fifths pile up it seems to me the ensemble slightly loses pitch. Two pieces are played instrumentally by Shira Kammen: ‘Ispariz’ and the ‘Kyrie’. Texts and notes are in English.

**LOEWEN**

**HINDEMITH:** Viola Sonatas, 
*opp 11:4+5, 25:1+4*

Christian Euler, va; Paul Rivinus, p

MDG 903 1952 [SACD] 69 minutes

This is not all of Hindemith’s viola sonatas but a selection of the more popular ones. Lawrence Power has recorded all of the sonatas on two separate discs (N/D 2009 & J/A 2010). Christian Euler is not as good a violist as Power. Paul Rivinus is a good pianist, but Power’s partner Simon Crawford-Phillips is excellent. Euler and Rivinus tend to take the music at a more relaxed pace, and that doesn’t serve it well. The urgency that I of the Op. 25:1 needs is lacking, for example. Hindemith’s own performances are tauter than these. The best recordings of the Hindemith viola sonatas are by Lawrence Power.

**MAGIL**

**Hoffmeister:** Viola Concertos; 
*12 Solo Studies*

Ashan Pillai; Gulbenkian Orchestra/Christopher Hogwood—Oehms 71—76 minutes

Don Vroon reviewed a program of viola concertos, including one by Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812) in the last issue of ARG (p 248). He commented that it “is a boring piece that could have been written by almost anyone in the classical period”. I agree with Don, especially concerning the slow movements, which are tedious. Hoffmeister was certainly no Mozart, and I also agree with Don that Stamitz wrote a better viola concerto. If you are looking for works of genius, you will not find any here.

The 12 Studies are better. They are quite a bit better than most pedagogical material, and I like them better than the concertos. I think that violists would find them rewarding to play. Ashan Pillai is a violist of average skills for a soloist (slow trills) but is musical, though not really charismatic. His intonation is almost invariably accurate.

**MAGIL**

**Hoffmeister; Beethoven:** Duos

John Mills, v; Bozidar Vukotic, vc

Naxos 573541—78 minutes

This program gives us three duets by each composer. The ones by Hoffmeister written for this combination, but Beethoven’s were transcribed by Friedrich Hermann (1828-1907) from duos for clarinet and bassoon. Both collections were composed between 1788 and 1792. Both are fine listening, particularly if you like music in the imaginative classical style of early Beethoven. The Hoffmeister duos are perhaps less memorable but they are fine pieces.

The performers here are perhaps not as perfectly matched in musical style as some, but they are obviously enjoying themselves and I enjoyed them, too. This music is not heard as much as it should be and there are no other recordings of the Hoffmeister duos available. At Naxos’s prices, this is a good investment, well recorded.

**D MOORE**

We are reading long words everywhere where short ones would do. The list could be endless, but one thing that is happening is backformation from adjectives to nouns: Hopeful becomes hopefulness, tasteful becomes tastefulness, graceful gracefulness, peaceful peacefulfulness (and so on). The correct words are hope, taste, grace, and peace—but they are not used much these days. When you read the longer word you know that someone doesn’t even have an adequate basic vocabulary.
HONEGGER: King David
Randall Scarlata (narr, Samuel), Rebecca Field (Witch of Endor), Gregory Feldman (Saul); In Young Lee, s; Emily Bullock, mz; Stephen Ng, t; Concert Choir, West Chester Mastersingers & Chamber Ensemble/ Ryan Kelly
Mark 51849—68 minutes

Having learned what little I know of Le Roi David from Messrs Ansermet and Dutoit, I came away figuring that Honegger had bequeathed us an attractive oratorio (or whatever it is) meant to be sung in French. So when I came across this release in my most recent bundle from Cincinnati, I confess I wondered whether an English King David from a Pennsylvania state school not really known for its music program would be of any interest.

Serves me right for doubting. Mind you, I’m not going to aver that a CD collection worth its salt must have an English King David. But since I have yet to read a complimentary review of the work en Anglais—and since this one is quite impressive—I will tell you that if you want David performed in our native tongue, you needn’t hesitate. It is handsomely sung by the West Chester choirs, admirably played by the chamber ensemble (terrific trumpets and horn), and well recorded by the engineers. The jacket is vague about the circumstances, but it sounds like it was caught in the studio by folks who knew what they were doing. (If it was recorded in concert, there is no evidence of an audience—not a peep.) No text is supplied, but the diction is so good you won’t need one. So while I’m still not sure an English Roi David is mandatory for all, here’s a nice account if you want one. West Chester University. Who knew?

GREENFIELD

HONEGGER & IBERT: L’Aiglon
Anne-Catherine Gillet (Eaglet, Duke of Reichstadt), Marc Berard (Seraphin Flambeau), Etienne Dupuis (Prince Metternich), Philippe Sly (Marshall Marmont), Helene Guilmette (Therese de Lorget), Marie-Nicole Lemieux (Marie-Louise), Montreal Symphony/ Kent Nagano
Decca 478 9502 [2CD] 92.29

It is difficult to be the son of a famous father. It is more difficult yet when your father was the Napoleon Bonaparte who bestrode Europe like a colossus at the beginning of the 19th Century. It is most difficult when that son is a bird in a literally gilded cage, the Schoenbrunn Palace of his mother’s Hapsburg family, watched over by the wily Prince Metternich, who is hailed as “the destroyer of Bonaparte”. Such is the subject matter of L’Aiglon (The Eaglet), an opera about the last year in the short, unhappy life of Napoleon Francois Joseph Charles Bonaparte (1811-32), the Eaglet of the title, the son of the Man of Destiny and his second wife, the Austrian princess Marie-Louise.

This 1937 opera in five concise acts has been recorded in its entirety for the first time from three performances by the Montreal Symphony. The seldom performed opera is a further rarity in that it is a collaboration between two major composers. Ibert wrote Acts I and II, and Honegger wrote Acts IV and V. Act III was a joint product. The opera is based on the 1900 play of the same name by the neoromantic Edmund Rostand, better known as the author of Cyrano de Bergerac. The opera is an unabashed exhortation of French nationalism composed on the cusp of another clash between Gallic and Teutonic civilizations.

We find the hero at the court of his grandfather, the Austrian Emperor Francis I, where he has lived since his mother fled France after his father’s first abdication in 1814. He is called “Franz” after Francois, his second given name. The Emperor made him Duke of Reichstadt in 1818, so he is referred to as “the Duke” here, except that his doting mother calls him Franz and the Bonapartist conspirator Countess Camerata hails him as “Napoleon”. The young man has a conflicted identity. The Duke struggles to resist Austrification, personified by Metternich, and yearns for a France he can barely remember. The opera centers around his desire to escape his de facto captivity and return to Paris to revive la gloire de la France. He is encouraged to do so primarily by Seraphin Flambeau, a veteran of Napoleon’s vaunted Old Guard, who has come to Schoenbrunn in disguise as a lackey, and Marshall Marmont, who regrets his abandonment of Napoleon. The son of the great military conqueror has been reduced literally to playing with toy soldiers in Act I. The tension reaches a peak in Act II, where Flambeau briefly frightens Metternich into thinking he is a reincarnated Napoleon. When the Duke enters, Metternich in a shattering scene forces the young man to look in a mirror and confront his haunted Hapsburg ancestry, in contrast to his Napoleonic glory.

With Flambeau, Marmont, and the Countess Camerata, the Duke escapes from a masked ball to return to Paris and restore his

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father’s empire. But unlike Napoleon’s legendary escape from Elba in 1814, the Duke’s attempt is a dismal failure caused by his lack of Napoleonic will. When the escapees are discovered and pursued, the Duke fatally dallies on the battlefield of Wagram, where his father decisively defeated the Austrians in 1809. In a climactic scene alternating between reality and imagination, Flambeau commits suicide, as the Duke reimagines the glorious battle. Returning to reality, the Duke realizes that the Austrian force arriving in pursuit is his own Austrian regiment. In the final act denouement, the young Duke dies of tuberculosis surrounded by his mother and Metternich, among others. His last wishes are to see the old cradle where his father had hailed him as King of Rome, and to hear nursery songs from his French infancy.

The Duke’s search for identity is the core of the opera. The part is a trouser role written for a soprano, probably because Rostand wrote the original for Sarah Bernhardt. The young prince trapped in a suffocating, alien court and engaging in vaughtion and self-laceration inevitably resembles Hamlet, a role Ms Bernhardt also played in cross-dress.

The score of this patriotic opera is tonal and meant to be accessible. It has almost a gossamer French texture, somewhat reminiscent of later Massenet. Although it is the work of two composers, the score sounds seamless. The waltzes in Act I and the more extended ballet sequence in Act III have a Strauss or Lehár-like quality to them. Some of the music is cinematic, especially the climactic imagined battle sequence in the Wagram scene where Honegger borrowed from the score he had written for another hagiographic rendering of the Bonapartist legend, Abel Gance’s 1927 pioneering film, “Napoleon”. French revolutionary songs, climaxed by ‘La Marseillaise’ mark the culmination of the Duke’s vision of France’s vanished military glory. Another highlight of the score is the powerful scene in Act II where Metternich forces the Duke to confront his Hapsburg ancestry, further eroding the young man’s confidence.

The cast of native French speakers is outstanding and has a real ensemble quality. The Belgian soprano Anne-Catherine Gillet conveys the introspective, fragile, conflicted Duke superbly. The opera rises or falls on the quality of the performance of the title character. Despite the subject matter of emperors and politics, the opera is essentially an intimate portrait of the title character. Ms Gillet sings without vibrato to capture the boyish quality of the conflicted young prince. She has worthy foils. Baritone Etienne Dupuis draws a complex portrait of Metternich not just as an equivalent of Boris Godounov’s Machiavellian Prince Shuisky, but as a person with a genuine liking for and interest in his young charge, especially in the death scene. Baritone Marc Barrard is a commanding presence as the old embodiment of Napoleonic glory, Flambeau, who cannot bear to live on when the last hope of a Napoleonic revival comes to naught. Helene Guilmette offers a honeyed lyric soprano as Therese de Lorget, a winsome would-be love interest for the Duke, who invites her for an evening assignation in his hunting lodge. The matter is left unresolved. One can only imagine how differently the great Napoleon would have handled such a situation! Therese is at the Duke’s deathbed to sing him French nursery songs. Contralto Marie-Nicole Lemieux is both regal and maternal as Marie-Louise, who, bereft of her husband, now faces losing her son as well.

The orchestra supports the singers and plays this very French score with clarity and spirit. The sound quality is fine, and the three concert performances have been skillfully merged into a coherent whole. The set is accompanied by an informative booklet in French and English with a full libretto.

The recording makes the best imaginable case for this opera. It does not have the musical profundity of an undiscovered masterpiece, and the Bonapartist message does not speak to our present age. Still, there are fine musical moments, and the performances are well worth hearing, especially Ms Gillet. This opera is a special treat for unapologetic Francophiles, who will want to add it to their collections.

ROSEN

HOWELLS: Collegium Regale
Eleanor Kornas, Owain Park, org; Trinity College Cambridge/ Stephen Layton
Hyperion 68105—61 minutes

By 1941 Herbert Howells (1892-1983) had come to be regarded as primarily a highly esteemed teacher of composition at the Royal College of Music. His output had dwindled, caused in part perhaps by his grief over the death from polio of his son Michael in 1935. When Robin Orr was called to military service from his position as director of music at St John’s College, Cambridge, Howells (an
Oxford man) was invited to fill the position temporarily. The experience in Cambridge rekindled his commitment to Anglican music.

He recalled being challenged many years earlier by Eric Milner-White, Dean of King’s College Chapel from 1919 to 1941, to write a set of canticles for that choir. The ‘Te Deum’ and ‘Jubilate’, the Morning Canticles, were completed in 1944, followed by the ‘Magnificat’ and ‘Nunc Dimittis’ for Evensong in 1945, and the Communion service in 1956. The complete set is known as Collegium Regale, the Latin name of the college. His weaving of shared thematic material among the services gives unity to the complete Collegium Regale.

Milner-White had thought that Howells might be the man to revitalize the Anglican compositional tradition. This magnificent Collegium Regale, as Paul Andrews comments in his excellent notes, “placed him unassailably at the pinnacle of 20th Century composers for the liturgy of the Anglican church.”

It’s wonderful to have the complete set, even with the liturgical order scrambled as it is here. Rather than following the Sunday sequence of Matins-Eucharist-Evensong, the Morning Canticles are used as bookends to the program. First comes the Jubilate followed by music for Evensong (the Evening Canticles, a psalm setting, and an anthem). Then comes the Mass setting. The program concludes with another Psalm setting, an anthem, an organ solo, and the Te Deum. (You can, of course, play them in any order you like.)

Also included are Anglican chant settings of Psalms 121 and 122, possibly from his student days at the RCM; two anthems (‘Behold, O God Our Defender’ (1952), composed as an Introit for the Coronation Service of Queen Elizabeth II, and ‘I Love all Beauteous Things’ (1977), one of the last works he completed).

The Trinity choir is clearly one of the finest mixed choirs anywhere. The singing here is superb—an exultant rendering of soaring vocal lines and subtle coloring of the texts. Stephen Layton never fails to direct superb choral performances.

Organ scholar Owain Park gives a magnificent performance of ‘Rhapsody’, Op. 17:1, on the splendid 1962 Harrison and Harrison organ of Coventry Cathedral, where the program was recorded.

If you love the music of Howells you won’t want to be without this. If you’re not familiar with his music, there is no better place to start. The sound engineering is outstanding. Excellent notes by Paul Andrews. Texts and translations.

R MOORE

HUGHES: Choral Pieces
I Am the Song; Everyone Sang: 3 Swans; Winter it is Past; Death of Balder; Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town; Revelation Window; Medieval Bestiary
BBC Singers/ Paul Brough
Signum 451—75 minutes

British composer Bernard Hughes (b 1974) can write warm and handsome melodies when he wants to. 'The Winter It Is Past' (Robert Burns) and 'anyone lived in a pretty how town' (ee cummings) are cases in point. But most of this music is more energetic and clever than it is "beautiful". Even 'Revelation Window'—a wordless study of light streaming through the stained glass of Manchester Cathedral—winds up a pretty feisty affair. The two longest works involve narration. The Death of Balder is a story from Norse mythology presented, the composer says, as a "miniature radio opera", with short solos, duets, and choral outbursts bringing the spoken story to musical life. His Medieval Bestiary also employs narration as it traverses the animal kingdom in search of spiritual insight. As with everything else I can think of from the Middle Ages, the Anglo-Saxon allegories the libretto is based on have religious intent. It strikes me that if there are bright young children in your life, you might introduce them to both Balder and the Bestiary. My kids would have gotten a big kick out of both of them back in the day.

The BBC sings Hughes’s music with authority. The soprano and alto sections are full of adult females, no one is the least bit interested in sounding like a cathedral choirboy, and the choral sounds and textures are as robust as Bernard Hughes’s creative energy. Notes and texts are supplied.

GREENFIELD

HUPPERTZ: Die Nibelungen Suite
Frankfurt Radio/ Frank Strobel
Pan 10346—76 minutes

Fritz Lang’s 1924 film Die Nibelungen is based on the Nibelung sagas that supplied the basis for Wagner’s Ring cycle. But Lang used the original stories for his film, and they are much more extensive than Wagner’s story outline. The five-hour silent film was presented in two parts: Part 1: Siegfried, and Part 2: Kriemhilds Rache (Kriemhild’s Revenge). If the name
Kriemhild is not familiar it’s because Wagner’s treatment eliminates many characters and incidents in the original sagas. Lang’s *Siegfried* part is similar to Wagner’s storyline in *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried*, but after that the stories differ considerably until the end of the Gods. For example, did you know that King Attila besieges Rome in the original tales? The reason for the different storylines is that Lang not only did not like Wagner’s treatment, but he wanted his film to be truer to the original sagas.

The same holds true for the original score for the film by Gottfried Huppertz. Lang opposed using Wagner’s score for the film and hired Huppertz, who was mostly known as an operetta performer, to write an entirely new score. After this film, Huppertz became known for his film scores, including Lang’s *Metropolis* (1926) and 8 other German films and 40 other musical compositions. For the film’s German premiere, Huppertz’s score was used, but for later European and US showings Wagner’s music was used against Lang’s wishes. Huppertz’s music is very complex and scored for a large orchestra. Like Wagner, he uses leitmotifs for the many characters, including heroic music for Siegfried, celestial music for the Nibelungen, majestic music for Brunhilde, and other themes for Hagen, Kriemhild, and even Attila that vary from ominous to romantic. Although it sounds nothing like Wagner, the music does have a dramatic heaviness and cinematic sweep. Huppertz is considered the father of this style of film music, which can be heard again in scores by Korngold, Steiner, and Herrmann. The score is very good, highly listenable, and constantly inventive. The brooding, romantic, and heroic music fits the film’s action. Overall, the score sounds like a long symphonic tone poem that allows for repeated listening.

Although not shown complete for many years, complete film prints along with some full orchestra manuscripts and piano parts did exist in German film archives. A restored version of the film with the original music reconstructed by conductor Strobel was premiered in 2010 with a recorded soundtrack impressively played by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony. The Suite was constructed by Strobel from the complete film soundtrack. I have not seen the film, but this Suite is impressive. The English and German booklet offers an excellent history of the film, the composer and music, and the restoration. Tracks descriptions are based on the film scenes used in the Suite. The sound is excellent.

**IBERT:** *Petite Suite; see MOUSSORGSKY*

**IBERT:** *Ports of Call; Sarabande for Dulcinea; Festive Overture; Feerique; Divertissement; Homage to Mozart; Paris; Bacchanale*

Orchestra de la Suisse Romande/ Neeme Jarvi

Chandos 5168 [SACD] 83 minutes

It’d be hard to imagine a better cross-section of Ibert’s music better led and played. Though I’m usually a Jarvi fan, of late some of his interpretations have rushed and insensitive. Here his tempos seem just right. He brings out a wealth of detail in the music, adding humor just where it most counts. The familiar *Ports of Call* gets a newly polished reading, including an extra-slinky middle movement.

A lot of the music is humorous and sometimes almost farcical, needing a light touch with precise execution. When so done, the jokes gain real class. The allusions to Mendelssohn and Ravel in the *Divertissement* emerge with subtlety and proportion. In the *Bacchanale*, a mock-dignified procession has as a basis for its humor a beautiful Prokofieff-like melody.

The *Festive Overture* (1940) was commissioned by Japan for the 2600th anniversary of its imperial reign. Britten’s *Sinfonia da Requiem* and Strauss’s *Japanese Festival Music* were other submissions for that occasion. (The name for the Zero fighter also derives from that final nought.) As Ibert was anti-Vichy, thus anti-Axis, political difficulties arose and the work waited till 1942 for its premiere. It’s an extroverted piece with little audibility. A plain, dignified chorale-like melody gets full developmental workout eventually forming a whopper of an ending.

Performances are excellent. I’ve always felt the Suisse Romande Orchestra got a bum rap; certainly no one hearing this release will deny its virtuosity. The combination of precision, delicacy, and strength is perfect for Ibert. Recorded sound is close-up, but not in your face. Rather it lets the listener concentrate on the many virtues of the music. There are other good readings of these works, but with Chandos’s sound this one must take pride of place.

O’CONNOR

American Record Guide 111
IRELAND: Cello Sonata; Summer Evening; In a May Morning; Soliloquy; Bagatelle; Berceuse; Cavatina; Downland Suite

Raphael Wallfisch, vc; Orchestra of the Swan/ David Curtis—Naxos 571 372—64 minutes

Except for the Downland Suite all these works are world premiere recordings. And they are arranged for string orchestra by Matthew Forbes or Graham Parlett. In every case this coloring enhances the music. Scoring for a couple of dozen strings lets the arranger subdivide parts and enrich both the harmony and counterpoint. In the Cello Sonata transcription, I is melodic with a hint of acid about the edges. II has one of Ireland’s most touching inspirations. III starts abruptly with a slashing introduction—a definite waker-upper for anyone who thinks Ireland was just another Brit cow-pat presser. Its sonorous descending themes come off especially well in their new guise. Formally, the music is cleanly laid out, introduction—a definite waker-upper for any cow-pat presser. Its sonorous descending themes come off especially well in their new guise. Formally, the music is cleanly laid out, its developments readily understandable. The underlying pulse of its paragraphs seems as much literary-poetic as musical.

‘In a May Morning’ is from the piano work Sarnia. It’s a seemingly straightforward tune, but as often happens with Ireland, there are subtle phrase extensions and pleasing digressions. The Bagatelle, Berceuse, and Cavatina show Ireland’s ability to write light music of quality.

In the Downland Suite the Prelude is a skipping dance; II, Elegy, is a weighty lament. In emotional depth, it’s in hailing distance of Elgar’s ‘Nimrod’ variation from his Enigma. III, minuet, has been a popular British radio theme and it’s easy to see why. If you can enjoy grace, or even have any memory of charm—it starved to death in the 1960s—you’ll appreciate music with plenty of both.

The performances—both by Wallfisch, the lead cello, and the ensemble as a whole—are superb. They’re also properly scaled, neither inflating the music nor sounding quaint. The record will delight people fond of pastoral English music, but who’d like it a little different, with added spice.

JAELL: Cello Concerto; Piano Concertos 1+2, Legende des Ours; Piano Pieces

Chantal Santon-Jeffery, s; Xavier Phillips, vc; David Bismuth, Lidija & Sanja Bizjak, Dana Gio-carlie, Romain Descharmes, Nicolas Stavy, David Violi, p; Lille Orchestra/ Joseph Swensen; Brussels Philharmonic/ Hervé Niquet

Ediciones Singulares Portraits 3 [3CD] 172 mins

Lovers of 19th Century music will want to know about the remarkable work of the Center for French Romantic Music. The Center, founded in 2009, is run primarily by scholars from France, but found in Venice, at the Palazetto Bru Zane. It engages in research—and offers financial support—for concerts, opera performances, print publications, and recordings. Many of the recordings are multiple-CD sets that come with a small hardbound book containing—in French and English—informative essays and texts and translations. The Center organizes these CD-book combinations into three categories: “French Opera” (11 releases so far), “[Composer] Portraits” (3 releases), and “Prix de Rome” (6 releases—compositions written by student composers). All the CD-books are produced and published by the Center itself, but record distributors tend to refer to them, instead, by the name of the firm that manufactures the book: Ediciones Singulares (El Escorial, Spain).

Whereas the Center’s “French Opera” category has had a lot of attention (Felicien David’s Herculaneum, J/F 2016), the other two series have gone relatively unnoticed. I was therefore delighted to be given the chance to write about the latest release in the “Portraits” category. (The previous two were devoted to Theodore Dubois and Theodore Gouvy.)

The present release consists of piano-solo works and works with orchestra by Marie Jaell (1846-1925), a renowned pianist and pedagogue who was also a close professional associate of Franz Liszt in his later decades. She gave concerts in Paris consisting of all the major piano works of Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt. Echoes of those composers’ approaches are heard in the ten works here, as are other possible influences (some pastoral patches recall Dvorak, and a sweet bit resembles something in the Grieg Piano Concerto). But Jaell is no mere imitator; these works show her to have been a composer with a truly individual profile and approach.

The ten works heard here are played by seven pianists, two orchestras, a cellist, and a soprano. None of these works has been

The men the American people admire the most extravagantly are the most daring liars; the men they detest most violently are those who try to tell them the truth.

HL MENCKEN
recorded before. The scores and parts for the works with orchestra were prepared by Sebastien Troester (author of one of the essays in the book).

Several pieces struck me as major revelations, not least the 12 Waltzes & Finale. Liszt and Saint-Saëns played the set at Weimar in 1876, and Liszt wrote to Jaell to express his “sincere praise for this charming jewel”. It is hard to imagine that even those two great masters of the keyboard performed with more nuance, humor, and loving care than the two pianists here do. The Bizjak sisters, from Serbia, attain admirable clarity, thanks in part to a light-toned 1902 Erard piano.

No less impressive in this composer-portrait are two cycles of 12 pieces each for piano solo: Les Beaux Jours (Lovely Days) and Les Jours Pluvieux (Rainy Days). They seem like jottings in a composer’s notebook: each piece is around a minute or two long. Yet the textures and harmonies are so varied and inventive, and each piece is so coherently woven into a neat little package, that I found myself following the flow of musical thought with close attention. Indeed, I listened to some of the pieces a second or third time, just to see how Jaell managed things so expertly and to think about the relationship between the notes of a piece and its descriptive title (e.g., ‘The Shepherd and the Echo’ and ‘Brushfire’, both from the fair-weather set). Ciocarlie is fully adequate in the joyous and peaceable set, Stavy a good bit more than that in the stormier, moodier one. Some of the pieces could, I think, be playable by an intermediate-level student. Piano teachers, take note!

My favorite of all the solo-piano works here are two selections each from three collections that—presumably inspired by Dante—bear the titles Ce qu’on entend dans l’Enfer—le Purgatoire—le Paradis (What Is Heard in Hell, Purgatory, Paradise). In many of the works already mentioned, Jaell manipulates short rhythmic motives playfully, intensely, even obsessively. Here she makes frequent use of the first four notes of the Dies Irae chant. Pianist Bismuth makes these six pieces sound like masterpieces. At the very least, one or another could add great novelty and interest to any piano recital. As in the two “weather” sets, each piece carries its own fascinating semi-programmatic title. One of the Purgatory pieces is called ‘Maintenant et Jadis’ (Now and Formerly). Its music alternates between what one might—in light of the title—read as a dead person’s terror (“now” meaning “in Purgatory”) and his memories of the life—full of striving and some pleasure—that he led (“formerly”) on Earth.

Less interesting are the two piano concertos, which Jaell herself played in her lifetime—but no one else did. I noticed, as so often with Jaell, some arresting moments; but the material is less memorable than the works for piano alone. Also, though soloists Violi (in 1) and Descharmes (in 2) fully meet the works’ demands, the microphones seem too distant from the Lille orchestra (under Swensen, once better known as a violin virtuoso). A more vivid, detailed sonic quality might have helped convey the changing nature of the interaction—in both works—between soloist and orchestra.

Jaell’s Cello Concerto seems like a major discovery: the material is attractive and well-defined, the forms of the three movements satisfying and clear. Given the paucity of first-rate cello concertos, I can easily imagine this one making the rounds of the concert halls, I hope in performances as committed and accomplished as the one here. The Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Niquet, sounds wonderfully vivid.

The only work with voice on these discs is a startling six-song cycle with orchestra, called La Legende des Ours (The Legend of the Bears). The six poems, by Jaell herself, are strange indeed. A male bear falls in love with a maiden, and she is smitten with him and his dark hair. She perhaps becomes a bear herself (at one point she is called an oursonne, “she-bear”) and lives and quarrels with the handsome brawler. (Hmmm, is he perhaps a hunky, lumbering human—and thus a bear only in the maiden’s eyes?) The young woman—or female bear—dies, “a victim of her love’. The male, now grief-stricken, expires soon after. Jaell has been described as a skilled songwriter. The “Bears” cycle offers good evidence for this. Though the orchestra has much clomping, growling, and lyrical emoting to do, the heaviest such writing occurs in between the vocal entries, which are well-shaped and sometimes sound a bit like folk song, reflecting the imaginative, ballad-like tale spun for us. Santon-Jeffery sings with beautiful line, if sometimes with a bit of wobble. The orchestral accompaniment (Brussels/Niquet again) is gratifyingly varied, reflecting the changing images of the sung text. I hope that this “Bears” cycle, too, finds a place in our concert halls—either in French (as here) or with the German text that Jaell herself prepared.
The translations in the book are largely reliable, notably the ones by Sue Rose. The ones by Mark Wiggins sometimes stumble, especially in excerpts from previously unavailable 19th Century sources, such as manuscript letters. In one spot Wiggins translates derniere (by which the writer clearly meant “most recent”) as “lesser”. In a quotation from a letter that Jaell wrote in 1880, Wiggins has her say, “the artistic benefit that I gained in Germany used to supply me with too much mental anguish” (my emphasis), whereas she is actually using the conditional tense: “the artistic benefit that I would find in Germany would bring me too much mental anguish”. She goes on to explain that this is why she is hesitant to travel to Germany to perform her works. Jaell came from Alsace, a linguistically mixed region that had been annexed by Prussia in 1871. Her complex feelings as a highly cosmopolitan yet strongly French-identified musician can be pieced together from the well-documented essays in the book.

I should add that, if Marie Jaell’s name sounds familiar, it is probably because of her fame as a piano pedagogue and as author of numerous treatises on piano technique. There are no fewer than three websites dedicated to her and to a version of her piano method that continues to be taught in many countries.

Liszt called Marie Jaell a “brave, ambitious, and subtle composer”. This set helps us see why Liszt praised her so.

Ralph P. Locke taught musicology for 40 years at the Eastman School of Music. He wrote about women’s contributions to musical life in the book Cultivating Music in America.

**JANACEK: Slavonic Mass; Adagio; Zdravas Maria; Otce Nas**

Sara Jakubiak, Susan Bickley, Stuart Skelton, Gabor Bretz; Thomas Trotter, Karstein Askeland, org; David Stewart, v; Johannes Wik, hp; Bergen Philharmonic Choir & Cathedral Choir, Grieg Choir, Collegium Musicum, Bergen Philharmonic/ Edward Gardner

Chandos 5165 [SACD] 65 minutes

This is Volume 3 in Edward Gardner’s Janacek cycle. Volumes 1 and 2 were reviewed by Roger Hecht (M/A & N/D 2015). For the most part, Mr Hecht has admired the efforts of the young maestro who has undertaken this series with the Norwegian orchestra he serves as Chief Conductor. Describing the Sinfonietta, Cunning Little Vixen Suite, and Capriccio on the first release, he used such words as “straightforward”, “clear-textured”, “exciting but not theatrical”, “no-nonsense”, and “tight ensemble”. “If there is such a thing as neoclassical Janacek”, Hecht concluded, “this is it.” Volume 2 seems to have fizzled a bit, with Gardner’s good-but-not-special Taras Bulba failing to achieve top rank, and the Violin Concerto (with soloist James Ehnes) never quite getting airborne.

From the sound of things, I’d say that Volume 3 would be the one to hunt down if you want to hear Gardner’s Janacek at its best. I think the Glagolitic Mass benefits greatly from that exciting but straightforward approach Mr Hecht spoke of. You hear it play out most vividly in Janacek’s 11-minute ‘Veruju’, the Slavonic Credo. The composer sets in motion a sinuous journey of faith, from the yearning of a will to believe, to a heartfelt meditation on the matter, to the anguished and exposed cry of the solo tenor, who reminds us that leaps of faith are not for sissies, to the aftershocks emanating from the moral transformations people and nations can undergo. (Janacek’s Czech nationalism is never far removed from his music, even in the sacred realm.) Gardner embraces that narrative fully, allowing it to speak its truth convincingly as an organic whole where each emotional state emerges inexorably from the others. His leadership reminds me of Bernard Haitink’s recent management of Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis (N/D 2015). Other readings might thump more, I concluded there, but a prayerful approach that still manages to convey the visceral excitement of the score will always be of value. If the trumpets blow Janacek’s notes harder and louder for other conductors, so be it. The youthful Brit makes his mark nevertheless.

Superb Chandos engineering complements the conductor’s approach at every turn, assuring that the strands of detail he brings out amid the density of Janacek’s writing speak with uncommon clarity. (And what a kaleidoscopic ruckus the King of Instruments raises when the organ soloist takes center stage!)

While Karel Ancerl’s recording of the Mass (Supraphon 1930) still radiates awesome power, his 56-year-old sound is battleship gray compared to the highly nuanced color scheme on display here. Sir Charles Mackerras’s memorable 1986 recording also bears Supraphon’s imprimatur (3575) but those shrill, variable sonics don’t come close to this either.

The singing and playing are exemplary in the Mass, and in the accompanying works as well. Soprano Sara Jakubiak and tenor Stuart...
Skelton dominate the liturgy as per Janacek’s instructions, and neither is a shrinking violet. The Central European throb you don’t mind hearing in this music comes naturally to both voices. I especially like the tenor’s Oce Nas (Our Father), a wonderful piece that deserves to be better known. This time around, the accompaniment from the organ and harp is gorgeously ethereal—a gentle backdrop for Skelton’s heroic timbre. That makes for an interesting contrast with Thomas Walker under Daniel Reuss (Harmonia Mundi 902097; J/A 2012). Walker’s voice is more lyrical, but there’s some pungent ethnicity imparted to his prayer courtesy of the Old World harmonium providing the accompaniment.

I had never heard Janacek’s ‘Ave Maria’ for soprano, organ, and obbligato violin before and am pleased to make its acquaintance. The somber Adagio is always a pleasure, especially when played and recorded this handsomely. Excellent annotation is included.

Johnston: Quartets 6–8
Kepler Quartet—New World 80730—67 minutes

This is the final volume of the Kepler’s traversal of the complete Ben Johnston (b. 1926) quartets (there are 10). These three are for some reason presented in the order 7, 8, 6. I have no patience for such irrational programming nonsense, and it is becoming distressingly common. I wish it would stop.

Quartet 6 (1980) is an essentially diatonic but serial work composed in just intonation. When the 12-tone row is combined with its undertones and each pitch is inflected with microtones, the resulting pitch collection is vast. Furthermore, the work is composed as “endless melody” with serial but non-angular rhythmic procedures and palindromic formations. The tone is lyrical and sad (the composer had major depression at the time). Its language could be characterized as out-of-tune diatonic Americanism (I won’t engage in perceptual issues of intonation theory here), with impossibly meandering long lines and lack of obvious repetition.

Quartet 7 (1984) is in 3 movements: a brief prelude, a palindromic scherzo, and a huge set of variations. Beethoven is a distant inspiration. The work opens with mysterious tremolos that devolve into chaos. The scherzo continues the mystery with ghostly ponticello creatures as trio. The sprawling 16-minute set of variations is also depressive. The movement is in 7 continuous sections (the variations) characterized by searching depths, motivic development, muddy harmony, and starry visions. There is an atmosphere of resigned profundity.

Written after his depression subsided, Quartet 8 (1986) opens out into the traditional classical model, but in Johnston’s expanded just intonation. I is a somewhat knotty sonata form, II a slow waltz, III a sickly minuet with a pizzicato trio, and the finale a happy bluegrass rondo.

The program concludes with Quietness (1996), a brief setting of a poem about death by 13th Century Persian poet Rumi read by a painted Johnston (sort of chanted). It’s scary.

Notes by enthusiastic Johnston scholar Kyle Gann.

Jolivet: Bassoon Concerto; see Vivaldi

Jommelli: Faith, Hope, and Divine Love
Valentina Bilancione, s; Marialucia Caruso, a; Manuel Ried, t; MAKSI Academy Orchestra/ Maurizio Quaremba
Bongiovanni 2480 [2CD] 97 minutes

Niccolo Jommelli (1714-74) was one of the most celebrated and influential operatic composers of his time. His early training was in the Neapolitan school, and he later studied with Giovanni Battista Martini in Bologna. Jommelli also acknowledged the influence of the Germans Hasse and Graun. His own influence was perceptible in composers of the younger generation, including Mozart. He produced works for the principal operatic centers in Italy and beyond, including Vienna and Stuttgart.

The work here is an Italian oratorio written in 1750 for the Collegio Nazareno in Rome. It comes from a period when Jommelli was resident in that city and part of the musical establishment of St Peter’s Basilica. It is scored for three vocal soloists and orchestra. The singers represent three allegorical characters—Faith (Fede, tenor), Hope (Speranza, alto), and Divine Love (Amor Divino, soprano)—who engage in dialog.

As an operatic composer, Jommelli was especially admired for his capacity to touch the hearts of his listeners with his musical projection of dramatic passion. There is little scope for that in this work, as a less dramatic libretto could hardly be imagined. The text is so flowery and obscure in wording as to be nearly meaningless to most modern listeners. It does not help that the English translation in the booklet is appallingly bad. That also goes for
the translation of the program notes. Jommelli's music is often very attractive, but there is nothing here to make us forget Haydn or Mozart. Most of the work consists of florid da capo arias linked by secco recitative, but there are several instances of accompanied recitative—an idiom that Jommelli made particularly his own and used to telling effect in his operas.

This is a recording of a performance in August of 2015 at a museum in Germany. There is a fair amount of extraneous noise. The performance itself leaves a great deal to be desired. The orchestral playing is rather heavy-footed, and the three vocal soloists are in over their heads with respect to technique, artistry, and refinement. Readers who absolutely must have a recording of this rarity on any terms may want to acquire it, but I suspect most listeners will be disappointed. It is worth noting that the review copy had some tracking problems, and I had to smooth out some bumps in the center hole of the first disc before my CD player would accept it.

**KEATON**

**KESSNER: Reverberance; Sonata; Quartet 4; Tornando al Mare; Suite**

Versailles Guitar Quartet; Velasquez Quartet; Nancy Roth, v; Dolly Eugenio Kessner, Lucia Rodriguez, p; Cecilia Fontes, s

Centaur 3478—77 minutes

Daniel Kessner is a professor emeritus at Cal State Northridge. All the pieces resulted from a performance by the Versailles Guitar Quartet he heard on the radio just after he retired in 2006. He was impressed and asked them if they were interested in a quartet he had written the previous year. They were, and they eventually performed the work. Through that group he encountered several other musicians they worked with, and that resulted in the four other major works here, dating from 2007 to 2012. Obviously, his retirement from academia did not mean retirement from composing. I find only one time his music was reviewed in these pages, a recording of his quartets on this label (M/J 2012). This is marked "Chamber Music III," so that is presumably an earlier volume in this series.

His music is interesting and well crafted. His voice is dissonant but tonal—I hear a fair amount of Bartok in his music, perhaps because the work that made the strongest impression is his fourth string quartet. It has the same sense of kinetic motion, except for III: 'Still Life: Melody with Ice Crystals,' which is in the same world as Bartok's night music.

Of the two guitar quartets, both are strong, but I prefer the suite from 2012. Like the quartet, it is an exciting driving work, particularly the wildly swirling finale. I don't know any of his other works for guitar. Both the violin and piano sonata and the song cycle, based on the Italian poetry of Giuseppe Ungaretti, are worthy works. All of the performers here are excellent.

There are surely dozens of composers making interesting, communicative music, who don't happen to get recordings distributed on national labels. I am glad to know Dr Kessner's work—I see on his website that he has done several other works for guitar in chamber combinations, including three more quartets just after the suite. I hope to get to know some of those as well.

**KEATON**

**KLENAU: Symphony 9**

Cornelia Ptaset, Suzanne Resmark, Michael Weinius, Steffen Bruun; Danish Concert Choir & Symphony/ Michael Schoenwandt

Dacapo 8.256098 [2CD] 89 minutes

Accomplished but almost forgotten Danish composer Paul von Klenau (1853-1945) left Denmark and emigrated to Germany of all places in the 30s—he was just in time for the beginnings of WW II. He seemed to be quite ambivalent about Hitler's ascension. Before the war he became involved with Schoenberg and company, but only became entirely enslaved by Degenerate Art around that time. Like so many composers, he used the techniques, mostly melodically (never harmonically), as he saw fit. For the most part, his music is traditionally tonal with unexpected voice leadings in a style palatable to unsoiled German listeners.

There are actually 10 completed symphonies, but he renamed the last one Symphony 9 in honor of Beethoven (but not in honor of people who can count). It was written at the end of the war and his life (1945). It's essentially a Requiem blended with an overall symphonic concept. The text is expanded with a line reminiscent of Kant about the stars being above philosophy. The work is filled with choral passages reminiscent of Beethoven, with plenty of skillful fugal writing. It is considered the longest symphony written by a Danish composer. Any influence of Mahler is conspicuously absent, but Bruckner is omnipresent.

This is basically the standard four-movement romantic symphony with a robust sonata form opening with plenty of counterpoint, a
Brucknerian scherzo complete with rustic trio, a rousing Teutonic march (which might disturb some), and an expansive Brucknerian Adagio, with some pregnant references to that composer’s Ninth. The finale states that “dreaming of heroic deeds we wish to take up arms while fighting for peace.” Interpreting this might or might not prove the key to a potentially sinister background of this work, but in the end this is an impressive example of the genre. One could almost call it a neglected masterpiece if it weren’t for some of the background implications. Its odd but interesting blending of genres and influences make it a must for the curious.

Performances are excellent. Texts and translations. Good notes.

GIMBEL

KODALY: Duo; RAVEL: Sonata
Kirsten Yon, v; Jeffrey Lastrapes, vc
Centaur 3465—47 minutes

These important duets for violin and cello by Zoltan Kodaly and Maurice Ravel are logical discmates, written in 1914 (Kodaly) and 1920-22 (Ravel). They are both strong and complex compositions that require much in the realms both of technical playing and in balancing of personality by the players. Both works are replete with nationalistic melodies in a sophisticated setting.

Yon and Lastrapes play with involvement and attention to detail and balance, though I find myself straining to hear Lastrapes sometimes, not that Yon drowns him out but that he plays the accompanimental passages, particularly the many pizzicatos, at such a low volume that they need to be played back at a rather high volume in order to be heard. Otherwise, these are sensitive readings, though you will find a great deal of competition in the Cello Overview (March/April 2009).

GIMBEL

KORENS: Much Ado about Nothing Suite; 2 Songs From Die Tote Stadt;
COPLAND: Violin Sonata; 2 Pieces
Yuri Bekker, v; Andrew Armstrong, p
Navona 6046—54 minutes

This is a very nice album, with a good violinist (concertmaster in Charleston) on a beautiful Stradivarius that has never been recorded before. The Korngold suite and the two arias are gorgeous music in the Viennese tradition. None were written for this combination, and I can only imagine the arias sung and them and the suite with orchestra. On solo violin there is a curious resemblance to Kreisler.

The Copland sonata was written for violin and piano, though here again I found myself thinking of a recording with orchestra (chamber orchestra, actually): Andres Cardenes on Albany 1148. It sounds wonderful that way—not as stark as it does here. That is especially so in the gentle portions (mostly II). But since I generally prefer to hear a piece the way the composer wrote it, I can hardly object to this new recording of the Copland.

The other two Copland pieces are welcome: a Nocturne and the ‘Ukelele Serenade’. They sound the way their titles suggest they should. The serenade is playful and jazzy.

VROON

KOWALSKI: Pierrot Lunaire;
see SCHOENBERG

KREBS: Organ works
Annette Unternährer, org; Thomas Unternährer, ob—Genuin 16399—74 minutes

Johnann Ludwig Krebs may have been JS Bach’s most talented and favorite pupil. Krebs was a pupil of Bach for eight years, and in 1729 he became the harpsichordist for Bach’s Collegium Musicum. Their relationship engendered the well-known quip: “In this great Bach (stream) only a single Krebs (crayfish) was caught.” The influence of Bach on Kreb’s style and compositional procedures is hard to overestimate, and he really seems to be the composer who most consciously emulated Bach; indeed, there is one organ work on this recording that was probably composed by both of them, the ‘Wir Glauben all an einen Gott’.

This is a refreshing presentation of a good selection of Krebs’s organ music—all of the surviving music is for organ solo or organ with other instruments, except for two lute concertos. On this recording we hear the Trost organ in Grosengotter, Thuringia. Krebs was familiar with the work of Trost. Annette Unternährer-Gfeller is an excellent performer, both expressively and technically; the performances are beautiful, and nothing seems out of place or unconsidered. The organ sounds lovely, and it is enhanced on several pieces by the fine oboist. Everything about the production is beautifully done, including the clever crab graphic on the cover.

HAMILTON

American Record Guide
**LALO:** *Cello Concerto*; see SAINT-SAENS *Symphonie Espagnole*; see Collections

**LANNER:** *Viennese Dances*
Cannes Orchestra/ Wolfgang Dorner  
Naxos 573552—68 minutes

Joseph Lanner is considered the inventor of the formal Viennese waltz. The waltz became synonymous with Vienna after the Congress of Vienna (1814-15). Johann Strauss, Jr dealt with this subject in his 1899 operetta *Wiener Blut*. Lanner (born in 1801) started playing in coffee houses and restaurant orchestras at 14 and formed his own orchestra at 17, where he was joined for a period by Johann Strauss, Sr. Lanner did very well in Vienna and eventually wrote 207 pieces: waltzes, polkas, galops, and other concert music.

The ten lesser known selections here were written in his middle and late periods (1826-1843) and display many of the dance types he wrote in that period. Their names—‘Tarantula Galop’, ‘Witches Dance Waltz’, ‘Schönbrun Waltz’, ‘New Year’s Galop’—show that they were written for specific purposes or events (described in the booklet).

Although the music is enjoyable, for various reasons it’s not particularly memorable. What I noticed most was that Lanner would use many melodies with different tempos without developing or repeating them. To extend a piece he would just add another melody. Instead of ABA or AABA, the music format might be ABCADEFG. With this odd musical format it was often difficult to determine when the piece would end. Sometimes the music would end abruptly when the last melody stopped. It’s also unlikely anyone would (or could) dance to these pieces, because they start and stop a lot, with pauses between melodies in the same piece. This might be why Lanner is less recognized than Strauss, who used more consistent melodies and rhythms and knew when to develop a Coda to end the dance.

The performances are very good, though it’s difficult to determine if sometimes the starts, stops, pauses, and slow-downs were added by the conductor. The large orchestra plays beautifully and is recorded in astonishing detail. You might want to test-out your subwoofer on the amazing bass response.

**FISCH**

**LANNER:** *Waltzes, Polonaises, Dances*
**SCHUBERT:** *Overture in C minor; Waltzes & Landlers; Moments Musicaux*  
*An de Musik*  
Erika Miklosa, s; Lanner Quartet  
Hungaroton 32766—58 minutes

This release is called *Viennese Miniatures*; it contains short pieces by Lanner and Schubert. It is the debut release of the very accomplished Lanner Quartet, and it is completely charming. It includes four dances by Lanner and various short pieces by Schubert, arranged for string quartet by the composers, Alexander Weismann for the Lanner Quartet, or other arrangers.

Unlike the Lanner *Viennese Dances* (Naxos, above) the dances on this Hungaroton disc are captivating and written for dancing. They have consistent melodies with some variations and a final Coda returning to the original theme. There are few abrupt tempo changes or pauses between each section, so they are more attractive and danceable. The quartet instrumentations are much as you might expect in a salon or café, and they are performed with deftness, accuracy, and musicality.

The Schubert selections include the *Overture in C minor, Waltzes and Landlers, Moments Musicaux*, and finally ‘An de Musik’ beautifully sung by Hungarian soprano Erika Miklosa. Again, the arrangements for string quartet are light, musical, and very appealing. Excellent sound. Informative booklet.

**FISCH**

**LAURIN:** *Organ Pieces*
Acclamations; Petite Suite; Pelerinages en Lorraigne; Poeme Symphonique pour le Temps de Avent; Beelzebub’s Laugh; Psalm 47  
Brenda Portman, org  
Raven 975—73 minutes

Rachel Laurin is a Canadian composer who, besides composing hundreds of vocal, choral, instrumental, and orchestral works, has written extensively for the organ. She served as organist for several churches in Quebec, Montreal, and Ottawa and now devotes her time to master classes, composition, and performance.

The recording was made on the 1990 4-manual, 88-rank Casavant found in Hyde Park Methodist Church in Cincinnati. It replaced one of the last Aeolian-Skinner organs, which this reviewer played while organist for this church in his undergraduate years at CCM.
The recorded sound is warm, but the organ is in a very dry acoustic, which perhaps is part of why the sound is somewhat top-heavy.

The theme of the program is entirely liturgical, and the composer joins the performer in the last work, an organ duet. Portman plays this well-crafted music with conviction and supplies the virtuosity it often demands. There are some interesting moments but, as a whole, I find the style somewhat derivative: hints of Langlais, Messiaen, Duruflé, Tournemire. After a while it all begins to sound the same. The booklet offers extensive notes on the music and specifications of the organ.

LAWES: Solo Lyra Viol
Richard Boothby
Harmonia Mundi 907625—60 minutes

The English composer William Lawes (1602-45) is best known for his music for viol consort, which has been recorded a good deal and is well worth hearing. Lawes has an expressive, somewhat folk-influenced style that satisfies the ears and doesn’t overwork the brain.

His music for solo lyra viol is on the same order though a bit simpler. Here we have 35 pieces played mainly in groups of 3, primarily an Almain(e) followed by a Corant(o) and a Saraband. There is also a Prelude, a Country Coll, a Jigge, and an Air. The order is arranged by Boothby and makes a lively program. As you can see by the timing of the disc, these are relatively short works, even with the repeats. There are only 8 pieces that last longer than 2 minutes and only one that takes more than 3.

The lyra viol is a curious instrument that contains extra strings under the main ones that are not played but are tuned to match the ones that are, giving the sound a slight echo effect, pleasant to hear but not disturbing to the ears. The tuning varies a good deal and changes the sound of the instrument when you are in a major or a minor key. Tunings are named here but not entirely explained. Boothby has a natural sound and a lively temperament and puts this lovely music across in an effective way. I can find no other recordings of this music.

D MOORE

Leifs: Songs, all
Finnur Bjarnason, t; Orn Magnusson, p
BIS 2170—80 minutes

Jon Leifs (1899-1968) is known as Iceland’s most famous composer and is something of a cult figure. His rugged, angular, and pounding orchestral works were inspired by the natural phenomena of Iceland and the great Icelandic sagas. In his 1950 artistic manifesto he described his approach to composition as “filled with wisdom and severity, terse and majestic like a cliff rising out of the ocean”.

During his turbulent life he composed songs, some containing the germs of his orchestral works.

This performance of his 32 songs was released by Smekkleyss in 2001 as a 2-disc set. It has been remastered by BIS as a single disc and released at a much lower price than the original. Most of the songs are based on Icelandic sagas.

The stark and severe landscape of Iceland is reflected in the angular vocal lines and stark, rugged, intensely percussive accompaniment. The tone is austere, volatile, and tumultuous, with occasional tender moments. Some songs incorporate Icelandic folk music. There is a modal and almost neo-medieval quality to his music.

Most of the texts depict the heroes of the Icelandic sagas. His settings are expressions of his artistic manifesto: “spearing with words worldly wise and severe, terse and majestic, each one unique”. The final song of the program, ‘Torrek’, a dark and brooding lament on the drowning death of his daughter Lil, is a setting of an episode from Egil’s Saga. His songs were often inspired by events in his life and cover a wide range of moods, from tender and delicate lullabies to forceful epic songs.

Bjarnason and Magnusson have championed the music of their compatriot in concerts and recordings for BIS. Bjarnason recorded Groa’s Spell as part of a 2005 BIS recording of choral works by Leifs (N/D 2005). Magnusson recorded his complete piano music (M/A 1995).

Bjarnason is magnificently stentorian in the songs that erupt like geysers and gently intimate in the lullabies and love songs. Magnusson offers steely and sturdy collaboration.

The notes give good background on the texts and music but scant information about the composer. Texts and translations.

R MOORE

American Record Guide
**LESCUREL: Love Songs**
Ensemble Celadon/ Paulin Bundgen
Ricercar 366—76:30

The songs and poems by Jehan de Lescurel (fl.1320) have often been overshadowed by the other musical work included in the same manuscript, the *Roman de Fauvel*. While little is certain about his biography, his lyrics, one of which included his name as an acrostic, are not the long courtly love songs of the earlier troubadours and trouvères; many are quite brief and almost aphoristic, though he does use the traditional forms for French lyric poetry: ballads, virelais, and rondeaux. (Missing on this recording are the two extended *dits entes*, long poems with interpolated lyric refrains.)

This release includes 31 songs by Lescurel from the manuscript. Bündgen made a number of interpretive decisions that make this a very enjoyable recording. The first is that the three singers (Anne Delafosse and Clara Coutouly, s; and Bündgen, ct) divide up the songs according to whether the lyrics present a female (Coutouly), male (Bündgen), or ambiguous viewpoint (Delafosse). While a few lyrics are sung a cappella by solo voices, most have tasteful and discrete instrumental accompaniments, and a few have added polyphonic voices based on the model of ‘A vous douce debonnaire’, the single polyphonic song in the collection (though this recording omits the monophonic version of this lyric also included in the original manuscript).

A few of Lescurel’s songs were included on an earlier anthology by Sequentia (DHM 77155), but the closest competition is the selection of 20 songs by the Binchois Ensemble (Virgin 45066). Like Bündgen, Dominique Vellard created variety by including some a cappella performances, some with instrumental accompaniment, though he also had a few songs performed only by instruments. (The older release also includes both the monophonic and polyphonic versions of ‘A vous douce debonnaire’.) Both recordings are sensitive to the texts, but having the almost complete set is a distinct advantage. While I would not want to be without the Binchois recording, this new release (with excellent booklet notes and complete texts and translations) will also have its place on my shelf, right next to the *Roman de Fauvel*.

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**L’ESTRANGE: Choral Pieces**

*Magnificat; Nunc Dimittis; Lighten Our Darkness; Let All the World in Every Corner Sing; Lord’s Prayer; Tune Me, O Lord; On Eagles’ Wings; Oculi Omnium; My Song Is Love Unknown; God Be In My Head; Panis Angelicus; Lute-Book Lullaby; Epiphany Carol; Hodie!; Let the People Praise You; Irish Blessing*

James Sherlock, p, org; Tenebrae/ Nigel Short
Signum 454—72 minutes

Alexander L’Estrange (b 1974) is yet another British choral composer winning popularity these days. In the notes he sums up his music for us with consummate simplicity. *On Eagles’ Wings*, he tells us, “is the culmination of over 30 years immersion in two of my greatest musical loves, cathedral music and jazz.” He proceeds to tell a story from his days as a choirmaster at New College, Oxford where, under the gimlet eye of the redoubtable Edward Higginbottom, he got in trouble for humming a harmonic 9th while everyone else was singing the final chord of Herbert Howells’s ‘Spotless Rose’. The maestro, he recalls, was *not* amused.

These days L’Estrange is winning praise from the likes of John Rutter and LSO Chorus conductor Simon Halsey, so he’s perfectly free to add 9ths, 6ths, or whatever harmonies he bloody well chooses. What’s more, his “Jazz in the Cathedral” idiom works quite nicely because of the talent and taste he brings to the synthesis. There’s no sense of L’Estrange as a mad tinkerer, keen to goose the Anglican tradition with razor-sharp harmonies or amped-up syncopations. (Indeed, most of the jazz licks are harmonic and not rhythmic at all.) When L’Estrange gets a good idea, he sounds perfectly willing to take it where it needs to go without forcing any stylistic priorities onto it.

His ‘Hodie’ is a snappy mainstream affair where the joy of Christmas speaks jauntily for itself. A radiant ‘Irish Blessing’ is very Rutter-like, as it flirts quietly and innocently with the popular idiom. The catchiest melodies of the lot come to us on ‘Eagle’s Wings’, with L’Estrange’s soprano harmonies lingering in the memory long after the track has concluded. I also like the ‘Panis Angelicus’ where the composer’s tight, jazz-inspired harmonies are woven in slowly as the melodies repeat.

In all of the selections, L’Estrange’s ideas are accorded flattering support by the Tenebrae chamber choir, which is, without question, one of Britain’s—and the world’s—best. I rather like this composer and think you will too.

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**BREWER**

**GREENFIELD**

September/October 2016
Lickl: Quartets (3); Cassation; Trio
Lajos Lencses, ob; Natalie Chee, v; Paul Pesthy, va; Angar Schneider, vc; Dirk Altmann, cl; Wolfgang Wippler, hn; Libor Sima, bn
Toccata 350—78 minutes
This release is dedicated to oboe chamber music of Johann Georg Lickl, an Austrian composer who studied with Haydn and Albrechtsberger and collaborated with Schikaneder in Vienna. This program is made up of three quartets for oboe and strings, the Cassation for oboe, clarinet, horn, and bassoon, and a trio for clarinet, horn and bassoon. The Cassation was at one time attributed to Mozart and may have been inspired by the famous quintet for piano and winds, also in E-flat. It is by far the strongest piece on this recording, though the trio is another fine work with some interesting writing for the horn. The oboe quartets are tuneful and pleasant, but not brilliant or especially inspired, and probably should be consumed at separate sittings.

Hungarian oboist Lajos Lencses heads up an excellent group of musicians from the Stuttgart Radio Symphony. A veteran of some 50 recordings, he is as solid as ever, with his trademark bright, clear tone, fantastic technique, and musical artistry. Lickl’s career is described in detail in the extensive liner notes, and the sound quality is very good.

Ligeti: Piano Concerto; Capriccio 2;
Haydn: Concertos 4+11; Capriccio in C
Shai Wosner; Danish Symphony/ Nicholas Collon—Onyx 4174—80 minutes
I’ve been waiting to review a Shai Wosner recording in order to tell you about the first time I heard him play. It was at Eastman, and the student-run new music group Ossia (many of whose inaugural members later became Alarm Will Sound) had programmed—somewhat ambitiously—Ligeti’s piano concerto. As conductor Alan Pierson recalls, an Eastman student had planned to perform the solo part but backed out close to concert time. After a lot of searching, Alan found Shai, then finishing up at Juilliard, to fill in. His performance was one of the most exciting I had heard. It’s hard to believe that this one is even better, but it is. He’s settled into this difficult, mesmerizing, and sometimes loony music and plays it like a Beethoven concerto. His own remarkable clarity is mirrored in the expert collaboration from the Danes, who reveal the crystalline texture of the music and its formidable rhythmic complexities in an enviably effortless way. Two solo Ligeti capriccios are fine as well.

It is only in his Haydn that I find problems. The fast movements often seem to project a rather naive sense of humor that many people think is what makes Haydn Haydn. That is incorrect. Haydn’s humor is sophisticated and mature—it’s not dark humor, nor is it petulant irony, but rather the humor of a man who had to work very hard to accomplish what he did and who faced, along the way, more loneliness than he should have. Only in the slow movements—for instance in the G-major Concerto—does Wosner approach the emotional depth that I find in all Haydn’s music. But I believe he’ll get there eventually.

Haskins

Liszt: Songs
I-chiao Shih, mz; Clemens Müller, p
Genuin 16402—67 minutes
The full title of this program is “Like the Sky in Rome: A Journey To Italy In Songs By Franz Liszt”. Selections include ‘Mignons Lied’ (Kensit Du das Land), ‘Die Loreley’, and ‘Bist du!’ (the latter, the genesis of the program’s title, briefly mentions Rome). The final piece, ‘L’Vidi In Terra Angelici Constumi’, suggests a thematic arrival of sorts in Italy.

I recently heard another program of songs by Liszt (Centaur 3386, J/F 2016). The Centaur recording is certainly better, though this recording makes use of “Liszt’s original Stein-graeber piano”. It’s a wonderful thing to have the piano itself play (excuse the pun) a role in a recording project; Müller plays it with sensitivity and skill. Shih is a committed interpreter; but her diction, especially on the “ck” sound, is so aggressively produced that it’s distracting. She has a nice line but I don’t love the voice. Notes, texts, and translations.

Heisel

Liszt: Songs 4
Sasha Cooke, mz; Julius Drake, p
Hyperion 68117—61 minutes
Like the previous releases in this project, the 17 songs of this volume come from Liszt’s early years to seven years before he died. It is illuminating to hear how the virtuosity and richness of his earlier years gives way to a leaner and more austere style later on. An advantage of this Hyperion series is the chance to hear his reworking of songs. Here, for example, we have
three versions of ‘Was Liebe Sie’ (1843, 1855, and 1879) that evolve from playful to reflective to wistful. The songs are not set in chronological order but in a way that brings out their contrasts, as when the filigreed accompaniment of the first ‘Was Liebe Sie’ setting is followed by the spare and (for measures) unaccompanied ‘Verlassen.’

Previous volumes of this commendable series have been sung by Matthew Polenzani (M/A 2011), Angelika Kirchschlager (N/D 2012), and Gerald Finley (J/A 2015) in collaboration with the exemplary Julius Drake. Sasha Cooke’s accomplished readings of these songs continue the exceptionally high quality of the earlier volumes. Cooke is attentive to the pervasive sadness and elegiac tone of many of these songs and seems thoroughly at home with them. She has a smooth and luscious voice—plummy alto tones in her lower range, good bite in her middle range, and some hard edge in her top notes. She draws out the seductiveness of ‘Die Lorelei,’ though her top notes there sound a bit strained. Overall hers is a smooth and luscious voice.

Hyperion consistently offers outstanding notes, written for these Liszt volumes by the venerable Susan Youens—and texts and translations.

R MOORE

LISZT: Dante Sonata; see MOUSSORGSKY

LOBO: Mass, Maria Magdalene; Lamentations; Regina Caeli; O Quam Suavis; GUERRERO: Maria Magdalene et Altera Maria

Westminster Cathedral Choir/ Martin Baker
Hyperion 68106—69 minutes

Alonso Lobo (1555-1617) began his musical career as a choirboy at Seville Cathedral under the tutelage of Francisco Guerrero (1528-99). He proceeded to holy orders and was appointed to a canon’s stall at the collegiate church in his home town of Osuna. In 1591 he was appointed assistant and presumptive successor to Guerrero at Seville, but in 1593 Lobo accepted the post of maestro de capilla at Toledo, Spain’s primatial see. He returned to Seville Cathedral in 1604 and remained there for the rest of his life.

Lobo’s only publication was a set of six masses and seven motets printed in Madrid in 1602. All but one of the masses are parodies of motets by Guerrero. The mass recorded here, Maria Magdalene, is based on Guerrero’s six-part (SSATBB) Easter motet ‘Maria Magdalene et Altera Maria,’ also recorded here to introduce the mass. Lobo takes over Guerrero’s part distribution to produce a rich and intricate texture.

In addition to the publication of 1602, numerous works by Lobo survive in manuscript. He wrote two sets of lessons for Holy Saturday Tenebrae. The second set is found in a Toledo Cathedral choirbook so badly damaged that the music cannot be reconstructed. The first set survives in a much later (1772) manuscript copy at Seville Cathedral. The text is from chapter 3 of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and as was customary in liturgical settings of these texts, Lobo sets the Hebrew initials to the prophetic verses, and he concludes with the refrain “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum.” As the notes point out, Lobo’s settings of the Hebrew initials get longer and more intense as the work progresses.

The program concludes with two motets. The four-part ‘Regina Caeli,’ the Marian antiphon for the Easter season, survives in an untexted manuscript intended for instrumental performance. A paraphrase of the Spanish plainchant for the antiphon appears in the top part, and from there the reconstruction of the choral motet was relatively straightforward. The motet that concludes the program is ‘O quam Suavis est, Domine,’ a six-part setting of an antiphon by St Thomas Aquinas from the liturgy he wrote for the feast of Corpus Christi. Lobo’s setting seems to assume the character of a tender love song to the Blessed Sacrament.

In assessing Lobo’s place in history, the booklet allows that he was not an innovator who broke new stylistic ground in the art of polyphony, but rather one of the last of the Spanish masters of that tradition. Yet some of Lobo’s music “rises above the conventions of beauty into a realm of great inspiration, on the level of his friend Victoria’s best.”

The Westminster Cathedral Choir is the pre-eminent Roman Catholic choral foundation in Britain. Like the traditional Anglican foundations, it is a choir of men and boys with countertenors on the alto part; but their sound is subtly different from the characteristic Anglican sound of, say, King’s College, Cambridge. It is a more continental sound, perhaps not unlike St John’s College, Cambridge, as directed by George Guest. It is a brilliant and majestic sound, but I would not describe it as warm. A rich reverberation is captured in the recording, and with the intensity of the choral sound some details of part-writing are obscured in the imposing acoustic. There is
not very much dynamic shading in these performances, and over the long haul I find that tiring to the ear. At the same time, such shadings should take second place to a keen sense of phrase trajectory, and one cannot fault these highly accomplished performances on that score. Even so, I wish for more tender understatement in the Agnus Dei from the mass and in the motet ‘O quam Suavis.’

**Lotti:** *Dixit Dominus in G minor; Miserere in C minor; Mass, Sancti Christophori; Credo in G minor*

Syred Consort; Orchestra of St Paul’s/ Ben Palmer

Delphian 34182—79 minutes

Antonio Lotti (1667-1740) is known today chiefly for three settings of the text “Crucifixus etiam pro nobis...” for six, eight, and ten voices. Each comes from a complete setting of the Nicene Creed, and the present recording gives the six-voice and eight-voice settings in their original context. As program annotator Ben Byram-Wigfield points out, Lotti’s output includes more than 140 works of sacred music and 23 operas, as well as other genres of secular vocal and instrumental music. He believes that the composer is ripe for a major rediscovery comparable to Monteverdi and Vivaldi in the 20th Century and Bach in the 19th. Most of this music is claimed as first recordings.

From the age of 17 until his death at the age of 73, Lotti was professionally associated with the musical establishment of St Mark’s in Venice. There were trips to other musical centers, most notably a two-year stint (1717-19) at the court of Dresden, where he supervised the production of his last three operas; but for the most part he was active in Venice, and in his later years devoted himself mainly to sacred music. In addition to his work for St Mark’s, he accepted commissions from other Venetian churches to compose music for festivals and other special occasions. Some of these works employed extravagant resources: choral writing in as many as 14 parts and orchestras augmented with choirs of woodwinds and brass. The works here are for more modest forces—a moderate-sized choir and orchestra of strings and continuo—but they are still substantial and imposing works.

We usually think of large-scale liturgical works, especially masses, as unified works conceived as a multi-movement whole. In Venice it was more customary for liturgical texts to be set individually and compiled for specific occasions. Lotti wrote 12 settings of the Kyrie, 14 of the Gloria, and 5 of the Credo. When these items were lengthy, it was the custom to sing the Sanctorus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei to plainsong. Jan Dismas Zelenka, who was one of Lotti’s pupils, compiled such settings into what appear to be conventional masses and gave them fanciful titles, like the *St Christopher Mass* here. For the Sanctorus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei, Zelenka produced a pastiche from works by Lotti. It is notable that these movements are much more compact than the Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo. It is this Credo that includes the familiar eight-part ‘Crucifixus.’

The Vesper Psalm *Dixit Dominus* (Vulgate 109) in G minor is one of six surviving settings by Lotti of this text and the most concentrated of them. The *Miserere* (Vulgate 50) in C minor is one of five settings. The Credo in G minor is for two antiphonal choirs with the orchestra forming a third choir. This work includes the six-part ‘Crucifixus.’

As with most composers of the 17th and 18th Centuries, Lotti treats lengthy liturgical texts as a series of short movements alternating full choir and orchestra with sections for solo voices or ensembles with lighter instrumental accompaniment. He was a master of counterpoint in general and of fugue in particular. The fugal movements in the works recorded here are fluent and elegant. In these movements Lotti sets a tone of churchly formality while avoiding the dry stiffness often found in less adept writers. In style his liturgical music is not worlds different from his younger contemporary Vivaldi, but one would be unlikely to mistake one for the other.

There are not very many recordings devoted entirely to Lotti’s music. I have reviewed two others. The earlier includes the concerted Kyrie in B-flat and Gloria in D with the *stile antico* Mass on the Sixth Tone (Hungaroton 32042; S/O 2002). The other contains Vesper Psalms that survive in Dresden court archives and most likely date from the time of the composer’s sojourn there (CPO 777 180; M/J 2007). At that time I faulted Lotti’s music as repetitious and with too much reliance on facile sequences. This new recording has induced me to reconsider that verdict. At his best, Lotti’s sacred music compares favorably with Vivaldi’s.

The performances here may be technically unimpeachable, but they seem to have something of a take-it-or-leave-it quality. They are not as engaging as I suspect they would be with more careful nuance and greater sensitiv-
It to phrasing and pacing. The recorded sound seems aggressively bright in full passages, and the balances are not always ideal. There are many places where the chamber organ sounds too prominent for a continuo instrument.

**GATENS**

**Luchesi:** *Salve Regina; Stabat Mater; Kyrie; Miserere; Te Deum*

Laura Antonaz, Elena Biscuola, Luca Dordolo, Matteo Bellotto; Busoni Chamber Orchestra; Trieste Civic Chorus/ Massimo Belli

Concerto 2098—61 minutes

Andrea Luchesi (1741-1801) began his career in Venice, where he was trained in both operatic and sacred composition. He had operatic successes in Venice and accepted commissions to write both sacred and secular works there. He was also renowned as a performer on the harpsichord and organ, and in 1768 he was invited to play for the dedication of the organ at Padua Cathedral. In 1771 he led a traveling opera company to Germany. In 1774 the Elector Archbishop of Cologne appointed him court Kapellmeister in Bonn, and that became Luchesi’s home base for the remainder of his career, though he still traveled. After the closing of the court theater, Luchesi’s primary occupation was to supply sacred music for the court chapel.

The sacred works on this recording date from 1768 to 1773, though it is likely that the instrumentation was revised in the years at Bonn. When faced with a little-known composer of the 18th Century, I have come to expect technically competent but unimaginative note-spinning. That is certainly not the case with Luchesi, whose writing is elegant melo melifluous and lyrical with frequent touches of dramatic expression. He was sometimes criticized in his day for failing to observe the distinctions between the operatic and churchly styles, but we would not regard that as a fault today. He won the admiration of many contemporaries. Burney declared him “a very pleasing composer”. La Borde referred to “a particularly graceful style, concise and energetic arrangement of the parts, and new ideas”. Mozart included one of Luchesi’s piano concertos in his repertory and wrote an original cadenza for it.

The *Salve Regina, Stabat Mater*, and *Te Deum* are concise settings of the texts, yet Luchesi never gives the impression that he is mechanically scampering through it as quickly as possible. Even Vivaldi is guilty of that in some of his briefer psalm settings. Luchesi’s settings do not sound cramped or rushed.

The other two pieces on the program are more expansive. The three-movement *Kyrie* probably dates from 1768 and was taken to the court chapel at Dresden by Luchesi’s contemporary Johann Gottlieb Naumann, who held a position as composer there. The *Miserere* is the largest-scale work on the program, and like the others, it alternates vocal solos and combinations of solo voices with full choir. Here and there are passages that remind the listener of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*.

The technical standard of these performances is very high. If it is not equal to the very best singers and instrumentalists for this kind of repertory, it is not far behind. In rare moments the choir’s tone is not perfectly blended or refined. Sometimes the soloists seem to be working too hard at their lines, but these too are exceptional moments. Most important, these are warmly engaging performances of highly attractive music directed by Massimo Belli with admirable pacing and coherence. They are claimed as first recordings.

There is only one other recording of music by Luchesi in the ARG index: a disc of instrumental works including the piano concerto with Roberto Plano as soloist with the same orchestra and conductor as on this recording (Concerto 2077; March/April 2014). Catherine Moore gave it a highly favorable review. Enclosed with the present recording is an advertising brochure containing notices of two further recordings of orchestral and solo piano works.

**GATENS**

**Lutoslawski:** *Concerto for Orchestra; Little Suite; Symphony 4*

NDR Symphony/ Krzysztof Urbanski

Alpha 232—56 minutes

This turns out to be useful for people too intimidated by Lutoslawski’s 60s avant-garde-isms to get to know the more palatable later work. The Bartokian *Little Suite* (1949) would have been better placed leading off the program than in the middle. The well-known *Concerto for Orchestra* (1954) has enjoyed a number of excellent recordings. This is a fine one, but check indexes for more obvious choices.

The brief single-movement Symphony 4 (1993), commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, retains the composer’s Polish
nuance, and its structure is clear and accessible. The NDR Symphony plays well enough, but can’t compete with the world-class ensembles that have recorded this music elsewhere. Mr Urbanski is currently the music director of the Indianapolis Symphony.

**GIMBEL**

**LUTOSLAWSKI:** *Little Suite;* see SHOSTAKOVICH

**MACHAUT:** *Mass, Nostre Dame; motets; plainsong propers*
Graindelavoix/ Bjorn Schmelzer
Glossa 32110—73 minutes

This is not your grandfather’s recording of 14th-Century music. These performances by Bjorn Schmelzer and Graindelavoix make a drastic departure from nearly everything we have come to expect from the interpretation of medieval music. The vocal tone seems to derive much of its flavor from jazz or rock, with bent pitches, slides, and funky ornaments. (Compare the singing of the National Anthem at sporting events.) It is all very impressive in its way, and the virtuosity of the singers is indisputable. As for plainsong, forget about Solesmes. The singing of the propers for masses of the Blessed Virgin has almost a Middle Eastern quality. The musical items are given in their liturgical order.

Ten male singers, including director Schmelzer, are listed here. At least two are formidable contrabasses. They furnish a vocal drone with staggered breathing for the communion antiphon 'Beata Viscera', which incorporates a conductus by Perotin of the early 13th Century. Two of Machaut’s polytextual motets are included. ‘Inviolata Genitrix/Felix Virgo/At te Suspiramus Gementes et Flentes’ opens the program. ’Plange, Regni Republica/Tu qui Gregem Tuum Ducis/Apprehende Arma et Scutum et Exurge’ is inserted in place of the Offertory.

In several pages of convoluted, jargon-ridden, and nearly impenetrable prose, Schmelzer seeks to explain his approach to the music of Machaut. He seems to deplore what he calls the “historicism” approach, associated with “modernism” that treats the music as a sterile artifact to be constrained by the notational evidence rather than as a medium whereby singers of the present day make spiritual contact with the past, “activating and animating a musical diagram...to make the past flow into the present”. How this translates into the artistic decisions made for the present recording is not clear. The closest we come is this statement toward the end of the essay: “Finally, we can return the *Messe de Nostre Dame* into its pre-modern(ist) or post-postmodern state, making its hybridity emerge again through diagrammatic, operative performance.” Enough said?

I was surprised to find that there have been no reviews in ARG of new recordings of Machaut’s mass in the past 16 years. The last was Dominique Vellard’s recording with Ensemble Gilles Binchois (Cantus 9624; S/O 2000), favorably reviewed by Peter Loewen. John Barker reviewed two recordings in M/J 1996: Jeremy Summerly and Oxford Camerata (Naxos 553833) and Marcel PerŠs with Ensemble Organum (HM 901590). Summerly worked in close association with Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, whose critical edition of the mass was published by Oxford University Press in 1990. Barker found that recording “well sung and unflinchingly reliable” but not particularly exciting. He found PerŠs far bolder, and not always agreeably so. It is worth noting that Schmelzer pays homage to PerŠs and his recording. Of all the recordings at that time, Barker declared the Hilliard Ensemble’s (Hyperion) “the most musically satisfying recording ever made of the work.”

**GATENS**

**MANEN:** *Caprices 1-3; Elegy; Dances; Romances*
Kalina Macuta, v; Daniel Blanch, p
LMG 2138—70 minutes

This is Volume 2 of Spanish composer Joan Manen’s violin music; Elaine Fine covered the first a few years ago (La Mada Guido 2120, J/A 2014). Manen, who lived from 1883 to 1971, started learning the violin at age 5; four years later he’d made such progress that his father, an amateur musician, quit his job at a textile factory to become young Joan’s accompanist and agent. They played several halls in Portugal and Spain, auditioned for Queen Cristina, then went to Central and South America and eventually to Carnegie Hall. On their third American tour, which lasted from 1895 to 1897, Manen began to compose more and more. He’d already had a jota-waltz published. He later felt that his lack of training hindered his composing technique and withdrew several of his youthful pieces.

Manen’s music is strongly Spanish-flavored, tending toward melancholy. His har-
monies are often unusual, especially for typical Spanish pieces. I don’t think they come from naivety—they are too compelling and judiciously used to be happy accidents. I’m not very familiar with Catalan folk music, but from the little I’ve heard, I believe that’s an influence.

I’m not nearly as taken with Macuta’s playing as Elaine Fine was. She’s talented and generally expressive and capable; but her tone is on the thin side, and her intonation is slightly off the mark now and then. When she plays successive intervals, her bowing is noticeably unpolished. She is best in the slower pieces—which is good, since most of the tempos are on the slow side. The quick, virtuosic Caprice No. 2 lacks some much-needed panache, but the Caprice No. 3, Catalan, is a lot better, as is the Romana Mística, which lives up to its evocative title in writing and in performance. ‘Interrudio’ sounds like a struggle, but ‘Danza Iberica No. 1’ is confident, relaxed, and sparkling, a real treat. The sonics are acceptable; notes are in English and Spanish.

ESTEP

MARCHAND: Harpsichord Pieces; see CLERAMBAULT

MARIOTTE: Songs & Piano
Sabine Revault d’Allonnes, s; Daniel Blumenthal, p
Timpani 1236—67 minutes

This is a program of songs and solo piano music of French composer and conductor Antoine Mariotte (1875-1944). Mariotte was also a sailor; and he wrote pieces for the stage, a cantata, and a piano sonata. His opera Salome, was performed in 1908, three years after Strauss’s, and the two composers and publishers were engaged in a brief scuffle over the rights to the Wilde play. In 2005 Montpellier Opera staged both.

Mariotte’s music is very interesting, a sort of mix between impressionism and the occasional rich, harmonically ambitious, late romantic harmony. It’s complex and dense but at the same time remarkably clear.

“Clear” is how I can also describe the performances. Blumenthal handles the demands of the solo piano music with ease, leading the listener through a shifting landscape of colors and textures. D’Allonnes has a bright, clear, even voice. She manages both lyrical and speech-like lines with great energy.

A lovely recording of music by a composer you may have (like me) never heard of. Notes and texts but no translations.

HEISEL

MARTINU: Songs 4
Jana Hrochova, mz; Giorgio Koukl, p
Naxos 573447—68 minutes

In 1920 Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu at age 30 was sent by the Czechoslovak State to collect Slovak folk-songs as a way to bring Czechs and Slovaks closer together through art and folklore. His efforts resulted in a collection of 30 songs: New Slovak Songs, the major work of this volume. One short work, ‘The Three Virgins’ (1910), and a set of 17 very short songs, Nursery Rhymes (1940) conclude the program and are recorded here for the first time.

Giorgio Koukl has long championed Martinu’s music. He recorded seven volumes of Martinu’s piano works for Naxos, four of them reviewed by Carl Bauman (M/A 2007, J/A 2007, M/J 2008, J/F 2010) and has researched and recorded all the songs—at least the ones he can find—with a Czech mezzo previously listed as Jana Wallingerova and here listed as Jana Hrochova, perhaps as the result of a change in marital status. With this fourth volume, Naxos completes its survey of Martinu’s songs.

Hrochova’s voice has a decidedly Slavic quality—large, rich, and guttural. In his review of Vol. 1 Mr Bauman found that she “has a bit more vibrato than I would prefer” but “sings with considerable gusto and good inflection” (S/O 2011). Erin Heisel was positive in her review of Vol. 3, mentioning her “golden tone and crisp diction” (N/D 2015).

I can’t call it a lovely voice, but it serves the music well enough. She pays attention to the meaning of what she is singing, as far as I can tell. (Naxos makes you go online to get texts, and in this case only English translations are available for all but the short nursery rhymes.) There is little variety in her use of dynamics; it’s all at mf, occasionally rising to a shriller f.

Koukl has supplied a great service to anyone interested in Slovak music through his tireless efforts to find and edit Martinu’s music. Mr Bauman named him “an ideal Martinu interpreter”, and his accompaniment here is sturdy and authoritative.

If you want to hear all of Martinu’s songs, this series is the place to go. If you’re looking for a sampling of his songs, try Magdalena

September/October 2016
Kozena with Graham Johnson (DG 463472). Her voice is vastly superior.

**R MOORE**

**Martini:** *Trios 1-3; Bergerettes*

Smetana Trio—Supraphon 4197—71 minutes

Martini may not be particularly deep or subtle, but he's usually enjoyable. Even when he lets himself go on autopilot, churning out thick, insistent textures with no space for breath, he's still congenial and skillful. The Bergerettes (1939) and Third Trio (1951) are autopilot pieces compared to the First Trio (1930) and Second (1950), and whoever decided the program order really did listeners a dis-service: Third, Bergerettes, Second, then First. Getting through the first half of the program is a chore, and it nearly dulls the ears so that the more inspired trios can’t be appreciated. It’s worth programming a different order on your CD player.

The First Trio is in five short movements, and the last is especially delightful with its sublimated touches of jazz. The slow movement of the Second is a real jewel; the finale’s repeated notes are made bearable by a few elegant changes in tempo and tone. Martini’s tonal, urbane, Czech-inflected harmonic language is appealing.

The bergerette was a form of early French chanson, pastoral in nature, basically a single-stanza virelai. Martini’s set of five is the most markedly ethnic music on the program; once again, the one real flaw is a reliance on chattering textures too often.

The Third Trio has an entrancing start to it, the opening phrase rising out of sheer mystery, and the echoes of that phrase are the best aspect of the movement. II, Andante, has some divine, soaring passages and fascinating harmonic twists; Martini comes close to sabotaging himself with some restless measures, though. III is almost a perpetual motion, and too much of it tries to raise accompanimental figures to the level of development-worthy themes. The melodies Martini does offer are rather simplistic.

The Smetana trio plays all these pieces as naturally as could be, as if they came out of the womb holding the scores. The sonics are fine though not exceptional, and there is one annoying engineering hiccup: the very first note of the first Bergerette is chopped off. Notes are in English, German, French, and Czech.

**ESTEP**

**Martiucci:** *Cello Sonata, op 52; 3 Pieces, op 69; 2 Romances, op 72*

Jacopo Francini, vc; Alessandro Deljavan, p

Tactus 851303—73 minutes

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909) was one of the first Italian romantic composers not to write an opera. He was a pianist and also composed for orchestra, violin, an oratorio Samuel, and some songs. His style is polished and good to listen to, though like the other recordings I have of this material, the cellist doesn’t vary his vibrato enough to intensify his phrasing.

I tend to feel that is the composer’s lack of expressive variety more than the players that makes the music hard to concentrate on. The effect of this new recording is much like the last one I reviewed (Brilliant 94816; J/F 2015). Both are well played but it is hard to keep one’s ears attuned to events in the music. Something seems to be missing in the personality of the composer. It is all very smooth and lovely but not really attention-getting. Both are otherwise fine performances, well recorded.

**D MOORE**

**Mendelssohn:** *Elijah*

Marlis Petersen, Lioba Braun, Maximilian Schmitt, Thomas Oliemans; RIAS Chamber Choir; Berlin Academy for Old Music/ Hans-Christoph Rademann

Accentus 30356 [2CD] 127 minutes

It seems like we’re continually complimenting Elijah recordings, then snatching the kudos back almost immediately. Fruhbeck (EMI) is grand but—oops—maybe Fischer-Dieskau’s voice isn’t ideal for the title role. Shaw’s choir sounds amazing for Telarc but—wouldn’t you know—the dramatic line goes slack more than once. Hickox (Chandos) has a fine Elijah in Willard White, but the women aren’t so great. Paul Daniel (Decca) gives us a larger-than-life Elijah in Bryn Terfel, but the period band leaves us hankering for the amplitude of a great orchestra. Marriner does pretty well, but what’s with the pale sound? (And I don’t much like his female soloists either.) Masur is very good except he does it in German, and isn’t the English version better for a work that triumphed so resoundingly in Queen Victoria’s time? Yes, but no. No, but yes.

As much as I’d like to buck this trend, I have to add one more ambivalent voice to the cacophony of ambivalence already out there.

**American Record Guide**
First of all, this July 2015 concert performance recorded at the Berlin Konzerthaus was given in German. If that disqualifies it in your eyes, so be it. Your loss, though, because there is a great deal to admire. Chorally, everything is extraordinary. The RIAS Chamber Choir, an ensemble of 42, sounds twice that size when kicking the Prophets of Baal to the curb. But when the delicacy of Mendelssohn’s handiwork is on display, the tonal allure of the singing is something to behold. Nothing is routine. Interludes that bespeak Mendelssohn’s love affair with the baroque period actually sound like Bach. The small ensembles culled from the choral ranks couldn’t be lovelier, which matters a lot in a work where angels keep charge over us and bid us lift our eyes unto the hills. ‘Wer bis an das Ende beharret’ (He That Shall Endure), a two-minute chorus from Part II that barely registers in some accounts, will stop you in your tracks here with its rapt spiritual presence.

The orchestra is a period group, yes, but there’s plenty of sound and the strings aren’t especially bothersome. Some vibrato in the recitatives would have cuddled the angels more, I suppose, but nothing in the score sounds scratchy or patchy to me. Maestro Rademann’s pacing is expert, and he mixes Mendelssohn’s intensity with his gentleness as well as anyone. I must confess to a bias here: the grand, overstuffed, Victorian Choral Society approach turns me off these days. I don’t want an *Elijah* that’s jumpy and light, but I don’t need a cast of thousands hyperventilating at me either. (That’s why I admire the elegance of Robert Shaw among the English versions, and why I’m finished with Frühbeck for the time being.)

Now, we drop the other shoe. Marlis Petersen is a terrific soprano, and she’s lovely in the roles Mendelssohn bequeathed her. Herr Schmidt is a sweet-voiced lyric tenor, which is OK by me. If you want Obadiah’s arias decked out in full operatic regalia, you’d best stick with Gedda on the Frühbeck recording. This mezzo is just sort of there. So it all comes down to the baritone—Elijah himself—and that’s where we have a problem. The fellow has a young, handsome voice and the musical intelligence to make each note and phrase an auditory pleasure. I just don’t hear a lot of character brought to the role. Imperiousness, menace, compassion, anger, world-weariness, sadness, and a flair for the dramatic are all part of the prophet’s make-up; and a truly compelling *Elijah* needs those emotions swirling at its core. Whether you love or don’t love Thomas Hampson, Bryn Terfel, Willard White, Thomas Allen, or Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the title role, they all have the juice to move the libretto and score along in a memorable way. This fellow, not so much.

So while I will keep Maestro Rademann’s *Elias* around as my German option for its excellent singing, incisive energy, and superb sound, I must conclude that it’s a musical donut; a tempting choral confection with a hole in its middle. Ambivalence yet again.

THOMAS MENDELS SOHN: *Erste Walpurgisnacht; Hebrides, Ruy Blas, Fair Melusine Overtures*

Birgit Remmert, a; Jörg Durmuller, t; Ruben Drole, bar; Reinhard Mayr, b; Zurich Sing-Akademie; Winterthur Collegium/ Douglas Boyd

MDG 9011949 [SACD] 64 minutes

A pleasant enough release that isn’t especially compelling. The choir in the *Walpurgisnacht* sounds young and small, and the male soloists are nothing special. Our Mendelssohn Overview (N/D 2008) suggests Dohnanyi on Decca 460236 as the best way to hear Goethe’s Druids clobber their enemies, and that recommendation gets no argument from me. With varying levels of enthusiasm, that same Overview also sends you to Dohnanyi’s Cleveland remake (Telarc), Masur on Berlin Classics, and Corboz on Erato—all still around.

The overtures sound nimble but small under Douglas Boyd’s baton. The best program of Mendelssohn concert overtures I’ve come across is Claus Peter Flor’s set for RCA, and again the Overview and I are in agreement. Musically, then, you don’t need this; and by ignoring it, you’ll be spared the aggravation of MDG’s flimsy, oversized SACD case breaking apart every time you open the bloody thing.

MENDELS SOHN: *Piano Concerto I; Symphony 4; see SCHUMANN* 

MÉSIAEN: *Visions de l’Amen; BACH: Sonatina; ADAMS: Hallelujah Junction*

Christina & Michelle Naughton, p

Warner 60113—62 minutes

The Juilliard and Curtis Institute-trained Naughton twin sisters are now well out of the brilliant young piano duo category and into the professional realm. They seem to be moving in the same direction as the Labeques. Their debut CD was a brilliant collection of mostly
standard repertoire (Orfeo 859121, S/O 2013) that I found both exciting and rewarding. Here they enter into extremely demanding repertoire with esoteric and religious overtones.

Messiaen’s two-piano masterpiece was written for himself and his future wife, Yvonne Loriod. They premiered the work in 1943 and even recorded it (Ades 13233, J/A 1989). There is no other two-piano work I know of that so completely uses the complete dynamic, rhythmic, and technical range of the idiom. The Naughtons are fully up to the task from the softest sounds possible emerging from a void at the beginning of the ‘Amen of the Creation’ to the grand chorale that ends the movement, with all of the requisite bell sonorities. The seven movements have new sonic discoveries in the hands of these two talented women. In music this complex, the rhythms and harmonies that Messiaen clearly organized very carefully can get lost in all the sound. Not here, for each pianist brings all the material to fore in a virtuosic manner. Their tempos are a little quicker than others (like Lowenthal and Oppens, Cedille 119, J/F 2011), and I don’t get as much a sense of the mystical aspect of the work. Nevertheless, the perfection of ensemble and brilliance of the presentation set this apart.

The Bach is listed as a Sonatina, but was written for a funeral and its German title translates as “God’s Time is the Best Time”. It offers a quiet three-minute respite between the two big modern works.

Hallelujah Junction has come my way before (in the past year, (Powerhouse Pianists, AMR 1039, J/A 2015; TwoPianists 1039220, M/A 2016). John Adams is a minimalist composer. This implies that the smallest motive or rhythmic pattern is used as the basis of a work where it is continuously repeated and varied. I must admit that even though this is a good minimalist work, it is a bit too repetitious for me. It got its title from the name of a truck stop on the Nevada-California border. Handel’s most famous use of the word hallelujah gives its four syllables a distinctive rhythmic motive: long, short, short, long. That plays a big role in this piece, but its unique element is the two pianos moving in and out of sync with each other. It is soft and loud; fast, slow and even faster, building to an exciting conclusion. It does seem very well suited to the dynamism of these sisters.

HARRINGTON

**MILNER: Song of Akhenaten; The Water & the Fire**

Janet Price, s; BBC Training Orchestra (Song); Hazel Holt, s; John Elwes, t; Stephen Roberts, b; BBC Northern Orchestra/ Meredith Davies

Lyrita 1125—71 minutes

Anthony Milner (1925-2002) was active in British musical life as a teacher of history, theory, composition, and harpsichord; his final position was as Principal Lecturer at the Royal College of Music. He retired in 1989. His compositional output was not large, but it included songs, sacred choral works, and instrumental pieces—including three symphonies and chamber music.

The Song of Akhenaten (1954), a six-movement work for soprano and orchestra, draws its text from Arthur Weigall’s English translation of the Hymn to Aten (Egypt, XVIII Dynasty, c. 1360 BC) and the Prayer on the coffin of King Akhenaten (1380-1362). In Milner’s words “The whole... work is a hymn of praise to the sole God, whose symbol was the sun-disc or Aten, musically portraying the various moods of the word of praise.” The 14-minute work is very attractive, in the manner of conservative British song composers of the 20th Century. Melody is at the core of his style; and the music, while often challenging, fits the voice very well and becomes a good vehicle for the singer. Here Janet Price is excellent, opulent in tone and expressive in her treatment of words.

Milner’s Water and the Fire reveals the same melody-based style on the scale of a dramatic oratorio. This work, lasting 57 minutes, was premiered at the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford Cathedral in 1964. The text, drawn from the Bible and elsewhere, narrates (in Milner’s words) “symbolically and allegorically the plight of man estranged from God and his later repentance and reconciliation, viewed in the context of Christ’s Passion and Resurrection”. The drama moves from the Waters of Tribulation to the culminating Easter Fire—hence the title. The last several minutes of the piece contain many lovely passages, and the ending is quiet and reassuring. The performance is beautifully paced and convinces us of Milner’s message. Soloists, chorus (including boys’ choir) and orchestra all present the piece in an ideal light.

These performances are from BBC radio broadcasts, Akhenaten from January 17, 1973, Water from January 13, 1977. Both are quite

American Record Guide
Mokranjac: Quartet; Violin Sonata; 
Old Song; Dance
Thomas Christian, v; Evgeny Sinayskiy, p; 
Thomas Christian Ensemble 
CPO 777 893—57 minutes

Vasilije Mokranjac (1923-84) was a Serbian composer and teacher. In the latter role he was respected as a mentor who allowed, even encouraged, freedom of thought in his students. He took his own life, for reasons apparently not yet known. I’d never heard of him, though my researches into Balkan musicians for other reasons should have prepared me for an interesting and accomplished talent.

In the String Quartet (1949) I is tuneful and well-knit with clearly voiced themes. The second subject is especially disarmig. The scherzo (II) uses an A-B-A layout. The sonorities are clangorous and relentless in pace. The trio has a suave melody, elegantly harmonized with good voice-leading. Though mostly in the minor mode, the movement ends in the major without a trace of cliche. It would make a dandy concert encore. III is more melancholy and heartfelt. Its relief theme, in higher registers, accumulates by using an ascending overall line above a pizzicato accompaniment. IV contrasts a spirited allegro figure with a more thoughtful theme. The ending is expansive, bordering on the heroic.

The Violin Sonata (1952) has a rhetorical opening on the piano, the violin then entering with an anguished theme. Mokranjac works these elements into a passionate dialog. In II, a piano theme with a steady rocking rhythm has a florid violin accompaniment sometimes suggesting bird-calls. The trio has a gypsy flavor. III opens with a hesitant, groping theme. The violin spins traceries, after which an extended new melody builds to a fervent peak. The movement ends with the violin in the stratosphere over detached piano notes. IV is a dance with a touch of Bartok. There are folk tunes embedded in the music, which concludes with resonant sounds.

The Old Song is a lengthy, somber cantilena. The Dance also has an ABA ground plan. It its outer sections the harmony suggests polytonality. The basic pulse is a subtly blended three-beat. The slow middle section offers refined relief. Though he later worked with the 12-tone idiom, Mokranjac’s music here manages to be traditional but not reactionary. By any intelligent standard by which one can gauge music—not the least being melody—this is all fine stuff. Performances are both skilled and sympathetic. Add another entry to CPO’s long list of terrific discoveries. Their Van Gilse CD—see below—makes that two.
De Profundis (Vulgate Psalm 129) concludes with the appended text “Requiem aeternam dona eis...”, suggesting that it was originally written for a funeral. The music in all of these motets is generally graceful and elegant, though Mondonville is quite capable of vehemence and passion where the text calls for it. Concert audiences particularly admired his skill at expressing the affective content of the texts through his musical settings. There are some delicious examples of word painting, but they are never mere sound effects. In Magnus Dominus (Vulgate Psalm 47), for instance, in the verse that begins “Laetetur mons Sion, et exultent filiae Judae” (May Mount Zion rejoice and the daughters of Judah exult) he suggests the daughters of Judah by writing for treble voices only, and there is no low-pitched continuo bass instrument. Mondonville forged a persuasive blend of Italian and French style and often displays an impressive mastery of counterpoint. His motets have a more ingratiating quality than do many by his 17th-Century forebears, where formal grandeur seems to have been more the order of the day.

The performances here maintain a very high standard. They are stylish and poised. One could find a minor fault here and there with details of solo or choral singing, but it would be churlish to make much of it. It is worth noting that Mathias Vidal and Jeffrey Thompson are haute-contre singers: high tenors capable of singing in the alto range in a light but full voice. It is a very different sound from an English countertenor. The recorded sound is warm but clear. The sessions were held at the Bela Bartok Concert Hall in Budapest. Listeners interested in these rarities of the French 18th Century will not go wrong.

It is hardly surprising that the catalog is not exactlly bursting with recordings of Mondonville’s music. The most recent ARG reviews of his motets were both in 1998: Christoph Coin and Chantres de la Chapelle (Astrée 8614; J/F) and William Christie with Les Arts Florissants (Erato 17791; M/A). Both were very favorably reviewed by John Barker.

**MONTEVERDI: Madrigals Books III+IV**

*Le Nuove Musiche/ Krijn Kletsveld*

Brilliant 93799 [2CD] 112 minutes

**Madrigals, Book IV**

*La Dolce Maniera/ Luigi Gaggero*

Stradivarius 33963—55:44

**Il Pianto della Madonna: Composizioni Spirituali**

*La Compagnia del Madrigale*

Glossa 922895—68:27

Kletsveld and his group are proceeding steadily with their series of the complete Monteverdi madrigals for Brilliant. They have already recorded Books V and VI (93799, 2CD: J/A 2009) and Book VII (94980, 2CD: J/A 2016). I suppose we may expect two more 2CD sets, containing Books I and II and Book VIII, and perhaps yet another with the posthumous Book IX and oddments.

In our reviews, both Catherine Moore and I have been favorably impressed by Kletsveld’s Dutch ensemble. Here, in particular, I was struck by the superb blend and balance of the singers, providing a smooth and rich texture in beautifully ripe sound.

Expressive strength is shown sometimes, as in two Tasso settings, *Vatene pur, crudel* and *La tra’l sangue*, among others from Book III. But there is mostly a quality of reserve and restraint about these performances. The boldly challenging character of so much in Book IV is rarely conveyed here. These two collections were never meant to be delivered and heard as entities, of course. But the straight-through approach encouraged by recording does run the risk of a certain monotony—in this case a degree of blandness.

By contrast, the single-shot recording of just Book IV is full of jolts and jabs. In the first place, the ensemble is not always smooth: this sounds like a bunch of separate singers (of international origins) rather than a well-modulated entity. One of the two sopranos has a particularly strident voice, which becomes an outstanding irritation after a while, especially in the clinical recorded sound. There are several occasions where the group jumps loudly on the first note and then pulls back. All along, there is a lot of exaggerated swelling that seems to represent nuancing but becomes just mannerism.

Let’s take two comparisons. *Sfogava con le stelle* is given a gentle and poetic treatment by Kletsveld’s group, pretty enough. Gaggero’s singers tear into it, pulling it apart into a series of overstated snippets. Even worse is *Si, chi’s*
vorrei morire, an extraordinary enactment of the love-is-death conceit. The voices claw at each other in frenzied passion: this is hot sex, folks! Kletsveld’s team sing the notes nicely, but the piece falls flat as a pancake. Gaggero’s group take it at almost exactly the same measured pace, but treat it as a set of abstract taffy-pull inflections. The only recording of this madrigal I have heard over the years that really captured the intense eroticism of the piece was made back in the 1950s by Noah Greenberg’s New York Pro Musica, in a Monteverdi LP never reissued.

In sum, I find it difficult to be fully satisfied with either group’s way with Monteverdi. I can at least commend both labels (especially the unpredictable Brilliant) for including full texts with translations.

The third release considered here is something quite different. One does not think of Monteverdi in connection with the idea of “spiritual madrigals”. But there is that category of his output, and this is not the first recorded exploration of it.

The category, as addressed here, has three subdivisions. The first is technically in the form of the liturgical motet. Five of those (more properly four, plus a long litany) are offered here, as taken from a publication of 1620 by Giulio Cesare Bianchi. They are treated as if they are madrigals, which very much befits their style.

A second subdivision is of pieces composed as madrigals and included in Monteverdi’s Books III, IV, and V. But a contemporary took a number of these and very skillfully replaced the original Italian texts with Latin words, making what are known as sacred contrafacta. Seven such pieces are given here, as taken from publications by Aquilino Coppini in 1607 and 1609. In these, the madrigal textures are faithfully retained.

A third subdivision is represented by the program’s title-piece and opener. It began as a long and much-admired lamento by the title character of Monteverdi’s otherwise lost opera of 1608, Arianna. Monteverdi made an arrangement of this aria as a five-voice madrigal cycle and included that in his Book VI of 1614. Then in his Selva Morale e Spirituali (1640) he restored the original monodic character of the Lamento d’Arianna, for soprano and continuo, but with a new Latin contrafactum text, under the Italian title of Lamento della Madonna. These performers have carefully turned all this into, effectively, a new composition—a five-voice contrafactum motet, fitting carefully the Latin text used in the Selva aria version to the madrigal lines of Book VI. This composite works quite well even if, it might be said, the Latin words are no more clearly heard than the Italian ones.

For a touch of variety, two little organ bits from Frescobaldi’s Fiori Musicali are tossed in, played by Luca Guglielmi; there is also a harpist on call. The vocal group itself is a pool of seven singers, who fit together very smoothly and sing with appropriate feeling. No leader is identified, but I would suspect that tenor Giuseppe Maletto is the guiding spirit.

Good notes, full texts and English translations. Not a program for casual collectors but one that will interest serious Monteverdi fans.

BARKER

MONTEVERDI: Madrigals & Arias
Magdalena Kozena, La Cetra Baroque Orchestra/ Andrea Marcon—DG 479 4955—77 minutes

Having done a program of Vivaldi with Marcon (DG 477 8096), Kozena has now moved further back to explore Monteverdi.

Her earliest experience with the composer was in a production of his opera L’incoronazione di Poppea. Here she gives three excerpts from that score. Two of them are monologs for Ottavia, which Kozena delivers with dramatic flair. But the third is the closing duet of Poppea and Nerone (adding soprano Anna Prohaska, one of several associates brought in). That is given a slow and languorous treatment, in the more recent fashion that rejects the obviously erotic message of the frenzied pawing and clawing by the interlocked two vocal lines.

In three other items Kozena is joined by singers: Prohaska again in ‘Zefiro torna’ from the 1632 Scherzi Musicali; a countertenor and bass for ‘Damigella tutta bella’ from the 1607 Scherzi; and two tenors and a bass for the triptych Lamento della Ninfa in the Eighth Book of Madrigals. In that last one Kozena accepts the dubious idea that the central (main) panel should be done in free rhythm, rather than as a metrical ciacona, as indicated. That metrical dilution deprives the music of its nagging poignance.

But the greatest risk taken is in a performance of the Combattimento di Tancredo e Clorinda. Kozena sings this entirely by herself, without any other singers taking the words of the two characters. One might find justification in the fact that Monteverdi set Tassos’s narrative verses for this episode without
breaking them up for dialog. In that sense, Kozena is taking a strictly poetic approach. But this was a piece meant for staged performance with distinct characters, singing in what Monteverdi called *stile rappresentativo* or theatrical style. Kozena’s attempts to differentiate the words of the two characters through vocal coloring are feeble and ineffective. This is simply not competitive with the many recordings that use three singers.

There are two other familiar short pieces: ‘Quel sguardo sdigenosetto’ from the 1632 *Scherzi* and ‘Con che soavita’ from the Madrigals Book VII. In all selections, Kozena sings with great beauty of sound and finely calculated musicianship.

This is not an all-Monteverdi program, for there are three instrumental spacers—pieces by Marco Uccellini, Tarquinio Merula, and Biagio Marini. Very fine sound; texts and translations. But buyers should be aware that this is a release primarily about Kozena, not Monteverdi.

BARKER

**MONTEVERDI: Mass;** see PALESTRINA

**MOORE, K:** *Whoever You Are Come Forth; Stories for Ocean Shells; Velvet; Dolorosa; Homage to My Boots; Broken Rosary*  
Ashley Bathgate, vc, voc; Lawson White, steel guitar, vibraphone—Cantaloupe 21118—52 minutes

Kate Moore is a young Australian composer who has been collaborating with cellist Ashley Bathgate since 2009. This is Bathgate’s first recording apart from the Bang-On-A-Can All-Stars. The composer and the cellist have become close friends over the years.

Most of these pieces are for cello or multiples thereof, in this case all played with involvement by Bathgate. *Dolorosa* includes a little semi-religious vocalization, and certain passages elsewhere include guitar or vibraphone. The impression left by all of the music is close to minimalism—in other words, tonal and beautiful to hear, but if anything happens, it is gradual. The playing is expressive and technically effective. If the ideas described by the titles interest you, give it a try.

**D MOORE**

**Mosolov: Piano Sonatas 1, 2, 4, 5; Turkmenian Nights; 2 Nocturnes; 3 Pieces; 2 Dances**  
Olga Andryushchenko  
Grand Piano 703 [2CD] 95 minutes

Alexander Mosolov (1900-73) has an interesting life story. Like many other Soviet composers, he was alternately admired and persecuted for his work. His orchestral piece *The Iron Foundry* (1927) was initially quite popular and is still performed occasionally. It is a good example of Soviet futurist music, with emphasis on percussive attacks and motive rhythms, harsh melodic lines and much dissonance. This kind of anti-romantic music makes a certain visceral impression on first hearing but does not often stand the test of time.

This release is labeled as his complete piano works (Sonata 3 has been lost), and all works were composed in the 1920s. Mosolov’s early career was centered more on piano performance than composition, so the ferocious difficulties heard here are well in line with a Russian piano virtuoso in the early 20th Century. Of the well known composer-pianists of this era, I hear an occasional influence of Scriabin, very little of Prokofieff or Stravinsky, and none of Rachmaninoff.

There is a strong stylistic similarity among all of the pieces here. Only in Sonata 5 do I hear moments of calm with something approaching a beautiful Russian melody. There are quiet spots here and there in the other works, but usually very dissonant and interrupted with violent outbursts. The Three Short Pieces (each under a minute) might be effective on a recital program.

We should all be grateful to a brilliant pianist like Andryushchenko for making the huge effort to learn these brutally difficult works and giving them a chance to be heard. She is Moscow born and trained, a winner of many competitions since 2000 and currently lives in Germany. Recorded sound and an exceptionally good booklet essay make this a worthwhile adventure for people who wish to explore this type of Russian repertoire.

HARRINGTON

**Word Police: Personal**

Sign on every Cincinnati bus: “When you leave the bus, be sure to take all your personal belongings”. Jerry is personal friends with John. The Y advertises “personal trainers”. Any remarks at all in a concert are called “personal remarks”. All of these are typical American pomposity. The word “personal” is superfluous in every case and is there to make the announcement sound (read) “fancier”. Ignore “personal.”
MOUSSORGSKY: Pictures at an Exhibition; DEBUSSY: Danse; Sarabande; SCHUMANN: Carnaval; CHABRIER: Menuet Pompeux
Lyon Orchestra/Leonard Slatkin
Naxos 573124—61 minutes

This is the third CD I know of with this program of Ravel orchestral arrangements. I have not heard the one with Emanuel Krivine, described in ARG as sluggish (N/D 1995), but I did review the one with the Flemish Orchestra led by Daniele Callegari (N/D 2005). There I discussed the arrangements, but I will go over them briefly now.

The Chabrier, from Pieces Pittoresques, is a lively, balletic work. The Debussy pieces (Sarabande from Pour le Piano, and Danse (formerly Tarantelle Styrienne) are exciting and exquisite, especially the Sarabande. I am still not sold on Ravel’s orchestrations of Schumann’s Carnaval, produced for Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1914. They sound too French.

This is Slatkin’s second Pictures at an Exhibition for Naxos. The first had different orchestrators for each movement (N/D 2005). This new one uses the Ravel, plus Slatkin’s orchestration of the last ‘Promenade’, omitted by Ravel. Slatkin’s performance is both quirky and interesting. The style is more French than Russian and leans more to lyricism than power. He plays around quite a bit with balances, bringing out the lower instruments more than usual. He also finds some interesting detail and noteworthy effects, including major ritards at the end of a few pictures. Both trumpet ‘Promenades’ are mostly legato and sing more than amble. ‘Castle’ usually tends to be mournful, but here it is more flowing and song-like. The brighter than usual brass sound makes ‘Catacombs’ sound less ominous and threatening. In ‘Bydlo’, the tuba takes a back seat to the treading lower strings. One misfire is the spot in ‘Hut’ where the flute trilling over the bassoon is so loud that the passage sounds like a trilling exercise. The added ‘Promenade’ is similar to the opening one, but there are subtle and not so subtle differences. The weakest picture, perhaps because it is the most Russian, is ‘Gate’. That music requires more power, color, solid attacks, and clear bells and chimes than it gets here; and the distant, blended sound does not help. Otherwise, this Pictures is good but more interesting than great. Callegari’s Pictures is also lyrical and more French than Russian, but Slatkin’s quirks and insights give him the edge, save for ‘Gate’, where Callegari is more colorful and Russian.

In the Debussy, Chabrier, and Schumann arrangements, Slatkin takes the classical approach typical of Ravel. Callegari is more Impressionist. I don’t want to take such parallels too far, but the effect is that Slatkin is the more compelling. Callegari is a little more convincing in the Schumann transcription, but I still find the Schumann the weakest of these transcriptions. Both orchestras play well, but neither has the panache of the great ones.

Between the two, I prefer the Slatkin. But if you have the Calligari, you don’t need the Slatkin unless you are looking for something exactly like it.

HECHT

MOUSSORGSKY: Pictures at an Exhibition with RAVEL: La Valse;
STRAVINSKY: Petrouchka movements
Khatia Buniatishvili, p
Sony 17003—61 minutes

with IBERT: Petite Suite;
BARADJANIAN: 6 Pictures
Andrei Gugnin, p
Steinway 30042—64 minutes

with BEETHOVEN: Sonata 14;
LISZT: Dante Sonata
Yuko Batik, p—Gramola 99083—73:25

Khatia Buniatishvili has her own approach to Pictures at an Exhibition. Essentially she just starts it really slow and builds it gradually, so the last few movements are actually faster than usual. The extremely slow opening few movements are deadly, as far as I can hear; and the later movements should be slower—in other words, she has it backwards. What she does with it has nothing to do with the music itself. Her recording is strictly for people who think it should start out slow and eventually (it takes a long time!) build up into something more exciting. But I would fall asleep before it woke up.

The whole program is planned that way, building to a climax with the Stravinsky. But I don’t like this pianist at all, can’t stand the cheapo approach, and am not susceptible to her seductive musical wiles. Not all the wiles are musical: all her photos picture her as a sexpot. I am not attracted to a pianist’s playing by semi-nude photos with painted parted lips. I hate this kind of photography (and playing) and urge you never to buy it.

Mr Gugnin is better—naturally. He has some very good moments, and the piano sound is wonderful (New York Steinway). And

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there aren't any drooling photos of him as a sexpot. (O yes! They do it to men, too!) But there is absolutely nothing about his performance that puts it ahead of dozens of others. We have reviewed so many—this is the age of CD proliferation. Anybody can afford to make a CD if he doesn't have to pay an orchestra—or anyone but himself. And no one at most record labels seems to know anything about how to judge a pianist, so anyone and everyone gets published. (I mean anyone who can play all the notes—most people can hear clumsy playing.) So he hits all the notes, he shows some taste, he doesn't exaggerate unduly, etc—but we have recommended a dozen recordings of this that are better.

The Steinway program includes some unusual pieces; buy it if they interest you—not for the Moussorgsky. I hate the Babadjanian pieces—about 15 minutes of horrid dissonant stuff by a contemporary Armenian composer. The Ibert pieces, from the 1940s, are better but nothing you can't live without. There are 15 of them, and the first five are boring, then we get a few good pieces, but the last few are again dull. I think Ibert just threw these together—they do not really belong together. A pianist might want to take one or two of the middle pieces for encores or transitions in a recital, but why would anyone want to listen to all 15 of them?

Yuko Batik is a pounder. True, she starts off with the Beethoven very smooth and dark. But the Pictures is utterly heavy-handed and loud and irritating. She has that Russian woman's insistence on having things her way; she forces her ideas on you. (She is Japanese, by the way.) I had trouble listening all the way thru her Pictures, though I was amused by her Beethoven. Part of the problem may be that the sound is overpowering, as if the microphone is inside the piano. The instrument seems threatening.

MOUSSORGSKY: Pictures; see Collections

MOZART: Piano Concertos 1, 17, 20

The unusual Haydn Notturno No. 8 in G completes the program. Conceived for the private rooms of Naples monarch King Ferdinand IV, the original score includes two clarinets, two violas, two horns, and two lire organizzate, one of the king's favorite instruments. When Haydn brought the piece with him to London in 1791, he observed that it would need more power in the large English concert halls, and he replaced the clarinets and the lire organizzate with flute, oboe, and violins.

Several fine recordings of the Mozart already exist, but the RAM Soloists offer a fantastic performance well worth hearing. The group plays with excellent clarity, balance, blend, technique, and intensity; and when Pinnock pushes the envelope on tempo in I and V, the students respond with clean and brilliant execution. The minuets are both regal and striking, and the slow movements are full of heartfelt beauty and lyricism. Only the Rondo finale is a bit strange—wonderfully played, but at a conservative speed. The Haydn is a nice complement, delivered with elegance and panache.

MOZART: Piano Concertos 1, 17, 20

Ingrid Jacoby; Academy of St Martin in the Fields/ Neville Marriner—ICA 5137—80 minutes

This recording follows concertos 14 and 27 by the same performers, reviewed by Gil French (S/O 2014). He was not impressed, and neither am I.

It is good to see Neville Marriner, who is now 95, still making records. His Mozart seems softer and more shaped than in the old days, but I've always appreciated Mozart with lyric grace. That said, the first two movements of the D-minor concerto (No. 20) sound too foursquare and undramatic; at least the finale has some spirit and abandon. Jacoby appears to be caught in the same trap. In the more lyrical parts of No. 17 (in G) she is fine, phrasing expressively and capturing the song-like qualities very nicely. The finale of 17, though, doesn't get off the ground until the speedier coda, and in the slow movement of the D-minor she pecks at the left-hand accompaniment and pretty much destroys the beauty of the passage.

It is interesting to have the program filled out with Mozart's first concerto, written when he was 11. The work is not wholly original, much material coming from sonatas by Her-
mann Friedrich Raupach and Leontzi Honauer. It is not a great piece, but a fascinating foretaste of what was to come. I am also curious about the piano here. The liner notes give credit to a man for “Steinway Tuning and Maintenance”, but I would never have thought this a Steinway. It sounds more like mid-19th Century iron-frame piano, something right after the period of fortepianos. She is particular about cadenzas, using Mozart’s for No. 17, an arrangement of Badura-Skoda’s for No. 20 (since she feels Beethoven’s are too out of the style), and Lili Kraus’s for No. 1.

ALTHOUSE

Mozart: Piano Quartets
Jane Coop, Orford Quartet
Skylark 9002—64 minutes

I looked at the picture here of Desmond Hobbig, who plays the cello, and decided this was not a new recording. He looks so young! (He was born in 1961.) He was a beautiful guy and a great musician, and I knew him slightly in the late 1980s, when he was first cello in Cincinnati. (Then he went to the Orford Quartet and Cleveland and Houston and ended up teaching at Rice.) The date on the sleeve is 2013, but we reviewed this in J/A 1991—in the same issue where we reviewed the reissue of the Vanguard recording with Peter Serkin and friends. I think it is fair to say that that recording—from 1965—has never been matched. But it is also fair to say that if you can’t find that, this is the second best—and very good!

What we have here is beautifully played and phrased. It’s all instinctively musical, not an attempt to obey “period performance” rules. It’s beautiful music, and the performances are perhaps a little less “romantic” than the Peter Serkin readings. But there is certainly no attempt here to cut back the emotional content or to make it more businesslike.

Jane Coop adds a very nice encore: Mozart’s 10-minute Adagio in B minor. That is the reason this disc takes 10 minutes longer to play than the Serkin.

VOON

Mozart: Piano Sonatas 1-6
Roberto Prosseda
Decca 4812632 [2CD] 117 minutes

Mozart’s first six piano sonatas were written in his late teens. I had never felt a need to buy any more modern-piano recordings of the Mozart sonatas beyond Klien and Uchida, along with Glenn Gould in his most extreme bad-boy mode (he claimed to hate Mozart). But if Roberto Prosseda continues what he’s started here, I want to hear him play the rest of Mozart’s sonatas.

He adds ornamentation, extends some passagework for extra bars, changes figuration or melodic shapes, and interpolates short cadenzas. His style sounds appropriate, presenting Mozart as the great improviser that he was. It keeps the music fresh and unfamiliar. The slow movements are serene enough. Some listeners might dismiss Prosseda’s work here as “fussy” as he probes into the music, or too bold in his adventurous enterprise. He meddles with the canonical way we’re accustomed to hearing the Great Master’s music. For me, though, his approach reveals what’s been missing from the standard methods: the sense of playful spontaneity.

As a bonus, Prosseda plays a fragmentary draft that Mozart discarded from an earlier version of Sonata 6, two minutes of music I had never seen or heard before. This illustrates Mozart improving himself, not merely shaking perfect masterpieces out of his ruffled sleeves.

The essay and the packaging prominently advertise the use of Vallotti’s unequal temperament for this recording on a modern Fazioli piano. It sounds unobtrusive here, gently hel-
ping the music to sound relaxed in the home
keys and slightly more tense in sections of far-
reaching modulation. Early-keyboard special-
ists have been using this scheme as a popular
all-purpose temperament in recordings for
more than 40 years. Prosseda's beautifully cre-
ative musicianship is the stronger selling point.

B LEHMAN

MOZART: Quartets 14+17
Hagen Quartet — Myrios 17 [SACD] 59 minutes

The Hagen Quartet, founded 35 years ago and
with no change in personnel, seems to drink
deeper and deeper from the well of period per-
formance dogma as time goes on. Violins and
viola often wheeze, scrape, rasp, and swell for
no discernible expressive purpose. Vibrato
begins almost always at the halfway point of
every long note but not before that—it's con-
sistent and predictable to the point of affecta-
tion. The quartet lacks blend, each instrument
easy to identify in most passages, and individ-
ual entries are coarse. And yet their interpreta-
tions are romantic, tempos flexible, indulging
even an occasional portamento. It's as if
they're trying to irritate everyone.

My favorite set of these works is the Alban
Berg Quartet's from 1991 for EMI (5 discs of
Mozart's 10 great quartets). The ABQ uses a
variety of vibrato, nearly continuously, even on
short notes, to breathtaking emotional and
expressive effect. But their recorded sound of
the ABQ is gauzy and two-dimensional com-
pared to the heavenly depth and transparency
of this Myrios SACD.

The Hagens recorded the six Haydn Quar-
tets twice before, and with this release they're
halfway through their third recording. They
play the Stradivari "Paganini Quartet" group of
instruments. A curate's egg indeed.

WRIGHT

MOZART: Violin Concertos 3,4,5
Henning Kraggerud, Norwegian Chamber
Orchestra — Naxos 573513—66 minutes

I would call these bippity. I can’t find such a
word in any dictionary, but the one word
implies to me that the music sounds frivolous
and bouncy, has no legato to it, no melody
lines. It’s also way too fast; each concerto takes
5 or 6 minutes less than it should to make any
kind of impression besides “bippity”. They
sound frenzied. The violins all need more vibra-
to, and notes need to be sustained (the
bow just bounces over the strings). No feeling
is allowed, no depth. It’s just plain silly—
Kukla, Fran, and Ollie. (They were “bippity”)

I liked his recording of the Divertimento,
but I despise this.

VROON

MOZART: Violin Concertos, all
Kristof Barati, Hungarian Chamber Orchestra
Brilliant 95368 [2CD] 125 minutes

This violinist is even less likely to have a true
Adagio in his playing, though the Rondo
movements (III) are routinely slower, and
nothing seems as breathless as in Kraggerud’s
readings. He plays all five concertos and the
two rondos and Adagio that Mozart may have
written as substitute movements. Most move-
ments are still too fast, and there is little vibra-
to or legato to be heard. I don’t like the concer-
tos played like this, but this is what you will
hear in any recent recording. No one dares to
delay the current dogmas about playing classi-
cal-period music. No one indulges the music
or the feelings it arouses in the player. No one
dares a true Adagio. Why not? It strikes me as
downright dumb to play music according to
rules instead of how you feel about it. What are
violinists for? Concertos are not written for
metronomes.

You may not like the applause either.

VROON

MOZART: Violin Sonatas
K 10, 14, 30, 301, 304, 379, 481
Alina Ibragimova; Cedric Tiberghien, p
Hyperion 68091 [2CD] 104 minutes

K 380, 454, 526; Variations on a French Song
Jacques Israelievitch; Christina Petrowska Quali-
co, p—Fleur de Son 58034—71 minutes

Between Bach and Beethoven, Mozart wrote
the most important sonatas for violin and key-
board. The development of the counterpoint
and overall invention from the earliest sonatas
to the latest is remarkable and became the
model for the best sonatas to come after them.

Alina Ibragimova and Cedric Tiberghien
have recorded a set that I suspect may be the
first installment of a complete series. Ibragi-
mova’s sparing use of vibrato is likely from the
influence of period performance practice
(PPP). She and her partner take a restrained
approach to the music. They reside in the UK,
and British reserve appears to have infected
the Russian’s playing. I have heard this music
played with more enthusiasm by both modern
and PPP players.

Jacques Israelievitch and Christina

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Petrowska Quilico play with a modern style without any influence from PPP. Their playing is red-blooded and wants nothing in enthusiasm. They find richer textures in the music than Ibragimova and Tiberghien and more variety too. They are especially wonderful in the two later sonatas. It is labeled “Volume 1”, and I really look forward to the series.

MOZART: Flute Quartets; see BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto 22; see GAL Violin Pieces; see SCHNITTEK

NIELSEN: Violin Concerto
Kolja Blacher, Duisburg Philharmonic/ Giordano Bellicampi—Acousence 22115—36 minutes

It pains me to say it, but this is a truly wonderful recording of the Nielsen concerto by a man who was once the Concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic. It pains me because that concerto is the only thing on the disc. On the other hand, most recordings of the Nielsen couple it with something like the Sibelius, which we all have too many recordings of already. So maybe it makes sense to buy an outstanding Nielsen by itself.

Duisburg is only a short distance north of Dusseldorf on the Rhine—pretty close to Holland. The orchestra seems excellent. The sound of this recording is brilliant: rich, full, and close enough to have bite but not too close for comfort. Tempos seem pretty close to ideal. In fact, I can think of nothing that would improve performance or recording.

NORDGREN: The Bergman Suites
Film Scores from Ingmar Bergman Films: Waiting Women, Smiles of the Summer Night, Wild Strawberries, The Face, and The Pleasure Garden
Slovak Radio/ Adriano
Naxos 573370—54 minutes

This is a reissue of Marco Polo 8223682 (1996). The Bergman Suites are based on five film scores Erik Nordgren wrote for Ingmar Bergman films from 1952 to 1961. Bergman’s pre-1960 films were known for their spare use of music—unlike Hollywood films, where scores often played all through a film or were used to emphasize a key plot point. The well-researched English notes indicate that a lot of Nordgren’s music was apparently edited out or not used by Bergman. The remaining manuscripts were maintained by Nordgren and obtained by conductor Adriano shortly after Nordgren died in 1992.

From the manuscripts and from listening to the soundtracks, Adriano reconstructed the film scores into suites. These arrangements do not always follow the film’s action or plot and include music cut from the final print. Some titles were invented by Adriano, and he reorchestrated some material from fragmentary materials. Nordgren’s basic themes and instrumental cues are heard, but are enhanced by Adriano’s reconstructions.

The films cover a wide range of subjects, but like many of Bergman’s films, the key actions and plot devices are sometimes abstract. Nordgren’s music follows the same abstract lines, with simple themes (not necessarily melodies) played by single instruments or orchestra sections to outline a character’s inner thoughts or actions. Much of the music is ethereal and dreamlike, and Nordgren favors harps and string sections to create this effect. The music for the Waiting Women and Wild Strawberries illustrate these dreamlike sections.

Bergman’s first international success was Smiles of the Summer Night (1956), later turned into the musical A Little Night Music by Stephen Sondheim. As there is a complicated plot and more action in this film, Nordgren composed several different themes; and music is used to mostly set a mood for a scene’s actions, rather than a character’s inner thoughts. Nordgren is quite inventive in his use of dance themes in the midsummer garden party sequence and very effectively uses slurred notes to emphasize the effect of wine on the party goers. The other films use various marches, galops, and polkas to emphasize the action of a particular scene; and there are some darker inner moments in The Face. The Pleasure Garden was a comedy with light-hearted music.

Nordgren’s music is consistently interesting, and the various musical styles match the atmosphere of the films. It is quite different from anything you might think of as film music, but is definitely worth your time. The sound is excellent.

The vogue of what was called rock and roll signalled the proletarian and barbarian advance of the coming Dark Ages with its monotonous and pervasive rhythm, cries, and sounds, performable by people with hardly any knowledge of music whatsoever.

JOHN LUKACS, PASSING OF THE MODERN AGE
**NORGARD: Symphonies**

2+6 Dacapo 6.220645—54 minutes
4+5 Dacapo 6.220646—56 minutes
Oslo Philharmonic/John Storgards

These two releases are part of what may turn out to be a complete set of Norgard’s symphonies (there are 8).

Symphony 2 (1970, rev. 1971), in one 23-minute movement, is the first to use the composer’s definitive Infinity Series (introduced in 1968 with his *Voyage into the Golden Screen*). It produces sequences of intervals resulting in an infinite series of pitches. Its appearances polyphonically make its perception as likely as what might occur in much serialism (i.e. irrelevant), though the technique was developed as response to serialism. The piece is dedicated to Norgard’s fan Celibidache, who refused to perform it owing to lack of rehearsal time.

The piece opens with sustained pitch wavering with quarter tones and moves on to constant transformations producing radiating growth and bloom. Static progressions are reminiscent of American minimalism. The branchings become pointillistic. Grand climaxes appear, and finally evaporate into squeaks, chirps, and silence.

Symphony 4 (1981) came about through his encounter with Adolph Wölfli, to whom it is dedicated. The piece is in two uninterrupted movements, one depicting a bleary rose garden, the second a hysterical witch lake; as the music deteriorates into dementia, quotes from Mantovani’s ‘Fascination’ and Nielsen’s Symphony 4 bleed through.

Symphony 5 (1987, rev. 1991) divides itself into 5 continuous segments roughly corresponding to the standard symphonic ordering, though its contents are products of the most turgid avant-gardism. Rather than employing a more linear “infinity series”, Norgard moved to a technique that he calls “tone lakes” where pitch collections are basically condensed into blocks exploded and evaporated in liquid fashion. The first section opens with turgid barfing, quiet jingling, static puddles, and fuzzy smears. Chaos is rampant. The stormy atmosphere is sour. Dripping points appear until bells are heard in the background. II is a ferocious scherzo of funny sounds. It ends with quiet pitches as contrast. III begins as a mellow slow movement, soon interrupted by more violence. IV is a passacaglia Lento, leading to the finale, which is filled with drunken dizziness and general turbulence. Nausea leads to episodes of weeping. The hysteria reenters and concludes with whippings and more chaos, then eventually a sudden evaporation into the heavens.

Symphony 6 (1999) is in three uninterrupted movements. It is subtitled *At the End of the Day* and was his Millennium symphony. The ambience as always is one of abstractionist mania. It opens with fearful descents; illness sets in immediately, until the chaos is interrupted by some jazzy playfulness, but that soon disappears into chaos. A nauseating waltz attempts to drift in, but is dispersed by intense energy. A deceleration leads to II, a muddy Lento passacaglia. The finale turns out to be a goofy dance, with an overlaid chorale. The ending dissipates.

Norgard is obviously an acquired taste, and will appeal to fans of academic modernism of the most extreme density.

**NYMAN: Piano Pieces, all**

Jeroen van Veen
Brilliant 95112 [2CD] 111 minutes

Nyman’s piano music—predominantly written for his film scores—is deceptively simple. His frequent use of plaintive right-hand melodies with deeper, rich chords creates problems of voicing (and sometimes of recording, as I mentioned in my S/O 2013 review of Joohyun Park’s release). No fear of that with the wonderful Jeroen van Veen, who is intensely involved in his recordings and makes sure the sound is perfect. He’s also a very expressive artist who consistently finds more in the music—often through emphasizing inner voices—than many others. He loves this music and knows how to play it in a way that both responds to its deep sentiments and acknowledges the contemporary attitude toward art that characterizes all of Nyman’s work. Sometimes I might disagree a bit with an interpretation—‘Franklyn’, for instance, begins a little too aggressively—most of the time we’re completely in accord. Nyman’s fans will certainly want to have the composer’s own recordings for comparison in some tracks (J/F 2009), but for a complete collection played with the highest artistry and commitment, you need look no further than this excellent release.

**American Record Guide**

There is nothing particularly desirable about freshness per se. Works of art are not eggs.

**TE HULME**
Jacques Pâisible was a French recorder virtuoso born around 1656 who moved to England in 1674, shortly after the composer Robert Cambert left France because he was angry about being replaced by Lully in the Royal Academy of Music. While living in London, he was accompanied by Englishmen John Blow and William Babell, Frenchmen Cambert and Charles Dieupart, and German Johann Pepusch. Since he also performed with Italian violinist Gasparo Visconti, we know he had an international set of influences that his own compositions reflect.

Many of the ones here are sonatas in four or five short movements with written-out ornaments. Musicke’s Pleasure Garden presents them with varied instrumentation that includes cello, bass viol, harpsichord, guitar, archlute, and theorbo. The three recorders are copies made recently from the maker Peter Bressan (1663-1731), who like Pâisible also relocated from France to England.

The recording was made in the White Hall of the Rein Abbey in Styria. This monastery is the home of the oldest community of the Cistercian Order that survives today. It’s a splendid baroque setting for some splendid baroque music that I’m sure you’ll enjoy. The spirited performances are presented in clear sound and accompanied by a 30-page booklet with pictures of the performers but alas, not the abbey, which deserves to be seen as well—look it up! For its comprehensive coverage and its quality, this set belongs in any music collection dedicated to the baroque period or assembled by people who love the flute or recorder.

Sonata, written at the onset of World War I. It has a certain thickness and heaviness in the first movement, but also plenty of passion. The slow movement is ambitious in its emotional range and expressivity.

The Waltzes and Caprices are performed with strong rubato and a winning perkiness. The Capriccio is knocked off with such whimsy and freedom that it sounds improvised. The two Intermezzos wander into slightly foreign harmonic territory, a forecast of Poulenc. They are charming and surprising—my favorites in this worthy project.

CPO offers a clear, warm recording.

Pâisible: Recorder Sonatas
Michael Hell; Musicke’s Pleasure Garden
Paladino 71 [2CD] 129 minutes

Pergolesi: La Serva Padrona;
Cimarosa: Maestro di Cappella
Rosanna Cartieri (Serpina), Nicola Rossi-Lemeni (Uberto); La Scala/ Carlo Maria Giulini; Sesto Bruscantini (Maestro); Collegium Musicum Italicum/ Renato Fasano
Profit 16009—60 minutes

Two golden oldies return: Serva from 1956; Maestro from 1959. Both are short works intended to be performed between acts of serious operas, both are musical delights.

I have never cared for Rossi-Lemeni’s voice—too much wooly frownsiness for all his musicality. Cartieri is brightly chirpy, a total contrast to Rossi-Lemeni. Bruscantini is a marvel in his singing and characterization of a conductor rehearsing an opera orchestra. The music is quite a marvel as well.

No libretto—a real necessity for Maestro.

Pergolesi: Stabat Mater;
Vivaldi: Assunto Sepolcro
Silvia Frigato, s; Sara Mingardo, a; Accademia degli Astrusi/ Federico Ferri
Concerto 2097—63:53

The Stabat Mater is perhaps Pergolesi’s most recorded composition. It was also in the 18th Century his best known work, to the point that even JS Bach made an arrangement with a German text—a poetic paraphrase of Psalm 51—and a new viola part. My favorite recording is with the St Florian Boy Choir (Pan 10277). In most period-instrument performances, the contralto part is sung by a countertenor, so it is refreshing to hear an excellent performance by two women, whose voices are wonderfully matched, with clear diction and elegant phrasing. This may not be the most profound performance, but it is perhaps the best I have heard recently.
The other major work allows Mingardo to shine as the soloist in Vivaldi’s setting of Psalm 127 (Vulgate 126), Nisi Dominus (R 608). While I still enjoy Nathalie Stutzmann’s recording with the King’s Consort (J/A 2004), Mingardo brings a depth to the interpretation that is matched by the members of Accademia degli Astrusi, especially in the Gloria with its solo for viola d’amore, played by Gianni Maraldi on this new release.

As a short filler, the recording includes Vivaldi’s Sinfonia Al Santo Sepolcro. Unfortunately, there are no texts or translations in the booklet, but these are easily found on other recordings or the web. This is a concert recording that includes the opening and closing applause for each of three pieces. One member of the audience at the end of the Nisi Dominus could not restrain himself, but it doesn’t affect the quality of the recording.

Persichetti: Songs
Sherry Overholt, s; Lee Velta, bar; Joshua Pierce, p
MSR 1558—56 minutes

Vincent Persichetti (1915-87) is probably best known for his instrumental music, but he also played a major role in defining the American art song. This is the second MSR release of his songs by Overholt and Pierce. The first was praised by Allen Gimbel (S/O 2013). The 41 songs of this volume, 11 of them unpublished, completes their survey. These are succinct miniatures; only three are longer than 2 minutes. All are settings of English texts or of texts translated into English. The vocal lines are well conceived, but the energy and imagination of these songs lies in their piano accompaniment.

The singing is divided about evenly between the two singers. Both are worthy interpreters of these songs. Their diction is laudably clear. Overholt is a particularly good singer. Velta’s singing is stiffer and less refined. Pierce’s piano collaboration is first-rate.

The notes supply scanty information about the composer but good information about the music. Texts are included.

Piazzolla: Adios Nonino; Le Grand Tango; Histoire du Tango—Café 12930; Michelangelo 70; Oblivion; Villa-Lobos: Bachianas Brasileiras 1+5
Anne Gastinel, vc; Sandrine Piau, s; Cellos of National Orchestra of France
Naive 5378—65 minutes

This is called Americas.

Would you like to hear all of these numbers by Astor Piazzolla arranged for a cello orchestra? Of course you would! These are arrangements by Thibault Perrine of music originally written for various combinations of instruments. The results here are highly attractive in sound, and Gastinel takes the lead with evident enjoyment. His lovely playing is full of sound effects and glissandos.

The Villa-Lobos is played in its original scoring for cello orchestra and for soprano and same. These great works are also played to the hilt, more smoothly than some aggressive performances I have heard but with polish and beautiful sound. I wish the texts for Bachianas 5 had been included, but Gastinel is clearly more interested in her own work, judging by her liner notes.

This continues this cellist’s growing collection of recordings. She is rather special in her productions and will probably turn you on with this one. Piau sings her part with elan, and the unity of effect is notable and enjoyable.

Pleyel: Violin Concerto; Viola Concerto; Symphony
Cornelia Loscher, v; Robert Bauerstatter, va; Camerata pro Musica/ Christian Birnbaum
Ars 38199 [SACD] 66 minutes

Ignaz Pleyel (1757-1831) is a composer best taken in small doses, one concerto or symphony at a time. He was a student of Haydn, and the works here sometimes sound like imitations of his. They’re not awful, but are not music I’ll bother listening to again.

All three recordings are world premieres of works unearthed over the past 21 years under the aegis of the International Pleyel Society. If so, I’m wondering why I listened to the Viola Concerto in D, Ben. 105, with an Eastman School of Music library score printed in 1951 in Frankfurt. The saving grace here is soloist Robert Bauerstatter, the principal violist of the Vienna Philharmonic. Even though he sticks strictly to the 1790 score without adding any ornamentation—not even in the written-out cadenzas for each of the three movements (in

The only authentic performance is one that reflects our own time and the character of the musician playing. Nothing could be more unauthentic than a reconstruction of historical performance practice.

American Record Guide
Il’s cadenza does he does eliminate a few of the notes—he shapes every short and long phrase with nuance and expression, making the most out of Pleyel’s music, and plays with a gorgeous tone.

The chamber orchestra, musicians from the Savaria Symphony in Szombathely—a Hungarian city of about 80,000 near the Austrian border—doesn’t produce a radiant sound but plays well under Christian Birnbaum, who never lets the pacing or musical line die in any of the three works. I hear only occasional intonation weakness in the cellos and string basses. The orchestra uses modern instruments and, while not attempting period instrument style, keeps the textures sufficient clear and alert.

Violinist Cornelia Löscher’s biography reads a bit thin, but in the Concerto in C, Ben. 1106, written in 1795, her playing too has bright pacing, spry rhythms, and nuanced phrasing. In both concertos, Pleyel includes long orchestral sections in the middle of each movement.

The Symphony in B-flat, Ben. 1493, written in 1785-86, is mostly for strings with winds and French horns adding color, has four movements (the same Haydn used—Sonata-Allegro, Andante, Minuet with Trio, and Rondo). It is the least interesting work on the album; nothing special or inventive happens in any of the movements, and IV has an almost childish theme.

**Poulencl:** 15 Improvisations; 3 Novelettes; 4-Hand Sonata; L’Embarquement pour Cythere; 2-Piano Concerto

Lucille Chung & Alessio Bax

Signum 455—62 minutes

Lucille Chung first came to my attention as the duo piano partner of Alessio Bax on a fabulous Stravinsky recording (Signum 365, M/A 2014). Here their roles are justifiably reversed—she is soloist and he is the partner for about half the pieces. Her resume is astounding: concerto debut at age 10 with the Montreal Symphony, graduating from both Curtis and Juilliard before the age of 20, performances since then with 65 different orchestras, recitals in 35 countries, fluent in 6 languages—you get the picture. She has recorded a number of CDs, so I am a little embarrassed that this is my first time hearing her wonderful playing as a soloist.

Poulencl requires a sophistication, savoir-faire, and a certain light French touch to be most effective. I have never heard better playing along these lines. This is a joy from beginning to end. The 15 Improvisations amount to more than 25 minutes, but these were composed over 26 years in three separate groups and only one is more than three minutes long. This is the second complete set (Bridge 9459, M/J 2016) to come my way this year and it jumps to the top of my list. The Novelettes are each about two minutes long and were composed over a 30-year period. They fit in nicely with the Improvisations, and I was especially pleased by the fast second one, reminiscent of a circus.

The short Sonata for Piano 4-Hands is one of my favorite works and I know how effective it is with an audience. The lower, Secondo part begins playing rhythmic chords in the middle of the keyboard. The upper, Primo part then plays big chords simultaneously below and above the other pianist’s hands. The visual effect alone makes it immediately engaging and a great opening piece. It is a lightweight work, and its three movements take less than seven minutes. L’Embarquement pour Cythere is a two-piano work that finishes off 22 short tracks in a bright and optimistic way.

Poulencl’s 2-Piano Concerto is probably the second most performed work in this medium (after Mozart’s). There are others, notably Bartok’s. Poulencl incorporated the orchestra in the piano parts and published a version for just two pianos, which is heard here. It works fabulously, no doubt owing to the exceptional pianism of the wife-husband duo. This finishes off one of the best releases of the year in a grand manner.

**Prokofieff:** Symphony 5

Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Mariiss Jansons

RCO 16002 [SACD] 43 minutes

You will not have missed the fact that this is half a disc—43 minutes. Why?

It is a gorgeous orchestra beautifully recorded, but the conductor is terrible. He is one of the few conductors who has recorded nothing at all in the last 30 years that I consider bearable. The phrasing is brusque and insensitive—never expansive or expressive. Slow movements are all too fast (the Adagio here is not even 12 minutes, and the best are 13 or more). Fast movements are a little slower than usual. This kind of evening out is a mark of a bad conductor—and it is perverse and drains the music of meaning. It is driven; it
never unfolds, and it never has majesty. He just rushes from note to note and phrase to phrase like people who talk nonstop and are afraid of pauses and silence.

So what we get here is the "modernist" Prokofieff, shorn of romanticism and lyricism. Nothing is poetic or rhapsodic. I first heard this kind of Prokofieff conducted by Jean Martinon in Chicago in the mid-1960s. I hated it then and still do. If this is the only way to do Prokofieff, I don't blame anyone for hating the composer. And, here as in Chicago, the brass completely dominate and you can often hardly hear the strings. Ugly! Nothing *sings*, even in those slightly slower than usual fast movements. Nothing breathes like a human being. It's cold and inhuman.

I think orchestras hire conductors by their resumes, and someone like this—who has nothing to say—gets hired because other orchestras hired him, and thus he has a "name". Sometimes a conductor's "technique" appeals to the musicians, but the musicians are seldom qualified to judge his ideas. The conducting profession is in a bad way, and the wrong people are getting the good jobs.

**PURCELL: Songs**

Ruby Hughes, s; Anna Grevelius, mz; Robin Blaze, ct; Allan Clayton, t; Benedict Nelson, bar; Matthew Rose, b; Joseph Middleton, p

Champs Hill 106 [2CD] 142 minutes

As Joseph Middleton comments in his introductory remarks, "For the many years before Britten revived them, Purcell's songs were simply not performed. Locked up as museum pieces, the glorious melodies as left by Purcell are accompanied only by bass lines and, in some places, figures to help with the harmonizing. . . . The results of the Purcell-Britten marriage wedded the greatest British Baroque composer with the 20th Century's finest British song composer in a totally idiosyncratic, vivid, and bold way."

These 40 songs, arias, duets, hymns, and theater pieces offer one delight after another. Wonderfully agile young singers perform adeptly in the period style you would expect in performance of Purcell's music but with a different thrust in Britten's "realized" accompaniments. Britten's aim, according to the liner notes by Paul Kidea, was to "honor the form of the song, the mood of the words, avoid creative dullness, the reverence that had strangled Purcell's music for centuries".

Whether or not you appreciate what Britten has done with Purcell's music may depend on whether you agree with Britten that "we know only too well how ephemeral fashions are, how quickly tastes change, so each generation must want its own realizations." With Purcell's music now so widely known, one can question the benefit of Britten's way of trying to make this music better known. I love Purcell's music and I appreciate Britten's music, but I'd rather hear each on its own terms. Britten clearly had a fondness for Purcell, but the incongruity of his settings with Purcell's style can prompt both enjoyment and disdain.

Some revisions work well, especially the songs where Purcell's spare settings are largely maintained (e.g. 'Evening Hymn'; 'Fairest Isle'; 'O Solitude'; 'Music for a While'). 'Sound the Trumpet' from *Come, Ye Sons of Art* with soprano and countertenor instead of two countertenors works nicely and is stylishly ornamented by Hughes and Blaze.

A highly dramatic recasting of 'In Guilty Night' (''Saul and the Witch of Endor') becomes an operatic scene rather than a sacred hymn. One must ask if 'Turn Then Thine Eyes', a duet for sopranos from *The Fairy Queen*, benefits in any way by turning it into a work for one voice with a beefy piano accompaniment.

As for the performance, this is just plain gorgeous singing. Hughes especially stands out with sublime and wondrously shaped phrasing of 'Evening Hymn' and 'The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation'. Clayton imparts both sweetness and vigor to what he sings; he is wonderful in a set of three songs: 'A Morning Hymn'; 'Alleluia'; and 'In the Black Dismal Dungeon of Despair'.

Rose sings one of the longer selections, 'Let the Dreadful Engines of Eternal Will' from *The Comical History of Don Quixote*, with assured vigor. Nelson brings more of a robust operatic approach to what he sings (e.g. 'I'll Sail on the Dog-Star' and 'Man Is for the Woman Made'). Middleton, who is rapidly establishing himself as an important member of a younger generation of accompanists, anchors this set admirably.

Notes, texts, translations (as needed).

R Moore

Of all the minor dissipations in which temperate men indulge, there is none more alluring than the after-breakfast pipe.

R Austin Freeman
**PURCELL: Theatre Music, Vol. 2**

Johane Ansell, s; Jason Nedecyk, b; Aradia Ensemble/ Kevin Mallon

Naxos 573280—63 minutes

We think of Purcell's theatrical music in terms of major scores; *Dido and Aeneas*, of course, and the six "semi-operas" (*The Fairy Queen, King Arthur, The Indian Queen*, etc.) But Purcell was making voluminous contributions to theatrical pieces all through his career. The Zimmerman catalog identifies 44 examples of "incidental music," ranging from single songs to groups of instrumental pieces, with or without songs.

Mallon has been recording Purcell's theatrical music for Naxos for a while, and this release betokens what could be an ambitious venture at comprehensive exploration.

Vol. 1 in this series (570149) was not reviewed in these pages, so far as I can find. It included music for *Amphityon, Sir Barnaby Whigg, The Gordian Knot Unty'd*, and Circe. There are substantial groups of pieces for Thomas Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love, or The Rambling Lady*, for John Crowne's *Married Beau, or The Curious Impertinent*, and for William Congreve's *Old Bachelor*.

There is much very enjoyable and often quite lovely music in these scores, if nothing quite on the level of beauty or imagination of the grander theater works. Mallon's two singers are very accomplished. Mallon seems to have a leisurely and relaxed feeling for all this music, leading in affectionate if understated fashion. The sound is clear and well balanced. Vocal texts are included in the booklet, with good notes.

Nevertheless, Purcell collectors will recall the wonderful 6CD series under Christopher Hogwood (Oiseau-Lyre 425893) and reissued by Decca (32150). Those performances have more character, and the songs are taken by more stellar singers (Emma Kirkby, Judith Nelson, James Bowman, Martyn Hill, Rogers Covey-Crump, Paul Elliot, Christopher Keyte, and Michael George, among others). If you have that set, or can still find it, clasp it to your bosom. Still, Mallon's set has values of its own.

BARKER

**PUTTLINGEN: Songs**

Lothar Blum, t; Tobias Krampen, p

Bayer 100 387—48 minutes

Johann Vesque von Puttlingen (1803-83) was an Austrian lawyer, diplomat, author, composer, and singer. His connection with Schubert led to studying voice with Johann Vogl, Schubert's primary exponent of his songs. Of Puttlingen's more than 330 songs, at least 100 are settings of Heine. He also published under the name Johann Hoven. Signum released three volumes of his songs sung by Marcus Schafer (N/D 2000, M/J 2001, N/D 2001).

Most of the 18 songs of this skimpy program—14 are Heine settings—are recorded here for the first time. It's pleasant but innocuous music, so it is likely to remain consigned to that vast repository of songs that never quite made it.

The performance is so-so and doesn't make a strong case for the songs. Blum has a pleasant voice with a tight and tremulous vibrato, and his top notes that sound forced. Krampen handles the often frilly accompaniment with agility.

Notes in German and English; texts in German only.

R MOORE

**QUILTER: Songs**

Charlotte de Rothschild, s; Adrian Farmer, p

Nimbus 5930—64 minutes

It's nice to see Quilter's songs elevated from the undergraduate recital stage. I've long admired his music with its wonderful melodies that almost sing themselves, sensitivity to text, and colorful and interesting accompaniments.

This program includes several Shakespeare settings as well as the Op. 14 songs (settings of Arthur Maquarie, William Watson, and WE Henley), the Op. 25 songs (Percy Bysshe Shelley, Manx Ballad, and Alfred Williams), the *Songs of Sorrow* (all settings of Ernest Dowson), the *Three Songs of William Blake, Two September Songs* (Mary Coleridge), as well as settings of Judith Bickle, Clifford Mills, John Irving, and 'April Love', with text by Quilter himself.

The 'Slumber Song' (Clifford Mills) is intimate and gentle.

The performances are OK. Farmer's playing is consistent and clear, but I don't care for Rothschild's voice. She's a good storyteller with clear diction, but there's no warmth, and...
the softer moments sound strident when she pulls back. Notes and texts.

RACHMANINOFF: Symphony 2
Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Mariss Jansons
RCO 16004 [SACD] 56 minutes

This has a lot going for it: a great orchestra in top form, great soloists (the clarinet in the Adagio), gorgeous sound. The music itself is glorious—one of the great peaks of romanticism.

But this is not one of the great interpretations of this music; in fact it is rather bland. The conducting is not rhapsodic, as the music must be to make its point. There is no passion, and the phrasing is mostly indifferent. The Adagio is really too fast, and the rhapsodic portion of II is utterly straightforward, without any feeling.

Why record a glorious romantic symphony in a non-romantic style? Why with a conductor who doesn’t seem to have a romantic bone in his body? And why is he there, in Amsterdam, at the helm of this great orchestra? It’s the resume phenomenon, I think: he has worked his way up the line with a better orchestra every few years. But he has never done anything that I have heard that could be called outstanding. That is fairly common among current conductors. Isn’t it sad that orchestras are playing better than ever but conductors are so boring? The only orchestra I heard in my college years that played this well was the Philadelphia, but ALL the conductors were much better than this.

I deeply love this music. I will not accept this beautiful-sounding but rather cold reading. I have Previn, Svetlanov, Temirkanov, Lopez-Cobos, and a number of other recordings that all make the music rich and rhapsodic. Why accept a technically perfect run-through?

RACHMANINOFF: Vespers
Christine Jasper, a; Dan Owens, t; London Symphony Chorus/ Simon Halsey
LSO 781 [SACD] 53 minutes

There are now so many recordings of Rachmaninoff’s All-Night Vigil that we’re long past the point of picking one as “the best” and blocking out the rest. We have expressed ARG’s preferences as recently as our last issue, where a new entrant from Germany was dismissed as not up-to-par with offerings from Mother Russia herself, as well as from Estonia (Paul Hillier) and the USA (Robert Shaw and Charles Bruffy), or with the Russian-American collaboration of Mstislav Rostropovich and the Washington Choral Arts Society. (All are mentioned in J/A 2016).

Here, the LSO Chorus joins in, and I’m pleased to welcome them to the ranks. True, theirs is not the most Slavic account you can buy. I don’t hear basso oktavists grumbling away in the harmonic cellar, and can’t honestly tell you that the soloists take us on spine-tingling explorations of the Russian soul. Also, this is performed without the liturgical interpolations that are sometimes included. If that matters to you, you’d best know it in advance.

What we do get is an elite choir revealing the elegant craftsmanship Rachmaninoff lavished on one of his best-loved masterworks. You hear special interludes, one after the other, emerging with all the lilting grace one could ask for. That’s what you’ll remember about the way the Londoners make their way through the score. And mind you, I’m not using “elegant” as a euphemism for “boring” “un-Slavic”, “veddy British”, or anything remotely critical. This is elegant, deftly crafted music, and if you have any doubts about that Maestro Halsey and his choir will erase them for good.

Notes, text, and English translation are included. This was recorded in concert at the Barbican a couple of years ago, with the engineers doing a pretty good job of neutralizing the acoustical gremlins so often encountered in that inhospitable setting.

RADECKE: Symphony; King John Overture; Nachtmusik; 2 Scherzos
Biel Solothurn Symphony/ Kaspar Zehnder
CPO 777 995—65 minutes

Robert Radecke (1839-1911) was born in what today is known as Dziecmorowice, Poland. His first music instruction was from his organist father, for whom the boy occasionally filled in at services. He later studied at Leipzig Conservatory, where his teachers included Ignaz Moscheles and Ferdinand David. He did very well there as a conductor, violinist, pianist, and as the institution’s best organist. After graduation Radecke composed, conducted, performed as a pianist, and served as a violinist in the Gewandhaus Orchestra. He spent his military service in Germany, where he established himself in a string quartet as well as a piano soloist and conductor. In 1863 he began a 25-
The character of the first of the two Scherzos reminds one of the Allegro Vivace of Beethoven’s Eroica. As always, Radecke keeps his themes and ideas wonderfully and logically carried out. The second Scherzo is more lyrical and heartfelt. He made every piece sound like his own.

The Symphony (1877) is a beauty. Schumann’s Fourth Symphony is the bulk of the influence, beginning with a lilting opening theme that flows naturally into a dotted triplet that sounds like a figure in the first movement of Tchaikovsky’s Fifth, a work that appeared 11 years later. The working out is classic German romanticism and unfailingly interesting, as themes and ideas are wonderfully and logically carried out. Allegro begins in the world of Mendelssohn’s Overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream but soon turns to the Allegro from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. The middle section is lyrical and heartfelt. The Adagio returns to Schumann, perhaps the Second Symphony, but Radecke makes it his own, as eloquent as Schumann but not as sad and with more motion. The second idea offers some beautiful woodwind work and gradually increased intensity. More Schumann plus a little Beethoven mark the good-natured, lively finale. As always, Radecke keeps his themes short and the pulse moving.

Nachtmusik’s downward intervallic opening over string tremolo creates dark tension in the first section. The second, also based on downward intervals, is fast and often surging. The piece plays more like an overture to a dramatic Schumannesque opera than “night music.” The character of the first of the two Scherzos reminds one of the Allegro Vivace of Beethoven’s Eroica and a touch of Mendelssohn, before turning to Schumann and perhaps Weber. The second Scherzo is more lyrical and flowing, especially in the slower passages, where it resembles Dvorak. Overture to Shakespeare’s King John is a stirring work that suggests Schumann’s Manfred Overture without actually sounding like it.

The orchestra is from the Swiss cities of Biel-Bienne and Solothurn, several miles north of Bern. Its playing and Kaspar Zehnder’s sympathetic conducting do Radecke great service, and the sound is just right. As usual with CPO, the notes are excellent; they include an essay by the composer’s great grandson, Christian Radecke.

Rautavaara: Rubaiyat; Into the Heart of Light; Balada; Rasputin Songs
Helsinki Philharmonic/ John Storgards
Ondine 1274—59 minutes

In 2004, Rautavaara was fighting a life-threatening illness (he actually died in July 2016), and these works all reflect the experience in one way or another. These may all be considered Late Works.

Rubaiyat (2012) is a song cycle in English for baritone and orchestra. The texts deal with mortality.

Into the Heart of Light (2012), for string orchestra, is a lush outpouring of lyricism and long line subtitled Canto V (part of a series).

Balada (2014) is a song cycle on poems of Lorca for tenor, chorus, and orchestra, set in Lorca’s original Spanish. The concern with artistic longevity is ubiquitous.

4 Songs from the opera Rasputin (2012), the implied background of which is the cure of the protagonist’s hemophilia, are for mixed choir and orchestra. These excerpts (in Finnish) might be interpreted as dealing with death and resurrection.

Listeners attracted to this great composer’s music will certainly want this beautifully performed music. Texts and translations.

Gimbel

Ravel: Daphnis & Chloe Suite 2; Rapsodie Espagnol; Mother Goose Suite; Pavane
USSR Symphony/ Evgeny Svetlanov
Melodiya 2338—58 minutes

This is taken from a 1975 Moscow concert in honor of Maurice Ravel’s 100th birthday anniversary. The Russian honoring of Ravel should come as no surprise, given the strong cultural exchange that has gone on between the countries for over a century. Svetlanov’s best known recordings are of Russian music, but he conducted a good deal of French music as well.

With one exception, the performances are on the heavy side and more romantic than...
Impressionist or, as Ravel, would prefer to call it, classical. When tempos vary from the norm, they tend to be slow. There is nothing particularly bad here, but there is nothing special or distinguished, either. The horn solo in Pavane is quite good, and ‘Fairy Garden’ from Mother Goose makes some interesting points. The one odd performance is Rapsodie Espagnole. It does not sound French at all. If anything, Svetlanov is thinking Spanish, though it is a slow, heavy-on-the-downbeat Russian take on it that is not completely without interest.

Russian orchestras from this period were known for dark, rather fat winds and brash brass. The strings play well but without the sheen we hear from French orchestras. The result does not really suit Ravel. The recording is typical of what the Soviets produced in that era: multimiked with a lot of gain-riding. With many fine Ravel collections available, this one is strictly for Svetlanov collectors.

The selections on this new release also include the seventh and eighth sonatas from Rebel’s 1713 collection. These sonatas were included on Andrew Manze’s more extensive selection from the 1713 publication (M/J 99), but while Manze plays with more flare, I believe the subtleties of Rebel’s writing benefits from both Johnson’s more restrained approach and the dryer acoustic of her recording. Though not readily available now, Ingrid Matthews’s recording of Suite 1 from 1705 and Sonata 8 from 1713 has the same qualities I respect in Johnson’s interpretation (J/F 2000). This new release would be a significant addition to any serious collection of French baroque music.

HECHT

RAVEL: Gaspard; see SCHUMANN
La Valse; see MOUSSORGSKY
Mother Goose; see Collections
Tombeau de Couperin;
see VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Violin-Cello Sonata; see KODALY

REBEL: Violin Sonatas & Suites
Jeanne Johnson, v; Brent Wissick, gamba; Peter Marshall, hpsi—Centaur 3430—77 minutes

Jean-Fery Rebel’s current reputation is excessively based on his extravagant ballet, Les Elémens (1737), which begins with a dissonant musical representation of Chaos (J/F 2015 includes references to earlier recordings). In a number of respects, his earlier compositions, such as the ones on this new release, are more typical of his inventiveness and creativity. In the year 1705, when his first collection of music for violin and continuo was published, he was appointed to Louis XIV’s exclusive ensemble, the 24 violons du roy, a strong indication of his growing reputation. It is perhaps significant that Rebel’s first publication was of dance suites, where he was able to amalgamate the French dance traditions with the virtuosic passage-work and double-stops of the Italians.

To my knowledge, this is the first complete recording of the three suites from the 1705 collection. Ms Johnson plays with all the control of ornamentation and phrasing one would expect in the French repertoire. Her continuo support is also sensitive to her interpretation, both in how Wissick mirrors her melodic gestures and in Marshall’s idiomatic realization of the figured bass.

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BREWER

REDFELD: Songs
Kristi Holden, s; Hollywood Studio Symphony/ Dan Redfeld—Navona 6045—65 minutes

This is a performance of the orchestral song cycle A Hopeful Place by American composer and conductor Dan Redfeld. The text is by John Gabriel Koladziej. In his notes he calls the piece a “life-cycle-song-cycle”; the theme of the piece is a woman’s life cycle. I would classify the music as a combination of musical theatre, John Williams-style movie music, and Disney. Tonal and harmonically unambitious, the orchestration is colorful, if predictable. There is some variation from song to song but little that is compelling or developmental. ‘Childhood’ skips and plays while ‘Words They Never Say’ starts slightly introspectively before weaving between thoughtfulness and a more than a hint of Hollywood melodrama.

That’s the main problem here; the text and music often start with an interesting idea that quickly dissolves into cliche. For example, I’ve often wondered what I would say if, as ‘No Longer a Child’ starts, “I could only have words with the girl I once was”, but I doubt I would tell her to “cherish each moment”. There are few interesting moments in ‘Bacchanal’ and in the text in ‘A Hopeful Place’, as it briefly explores darker aspects of the human experience before it spins into the—by this point in the cycle—hackneyed motif of the world as a love-filled hopeful place.

Perhaps I’m too cynical to appreciate what the piece is supposed to be about. It’s hard to listen to this excessively sentimental program a week after the massacre in Orlando. In a real-
world context, the piece trivializes suffering and in doing so minimizes those rare moments of true beauty and hope. Not to mention that anyone interested in hearing new music that sounds new will be disappointed. Notes and texts.

HEISEL

REGER: Chorale Cantatas
Dorothea Wagner, s; Marie Henriette Reinhold, a; Florian Sievers, t; Michael Schonheit, org; Reinhold Quartet; Gewandhaus Choir; Children’s Choir/ Gregor Meyer & Frank-Steffen Elster
CPO 777 984—71 minutes

These chorale cantatas are the product of an interest in a simpler, scaled-down style of church music, as was becoming popular in the very late 19th Century. Reger had been in contact with Friedrich Spitta, who had asked for a “dramatized” version of the hymn ‘Von Himmel hoch’ that would divide the stanzas among various performing forces and make modest use of strings. I confess I had no idea of what this would be like (and maybe you don’t either!), so let me describe this piece in some detail. We know this Advent hymn from several Bach settings and in English as ‘From Heaven on High’. But did you know there are 15 stanzas in German? Reger takes us through the 15, all at a quite deliberate tempo and with short instrumental interludes (violins and organ) separating the stanzas. Of the 15, 5 are for soprano soloist, who sings the unadorned tune 4 times, the fifth being paraphrased. 2 go to solo quartet, 1 to the tenor soloist, and 1 to a soprano-alto duet, where the melody is in the violin and the singers sing snatches of ‘Silent Night’. A further stanza is given to the alto soloist, who sings a countermelody with the original implied, but not really heard. That makes 10. Of the remaining 5, 3 go to the Children’s Choir and 2 to the full choir or congregation. Through the course of the cantata, lasting 17-1/2 minutes, we hear interesting re-harmonizations and interludes, but everything is in the same tempo, and fancy music is missing (as in some choral counterpoint!) It is really quite lovely, though, and would be very effective in a service, where the simplicity could lead to a meditative spirit.

The other cantatas are meant for other times of the church year: ‘O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden’ for Good Friday; ‘Auferstanden, Auferstanden’ for Easter; ‘O wie selig seid ihr doch, ihr Frommen’ for funerals. ‘Meinen Jesus lass ich nicht’ is not associated with a particular feast.

These cantatas, deliberately simple, are not particularly challenging for the performers. All across the board, though, the pieces are beautifully done. This won’t be for everyone, but if you’re interested by the premise of this music, you won’t be disappointed.

ALTHOUSE

REGER: Clarinet Sonatas
Claudio Conti; Roberta Bambace, p
Brilliant 95258—70 minutes

The oeuvre of fin-de-siecle composer Max Reger (1873-1916) continues to be popular with contemporary clarinetists. Italian musicians Claudio Conti and Roberta Bambace offer the composer’s entire catalog for clarinet and piano: Sonata 1 in A-flat, Sonata 2 in F-sharp minor, Sonata 3 in B-flat; the ‘Albumblatt’ in E-flat; and the Tarantella in G minor.

The Reger sonatas are difficult to grasp because the hyper-romantic chromatic themes and harmonies can obscure whatever music lies underneath. Conti and Bambace offer excellent balance and good phrasing, but the thin clarinet tone and wobbly intonation and dry, sometimes tinny piano undermine their efforts and turn listening into somewhat of a chore. Better renditions are available.

HANUDEL

REGER: 3 Motets;
O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden
Sabine Czinzziel, a; Johannes Kaleschke, t; Stuttgart Radio Vocal Ensemble/ Frieder Bernius
Carus 83.288—59 minutes

What are we to do with Reger? His unaccompanied choral music reveals the highest level of compositional skill, but it is unrelentingly thick in texture, and the harmonic rhythm (the speed with which harmonies change) can be so swift that the ear simply cannot follow the argument. In the liner notes conductor Bernius says these motets are among the greatest challenges in the whole tonal, a cappella literature. And who would doubt him? The first two motets—Mein Odem ist schwach in four movements and Ach Herr, strafe mich nicht in three—include fiendishly difficult fugues in what seems to be page after page of 7-part counterpoint. The third motet O Tod, wie bitter bist du in two movements is simpler and more easily comprehended, but since Reger wrote it in two days, we can surmise he wasn’t trying very hard! Here, though, Reger responds...
well to the text (same as Brahms’s) and effectively depicts the pain vs. the blessing of death through minor-major contrast. The program is filled out with a fine performance of one of Reger’s five chorale cantatas, works in a deliberately simpler style. (All five are reviewed above.)

Bernius also points out in his notes that it is common to do the motets with instrumental doubling in order to clarify the part writing and keep things on pitch. Here, though, we have a cappella singing, and it is splendidly impressive, superbly controlled and excellently in tune. The singers use very little vibrato, but even so, the thornier passages are very hard to “read”. The third motet, though, is very satisfying (and a nice piece!). *O Haupt*, which includes soloists and instruments (violin, oboe, organ), is meant as service music and as a result is quite accessible.

A terrific recording, then, but I’m still not sure what we should do with Reger!

**REGER: Organ Pieces**

Vol. 1: *Fantasy & Fugue on BACH; Introduction & Passacaglia in D minor; Symphonic Fantasy & Fugue; Sonata 2*

Cybele 51501 [SACD] 82 minutes

Vol. 2: *Introduction, Passacaglia, & Fugue; 9 Pieces, op 129*

Cybele 51502 [SACD] 63 minutes

Vol. 3: *Fantasy & Fugue in D minor; 7 Pieces, op 145*

Cybele 51503 [SACD] 71 minutes

Martin Schmeding, org

CPO 777729 [2SACD] 124 minutes

In celebration of Max Reger’s 100th birthday on May 11 there have been several projects to record his complete organ music. I am not usually a fan of his organ music, having heard too many performances over the years that can’t get beyond the stacks of notes and the complex contrapuntal textures. The times I have become engaged in a performance of Reger is when the performer has mastered the technical demands to such a degree that the listener is not aware of the difficulties and can enjoy and engage with the music. In the words of Saint-Saëns “beauty comes into existence only when the difficulty is really overcome to such a degree that the listener is unaware of its existence”.

These two series have made me sit up and take note, especially the playing of Martin Schmeding, who offers effortless performances of this complex music. His series will eventually amount to 17 SACDs (8 have been released) to be completed in 2016. They will include an extensive illustrated booklet with information about Reger, his organ music, and the specifications of all the Walcker and Sauer instruments used. There are no notes supplied with the separate volumes; but if you buy them separately, the company will send you the booklet and collector’s box free when the series is completed. The recorded sound is SACD and is absolutely stunning.

Volume 3 of the competing series by Weinberger (I assume it will be a complete series but there is no indication of that on the CPO website) also offers very fine performances. Weinberger plays on two Sauer organs; and the recorded sound, while clear, lacks the spaciousness of the Cybele set. Other competing series include Naxos (16 discs, various organists and organs), and Oehms (4 discs each year since 2013 recorded on a variety of organs). So, for the Reger enthusiast or, if you want to explore some of this fascinating music, your “cup runneth over”.

**DEL CAMP**

**REGER: Pieces for solo violin & cello**

Laura Young, g

Gramola 99072—56 minutes

Old prejudices die hard. My initial encounter with the reputation of Max Reger was from my musicology professor—still my role model for the Great Professor—who commented that at a previous university his musicology department had refused a donation of the collected works of Reger, primarily for lack of interest. That surely shapes my response to his music, but I’ve often changed my mind and rejected previous perceptions. Still, I’ve never heard any of Reger’s music that inspires me to reconsider—this recording included.

But that is not for a lack of commitment or skill on the part of Ms Young, currently a professor at the Salzburg Mozarteum. She plays beautifully, with a lovely sound, plenty of range, and a full technical command. And her notes made me really want to enjoy the music more. The music is from works for solo violin and solo cello. Bach was his musical hero and is clearly the model for this music. Indeed,
these pieces—the Solo Violin Sonata, Op. 42, the preludes and fugues, Opp. 117 and 131a, and the solo cello suites, Op. 131c—owe more to Bach than other works for solo strings by Ysaye, Kodaly, or Britten. He even, occasionally, catches a touch of the sheer joy of Bach’s music, as in the final fugue from the cello suite in G. And the works lie well for guitar, an instrument for which counterpoint is more natural than a solo violin or cello.

I find the works rather too stark, but they are still a welcome addition to the repertory, so thanks to Ms Young for her advocacy. Regardless of your fondness, or lack thereof, for Reger’s music, he still penned the greatest response ever to a negative critic: “I am seated in the smallest room of my house. Your review is before me. In a moment, it shall be behind me.”

KEATON

REGER: Trios
Parnassus Trio—MDG 3030751—67 minutes

Max Reger wrote two trios with piano, and they are both here. This is MDG Gold—a reissue series. The recording is from 1997, though we did not review its 1998 issue. The E-minor Trio is for the standard group of violin-cello-piano. The B-minor Trio substitutes a viola for the cello, yielding a lighter texture. Neither is a “heavy” piece, but both are “Brahmsian” and very German. Both are full of musical invention—very well composed. But neither has melodies you won’t forget. Both would sound good played quietly in an art gallery.

In our review of the E-minor Trio on Thorough (by the Hyperion Trio, J/F 2009) we referred to this recording for the power and finesse of the pianist. Yes, he is very good. I actually like him even better in the other trio. And in that trio Reger shows the same talent for variations that Brahms had. Both discs have very fine sound.

This is not “must have” music, but it is well crafted and never obnoxious. It’s Brahms without the sheer inspiration Brahms always managed to summon.

VROON

RESPIGHI: Roman Trilogy; see Collections

RIES: Cello Sonatas, opp 21, 22, 125
Gaetano Nasillo; Alessandro Commellato, fp
Brilliant 95206—79 minutes

Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838) is connected closely to Beethoven, whose friend he was. The intensity and imaginative writing that characterize these three cello sonatas is not far from Beethoven’s style, though Ries is more romantic in sound, particularly in the late Op. 125 from 1823, which has a tragic mood you never hear from Beethoven. Ries is not as intense as Beethoven and emphasizes color and conversation rather than drama and intensity of formal structure. His music is replete with fun and frolic and is usually led by the piano.

The piano part is played here on a fortepiano. The recorded sound is well balanced, and Commellato can play out to the limit without drowning Nasillo, giving them both an opportunity to combine early music and romantic styles without pushing each other off the raft. This is a very effective reading of some cello-piano music that should be much better known than it is.

D MOORE

RODRIGO: Aranjuez; see BROUWER & Collections

ROGER-DUCASSE: Piano Pieces, all
Martin Jones, Adrian Farmer
Nimbus 5927 [3CD] 186 minutes

The name Roger-Ducasse was familiar to me only in that it was unusual and I had seen it in passing, before this extensive release arrived for review. A picture in the superb booklet ably sets the stage for evaluating these compositions for piano. Fauré and Roger-Ducasse are seated at a piano playing a duet, both sporting huge moustaches, while a group of young students are standing behind them: Ravel, Caplet, Aubert, Koechlin, and Vuillermoz among them. Younger than Debussy by 11 years, Roger-Ducasse (1873-1954) lived into his 80s. He was most definitely an impressionist composer, with strong influences from Chopin and Liszt. It is too bad we don’t get much of a chance to hear his music. He was active in the French music scene for more than 40 years and was influential with many of his contemporaries. The chromaticism of his music is clearly based in Fauré’s teachings and style.

The solo piano music was composed 1906-1923 and consists mostly of short works: Preludes, Etudes, Arabesques, Esquisses, and miscellaneous character pieces. There are three more extended Barcarolles that actually remind me more of Chopin’s Ballads than his Barcarolle. Martin Jones has immersed himself in this music and seems to capture every nuance. He also handles its considerable difficulties with great skill.

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The largest work here is Variations sur un Choral at just under 16 minutes. Of the 10 variations, the second will surprise most people in that it takes the chorale tune and puts it in the guise of Beethoven’s famous theme for his Variations in C minor, with contemporary harmonic twists.

As this release is titled the “complete” piano music, we get Roger-Ducasse’s fine solo piano transcription of Bach’s organ Passacaglia and a couple of extended reductions of his own orchestral pieces. The most interesting discoveries for me are the works for one piano, four hands. Jones is ably joined by Adrian Farmer, who also contributed the extensive booklet essay. Petite Suite (1899) is the earliest work in this collection. The three books of Etudes a Quatre Mains, pour un Commencant were probably written as Conservatory test pieces in 1916-17. They follow a progressive order of difficulty, beginning fairly easy and eventually encompassing all of the nasty technical items piano duet teams wrestle with, like loud chords in all four hands in a slow tempo, hand on top on hand playing the same note only a split second apart, and arm crossings at fast tempos. These are now on my short list of works to get much better acquainted with.

I would like to finish by making a comparison of Roger-Ducasse and Medtner. They were both conservative composers, expert at their craft. Their melodies are not quite memorable. Their music is often dense and quite difficult for both the performer and listener, but it repays study and familiarity. Medtner’s music is performed and recorded with great regularity these days. I hope that this release is the beginning of similar trend for the music of Roger-Ducasse.

HARRINGTON

ROLLE: St Matthew Passion
Ana-Marija Brkic, s; Sophie Harmsen, a; Georg Polutz & Joachim Streckfuss, t; Thilo Dahlmann & Raimonds Spogis, b; Cologne Academy/ Michael Alexander Willens
CPO 555 046 [2CD] 99 minutes

Johann Heinrich Rolle (1716-85) came from a musical family. His father was appointed director of music at Magdeburg in 1721, and the son became organist of St Peter’s Church in that city in 1734. He entered Leipzig University as a law student in 1737. He probably became acquainted with JS Bach at that time, but there is no documentary evidence of it. From Leipzig he went to Berlin, where he practiced law for a time, but in 1741 an influential friend recommended him for a position in King Frederick’s court chapel, where he served as violinist and violist for six years and became acquainted with CPE Bach, the Benda brothers, and Carl Heinrich Graun. In 1746 Rolle returned to Magdeburg to become organist at St John’s Church. His father died in 1751, and the younger Rolle succeeded to his position. The St Matthew Passion recorded here dates from 1748.

It is inevitable, and in a sense unfair, that works like this one will be compared with the Passions of JS Bach. No one would pretend that Rolle or contemporaries like Graun or Homilus were possessed of a genius comparable to Bach’s; but beyond that, the aesthetic landscape of mid-18th-Century German church music had changed significantly. Program annotator Klaus Winkler observes that Rolle’s St Matthew Passion “represents a composition characteristic of the Age of Sensibility” (die Zeit der Empfindsamkeit). By mid-century, Bach’s challenging technical complexity was regarded as old fashioned and off-putting by a generation that wanted something more simple and direct. Rolle offers the listener consolation in music that is mostly gentle and pretty where Bach’s Passions are full of pentagonal anguish and intensity. Where Rolle offers drama and vehemence, it is always several degrees cooler than its counterpart in Bach. A listener can easily feel emotionally drained by the end of a Bach Passion. That is hardly the case here.

To his credit, Michael Alexander Willens does not attempt to make Rolle’s music what it is not. He guides the music coherently along its gentle and congenial way. Much of it is very attractive, and Rolle displays skill and imagination in his use of wind instruments. Willens’s treatment of the chorales is so tender that they almost sound like lullabies. The performance leaves nothing to be desired technically. The instrumental playing is clean and taut, and the vocal soloists all sing with a relatively light but refined tone to deliver readings that are understated but with assurance and poise.

There are not very many recordings of Rolle’s sacred music. Peter Loewen recently reviewed a 2-disc recording of motets by Rolle (CPO 777 778; M/J 2015), a genre he cultivated far more extensively than did JS Bach. Some years ago Paul Althouse reviewed a recording of Rolle’s Christmas Oratorio (CPO 999 514; J/F 1998), and his response to that piece was quite similar to mine to this one.

GATENS

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**ROTA: Piano Pieces**

Christian Seibert—CPO 555019—70 minutes

Nino Rota was one of the great film composers, scoring dozens of masterpieces by Fellini, Visconti, and Coppola. As this welcome album of piano music shows, he was considerably more than that. His operas, concertos, and symphonies are largely forgotten, but perhaps releases like this will someday spur a revival. Rota’s music is melodic, nostalgic, witty, and wildly colorful, alternating between a carnival atmosphere and a brooding melancholy. There are modern touches, but he was basically a romantic. The modernism in his music came not from serialism but from influences acquired during his sojourn to America, where he studied with Fritz Reiner at Curtis and imbibed jazz and Hollywood music. He described his art as having “a little nostalgia, a lot of humor and optimism.”

This album opens with Variations and Fugue on the Name of Bach, a highly formal work that concludes with a sinister, chromatic fugue. The other big piece is a Fantasia full of expressive melodies written for his friend, Michelangelo (alas, never recorded by that great pianist), discovered after Rota’s death in 1979. The 1964 Preludes are more mercurial and unpredictable. Their abstractions are divorced from movie associations, except 4, a graceful piece with a phrase that anticipates the gorgeous Sicily scene in The Godfather. 2 is dreamy and nostalgic, with an undercurrent of darkness. 3 combines whimsy and sadness. 5 moves in perpetual motion through haunting modulations. 7 is exuberant and romping, conveying a circus atmosphere. Rota’s harmonies are lushly tonal or elegantly dry (he came to admire Stravinsky during his time in America). The finale brings the series to a virtuosic close. Why these pieces are not more popular with pianists is beyond me.

As I wrote in these pages, Jimmy Briere makes a convincing case for the Preludes on Analekta, but that CD covers piano works by other film composers too (Korngold, for example), so the context is different. Here we get all of Rota’s piano pieces, so we can see his developments for that instrument. Even the children’s tunes are remarkable for their wealth of simple melody and variety of mood. The more sardonic ones have a hint of Prokofiev. Others, such as the Cantilena, have a seductively melancholy atmosphere. The charming waltzes from 1945 bring back a bygone era with touching sincerity; this is not neo-classical pastiche, but the real thing.

German pianist Christian Seibert captures all of Rota’s moods and colors with warm tone, clear voicing, and a keen sense of melody. The magisterial ending of the Bach variations shows off his big sonority, but the more delicate pieces are perhaps even more impressive. CPO’s recording is seductive, with a nice ping in the piano’s upper register. These are accessible, sometimes inspired pieces by a greatly undervalued composer.

**SULLIVAN**

**ROZSA: Sonatas (2); KODALY: Duo**

Szymon Krzeszowiec, Bartlomiej Niziol, v; Adam Krzeszowiec, vc

Accord 226—60 minutes

Hungarian-born, German-trained, and long a resident of California in his later years, Miklos Rozsa (1907-95) is one of the few internationally known film score composers who also produced a substantial body of first-rate concert and recital music. The key words here are “first-rate”: Rozsa’s best such pieces, including such superlative compositions as his 1954 Violin Concerto (written for and first recorded by Heifetz), his early duos (for violin and piano and for cello and piano), his 1933 2-Violin Sonata, his 1948 Piano Sonata—even his haunting Valse Crepusculaire (for piano) originally written for a movie—are much loved and played around the world, having earned a secure place as established standards in the repertoire. Their salient virtues encompass indelible melodies, gorgeously enriched tonal harmonies, confident idiomatic writing for the instruments, and skilfully crafted formal architecture contrasting exciting allegros with luxuriant andantes that flower into enraptured lyrical eloquence: in short, music that epitomizes “modern romanticism” at its best.

This new Accord couples Rozsa’s Solo Violin Sonata and Sonata for Two Violins. The Solo Sonata, a very late work, is somewhat atypical, prickly and without the warmth and effusion of his earlier chamber music. It’s also quite demanding, requiring daunting virtuosity to perform and also, I think, considerable tolerance for complexity and astringent dissonance (however tonally-anchored) from the listener. The opening motive, an agitated, jagged, jumpy stretch of double-stops, is restless and intense; this is quickly followed by a distorted (but unmistakable) quotation from Bartok’s great 1938 Violin Concerto. II, a varia-

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I find the result dazzling but also (paradoxically?) distracting, with the playing sometimes calling more attention to itself than to the music. My preference for the Kodaly is Pieter Wispelwey on Globe 5089, and for the Rozsa sonata, no one compares to Endre Granat and Sheldon Sanov. Granat, who knew and worked with Rozsa on both the film scores and chamber music recordings, plays with aristocratic phrasing, precision, tonal beauty (the recording is up-close, absolutely clear in every detail, but with a slightly “dry” ambiance), and finds exactly the right tempos (about 20% slower than Szymon Krzeszowiec and Bartłomiej Niziol)—brisk and forward-driving but never rushed in the outer allegros, expansive and shapely, with plenty of time to allow the lyricism and romantic warmth to fully flower in the central Lento. Alas, the Granat-Sanov performance awaits much-needed reissue on CD, though the recording (on an Entr’acte LP) is still easily and inexpensively available from on-line sources.

If that alternative doesn’t appeal to you, there are other recordings, as for example on ASV 1105 (N/D 2001) played by the top half of the Flesch Quartet and recommended by Mark Koldys. That in addition includes Rozsa’s two string quartets, which Koldys also lauded. Two releases of the Solo Violin Sonata (both also including the excellent Duo for Violin and Piano) were praised by Elaine Fine: Isabella Lippi on Koch 7256 (N/D 1995) and Philippe Quint on Naxos 570190 (1/F 2008). On the other hand if you prefer to hear Rosza’s string pieces at full thrill-ride throttle, this new Accord may be your catnip.

LEHMANN

RUTTER: Psalmfest; This Is the Day; Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge; Psalm 150
Elizabeth Cragg, s; Pascal Charbonneau, t; Mike Allen, treb; Tom Winpenny, org; St Albans Cathedral Choir & Abbey Girls Choir; Royal Philharmonic/ Andrew Lucas
Naxos 573394—72 minutes

John Rutter’s penchant for dressing the British choral tradition up in Boston Pops-like orchestrations has made him one of the most popular composers on the planet. And nowhere has he made that synthesis work better than in his settings of biblical psalms. Psalmfest (1993) is a gathering of nine of them. Some will be familiar to you; they have appeared previously as stand-alone anthems or as portions of other works. The composer’s gracious and lovely 23rd Psalm, for example, was a movement of...
his 1985 Requiem. For *Psalmfest* it was remodeled to incorporate soprano and tenor solos. ‘Cantate Domino’ may be new to you—it was previously unpublished; and the handsome melodies of ‘How Amiable’ (Psalm 84) were crafted more recently so they could be added to this *Psalmfest* collection.

The three additions that round out this program also are settings of psalms. The bright, happy ‘This Is the Day’ was composed for the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (Will and Kate). ‘Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge’ puts the solo trumpet to its zippy rhythms and brassy fanfares. If you like Rutter, in short, this is something of a mother lode.

The St Albans choirs sound small alongside the Royal Phil, but there’s nothing wrong with their singing. Rutter has been accorded richer sound from Naxos when he himself has been on the podium, but these results are certainly acceptable. Notes from the composer and full psalm texts are included in the booklet.

**GREENFIELD**

**SABANEYEV: Piano Pieces 1**
Michael Schafer
Genuin 15380 [2CD] 108 minutes

Composer-critic Leonid Sabaneyev began his life in the Russian Empire in 1881 and lived until 1968. He wrote extensively about Scriabin and was clearly infected with that singular composer’s perfumes and poisons. Though his hyper-intense, melodically rich music is in many ways a throwback to Russian romanticism, it was purged from music history by the Soviets for its alleged modernism and “formalism”.

Now Michael Schafer has launched a three-volume traversal of his piano works. Sabaneyev is so fabulously obscure that one might fear this to be a case of unearthing something purely for historical reasons, especially given Sabaneyev’s curious and exotic life. As it turns out, the music itself is impressive, massive, sometimes jaw-dropping in its deliberate over-wroughtness and unwavering intensity. The piano writing is orchestral, with layers of sound spanning the entire keyboard. The overtly romantic pieces such as the earlier Preludes are like an alternate Rachmaninoff in their richness and Russian sensibility. The mysterious, Scriabin-like works—the Poems and Fragments—breath a rarified atmosphere. The floating chromaticism is as wonderfully “decadent” as the Soviets claimed, though Sabaneyev denied this element.

There is lots of uncelebrated music here, and fanciers of Russian romanticism will get a great deal of pleasure. Often Sabaneyev works with a single melody or idea, unfolding in surprising, sometimes sinister manifestations. These are miniatures, but each piece offers a concentrated world of emotion. As Sabaneyev himself says, there is little “joyousness in my creative work. The best epithet would be ‘trag ic.’” As long as one can tolerate singularity of mood, this is an illuminating and gripping release. Schafer immerses himself in Sabaneyev’s seductive perfumes, using vivid colors, generous pedal, and sumptuous voicing. He plays a Bosendorfer Imperial, which in this recording delivers a stunningly rich sound. His virtuosity—the sheer bigness of sound even in quiet pieces—is one of the album’s pleasures. I can’t wait for the next volume.

**SULLIVAN**

**SAINT-SAENS: Cello Concerto 1**
**LALO: Cello Concerto**
**MARTIN: Ballade**

Wen-Sinn Yang; Giessen Philharmonic/ Michael Hofstetter
Oehms 1838—62 minutes

There is nowhere you can find a biography of the cellist. Nowadays, no one expects a “bio” to tell you where and when he was born and whom he studied with. The “bio” on this album and on his web site tells you almost nothing, except that he has taught cello at the Munich Academy since 2004. The rest is bragging about orchestras and conductors he has teamed up with. It’s a resume, not a biography.

Nevertheless he is a very good cellist, as becomes apparent right away in the Saint-Saens. I would not replace favorite performances with this one, but some readers might, especially since the sound is so good. I happen to think no one has matched Christine Walevska and Natalie Klein in the Saint-Saens.

Swiss composer Frank Martin wrote six “ballades” with six different star instruments: saxophone, flute, trombone, etc. This one was written in Amsterdam in 1949 but first performed in 1950 in Zurich. It is completely dominated by the cello. It doesn’t stop singing until about 12 minutes in; then it is only quiet for half a minute. The notes tell us there’s a dialog with an oboe. It sounds like a bassoon to me, but it could be an oboe in its lower range. Like all of Frank Martin’s music, this is
not especially beautiful or melodic, but neither is it ugly and cold. People who have grown to like his music will tell you that there’s something to it, and once you get used to it you remain a fan.

The Lalo is a little overdone—especially the orchestral punctuation near the beginning. The conductor needs a shave; maybe that makes him virulent and defiant. I still like the Vargas and Leonard Rose recordings best.

This is better than I expected; I like the cellist and the sound, and I was interested in the Martin ballade.

SAINT-SAENS: Dances & Souvenirs
Geoffrey Burleson, p
Grand Piano 625—72 minutes

This is the fourth installment in Burleson’s traversal of Saint-Saens’s piano music. The music here is generally light, melodic, and brilliant. Saint-Saens (1835-1921) was one of the most formidable pianists of his time, and his substantial output of solo piano music bears this out. Living well into his 80s, he played two-piano concertos with Liszt and outlived Debussy. Fauré was his most famous student, but his very public disdain for modern music in the 1900s put him at odds with people who looked to Debussy and Stravinsky for contemporary compositions. Nevertheless, Ravel considered him a genius.

He composed five piano concertos, hundreds of songs, and chamber music that included piano; yet his piano solo output was almost completely devoid of large-scale compositions. He seemed content to write sets of études, bagatelles, and fugues along with a few other medium sized works; mostly he left a great quantity of individual pieces such as we have here. His compositional skill is never in doubt, though his creative spirit wafts from brilliant down to simply perfunctory.

Burleson has immersed himself in the entirety of Saint-Saens output and is a powerful advocate for this music. He plays with all the requisite technique and a style and flair that one would expect from music firmly entrenched in the romantic style. His booklet notes are enlightening, and the piano sound is wonderful. I am sure that I will also enjoy the future volumes in this series.

HARRINGTON

SAUGET: Cadence; 3 Preludes; 6 Easy Pieces; Music for Claudel 1+2; Soliloque; Reverence to Bach
Alfonso Baschiera, g; Federica Lotti, fl; Nicola Boscaro, vc—Brilliant 95168—48 minutes

Henri Sauget (1901-89) was born in Bordeaux and spent the bulk of his professional life in Paris. He studied with Canteloube, Koechlin, and Satie; and his music is quite tonal. A quote from him in the notes indicates that he used the guitar in some works for orchestra and for theater. This collection brings together all his works for guitar solo or in chamber combinations.

All the works are brief, many just longer than a minute. The 6 Easy Pieces are for flute and guitar; and the final work, ‘Reverence to Johann Sebastian Bach’, is for guitar and cello—the rest are guitar solos. The neo-classical music is all charming, but not especially memorable. The most interesting are the two sets of Music for Claudel, apparently intended to be added to a play by Paul Claudel, Conversations dans le Loir-et-Cher, performed here without the dialog.

Baschiera performs everything quite well, with appropriate Gallic reserve, and his partners play with equal skill. Any of the works might be a pleasant addition to a recital, though the entire set doesn’t sustain interest.

KEATON

SCARLATTI, A: La Gloria di Primavera
Dianna Moore (Primavera), Suzana Ograjensek (Estate), Clint van der Linde (Autunno), Nicholas Phan (Inverno), Douglas Williams (Iaiove); Philharmonia Baroque/ Nicholas McGegan
Philharmonia Baroque 9 [2CD] 138:30

The birth of Archduke Leopold in April 1716 was an important event. As the long-awaited heir to the Hapsburg Emperor Charles VI, he was the guarantee of the dynasty’s continuity—and, indeed, of general European security. In the newly created satellite realm of Naples, the local political and cultural authorities set about making a proper celebration of the birth. They naturally called on the court composer, Alessandro Scarlatti, who, with a local poet, speedily created a elaborate serenata. It was first performed a mere month after the imperial birth, and involved some of the best Italian singers of the day.

It was, of course, an explicitly occasional piece, its text extolling the blessings and glories that the newborn prince would bring in the course of his splendid reign. The work was gi-
ven a few more performances, but to its juicily dated topicality was added the cruel irony of little Leopold’s death only months after his birth. Scarlatti’s score was dropped and forgotten, while the failure of a male heir to Charles VI led to the succession of the Emperor’s daughter Maria Theresa and the consequential tumult of the War of Austrian Succession.

Only without the political associations could Scarlatti’s work be taken seriously. It was revived for a performance in 1825, and now at last is given editorial and artistic attention as an important extra-operatic work by the great theatrical composer.

Cast in two parts, it begins with fulsome praise of the new prince by a conclave of the seasons: Primavera (Spring), Estate (Summer), Autumn (Autumn), and Inferno (Winter). Each claims a special link with the prince, and soon the proceedings are turned into an argument as to which is most important. It is agreed that the judgement will be left up to Giove (Jove, or Jupiter), whose arrival opens Part II. The seasons state their cases but Jove judges on a choice under the mask of renewed celebration of the newly arrived prince, but “the Glory of Spring” is clearly asserted. Obviously, no inspiring ideas in all this for us.

The music survives today as a charming bundle of Baroque Italian conceits—no striking masterstrokes, but very pleasant listening. The well-honed techniques for evoking the sounds and feelings of nature are exploited fully. The vocal writing allows the singers plenty of impressive display, and the orchestral writing is full of delicate instrumental colors.

There are no stellar singers here, but they are all fine. Mezzo-soprano Moore certainly sets the standards with warm and ripe singing in a role written for a castrato. Ograjensek is a light and girlish Summer, if not quite matching. I would think, the full vocal dimensions of the original soprano, Margherita Durastanti (later to serve Handel well in London). Countertenor Van der Linde captures the dramatic qualities of his role. Tenor Phan brings a certain dark coloring to his wintry functions. Bass Williams brings off his technically demanding numbers with flair and fullness of voice.

McGegan seems to have taken this composer very much to his bosom in his recent productions. He leads well-balanced and apt choral and orchestral forces. He has added one more important contribution to the latter-day rediscovery of Alessandro Scarlatti.

The recording was made at a concert performance and is uniformly excellent. The booklet contains good notes, with full text and translation.

**SCARLATTI, D:** *Sonatas, vol 4*  
Pierre Hantai, hpisi  
Mirare 285—76 minutes

It’s music to bring a smile and tapping toes. Hantai plays 17 sonatas here: Kirkpatrick numbers 212, 247, 144, 133, 204a, 279, 533, 405, 402, 403, 381, 208, 456, 457, 302, 201, and 45. The booklet does not explain why he plays K 247 a semitone higher than its usual key. There are three earlier volumes of this series for Mirare, which I have not heard, but I have Hantai’s much older Astree recording of 22 sonatas (1992). This new “Volume 4” makes me want to catch up, and the boxed set reissuing volumes 1-3 (“50 Sonatas for Harpsichord”) makes it easy to do that.

Hantai keeps tempos basically steady, filling the space with small expressive nuances on top of a “hot” touch where he plays the notes very short. It makes the music sound energetic. I can listen to only about half an hour of these at a time, as they leave me feeling caffeinated in these performances. The slow sonatas are a welcome relief from the bristling drive and are invested with details that hold the attention. Hantai is never dull.

I went through A-B comparisons in the four sonatas that are remakes from the Astree album (K 144, 204a, 208, and 456). His Italian-styled harpsichord on Astree has its charms, but his playing now is much more imaginative and richly layered. The rhythms and ornamentation are freer, and Hantai projects more intensity in slightly slower tempos. The harpsichord here is a German-styled double from 2004, built by Jonte Knif.

Nickolai Sheikov’s recent disc on Musica Omnia is another one I have enjoyed, with great sound and a brisk interpretive approach similar to Hantai’s (S/O 2015). For a wilder ride to knock yourself off any seat, try the three CDs by Enrico Baiano on Symphonia and Stradivarius. It’s tremendously exciting with Baiano’s extreme bending of tempos, probing every nuance of Scarlatti’s compositions.

**BLEHMAN**

The purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenalin but rather the gradual, lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity.

**GLENN GOULD**
SCHNITTKE: *Fugue; Sonata for Violin & Chamber Orchestra; MOZART: Violin Sonata, K 306; Adagio in E; Rondo in C*
Maia Cabeza; Jose Gallardo, p; Liga Skride, hpsi; Concertino Ensemble/ Dirk Kaftan
Oehms 766—56 minutes

Born in Japan and educated primarily at Curtis (with Ida Kavañan and Joseph Silverstein), the young violinist Maia Cabeza won the 2013 Leopold Mozart Violin Competition in Augsburg, where she also won a prize for the best performance of a contemporary composition. That, I suppose, is why we have here the exceedingly odd pairing of early Mozart pieces and the unrepentantly eclectic modernist Alfred Schnittke. I suppose one could argue that Mozart, in his way, was also a polystylist, mixing and matching national styles with the classical idiom and including along the way a healthy dose of JS Bach. In Mozart’s case the alchemy didn’t begin until 1783, and none of the pieces on this program show evidence of it.

Cabeza is well suited for the extreme contrasts in this program. When the music demands it, she’s sweet and lyrical but never superficial; the music breathes and lives. The Schnittke Sonata is extremely well played—indeed, I cannot imagine a better performance. But I’m no longer attracted to Schnittke’s lurching stylistic contrasts, which now seem too self-conscious and childishly outré.

SCHOECK: Violin Sonatas 1, 2, 3
Maristella Patuzzi; Mario Patuzzi, p
Brilliant 95292—55 minutes

The Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck (1886–1957) has always been underrated. I’ve supposed that’s because his output, for all its excellent quality, avoids the demagogic touch, seeking instead the intellectual, even spiritual aspects of the art. Sonata 1 (1909) begins with a sweet, lyric melody expanded in sequences. Schoeck is a savvy enough composer to vary them subtly. The gestures and rhythmic pulse of the movement are postromantic, but the music itself is fairly diatonic. II initially begins at a similar pace, but as the movement grows, it becomes faster and more demonstrative. III, a rondo, has a clear-cut little tune. Schoeck studied under Max Reger, and the movement sounds like his mentor, but with the underbrush cleared away. Its episodes have both melodic and harmonic interest.

By the time Schoeck wrote Sonata 2 (1931), he’d written his masterpiece, the Expressionist opera *Penthesilea*. As annotator Danilo Profuamo observes, he took a hard look at various avant-garde directions of the time. I has stark independent lines, wayward in their chromatrics. It has a wandering piano line accompanied by dissonant multi-stop pizzicatos from the violin. The connection to III is less a transition than a sudden drop-off. A major portion of the movement is a *danse macabre*, its theme stretching all over the violin’s range. The work abruptly ends with a smack. Schoeck may have rejected atonality, but there’s no doubting the modernity of this music.

Sonata 3 was actually the earliest, written in 1905. Schoeck, though at first reluctant to publish it, revised it in 1953. The label describes II as a theme and variations, but actually both the first two movements are. The variations in I are more sophisticated because the theme itself is.

Theme and variations is a tricky genre. The composer Ned Rorem calls them “a yawn-making form”; and as much as one may admire individual variations, it’s often neck and neck for the listener not to agree with him. III, a rapid dance movement, has a variety of tempos, some gypsy accents subtly blended into the mix. The notes wrongly claim Schoeck was sympathetic with Nazi philosophy. He wasn’t. His opera *Das Schloss Durande* premiered in Berlin during the war. Naturally, he met some German artists, but to infer from this that he was a Nazi is guilt by association.

The performances by the Patuzzis—father and daughter—are excellent. Maristella plays with a bold, animated tone and fine dynamic control. In the finale of Sonata 1, where the speed of the music keeps redoubling, she’s completely on top of the work. Mario’s piano is a worthy partner. His phrasing is ever elegant and his balances ever in the right proportion.

Our Esteemed Editor once correctly described modern family values as merely group narcissism. If the fam val crowd, as Florence King calls them, could produce artistry like this, we might believe otherwise.

O’CONNOR

SCHOENBERG, KOWALSKI: *Pierrot Lunaire*
Ingrid Schmitthuens, s; Carissa Klopooshak, vva; Chloe Dominguez, vc; Claire Marchand, fl; Simon Aldrich, cl; Sara Laimon, Brigitte Poulin, p
ATMA 2734—58 minutes

A terrific program. The pairing of Schoenberg and German composer Max Kowalski (1882–1956) makes good sense. Kowalski was born in Poland and emigrated to Germany, where he

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studied law as well as composition and singing. According to the (excellent) notes, he represented Schoenberg in 1930 in a dispute with the Frankfurt Opera; they remained friends until Schoenberg died in 1951.

The two settings of Giraud’s poems (six overlapping poems between the two works) show different sides of Pierrot. The more familiar Schoenberg is darker and more intense than Kowalski’s sometimes playful and, as the notes suggest, ironic interpretation.

The Kowalski setting gives Schmithüsen a chance to sing out more, too. While it’s not a voice I love, I love what she does with it. She’s not afraid to take risks in the extremes of her range or to play with different colors in the sprechstimme sections. There’s appropriate warmth in the few places the music allows.

The ensemble in the Schoenberg plays well; and Poulin, who accompanies the Kowalski, finds plenty of colors in the instrument. It’s nice to hear some new ideas in the Schoenberg, and the contrasting character of the Kowalski makes for a very interesting program. Excellent notes (by Schmithüsen), texts, and translations.

HEISEL

**Schubert:** String Quintet
Matt Haimovitz, vc; Itamar Golan, p; Miro Quartet—Pentatone 5186 549—77 minutes

The Haimovitz series continues with both Schubert works that emphasize the cello. The arpeggione was a short-lived guitar-like instrument with six strings and frets that didn’t really work out. Schubert wrote this lovely three-movement sonata for it with piano in 1824. Cellists took the sonata over immediately, particularly since Schubert had never written one for cello and never would. Haimovitz plays it with his customary elan, combining technical virtuosity with sensitive and individual phrasing, joined with the same by Golan on piano.

The String Quintet in C for quartet plus an extra cello is one of the great chamber works of the ages. Written while Schubert was slowly dying of syphilis, it is a work that blends major and minor in a most meaningful and emotionally deep way. The Miro Quartet makes much of both ends of the emotional spectrum. It is not stated which cello line is played by Haimovitz, but the handling of the second cello line in the slow movement seems clearly his work. There are a few places where voices in the upper strings could be clearer to the ear, but mostly this is one of the most emotionally satisfying interpretations I have heard. The exposition repeat in the first movement is omitted, but it usually is.

There are many great recordings of these two works, particularly the quintet. These are up there with the more individual interpretations that have appeared recently.

D Moore

**Schubert:** Male Choruses (27)
Christoph Pregardien, t; Andreas Frese, p; Limburg Camerata Musica/ Jan Schumacher—Genuin 16416—67 minutes

This release, which carries the title Der Triumph der Liebe, is the second volume of Schubert’s complete choral works for male voices. This repertory includes mostly convivial, homophonic works, meant for social occasions. A few on this disc have solo tenor parts, taken very nicely by Christoph Pregardien, and 10 of the 27 have piano accompaniment. We would have to concede that many of these pieces are rather lightweight and routine, even if we wouldn’t want to dismiss them completely (this is, after all, Schubert!). Among the truly great pieces for men only the 8-part ‘Gesang der Geister über den Wassern’ (accompanied by lower strings) and perhaps ‘Die Nacht’ are included here. Other favorites like ‘Nachthelle’ and ‘Der Mondfahrer’ will appear on other volumes.

These pieces have been done one on a part by groups like Die Singphoniker and Schubert Hoch Vier, and large groups like Shaw’s have done them as well. This group, consisting entirely of former members of the Limburg Cathedral Boychoir, is mid-sized, numbering about 19, but with several “guests” on some pieces. They sing with fine enthusiasm and intonation, and my only disappointment was with the Gesang der Geister (the one great piece here!), where the first tenor line is too weak. In general, though, a good recording.

Althouse

**Schubert:** Moments Musicaux; Huttenbrenner Variations; 3 Piano Pieces
Peter Kairoff—Centaur 3473 — 65 minutes

Markers of Kairoff’s playing are his light, easy sound and impeccable sense of rhythm. The Moments Musicaux could employ better, more lyrical phrasing from time to time, but he offers a very sensitive rendering of No. 2. No. 3 shows a good sense of metricity and a fine hand with harmonies. I do wish that No. 6 had

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a bit more warmth. While the Variations are exactly performed, this not a particularly interesting piece; maybe he is too straightforward, and unleashing more adventurousness would improve my impression of the works. Nevertheless, this is a fine, solid recording.

**KANG**

**Schubert: Octet; Crussell: Clarinet, Bassoon, & Horn Trio**

Emma Johnson, cl; Michael Thompson, hn; Philip Gibbon, bn; Chris West, db; Matthew Denton, Michelle Fleming, v; Eoin Schmidt-Martin, va; Emma Denton, vc

Somm 156—75 minutes

British clarinet soloist Emma Johnson leads in two early 19th Century masterworks—the famous Schubert Octet and Finnish clarinetist-composer Bernhard Crussell’s Trio for Clarinet, Bassoon, and Horn. Joining her are horn superstar and Royal Academy of Music professor Michael Thompson; Royal Philharmonic double bassist Christ West; British bassoonist Philip Gibbon; and the UK-based Carducci Quartet, a globe-trotting ensemble that hosts festivals in both Highnam, Gloucestershire and Castagneto-Carducci, Italy.

The performances are spirited and expressive but also puzzling. While Thompson, Gibbon, West, and the Carducci Quartet all sport great skill and expertise, Johnson crashes the party with a thin, bright tone, sloppy technique, abrasive articulation, bad intonation, and sometimes a very poor awareness of her role in the texture. At soft volumes, her playing can be acceptable given her ability level, but at loud volumes her sound can be scathing and create serious balance problems. The audiences respond with thunderous applause, but educated musicians will know better.

**HanudeL**

**Schubert: Sonata in D, D 850; 3 Piano Pieces**

Paul Badura-Skoda, p—Genuin 16425—63 mins

I have heard more even and polished performances of Schubert’s sonatas, but the legendary Badura-Skoda captures the spirit of the work in full glory. Challenges such as hands not together and uneven passages can be easily overridden by his full, rounded tone, especially in II. He also takes more liberty with rests, but is able to infuse energy into this and the three pieces.

Interested listeners should check out his recording of the complete Schubert sonatas on a Viennese fortepiano (Arcana 364).

**KANG**

**Schubert: Piano Sonata in G, D 894; Schumann: Kreisleriana**

Natalia Ehwald—Genuin 16413—79 minutes

Yet another set of fine performances from a pianist hitherto unknown to me. Born in Jena, Germany in 1983, Natalia boasts of several competition prizes and currently resides in Berlin. The first movement of her Schubert is slow, methodical, very laid back, and with a wide dynamic range. At almost 21 minutes, she certainly takes her time. While the slowest performance in my collection, it is not outrageous when considering the matter of repeats and the quotient of applied expression. Still, if there is any degree of impatience in your soul Natalia would not be your kind of gal. Richter, notorious for his slow Schubert, adds yet another five minutes to the timing of this movement and was an strong influence on the pianist.

The Andante, while not stretched to the same degree, just seems so because of what has preceded it. Once again dynamics are extremely wide. Even the Minuet, marked Allegro Moderato, places greater emphasis on refinement, and the final Allegretto does move along quite nicely.

Nothing quite so lethargic inhibits the Kreisleriana. At the start, the playing is reasonably spunky, and contrasts are handled with aplomb. Ehwald, ever the romanticist, uses a fair amount of pedal but never clouds things to an annoying degree. Her rubato is liberally applied and fairly dreamy. The notes, taking the form of a conversation, find Ehwald stating that [Schumann] “is a composer whose music is especially close to my heart”. I can well believe it; this is passionate playing, deeply expressive and more than willing to dawdle over phrases or push on when her emotions spill over. While her Schubert does not work for me, her Schumann is better. Outstanding sound.

**Becker**

**Schubert: Quartets 10+13**

Quartetto Italiano

Pentatone 5186 232 [SACD] 65 minutes

What a pleasure to hear the Quartetto Italiano; this is a 1976 recording re-mastered in 2015. These performances were as fine as any in their day, and their appeal has not faded. They play slower than many current groups, but...
every bar seems expressive and full of pathos. Here it is the composer, not the slickness of the ensemble that we hear foremost. Everything has been carefully considered and thought out, and nothing is just "played".

But before I go too far, let me advise you not to get this recording. Somewhere in the remastering process from quadraphonic sound to SACD, the sonics have become harsh and brittle. Loud passages like the middle of the *Rosamunde* variations in Quartet 13 are really hard to listen to. This may sound fine on SACD systems, but for two-channel stereo I can’t recommend it. It is curious that the other piece (Quartet 10 in E-flat, written when Schubert was 16) sounds fine, but you probably wouldn’t be buying this for that. My recommendation, if you basically want the A minor, would be to find an earlier reissue. I have the last four Schubert quartets with the Italians on a Philips 2-disc Duo (issued in 1995), and they sound terrific. And a final note if you’re looking for reissues: this Quartetto Italiano recording from around 1965 skipped it, probably to allow the quartet to fit on one side of an LP.

**ALTHOUSE**

**SCHUBERT: Quartet 15; movement**

Diogenes Quartet—Brilliant 94467—64 minutes

Here is Schubert’s last quartet (in G) with an early movement that was only a fragment and is "reconstructed" by Christian Starke. (Why so many reconstructions in this issue?)

The first movement takes 7 minutes longer than the excellent Guarneri (last reviewed J/A 2009), which must be a matter of repeats. It’s 15:42 versus 22:42. I hate all those repeats. How tiresome! The two middle movements are also somewhat longer, but IV is about the same.

I don’t understand why one would buy this recording. They even have some PPP influences: swells in the middle of held notes and no vibrato (scrape, screech). I find their playing ugly. A violin without vibrato is horrible—how can anyone stand it?

**VROON**

**SCHUBERT: Die Schöne Müllerin**

Klemens Sander, bar; Uta Sander, p

Ars 38 535—71 minutes

Sander’s *Schwanengesang* with Justus Zeyen (J/A 2004) was so good that I was expecting to have a more positive response to this. This performance is nicely paced. His diction is excellent. Her clear playing emphasizes details that others miss, particularly in adding breathing room at appropriate points. Both performers show good attention to dynamics and phrasing and are in tune with the emotional fluctuation of the songs.

Sander has a fine voice for lieder and this is a respectable reading, but there are too many better baritone readings. The performance gets off to a shaky start with pitch instability in ‘Das Wandern’. That problem crops up here and there in the more energetic songs.

The booklet includes the singer’s comments about the work. His comments about the cycle (e.g. “The miller in this story was definitely not right in his head”) and his singing of it both show a clear understanding of its psychological dimensions.

What is most distinctive about this release is that it is performed by a husband and wife. The booklet includes eight color photos of the smiling two holding unidentified paintings and offers no explanation of why they are included.

The recorded sound is fine. Texts, translations

**MOORE**

**SCHUBERT: Schubertiade**

Julian Pregardien, t; Marc Hantai, fl; Xavier Diaz-Latorre, g; Philippe Pierlot, baryton

Myrios 18 [SACD] 75 minutes

In his introductory note about this program Julian Pregardien asks us to imagine a Schubertiade such as one might have experienced in 19th Century Vienna when a flutist, a guitarist, and a cellist (“who, since his arrival in Vienna, has become fascinated with a curious instrument called the baryton”) come together with a singer to perform Schubert songs, recite commentary about Schubert and his music, and play instrumental arrangements of other Schubert works.

The liner notes supply a good explanation of musical performance in Schubert’s time. The guitar was a fashionable instrument in 19th Century Vienna. Anton Diabelli published Schubert’s Opus 4 song collection in a version with guitar accompaniment before he published the piano version; and he published other volumes of Schubert songs with guitar accompaniment. Haydn had written for the baryton, a gamba-style instrument like a cello with sympathetic strings, and the instrument was still popular in Vienna at the time. So
there is historical justification for these arrangements.

Several instrumental pieces and recitation of comments by Peter Härting and Michael Stegemann about Schubert are interspersed among 15 songs, primarily Goethe settings. The performers take various liberties consistent with period practices. Pregardien adds a few embellishments here and there as Vogl had done, and flute improvisations are included between the three Songs of the Harper.

For the most part this makes for an engaging and creative program of historic interest. Pregardien has a perfect voice for liedert, and his reading of the songs is a marvel of taste and beauty. His natural and effortless singing is enhanced by the gentle sound of these instruments in various combinations. The gentleness of the accompaniment is in perfect accord with Pregardien’s lovely voice. He seems to have the same amazing low range as his father, hitting a low G in ‘Der Wanderer’ D489.

Not everything comes across effectively. In ‘Auf der Strom’, the longest song of the program (8:44), the baritone takes the part of the horn but lacks the power and the romanticism the horn brings to the song. Without the percussiveness of the piano, the Minuet and Trio from Op. 78 lacks crispness.

Pregardien explains on his website that having included the spoken passages in concert performance it seemed important to include them in the recording. Well, it may have been effective in the concert hall, but in a recording it adds little to the program notes, unless you wish to hear his speaking voice recorded so closely that it sounds like he is whispering in your ear. It’s his singing I want to hear.

The biggest disappointment with this release is the omission of texts and translations. The 15 songs of this program are some of Schubert’s best known. Schubert lovers will already be familiar with them, but why not make this more satisfying for listeners unfamiliar with these songs by providing texts and translations?

The glowing and intimate SACD sound puts you in close proximity with the performers. There’s a lot to like about this recording, especially Pregardien’s lovely voice. It was good to hear the instrumental pieces performed by such outstanding artists, but if I return to this it will be only to hear the songs.

Schubert: Schwanengesang: Songs
James Rutherford, bar; Eugene Asti, p
BIS 2180 [SACD] 70 minutes

In preparing for this recording Rutherford and Asti researched as many published editions of Schwanengesang as they could find, including the original manuscript. Rutherford comments in his introductory notes, “On further investigation it appeared that there existed no baritone recording of Schwanengesang that followed the same progression as the original ‘tenor’ keys.” They agreed to follow that tenor pattern transposed down a minor third.

The program begins with eight Rellstab settings, including ‘Herbst’, which was not published as part of Schwanengesang but is sometimes included in performance. There is then about a 12-second pause before continuing with six Heine settings ending with a chilling reading of ‘Der Doppelgänger’. Again a welcome—and really necessary—break of about 20 seconds is taken before the concluding ‘Taubenpost’.

After another break, four more songs are included: ‘Die Forelle’, ‘Auf der Brück’, ‘Gruppe aus dem Tartarus’, and ‘An die Musik’. For pure energy, it’s hard to beat ‘Auf der Brück’, which his voice has the agility and vigor to manage well.

This is one of the best recordings of these songs I’ve heard. Both artists employ excellent pacing and expression, and both apply just the right amount of discreet rubato and dynamic variety. Rutherford’s substantial dramatic baritone voice is perfect for these songs. He has the vocal heft needed for ‘Der Atlas’ and the serenity needed for calmer passages, as in ‘Am Meer’; he uses both qualities and everything in between to apply the right affect to whatever he is singing. Asti is just as gifted in conveying the nuances of the songs. This is quite simply an outstanding lieder program.

The excellent SACD sound further enhances this recording. Excellent notes by Susan Youens. Texts and translations.

American Record Guide
**Schubert: Winterreise**

Jesse Blumberg, bar; Martin Katz, p
Blue Griffin 393—70 minutes

Hermann Prey, bar; Helmut Deutsch, p
SWR 19012—72 minutes

Here are two very different Winterreise recordings. One of them I loved, the other I could barely endure.

As soon as I heard Blumberg’s voice I was captivated by his excellent tone production and solid technique. He immediately establishes the story’s somber mood with a stern tone. As the cycle progresses he demonstrates effective and imaginative use of dynamics and well-chosen accent of notes and words. Most of all he shows a good storyteller’s ability to set a grave tone that takes you through the unraveling of the wanderer’s spirit as it leads to desolation.

His attention to the text is as good as any singer’s I’ve heard and it comes out clearly in his contrasting variation of tone from strophe to strophe. He has a good, sturdy, well-managed voice capable of fine nuance and brings the right affect to each song. This reading totally drew me in. It is one of the best of the 40 or so I’ve heard. Martin Katz is not heard as often as some of the more familiar names, but he is one of the best around.

Prey was a fine interpreter of lieder and operatic roles, but I have always had trouble warming up to his voice—a voice that somehow seems caught in his throat. Winterreise was one of his signature works. He recorded it at least four times, and I particularly appreciated his 1961 EMI recording with Karl Engel. This performance, recorded at the 1987 Schwetzinger SWR Festival, is a big disappointment. His voice sounds sluggish and lacks precision, with breathless pouncing on notes and difficulty sustaining the line.

He takes great freedom with rhythm and phrasing, and his pitch is not always solid. It sounds like the cycle is being sung by someone on the edge of madness. Perhaps that was his intention, but it also sounds like an artist losing command of his voice—and it doesn’t sound like Prey and Deutsch are of one mind.

In addition to offering a much better interpretation of the work, Blumberg simply has a lovelier voice.

SWR offers notes about the singer but no texts or translations. Blue Griffin includes texts, translations, notes about the performers, but nothing about the music. R Moore

**Schubert: Symphony 9**

Philharmonia Orchestra/ Christoph von Dohnanyi—Signum 461—53 minutes

Dohnanyi’s second recording of Franz Schubert’s great Ninth Symphony is a fine one of its kind. Tempos are fast, and there is little romantic indulging. The result is lively, with excellent lift to rhythms that dance off the score. The playing is stellar, and balances are blended. The woodwinds are brought out more than usual to delightful effect, and that includes some nice phrasing from the principal oboe, who has a major role in this work. The trombones are mostly blended into the texture. The point here is that their treatment in the Ninth serves as a litmus test of what kind of performance you are hearing. Most romantic performances tend to bring them out. The more neoclassical ones tend to blend them into the textures, and that is the case here.

The pacing has a forward lean to it, but everything is so well done that it is easy to get used to that quirk, even if Dohnanyi moves a little too quickly through some transitions—another foible one can get used to. The slower parts are dark and probably slower than they need to be, but the contrast—not to mention the beautiful playing—is worth it. The outer movements are fast, sleek, and beautifully played. The famous dissonance toward the end of II is well prepared and nicely laid out. Come the Scherzo, and we hear warm strings playing with some urgency and more of those dancing woodwinds. The trio is lyrical, and the waltz does what waltzes should do: dance.

If you are looking for a classically oriented recording of the Ninth, Dohnanyi is a good choice. The question is which Dohnanyi: this one, or the one he made with the Cleveland Orchestra (Telarc). The performances are very similar. The Cleveland is more consistent in terms of pacing, with less of that headlong feeling and pulling back at some transitions. The Philharmonia reading bubbles along a little more, but that is a close call. The engineering is similar too, though the Telarc is a little clearer. The greatest difference is that Dohnanyi does not take the first movement repeat in Cleveland but does with the Philharmonia. If forced to choose, I would go with Cleveland, but not everyone will agree. It is probably safe to say that if you have the Cleveland reading, you don’t need this.

For more recommendations, check the Schubert Overview (N/D 2003). The recommendations there of the romantic Furtwangler,
Walter, and Bohm readings resonate with me, though I am less fond of Solti and Krips. A few I would add are Boult (noble but not dull), Barbirolli (lively), and Heinz Rogner (Old World but also lively).

**HECHT**

**SCHUBERT**: Waltzes; **STRAUSS, J**: Polkas
Paul Badura-Skoda, p
Gramola 99104—47 minutes

Paul Badura-Skoda has been recording since the early 1950s, and at 88 is still actively performing. He has been a composer and arranger as well as a piano recitalist. He has recorded for many different labels, and he has specialized in Mozart, Schubert, and Beethoven. With his long performing experience, this new recording displays his still considerable skills playing these lovely waltzes and polkas with lightness, expressiveness, and grace.

The program includes eight of Schubert’s waltzes, originally written by the composer in simple arrangements for home pianists. The waltzes were designed for dancing. Schubert later arranged them into cycles, and they became some of the earliest published Schubert compositions. Liszt thought very highly of them and re-arranged the waltzes with fuller harmonies and contrasting voices to sound more like Chopin's popular waltzes. Although these arrangements were not designed for dancing, they were popular as concert pieces.

For this recording, Badura-Skoda has returned to the earlier and simpler versions, selecting eight waltzes from the various cycles. They are delightful, the playing captivating and graceful. You can sense from his infectious playing that he enjoys performing these pieces. He also plays three Johann Strauss, Jr polkas arranged for piano. These are also beautifully played.

I think you’ll like this new recording as much as I did. The English, German, and French notes are by the pianist. The piano sound is excellent.

**FISCH**

**SCHUMANN**: Album for the Young
Vladimir Feltsman, p
Nimbus 6307—76 minutes

There have been other recordings of Schumann’s piano music, but this series promises to be the most comprehensive. Volume 1 was reviewed by Stephen Estep, who felt the playing to be “detached and mechanical” (J/A 2012). I reviewed Volume 2 with greater approval (N/D 2013) while noting that the jazz pieces had greater inflection in the Supraphon recording of Tomas Visek.

There’s no question that Schulhoff has become the best known of the composers who perished as a result of the Holocaust. Some of his music has the cheeky irreverence we find in Kurt Weill, while also not breaking with past traditions of what we know as “classical music”. Given the circumstances, it’s amazing how the composer was able to keep his humor and his sanity.

In this recording we have the 5 Jazz Etudes from 1926, the last of which is “Toccata sur le shimmy Kitten on the Keys” by the American composer Zez Confrey. Weichert scores a coup by including Confrey's own 1921 piece as well. It swings in a more traditional style, while Schulhoff’s take off is a bit further from the original rhythmically and harmonically.

The remaining Etudes keep our ears perked up with such movements as a ‘Charleston’, ‘Blues’ for Paul Whiteman, and a ‘Tango’, each with its own caustic flavor. The *Suite Dansante en Jazz*, starting with a ‘Stomp’ and ending with a ‘Fox-Trot’, is one of the composer’s last works to embrace the jazz idiom. All movements are brief and evoke both Ravel and Billy Mayerl as if experienced through a cracked mirror. If Weichert still continues to be a trifle stiff, her overall accomplishment is still pretty substantial—and deliciously entertaining.

**Neun Kleine Reigen** is an earlier jazz-inflected suite (1913) that spins its acidulous web with grace and nasty charm, but the six-movement *Ostinato* dates after birth of the composer’s son (1923) and pays more than a debt to Expressionism. Essentially vignettes of life with a child, it has a wicked charm where simplicity gives way to parody.

If you are collecting this series you may safely proceed. If it’s the jazz-inflected pieces you seek, I would give a special nod to Tomas Visek, who is totally at one with Schulhoff’s idiom (N/D 1996). It’s the difference between playing the notes and playing the music.

**BECKER**

**SCHUMANN**: Album for the Young
Vladimir Feltsman, p
Nimbus 6307 — 76 minutes

Feltsman is known for his muscular recordings of Baroque and romantic repertoire. But to play these simpler works requires a different kind of aptitude. Here he proves his interpre-
tive range; his playing is crisp, clean, and sensible, even drawing out subtle contrasts. ‘Folk Song’ is delicate and shimmering; the upper lines of the melody are pristine. The familiar ‘Happy Farmer’ has rich and warm tones.

Though these are ostensibly “children’s” pieces, there is a depth to his playing that makes them sound haunting: listen to ‘Chorale’ or ‘First Loss’. The stumbling harmonies and somewhat awkward melodic shapes in ‘First Loss’ pictures a sadness that can’t quite be expressed or accommodated. Childhood is transient, after all.

KANG

**SCHUMANN:** Beethoven Studies; Ghost Variations; Schubert Variations

Olivier Chauzu, p—Naxos 573540—76 minutes

Not to be outdone by pianists recording Schumann’s complete piano music, Naxos now offers some of the composer’s rarest, least often heard pieces on a single disc. It’s an inexpensive way of acquiring these rarities and requires no investment in any of the giant Schumann boxes (which may not contain all of them anyway). You may also acquire some of them on single discs, though you would have to struggle to find all. If you are a Schumann completist, hesitate not one second if you want all the little chips from the master’s workbench.

French pianist Chauzu has already given us interesting recordings of Dukas and Samazeuilh. His Schumann is not to be sneezed at, though the competition in most of these selections is almost nonexistent. The *Beethoven Studies* are based on the slow movement of Symphony 7 and probably the best known works here. They are very well played, and the additional studies from the first and second autograph are included. The *Ghost Variations* come next, followed by the Schubert, immediately recognized by opening with the ‘Preamble’ to *Carnaval*. These four variations are based on one of Schubert’s waltzes.

Three discarded movements to the Sonata in F minor, Op. 14, lead to speculation as to what might have been, especially in the extended Finale, at one point almost quoting from ‘La ci darem la Mano’ (Mozart).

A number of very short pieces, including a variant on the famous Toccata that started life as Exercice supply added interest, but Schumann’s schoolboy prowess is strikingly shown in his transcription of Georg Christoph Grosheim’s totally unknown and totally vacuous ‘Titania Overture’. Notes are excellent, and the sound is clean and clear.

BECKER

**SCHUMANN:** Kinderszenen; Kreisleriana; RAVEL: Gaspard de la Nuit

Irina Georgieva, p—Genuin 16408 — 74 minutes

Georgieva has a good singing tone, but I wished for more contrasts and more variance in color. While the first movement of *Kreisleriana* has interesting voicing, bringing out the textural elements of Schumann’s art, the middle section needs more contrasts. *Kreisleriana* 4 is subtle in her tempo choices, but the color palette is lacking. While her *Gaspard* has the right nuance and a good choice of rubato also evident in her Schumann, the opening of ‘Ondine’ is a few shades too loud and sounds too metrical to really summon the water sprite; but her ‘Scarbo’ is pretty clean if not as exciting or unrestrained as some I’ve heard. ‘Le Gibet’ is well paced but does seem to lose some of the eeriness—it seems too controlled.

KANG

**SCHUMANN:** Overtures; Zwickau Symphony

Cologne Radio/ Heinz Holliger

Audite 97.705—76 minutes

This is Volume 6 of Audite’s Complete Symphonic Works edition and contains Schumann’s earliest and latest pieces for orchestra, including all his overtures. As with his hero, Beethoven, Schumann’s overtures are better known than any of the stage or operatic music they precede. And, like Beethoven, Schumann had a gift for writing exciting, memorable overtures.

Beethoven’s influence is also obvious in the only non-overture here, the unfinished *Zwickau* Symphony of 1833; this is Schumann’s third and final revision of the first movement, so it lacks the slow intro of John Gardiner’s 1998 recording (DG 457591). Gardiner’s orchestra has 40 strings where Holliger’s has 60, plus Holliger’s accents are tempered and his pace relaxed, so I heard for the first time the influence of Louis Spohr—another hero of the young Schumann—in the wilting chromaticism of the string figures.

Before the two-movement symphony, Holliger raises the curtain on the concert with the mature sonata-form *Manfred* Overture. In it we hear Holliger’s approach to all the overtures: warm, genial, and flowing. He lets the dramatic tension build up slowly, free of histrionic...
onics, with subtle orchestral flexibility to broaden tempos for grand climaxes and lyrical passages. The violins are split left and right as they were in Schumann’s time and they play cleanly, without vibrato, and this clarifies Schumann’s allegedly thick and clumsy orchestrations. There’s no mention anywhere of period instruments or gut strings, so I assume they’re modern, but at 60 strong they don’t sound shrill, nor do they indulge any supposed historic practice like swelling on long notes.

The sound quality matches interpretation: warm, full, and detailed, especially the surround-sound recording, right now available only as a download from Audite’s website (mentioned on the back of the digipak). The improvement in three-dimensional depth and presence is unmistakable in the five overtures recorded in 2010 but subtle in the symphony and Manfred recorded in 2015. Considering the high quality of both performance and surround-sound recording, I hope Audite issues a boxed set of this complete series on SACD (or Blu-Ray).

The booklet is informative, recounting the circumstances of each piece’s composition. This is an attractive and rewarding survey of Schumann’s overtures and makes me want to hear the other volumes in the series.

The problem is the engineering. I suspect both soloist and orchestra were recorded at too far a distance. The sound is objective—drier rather than generous. The piano itself has a bright edge that in louder octave passages gives it a metallic halo. In Schumann’s cadenza, for example, the piano is too far away to have any richness. The orchestra sounds smaller than the listed 37 players, especially the violins and barely audible string basses and timpani. Sometimes the small numbers clarify the orchestral textures, but too often the orchestra is inaudible, especially in Schumann’s delicate orchestration.

In Fair Melusina the problem is just the opposite. The engineers seem to have the microphones buried down the throats of the instruments; when the music is loud, it’s congested. More air and space is needed. Again, that’s a pity, for the vigorous performance, like the concertos, is highly infectious. By the way, Mendez, who was born in 1984 in Mallorca and is just guest-conducting the SCO, may be short on biography, but he certainly has promise, based on this album.

WRIGHT

SCHUMANN: Piano Concerto;
MENDELSSOHN: Concerto 1;
Fair Melusina Overture
Ingrid Fliter; Scottish Chamber Orchestra/ Antonio Mendez
Linn 555 [SACD] 61 minutes

These two concertos make good partners in that both present the pianist with endless arpeggios, yet their magic lies in their melody lines. And Ingrid Fliter is the right pianist to make the melodies sing while making the arpeggios seem as sparkling and buoyant as a bright spring day!

Fliter gives all movements in both concertos a distinct forward flow, without ever rushing in the slow movements. Perhaps most illustrative of her overall style is II of the Schumann. While her approach is traditionally romantic, her use of rubato is very much her own—her stamp of identity. Some will like it; some won’t. I find it very mature, extremely beautiful, and expressive almost in a rhetorical sense, as if she is delivering the lines reminiscent of a person who speaks with a lyrical rhythm. She also has the gift of weighting those endless arpeggios so that the rhythm of all the phrases makes sense (see my review of Glazounov’s String Quintet in this issue for an example of just the opposite). She also articulates those flurries of notes so that their sparkling clarity enhance the melody. In addition, she and Antonio Mendez are hand-in-glove partners. Together they make both works truly infectious.

The problem is the engineering. I suspect both soloist and orchestra were recorded at too far a distance. The sound is objective—drier rather than generous. The piano itself has a bright edge that in louder octave passages gives it a metallic halo. In Schumann’s cadenza, for example, the piano is too far away to have any richness. The orchestra sounds smaller than the listed 37 players, especially the violins and barely audible string basses and timpani. Sometimes the small numbers clarify the orchestral textures, but too often the orchestra is inaudible, especially in Schumann’s delicate orchestration.

In Fair Melusina the problem is just the opposite. The engineers seem to have the microphones buried down the throats of the instruments; when the music is loud, it’s congested. More air and space is needed. Again, that’s a pity, for the vigorous performance, like the concertos, is highly infectious. By the way, Mendez, who was born in 1984 in Mallorca and is just guest-conducting the SCO, may be short on biography, but he certainly has promise, based on this album.

FRENCH

SCHUMANN: Piano Sonatas for the Young;
Gesange der Frihe; Original Movements
Jinsang Lee
Naxos 573436 — 74 minutes

What makes this recording stand out among the “usual” collections of Schumann’s well-known works is the unfinished sketches and original movements. Lee begins the program with Gesange der Frihe, composed towards the end of Schumann’s life. While I think Mitsuko Uchida’s has better continuity (the opening sequence of chords sounds rather detached and tense), he does have a beautiful and sensitive tone in the first movement.

The unfinished sketches (Sonata 4) and original movements (Sonatas 3 and 4) offer insight into Schumann’s compositional process—a “what could have been” where the sonatas are concerned. These works are
included on their own, but it would be interesting to hear the whole sonatas with these movements.

KANG

**SCHUMANN: Trios 1+2**
Karenine Trio
Mirare 311—56 minutes

**Trio 1; DVORAK: Trio 4; SUK: Elegie**
Trio 180
NPM 39—69 minutes (CD Baby)

The Karenine Trio, named after Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina, is a young French group, here making their first commercial recording. They are a very fine trio with a sympathetic understanding of Schumann. They take fairly swift tempos in every movement, so the spirit of youthful impetuosity and ardor, so key in Schumann, is never lost. The freshness of their playing satisfies the Florestan side of the composer; and, happy to say, the tender, dreamy side, is present as well.

In the first trio the crispness of the faster movements is nicely contrasted to the slow movement, which reveals a quiet reticence that brings tenderness and expressivity to the playing. The second trio was written quickly, Schumann finishing three movements in a matter of weeks. Shortly thereafter Mendelssohn died, and Schumann set aside the work for about 18 months. It is a bright, alert piece, a bit lighter in weight compared to the more dramatic and passionate first. The second is also well suited to the Karenine’s bracing style, and the performances lead me to think I have underestimated these trios (and Schumann’s third, as well).

Trio 180 is in residence at the University of the Pacific’s Conservatory of Music. They too are an excellent group, seen most clearly in their Dumky Trio. Here the sudden shifts of mood, usually accompanied by drastic changes of tempo, are securely handled; and the wide range of emotion, going from despair to reckless abandon in mere seconds, is convincing. Suk’s lovely, expressive Elegie is played with intense beauty and passion, particularly from violinist Ann Miller. Their Schumann is also impassioned, perhaps a little less youthful sounding than the Karenine Trio. Both groups, though, are first rate, and if I prefer the Karenine, it is only by a small margin. If you’re on the fence, let the couplings be your guide. Sonics on both discs are excellent.

**SCHUMANN: Kreisleriana;** see SCHUBERT
Piano Concerto; see DVORAK

**SCHUTZ: St John Passion**
Jan Kobow t; Harry van der Kamp, bar; Dresden Chamber Choir/ Hans-Christoph Rademann
Carus 83.270—56 minutes

This choir’s Schütz recordings project continues in Volume 13 with an outstanding performance of the Johannespassion, motets ‘Unser Herr Jesu Christus in der Nacht, da er Verraten Ward,’ and ‘Ach Herr, du Sohn Davids,’ and the ‘Kyrie eleison, Christs eleison, Kyrie eleison.’ The latter two works are recorded here for the first time. There is another lovely recording of the Johannespassion by Paul Hillier and the Ars Nova Copenhagen (Dacapo 8.226093; M/A 2011).

According to local decree, no instruments were to be used at the court of Dresden in Passion Week. As a result, Schütz’s setting of the Johannespassion for voices alone becomes an intense drama, pitting soloists against choruses. Chant-like narrative for the Evangelist, Jesus, and other characters is sung freely, according to Schütz’s directions. This reveals singers’ ability to project the emotional nuances in John’s gospel text. The Turba choruses for high priests or the Jewish people are rigidly metrical by comparison. They interject with imitative polyphony that cuts into the narrative to give us the dramatic turmoil of John’s gospel.

‘Ach Herr, du Sohn Davids,’ for six voices in two choirs, suits the musical forces of the Johannespassion, as it, too, was assigned to Passion week. ‘Unser Herr Jesu Christus in der Nacht, da er Verraten Ward’ is a communion motet for two four-part choruses. It entails the discourse between Christ and a Canaanite woman, who implores Jesus to heal her daughter. Texts and notes are in English.

**SCRIABIN: Symphonies 1 + 2**
Ekaterina Sergeeva, mz; Alexander Timchenko, t;
London Symphony & Chorus/ Valery Gergiev
LSO 770 [2SACD] 92 minutes

Even in his early symphonies, Scriabin’s music was the least audibly nationalistic of any Russian composer. French culture was strongly influential in Russia then, and Scriabin’s work often sounds like D’Indy having a good day. These performances are from 2014 and may have been meant for the centennial of the composer’s 1915 death.
They’re a mixed dish. Gergiev can sustain a grand line as well as anyone, but his work can also be less than ship-shape. In Symphony 1 (1900) his reading is competent but not inspiring. The playing is sometimes imprecise and in a symphony that can easily ramble, some rhythms are diffuse. The net effect is bland. The vocal work from both soloists and chorus is good, but Gergiev’s direction in the first part of the final fugue is limp. I don’t want to be too condemnatory. If this were the only recording of the work, we’d consider ourselves in luck’s way. It’s just that better ones are available, my own favorite being Pletnev’s (M/A 2016). Muti’s superb job on his integrated set of the symphonies is, alas, out of the catalog.

Symphony 2 (1901) was, for Scriabin, a problem child. It’s actually a well-constructed piece. The reticent opening clarinet theme eventually becomes the driving motor for the finale, and the convulsive rhythms of several of the themes and motifs in the work give it a well-knit effect. Scriabin was unhappy with the finale, and the convulsive rhythms of several of the themes and motifs in the work give it a well-knit effect. Scriabin was unhappy with the finale. What he’d meant to be a transcendent effect wound up “like a military march.”

It sounds like music for a superior documentary and would be a perfect sound track for the News on the March! episode in Citizen Kane. With all its faults—and they’re the “faults” of a young genius afire with enthusiasm for his art—if any English or American composers in 1901 had written a symphony this good, it would have been the making of them. Gergiev’s handling of the work goes to the top. It’s full of energy and dynamism, heightening its assets and diminishing its liabilities. The orchestra plays with verve and enthusiasm. The effect their work creates in the finale would have pleased even Scriabin. Concert performances, but audience noise is nonexistent.

O’CONNOR

SHARP: Tranzience: Approaching the Arches for Corti; Homage to Leroy Jenkins; Venus & Jupiter
Rachel Golub, v; Joshua Rubin, cl; Jenny Lin, p; New Thread Saxophone Quartet, Jack Quartet; Either/Or/ Richard Garrick
New World 80778—60 minutes

Elliott Sharp (b. 1951) combines New York downtown free jazz with touches of minimalism, held together with modern scientism. The result is wild, dissonant, and thoroughly palatable. These are four chamber works.

Tranzience (2013), for string quartet, is a pun on the sounds emanating from the onsets of pitch production, as well as change in general. Opening with a lengthy introduction unfolding noise and its overtones and undertones, the music is contrasted with a quasi-minimalist boogie, soon interrupted by wild pizzicatos. Pointillist noises and angular hysterics follow, with quiet harmonics appearing as relatively serene contrast. Double-finger plucked pizzicatos and stray glissandos along with retching and screeching follow. Eventually we’re back to sustained vision and a final climax with energy and distorted raving. The movement suddenly lands on a brief single pitch and a concluding flurry. The effect is of neurotic schizophrenia, and will appeal to people amused by that condition.

Approaching the Arches for Corti (1998), for soprano saxophone quartet, starts with a fanfare on a motive of a tenth introducing clusters, glissandos, and scatterings. A melody of sorts briefly emerges, but the previous materials develop until it ends quietly.

Homage to Leroy Jenkins (2008) is for clarinet, violin, and piano. Jenkins was a member of the avant-garde Revolutionary Ensemble in the late 60s. Modernist Jazz is the name of the game here, with plenty of solo turns, ending with a funky dance.

The program closes with Venus & Jupiter (2012), for septet with Sharp assisting on “electroacoustic guitar” It begins with a few dances (one a boogie, one robotic) but all pretty sick. All are overwhelmed by chaos.

All told, Sharp’s work is fashionably countercultural (if a little old-fashioned nowadays), but may be amusing to some, especially wannabe cool young people. I wonder if such countercultural types exist nowadays. But Sharp is 70 now. The virtuosity involved is considerable. Informative notes.

GIMBEL

SHOSTAKOVICH: Cello Concerto 1;
VAINBERG: Cello Concerto;
LUTOSŁAWSKI: Mala Sūta
Nicolas Altstaedt; German Symphony Berlin/Michal Nesterowicz—Channel 38116—72 mins

I’m not that taken with the first movement of the Shostakovich. It has good energy and flow, and Altstaedt brings out the feeling of conflict, but the all-important horn sounds sluggish and muddy. In a few restatements of the four-note DSCH theme, the cellist doesn’t get his intonation clean enough and one of the notes is out of tune. If you know how salient that motif is, it really stands out. It is lyrical and
almost diaphanous, restrained in mood but not emotion. It’s very powerful, and the cadenza that begins III grows out of it naturally, though that has a few sour notes. III itself is exciting, a whirlwind. The orchestra is, other than the horn, excellent; even the briefest of solos have a lot of color and character. The sound is boomy in the low end and a little muffled in the highs.

Those sonic drawbacks mostly disappear in Lutoslawski’s *Mala Suite* (Little Suite) and Vainberg’s concerto. The Lutoslawski was a 1950 commission for Polish radio, and the composer used folk melodies from southern Poland. There are four short, vivacious movements. The Vainberg (spelled “Weinberg” by the label) is a stunner, making good use of Vainberg’s Jewish heritage. The Adagio is a mournful, ravishing cantilena; the melodies and harmonies aren’t complicated, but Vainberg is such a master that he elevates them to something cinematic in scope. A quiet, breath-taking coda leads directly to the Moderato with its habañera-like rhythm. II isn’t a great piece of writing, but it is still very evocative, giving us a chance to prepare for the livelier III. The cello then gets to show off a little, dancing with the agile orchestra, but musicality is always more important than virtuosity. Alstaedt’s tone in the cadenza suddenly gets raspy on some of the notes. IV is rhapsodic, with many echoes of the movements that came before. There are nods in Shostakovich’s direction as well, including a sneaky reference to the DSCH theme in the brass-led climax. The two men were close friends and their musical influence went both ways. This is one of the most appealing and impressive pieces I’ve encountered in quite a while, and I cannot recommend it highly enough. After the final hushed notes faded away, I sat unwilling to move, praising it with a faint “Damn!” Notes are in English, German, and French.

Mark Drobinsky and the Kazan Symphony recorded the Vainberg and Shostakovich, along with Yuri Levitin’s concerto, several years ago, and Mark Lehman recommended it (Talent 85, J/A 2002). The Vainberg and Levitin were also issued with Vainberg’s Cello Fantasy on Russian Disc 1111 (J/F 1997, p 177); it’s available inexpensively online, and I treated myself to a copy.

**SHOSTAKOVICH: Quartets (all)**

*Alpha* 226 [5CD] 387 minutes

This is a strange Shostakovich cycle in several ways. The Quatuor Danel recorded it from 2001 to 2005 and it came out on Fuga Libera in a box set back then (no review); I don’t believe the discs were released individually. Fuga Libera is one of the labels under the umbrella of the Belgian Outhere Music; Alpha is as well, but it was founded in 1999 as a French early-music label.

The order of the quartets is jumbled: 2, 7, 5, 6, 3, 13, 14, 8, 12, 4, 11, 9, 1, 10, and 15. No reason is given for this, and they were recorded in an even different order. It flies in the face of the annotations themselves, which, contrasting Shostakovich’s cycle with Beethoven’s, note that Shostakovich’s form an almost uninterrupted cycle where Beethoven’s are grouped into three distinct periods. They also note the “steady broadening of artistic horizons” in the first five quartets.

The Danel’s interpretation is unusual but refreshing—Gallic or at least close to it: they’re based in Belgium. The playing is generally light and smooth, and often serene or playful depending on the mood of the movement. While never emotionless, they still avoid the usual abundant angst and oppression, and it’s not often they fall short of what the music needs. In 8:II their approach fails to carry the day. The rest of it is very good, but it’s difficult to recommend this quartet with that weak link. A few—1, 11, and parts of 9—are boring; exceptions, yes, but I shouldn’t have to make that observation to begin with. 12, a fantastic work barely on my radar before, is utterly fascinating in these musicians’ hands. It’s one of Shostakovich’s strangest works, “the almost dizzying throwing together of highly dissonant, chromatic music...alongside passages of almost banal diatonicism”, as Michael Mishra describes it in A *Shostakovich Companion*.

The sonics are the biggest drawback, and they served to remind me how much engineering can affect a group’s sound. Mark Lehman and I have praised their installments of Moisei Vainberg’s complete quartets on CPO (each M/A issue from 2008 to 2011, and J/F and N/D 2012), now gathered into one box, and the sound there is superb. With this cycle, I had to take the treble down a click or two, because it’s just too bright sometimes, making the quartet sound screechy. The bottom end is
light, too; the Fitzwilliam Quartet has a much fuller sound across the spectrum.

If the idea of a polished, urbane cycle sounds interesting to you, this will be quite rewarding. It speaks well of the quartets that they can mostly flourish in such different settings. The booklet says nothing about the players, but they’ve worked and consulted with members of the Beethoven and Borodin Quartets, specialist Krzysztof Meyer, and Shostakovich’s widow Irina. The scores used are the ones edited and published by the Shostakovich Center in Paris around the turn of this last century, I believe. There’s a brief essay by Frans C. Lemair that takes a firm stance against Volkov’s *Testimony* and a 15-page examination of the quartets by David Fanning. Notes are in English and French.

**SHOSTAKOVICH:** *Quartets 4+6; Piano Quintet; Theatrical Suite*

Anatol Ugorski; Delian Quartet

Oehms 431 [2CD] 106 minutes

Serenity is the watchword for this collection. The Delian Quartet, a fairly young group from Germany, takes a very calm approach to Shostakovich, though they’re never placid, lazy or boring; nor do they gloss over anything. It’s an unusual tack, even for the relatively sunny Fourth and Sixth Quartets, but it’s a rewarding one. The *Theatrical Suite* suits them especially well, light-hearted pieces that Elizabeth Wilson collected from the scores to *Hamlet* and *The Human Comedy:*

In Quartet No. 4, the Fitzwilliam Quartet has a lot more intensity—they push and pull your emotions along with them, leaving you breathless at the end of the movement. The Delians give the music plenty of shape, and the movements aren’t without drama, but the picture they paint is of a sunny day. The Fitzwilliams sound like they’re baring someone’s soul. The Delians’ interpretation is invalid, but it would never be my first choice.

They’re generally more convincing in 6. The Borodin Quartet’s Chandos recording suffers from a nasal, scrunched sound, and the musicians sound too in-your-face. The Fitzwilliams have more padded sonics, but they sound a little heavy in the opening of I. The Delians are lighter, more Haydn-esque and with more detailed phrasing, and they save their boisterous arguments for the middle of the movement. The Fitzwilliams have a better sense of what to do with II; the differences are subtle, but their lines are noticeably clearer. At about the four-minute mark in both recordings, the upper strings come to rest on a chord, and then the viola (I believe) begins switching between neighboring half-steps. On the Delians’ recording, the viola is prominently voiced before that point; the Fitzwilliams’ violist rises up out of the background to bring that change to our attention, and the moment is much more interesting. The Delians excel in III: parts of it have such a saunter that they almost swing, and the Dvorak-like themes are warmly played. The hushed ending is completely satisfying.

In the Quintet, I is powerful and taut, and I’m not disappointed. It is both devotional and poignant, and there’s a strength that lies just below the surface. The movement’s sweep is gripping, too, though Ugorski could be more forceful toward the end. The Scherzo is a circus, vigorous and a lot faster than the Borodin Quartet with Richter (Melodiya 1077, J/A 14). About three-fourths of the way through, the cello takes the ascending-and-descending-scale motif, and Romain Garroud spices it up with some tipsy pitch-bending. It’s one of the funniest things I’ve heard on a classical recording, and I’ll gladly keep this performance around just for that! The Delians’ serenity works against them in IV: it should grieve more. The Finale is stalwart; it doesn’t stand out in a crowded field, but it holds its own just fine.

So, this release has a lot to commend it. I think general listeners would want it, especially if Shostakovich’s angst has kept them from exploring his music further; and it’s unusual enough that the more obsessive fans should consider it. The balance between the instruments is always good, and the sound is clear and clean. Notes are in German and English.

**SHOSTAKOVICH:** *Violin Sonata; Viola Sonata*

Duo Tschopp-Bovino

Genuin 16428—62 minutes

Duo Tschopp-Bovino is violinist-violist Mirjam Tschopp and pianist Riccardo Bovino. Tschopp was born in Zurich in 1976 and is a professor at the Landeskonservatorium Innsbruck and also teaches at the Musikhochschule Konservatorium Zurich. Riccardo Bovino was born in Turin in 1975 and is a lecturer at the Hochschule der Kunste in Bern. They are obviously fine musicians with a good feel for this music.

Tschopp is just as comfortable on the viola.
as she is on the violin, and I can’t say that the performance of one sonata is better than the other.

I enjoyed these performances, but they are up against stiff competition. Two recordings are so outstanding that they completely eclipse their competitors. For the Violin Sonata, Sergey and Lusine Khachatryan are peerless (J/A 2008). They find the mood of each section and even each note with a perception and precision that are breathtaking. For the Viola Sonata, Yuri Bashmet and Sviatoslav Richter play as though hypnotized by the music (J/A 1998). They sustain a mood of despair that leaves the listener immersed in thought at the end. It is interesting that the performers of the Viola Sonata knew Shostakovich personally, and the performers of the Violin Sonata were members of the last generation to grow up in the Soviet Union. Those two recordings are among the greatest of any music ever made and are mandatory acquisitions for anyone devoted to the composer.

MAGIL.

SIBELIUS: Symphonies 5+7; En Saga
Halle Orchestra/ Mark Elder
Halle 7543—72 minutes

Jean Sibelius is one of those composers whose symphonies can be heard as romantic, modernist, or both, though not everyone agrees on which belong in what group. I categorize Symphonies 1, 2 and 7 as romantic, and 3, 4, and 6 as modern, with the Fifth somewhere in between, tending toward the romantic, as led by Colin Davis (with Boston), Bernstein (New York), and Barbirolli (two Halle recordings). All those Fifths tend to be slow and lyrical, with the string parts lush and fairly prominent. Vanska probably fits here, too, with his smaller Lahti orchestra, though his Minnesota recording seems lighter and more expansive.

Mark Elder’s newcomer leans toward the modern but in an interesting way that is sturdy, clean, and detailed. The string parts are not brought out as much as in the other performances mentioned. Their textures are tighter and more concentrated, thereby casting the wind solos in higher relief. Rhythm is well marked, with a bit more separation between notes than usual so the pacing is more vertical than lyrical. At the risk of considerable overstatement, you can think of chords moving as units rather than flowing along. The effect is muscular or sinewy. All of this is clearly thought out, as well as controlled and well executed. I have always thought of the Fifth as a mysterious and even misty symphony, but this performance presents it as solid, transparent, and a little blocky. Elder’s approach produces a cerebral II that is quiet and intimate in the manner of someone taking a device apart, looking at each element, and carefully putting it back together. The tight figure that opens III is deliberate, fast, and impressive, with well-scaled crescendos, though crispier horns would fit the design better. The soft music suggests disciplined chamber playing, and the music before the end is touching.

If the Seventh is a more romantic work, its structure is certainly modern. The romantic element usually emerges from stressing the lyrical line and encouraging broad string textures. Elder counters that by taking a path similar to his Fifth: controlled, deliberate, thought out, and not at all impulsive. His Seventh is also on the slow side. All those qualities combine to create a layered rather than a flowing texture that produces an interesting, quasi-massive view of this symphony. The trombone solos are blended but audible and full. Elder’s layering is a plus in the second brass passage, where well defined entrances are almost kaleidoscopic.

There is an English nobility to these performances, but that is not the entire story, because there is also a slight granitic aspect that speaks to something more rugged than grand. This is the third release in this series, but the first reviewed by ARG. Listening to the First and Third Symphonies reinforces these findings. In both there is that slight separation of notes, the marked consistent rhythm, and the consistent pacing. The result is an epic, large-scaled First and a deliberate, clearly-etched Third. In the last movement of 3 it is interesting how far Elder takes this tendency when the big tune reappears for the last third or so. Both the tune itself and the accompanying figures are more strictly paced and delineated than I have heard anywhere else.

I have not heard the Second; the Fourth and Sixth have not been issued. If you try any of these performances, it might take a few hearings to “get” them, but it should be worth the effort.

En Saga is so different here that it is hard to believe it comes from the same performers. It is quite fast, almost headlong, often exciting, and the big moments fill out impressively. I am not familiar with the Icelandic Eddas, but Sibelius did tell his biographer Erik Tawaststjerna that he had them in mind when he wrote
En Saga. That might explain the adventure-some quality of the music, but Sibelius later commented that the work is more a state of mind than a tone poem. That fits Elder’s performance.

The playing on the symphonies is first rate. In En Saga it is less polished, almost as if the orchestra is uncomfortable with its conductor’s dash and elan. The sound is solid for all three works.

HECHT

SMETANA: Czech Dances; On the Seashore
Garrick Ohlsson, p
Hyperion 68062—62 minutes

Ohlsson is recognized as one of the world’s foremost Chopin pianists. Since his 1970 Gold Medal in Warsaw he has explored and recorded a wide range of romantic piano literature in addition to Chopin’s complete works. I have many of his records in my library and have learned a number of works based on his convincing performances.

Smetana’s Czech Dances are overlooked masterpieces easily categorized alongside Chopin’s many dances: Mazurkas, Waltzes, Polonaises, etc. I would even go so far as to say that Smetana has done for the Polka what Chopin did for the Mazurka.

The two books of Czech Dances are quite different in composition. Book 1 (1877) contains just four Polkas, about 14 minutes of music. These, as with Chopin, are not for dancing, but idealized concert works with inventive forms and considerable substance. Smetana himself requested that the word “Polka” not be used in the title, but the more generic “Dances”. Book 2 contains 10 more traditional Bohemian dances with titles like Furiant, Slepicka, Hulan, Okbrokac, and Skocna. Each of these is a minute or two longer than the Polkas, making this book 45 minutes. Some are simple folk tunes, presented and then elaborated on, while others are more extensive and virtuosic. For readers familiar with all of Chopin’s Waltzes, the parallel is quite clear.

The term polka, reminiscent to me of string bands and accordion players, truly does not do these works justice. While Book 2’s rustic forms might occasionally bring a Hungarian Rhapsody or Dance melody to mind, Smetana keeps things concise and varies repetitions effectively, all while keeping the energy and spirit of the original intact. Ohlsson’s performance is up to his normal world-class standards, and I expect as this disc gets known in the piano world these wonderful works will start appearing on concert programs and probably other recordings. This is my discovery disc and will be the standard against which I measure all future performances. As always with Hyperion, the booklet essay is very well written and the piano sound exemplary.

HARRINGTON

SOLER: Piano Sonatas
Christopher Hinterhuber—Paladino 42—60 mins

Over the years we’ve reviewed a number of Soler sonata recordings, most on the harpsichord or fortepiano. I have tried to approach Soler’s music with an open mind, but I always end feeling that he’s simply a second-rate Scarlatti. The problem isn’t just that the music is formulaic: there are plenty of surprises in this music, just as there are in Scarlatti (The C-major Sonata, R28, is a great example). The difference, I think, is that Scarlatti’s music—both its familiar moments and its surprises—is always more memorable.

I will say, though, that Christopher Hinterhuber is a considerably better artist than many performers whose Soler programs have crossed my desk. His technique and tone are expert and wide-ranging, and fortunately he never allows a listener’s attention to flag as the more or less predictable musical ideas come and go. In short, he makes me care about this music more than usual—but it’s still not enough. Great sound, though the reverberation slightly mars the crispness of the performances.

HASKINS

S T R A U S S, J: The Gypsy Baron
Nikolai Schukoff (Barinkay), Claudia Barainsky (Saffi), Iochen Schmeckenbecher (Zsupan), Khatuna Mikaberidze (Czipra), Paul Kaufmann (Ottokar), Jasmina Sakr (Arsena); NDR Philharmonic/ Lawrence Foster
Pentatone 5186482 [2SACD] 118 minutes

This new recording of The Gypsy Baron (Zigeunerbaron) is a May 2015 performance in Hanover, Germany. It is the standard performing version of Strauss’s operetta (about 2 hours). I reviewed a video from the 2011 Morbische Festival (N/D 2015) that was 140 minutes. In that review, I also mentioned Nicholas Haronn-court’s comments included with his recording (Teldec 94555, J/A 1995) where he added another 40 minutes of Strauss’s music which had been cut or edited over the years by censors, Strauss, or for running time. The standard
performing version is short on dialog and on character motivations in a very complex plot.

The plot is laden with gypsy mysticism and coincidence, characters whose motives are often unclear, and Barons and Princesses who are disguised as gypsies or other characters. The standard performing version skips over the questionable plot elements, the dialog is kept to a minimum, and the emphasis is on Strauss’s beautiful score. It is one of his most popular and most performed operettas.

The complex plot involves Sandor Barinkay, who returns to his ruined estate after a war between Austria and Turkey. The estate has been taken over by Kalman Zsupan for a pig farm. To get his land back, Barinkay bargains with Zsupan to marry Zsupan’s daughter, Arsena. She won’t consider this unless he is royalty. Instead Barinkay marries Saffi, the daughter of Czipra. Saffi is actually the daughter of a Turkish pasha and therefore a Princess. In the end, Barinkay becomes the “Gypsy Baron.” It’s the music that matters, and Strauss offers some of his most famous and beautiful music in this score.

This new recording has generally good and idiomatic performances, though I sometimes found the tempos too slow. The orchestra plays well, but the cymbal is very weak and makes no impression at all. The singers are good—especially Schukoff’s beautifully sung and ardent Barinkay and Schmeckenbecher’s humorous Zsupan. Barainsky’s Saffi, although good in the first act, sounds strained in Acts 2 and 3. The SACD sound is superb and well balanced between the orchestra, soloists, and chorus. It actually sounds like the orchestra is performing in a pit below the singers. In non-SACD mode, the recording emphasizes the orchestra. In both cases, you need to boost the volume considerably.

I prefer the expanded Harnoncourt recording, where the sound and performances are excellent. It is currently part of a set of Strauss operettas on Warner. The Morabische video includes some of the Harnoncourt additions.

FISCH

STRAUSS, J: Polkas; see SCHUBERT

STRAUSS: Piano Pieces 2
Dario Bonuccelli—Dynamic 7748—74 minutes

Now here is something really special, titled “The Richard Strauss Project”. When completed we should have all the composer’s works for solo piano. Most of this volume consists of pieces that have never been recorded before. While these are works of childhood or adolescence, they are vital to our understanding of the genius to come. The first volume has not been reviewed on these pages.

From what we already know, it would be difficult (if not impossible) to name the mature composer from his early works. Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms all come to mind.

The Fantasia (1874) from the pen of a composer just ten years into his life is certainly no masterpiece, but I was not expecting it to be. Mozart seems to be the most prominent influence, and that’s nothing to sneeze at. Melodically it is simple, and with an innocent, plain accompaniment. Counterpoint is also absent at this stage. Unless I am mistaken, pianist Bonuccelli is a little heavy-handed. The sound is also close and boxy.

The two Kleine Stücke probably from a year later are less ambitious, though better because of it; but Sonata 1 is Strauss at age 13 and definitely shows an advancement in his ability to piece together a cogent argument. It is in four movements with the Andante with Variations (II) the most extensive of the four. It’s all quite nice, but Mozart continues to be the dominant influence. There is not a trace of the romanticism to follow, but a bit of Beethoven does manage to sneak in here and there. The remaining movements are both balanced nicely, with considerable enjoyment to be had from this grossly derivative, but deliciously enjoyable first effort.

Three other short pieces are totally likable and reflect early efforts of Strauss to bring more imagination into his creations, especially in the Albumblatt. The Schumann-like Stim-mungsbilder Op. 9 have been recorded before and sound like direct descendents of the Albumblatt. All five movements, while hardly mature Strauss, have the charm and grace of a professional composer. While I admit to being seduced by even the scribblings of early Strauss, the album will certainly not be for everyone. Good notes.

BECKER

STRAUSS: Violin Sonata;
MARTINU: Sonata 3
Zenaty-Shapiro Duo—Azica 71307—54 minutes

Strauss’s romantic early sonata—Op. 18—shows that he was already comfortable writing large-scale pieces. It is tonal and lyrical, especially in the gorgeous slow movement. The heroic gestures of the outer movement are
almost better suited to orchestral writing, and it's easy to see why he made his reputation on bigger stages. The sonata's main fault is that the themes aren't that compelling, especially in the outer movements. Strauss's later writing has melodies with much more personality. It's perhaps related to this that their development is sometimes fitful, and the peaks they scale are not as high as they seem to think. I sense the musicians struggling against these problems as well; I and III lack drama and a strong architectural profile.

In the Martinu, I is turbulent, with some real muscle to it. The themes are easy to remember and well developed; there's a sly scalar melody in the violin with some off-kilter rhythms that's particularly fascinating. The duo does much better here: they're more expressive, and Ivan Zenaty gets more variety of tone out of his violin. In II he uses some of that low, husky playing that violinists are known for in romantic pieces. I wish he would be more mindful of those possibilities elsewhere; too often his tone stays the same even though the dynamics change, and that robs some passages of their magic—as in the long final note of II in the Martinu. A lot of the Scherzo sounds rather pedestrian, though the last few minutes are very good. The galloping finale—after the *lento* introduction—is the best, though even there Sandra Shapiro needs to put more vim into the faster parts. Her big chords are usually effective. The sound is fine; notes are in English.

**Stravinsky:** *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto; 2-Piano Concerto; Satie: Socrate; Cinema.*
Alexei Lubimov, Slava Poprugin, p
Alpha 230—78 minutes

This is a very attractive release, especially to a reviewer who seems to get one or two new recordings of *Le Sacre du Printemps* and/or *Petrouchka* in the composer's two piano arrangements almost every issue. Titled "Paris Joyeux & Triste" this collection of works does not indicate any premiere recordings, but outside of the 2-Piano Concerto all are new to me.

Stravinsky made the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* transcription for two pianos. John Cage did the transcription of *Socrate* also for two pianos. Darius Milhaud was responsible for the one piano, four hands transcription of *Cinema*, and pianist Lubimov prepared the piano for this recording.

I like Stravinsky's rather limited output for solo piano. The Sonata, Serenade in A, Tango, and Piano-Rag-Music are all pieces I regularly listen to. The *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* reminds me of those works, and at about 14 minutes makes for an excellent opening piece on this program. At a little over 20 minutes, the 2-Piano Concerto does get heard and recorded on a regular basis. The current performance is as good or better than most.

It should be noted that the excellent piano sound captured here and in *Socrate* is from early 20th Century French pianos: a 1920 Pleyel and a 1906 Gaveau.

Satie's Symphonic Drama based on Plato's Dialogues (1919) was originally scored for four sopranos and a small orchestra. In three movements, *Socrate* is nearly half an hour long and well worth hearing in Cage's excellent arrangement that was made to accompany a ballet by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. All I remember from seeing this group in the early 1970s is Cage sitting in the orchestra pit with a cello bow and a wood saw that he bent to change his bowed, eerie pitches in between reading from the book of I Ching. His arrangement was never performed owing to copyright restrictions and Cage went on to write his work *Cheap Inspiration* that mapped a pattern of alternative notes onto Satie's original.

Cage's most important creation, the prepared piano, inspired Lubimov to prepare a 1909 Bechstein grand for the recording of *Cinema*. This was originally a symphonic "Entr'acte" from Satie's ballet, *Relache* (1924), one of his last compositions. Milhaud made this arrangement of his friend's piece for piano four hands in 1925, and I have several recordings of that version. It is just under 14 minutes long and is well constructed, with recurring themes and lots of variety. It would be very effective if simply played on a regular piano by Lubimov and Poprugin. Using an exceptionally creative and well-thought-out prepared piano adds a percussion section, bells, and pizzicato strings to the piano sound and makes for a unique performance that would have pleased Satie greatly. Were it not for one out-of-tune note (a low C-sharp) that we hear every time the main theme is presented, I would call this a perfect recording. Even with that, it is exceptional and one that I will return to often.
Stravinsky on period instruments! I jest, but the minute I started this I was struck by how baroque the *Pulcinella Suite* (1949 revision) sounded. The strings keep vibrato to a minimum, the interpretation is very gentle and refined, and the tempos are on the stately side, to put it diplomatically. In *Apollon Musagete* there is more vibrato, and it sounds like a much newer piece. I've heard and accompanied *Pulcinella* a few times, and it's quite charming; this is my first time meeting Apollo, and even after several hearings he's still a total snooze. The Concerto in D for string orchestra has more spunk to it, but the development wanders around obstinately, like a tourist taking pictures of all the wrong things at all the wrong angles. The playing and sound are fine, but they're not standouts. Notes are in English, French, and German.

ESTEP

Stravinsky: *Song of the Nightingale*;
see Collections

Stutchewsky: Chamber Pieces
*Agada; Freilachs: Improvisation; Kinah; Hassidic Suite; Kaddish; Jolly Dance; Shir Yehudi; 2 Israeli Melodies; Klezmers' Wedding Music; Hassidic Fantasy*

Aron Zelkowicz, vc; Luz Manriquez, p; Jennifer Orchard, v; Marissa Byers, cl

Toccata 314—73 minutes

Joachim Stutchewsky (1891-1982) was a cellist and composer, born in the Ukraine and living in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and finally Israel. His music is true to his roots and is handled with style by these Musicians of the Pittsburgh Jewish Music Festival.

Stutchewsky’s music is outgoing and warmly romantic in tone. He is a master of subtle phrasing and evokes Jewish folk music in a beautiful way. The longest work here is the 18-minute *Hassidic Fantasy*, a colorful work for clarinet, cello, and piano that begins and ends with whispering clarinet and runs the gamut of emotions in between. The Klezmers’ Wedding Music is almost as long and just as fascinating.

The rest of the program consists of music for cello and piano, written from the 1930s to 1962. This includes *Israeli Melodies* 1 and 6, the same ones played by Isserlis on his Children’s Cello album (BIS 1562) but played in different octaves sometimes. *Kinah* may also be heard on Paul Marley’s album, From Jewish Life (Signum 505) and Kaddish and two movements from the *Hassidic Suite* on Inbal Segev’s Nigun album (Vox 7910). Still, this all-Stutchewsky program is well worth hearing and gives us a better all-round look at his style than anything else I have heard. The recording is excellent and the playing is full of feeling and conviction.

D MoorE

SusA: *6 Joyce Songs; Landscapes & Silly Songs; Conte: Composer; Whitman Triptych; Invocation & Dance*

Keisuke Nakagoshi, Kevin Korth, p; Artie Storch, Stan Muney, perc; Capella SF/ Ragnar Bohlin

Delos 3524—58 minutes

This album, *Facing West*, is an hour of gentle, beautiful, thoughtfully-composed choral music. Not once does it try to sway you with the too-clever chords that have become a cliche in a lot of newer American writing. The poems set are by Walt Whitman, James Joyce, John Stirling Walker, and Federico Garcia Lorca.

Conrad Susa’s *Six Joyce Songs, Volume II* are notable for the powerful simplicity of their vocal parts; the wide-ranging piano part contrasts well with the choir, and it’s striking but not effusive. ‘What is the Grass?’ from David Conte’s *Whitman Triptych* is the only one of the three that doesn’t win me over. Many of the words in the first half are sung to almost trumpet-like fanfares, and the result doesn’t quite ring true.

‘Silly Song,’ with its Lorca text, is a hilarious depiction of a child dancing around, clapping, and nagging “Mama” but then turning oh-so-serious as he tells his mother he wants to be made of silver or water. She warns him that he’ll be chilly, so he begs her to embroider him on his pillow, and she replies, “I’ll start at once!”

*Invocation and Dance* sets words from Whitman’s *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d*, and it was written for the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus in 1986. Conte created this version for mixed chorus a few years later. It begins with Whitman’s line, “Come lovely and soothing death,” and the piano’s golden high notes are brightened further with glockenspiel and vibraphone while bass octaves pulse in a funeral march. The ‘Dance’ praises the “fathomless universe for life and joy, and

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for objects and knowledge curious, and for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise! For the sure-en-winding arms of cool-enfolding death.” It’s a Bernstein-esque setting in compound meter.

Capella SF is expressive and has excellent dynamic control, though their consonants aren’t always unified and a few notes are out of tune. They’re not the Robert Shaw Chorale, but they’re fine enough, and a few surface flaws would never keep me from appreciating the quality of their work. The sound is clear; notes and texts are in English. You’ll need them to understand all the words.

Szymanowski: Quartets
Quartetto Prometeo
Brilliant 94744—63 minutes

Pairing the Debussy and Szymanowski quartets is an inspired idea—and it’s the first time (I think). The two quartets of the Polish master are more Impressionist than Debussy’s early, rather classical work.

The Prometheus Quartet wisely takes on the mellower Debussy first, tempos measured, a certain languor conveyed by blunted accents and muted dynamic range in I through III, then more intensity in IV, preparing our ears for the feverish, hallucinatory Szymanowski.

If you’ve never heard Szymanowski’s quartets, they’re drenched in post-Wagnerian chromatics, radiate 100 psychedelic colors, and are structurally loose, hard to analyze—its best to let the beautiful strange sounds and textures wash over you at first. If Scriabin wrote quartets incorporating Bartók’s earthy folk rhythms, they’d sound like Szymanowski’s. They’re also short, about 18 minutes each, and packed with incident and detail. And is that Shostakovich’s DSCH motif pervading the irreverent fugal finale of Quartet 2, from 1927? You bet it is.

The Prometheus dives right into these late-late romantic works with little restraint, yet their tuning is accurate and tone as beautiful and sweet as the steamy, sickly-sweet harmonies allow.

Good sound, interesting and informative booklet essay. Another excellent budget production from Brilliant.

Szymanowski: Violin Sonata;
Brahms: Sonata 2
Shari Mason; Manuel Gonzales, p
Urtext 258—48 minutes

This program, performed by two impressive Mexican musicians, appears to be about contrast, but is actually a study in continuity.

The early, rapturous Szymanowski sonata, from 1904, comes across as more romantic than the more familiar sonata by Brahms, who was trying against the odds to preserve the Viennese classical tradition against the onslaught of Wagnerism and who observes the rigors of sonata form. Shari Mason, Concertmaster of Mexico’s National Symphony, plays with uninhibited passion in both works. The slow movements are particularly gorgeous. Manuel Gonzales’s pianism is pointed and sensitive, and the recording is excellent.

Takemitsu: Film Scores; see Debussy

This is the sixth installment of the Tallis Edition from Andrew Carwood and The Cardinall’s Musick. I have reviewed four out of the previous five: 67548 (J/F 2006), 67994 (1/F 2014), 68026 (J/A 2014), and 68076 (M/J 2015). I expressed some reservations about the first of the series, recorded quite a few years before the others, but I have been impressed with the volumes that followed. My earlier reviews also contain remarks about Tallis recordings by other artists.

As with the other volumes in Carwood’s series, this one presents a cross section of the composer’s works. Tallis’s long career began in the reign of Henry VIII and ended in the reign of Elizabeth I. It was a time of religious upheaval in England, and each royal accession brought its own musical demands, from the Catholic repertory under Henry VIII, the severe Protestant restrictions on musical elaboration under Edward VI, the revival of Catholicism and elaborate liturgical music under Mary Tudor, and finally the more lenient Protestantism of Elizabeth. This program contains works from all of these periods, though it is
nearly impossible to assign precise dates to many of Tallis’s works.

The principal work on this program is the two sets of *Lamentations of Jeremiah*. It is almost impossible to date reliably. The earliest piece here is ‘Sancte Deus,’ from the time of Henry VIII. Several of the pieces are Latin liturgical settings. ‘In Pace, in Idipsum’ and ‘Dum Transisset Sabbatum’ are office responsories. ‘Solemnis Urgebat Dies’ is an office hymn alternating plainsong with polyphony. The pieces known to date from Elizabeth’s reign are ‘Salvator Mundi,’ one of the most famous in the *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1575 produced in collaboration with William Byrd, and the two tunes (of nine) from Archbishop Matthew Parker’s metrical psalter (1567).

The Short (Dorian) Communion Service reflects the simple austerity demanded in the reign of Edward VI. It is what I would call Anglican *Gebruchsmusik*, a work written to fulfill a practical need with a minimum of artifice. It is a simple four-part setting with decani-cantoris dialog across the choir in keeping with the traditional choral seating in facing choir stalls.

The Te Deum “for meanes” is also an English-language setting that probably dates either from the time of Edward VI or early in Elizabeth’s reign, but it is more ambitious musically. It is in five parts with decani-cantoris division, and contains passages of imitative writing.

The performances are of the highest technical standard. There is a keen sense of phrase trajectory and overall coherence. Dynamic shadings seem to grow from the phrases instead of being imposed from without. The music is sung with one or two voices to a part, and so has a feel of vocal chamber music with clear delineation of the contrapuntal writing. As we have come to expect from Hyperion, the recorded sound is warm but clear.

**TAN: Traces; see BERNSTEIN**

**TAN**YEV: *Piano Quintet; Poems*

Olga Gollej, p; Marina Prudenskaya, mz; Leipzig Quartet—MDG 3071917—65 minutes

The first thing on this album is the voice of Marina Prudenskaya. Taneyev’s *Poems*, Op. 34, are seven songs in 17 minutes sung in the original Russian, but only a German text is supplied. I searched online for an English translation but found none. The notes merely say that the texts by Yakov Polonsky are mostly about love. Prudenskaya, who’s developed a reputation as a Wagnerian singer, has one of those direct Slavic voices that can peel the wallpaper, if she so wishes, like Galina Vishnevskaya in her glory days. True, for love songs hers isn’t a comforting voice; but she injects her riveting tone with distinct personality. In a long crescendo she can control her vibrato from a completely flat tone to an intense emotional catharsis. Her voice, filled with intent, wraps around the Russian words, inflecting them with slight portamentos and sighs. Here is a consummate artist who combines technical perfection with total musicality. Taneyev’s piano here is not the Mahlerian kind with a voice of its own; it’s purely accompaniment but with a wealth of colors that accent the singer; it is certainly not just wallpaper. Olga Gollej is a hand-in-glove partner for the mezzo; I just wish her pianism were a little more subtle (more below).

One person called Taneyev’s Piano Quintet a “chamber symphony”; at 47 minutes with elaborate textures, that’s about right. The first movement alone is 20 minutes.

In the quiet introduction I thought the sound on this album would be excellent: piano center, two violins on the left, viola and cello on the right, with beautiful expressive strings. But at the first crescendo, problems multiplied. With the volume for soft passages comfortably set, loud passages become so oppressive they practically shout. They are also congested, making the strings distorted and ugly. Nor is there an ounce of resonance. The microphones must have been very close to the strings. Yet the piano sound is somewhat distant, with a hollow halo around its tone when loud. Also, even though Olga Gollej here is a real banger (no textures, just all notes getting loud at once or soft at once), her playing is little more than a muddle buried by the strings.

It’s a shame that the engineering really gets in the way of the music, since the Leipzig Quartet plays with deep expression, a good grasp of form, and beautiful tone (when not distorted). For just the opposite turn to Repin, Gringolts, Imai, Harrell, and principal pianist Mikhail Pletnev on DG, where the piano truly is an equal partner sound-wise and an elegant partner among just as eloquent musicians. That recording makes me want to refer to the title as *Piano Quintet* because Pletnev is such a revelation compared to Gollej, but he is only primus inter pares, with sound that allows me to get lost in the music itself. Also, the performance itself is better. Judging from Stephen

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Wright’s recent review of this work with Peter Wispelwey and the Utrecht Quartet (also on MDG—M/J 2016), you’ll probably have better luck with that album. The companion work there is Taneyev’s String Quintet 2.

TANEEV: String Quintet 1; GLAZOUNOV: String Quintet
Christian Poltera, vc; Gringolts Quartet
BIS 2177 [SACD] 66 minutes

Taneyev’s 36-minute Quintet 1 is really glorious music. It opens with a dramatic 11-minute Sonata-Allegro that is filled with lyricism and inventive modulations. That is followed by a five-minute Vivace con Fuoco. III is a 20-minute theme with nine beats per measure has a inventive modulations. That is followed by a five-minute Vivace con Fuoco. III is a 20-minute theme with nine inventive variations that are cleverly linked and never sound simple-minded, as so many theme-and-variations can.

The Glazounov—four movements in 29 minutes—also is a richly romantic work with a clever pizzicato Scherzo and an Andante Sostenuto that is pure late-19th Century; only the Finale with its use of Russian folk music (not as spiky as Tchaikovsky, more like Borodin) identifies the composer as Russian.

The performers have a solid grasp of each movement’s form, and they play with full lyricism and superb flow, giving expressive shape to phrases, whether short or long. Rhythms in the Taneyev are superb. Where I have an interpretive problem is in the Glazounov: its opening theme with nine beats per measure has a very tricky suspension, but its rhythm is a major element in I. It’s played by the solo violinist, yet, even after he is joined by the other players, it took considerable work to unravel its rhythm because of the degree of rubato used. How can one fully appreciate the music while struggling with the rhythm of the main theme? All five musicians play with gorgeous tone on first-class instruments, but opening and closing lines of phrases are sometimes lost, and the first violinist is too often understated.

Part of the problem I suspect is Glazounov’s: this is very much a symphonic work whose thick textures he crams in just two violins, a viola, and two cellos. But another problem for me in both works is the engineering. I listen not with five but with two speakers (four matching ones really—two in front and two in back), and I constantly battled with the sound. Is it the players who aren’t balancing their voices, or does the sound itself have a distorted edge as it gets louder? Sometimes I get the feeling of a processor being used that swells with every crescendo and fades into the wallpaper with every decrescendo—probably not the cause, but it does describe the effect. The melody line is always clearly projected, but, other than harmonic shifts, other details are not audible—I want to hear the details as well. Other times, whether the music is pianissimo or fortissimo, the sound is consistently loud, as if the players are recorded so closely that they’re “up front” constantly—I want more air, more space. I’m not being clear because nothing seems consistent. I love the music, in general I love the playing, but something is constantly getting in the way.

TANSMAN: Guitar Pieces, all
Cristiano Polli Cappelli, Andrea Pace, g
Brilliant 95221 [2CD] 137 minutes

For years Tansman was known to guitarists only by a few works: Suite in Modo Polonico, Cavatina (with the added ‘Danza Pomposa’), and a single mazurka. A few other pieces gained currency—homages to Chopin and Lech Walesa, the Scriabin Variations. But the real revelation came when the Segovia Archives were opened, and Ermanno Brignolo recorded an entire disc of brand-new Tansman. All that is here, except for a piece for guitar and orchestra. Cappelli also gives us two different versions of the Suite—the original, with just six movements, and a second suite, from which Segovia took three extra movements to make the familiar version.

If you don’t know the new pieces from Brignolo’s recording, they are worth knowing. All are miniatures, most 3 minutes or shorter. The longest is the 10-minute Scriabin variations, though that can be considered a set of miniatures. Tansman’s style is consistent across all of the pieces. He’s a beautiful mix of Ravel, early Scriabin, neoclassicism, and a healthy dose of Polish nationalism. His fondness for the sharp 4 degree links him to this, as it does to Chopin. A frequent figuration is a sequence of parallel triads a tritone apart. There are a few pieces (‘Inventions’ and the passacaglia) that are sort of neo-baroque, homage to Bach. There is also a sonatine for two guitars, where Cappelli is joined by his duo partner, Andrea Pace, a pleasing neo-classic piece in four movements.

I don’t find any of the newly discovered works better than the familiar ones, though that may well be because I’ve played and
taught the three for several decades, and the others haven’t had the chance to make the same impression. But I enjoyed each of the pieces, and I’m glad to have them as a complete set.

I had reviewed Mr Cappelli in the complete works for two guitars by Castelnuovo-Tedesco, a spectacular performance with Pace (J/F 2015) that made my best of the year list. In this music, he really leans toward a neo-classic approach, giving more subtle readings. Brignoli is more dramatic, and I prefer his playing, but he only plays the undiscovered works. If you want the whole pierogi, Cappelli is an excellent choice.

KEATON

TCHAIKOVSKY: Francesca da Rimini; Romeo & Juliet; Capriccio Italien; Slavic March; Coronation March
Russian National Orchestra/ Mikhail Pletnev
Pentatone 5186550 [SACD] 75 minutes

The background of this issue is confusing. In 1997, DG issued a box of the complete Tchaikovsky symphonies (no companion pieces) with Mikhail Pletnev conducting the Russian National Orchestra. That was reviewed without enthusiasm by Arved Ashby (J/F 1997). Some time later DG issued the symphony recordings separately, but with companion works. Later yet, DG issued a box of the companion pieces plus two works recorded earlier, Manfred and The Tempest. Steve Haller reviewed that box, praising Manfred and The Tempest but disdaining the rest (S/O 2004).

Enter Pentatone. From 2011 to 2014, that label issued a new set of Tchaikovsky symphonies, plus companion pieces, on single discs. The performers were the same. Pentatone later put the whole collection in a box. To complicate things further, there is not much overlap between the Pentatone collection and the one on DG.

The ARG assessment of Pletnev’s Tchaikovsky is that it is well played but lacks soul, Russian or otherwise. That includes Lawrence Hansen’s disdain for both the Pentatone and DG Manfreds. One of the negative reviews could be up for an ARG shortest review ever if such an award existed (J/A & S/O 2011; M/J & S/O 2012; N/D 2014).

Pletnev’s Manfred and Tempest disc is his only Tchaikovsky that I had heard. I rather like it, but I can understand why writers did not. The Russian National Orchestra sounds world class and is extremely well disciplined. Some of the fast passages are played with breathtaking precision. The strings have a rich dark tone, the brass are solid, and Pentatone’s sound is blood rich and detailed. This is Tchaikovsky polished to a shine plus a certain Teutonic rigidity. Karajan’s DG recordings of the symphonies come to mind, but these Pletnev readings are heavier and more golden. What they are not is red-blooded and Russian.

That brings up an interesting point about Tchaikovsky. Many people think of him as one of the ultimate romantics whose Russian soul must be plumbed to the depths. In fact, Tchaikovsky was one of the first students at the St Petersburg Conservatory, where the controversial-at-the-time approach to music was Germanic, not Russian. Tchaikovsky was a product of that thinking and for a while stood aside from such nativist composers as the Russian Five: Cui, Borodin, Balakirev, Moussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakoff. He eventually would make his peace with The Five, but Tchaikovsky was a bridge in Russia between German theory and the Russian practices of blocky but colorful orchestration and treatment of melody by repetition, sequences, modulations, etc. I have no idea if Pletnev had any of that in mind, but there are elements of the Teutonic in his Tchaikovsky.

Capriccio Italien puts a magnificent foot forward with that big brass fanfare. The hymn that follows is rich, warm, and very even in scale; and the later accompanying string rhythms are taut and precise. The problem is that evenhanded and controlled often become plodding, and there is little that is exciting.

The same apples to Francesca da Rimini. The romantic music is drawn out and even-handed without much ardor. The Hellish parts are anything but. Clean and precisely drawn out is more like it. Francesca is not Tchaikovsky’s greatest work. It needs the kind of emotional help from a conductor that it does not get here, and the result is boring.

Romeo and Juliet is similar in style to Francesca in the romantic parts, but Romeo’s livelier fight scenes have much more fire. I’m not sure if I have ever heard them this precisely executed, phrases passing back and forth in the brass with amazing authority. The final climax is thunderous, and the tomb scene presents some beautiful woodwind ensemble playing.

Pletnev makes March Slav sound like a major work. The trumpets do not just hammer out the main theme, they sing it; and when the strings get their chance with the tune, they

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play it with glowing power. The same can be said for *Coronation March*, a lesser work but impressive nonetheless.

Even if all these performances were good for what they are, these recordings would not be for everyone. One of their attractions is the sound, which is bigger and fuller than on the DG recordings. Even people drawn to Pletnev’s Tchaikovsky will probably hear this program as a mixed supplement to the many recordings they already have of these works.

**HECHT**

**TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphonies 1,2,5**
Liverpool Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko
Onyx 4150 [2CD] 118 minutes

I have to say right away that these are all too fast. Tchaikovsky liked to mark movements “Adagio” and “Maestoso”—there is none of either in the way these are played. This is cold, businesslike, very English playing. I would never recommend these recordings, because the magic of Tchaikovsky isn’t here, so the listener would be left high and dry.

Winter Dreams (No. 1) must be atmospheric above all—and it simply isn’t. It’s prosaic and dull. No. 2 can have such charm; II almost does, but the rest of the symphony is utterly without charm here. They just slash away at it.

It is much harder to wreck No. 5, and orchestras know it well. But would you buy this two-disc set for the 44-minute Symphony 5? Don’t you already have some fine recordings of it? This is a beautiful orchestra, with wonderful soloists, but the conductor seems terribly shallow. The grand finale of No. 5 just breezes by, as if it hardly matters. There is no need to bother with his Tchaikovsky symphonies.

**VROON**

**TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony 6; DVORAK: Rusalka Fantasy**
Pittsburgh Symphony/ Manfred Honeck
Reference 720 [SACD] 67 minutes

Here is a symphony that has been recorded a great deal. Even conductors who don’t like Tchaikovsky have recorded it, probably because of the challenges it presents. So naturally there have been a great many routine performances under conductors who have no real feeling for it. Manfred Honeck is not among them. I don’t know him and have never seen him conduct, but for some reason he knows exactly what can be done—what *must* be done—with this great piece of music.

Every tempo is appropriate; every phrase makes the maximum effect without any distortion. The parts perfectly add up to the whole, and nothing is episodic. It is rich in feeling, but it is still music above all. The orchestra is gorgeous—to the point where you wonder how they maintain that glorious sound in our world. The strings are lush, and all the soloists are great. The overall feeling is the opposite of routine, as if everyone playing is feeling the pain.

A critic just doesn’t expect something like this. We are 120-some years from when it was written. People who thought like this and felt like this have all died off, as has romanticism. But this conductor has got these musicians playing like romantics (but without the portamentos). This is truly moving, no matter how often you have heard the music. There has been almost nothing to add to the Tchaikovsky Overview of 2001—and why should we expect there to be anything in our age of technique and business? But here it is.

The 20-minute “fill” piece is Mr Honeck’s orchestral suite from Dvorak’s opera. I don’t like suites from operas, and I don’t want some woodwind instrument singing the ‘Song to the Moon’; so I will never listen to it again. But it probably should have come first, since it is much too “light” and operatic to follow Tchaikovsky at his most profound and depressed.

The orchestra sounds simply wonderful; surely superb engineering has helped convey that to the listener. There’s not a lot of “depth” when you listen in stereo; all the instruments seem equidistant from you. But the clarity and the ensemble are something that other engineers will envy. And the sheer richness of such a great orchestra playing so beautifully is enough to bring me to tears.

**VROON**

**TELEMANN: Concertos for Mixed Instruments 3**
La Stagione Frankfurt/ Michael Schneider
CPO 777 891—63 minutes

This follows two predecessors in the series, already reviewed in these pages (J/F 2015, S/O 2015). We are once more reminded of how fascinated Telemann was by the endless possibilities of instruments in solo capacities.

There are five works. The first, and by far the most spectacular, is a five-movement one in D for three trumpets, timpani, and two oboes, with strings and continuo. The fire-
works are in the odd-numbered movements, and there is thoughtfulness in the others, including some very pretty solo oboe writing. Another D-major concerto, this time in three movements, calls for violin and three horns, but only one horn is a soloist, with the violin, and the two others join the strings as the ripieno.

The remaining three works each call for a violin along with wind soloists. A five-movement Concerto in E minor adds one flute. Another E-minor Concerto mixes two oboes with the violin, in a four-movement work that originally served as an overture to one of Telemann’s operas. The most sublime item is the final one, in D, where two flutes join with the violin and a cello, in four movements full of interesting harmonic experimentation.

The solo playing is superlative, joined by a string body of 13 plus bassoon and harpsichord.

Given the Telemann repertoire available, this series could go on close to forever, and I for one would not mind.

BARKER

TELEMANN: 12 Gamba Fantasies
Thomas Fritzsch
Coviello 91601—85 minutes

Here is some mystery music. We don’t think of Telemann as a composer for viola da gamba, but his publisher lists these fantasies as having been brought out in 1735. They have been lost for a long time but were recently rediscovered by Thomas Fritzsch, who has made quite a reputation not only for his playing but by his discovery of numerous works for his instrument, notably by Carl Friedrich Abel and CPE Bach (Coviello 21205, J/F 2013).

Fritzsch’s playing ability is tested even more in this program than in his previous recording. One gets a lot of it, as you can see by the amazing duration of this (single) disc. Of course, the test is of Telemann’s music as well. 85 minutes of early classical music for a single viola da gamba is a project matched only by JS Bach’s 6 Solo Cello Suites. There is not as much variety in intensity here as there, but Telemann has amazing talent in writing for any instrument he tackles, and his music is lovely and played with beauty of tone, stylistic accuracy, and fine intonation by Fritzsch. This is an important release that we should all be aware of. Coviello has given him highly listenable sound.

D MOORE

THOMPSON: Requiem
Philadelphia Singers/ David Hayes
Naxos 559789—55 minutes

If you’re American and you sing, chances are that the choral music of Randall Thompson is known to you. But few of us have come across Thompson’s Requiem, which was premiered at the University of California, Berkeley in 1958. Nearly an hour long and set in a complex a cappella format for double-choir, the work has spent most of the past 60 years gathering dust, even as the composer’s Peaceable Kingdom, Testament of Freedom, Frostiana, and ‘Alleluia’ have become part and parcel of choral Americana. But the record has finally been set straight, thanks to this admirable performance of the Requiem recorded complete for the first time. The work acquires new life thanks to the Philadelphia Singers, an ensemble that, alas, disbanded last year owing to financial difficulties. The music lives on courtesy of a choir that died soon after singing it.

What is Thompson’s Requiem like? It is a deeply personal reflection on matters of life and death with a libretto that bears no resemblance to the Roman Liturgy for the Dead. The double-choir format was not chosen on a whim, because the composer structured the work as a series of metaphysical discussions, which proceed back and forth as the two subgroups exchange melodies and ideas.

One reason I like Thompson’s music so much is its volatility. His terse New England pronouncements set up some of the warmest hugs of comfort the American songbook has to offer. Think, for example, of Peaceable Kingdom, where the cranky judgements of ‘Have Ye Not Known?’ summon forth the luminous sentiments of ‘Ye Shall Have a Song’. Similar exchanges occur in the Requiem, with passages like “I am their music” (Lamentations) and “Now I am their song” (Job) providing hushed, introspective contrasts to the declamatory gestures that precede them. (It does take the music a while to warm up, though: the opening set of Lamentations starts out chilly and stays that way for a time. Be patient.)


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Brahms Requiem, say hello to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. The engineers give us clear but dry sound that isn’t quite up to Naxos’s best, but we are accorded excellent notes and a full text.

GREENFIELD

TOWER: Quartets 3-5; Dumbarton Quintet
Blair McMillen, p; Daedalus & Miami Quartets
Naxos 559795—64 minutes

Miscellaneous recent string chamber music by Joan Tower, programmed randomly for maximum confusion.

Quartet 3 (2003), programmed second for some reason, carries the subtitle Incandescent. The extended single movement alternates tragedy with sizzle (“white heat”, as she puts it) and has an apparently dramatic subtext, though her notes stress abstraction. There are plenty of passionate cadenzas to go along with the jumpy action.

Quartet 4 (2008), subtitled Angels, follows a similar course. This one opens with an energetic gigue and deteriorates into tragic sadness, with pleading glissandos. These ideas alternate until trembling leads into a strange waltz. A robust coda summarizes.

Quartet 5 (2012) (White Water), again begins with a (particularly insistent) motto which is clearly present all through the piece. Those glissandos return, and there is again a pervasive sadness interspersed with all the energy. The triadic ending is particularly unconvincing.

Dumbarton Quintet (2003), for quartet with piano, traces Tower’s familiar trajectory. It begins with a serious introduction with motto leading to a rapid development. The ending begins with indecision, but ends up with appropriate triumph.

All of this is nicely crafted and palatable to the academic and festival audiences it is intended for. Performances are good; production is sloppy.

GIMBEL

VAINBERG: Cello Concerto; see SHOSTAKOVICH

VAN GILSE: Piano Concerto;
St Nicholas Variations
Oliver Triendl; Netherlands Symphony/ David Porcelijn—CPO 777 934—64 minutes

Jan Van Gilse’s 1927 Piano Concerto is the most unconventional I’ve run across in decades. Subtitled Three Dance Sketches, it owes nothing to any classical notions of the medium. Each movement explores some aspect of the dance. I, marked “tempo di menetto moderato” sounds as if Richard Strauss, after he finished Rosenkavalier, decided to write a piano concerto using some of its charms. The music is generally lightly scored in the higher registers, with frequent use of the celeste. Van Gilse uses to full effect some of the delicate harmonic twists of that great opera. II—billed as an homage to Johann Strauss—is more like one to Richard. There’s a piano cadenza and a hefty 3/4 meter tune as a slow introduction before the movement proper begins. It’s an array of waltz melodies, all of them agreeable. The music has some of the most innovative harmonies I’ve heard from this composer.

III—quasi jazz—opens with a snare drum roll, then the soloist is off to the races on scurrying runs with syncopations. A lounge-lizard cocktail room theme is preceded by a violin cadenza. It’s followed by a burlesque section, the work ending with a bang—several of them—with the last word on the lower brass alone. The work has all sorts of “wrong” usage: the big cadenzas aren’t by the soloist; using a celeste means two keyboard instruments competing; ignoring the usual fast-slow-fast movement tempos. The composer pays for his whimsy with lack of continuity, but the piece is so full of wit and invention that it’s fair exchange.

A prologue on the bassoons leading to the theme itself on the horns begins the variations. The theme is a Christmas carol. When I was a kid in England we’d sing it in the halls; but 70 years later, I no longer recall the words. Van Gilse’s variations range from a rustic triple-time dance through an extravagant polonaise to a jaunty flute melody with excellent counterpoint. A Brahmsian scherzo of rushing triplets builds up to a grand finale with the tune in festive spirit played by the whole orchestra.

The notes have plenty of biographical material (see also J/F 2009). The pages describing the music in English have been omitted. Granted, the music speaks for itself, but some background would still help. Performances are top-drawer in both skill and sympathy. For all its whimsy, the concerto isn’t an easy work to bring together. Porcelijn conducts with his customary clarity and genius at getting the point. Triendl, who specializes in unknown repertoire, is just the berries. He plays the most obscure music with confidence, as if

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he’d known it all his life. It makes us wonder why didn’t we?

O’CONNOR

V

ASKS: The Seasons
Marcel Worms, p—Zefir 9643—64 minutes

The Seasons is a series of five piano pieces dating from 1980 to 2009. These are more suggestive than literally illustrative. The cycle opens with winter, White Scenery (1980), with a lazy breeze. The atmosphere is pensive, with meditative snowflakes and a distant chorus.

Spring Music (1985), marked ‘quasi una sonata,’ begins with stasis and another distant chorale. A wild cadenza and impassioned drama follow, with blaring fanfares and allusions to Liszt and Rachmaninoff. A recapitulation fades into fragments. Timelessness is reflected by the lack of bar lines. There are agitated (spring) storms.

Green Scenery, Summer (2008) retains the eastern motifs, with Russian Orthodox style chorus and radiant dances worthy of Tchaikovsky (Vasks is Latvian). The summer celebrations recall Mussorgsky. The solemn religiosity seems apt, even though we are told that the composer is “not a religiously inspired man.”

The considerably lighter Autumn Music (1981) begins with peaceful meandering before settling into a joyful gigue, soon joined by those bells. The episode ends happily.

As an addendum, we return cyclically to Music for a Summer Evening (2009), which opens as a gentle barcarolle, but leads to an intensive climax. It all ends peacefully.

Much of the material is inevitably derived from the composer’s Latvian roots. These are attractive, probably best taken separately, though they can be heard as a cycle; that might be a bit of a chore for some. Mr Worms is a fine pianist.

GIMBEL

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Piano Quintet;
RAVEL: Frontispice; Tombeau de Couperin;
FALLA: Ritual Fire Dance
Stockholm Syndrome Ensemble
Channel 36916—58 minutes

The six players of the Stockholm Syndrome Ensemble, organized in 2013, produce gorgeous sounds both individually and as a group. They include one pianist, three violinist-violists, a cellist, and a heavenly string bass player. Each has a wealth of experience, and most of them have leading positions in major European orchestras.

Ravel originally wrote Le Tombeau de Couperin as six movements for solo piano; he later arranged four of the movements for orchestra. I hear it in my head both ways. Along comes this arrangement for piano sextet by Marijn van Prooijen that makes me hear the music as a bit of both, some moments with the piano leading, others not. This five-movement suite includes the Fugue but excludes the Toccata (neither of which Ravel orchestrated). What is magical here is the players’ delicate nuanced shading, rhythms that flow in gentle buoyant waves, and the remarkably clear textures that are exquisitely balanced and richly projected from treble to bass. Composer David Diamond’s orchestration of the Fugue, when in the wrong hands, leaves it sounding even more cluttered; here the leading voices are so beautifully orchestrated and played that its textures are remarkably clarified, especially with the piano as an equal among the strings. The engineering here couldn’t be better.

Ravel’s ‘Frontispice’ is a weird two minutes for two pianos and five hands (only one pianist is identified on the album) that clears the air following an eminently musical performance of Vaughan Williams’s Piano Quintet that has very cluttered sound with help from both the engineers and the composer, who often doubles the piano bass line with the cello and string bass. The engineers also leave the violin and viola too remotely placed to cut through the congested acoustics—indeed, the piano sound reminds me of Nimbus recordings from the 1980s and 1990s recorded at Wyastone Leys where the piano sounded like it was at the bottom of an empty swimming pool in a resonant natatorium. What a shame! Aside from the composer’s rather poor writing for the piano itself and inferior instrumentation, the work itself has three substantial sonata-allegro movements (even III, a theme and variations) that are powerfully shaped and very expressively performed with marvelous flow and grasp of structure.

Falla’s ‘Pantomime and Ritual Fire Dance’ from El Amor Brujo, also arranged for piano sextet, here swells and wanes with long lines, elegant flow, rubato, warm rich sound, and exquisite balances that project ppp and fff equally, making the performance as sensual as it is lovely.

FRENCH

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Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote his Symphony No. 2 (London) in 1913, revised it in 1925, and in 1933 produced the edition we know today. The earlier scores contained more music than 1933, particularly a long section that VW excised from the slow movement. The London was VW’s last symphony from England’s Edwardian era, which ended with a bang with the onset of the Great War. VW was a different composer in 1933 than in 1914, when he was combination of romantic and impressionist, six years out from his studies with Ravel. By 1933 his style had scaled down in a Sibelian kind of way; the 1933 revision is a sign of that scaling down.

All that is worth mentioning because Manze’s view of the symphony is one of the leaner ones I have heard, perhaps related to the conductor’s interest in and experience with early music as Associate Director of the Academy of Ancient Music and Artistic Director of The English Consort. We are not talking HIP or something from Philippe Herreweghe, but Manze streamlines what even in the 1933 score was one of VW’s more romantic works. Most performances play up the imagined dark mist or London fog, but Manze leans more to the clearer skies over today’s London. Rhythms are more bracing than usual, and attacks are more pointed. The most interesting difference is a greater emphasis on melody than on atmosphere. The music sings, not in the way of a big chorus, but more like solo voices or a small choir. In our English Symphonies Overview, I mentioned that interpretations of English music often can be classified as British and everywhere else, especially American. This one is a blend of the two: English song with American rhythm and clarity. I opens at a clearer than usual (for this symphony) London morning. The main tune is jaunty and the slower sections are streamlined, creating a more intimate feeling. II is slow and plaintive, again intimate, and sweet in tone. The Hanscom cab is in the distance as it should be. The big climax is controlled and the ending beautifully done. III is lively, fast, and well articulated. VW thought of it as a nocturne, but here it is more like a gentle late afternoon. The ending’s return to the mood of II is well done without seeming like a drastic change. After IV’s opening cry, the ensuing march is subdued, legato and lyrical, with less than the usual grandeur and a chorale-like passage that sounds almost religious. The ensuing Allegro is unexpectedly aggressive, creating quite a contrast with everything else. Lewis Foreman’s notes call the big climax near the end a catharsis, but here it sounds like a cataclysm, mainly because it is so dire in comparison to what has come before. Foreman also says that sunlight comes in when the brass discard their mutes for a single chord at the end, but what I heard this time is uneasy, worried, and unsure. London Symphony was a product of a Britain relatively close to the peak of its influence and months before its reckoning with a frightening future. This performance seems to sense the shakiness in Britain that just manifested itself in the vote to leave the European Union.

Manze maintains his revisionist view with the Eighth Symphony (1956). The opening of I is slow and serious, and the faster sections are quick, even darting sometimes, with all voices clear. The hymn section is transparent and clear-headed; but most of all, it sings. Balances are clear. Nothing is romanticized. The conflicted passage toward the end is strict and rhythmic, and the orchestral sound tends to the lean side. The winds-only II brings out the dissonances, and the trumpet solo is rhythmically marked. The rhythms under the woodwind response are more prominent than usual, and the canonic section is solidly played. The whole movement is more serious and impish than playful. The strings-only Cavatina sings with clean lines and, when called for later, very clean polyphony. The Toccata moves right along and the percussion is not heavy so much as it is clear. This movement can be on the wild side in some hands, but here it is controlled as it builds to a full climax. My one complaint is that the chimes and bells lack size and resonance.

Apparently Manze will be taking an interesting revisionist view of Vaughan Williams’s symphonies. It is sometimes said about performances like these that they “clear the cobwebs”. With VW, I’ve always said “hurrah for the cobwebs”, but Manze has made a case for his view with these two performances. They do not replace the great readings from Boult, Previn, Handley, Barbirolli, and others; but they are worthy additions to the VW discography. The sound is fine, and the brief notes are decent introductions to the works.
VENENZIANO: St John Passion
Raffaele Pe (Evangelist), Luca Cervoni (Christ), Marco Bussi (Pilate), Ghislieri Choir, Cappella Neapolitana/ Antonio Florio
Glossa 922609—56 minutes

Born in Bari, Gaetano Veneziano (1656-1716) became one of the important musicians of the Neapolitan school, serving at the Naples court and at the Loreto Conservatory. An organist and choirmaster by trade, his voluminous compositions are entirely religious and survive only in manuscript.

Only gradually are those compositions beginning to be retrieved and studied critically. Offered here is an important one. Veneziano set the Gospel Passion texts of each of the Evangelists. What gives this St John setting particular interest is that it can be placed beside a parallel setting of the text by Veneziano’s more distinguished contemporary, Alessandro Scarlatti—and that has been recorded more than once.

Both of those works give us a taste of the Italian High Baroque approach to the Passion texts. Our stereotypes for this idiom are founded mainly on German Baroque examples. At one end of the gallery are the very special ones of Heinrich Schutz: the text set in a kind of neo-chant austerity, with sparse polyphony for the turbae or “crowd” passages, and all devoid of any instrumental accompaniment. At the other end of the gallery we have the Passions by Bach and such others as Telemann: Late Baroque vocal styles for voices, with choir and ample instruments.

With Veneziano and Scarlatti we enter a stylistic world, as we ought to expect, shaped by the all-important idiom of opera. The words are kept in Latin. The words of the Evangelist and other characters are in a kind of free-ranging recitative style, sometime bordering on arioso, and accompanied by continuo. But at many points, an ensemble of strings and continuo chimes in with a quasi-“orchestral” enhancement. And, at the very end, the Evangelist has a full-blown aria. If you are familiar with Italian opera of the period, you will feel quite at home.

On the basis of this evidence, Veneziano was a skilled and sensitive composer. It would be interesting to hear his other three Passion settings and more of his sacred music. There is ample leftover space here that might have been used for some of that.

The performers make an honest case for the score. The vocal assignments might sound strange to us: a high alto voice, probably originally a castrato but here a countertenor, while Christ is a tenor. Rafael Pe deals very evenly and pleasantly with his narrative role, and Cervoni is an aggressive tenor who almost sound ready to ride off heroically on horseback. Bussi is a lackluster Pilate; the lesser characters are taken by members of the nine-member choir—which sings its own contributions lustily. Director Florio shapes things steadily.

The booklet has extensive notes, and full text with English translation.

VERDI: arias
Leontyne Price, Julia Varady, Anneliese Rothenberger, Arleen Auger, Sena Jurinac, Margaret Price, s; Neil Shicoff, Jose Carreras, Nicolai Gedda, Carlo Bergonzi, Franco Bonisoli, Vladimir Atlantov, t; Piero Cappuccilli, Renato Bruson, Giuseppe Taddei, bar; Munich Radio/ Carlo Franci, Heinz Wallberg, Lamberto Gardelli, Kurt Eichhorn, Hermann Hildebrandt, Arnold Quennet, Giuseppe Patane, Horst Stein
BR 900313—74 minutes

This recording is a potpourri of sumptuous Verdi singing compiled from the archives of the Munich Radio. It includes 15 performances of concert or radio broadcasts from 1968 to 1984 by a veritable who was who of Verdi singers, The performances are in chronological order of composition, beginning with Verdi’s fifth opera, Ernani, through his Shakespearean masterpieces, Otello and Falstaff.

The first singer embodies great Verdi singing: Leontyne Price doing ‘Surta e la notte Ernani! Ernani! Involami!’ which she sang at the Metropolitan opera with Franco Corelli. Price commands the material, with glorious chest tones. American tenor Neil Shicoff as the eponymous hero sings ‘Merce, diletti amici—come rugiada al cespite’ sounding slightly pinched sometimes in the aria, but finishing with a stirring version of the cabaletta. German soprano Julia Varady gives full voice to Lady Macbeth’s deadly ambitions with ‘La luce langue’, written for the 1865 revision. Spanish tenor Jose Carreras sings the closest number to a rarity in the collection, ‘Tutto parea sorridere’ from Il Corsaro.

From the seminal Rigoletto, Piero Cappuccilli displays the essential Verdi baritone with his rendition of ‘Cortigiani, vil razza dannata’, covering the emotional gamut from rage to the pleading despair of a broken man. From the same opera, the irreplaceable Swedish tenor Nicolai Gedda tosses off ‘La donna e mobile’—
raffish, rapidly paced, capturing the rakish, devil-may-care character of the Duke. From *Il Trovatore*, the second opera of Verdi’s great middle period trilogy, Carlo Bergonzi offers a lyrical ‘Ah, si ben mio coll’essere’ with well-executed trills. His more dramatic countryman Franco Bonisoli follows with a concert performance with applauding audience of ‘Di quella pira’ with the expected bevy of ringing high notes. The famous cabaletta is repeated with a choral interlude. Unfortunately, Bonisoli breaks at the conclusion of the final high C. From *La Traviata*, soprano Anneliese Rothenberger, known for her Richard Strauss roles, offers one of the high points of the disc, an electric concert rendition of Violetta’s ‘E strano—Ah, for s’e lui’. She is especially effective in pouring out her heart in the “A quel-l’amor ch’e palpito” sequence of ‘Ah, fors’e lui’.

She turns to ‘Sempre libera’ with flowing reckless abandon, minus the off-stage tenor lines. Veteran Italian baritone Renato Bruson is properly paternal as the elder Germont in ‘Di Provenza il mar’.

The final four selections begin with an American better known for her Mozart and Bach than Verdi, coloratura soprano Arleen Auger. She does a number not written for a Verdi soprano, but rather a light coloratura—the foppish page Oscar in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, a trouser role. She tosses off ‘Saper vorrest’ without a care in the world.

The next two numbers are from the heart of the mature Verdi soprano oeuvre, ‘Tu che le vanita’ from *Don Carlo* and *Aida’s* ‘Ritorna vincitore!’ Croatian soprano Sena Jurinac, who performed Elisabetta under Karajan at Salzburg, delivers a penetrating performance of the conflicted queen’s fourth act scene. The Welsh soprano Margaret Price follows with another aria of a proud woman torn between love and duty: ‘Ritorna vincitore’. She is especially affecting pouring out a plaintive “Numi, pieta.”

Vladimir Atlantov, the tenor mainstay of the Bolshoi Opera in the period and the only Russian artist represented, performs a shattering ‘Niun mi tema’ suicide of Otello with effective dynamic contrast, practically whispering the third and final “morta” and “morescendo.”

The one humorous selection, from *Falstaff* has Giuseppe Taddei, a terrifying Scarpa in the RCA recording of *Tosca* with Leontyne Price, in a vivid rendition of the fat knight’s concluding monolog of Act I, ‘Eh paggio! L’onore! Ladri’ with rollicking vocal inflection, dynamic contrast, and complete characterization.

The singers are well supported by the Munich Radio Orchestra, under eight different conductors. The Bavarian Radio chorus appears for the second Ernani number and in ‘Di quella pira’, but its sound is muffled in the former. The sound quality can vary, but most of it is fine. No texts, but there is a brochure in German and English listing the selections and the artists, with some information about the performers. The brochure includes a useful table of the date, producer, and engineer for each recording.

For the novice this operates as “Verdi’s Greatest Hits”, displaying the Master’s artistic development from early bel canto to the Shakespearean pinnacle. For more experienced listeners it is a precious time capsule of the glorious Verdi singing of the time.

**ROSEN**

**VIARDOT: Songs**

Ina Kancheva, s.; Ludmil Angelov, p.; Kamelia Kader, mz; Christo Taniev, vc

*Toccata 303—69 minutes*

This is an incredibly interesting program. While it is not the only full program of singer and composer Pauline Viardot’s music (Brilliant 94615, N/D 2014), this is the first recording of 14 songs in Russian—settings of texts by Fet, Kotlsov, Lermontov, Pushkin, Turgenev, and Tuchev. It’s a terrific addition to your library for this reason alone.

The variety in poetry and music is terrific. From the dramatic ‘Midnight Phantoms’ to the gentle lullaby ‘Quienly Fades the Evening Light’, there is plenty to enjoy and to marvel at. Viardot’s interest in and facility with the Russian language and literature was not something I was previously aware of. I hold her in even higher regard now.

Performances are pretty good. Kancheva has a beautiful, rich voice, but struggles with the occasional higher, soaring line. There aren’t many, so those moments do stand out. That said, she manages the quick turns so prevalent in the Mazurkas with ease; and it’s quite a nice voice. Angelov’s playing is consistent and clear. The small contributions of Kamelia Kader and Christo Taniev add nice color and shape. Detailed notes, texts, and translations.

**HEISEL**
VILLA-LOBOS: Prole do Bebe 1+2; BARBER: Piano Sonata
Krina Krimsky
North/South 1062 — 63 minutes
Krimsky’s playing is straightforward and rhythm-
ic, but there is not much depth in the sound. While the fourth movement of the Barber
sonata has a fast, impressive tempo, the piano
sounds a little like a midi file, with not much
weight to the playing. III, especially in its soft
passages, seems to miss long phrases. The
same problems appear in the Villa-Lobos
works. In general, a shallower sound reduces
dramatic effect.

KANG
VILLA-LOBOS: Bachianas Brasileiras 1+5;
see PIAZZOLLA
VIVALDI: Bassoon Concertos (3);
WEBER & JOLIVET: concertos
Rodion Tolmachev; Mariinsky Theatre Orches-
tra/ Ivan Stolbov—Melodiya 2413—65 minutes
The Vivaldi concertos, the Weber, and the
Jolivet make for a balanced program. Award-
winning Russian bassoonist Rodion Tolmachev
seems to become more comfortable as the
recording proceeds. He does a workable job
with the Vivaldi concertos, with minimal orna-
mentation. The E-minor Concerto is the most
interesting—he displays more variety in articu-
lation and style. The performance of the Weber
concerto is better, with more overtly impos-
sioned playing and convincing musical lines.
His is an admirable performance of a standard,
much-recorded work. His technique is out-
standing, but the intonation in the middle reg-
ister tends to go a bit flat at louder dynamics.

HIS strongest performance is definitely the
Jolivet concerto, which is perfect for showing
off his soaring high range, velvety low notes,
and ability to shift from stirring declamation to
jazzy, jaunty rhythmic figures to cool, neo-
classical melodic lines with complete ease.
Tolmachev makes sense of every line.

PFEIL
VIVALDI: Concertos
Les Violons Du Roy/ Mathieu Lussier
ATMA 2602 — 57 minutes
This illustrates the very high standard of virtu-
osity now in the best of the early music groups.
I am old enough to remember what the first
attempts at early brass playing were, and the
seeming ease which the two horn players
manage the virtuosic parts of R 569 is impres-
sive—it shows how far early music perform-
ance has come. Les Violons du Roy has an
impressive recording and performance history
at the top of the early music charts. Led here
by Mathieu Lussier, the group sounds tight,
expressive, and on top of the music. One thing
I especially like is that the musical phrase is
always going somewhere; nowhere do we hear
a static marking time.

HAMILTON
VOLLRATH: Piano Concertos (3)
Karolina Rojahn, Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr
Vronsky—Navona 6039—61 minutes
Carl Vollrath was born in New York City in
1931. He’s written a fair amount of music,
much of it for winds and wind ensembles. ARG
has reviewed his chamber pieces with brass on
MMC 2129 (J/F 2003), which Barry Kilpatrick
found “agreeable...but not especially memo-
rable”; clarinet pieces on MMC 2174 (J/F
2009), which Patrick Hanadel liked; and
another batch of clarinet pieces on Navona
5988 (J/A 2015, p 232), which Kraig Lamper
described as employing a light-hearted and
“approachable” mix of vernacular styles.

The three piano concertos on this new
Navona, which the composer subtitles Pastels,
confirm the impression that Vollrath’s music is
easy to listen to but also easy to forget. Quieter
moments, which tend to dominate the concer-
tos, offer placid tunelets that meander along
pleasantly but lack a strong individual profile.
More agitated sections consist mostly of back-
and-forth between boiler-plate piano flourish-
es and orchestral responses but lack urgency
or serious emotional commitment. Another
weakness, at least to me, is that the large-scale
formal unfolding of these works feels distinctly
haphazard and too dependent on repetitive
sequences. Indeed the concertos themselves
are redundant in that they simply sound too
much alike. I’ve listened to the disc several
times and can’t tell one from the other.

But perhaps that’s my failing, not the
music’s. Vollrath’s concertos are, moment by
moment, listener-friendly enough and often ra-
ther pretty, in a tame, superficial way. They’re
nicely played by pianist Karolina Rojahn and
the Moravian Philharmonic, and well enough
captured in Navona’s sonics.

LEHMAN
**Wagner:** *Liebesmahl der Apostel*

see BRUCKNER

**Weber:** Clarinet Concertos

Paul Meyer, Lausanne Chamber Orchestra

MDG 9401922—51 minutes

French-German clarinet-conductor Paul Meyer is soloist and maestro in Carl Maria von Weber's three youthful masterpieces for clarinet and orchestra, all inspired by and written for early 19th Century clarinet virtuoso Heinrich Baermann: Concerto 1 in F minor, Concerto 2 in E-flat, and the Concertino.

The performances are confident, though the sonic forces are more classical than romantic, and the approach is more symphonic than operatic. Meyer is a compelling soloist, offering nice phrasing, excellent fingers, and amazingly quick and agile articulation. Yet his sound has a strained quality, almost to the point of distortion at loud volumes, and his middle and low registers—the throat tones and the chalumeau—can turn cloudy. Nevertheless, the readings are respectable and the interpretations interesting.

**Weckmann:** music

Siebe Henstra, hpsi, clav; Bernard Foccroulle, org; Greta De Reyghere & Jill Feldman, s; James Bowman, ct; Ian Honeyman & Guy De Mey, t; Max Van Egmond, b; Cappella Sancti Michaelis/ Eric Van Nevel; Ricercar Consort, La Fenice/ Jean Tubery—Ricercar 369 [5CD] 6:13

This is a compilation of recordings made from 1988 to 2013. Most were reviewed in ARG at the time.

Matthias Weckmann (1616-74) was an important figure in the musical life of Northern and Central Germany, principally in the electoral court of Dresden and in Hamburg as a prominent organist of the city, with some sojourns to the royal court of Denmark. He was a pupil of Heinrich Schütz at Dresden, and in the 1630s studied the organ as a pupil of Jacob Praetorius in Hamburg. Weckmann left a substantial output of sacred vocal works, music for organ and harpsichord, and instrumental chamber music.

The sacred vocal works were recorded in 1992. They are often referred to as cantatas, but a more accurate designation would be sacred concertos in the tradition derived from Schütz. Most consist of a series of contrasted sections rather than fully developed and free-standing movements. There are some extended instrumental introductions and interludes, and Weckmann sometimes indulges in audacious chromatic writing.

The singers here are some of the outstanding early music vocalists of their generation. The instrumentalists of the Ricercar Consort produce an unequivocal “period” sound. The string tone (violins and viols) has a biting edge, as was common when many artists were keen to distinguish the sound of period instruments from modern ones. In the end, these are magnificent performances of music that is well worth getting to know. As I said when I reviewed the earlier release (Ricercar 216; J/F 2006), Weckmann’s name may never be a household word, but these performances demonstrate that he is more than a musicological footnote.

The ten instrumental sonatas and nine secular songs were recorded in 1995 (Ricercar 140152; M/J 1997). When most of us think of baroque instrumental sonatas, we are apt to think first of the classic trio sonata for two violins and continuo. Two of Weckmann’s sonatas are trio sonatas, but the eight others are for four obligato parts, and they all involve a combination of string and wind instruments: cornetto (a small version of the cornetto), violin, bassoon, and trombone. The manuscripts allow for the substitution of other instruments. In this recording one of the trio sonatas is played by strings only. Annotator Jerome Lejeune points out that this combination of string and wind instruments was common in Italian churches of the time and conjectures that Weckmann may have written these sonatas for the Collegium Musicum he founded in Hamburg. Barker likens their structure to Purcell’s consort fantasias. Perhaps a more apt comparison would be with Purcell’s trio sonatas—a series of short movements played with little or no pause. Weckmann’s sonatas are remarkably imaginative and colorful, played here with great aplomb by the ensemble La Fenice.

The nine strophic solo songs were written for specific occasions and dedicated to some of the composer’s Hamburg acquaintances. It is as if we are allowed a glimpse of their personal friendships. Barker speaks of Greta De Reyghere’s “deft, light voice” that “fits them very well”. I second that assessment. In each case, there are more stanzas than are recorded here.

According to the booklet, the recording of...
the keyboard works is the earliest in this compilation. It appears to be the only one not previously reviewed in ARG. These works include toccatas and canzonas of the Italian tradition, French dance suites, and variations that suggest the influence of Sweelinck, perhaps as mediated by Weckmann’s teacher, Jacob Praetorius, who studied with Sweelinck. Lejeune suggests that Weckmann’s dance suites are more influenced by the music of lutenists than by the French clavecinists of his period. Another probable influence was Johann Jacob Froberger, who visited the court of Dresden around 1650. He and Weckmann became lifelong friends. The works are played here by Siebe Henstra with a keen understanding of their musical style. Many of these pieces, though fully written out, must sound as spontaneous as an improvisation. Henstra persuasively conveys that with his flexibility of tempo and pacing. He plays three modern instruments based on historical models: a Flemish harpsichord after Johannes Ruckers, an Italian-style harpsichord, and a clavichord based on 17th-Century German models. The recorded sound of the harpsichords is bold, verging on raucous. The microphone placement appears to have been very close—sometimes the player’s breathing is distinctly audible. The ear adjusts to such things. These are very fine performances.

The most recent of these recordings (2012 & 2013) are the organ works played by Bernard Foccroulle. In my review of their prior issue (Ricercar 348; M/J 2015) I observed that the performances are historically informed but not severe. Foccroulle never forgets that he is making music, not just conducting an exercise in historic performance practice. He plays three historic North German instruments: the Stellwagen organ restored by Flentrop at St Katharine Church in Hamburg, the instrument of Berendt Huss and Arp Schnitger at Sts Cosmas & Damian Church in Stade, and the smaller Schnitger organ at St Mauritius Church in Holtern. There are only three free compositions by Weckmann that are unequivocally for the organ, judging from the presence of obbligato pedal writing. Many of the keyboard works for hands alone could have been for harpsichord or organ. Foccroulle considers the toccatas better suited to the harpsichord, but he includes the five canzonas and plays them with very light registrations, perhaps to suggest the sound of a small chamber organ rather than a large church instrument. Siebe Henstra includes them in his recording of the keyboard works, so they appear twice in the current set, allowing the listener to compare and contrast.

The center of gravity in Weckmann’s organ works lies in his sets of variations on chorales and other sacred melodies. Two of them—‘O Lux Beata Trinitas’ and ‘Es Ist das Heil uns Kommende’—stand out for their breadth of treatment and sheer length. Each takes about half an hour. There are several smaller but substantial sets of chorale variations and a set of Magnificat verses. All three instruments are beautifully recorded, and Foccroulle engagingly brings out the gravity, elegance, and occasionally the playfulness of Weckmann’s writing.

These are magnificent recordings, and I heartily recommend them. At the same time, I must point out that there are some signs of haste in the production of this particular compilation. There is some redundancy in the program notes, which appear to have been reprinted from the booklets of the earlier releases. Some of the solo songs are given in the wrong order in the track list. In some instances, where artists are identified as performing on a particular track, the reference is to the prior release rather than the present compilation. There is at least one outright contradiction. The recording of the keyboard works is dated 1988, but two of the instruments used on it are dated 1991 and 1992. But that should by no means deter readers who wish to know the varied and imaginative music of this composer.

GATENS

WEINBERGER: Overture to a Chivalrous Play; 6 Bohemian Songs & Dances; Passacaglia
Jorg Strodthoff, org; German Symphony Berlin/Gerd Albrecht—Capriccio 5272—57 minutes

Jaromir Weinberger (1896-1967) was born near and raised in Prague. That would seem to brand him as the Czech composer that he was, but he was also Jewish with a German name. Since most of Prague’s Jewish musicians spoke German, Weinberger was often thought to be German. The boy was a prodigy. He began his serious music education at the Conservatory in Prague, where he studied with Vitezslav Novak and Vaclav Talich. He moved on to the Conservatory in Leipzig where he worked with Max Reger in the last six months of Reger’s life. For a while he taught at Ithaca College in the United States before returning to Europe to work in Slovakia, Hungary, and then Prague.

Schwanda the Bagpiper, his well-known
opera, was first performed in Prague in 1927, though it did not enter the repertoire until it played in Breslau, Germany in Max Brod’s German translation. After that came more than 2000 performances in just a few years.

The now wealthy Weinberger moved near Vienna and continued to compose. By 1933, he had written four operas. The most interesting to Americans might be The Outcasts of Poker Flat, based on Bret Hart’s novel (shades of Puccini’s Fanciulla del West). His operetta Spring Storms might have advanced his career, but a work by a Jewish composer premiered in Berlin in 1933 did not remain in the repertoire for long. After a few revivals, the score and parts were lost. After the post-Anschluss premiere of Wallenstein in Vienna, Weinberger and his wife fled for America and became US citizens in 1948. He continued to compose, but the only works that enjoyed success in the US were Under the Christmas Tree and Polka and Fugue from Schwanda. The Weinbergers eventually settled in St Petersburg, Florida, where he suffered from depression and ill health. He killed himself with sleeping pills in 1967.

Weinberger described Overture to a Chivalrous Play (1931) as the “the hobbies, deeds, and merits of highly noble Mr Mikulas Dacicky of Heslov, a suitor and drinker, but also a sincere patriot, transposed into music”. That describes the music well. Heslov was a real person (1555-1626), who had a way with sayings still popular in the Czech Republic. Much of the music is playful and/or sneaky, with a good deal of skipping rhythm, like a light Til Eulenspiegel but with a happier, brassy outcome. The lively mood of Schwanda is present.

Weinberger wrote Six Bohemian Songs and Dances (1929) for violin and orchestra (or piano). The idea was to draw on Bohemian folk music and perhaps to connect to his recent success with Schwanda. It is somewhat similar to folk-like works of early Bartok and Kodaly. According to annotator Christian Heindl, I portrays an evening scene at a camp fire. It begins as a soulful Bohemian (or even Hungarian) duet between violin and harp. After the orchestra joins in there are traces of Janacek, particularly Jenufa, and the writing becomes more rhapsodic as the music goes on. II is simpler and quieter at the beginning, interrupted by outbursts of Gypsy-style music before contemplation returns. III is in a similar vein, but leans more to a slow dance sometimes. II and III both have a distinctive yearning quality. The more lively IV is based on one of the themes from Schwanda, though its leisurely and eventually yearning style is more in keeping with the present work. There is also a hint of Dvorak. V is labeled Vivo Cantabile, though there is not much Vivo to it. Nor does it veer far from the contemplative nature of the whole piece. It too is more of a dance, with touches of Dvorak’s Devil and Kate. VI continues as before, though livelier, with the winds carrying most of the weight.

The most serious work here is the Passacaglia for Large Orchestra and Organ (1931). The brass fanfare of the Intrada suggests Janacek’s Sinfonietta. Then there are choral phrases and soon, the entrance of the organ, which joins the orchestra more than it serves as a solo instrument. Here we find somewhat solemn touches of Reger and even Bruckner. The midsection is more chromatic and romantic. The organ opens Passacaglia, the most romantic movement on the program. For some reason, much of it reminds me of the Interlude in Mascagni’s Amico Fritz, though Weinberger is darker, looking to Reger or even someone like Walter Braunfels. The closing in the organ is spooky. The lively Fuga contains more than a little suggestion of the fugue from Schwanda. Running through it is a kind of can- tus firmus on part of the choral theme, which eventually takes over, building to a triumphant Straussian conclusion, Bohemian style.

Weinberger was a good, not a great composer, but his music is entertaining and colorful and certainly worth exploring. The sound and performances suit the music well, and the notes are up to CPO’s usual high standards.

HECHT

WHEELER: Piano Pieces

Donald Berman—Bridge 9463—72 minutes

Scott Wheeler was born in 1952 in Washington, DC and lives in Boston, where he’s been a fixture on the new music scene for quite a while. He founded and conducts the ensemble Dinosaur Annex and has had commissions from the Metropolitan Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, and Washington National Opera. Wasting the Night, an album of his songs, is well worth hearing (Naxos 559658, M/A 2011), but I was less taken with his orchestral music on Crazy Weather (BMOP 1038, J/F 2015).

Wheeler studied with Virgil Thomson, and like his teacher he’s written many miniatures and piano portraits of friends and colleagues. There are similarities to Bolcom, Copland, and Bernstein along with hints of ragtime, pointil-
lism, and jazz. There are titles like ‘Alphabet Dance’, ‘Epithalamion’, ‘Cliff Walk’ (like a cake-walk, but more dangerous and scenic), ‘Green Geese’, and ‘Study in Concord’. The mood is often dreamy or at least meditative—no fire or ice here.

Wheeler can be witty, but he avoids the merely clever; the portraits have real heart to them—even ones like ‘Green Geese’ that use a lot of pop-music figurations.

The pseudo-sonata Flow Chart, at 11 minutes, is by far the longest piece; it’s also the weakest. When the post-minimalist influence is mixed with the pop-romantic style, there’s not enough drama and development to keep it interesting.

Lovers of down-to-earth, intelligent American piano writing should check out this release, officially called Portraits & Tributes. Berman is a superb pianist, and the sonics match his lovely tone. Notes are in English.

**Widor: Organ Symphonies 9+10**

Joseph Nolan—Signum 347—62 minutes

This is the fifth and final volume of Nolan’s complete Widor symphonies. These two are his acknowledged masterpieces in this form and represent the apogee of the French symphonic organ style, conceived by Widor for the organs of Cavaillé-Coll. They were inspired by the architecture of two churches: No. 9 by the gothic splendor of St Ouen in Rouen and No. 10 by the romanesque style of St Sernin in Toulouse. Both churches have important organs by Cavaillé-Coll. It is unfortunate that Nolan did not record Symphonie Gothique on the organ in St Ouen, using instead the organ of La Madeleine in Paris. Symphonie Romane was recorded at St Sernin.

The sound is harsh and unsatisfying: the organs are closely miked and there is no sense of space. This is noticeable when compared to other recordings of these two organs. I found the playing perfunctory and uninteresting. Search out the classic Westminster LP recording by Marcel Dupré of No. 9 at Sulpice; No. 10 by Chorzempa (Philips) and Robilliard (Festivo, the first recording on the restored St Sernin organ) or the complete series by Van Oosten, Van Vliet, and Pincemaille (Solstice—No. 9 at St Ouen; No. 10 at St Sernin). The booklet offers specifications of the organs and confusing notes about the music.

**Wolf: Songs**

Sophie Karthauser, s; Eugene Asti, p

Harmonia Mundi 902245—61 minutes

I’ve admired Karthauser and Asti before (Harmonia Mundi 902179, S/O 2014) and I still do. This program of Hugo Wolf settings of Goethe, Mörike, Eichendorff, including one setting of German painter and poet Robert Reinick (1805-1853), is stunning. The familiar Wolf settings have new life here, and the performances offer compelling reasons to give less familiar songs more attention (including the Reinick). Karthauser’s voice is clear, her diction superb, and her commitment to the text and storytelling energetic and fresh. All of this is echoed by Asti’s supportive and sensitive playing. From the playful ‘Mausfallensprüchlein’ to the desolate ‘Verlassene Mägdelein’ to the ethereal ‘Verschwiegene Liebe’, it’s excellence the whole way. Notes, texts, and translations.

**Wordsworth: Symphonies 1+5; Conflict Overture**

BBC Scottish Symphony/ James Loughran; Stewart Robertson (5)—Lyrita 1121—74 minutes

The composer William Wordsworth (1908-88) actually is related to the poet, who was his great-great grand uncle. In the 1930s he studied with Donald Francis Tovey and evolved a musical language that was nontonal, say like William Schuman, rather than atonal—thus the listener isn’t at sea. His forms are tightly constructed, with dramatic coloring. It’s not always easy listening, but for people who like a bit of headwork in their music, it can be highly rewarding.

His Symphony 1 (1942) starts with a dissonant chord progression leading to a strident theme. A more conciliatory trumpet melody has an important role. The development begins with a transparently voiced fugue. Lest all this sound dour and technical, the music has plenty of dynamic tension. The slow movement is more intimate. Wordsworth reintroduces the trumpet motif from I, helping tie things together. III is a disjointed march, rather like Havergal Brian’s in his Symphonies 8 and 9. IV opens with a slow fugato introduction. Its mood is edgy, defiant even, but winds up in an impressive peroration.

Symphony 5 (1962) is even better and the best I’ve heard of Wordsworth’s symphonies. It is marked andante maestoso, and more than fulfills the description. It’s somewhat static in motion, but includes a wealth of full-voiced
sounds. The first part has a slow-moving melodic line overlaid with resounding decorative patterns on the violins. The movement ends with beautiful high sonorities, pointed by the celeste. In English music, you’d have to go back to the ‘Blue’ movement in Bliss’s Colour Symphony for such indulgence in sheer sonic beauty. The highlight of the middle movement is a flute playing a fractured tarantella to an oddly inconclusive finish. III, like I, begins with a slow fugal intro, developed to a mighty wall of counterpoint suddenly capped by a major triad. The ensuing theme is self-contained, thus easy to catch. There’s a succession of woodwind themes over ringing sounds from the percussion section. A perpetual motion rhythm builds the music to a kitchen sink ending.

Wordsworth got a commission for the Conflict Overture in 1968, just before the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia crushed Alexander Dubček’s gallant, doomed effort to humanize Communism. This may have influenced the approach of Wordsworth, a lifelong pacifist. The music sounds like the later Havergal Brian, earning its title with constantly clashing musical lines. It’s a fairly dissonant work, but the asperities seem to have a destination. In some parts, motor rhythms are over-spanned by longer themes. Toward the end the music turns mysteriously spectral before a determined rapid finish.

Interpretations by both conductors are excellent, as is the playing. The overture and Symphony 1 are in monaural sound; 5 is stereo. They all sound fine.

**ORGAN: Organ Pieces**

Timothy Roberts—Toccatas 332—65 minutes

Timothy Roberts is a long-time early keyboard expert in English music of 17th to 19th centuries. (I recall playing in a concert with him in a church in London.) Although the historian Charles Burney called Wordsworth “very masterly and learned” we know now that some of Burney’s judgements are questionable. But in this case, it is clear that there is learned counterpoint and harmony in this music, even if it is not always inspired. On the other hand, is even Handel always inspired?

These works and given a very convincing rendition, and it’s hard to imagine a more committed performance. The music is always harmonically well wrought, sometimes a bit odd about the edges, and sometimes the ideas are a bit unusual. The music does vary in interest, though that may be more a reflection of the accuracy of its transmission. Some of his best repertoire may be lost; these 24 pieces represent all that survives.

The organ, with its buzzing reeds (vox humana) and characteristic diapasons, is a good example of the English organ of the 18th Century. Indeed, this may be the earliest intact English organ. It has a lovely tutti and great character.

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**ZIPOLI: Keyboard Pieces**

Domenico Zipoli (1688-1726), after studying in Bologna and Rome, published his thin volume of organ music in 1715. He then became a Jesuit missionary and was set to become a priest, but he died of tuberculosis at age 38. His organ music sounds several generations behind its time, except for using seventh chords and some surprising chromaticism. It doesn’t do much for me: it’s mostly boring and static liturgical music. The only things I’d care to hear again are the bizarre Pastorale and Zipoli’s organ arrangement of a Corelli sonata, at the end of the program. Carlo Guandalino plays an organ that was built in 1612, enlarged in 1796. It is tuned in meantone.

The second disc, with Zipoli’s complete extant harpsichord music, has four suites and two sets of variations. Laura Farabollini has a fine touch and lists several awards and top-flight teachers in her note. It’s unfortunate that this program is almost a total loss after the first 15 minutes. That Suite in B minor goes well and establishes some high expectations. After that, some of the harpsichord’s treble notes go flat, and it keeps getting worse. The bad unisons and fifths ruin all the rest of the program. It insults the customer to let things get so out of tune. A competent harpsichord tuner could have fixed all these problems in a few minutes. These things matter! The harpsichord music is attractive, and doesn’t appear to have been recorded much elsewhere.

**American Record Guide**

191
The Young Boulez
Debussy, Bartok, Stravinsky
Concertgebouw Orchestra, Domaine Musicale, BBC Symphony—Praga 250332—80 minutes

Rather than repeat others’ recollections of Boulez’s legendary skills as a conductor, I can share an anecdote of my own: I studied in London in 1986 and attended at least one concert in a series pairing Schoenberg and Mahler conducted by Boulez. I don’t recall the Schoenberg piece, but the Mahler was Das Lied von der Erde. I have to this day never heard a performance like it: the densest textures had a marvelous transparency, and the formal design of the music—which at that time eluded my understanding—appeared with force and clarity.

The concert and studio recordings on this release date from the period 1960 to 1964, and despite the obvious inadequacies of the sound, particularly noticeable in the Debussy Jeux and the early Bartok violin concerto (with Yehudi Menuhin), the performances show the amazing facility Boulez had with this music. Of all the performances, I like best Stravinsky’s Song of the Nightingale, where the timbral shifts take on a structural importance that may or may not have been intended.

Beautiful colors, of course, abound in Boulez’s own music, as in the 1958 Soleil des Eaux recorded here (with the BBC Chorus and soloists Josephine Nendick, Louis Devos, and Barry McDaniel). I will point out one limitation in the performances that may not bother everyone as much as it does me: the music has no joy, no emotional engagement of any kind except perhaps cruelty—this is particularly true in the painfully precise account of Stravinsky’s Symphonies of Wind Instruments. And yes, I know Stravinsky was fond of this approach, though I doubt it would hold a child’s attention—the music itself does a better job of that.

Ms Falletta herself recites miniature, telescoped fairy tales, some familiar, some not (adapted by Charles Perrault), before each movement of Mother Goose. Her voice is pretty and pleasant, one I would have liked as a boy. Both narrators are recorded close-up and enunciate their texts clearly, so they’re easy to understand even while riding in a car.

Utterly silent concert audience.

British Overtures 2
WALTON: Portsmouth Point; LEIGH: Agincourt; BOWEN: Fantasy Overture; SMYTH: The Boatswain’s Mate; ANSELL: Plymouth Hoe; MACKENZIE: Britannia; COATES: The Merry-makers; PARRY: Unwritten Tragedy; QUILTER: Children’s Overture; FOULDS: Le Cabaret
BBC Wales/ Rumon Gamba
Chandos 10898—82 minutes

Volume II in Chandos’s series of British overtures has a few duplications with other labels; but like its predecessor it has plenty of music that’s both unfamiliar and good. Conductor Gamba notes that several of the overtures have a sea theme. It’s not intentional but as unavoidable in music from England as the prairie would be in music about the American West.

The children I know are either too old for this or live far away, so I’m relying on my memory of the voices I liked as a boy, and I wouldn’t have liked Robby Takac, who’s a rock bassist and the narrator here for Carnival. He sounds like comedian Denis Leary, as if he washes down half a pack of Lucky Strike unfiltereds every day with a shot of warm bourbon. His voice is menacing. The text, by composer-comedian Peter Schikele (PDQ Bach), is sardonic and self-deprecating and well beyond the ken of a child. Mr Schikele made a recording of his own back in 1993 (Telarc 80350), and his avuncular, chummy voice better characterizes his text, as you’d expect from a man who has spent decades on stage apologizing for JS Bach’s obscure 21st child. One unique and charming moment of this BPO recording is the very PDQ-esque lightning medley of famous romantic piano concerto tunes in ‘Pianists.’ Takac’s recital of Goethe’s Sorcerer’s Apprentice before Dukas’s piece of the same title is effective enough, though I doubt it would hold a child’s attention—the music itself does a better job of that.

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HASKINS

Classics for Kids
SAINT-SAENS: Carnival of the Animals; DUKAS: Sorcerer’s Apprentice; RAVEL: Mother Goose
Robby Takac, JoAnn Falletta, narr; Buffalo Philharmonic/ JoAnn Falletta
Beau Fleuve 94999—63 minutes

Nobody buys something like this for the performances per se of course, but rest assured these are expertly done and very well recorded.

The real question is: will children like it?
Walter Leigh (1905-42) was a composer mostly of theater music, killed at Tobruk in WW II. He wrote his Agincourt Overture in 1935 for the 25th anniversary of the reign of George V. It's an imposing piece in three main sections. A swashbuckling introduction leads to a march, then Leigh quotes the title song, a hymn in the Dorian mode. The latter, from modestly scored, rustic beginnings gradually opens up to a noble, stirring conclusion. It's a tribute worthy of the decent monarch whose reign it celebrates.

Bowen's Fantasy Overture (1945) is also a rollicking piece. Dame Ethel Smythe's Boatswain's Mate is a fine bit of orchestral writing, making good use of her song, 'March of the Woman.' Today's feminists have really dropped the torch by letting this rousing tune fade from their cultural memory. John Ansell's Plymouth Hoe (1914) quotes, among other tunes, 'The Sailor's Hornpipe' and 'Saucy Arethusa' ingeniously blending them into the music till 'Rule Britannia' caps everything. Plymouth Hoe is a stretch of grassland near that port. It is said that Raleigh bowled there while the Armada was en route.

MacKenzie's Britannia (1894) also incorporates the Sailor's Hornpipe into an outstandingly scored medley. The Merrymakers (1923) by Coates has all the air of a good Korngold movie score. One of its fanfares foretells the music to Elizabeth and Essex.

Quilter's Children's Overture (1919) was a chestnut when I was a kid in London. It's still a pleasure to listen to, but many of the tunes that were once part of any child's heritage in the UK or US are now forgotten. John Foulds's Cabaret, 'Overture to a French Comedy,' is four minutes of solidly colored ebullience. It has not only a good melody, but a good counter-melody (what the Tin Pan Alley boys used to call a two-tune).

The performances are terrific, full of life and humor, with good ensemble and bright tone quality. My ARG colleague Roger Hecht, a trombonist, noted that nobody scores for the brass as well as the Brits. This release will back his claim. Even a conservative work like Parry's Overture to an Unwritten Tragedy (1905) uses the brass constantly to buttress the music for the best effect. Gamba's animated conducting is perfect for these exuberant pieces. One of my soapbox topics is that people don't realize how many great symphonies came out of the last century. A recording like this and its predecessor will let me extend that claim to overtures as well.

O'CONNOR

American Record Guide

Antonio Pedrotti in Prague

RESPIGHI: Roman Trilogy; Boutique Fantasque;
RAVEL: Mother Goose Suite; Pavane; Daphnis & Chloe 2; FALLA: Nights in the Gardens of Spain;
BRAHMS: Haydn Variations; MOUSSORGSKY: Pictures at an Exhibition; DEBUSSY: Afternoon of a Faun; MENDELSSOHN: Symphony 4

Jan Panenka, p; Czech Philharmonic
Supraphon 4199 [3CD] 3:53

Have you ever wondered why the "experts" at recording companies put together some of the box sets they come up with? Take this one. There are some good recordings in this mix, but none compete for top prize. They range from 1951 to 1972. Judging from these recordings, Antonio Pedrotti (1901-75) was a weak disciplinarian, and the Supraphon engineers were often bad. (I list the recording date after each work.)

This is the worst Mother Goose Suite (1962) I've ever heard. The opening flutes are insecure with uncontrolled vibrato, musical phrases are broken with awkward breaths, the beat is rigid and plodding, and rhythmic discipline is a mess—vertical ensemble is horrible. Bernard Haitink with the Concertgebouw Orchestra (Philips) is just the opposite.

The Fountains of Rome (1961) is metronomic without poetry, and the sound is awful—strident violins, dominant brass, and absolutely no transparency (inner details are lost). The pacing of Brahms's Variations (1966) is utterly wooden with excruciating treble sound, awful balances, and poorly tuned strings. In Roman Festivals (1961) when the brass play, all else is a wash. The treble needs taming, and the bass has to be turned up all the way to be heard—this in an extravagant orchestral showpiece! Nor does Pedrotti elicit any subtlety from the players. The Pines of Rome (1972) has fuller, more spacious, atmospheric sound and opens with exciting, disciplined tightness, but dies when it gets to 'The Catacombs'; each note of the melodic legato triplets is articulated—what were Pedrotti and the players thinking? And III moves stiffly with a blatant clarinet solo. Respighi marks IV at 66 beats per minute, but Pedrotti takes it at 54, and the final measures lose their tension. I'm not one to long for the old days of monophon-ic recordings, but no one matches Toscanini and the NBC Symphony on RCA in Respighi's Roman Trilogy—I still get chills, especially in Roman Festivals.

In Nights in the Garden of Spain (1962) the beat is so regular I tapped my toe almost constantly—this in a quintessentially impression-
ist mood piece where the frequent tempo changes are clearly marked and here almost always ignored. Kubelik and Margrit Weber (DG) capture this work’s essence best. Nor is there an ounce of mood in Ravel’s Pavane (1962); phrases are flat and unshaped, and the flutes’ uncontrolled vibrato destroys any serenity. In Mendelssohn’s Italian Symphony (1951 mono), Pedrotti’s rhythmic style is bolt upright right from the start, yet sometimes the tempo rushes, and as IV opens the woodwinds almost tumble over themselves. Here the monophonic sound is so bad it sounds as if the performance was from the pre-tape era (before 1948)—a hollow sound with only the melody line distinct and all else a blur.

What a surprise then that some of the best performances and sound are also from the monaural era. Discipline in Pictures at an Exhibition (1953 mono, Ravel’s orchestration) is excellent, and tempos are traditional but played with verve and crisp attacks. The sound is rich, resonant, and transparent with a solid bass until ‘Baba Yaga’ and ‘The Great Gate of Kiev’, where resonance, bass, and clarity are compromised. And where does the marvelous flow and atmosphere come from in Daphnis and Chloe Suite 2 (1956 mono)? Not an ounce of stiffness. Only the less than polished blend of the woodwinds and occasional excessive wind vibrato detract (the vibrato in the alto flute sounds like the thubbing of a bad motor). The flow in Afternoon of a Faun (1957 mono) is quite good, though a solo flute again breaks up clearly marked legato lines with frequent breaths, like a heavy smoker who hasn’t had any physical exercise for a decade. Also, the extremely nasal tone quality of the solo oboe doesn’t blend with the other players.

The best performance here is the nine Rossini dances Respighi orchestrated for La Boutique Fantasque (1971). The sound is full and transparent, and Pedrotti captures the quick-stroked rhythmic upbeat the CPO does like no other orchestra. This 19-minute suite (it is not the entire ballet) is smartly paced and very colorful.

As the dates show, Pedrotti’s lack of discipline came and went from 1951 to 1972, allowing the Czech Philharmonic to sound like a second-rate ensemble. In these recordings the winds are the orchestra’s weakest section in terms of blend, security, tone, vibrato, and ensemble. I find this quite remarkable! Here we are dealing with one of the world’s greatest orchestras. I just finished listening to Janos Ferencsik’s 1961 recording of Beethoven’s Symphonies 2 and 4 with the CPO, and Karel Sejna’s stunning 1959 recording of Dvorák’s Slavonic Dances; in both the orchestra is stellar and the engineering fine. And there is no need to refresh my memory of how superb Karel Ancerl, music director from 1950 to 1968, made this orchestra sound; some of the movements from his excerpts from Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet still make my jaw drop. But then, as I always tell friends when they ask if I’m going to a particular concert, it’s not the music they’re playing but the person on the podium who will make all the difference. Which brings me back to my opening thought: why would someone at Supraphon put together this Pedrotti box set?

**TrioSono**

**Haydn, Klughardt, Schneider**

Genuin 16426—67 minutes

TrioSono play like they’ve been together for decades, not just since 2012. Violinist Karl Heirich Niebuhr is a member of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Matthias Wilde is a cellist in the Dresden State Orchestra. Pianist Hiroko Kudo is Japanese by nationality but apparently has ties to Canada and lives in Germany. She is also the central performer in all three trios.

Haydn’s Trio 27 in C, one of his more often played, is better described as a work for piano with string accompaniment filling in the harmonic flow. Kudo sets a bright pace with upturned rhythms and spry, lithe melodic phrasing. Her intelligence and warmth are evident as she contrasts long lyrical passages with ones made up of rhythmic short phrases. She takes the Andante at a relaxed walking pace, while peppering it with Haydn’s teasing figures. The final Presto is a complete tease, full of light, quick strokes.

The other two works here are world premiere recordings. In the liner notes Wilde says he enjoys digging up 19th-Century programs as a way of finding out what works, unheard today, were popular then. One was by Friedrich Schneider (1786-1853), who was soloist for the world premiere of Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto. His 24-minute Piano Trio in E-flat, Op. 38, was written in 1816 and, like the Haydn, is for piano with string accompaniment. It’s in four movements, like a Beethoven symphony: Sonata-Allegro, Larghetto, Scherzando, and Presto. Despite the superb performance, the first two movements are bor-
ing because the material is so thin; uninteresting phrases are followed by repetitive imitations that aren’t any cleverer than the source material. The Scherzando has elements of Schubert, which TrioSono make lyrical and playful. They also make the finale really effervescent, despite the second-tier material.

The other world premiere recording is the Trio in B, Op. 47, written in 1885-86 by August Klughardt (1847-1902). It develops much in the way a Brahms piano trio does, not just harmonically but in the equal status of all three instruments. Its melodies are longer-lined and its harmonic progressions and development sections more dramatic. Yet even here Kudo has the lead role, linking the parts of I into a whole. It is a soulful Adagio cantabile, especially with the group’s expressive phrasing, touches of rubato, and elegant flourishes. The final movement, more of a rondo, starts as a fugue, but the second theme is folk-driven, and the performance is vital and infectious. I wouldn’t call Klughardt’s Trio a great work, but it really is worth resurrecting.

When all is said and done, I have no fixed awareness of the two string players, partly because of the music itself, but partly because the engineering gives a more distinct image of the piano. At first in the Haydn, the piano had a kind of resonant or bell-like edge that projects more strongly than the strings. By the time I got to the Schneider, I realized that didn’t bother me anymore.

Two world premieres, superb performances, and a mix of top-, second-, and third-tier works.

**Bassoon Trios**

**DEVINNE:** Sonata in C; **DONIZETTI:** Trio in F; **BEETHOVEN:** Trio for piano, flute, bassoon; **MORLACCHI-TORRIANI:** Duetto concertato

Massimo Data, bn; Mario Carbotta, fl; Piero Barbareschi, p—Brilliant 95251—69 minutes

Although titled “Bassoon Trios”, this release contains three trios for flute, bassoon, and piano and a duet for flute and bassoon. The program opens with the Devienne sonata. Devienne played both wind instruments well, and the writing is stylish and demanding. It has the feel of a duo concerto with the piano standing in for orchestra, but it is indeed written for this grouping, originally described by the composer as a sonata for piano with flute and bassoon obbligato.

Donizetti, best known for his operas, also wrote a number of instrumental works. This trio consists of two movements, Larghetto and Allegro, suggestive of the aria-and-cabaletta design of many bel canto arias. This piece is light and tuneful if insubstantial. The performers play with pleasing stylistic touches, particularly the nicely phrased conversational exchanges between the flute and bassoon in II. Unfortunately, there are a number of intonation problems, especially in the bassoon, and the melodic lines in the flute are sometimes marred by clipped-off phrase endings.

The Beethoven trio is an early work, written when the composer was in his late teens, and does not bear an opus number. It’s a substantial piece, lasting some 26 minutes, with a virtuosic piano part and expressive writing for the winds that looks forward to Beethoven’s middle period.

The Duet on themes of Verdi was composed around 1850 by flutist Pietro Marlacchi and bassoonist Antonio Torriani, who were students together at the Milan Conservatory at the time. Alas, none of the best known Verdi tunes end up in this medley, and it’s more of a

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**Brass Septet 4**

Gabrieli, Lassus, Palestrina, Victoria

Septura—Naxos 573526—68 minutes

This is the fourth in a planned ten-album Naxos series by this English brass septet (J/F 2015: 189; N/D 2015: 175). The players are so fundamentally good—such stable tone at all times, such ease of tuning and blending with each other—that one suspects a program like this might not have taken long to prepare and record.

The readings of four motets by Tomas Luis de Victoria (1558-1611) are dramatic, reverent, and beautifully shaped. Six pieces by Giovanni Gabrieli (1557-1612) include three four-part canzonas (familiar to brass players) that are tastefully ornamented. Canzona 2 is the most familiar of the bunch, and Simon Cox’s arrangement has it set quite high in pitch. Sep-tura’s style in three Gabrieli motets (‘Exultavit cor meum,’ ‘Sancta Maria, succure miseris,’ and ‘Cantate Domino’) is rather bouncy, not as smooth as might be expected for vocal works.

The playing in three movements of the Pope Marcellus Mass (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Benedictus) by Palestrina, and in seven liturgical madrigals from Lagrime di San Pietro (Tears of St Peter) is very lyrical, smooth, blended, and beautiful. But it is 35 minutes of mind-numbing sameness.

KILPATRICK

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bravura showpiece than a serious composition.

In general, the playing here is stylish and elegant, with well coordinated musical lines. Data has a rich, singing sound and fluid technique, but also some intonation problems and “barked” articulations in the mid-range. Pianist Baereschi plays with fluent technique and clear articulation, but Caroubia’s dropped phrase endings are jarring. The Devienne trio has not been recorded before.

**Baroque Bassoon Concertos from Dresden**

GRAUN: Concerto; REICHENAUER: Concertos in F & C; TELEMANN: 2-Horn Concerto; HORNECK: Concerto in E-flat

Erik Reike, bn; Harald Heim, Klaus Gayer, hn; Dresden Chamber Soloists/ Helmut Branny
Ars 38198—60 minutes

Dresden has a long history as an important musical and cultural center. Thanks to Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755), a concertmaster of the Dresden court orchestra, a large collection of instrumental music from the early 18th Century was acquired by the Dresden court. It was stored for many years in “Music Cabinet No. 2” which lent its name to the entire collection. The music on this recording was part of that group. The Dresden Chamber Soloists perform early music on modern instruments, but in a style that reflects the performance practices of the time. That is deeply satisfying to people who prefer the sound of the more technically advanced instruments of today (especially double reeds).

This recital consists of four bassoon concertos and the concerto for two horns by Telemann, which occurs at the mid-point of the program. Johann Gottlieb Graun was a student of Pisendel. His concerto, in C, is an amiable, engaging piece. It is written for just bassoon and basso continuo, showing off Reike’s stylish cantabile playing. The two Reichenauer concertos are fiendishly difficult, and one can only imagine the challenges they posed to the bassoonists of their day.

Reike displays huge facility and command of the instrument, tackling these passages with fluency and ease. The outer movements of the Hornneck concerto pose similar challenges, bracketing a lovely, lilting Sicilian slow movement. Telemann wrote several concertos for two horns, and this one found its way into Cabinet 2. This piece has four movements, a bit unusual for a Baroque concerto. The opening movement, Polonaise, is majestic and noble, suitable for a solemn occasion. It is followed by a sprightly fast movement, then a melancholy slow movement accentuating the solo violin and the organ. It ends with a rollicking “hunting horn” conversation between the two soloists. Harald Heim and and Klaus Gayer match one another perfectly in style and articulation. Conductor Helmut Branny and the Dresden Chamber Soloists supply sensitive and assured support.

The sound quality is excellent, and the liner notes are detailed and helpful.

**Hypersuite**

BACH: Solo Cello Suite 2; CARTER: Figment 1; GOLIJOV: Omaramor; NORDHEIM: Clamavi; VERDIE; Jire che Tango; SESSIONS: 6 Pieces
Darrett Adkins—Oberlin 13-02—60 minutes

Now here’s a fresh approach to a solo cello recital. Adkins starts out with the prelude to the Bach suite, then gives us Elliott Carter’s modernistically entertaining Figment 1. Then it’s back to Bach’s Allemande with added ornaments, mostly trilly in nature. Now we have Osvaldo Golijov’s Omaramor, a more richly romantic work, partly because the cello’s C string is tuned down to B. Bach to the Courante, followed by Arne Nordheim’s Clamavi that is reviewed in this issue as played on the double bass! It is a rather bassy piece even on the cello, as well as a trebly one in contrast. It seems centered around the open G string at first. Later it rises to the skies quite expressively, leading into the thoughtful Bach Sarabande. Now we meet Adriana Verdi in an amusing dance replete with sound effects, nicely joined by the Bach Minuets. Roger Sessions takes over with his suite of relatively abstract music and the program then ends with Bach’s Gigue.

Adkins plays all of this material with involvement and only an occasional questionable note. It is a program calculated to make one think about the actual meaning of music, how and why we listen to it and what it does to our feelings. This is further complicated by the way Adkins improvises in his Bach performances. Does he do the same for the contemporary pieces he plays? No, but his Bach blends curiously with the rest because he seldom leaves it to make its own point but seems to be trying to modernize it so it will not contrast too strongly with the rest of the program. You’d better hear it for yourself.

D MOORE

September/October 2016
Pardessus de Viole

BARRIERE: Book 5, Sonata 4; CAIX d’HEREL: Book 5, Suite in D minor; BOISMORTIER: Sonata 2, op 61; DOLLE: op 4, Book 2, Sonata 1; LA ROSA: La Favorite, La Precieuse, Les Regrets

MELISANDE Corriveau: Erich Milnes, hpsi

ATMA 2729—60 minutes

The pardessus de viole is a viola da gamba that covers about the range of today’s violin, though it is held between the legs somewhat like a cello, but without reaching the ground. It was considered a ladies instrument in its time—the 1700s. Don’t look now, but this conforms to that tradition. Hi, Melisande!

As far as I can determine, little of the music recorded here has appeared on records before. These are all fine French composers of the time of Bach and his boys, and they write with poetic personality and enjoyable verve. Corriveau and Milnes play sensitively and stylistically. The only minus aspect to my ears is that the otherwise well-balanced recording is a bit lacking in high frequencies when played at a normal setting. You can turn up the highs a bit and that problem may be solved. At any rate, this is a lovely collection of suites and sonatas played with sensitive phrasing and polished to a turn.

D MOORE

Transitions

DAVIDOVSKY: Synchronisms 3; REICH: Cello Counterpoint; FULLER: Speak of the Spring; GOSFIELD: 4 Roses & a 5-Spot; THORVALDSDOTTIR: Transitions; LA ROSA: flexura

Michael Nicolas, vc

Sono Luminus 92202—61 minutes

Here is another program of varied compositions for solo cello, etc. Mario Davidovsky opens the show with a 5-minute piece that I know intimately since it also opens my solo LP from back in the 1960s. Nicolas plays it with polish and pizzazz. Then Steve Reich steps in with a lively if somewhat unvaried work for numerous cellos, all played by Nicolas, presumably. David Fulmer’s Speak of the Spring appears to employ extra sushi, though the nature of the sound effects may be all played on the cello. It is a moody work in a pleasantly atonal idiom.

Now we go for the Anns among us. Annie Gosfield divides her piece into two parts, apparently for cello and an out-of-tune piano-like instrument. The cello is out of tune as well, so it all fits together, though not like a glove. Boy, do I hate this sound! Anna Thorvaldsdottrir continues the out-of-tune trend, but she handles it in a more conscious way, turning the cello around and about while it is played. Her piece is a more thoughtful one, less stuck on one out-of-tune note than Annie’s.

Jaime E. Oliver La Rosa’s piece adds to the one or two cellos everything that goes on outside my window from birdsongs to cars and trucks, airplanes and wind and rain. It is sonically entertaining but, like the rest, musically unappealing.

I don’t see the point of this program. If it appeals to you, it seems played with spirit. The liner notes have no information about the composers or the music.

D MOORE

Matryoshka Blues

HANDEL: Larghetto (op 1:13); SCHNITTKE: Cello Sonata 1; FAURE: Elegie; DAVIS: Matryoshka Blues; SCRIABIN: Etude, op 8:11; PROKOFIEFF: EFF: March from Love for 3 Oranges; SAINT-SAENS: The Swan

Misha Quint, vc; Svetlana Gorokhovich, p

Blue Griffin 395—55 minutes

Here is a curious cello program combining the known and unknown in a sort of stream-of-consciousness order as listed above. It opens with a slow movement from a Handel violin sonata and then gives us the major work of the program, Alfred Schnittke’s oft-recorded Cello Sonata 1 played in a sensitive but somewhat unpolished manner that sent me back to the Cello Overview (M/A 2009) to see what the options are. If the piece is your major concern, you might do the same since. This dramatic and soulful work is brought back to earth and beauty by the Fauré Elegie, a most memorable and oft-recorded piece again played intensely but with improvisational tone quality.

Now we meet the purpose of this production, according to the title. Nathan Davis (b. 1937) is a black composer whose background is in jazz. His music has been recorded before. In my collection there’s a percussion duo called Diving Bell (Travel Diary, Bridge 9370; M/J 2012) that both Kraig Lamper and I enjoyed. Matryoshka Blues is a considerable piece lasting 15 minutes that contrasts a number of blues styles in an improvisational way that is effective and enjoyable. Then it’s back to the known with a transcription of a familiar Scriabin tune and the jaunty Prokofieff march, finally leading us out to pasture with Saint-Saens’s swan.

This material is played with a somewhat jazzy approach; the entire program appears to be improvised on the spur of the moment. I found it enjoyable, though as the title admits,
the work by Davis is the only new one, written for the cellist. The recording is quite good.

**Cello Concertos**

Haydn (in C), CPE Bach (B-flat), Mozart

Valentin Radutiu; Munich Chamber Orchestra/Stephan Frucht—Hanssler 16038—69 minutes

Vibrato Alert!

The strings play with no vibrato, so they scrape and squeak and sound terrible. I’m sure they think they are doing the right thing, but who can stand to listen to it?

The Mozart is the E-flat Horn Concerto arranged for cello by Gaspar Cassado and played in the key of D. It sounds very good on the cello. The cellist uses cadenzas in the Haydn by Tobias Schneid that are rarely heard and seem rather weird—certainly foreign to Haydn. Tempos here are not outrageous; Adagio is reasonably slow, which is rare with PPP. (One of the PPP dogmas is that slow tempos are romantic and don’t belong in classical-period music.)

The Mozart is unusual—and nicely done—so you might want this for that. There are many recordings of the other two concertos, and this is not worth bothering with. A charming, old-fashioned recording of the CPE Bach led by Carlos Kleiber was reviewed under Teleman (J/F 2012).

**Double-Basses**

NORDHEIM: 3 Stanzas for Bass Alone; Partita for 6 Basses; Clamavi; LIDHOLM: Fantasia on Laudi; SALLINEN: Elegia—Sebastian Knight’ille; LUTOSLAWSKI: Grave—Metamorphoses

Dan Styffe, Hakon Thelin, Karol Ciesluk, Octophonijon Asnes, Eskild Abelseth, Mathias Sundevolseth, db; Ingrid Andsnes, p

Simax 1342—51 minutes

Let’s see if we can straighten this one out. To begin with, the program is played primarily by bassist Dan Styffe with a little help from his friends. Most of the music was originally for cello solo. The Lutoslawski was originally for cello and piano. Nordheim’s 3 Stanzas is the only piece originally for solo bass, but his Partita employs all of the bassists. Clear?

No, it isn’t. The Nordheim Stanzas and Partita are reversed on the disc, though the timings are not. The name of the first movement of the Partita is listed as Passionato on the listing but as Passinato in the notes that tell us it “implies to filter or to sift.” At least the descriptions in the liner notes appear to be accurate.

The music recorded here would make an effective program in its way except that Styffe is not the most accurate player, and all of these works but the Lidholm and Sallinen transcriptions are already in my collection played on the instruments they were written for. I think I can do without this one.

**Mannheim Cellists**

TRIKLIR: Sonata 6; FILZ: Sonatas, op 5:1+3; SCHETKY: Sonata, op 4:3; RITTER: Sonata 2

Marco Testori; Davide Pozzi, fp

Passacaille 1018—73 minutes

This is one of the most virtuosic cello recordings I have heard in some time. The compositional styles vary a bit, but the general idiom is early classical.

Jean Balthasar Triklir’s (1750-1813) sonata is the most technically demanding, spending a lot of time in a very high register leaping about madly. It is a colorful work well worth investigating. Anton Filtz or Fils (1733-60) is the earliest in compositional style, writing in a compact but just as demanding technical world. He died at 27 so enjoy him while you can.

Johann Georg Christoph Schetky (1737-1824) is a little less overtly difficult to play, but also enjoyable musically. Peter Ritter (1763-1846) was a long-lived and more clearly classical composer than the preceding.

All of these composers are little known today and none of them are stylistically very memorable. This does not mean they are not worth hearing. They are all replete with surprises and imaginative writing and cast a new light on the music of this period since they are so little known and do not resemble the pieces we usually hear from Haydn to Beethoven.

Using a fortepiano rather than the usual grand makes it easier on the cellist, who doesn’t have to force his tone to make his presence felt. These players work together with sensitivity. I could wish that Testori was a bit more polished in his handling of some of the phrases, but he has a tough row to hoe in this program. On the other side of the fence, this music is unavailable elsewhere except the Triklir Sonata, which appeared recently, played and arranged rather far from the original basso continuo line by cellist Fedor Amosov (Centaur 3408, J/F 2016). The present recording presents the music in a more realistic light, though Testori is not quite Amosov’s equal in cello technique. But I think this is
worth your consideration: there is much new and attractive material played with involvement. The recording is clear and clean.

D. MOORE

**British Clarinet Concertos 2**

Britten, Cooke, Finzi, Mathias

Michael Collins; BBC Symphony/ Stephen Bryant Chandos 10891—83 minutes

In 2012, English clarinet soloist Michael Collins and the BBC Symphony issued British Clarinet Concertos, masterworks for clarinet and orchestra by Charles Stanford, Gerald Finzi, and Malcolm Arnold (March/April 2013). Here is a sequel that goes down new corridors.

There are two original contributions, both for British orchestral clarinetist Gervase de Peyer—the Arnold Cooke concerto (1955) and one by William Mathias (1975). A one-time student of Paul Hindemith in Berlin, Cooke adopted the German composer’s view of harmony and form, yet his music still has roots in English nationalism. By contrast, the Welsh-born Mathias strives for a more international idiom, calling for modernist soundscapes, colorful percussion, and an aggressive rhythmic drive.

The album begins with two highly interesting creations—the Benjamin Britten Movements of a Clarinet Concerto (1942) and the Gerald Finzi Bagatelles (1943). In 1939, the pacifist Britten sailed to the United States for an extended visit, where in late 1941 the American bandleader Benny Goodman asked him for a concerto. Britten finished a sketch for an opening movement, but when the US entered the war after Pearl Harbor, he chose to return home. As he left New York, US Customs agents seized the sketch fearing that the manuscript contained state secrets, and by the time his sketch was released and returned to him Britten was too busy with his opera Peter Grimes (1945) to proceed with Goodman’s request.

Near the end of Britten’s life the budding composer Colin Matthews served as his assistant, and in 1989 he orchestrated the concerto sketch according to the notes on the manuscript. The premiere by Michael Collins in London the very next year impressed Matthews, and in 2007 he decided to craft two companion movements out of Britten’s music from the same time period. For the slow movement he adopted the ‘Mazurka Elegiaca’ for two pianos, a contribution to a set of pieces by several composers to commemorate Polish pianist, composer, and statesman Ignacy Paderewski, who had died in June 1941 in New York. For the finale Matthews turned to a 1943 draft for an orchestral piece that Britten intended as a “Sonata for Orchestra”. Once again, Collins championed the effort, and in 2008 he premiered the three-part Movements of a Clarinet Concerto with the Northern Sinfonia.

In January 1943, the young clarinet-and-piano duo Pauline Juler and Howard Ferguson introduced the Finzi Bagatelles in the wartime series of concerts at the National Gallery of London, and it remains a recital favorite. Violinist Lawrence Ashmore, a member of the composer’s Newbury String Players early in his career, recalled it fondly; and in 1989, the American clarinetist Richard Stoltzman gave him the opportunity to give the work a new angle. During plans to record the Finzi Clarinet Concerto, Stoltzman asked Ashmore, then an orchestrator for stage and film, to cast the piano part of the Bagatelles for string orchestra. The result drew rave reviews in the clarinet world; and maybe in a nod to the late Ashmore, who died in 2013, Collins revisits the arrangement here.

The British clarinet world is a peculiar paradox—the timbral dialect can be bothersome to some clarinet purists, but British composers have a magnificent understanding of the instrument. The Matthews concept of a “British Clarinet Concerto” is exceptional, from the choice of the source material to the meticulous orchestration; and the Ashmore casting of the Finzi for strings reveals a new poignancy in the score and in the clarinet. Although the Cooke Concerto is an austere and demanding post-romantic essay like the Nielsen Concerto three decades earlier, the clarinet still has room for pastoral utterances; and while the mystery and dark energy of the Mathias Concerto is a pronounced departure from English grace and charm, the work is an engaging showpiece for both soloist and orchestra.

The performances are strong. Collins has a robust soloist personality, a keen expressive character, and breathtaking technique and stamina. He controls his soft reed well, sporting a pleasant and supple tone, but his sound can spread at loud volumes and in marcato articulation, and his pitch can sag in the high register. The BBC Symphony plays with the professionalism and artistic commitment of a world class ensemble, treating the concertos as serious symphonic scores and infusing the Finzi with perfect neo-classical warmth and lyricism.

HANUDEL

*American Record Guide*
A Place Toward Other Places

ALBRIGHT: Clarinet Quintet; BROENING: Concerto; CARTER: Concerto
Richard Hawkins; Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble/ Timothy Weiss
Oberlin 13-01 [2CD] 91 minutes

Founded 1865 in Lorain County, Ohio, a 45-minute drive west of Cleveland, the Oberlin Conservatory was the second collegiate school of music to take root in America, and it remains the oldest one still operating.

Here, on the school's own label, clarinet professor Richard Hawkins and conducting professor Timothy Weiss lead the Conservatory students in an avant-garde program: Elliott Carter's Clarinet Concerto, written for the 20th anniversary of the Ensemble InterContemporain in Paris; University of Richmond (VA) composer Benjamin Broening's Clarinet Concerto, first written for Hawkins in 1996 and later expanded and revised; and the late University of Michigan composer William Albright's Clarinet Quintet, whose second movement follows in the footsteps of the Mozart Clarinet Quintet and the Brahms with a lengthy and creative theme-and-variations. California-based composer Aaron Helgeson offers an unaccompanied clarinet soliloquy titled 'A Place toward Other Places.'

The music is highly abstract, technically demanding, and will likely speak only to a select few, yet Hawkins and the Oberlin ensemble are deeply committed, rendering each selection with admirable skill, drive, and feeling. The Carter is the colorful and ethereal clarinet concerto that Pierre Boulez never wrote; the Broening is a bold atmospheric work in the spirit of Joseph Schwantner; and the Albright has the otherworldly air of the Second Viennese School. Hawkins produces a smooth, covered sound that works beautifully in the chamber ensemble and melts effortlessly into the ultramodern orchestral soup; and the Oberlin students play with sensitivity and authority. The concluding Helgeson is a muted minimalist essay that allows Hawkins to display his mastery of multiphonics and other extended techniques.

Vocalises-Etudes

Auric, Cantelouve, Dukas, Gretchaninoff, Honegger, Ibert, Martinu, Messiaen, Milhaud, Nielsen, Poulenc, Ravel, Roussel, Schmitt, Tcherepnin, Vierne, Villa-Lobos
Harry White, sax; Edward Rushton, p
BIS 9056—88 minutes

In 1755 the former Paris Opera tenor and renowned voice teacher Jean-Antoine Berard published “The Art of Song”, a three-part treatise that discusses the role of human anatomy in singing, analyzes each letter of the French alphabet for the proper enunciation, describes the role of ornaments and suggests a better way to notate them, and presents a series of songs culled from the works of Lully and Rameau, all stripped of text and replaced with a vowel.

These songs introduced a new genre known as the vocalise, an exercise that compelled the student to concentrate on the fundamentals of singing, and it became a staple of voice pedagogues all through Europe and the United States.

By the end of the 19th Century, though, the vocalise had become a chore, appearing in books as if produced by a machine. In 1906, Paris Conservatory voice professor Amedee-Landely Hettich decided to challenge the status quo; and he asked his superior, the famous Conservatory director Gabriel Fauré, to write a vocalise with artistic merit. The endeavor inspired Hettich to approach other composers, and by the time he died in 1937 he had collected over 100 new vocalises. Most of the contributions were French, yet a handful reached both to the east and the west, including Polish composer Karol Szymanowski, Danish composer Carl Nielsen, Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, and American composer Aaron Copland.

Here, two Swiss expatriates present 23 of Hettich’s commissions on saxophone and piano. Mississippi native Harry White is a former Sigurd Rascher protege who teaches saxophone at the Zurich conservatory, and British-born Edward Rushton is a noted keyboardist-composer who teaches piano accompaniment in Lucerne.

The recital is well done and enjoyable. The selections have a wonderful variety of color and character, and they are delivered with great care, thought, and vigor. White boasts an easy and natural lyricism, especially in soft and tender moments; and Rushton plays with a warm and elegant touch. The Rascher influence is palpable—at a mezzo-forte and above

GEORGE ORWELL
White’s tone is more open and diffuse—and when the music calls for more drama, Rushton tends to be cautious out of respect to the soloist. Still, classical saxophonists will find these arrangements valuable additions to the repertoire.

**HANUDEL**

**Breathe**
William Dowdall, fl—Atoll 111—80 minutes

The selections involve the full range of avant-garde playing techniques as well as a new invention, the headjoint developed by Robert Dick that makes glissandi far more possible than on a regular flute. An assortment of Irish and New Zealand composers wrote these pieces between 1978 and 2010. They employ the flute family from bass through piccolo, and sources of inspiration range from Indian classical music through Poe’s 1838 novel The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket. Whatever flute he plays, William Dowdall is a master musician and storyteller who evokes all the mystery, wonder, explosive excitement, and tranquility these compositions present.

The title work, written in 2010, includes breath and voice sounds from Italian visual artist Alice Grassi. The two met while artists-in-residence at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. People who are fans of modernism and the avant-garde should enjoy this collection, though the general listener may be put off by a couple of pieces. As far as modernist music goes, these selections are very easy to grasp and not unpleasant to hear, especially given the fine sound, which has liveliness and body yet reveals every detail and nuance down to the softest pianissimo. Each page in the booklet gives a brief description of the piece and biography of the composer, with references to web sites for listeners who are interested in finding out more.

**FRENCH**

**The Genteel Companion**
Richard Harvey, rec; others
Altus 10—68 minutes

This baroque bounty takes its name from a collection published in 1683 and expands on a 50-minute program released with the same name by ASV in 1986. A 10-page booklet attached to the tri-fold case offers excellent background.

There are concertos by Telemann and John Baston where the strings play without vibrato and can be acerbic when they swell, but the recorder adds a pleasant balm to the sound of the ensemble. Although the playing in the Chedeville Vivaldi Sonata is a bit dull, overall I enjoyed a singing sound varied by staccatos and ornaments and did not mind Harvey’s tendency to hold notes their full value. The assortment of genres and nationalities makes this a pleasant survey of early to late baroque recorder pieces. For another, look up Early Birds, which Peter Loewen praised not long ago (J/F 2016: 183).

**GORMAN**

**Petite Delights—Flute & Harp**

**DEBUSSY:** In the Boat; Syrinx; **GAUBERT:** Madrigal; **GLINKA:** Nocturne; **SAINT-SAÈNS:** Romance; **NIELSEN:** Fog Is Lifting; **SIBINGA:** 3 Images; **RAVEL:** Piece in the Form of a Habanera; **IBERT:** 2 Interludes; **FAURE:** Contest Piece; **MOUQUET:** Flute of Pan
Limor Toren-Immerman, v; Ariosos
Centaur 3484—65 minutes

The members of Ariosos are Cynthia Ellis, piccolo with the Pacific Symphony, and Michelle Temple, principal harp with the Santa Barbara Symphony and Opera Santa Barbara. In Glinka’s Nocturne for solo harp, Temple has an expressive flow and shapes phrases with lovely rubato, giving the work lyricism and texture. She is just the opposite of Ellis, whose note values are literal, pacing most often rigid, and expression flat-lined most of the time. Worst of all, she breaks up relatively short phrases with breaths in the wrong places, as if she is physically out of shape and can’t sustain long lines (her audible breaths are also irritating). Her playing doesn’t drown out Temple’s, but the music is such that you listen mainly to the flute.

The violinist, whose pitch seems just a bit shy sometimes, is used only in Ibert’s Two Interludes and sounds as if she were recorded separately in a different wiry acoustic. Unless you’re looking for a recording of the 10-minute Trois Images by composer Theo Snit Sibinga (1899–1958), who was born in Indonesia but spent his adult life in Holland, or the 15-minute, three-movement Flute of Pan (1906) by Jules Mouquet, pass on this one. [There is no other recording of the Mouquet—a very nice piece. —Ed]

The spiritual is a quality perceived as other than physical or purely intellectual. It is not opposed to the natural; it is a natural part of life.

**WILLIAM JAMES**
**Latin American & Spanish Flute**  
Guastavino, Guridi, Lasala, Piazzolla, Villa-Lobos  
Stephanie Jutt; Elena Abend, Pablo Zinger, p  
Albany 1620—76 minutes

Most of these selections are songs, and the texts are presented in Spanish and English in the booklet. Listeners who expect to find sassy Latin stereotypes will be disappointed yet pleased to discover the lyrical beauty that still derives its sense of place from Argentina, Brazil, and Basque Spain—plus a little from France. Stephanie Jutt is a marvelous flutist who plays with excellent control yet almost boundless energy. Her collaborators are superb at capturing and rendering the moods these pieces convey. Flutists and non-flutists alike are in for some delightful discoveries.  

**French Sonatas & Suites**  
Blavet, Chedeville, Cheron, Dieupart, Hotteterre, Leclair, Marais, Philidor  
Dan Laurin, rec; Domen Marincic, vc; Anna Paradiso—BIS 2185 [SACD] 85 minutes

A program of French baroque sonatas and suites may not seem all that enchanting unless Dan Laurin is playing it. This survey attests to the high general level of composers and (amateur) performers in early 18th Century France. I’m particularly impressed by the gravity of a sonata by Philidor with two movements that are fugues and opening with a marvelous Lentement.

The balance is distributed among the three players, with the cello so prominent that you don’t have to listen for it when its part exchanges with the treble. The ornaments from Laurin are lavish and filled with style and glee. Tempos are chosen well to suit the style, but thrown off with hemiolas in several instances. The harpsichord is a modern copy of a Blanchet from around 1730, and the cello is a modern-sounding instrument played with three bows (shown in the booklet)! The period design of the front cover takes the baked good we know that Marie Antoinette actually never said. Husband (recorder) and wife (harpischord) fit together so perfectly you hope they’ll have many more chances to make music together! For a recent example, turn to their flute sonatas of Johan Roman (1694-1758), also on BIS, which Charles Brewer praised (J/A 2015).

**Accento Austria**  
Elisabeth Most, fl; Maroje Brcic, g  
Gramola 99100—62 minutes

If you like the sound of flute and guitar, this is all pleasant music. The best known composer is Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829), but even the modern ones are moderate and pleasant: Bresgen, Uhl, Trular. Nothing here tries to sound “contemporary” or obnoxious; everything exploits the naturally pleasant sound of these two instruments.

Great art gallery music.  

**Conversations**  
Nevermind—Alpha 235—74 minutes

The four members of Nevermind play flute, violin, viola da gamba, and harpsichord (all period instruments) and present works by Jean-Baptiste Quentin (1690-around 1750) and...
Louis-Gabriel Guillemain (1705-70). The sonorous ensemble sound and especially fine viola da gamba had me relishing every sequence and change. The harpsichord is ravishing too, as are the exchanges among the players.

A 23-page booklet with several stylish pictures has notes in three languages including English. Although there’s plenty of interesting history to relate, it doesn’t really matter unless the music is good, and this is.

Pair this program perhaps with contemporary sonatas and trios by Herman-Francois Delange on Musica Ficta (M/J 2012) and more classical works from the 1780s by Jean-Francois Tapray on K617 (J/A 1998).

German & French Recorder
Michala Petri, Odense Symphony/ Christoph Poppen—OUR 8226014 [SACD] 54 minutes

Michala Petri is a star and attracts composers. These three are Markus Zahnhausen (born 1965), Fabrice Bollon (same), and Günter Kochan (1930-2009). The most tolerable piece here is the seven-movement suite by Mr Kochan. The other two pieces are truly dreadful—every cliche imaginable. I guess composers feel they have to sound a certain way to be accepted as “composers of our time”. But it’s ugly; it hurts the ears. And it all sounds like every other rotten new piece you’ve heard.

I wouldn’t buy this for the decent Kochan piece; I wouldn’t buy this at all.

Fantasias
PIAZZOLLA: Otono Porteno; TRAD: 4 Celtic Songs; HOUGHTON: God of the Northern Forest; Kinkachoo, I Love You; FALLA: Pantomime; Miller’s Dance; DOWLAND: Fantasy; BROUWER: 3 Apuntes; YASUI: Hawaiian Fantasy; LEGNANE: Fantasia in A minor; FORNEROD: Prelude; VILLA-LOBOS: Etude 9; LLOBET: El Noi de la Mare; ARCAS: Traviata Fantasy
Rupert Boyd, g

Little Mystery 103—72 minutes

This is a delightful program of rarely heard works, beautifully performed and arranged in a truly satisfying order. I appreciate that last point, because I still think of a CD as a recital. It’s important to present the music in such a way that the works complement each other and build to a satisfying climax.

Only a few of the works are actually titled fantasia, though that’s of little importance. His Piazzolla sparkles; and the four Celtic Songs, arranged by Scotsman David Russell, are touching and lovely. The two works by Houghton are both based on mythology—they were composed almost a decade apart, but the composer suggests performing them together. They have the same scordatura, with the sixth string tuned to an F, and they do complement each other nicely. Falla’s ‘Pantomime’ from El Amor Brujo, is Boyd’s own transcription and fits nicely with the ‘Miller’s Dance’ from 3-Cornered Hat.

The Dowland is played a touch more slowly than usual, but the counterpoint comes through better at this tempo, and there are plenty of fireworks for the end. Byron Yasui is a Hawaiian composer, and his ‘Fantasy on a Hawaiian Lullaby’ is simple and beautiful. The Arcas Traviata Fantasy is also performed by Luciano Tortorelli, reviewed below. I complain about his overuse of rubato; Boyd gets things just right. Indeed, the only complaint I have is his Villa-Lobos Etude 9—I love the piece, and this is the only time I’ve heard it played outside of the complete set. Boyd plays it too fast, and though his rhythm for the second half is accurate, he doesn’t articulate clearly enough, and it sounds like he’s just strumming the arpeggiation.

But otherwise, Boyd plays with unerring good taste and musicianship, and his tone is absolutely gorgeous, with plenty of range and variety. He is technically superb, but never makes virtuosity the goal—the music always comes first. This is his second release as a soloist, and he also plays with the Jacob Cordero as the Australian Guitar Duo, which I reviewed warmly (J/A 2014). I look forward to more from this fine artist.

Stars of the Guitar
PONCE: Concierto del Sur; BROUWER: Concierto Elegante; RODRIGO: Fantasia para un Gentilhombre; Concierto de Aranjuez; SIERRA: Follas; VILLA-LOBOS: Concerto; CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: Concerto I
Benjamin Beirs, Petrit Ceku, Marcin Dylla, Chad Isbion, Ekachai Jearakul, Celik Refik, Marko Topchii, g; Buffalo Philharmonic/ JoAnn Falletta Beau Fleuve 94982 [2CD] 144 minutes

This collection is not only a great way to get recordings of all the major 20th Century guitar concertos, but also to get a sense of the state-of-the-art in the guitar world. As I’ve often stated in these pages, that is remarkable.

And that world owes considerable gratitude to the figures behind this document.

American Record Guide
JoAnn Falletta has been music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic since 1998. She, and the orchestra, are among the nation’s best—I’ve reviewed them in Florida a couple of times, and the performances were overwhelming. Falletta began her musical life as a guitarist; and, with Joanne Castellani and Michael Andriaccio (the Castellani-Andriaccio Duo) has set up an annual guitar competition, specifically for concertos. The winners are among the finest of their generation, and that is high praise indeed. Here we have their winning performances with Falletta and the BPO. Not all were first place winners, but each is fine enough to be first place, even if that year’s competition was so intense that they were outdone.

It’s not clear from the header who plays what, so I’ll include the list, along with the year and their place:

- Ponce: Marcin Dylla (1st 2004)
- Brouwer: Chad Ibison (3rd 2014)
- Rodrigo Fant: Ekachai Jearakul (2nd 2014)
- Rodrigo Aranjuez: Petrit Ceku (2nd 2012)
- Sierra: Cell Refik Kaya (1st 2012)
- Villa-Lobos: Marko Topchil (1st 2014)
- Cast-Tedesco: Benjamin Beirs (3rd 2008)

With one exception, each of these performances is as fine as any you can hear, and better than most. The orchestra is terrific, and Falletta’s conducting a perfect match for each soloist. Each player has his own voice, but each voice is beautiful, tasteful, inventive—and, needless to say, virtuoso. They are young—two, Ibison and Kaya, were at the time doctoral students under Adam Holzman at UT Austin—but their musicianship is mature.

The sole weak link is the Aranjuez. I reviewed Ceku’s debut release on Naxos (J/F 2009), and it was really fine. For whatever reason, his performance just doesn’t have the consistency of sound, the clarity that the work needs. To be sure, the competition is stronger in this work than in any other; and there are loads of inferior Aranjuezes out there. But listen to Miguel Trapaga’s performance, reviewed in this issue, for a stronger, more consistently beautiful reading.

But if you’re a guitar lover, you already have a fine Aranjuez. This release covers the Big Five, with an excellent Brouwer Elegiaco—as of 2007 he had 11 guitar concertos in his catalog, but this is the best known. You also get a delightful piece, Roberto Sierra’s Folias, a fantasy on the popular theme, rather less thorny than Sierra’s usual language, brilliantly played by Kaya. Add a good price and you’ve got quite a prize.

**Catalan Songs & Dances**

**MOMPOU: Suite Compostelana; Song & Dances 10+13; LLOBET: 13 Catalan Songs; MANEN: Fantasia-Sonata**

Franz Halasz, g—BIS 2092 [SACD] 61 minutes

I have reviewed Mr Halasz often in these pages, both as soloist and with his pianist wife Debora, always with considerable praise. Their release “Fandango” made my best of the year for last year (M/J 2015). Here he plays with terrific virtuosity and always perfect taste. Perhaps I should say nearly always—the opening piece, the prelude from Mompou’s Suite Compostelana, is blazingly fast, the fastest I’ve ever heard it. Georg Gulyas (J/A 2016) takes about 40% more time with it, and it fits far better with Mompou’s essential simplicity. To be sure, Halasz’s playing is beautiful, and perhaps if this were the first time I’d heard it, I might decide that all the others are simply sluggish. In the rest of the suite Halasz has the measure of the music perfectly. And in the two song and dance pairings by the same composer—written for the piano, Mompou’s main medium—he allows the directness of the music to come through.

Miguel Llobet’s settings of Catalonian folk melodies have had several complete recordings recently. I’ve heard many of them too often in bad student performances, so it’s nice to hear the set performed by a master. Stefano Grodona (J/A 2010) performed these works with a depth I’d never encountered, but Halasz seems more right to me. These are works of the people, never intended to reach great heights. Tolkien, describing the house of Tom Bombadil in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, wrote “less keen and lofty was the delight, but deeper and nearer to the mortal heart; marvelous and yet not strange”. That perfectly describes my response to Halasz’s Llobet.

Joan Manen’s sprawling Fantasia-Sonata is another matter entirely. Here Halasz’s virtuosity is put to the test, and he passes stunningly. Again, this is the fastest performance I’ve ever encountered—Halasz runs 15 minutes, Segovia 19, Porqueddu (J/F 2015) and Ducharme (J/F 2007) 18. Yet the piece never sounds rushed, and its difficult architecture holds together better in this than any other performance.

So, another magnificent recital from Mr Halaz—great music, beautifully programmed, executed with virtuosity and taste. Bravo!

**KEATON**

*September/October 2016*
Mr Lislevand is based in Oslo. He has an active career in early music circles, including several recordings with Jordi Savall and Hesperion XXI. He presents a delightful and charming recital here, freely mixing works by Francesco Corbetta and his student, Robert de Visee, who would become the court lutenist to Louis XIV, the Sun King. The program mixes variations—chaconnes and passacailles—with character pieces with titles like ‘La Mascarade’ or ‘Les Sylvains de Mr Couperin’. A pair of sarabands are the only dances, and even those are treated more like fantasias. Lislevand has also inserted three of his own pieces, each a rapidly strummed chord progression, suitable for a passacaille. They fit the style, though they don’t really add that much, except perhaps sounding like what might have been improvised introductions back in that time.

Lislevand plays both baroque guitar and the larger archlute (theorbo). He doesn’t specify, but I assume most of the Corbetta is on the guitar, the Visee on the theorbo.

This is subtle music—don’t expect a wide range of dynamics and color—but if you let yourself into this quiet, but richly expressive, world, you will find much pleasure.

**Keaton**

**La Mascarade**
Visee, Corbetta, Lislevand
Rolf Lislevand, g, theorbo
ECM 24752—49 minutes

Diego Castro Magas is a Chilean guitarist, a specialist in new music. He is well established as a performer and lecturer. This is his second CD, his first with a distributor.

The Dillon dates from 1987, the Ferneyhough from 1983-89, the rest from the 21st Century. All but one have the sound of what we used to call “modern” music—non-tonal, generally harsh, with experimental sounds beyond what is usually encountered. Two pieces, Ferneyhough’s seven-movement ‘Kurze Schatten’ and Hoban’s ‘Knockler I’, use microtones—an effect that to me just sounds out of tune.

My problem with many of these is found in the very opening work, Matthew Sergeant’s ‘Bet Maryam’ and echoed to an extent in each of the others. They all have stretches of rapid activity, sounding rather like various sounds scattered across the stage floor. Magas’s execution sounds sloppy—notes with unclear articulation, swallowed or muted sounds. What I can’t tell, given the nature of these pieces, is whether this is intended by the composers. My suspicion is not, though he has worked with many of the composers, so I may be wrong.

Certainly in a work like Henze’s *Royal Winter Music I*, the first movement has similar passages of angular dissonance and percussive effects and articulation. But listen to Bream or Tannenbaum’s performances of the work—or, more recently, Halasz (M/A 2011) or Simpson (J/F 2013)—and you can hear clearly, and even transcribe the sounds. That’s not the case here.

The exception to the relentless “modernism”—I use the quotes because music of this style and character is older than I am, even dating back to the 1920s—is Bryn Harrison’s M.C.E., a four-movement work inspired by MC Escher. The Dutch artist famously explored the three-dimensional perspective in a two-dimensional setting, where stairs might be seen as ascending and descending simultaneously. Harrison captures this quality in music that is tonal—or at least not dissonant. It moves without progressing and without any sense of development. That works as a musical version of Escher’s whimsical images. You’ll have to decide for yourself if you want to spend 16 minutes listening to it. I won’t be returning to this.

**Keaton**

**Shrouded Mirrors**

**Sergeant**: Bet Maryam; **Harrison**: MCE; **Finnissy**: Nasiye; **Dillon**: Shrouded Mirrors; **Ferneyhough**: Kurze Schatten 2; **Hoban**: Knockler I

Diego Castro Magas, g
HCR 10—66 minutes

Diego Castro Magas is a Chilean guitarist, a specialist in new music. He is well established as a performer and lecturer. This is his second CD, his first with a distributor.

As much as I love the music of the Mighty Handful—as the group of Russian nationalist composers from the late 19th Century liked to call themselves—I’ve never expected their music to work well on guitar. And it really doesn’t, but still I enjoyed this performance very much. And, after all, at that time, instrumental potpourris of opera or symphonic works were popular. It was a way of enjoying the hits without needing 100 musicians. Nobody complained that the arrangements weren’t as good as the original; they just enjoyed the music in an accessible version.

**Mighty Handful**

**Cui**: Cherkess Dances; Cossack Dances; **Mousorgsky**: Boris Godunov Potpourri; **Balakirev**: Mazurka; Polka; Balakireviana; **Borodin**: Polovtsian Dances; **Rimsky-Korsakov**: Scheherazade in Spain

Russian Guitar Quartet
Delos 3518—65 minutes

American Record Guide
That’s how I approached this music, and it gives me great pleasure.

The Russian Guitar Quartet—Dan Caraway, Alexei Stepanov, Vladimir Sumin, and Oleg Timofeev (see his recording of Elizabethan Pavans below)—is not the standard guitar quartet. They play two quartet guitars, tuned a fourth higher than a standard guitar, and two Russian seven-stringed instruments, each tuned to an open G major triad, with five additional free standing basses. All their music is arranged or composed for them specifically. And since Timofeev, a scholar who specializes in the revival of that Russian guitar, knows his national heritage, it was a natural idea to put together works from the Mighty Handful.

I had no idea that Cesar Cui wrote operas, but these two sets of dances are taken from two of them, written almost 50 years apart. They are quite attractive, though I can’t compare the arrangements to the original. I don’t know the songs of Mili Balakirev, but the suite Balakireviana, based on those songs, is full of lyric charm.

Moussorgsky’s Boris Godounov is well known. I had contradictory reactions—how beautiful the themes are, how much I’d like to play this music, and yet how much I really wanted to hear the colors and intensity of the original. It quotes bits and pieces, never much developed: in 13 minutes we hear the haunting opening, the song of Boris’s son, Varlaam’s song, the song of the Holy Fool, the duet of Grigory and Marina, even the glorious coronation scene. It doesn’t stand up to the original, but I still wept at its beauty.

Alexander Borodin’s Polovtsian Dances just don’t work on four guitars, though it must have been fun trying. Scheherazade in Spain, arranged by Viktor Sobolenko, is not just a potpourri from Scheherazade, but also includes Capriccio Espagnol. The latter actually works on guitar quartet, mainly because of the Espagnol part. Bill Kanengiser arranged it for the LAGQ, and they have recorded it along with the Aquarelle Quartet—and I just finished performing it with my students. That arrangement is better (and more demanding) than this one.

But the Russian Quartet plays beautifully, with great sensitivity and technical command. If you want to hear this music performed on guitar, you won’t do much better. KEATON

New Guitar 10

SMITH: Steps; BLAND: Nielsen Variations; STAROBIN: 4 Stevens; CHIHARA: Girl from Yerevan; RUDER: Oh, Mother

David Starobin, Robert Belinic, g, Roslind Rees, Camille Zamora, v; Vassily Primakov, p; Patrick Mason, bar; Movses Porossian, Giovanni Andrea Zanon, Jee Yoon Kim, v; Paul Coletti, Thomas Howerton, vl; BlakeAnthony Johnson, vc

Bridge 9458—59 minutes

David Starobin has been putting out this series for 35 years, beginning with LPs for the first three. Now an eminence grise in the guitar world—his hair is as white as mine, though he has rather more of it—his importance is hard to overstate. I’ve reviewed volumes 8 and 9 (J/F 2014 & I/A 2015), and I’ve heard most of the rest. Performances in the series are consistently fine; and so, for the most part, is the music itself. On this program every piece is a treasure.

This also is something of a history of the project, or at least several snapshots of works at various periods. Gregg Smith’s song ‘Steps’ was composed over four decades ago, and this recording dates from 1976. It is a ten-minute tour de force, a celebration of life in mid-century New York City. It sort of reminds me of Charles Ives, had he been born in NYC instead of New England. It’s a real delight, and Rees’s pitch and diction, no matter how fast the patter, is perfection.

Four Stevens, by Starobin’s brother Michael, is a cycle of poems by Wallace Stevens, each concerning one of the seasons, so the title is a double pun. This performance is from 1995. The music recalls Britten, another master songwriter—or perhaps John Duarte’s rarely heard but beautiful 5 Quiet Songs. The cycle is also beautiful, and beautifully executed by Starobin and Patrick Mason. The music is somewhat dissonant, yet essentially tonal—rather like Britten. Copyrights kept all but one text from the notes, though they include links to the other poems. Mason’s diction is so fine that one doesn’t really need the text.

William Bland’s Variations on a Theme by Carl Nielsen is for guitar and piano, a notoriously difficult combination. Vassily Primakov plays with enough delicacy that the piano never overwhelms the guitar. The theme is from a song, ‘Underlige Aftenlufte’—it’s a gorgeous theme, and Bland’s variations are inventive and deeply expressive. It makes me want to get the score and play it. Paul Chihara’s Girl from Yerevan, for guitar, violin, and viola, was commissioned for a concert series that programmed Armenian music (Yerevan is Armenia’s capital).
The piece combines Armenian themes with bossa nova, and I must say, the results are a bit odd—‘An Armenian Girl in Rio’? But the performance is fine, and the climax is satisfying enough to make one forget any qualms.

The recital concludes with an aria from Poul Ruder’s opera *The Thirteenth Child*, set for soprano, guitar, and string quartet. The libretto, based on one of the Grimm Brothers fairy tales, is by Starobin and his wife Becky. I can’t say what the entire opera is like, but this aria is hauntingly beautiful.

So, another triumph for Mr Starobin.

**Elizabethan Pavans**

Dowl, Bachelor, Daniel, Philips, Johnson, Ferrabosco, Robinson, Cotton, Anon.

Oleg Timofeyev, lute

Brilliant 95236—67 minutes

Let me say up front that I really love this music. It has charm, beauty, invention, and can surprise and deeply move you at its best. Timofeyev traces the development of the Elizabethan pavans from a simple dance form to a freer fantasia. And we meet all the old familiar faces, from Dowland and Johnson to Ferrabosco, Philips, and Bachelor, with several entries from that most prolific of composers, Anonymous.

If I were to complain about anything, I’d say that an entire recital of pavans is just not a good idea. Even the Elizabethans knew the value of variety and contrast and would pair a pavans with a galliard. Still, Timofeyev plays with variety and range. And, yes, I know a CD is not the same as a recital, and many are intended as a compendium, not meant to be heard in a single setting. That is the case here.

**Latin Latitudes**

PIAZZOLLA: *Ausencias*; *Chiquilin de Bachin*; *Oblivion*; BROUWER: *Danza del Altiplano*;

ARCAS: *Traviata Fantasy*; TARREGA: *Waltz*;

BARRIOS: *Waltz*; VILLA-LOBOS: *Suite Populaire Bresilienne*; TORTORELLI: *Dobru Noc Brno*

Luciano Tortorelli, g

Brilliant 95285—58 minutes

Mr Tortorelli has an active career as performer, teacher, and scholar. He has a lovely sound and a distinct personality.

I would describe this program as old-fashioned, which also describes his playing. He uses too much rubato for my taste—the sort of interpretive approach you would hear from guitarists half a century ago. To be sure, this repertory—including three new transcriptions of Piazzolla—invites this sort of performance, and certainly Tortorelli’s rubato is more tasteful than most.

That is particularly the case in the Villa-Lobos. The *Suite Populaire Bresilienne* is the most sentimental of his works, and it’s easy to play badly. I found his performance the most convincing of the entire recital.

So, while I would approach these pieces differently, if you prefer an approach with more freedom—more of what used to be called “romanticism”—you may find this enjoyable.

**Varietas**

Jean-Christophe Dijoux, hpsi

Genuin 16420—82 minutes

Harpischordist Dijoux won the 2014 International Bach Competition. I haven’t heard the playing of his rivals from that contest, but it’s easy to hear in this debut album why his artistry earned a prize. Dijoux has tremendous control of time, both in his phrasing and in the subtle art of not playing the notes together. His expressivity is impressive, too. He keeps the music interesting and makes it his own.

This program includes music by Handel, Buxtehude, Bohm, JS Bach, Mattheson, Telemann, and CPE Bach. The common themes are the connections with the city of Hamburg and the observation that most of the music needs to be filled out with substantial amounts of improvisation and elaboration. Dijoux comes to this task brilliantly and with great enterprise. His performances are thrilling. Two of the three Mattheson pieces are in a demonstration video on Dijoux’s web site. The value there is seeing with a scrolling score that he is improvising these pieces himself from figured bass, working out right-hand parts to complete the compositions. The CD has much better tone and intonation than that video. Genuin’s recorded sound is impeccable. Dijoux plays two big harpsichords by Matthias Kramer that both include a 16-foot register.

His taste doesn’t completely convince me. He uses the 16-foot registers too much, and they sound weird by themselves. The performance is full of sudden stops and other emphases that would be effective when playing in big halls. I like to do these things myself, but it’s a dangerous line to walk. The goal is to draw attention to the details or the dramatic strokes of the composition, pointing out salient elements by italicizing them thought-
fully. When it gets too extreme, as I feel it often does here, the distortions draw attention only to themselves or to the performer. There is a difference between sounding spectacular for a one-time concert or competition before an attentive audience and sounding satisfying over the lifetime of a recording. While listening to this I keep wanting to hear phrases played more neutrally; everything is so heavily inflected. It makes an impression that Dijoux is afraid to be dull or to let the music have its own say. There is so much interestingly-shaped figure that it’s hard to find the ground. But he’s improvising, and he’s playing to stand out as a winner.

Dijoux’s approach works perfectly for the CPE Bach Rondo in C (W 56) that ends the program. I reviewed six different Telemann solo-keyboard Ouvertures played more plainly by Anke Dennert for the same label (J/A 2016). The one that Dijoux plays is in G, (32:13), which I have not seen in any other recording.

This is a recommendable CD for the hard-to-find music and the imaginative interpretation. I hope that his next one will show more willingness to play simply.

B LEHMAN

**Shakespeare in Music & Words**

Decca 4825281 [2CD] 120 minutes

In commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death (1616) several festivals will be held around the world presenting his plays, films of the plays, operas, and ballets. As part of this, Decca has released this two-disc collection.

Disc 1 includes 75 minutes of music by various composers who were inspired by Shakespeare’s plays. The selections are from operas, ballets, oratorios, films, and song cycles composed by Verdi, Rota, Prokofiev, Gounod, Mendelssohn, Purcell, Finzi, Walton, Tchaikovsky, and Vaughan Williams. The content is from Decca’s back catalog.

Disc 2 contains readings of scenes from Shakespeare’s plays and three of his Sonnets.

Selections on Disc 1 (75 minutes) range from Purcell’s Fairy Queen to Rota’s ‘Love Theme’ from the film of Romeo and Juliet. There are Verdi selections from Macbeth, Falstaff, and Otello. Renee Fleming sings the ‘Willow Song’ from Otello and ‘Juliet’s Waltz’ from Gounod’s Romeo and Juliet. Vaughan Williams’s Three Shakespeare Songs are performed by the Choir of King’s College, Cambridge. A Midsummer Night’s Dream is represented by the Scherzo performed by Ernst Ansermet and the Suisse Romande and the ‘Wedding March’ played on the organ by Peter Hurford. There are many notable exclusions, including Britten’s Midsummer Night’s Dream, Bernstein’s West Side Story, and Thomas’s Hamlet. The dates and performers of the music are listed in the booklet.

Disc 2 has 15 individual scenes from plays and the sonnets. The performances are outstanding. The actors include Christopher Plummer in a scene from Much Ado About Nothing, Sir John Gielgud in Othello, Dorothy Tutin in Romeo and Juliet, Vanessa Redgrave in As You Like It, and Donald Sinden in King Lear. Sonnets 18, 73, and 116 are presented by Richard Johnson, Richard Pasco, and Tony Church. The best is the ‘All the World’s A Stage’ scene from As You Like It performed with unrivaled depth and meaning by Max Adrian. The booklet notes that all of the complete plays will be released in a box set this year.

FISCH

**Wordless Verses**

**KLUGHARDT:** Schillflieder; **WHITE:** Nymph’s Complaint for the Death of her Fawn; **HOLBROOKE:** Nocturne; **LOEFFLER:** 2 Rhapsodies

Roger Roe, ob; Michael Isaac Strauss, va; R Kent Cook, p—Oberlin 16-03—65 minutes

The music is evocative and sensuous, inspired by poetry. Klughardt’s Schillflieder are based on poems by Nicholas Lenau. Felix Harold White’s Nymph’s Complaint for the Death of her Fawn is based on a poem by English metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell. Another English composer, Josef Holbrooke, was obsessed with the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, and the Nocturne was inspired by one of Poe’s earliest published poems. Loeffler was inspired by texts by French poet Maurice Rollinat. The Klughardt and Loeffler pieces are often performed (and recorded), but White’s Nymph’s Complaint and the Holbrooke piece (written in 1921 and 1917) are less standard. They are both enchanting, dream-like pieces and call to mind the impressionist writing of Debussy, Ravel, and Charles Griffes.

This is a wonderful recording. Violist Michael Isaac Strauss plays with a lush, warm, sound. Roger Roe, who plays oboe and English horn with the Indianapolis Symphony, is a real find. Not every orchestral musician is a convincing soloist, but his phrasing and presence are exquisite, and his clear, singin sound lends itself well to subtle nuance and clarion fortés. The intonation between oboe and viola

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is fantastic, especially in the unison and octave passages. They match one another beautifully in phrasing and artistic line.

Pianist R. Kent Cook nearly steals the whole show with his gorgeous playing, with lovely sound and touch in everything from the gentle, melancholy music of the White and Holbrooke pieces to the robust, Brahmsian writing in the Klughardt. The trio takes the slow tempo markings very seriously, and not everyone will like that, but it really comes off well. Another group might sound ponderous or dull, but the Jackson Trio exhibits depth and authority. Roe’s breath control in the slower tempos is truly impressive, and he spins out the long melodic lines effortlessly. Don’t miss this one.

PFEIL

Russian Oboe Concertos
Kikta, Rubtsov, Eshpai
Maria Sourmatcheva; Göttingen Symphony/Christoph-Mathias Mueller
MDG 9011947—73 minutes

This release of four little-known Russian oboe concertos is excellent. Oboist Maria Sourmatcheva, born in Russia and raised in Germany, puts in a flawless performance of these unfamiliar works, and the Göttingen Orchestra offers sympathetic support. The sound quality is top-notch.

There are two concertos by Ukrainian composer Valery Kikta. The first of these, the one-movement Belgorod Concerto, employs folk music from southern Russia and was originally written for an orchestra of Russian folk instruments. The third concerto, written in 2001, is in typical three-movement form. Accompanied only by strings, it is quite programmatic, with the movements subtitled ‘Pastoral idyll,’ ‘Song of the blissful night,’ and ‘A masked ball.’ It is evocative and intimate, with the feel of chamber music.

Andrey Rubtsov is the youngest of the composers represented, and is an oboist as well. His music bears the stamp of Prokofiev in its neo-classical flavor and wry wit and in the the gorgeous, soaring lines of the slow movement. Andrey Eshpai composed his oboe concerto in 1982, and it won the Lenin Prize four years later. Eshpai was strongly influenced by the music of his Mari heritage, and the concerto is loaded with folk melodies and rhythms combined with jazz elements. This piece is joyful and lyrical, with melodies that linger in the listener’s mind.

Ms Sourmatcheva’s beautiful playing should persuade other oboists to add these concertos to their repertory. I look forward to hearing more from her.

PFEIL

French Organ
Lefebure-Wely, Albert Paul Alain, Jehan Alain, Messiaen, Franck, Widor
Jason Alden—Raven 971—73 minutes

This is the first recording of a new organ at Christ the King Catholic Church in Dallas. Dallas has become one of the world’s great destinations as far as pipe organs are concerned, with something like seven or eight new installations of noteworthy instruments in churches and concert halls in the last few years alone. It is greatly heartening to residents that the city might one day be possibly known for more than football and assassinations. This organ by Jurget-Sinclair of Montreal is in the French idiom, taking as inspiration the work of Cavalle-Coll. In Dallas alone, there are four organs based on the Cavalle-Coll aesthetic. This recording captures very well the tone, atmosphere, and power of the instrument (which I have played). I do not know if any reverberation was added in the recording process, but the sound seems ideal and the organ is captured beautifully. And Alden’s playing is beyond reproach, attentive to many registration details as well as the larger picture and form, with varied and musical expression.

The program is very well chosen. We get the expected Widor symphony and Franck but also some off-the-beaten-track works by Albert Alain and Lefebure-Wely. This is beautifully done in all respects, including the liner notes, well written by the performer.

HAMILTON

Virgil Fox Remembered
FAURE: Nocturne from Shylock; BACH: Toccata in F; Come, Sweet Death; ELMORE: Night Song; MULET: Tu es Petra; SULLIVAN: The Lost Chord; HEBBLE: Kreisler Homage; REUBKE: Psalm 94
Peter Conte, org—Raven 976—68 minutes

This is a recording of a recital given October 12, 2012 in celebration of the 100th birthday anniversary of the legendary American organist, Virgil Fox. Conte plays the magnificent Wanamaker Organ in the Philadelphia Macy’s. The 6 keyboards and 464 ranks makes it the largest functioning pipe organ in the world. Fox had a long association with this organ, beginning in 1939, when he played a recital on it at the national convention of the American Organists Association.
Guild of Organists. His 1964 recording for the Command label (available on CD and DVD) gloried in transcriptions and orchestral color, at a time when his aesthetic was viewed as heretical in the organ world, then dominated by the Baroque revival. This organ was perfectly suited to his unique style of playing: colorful, theatrical, controversial, individual, unapologetically romantic.

Come Sweet Death is an example of how Fox liked to turn things upside down, in his words, "driving the purists crazy". His version was inspired by the famous 1926 Stokowski adaptation for the Philadelphia Orchestra, recorded in 1933. At nearly 10 minutes, Fox transformed Bach’s simple song into a “Mahleresque” slow movement, letting the organ do one of the things it does best: sustain.

This recording includes pieces that were staples of Fox’s repertoire, and Conte delivers superb performances which display every aspect of this extraordinary organ.

His ‘Come Sweet Death’ is almost exactly the same length as Fox’s classic 1964 recording. The organ is played Monday through Saturday at noon and 5:30 (7 PM Wednesdays and Fridays) by Conte and other organists. So, if you are in Philadelphia, do not pass up the opportunity to hear this instrument. Visit the Friends of the Wanamaker Organ website (www.wanamakerorgan.com) for more information. Notes on Fox and the music and the organ specifications are included.

Yulianna Avdeeva

CHOPIN: Fantasy; MOZART: Sonata 6; LISZT: Dante Sonata; LISZT: Sacred Dance & Final Duet from Aida

Mirare 301—67 minutes

Avdeeva was the Chopin Competition winner in 2010 and has recorded the Chopin concertos on period instruments as well as a previous piano recital that was favorably reviewed by our editor (Mirare 252, J/F 2015). I agree with his superlatives completely. She is very good. I get to review a lot of piano recitals and rarely do I hear as mature a pianist as Avdeeva. The Chopin Fantasy is as good as her credentials would lead you to expect. The sections and moods of this work are brilliantly balanced, flowing naturally from one to the next (and abruptly when Chopin calls for it). I have heard a lot of recordings and performances of this work but nothing better.

The big Mozart sonata surprised me after the Chopin. I like the melodic phrasing, occasional ornamentation, and classical elements so common in Mozart. The full-blooded modern piano puts Mozart closer to Chopin, which is perfectly natural. She never overdoes the dynamics, but unlike other Mozart interpreters, she is never namby-pamby either. I would go out of my way to hear her play a Mozart recital. After that, she switches to Liszt and I was ready for a knockout Dante Sonata. Her technique is flawless to a point where I don’t think about the huge difficulties in some sections of this work, but just enjoy the performance. The Liszt Aida transcription has so many different colors that I was carried back to the first time I saw the opera and the magic effects of the sets,
staging, lighting, singing and orchestral sound as the final duet was performed.

Avdeeva plays works that bring Rachmaninoff the pianist to mind. His recorded Mozart and his regular performances of the Chopin Fantasy and the Dante Sonata were along the same lines as what we have here. I can’t wait to hear the next recording from this talented pianist.

HARRINGTON

Romantic Piano 1
Jane Coop—Skylark 702—59 minutes

This is a reissue of a CBC CD. The recording was made in 2000. Coop is a well established Canadian pianist, and this program is mostly potboilers by Chopin, Liszt (‘Liebestraume 3’), Schumann (‘Traumerei’), Debussy (‘Clair de Lune’), Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff and Brahms. Our review of Volume 2 (N/D 1995) speaks of a “healthy, sane, intimate style, singing, poised, and musical!” That volume is to be reissued next year.

These performances are all good ones. Her Bosendorfer piano sounds full and plush. No collection would be shamed by Coop’s impassioned advocacy for the music. There is plenty of soul, excitement, and beauty here no matter how many times you may have heard the pieces. Good notes.

BECKER

1980 Ambassador Auditorium Recital
MOZART: Fantasy; SCHUMANN: Fantasy; CHOPIN: Etudes
Youri Egorov, p—FHR 44 — 81 minutes

Russian pianist Egorov died too soon, at age 33 (of AIDS). This remastered recording, of superb quality, makes one wonder what might have been. The Schumann Fantasy has passion and spontaneity. With the Chopin he is able to keep an enviable brisk tempo with a beautiful tone. The second etude has a light touch and fine phrasing. Etude 11 is a tour-de-force of power and virtuosity.

KANG

Neglected Piano Pieces
Kapralova, Beach, Carwithen, Aulin, Almen, Baciewicz, Tailfeather, Crawford Seeger
Bengt Forsberg—DB 170—70 minutes

Though not mentioned in this collection’s title, all of the eight composers represented on it are women, with the implication that their works have been “neglected” because they’re female. There may be some truth in this, I suppose, though considering the great amount of worthy music by composers of both genders that languishes in obscurity, being neglected hardly puts women in a special class. And figures like Amy Beach, Grazyna Baciewicz, and Ruth Crawford Seeger can hardly be considered “neglected”. There are several recordings of all the composers on this collection with the possible exception of Ruth Almen, and only two pieces here are likely first recordings.

Still, this offers a dandy batch of rewarding piano music not commonly recorded, all of it played with notable intelligence and expressiveness heightened by the beauteous sound that Bengt Forsberg gets both from his sensitive “touch” on the instrument and by the flawless recorded sound.

First is a set of four April Preludes from 1937 by Czech composer Vitezslava Kapralova (1915-40), who studied with Martinu, though her preludes are more chromatic than his music, with enriched harmonies sometimes pushing past the boundaries of tonality. The pieces deploy the piano resourcefully and are well contrasted in tempo, materials, and mood. II is broadly choral and sonorous, and III is laid out in spare two-voice counterpoint. They leave the listener with an overall impression of an ardent and impatient temperament, far different than that evoked by Amy Beach’s not-quite-three-minute 1903 ‘Scottish Legend,’ an amiable ballad with a Vaughan-Williamsish feel and a melodic line enlivened by the spring-loaded “scotch snap” rhythms common to many kinds of folk tunes around the world from the British Isles to Hungary and beyond.

Doreen Carwithen’s 1946 Sonatina is a charming but substantial three-movement work of 14 minutes in a sort of updated impressionist manner “a little reminiscent of Ravel’s Sonatine”, as the notes point out. Outer allegros are fluid and graceful, with modally-inflected chords ripped out in arpeggios; the central Adagio is a moonlit nocturne, sensuous, dreamlike, spell-casting. Carwithen was the wife of the better-known English composer William Alwyn and worked under his shadow, though Chandos issued two CDs that included her piano concerto (S/O 1997) and a program of her chamber pieces (J/A 1998). Another recording of the Sonatina, played by Mark Bebbington, is on Somm.

Valborg Aulin (1860-1928), also the wife of a better known (Swedish) composer, contributes two salon-style items, an album-leaf and a waltz, both very conventional. Another Swede, Ruth Almen (1870-1945), also wrote in
a then-common conservative Victorian language but, unlike her contemporary, in a thoroughly un-conventional manner that simmers with complex and fervent emotion. Pianist Forsberg describes her 1919, 15-minute Sonata in B minor in his notes as “sometimes clumsily laid out and ungratefully written for the instrument”. It doesn’t sound that way at all to me; rather, the music radiates a strong-willed and imaginative personality that came as a bracing surprise. The idiosyncratically leaping rhythmic phrases and spare, oddly punctuated piano figurations in III are striking in both their individuality and effect. II, a short but eloquent andante, is also memorable. Both have a sort of Beethovenian balance of eccentricity and entirely convincing musicality.

The program concludes with three more modest efforts. Grazyna Bacewicz’s playful, concise, tightly-wound neoclassic 1925 Sonata-na, nicely topped off by a catchy, capricious oberek (Polish folk dance), is a typical early piece by this distinguished Eastern European (1909-69) who studied in Paris.

Also gratifying and even more Gallic in orientation are the mellifluous Three Pastorales (1919-1929) by Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983). Finally, there’s a 4-minute prelude by Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-53), best known for her blazingly original and uncompromisingly atonal String Quartet 1931—along with Carl Ruggles’s Sun Treader and Ives’s Fourth Symphony perhaps the most significant work of the early 20th Century American modernists. Her preludes date from the 1920s and are vaguely Scriabinian. Prelude 6, Andante Mystico, is evocative and otherworldly, with a plangent, slow-motion chorale under calmly ascending dissonant chords evoking a vast and quietly revolving vision of the celestial realm—truly, as the ancients would have said, music of the spheres.

LEHMAN

Enchanted by the Moon
Brahms, Debussy, Viragh
Balazs Fulei, p
Hungaroton 32768—73 minutes

Three compositions inspired by moonlight. While it is easy to concede that Debussy’s Suite Bergamasque (remember ‘Clair de Lune’), and Andras Gabor Viragh’s Visages de la Lune fit this niche, I was puzzled by the inclusion of Brahms’s Piano Sonata 3. The notes tell us that “its central theme is the music of moonlight in the second movement, which returns in the fourth movement”. Recalling the quotation of a poem by Otto Inkermann on this movement put me back on track again: “Through evening’s shade, the pale moon gleams/While rapt in love’s ecstatic dreams/ Two hearts are fondly beating.”

The largest work by far, is the Brahms. It’s his most popular sonata, and the competition is vast—even forbidding. This pianist was born in picturesque Kecskemet, Hungary in 1984. He attended the Franz Liszt Academy and went on to win a scholarship to study at Tel Aviv University. Many prizes followed. This appears to be his recorded debut.

There is certainly nothing wrong with his performance of the Brahms. It’s big boned, yet gentle and expressive in I. II brings additional expressivity without sentimentality. The movement flows without exaggeration and grows to its powerful climax naturally. The Scherzo lets loose as it should. Few pianists can resist the sweep of this movement, and ones that do are guilty of misinterpretation. The music calls for Gypsy abandon. Fulei adds admirable clarity in his pedaling. The eerie Intermezzo with its Beethoven-like fate motif is given serious weight, and the cathartic Finale concludes this masterpiece in fine fashion.

Debussy’s beloved suite begins with a somewhat matter-of-fact ‘Prelude’. While many might find it refreshing, this reviewer would like a little more emotional juice. A similar style also appears in the ‘Menuet’, but it works a little better here. The famous ‘Clair De Lune’ finds the pianist at his best—and using a little more pedal. He is also more willing to stretch phrases. The concluding ‘Passepied’ is in joyful detach mode.

Andras Gabor Viragh is a fellow Hungarian and is known both as composer and organizer. His 1912 four-movement suite, Faces of the Moon, is an impressive achievement, closest in style to Debussy, but with more contemporary harmonies. While there is little to worry the more conservative listener, it does splash its colors and virtuosity all over the place. There is not a dull moment in its more than 13 minutes. Another composer it brought to mind was Honegger.

The pianist’s own notes are informative, as far as they go. For information on Viragh I had to search elsewhere. The notes also describe Beethoven’s Sonata 14, though it is not included here. With excellent sound, this is an impressive and interesting debut.

BECKER
American Visions
Copland, Gershwin, Becker, Rodgers, Sousa
Ian Gindes, p
Centaur 3475—63 minutes
‘Muted and Sensuous’ from Copland’s Four Piano Blues is a beautiful start to this recital. The four excerpts from Rodeo and three from Our Town come across convincingly except for the ‘Hoe-Down,’ which is too restrained. Earl Wild’s etude on ‘Fascinatin’ Rhythm’ suffers from the same problem—its virtuosity needs to glitter and be effortless; Gindes plays jaw-clenchingly rather than jaw-droppingly.
‘Embraceable You’ is stronger, and it sounds like it lies under Gindes’s fingers more easily.
Who is Kris Becker? The booklet only says he’s a “virtuoso pianist-composer...unashamedly from today’s generation,” a rather meaningless description. His website says, “Out of the imagination of an award-winning composer and pianist KB Kris Becker (sic) come barrier-smashing ideas and inspirational performance experiences.” Gag me with a spoon. The barcarolle-like Passacaglia from The Four Curiosities is an attractive pastiche of Debussy and a few others, but that’s about it. The Elegy is a fatuous wash of broken chords. My barriers remain unsmashed.
Stephen Hough’s arrangements of ‘Carousel Waltz’ feels too long, but ‘My Favorite Things’ is enjoyable. The three other credited pianists join Gindes for an eight-hand arrangement of ‘The Stars and Stripes Forever’—belabored, bangy, and beset with wrong notes. On his own, Gindes has a fine tone, and the program is pleasant and musically played if sometimes lacking in thrills.

16 Love Songs
William Howard, p—Orchid 56—66:30
Another pianist who thinks he can also write. The notes are not very good. He overuses the unnecessary word “throughout” and talks about songs that have become “massively well-known”—both in the first paragraph. He overuses “passionate” and “impassioned” (his playing is neither, despite the descriptions of the music). One piece “describes Anezka wearing a violet dress” (can music describe colors or dresses?). Another piece is described as “fascinating” (ugh).
The playing is not bad, but it’s an odd program, and often the songs only have a word in their titles in common. In other words, it has the weakness of all theme programs: music doesn’t have ideas in common, and there is no agreed-upon way to express, say, “love”.
The program starts with Liszt arrange-
ments for piano of songs. If you know the songs you will miss the voice. The next eight pieces are by Czech composers: Smetana, Dvorak, Fibich, and Novak. I don’t find them very interesting. The Fauré and Granados pieces are piano originals. Fritz Kreisler’s ‘Liebesleid’ was originally for violin; we hear Rachmaninoff’s piano reading of Strauss’s ‘Morgen’.

So you have to decide if you like the program, and you will then find Mr Howard OK but not delicate or at all “passionate,” despite his frequent use of the word.

VROON

Americans in Paris

RAVEL: Ma Mere l’Oye; BARBER: Souvenirs; FAURE: Dolly; BROWN: Chant; GERSHWIN: American in Paris

Jerome Lowenthal & Michael Brown, p
CAG 116—61 minutes

“Americans in Paris” is the title of the piano duet program performed here. It includes two of the greatest piano duet suites by French composers, probably the greatest by an American, the first recording of a short contribution by Brown, and, naturally, has to end with a one piano, four-hands version of Gershwin’s symphonic masterpiece.

Lowenthal needs little introduction as one of the elder American pianists (b. 1932) and teacher of so many over the past 42 years. Brown is a Juilliard graduate who once studied piano with Lowenthal and is now teaching at Brooklyn College.

As an American who has performed piano duets in Paris, I hoped there would be a good story behind this recording. But it was recorded in New York in 2014. The Ravel, Barber, and Fauré performances all stand up well to the dozens of others available. The pianists add narration before each of the Ma Mere l’Oye movements—an unusual and effective touch. Brown’s brief piece has an interesting interplay of melodic lines that create harmonies reminiscent of the French works that precede it here.

The Italian pianist Alessandra Gelfini made the four-hands arrangement of Gershwin’s American in Paris in 2013. Both solo piano and two-piano versions have been available for decades, and now this new duet version can be downloaded from www.prelude.com. Lowenthal and Brown give as convincing a performance as I could imagine, but I really miss the orchestration. I have performed Gershwin’s only piano duet arrangement (Cuban Overture) and had the same feelings. It is Gershwin though, and the melodies, harmonies, and rhythms we all know and love are all there, performed with the panache only a couple of excellent American pianists can supply.

HARRINGTON

88x2

MARTINU: 3 Czech Dances; PONCE: Mexican Idyll; POULENC: Elegie; SLOMINSKY: Suite from Icarus; DEBUSSY: Lindaraja; OPEL: Dilukkenjon;

TRADITIONAL: Mexican Hat Dance; KORCH-MAR: Gavrilin Fantasy

Duo Petrof—Columna 334—60 minutes

This must be my issue for Czech Dances (also see Smetana). The Martinu group that begins this program is a very engaging set, fast-slow-fast, delivered with an unexpected brilliance that takes a few hearings to adjust to. Duo Petrof takes its name from the excellent pianos manufactured in the Czech Republic. While not very common in the US, this brand has been around for at least 150 years. Based on this recording they are exceptionally brilliant with a big sound and perfectly suited to the style of these pianists.

Anatoly Zatin and Vlada Vassilieva have been a duo since 2003 and representatives of the Petrof pianos since 2008. Both are faculty members of the University of Colima in Mexico. Their Russian training is fully evident here, and while there are quiet melodic moments (‘Mexican Idyll’ and ‘Elegie’), most of the music is pretty busy. Their percussive, steel-fingered playing style suits that music very well and probably is quite effective in the concert hall. Their exuberance is infectious and you will be caught up in both the music and the performance.

HARRINGTON

Love and Death: Verdi & Wagner

Abdiel Vazquez, p
Piano Classics 101—75 minutes

An interesting concept and a tribute to Wagner and Verdi’s birth bicentennials at the 41st International Cervantino Festival in Mexico. Vazquez’s program includes transcriptions from several composers, some well known, others little performed.

The pianist’s own pasted together Rhapsody on Themes from Die Meistersinger is based on fragments from Liszt, Franz Bendel, Wolf, and Von Bulow. At just over 10 minutes, it’s effective enough in its first outing on records. It begins with the sublime quintet, but
diverges quickly into a melange of motifs from the opera. It rarely stays in one place long enough to satisfy and is more a medley of fragments. Vazquez plays as if totally convinced by what he is doing. He ends with a more protracted statement of that quintet, plus a fragment of the Prelude.

‘Sigmund’s Love Song’ from Die Walkure in a complete transcription by Karl Tausig follows and is far more satisfying than the Meistersinger mess. Best of all is Tausig’s ‘Ride of the Valkyries’—an imaginative tour-de-force of virtuosic splendor. Also most enjoyable is the extended ‘Love Scene and Transfiguration’ from Tristan und Isolde. This takes us from the Prelude (or part of it) to the love scene and the love death. All in all, Tausig is imaginative and plays with the themes respectfully, but still manages to entertain us with a real wallow. It’s all beautifully played by Vazquez.

La Forza del Destino gets the royal treatment in Giuseppe Martucci’s Concert Fantasy. Motifs and arias tumble over each other in virtuosic fashion. It works just fine, and there is enough original Verdi for sustained enjoyment. Liszt’s Rigoletto Concert Paraphrase is well known. This is no wimpy performance.

Liszt’s Sacred Dance and Final Duet From Aida once again shows the hand of the master in putting together a transcription that works to great satisfaction. Actually, transcription is not really the right word, as Liszt has created one of his free fantasies. If you love Verdi and love Liszt, you will easily succumb to these selections.

The Concert Paraphrase on Themes from Il Trovatore is by the notable legend, Gyorgy Cziffra. It certainly has plenty of swagger and makes great technical demands on the player. For all that, it works pretty well and should not offend anyone except readers who abhor outrageous showy display.

Recording is superb, but the notes are skimpy. Abdiel Vazquez wears the mantle of the great pianist virtuosos extremely well.

Jennifer Montone, horn

Schumann, Strauss, Saint-Saëns, Dukas, Bozza, Hindemith, Planef, Ludwig

Anna Polonsky, p—Albany 1612—72 minutes

Jennifer Montone has been principal horn of the Philadelphia Orchestra since 2006, and it is a pleasure to hear her make music with pianist Anna Polonsky. In every piece, every phrase gets what it needs plus loads of heart. The program is loaded, too. There is a double dose of deeply expressive Schumann: 3 Fantasy Pieces (heard an octave lower here than on the original clarinet) and Adagio & Allegro, both composed in 1849. Saint-Saëns’s Morceau de Concert (1887) has an exhilarating final variation. Strauss’s ‘Andante’ (1888) is brief but full in feeling. Paul Dukas’s Villanelle (1906) and Eugene Bozza’s En Foret (1941) conjure memories of the horn’s centuries-old hunting heritage. Hindemith’s winful Alto Horn Sonata (1943) is my favorite of his solo works for brass, though the recited poem (in English here) before the final movement always seems a little odd.

The program ends with Robert Planef’s dramatic little ‘Legende’ (1969) and David Ludwig’s thought-provoking 6 Haikus, composed in 2007 for Ms Montone. Most arresting are the moments when the horn sound is directed toward undamped piano strings. Kudos to the engineers for making the sympathetic vibration so audible.

Superb recording.

KILPATRICK

Czech Portraits

JANACEK: Viola Sonata; Dumka; Romance; VYCPALEK: Suite; ZICH: Elegie
Jacob Adams, va; Pascal Salomon, p

Centaur 3470—51 minutes

Ladislav Vycpalek lived from 1882 to 1969; he wrote mostly vocal music. His four-movement, 19-minute Suite for solo viola is from 1929, and it’s a strong, masterly work with chromatic anguish and yearning. The thematic cells give each movement a great deal of unity: everything is clear on the first hearing, and repeated hearings reveal more subtleties. The slow III opens with a long, lyrical phrase punctuated—or replied to—by two chords: they’re C and E (major third) dropping down to a D and A (fifth) on the open strings. The lyrical phrases get longer and that two-chord gesture comes back several times but with the second chord changed. In the final instance the melody comes to rest on the low C, and a long pause seems to indicate the end of the movement, but then the viola whispers twice more: C and E to G and E-flat, the top notes a half step apart. It’s simple but jaw-dropping. Only IV sounds belabored, and part of that is Adams struggling with the chords. The piece is a keeper, though.

Violist Jitka Hosprova recorded the Vycpalek for Supraphon on her 2011 album Monologue, alongside Borkovec’s sonata, Klusak’s Ubi Vult, and Smolka’s Mist of
Depression. The sound is better though also imperfect; her playing is smoother than Adams’s but not as engaging.

The Janacek pieces are Adams’s own arrangements of the violin originals, quite beautifully done. I’ve heard a fair bit of Janacek, and the sonata strikes me as one of his most immediately appealing pieces. His tendency to wander and rhapsodize never becomes incoherent. It is especially tender and sweet. The playing in III needs more vim and unpredictability; it should contrast even more with the other movements. The ‘Romance’, which Janacek criticized as “too heavy for a romance—in other words, it is no romance,” sounds more like a hymn, though the melody is winsome.

Otakar Zich’s ‘Elegie’ from 1905 could have been written a good 60 years earlier. The chords and the bass counterpoint in octaves in the climax are in the stubborn Germanic tradition, but they can’t obscure the miniature’s Czech soul.

Adams graduated from Oberlin, Yale, and UC Santa Barbara and teaches at the University of Alabama. His playing is expressive and intense; his tone is sometimes gritty and his bowing not quite clean, but there’s nothing intolerable. I would recommend this to any serious music lover with a few qualifications but without hesitation. Notes are in English.

A Violin’s Life 2

MAIER-RONTGEN: Violin Sonata; TUBIN: Solo Sonata; BEETHOVEN: Sonata 9
Frank Almond; William Wolfram, p
Avie 2363—67 minutes

Frank Almond is concertmaster of the Milwaukee Symphony and plays the “Lipinski” Stradivarius of 1715, reputed to be one of the master’s finest creations. The violin is on loan to the symphony from an anonymous donor. I haven’t heard this violin in person, but it certainly sounds like a very fine instrument on this recording and on the previous one in this series. This recording almost never saw the light of day, because in early 2014 the violin was stolen. The authorities recovered it a few weeks later.

The reason for the choice of composers is their association with the violin. Swedish composer Amanda Maier-Rontgen (1853–94) was the first wife of composer Julius Rontgen, who inherited the violin and whose Violin Sonata 2 is on A Violin’s Life Volume 1. Her violin sonata is written in the spirit of Schumann, though it is far inferior to any of his sonatas.

Estonian composer Eduard Tubin wrote his Solo Violin Sonata in 1962. It is a modernist work with jagged edges. This is the year that the Estonian violinist Evi Liivak acquired the “Lipinski.” Liivak often programmed the music of her countryman.

The best piece on the program is Beethoven’s Violin Sonata 9, the famous Kreutzer. Lipinski is known to have performed it in Dresden with Franz Liszt. This is a good performance, but Almond’s technique often shows strain. It also comes up against tremendous competition. It does have excellent sound, and while I prefer the recording by Szymon Goldberg and Lili Kraus over all others (J/F 2013), that one was recorded in 1936 and cannot help but show its age.

James Ehnes

DEBUSSY: Violin Sonata; ELGAR: Sonata; RESPIGHI: Sonata; SIBELIUS: Berceuse
Andrew Armstrong, p
Onyx 4159—69 minutes

All of these works date from the final years of WW I, yet they are very different.

Debussy’s Violin Sonata is one of his last works. It shows his final move toward neoclassicism, but is one of his most difficult works to understand. Edward Elgar’s sonata was written in 1918 while he was living at his country house in West Sussex. If there is a similarity between the two works, it is in the impishness of the middle movements. Respighi’s sonata is very different from his Roman Trilogy—mature impressionist works whose technique picks up where Debussy’s Iberia leaves off. The sonata harks back to Brahms and Franck. Sibelius’s ‘Berceuse’ is a very brief, light character piece.

James Ehnes and Andrew Armstrong move effectively from one style to the next and do full justice to each, no doubt from long experience. Ehnes draws a consistently lovely tone from the “Marsick” Stradivarius of 1715.

To speak of music in terms of neural response to vibrations in the air is to say something of validity, but it falls far short of being able to embrace the mysterious reality of our experience when we listen to a Beethoven symphony.

JOHN POLKINGHORNE
I had never heard any of these works before I got this to review, and I found the consistent quality of the music remarkable. I just sat back and listened the first time, not consulting the book or watching which track was playing, and I soon lost track of which composer I was listening to. I was only aware that all of them sounded British and 20th Century.

The sonata by Frank Bridge from 1904 opens with an exuberant movement with a theme of Straussian character. The second and last movement, completed by Paul Hindmarsh in 1996, is more tranquil. Although the music is lovely, a true finale is missing. John Ireland's sonata was subjected to several revisions (1909, 1917, 1944). It shows some impressionist influence and is harmonically more sophisticated, with a more searching character. It is not as exuberant as Bridge but sounds more mature. The slow movement has a long-breathed theme and moves at a leisurely pace. The rondo finale is the most energetic of the three movements, with a touch of British wistfulness and impishness.

Arthur Bliss's sonata was edited in 2010 by Rupert Marshall-Luck. Only one movement was sketched 1914-16. Bliss abandoned the sonata, possibly because of the shock of the death of his brother Kennard, who was killed that September in WW I. This piece has a rhapsodic character that is specially British and resembles Ireland’s sonata a bit, though it has more grandiose and stately moments. I am more moved by this sonata than by Ireland’s, and it is a pity that the composer did not finish the work.

Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Two Pieces likely date to 1912-14, after the months that he studied with Ravel in Paris. They are brief, lovely, and harmonically sophisticated, but not among his best works. William Lloyd Webber’s very brief, nostalgic ‘Gardens at Eastwell’ from 1980 is as lovely as any of the preceding works and sounds like it too could have been composed early in the 20th Century.

Tasmin Little and Piers Lane play this music very well. Little plays a violin made by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini in Milan in 1757. The remarkable work here, which I had never heard before, is the violin sonata by Robert Beaser, born in Boston in 1954. It sounds as if it could have been written decades before. There is no trace of the influence of minimalism or even serialism. It sounds like something written by a student of Nadia Boulanger. The piece is actually a set of three themes and variations. It is well composed, balances the instruments expertly, and exploits them idiomatically. There is a very pleasing variety of moods and tempos in the work. I even find a hint of nostalgia. Some might object to a composer’s writing in a style from the time of his parents or grandparents, but I think music has lost its way since WW II. I must reiterate Ornette Coleman’s famous maxim that music is for our emotions. Even Bach could be arid. Who among us really enjoys listening to The Art of Fugue? Minimalism is little better than afad, and Henryk Gorecki’s Symphony 3 (Symphony of Sorrowful Songs), as fine as it is, would probably be an even better piece if it has not been influenced by it. Postwar Western classical music was largely stillborn, and the only music I am familiar with from this period that I enjoy is Gyorgy Ligeti’s compositions from the 1960s and Conlon Nancarrow’s Studies for Player Piano, and they are far outside music’s mainstream.

The other works by Ysaye and Bartok are much better known than the Beaser. Miller and Leong play this music very well, as they do the Beaser, but I can think of several other recordings that are better. The sets by Thomas Zehetmair (J/F 2005) and Rachel Kolly d’Alba (M/A 2011) are the best performances I know of the Ysaye Sonatas. Gidon Kremer and Martha Argerich play the Bartok with ferocious barbarity and intoxicating mystery.

As we commented in reviewing his recording of the Bruch Scottish Fantasy (M/A 2014) this violinist is never histrionic (it seems almost normal for a violinist to be high-strung!). He has a
sweet tone and he remains calm—he lets the music unfold naturally. That may not be the way to "reach a modern audience", but it’s far more musical than what you hear from most other violinists. There is no showing off, no attempt to “wow” the audience. He plays as if he is meditating. He sees no need to dominate.

I first heard the Lalo in Chicago with Henryk Szeryng. I liked his approach right away. Itzhak Perlman’s London recording for RCA (Previn conducting) came along not long after that. I have had it ever since (it must be 45 or 50 years) and have never tired of it. Perlman does dominate his recording in a way that Feng does not.

I like these two very different readings of the music. Perlman belts it out in a Spanish way; Feng remains subtle and expressive, with great attention to detail and nuance (can there ever have been a more beautiful Andante?). Perlman is onstage in a concert hall (as I first heard it, though I think it was Ravinia), but Feng is meandering around musing on the music, accompanied by an orchestra (a pretty good one, though not a big one: 69 musicians). There is something lovely and meditative in his approach. He is certainly playing a gorgeous Stradivarius with a silken tone. How nice not to have a violinist try to take over the show. I like this so much that I will replace other recordings with this one—except that I will keep the Perlman, because I do like his kind of playing too.

The Lalo is really a concerto in five movements, despite its name. (It has often been recorded minus one of its movements.) It was the piece that inspired Tchaikovsky to write his own violin concerto, which is very different—much more expansive and outgoing. But Lalo has his Spanish-sounding moments, even if it hardly fits the gypsy theme of this program.

Everything else here is also beautifully played—none of it like a big showpiece, all of it like great music. I like the Sarasate pieces best, but it is easy to enjoy the Waxman Carmen Fantasy (Bizet wrote the tunes) and Ravel’s Tzigane. I don’t think the Lalo actually fits the gypsy theme, but instead it becomes an exceptional half hour that anchors the whole program in music of substance.

Channel delivers wonderful sound, as we have come to expect. A treasure!
names like Ruggiero Ricci, Zino Francescati, and Fritz Kreisler.

Kavakos has a special flair for the Spanish works. His breadth of technique and style in the 'Caprice Basque' is astounding. His languid use of rubato in the 'Andalusian Romance' and the lightness of his virtuosity in 'Memories of the Alhambra' are gorgeous; his colors in 'The Miller's Dance' from The Three-Cornered Hat are kaleidoscopic; and Wieniawski’s 'Caprice Valse,' simultaneously capricious and tender, simply floats on air. I find both Paganini works, Introduction and Variations on Nel Cor Piu Non Me Sento (all 13 minutes of it) and Variations on God Save the King (7 minutes) to be empty and vapid, but he plays both with panache. The 'Dance Russe' is from Petrouchka and the 'Chanson Russe' from Mavra. The Tchaikovsky is the last of 6 Morceaux, Op. 51.

Yes, I do have one reservation about Kavakos: the earlier works on the album allow a considerable degree of stylistic freedom; the Strauss, Dohnanyi, and Elgar do not, but here he seems to continue a habit of rubato, filling them with too many tiny lurches and retards. He then proceeds to milk the Tchaikovsky and Dvorak to death, destroying their shape and form.

I have some criticisms of the album itself. The violinist is relegated to the left speaker, the piano is placed center on the stereo spectrum, and I had to check whether any sound at all was coming from my right speaker. What idiot determined this? It's Kavakos the virtuoso who should be front and center. Also, even though the excellent pianist is clearly audible, engineers removed him to the background where his instrument simply isn't projected. He's like second-hand Brooks Smith with Jascha Heifetz.

Also, the type face on the album cover for the one word "Kavakos" is plain and ugly, and I had to search four times before being able to read the word "virtuoso". The rest is just a swirl of hair holding a violin. The liner notes give a brief blurb on each of the 15 works but not a word on the violinist or the pianist! Kavakos deserves far better. Decca may be the label name, but, as Don Vroon has warned, that means nothing anymore—the former "major labels" now outsource both engineering and packaging, and quality control is minimal.

FRENCH

American Record Guide 219

Persistence

Boysen, Hultgren, Wilson, Clarke, Tandon, Rincon, Pigovat, Alarcon, Santandreu, Forte
Carrie Henneman Shaw, Casy Barker, voice; Jesus Santandreu, sax; University of St Thomas Symphonic Wind Ensemble; Grand Symphonic Winds/ Matthew George
Innova 812 [3CD] 183 minutes

With a student population of about 10,000, the University of St Thomas is a medium-sized Catholic school in Minnesota. I don't know how large its music department is, but it has a rather small core of full-time and large list of adjunct faculty. Its Symphonic Wind Ensemble consists of music and non-music majors.

People on the inside of the American university band world probably know about the UST Symphonic Wind Ensemble's amazing list of about 80 commissioned works. I did not know about it until now.

This 3-disc collection offers ten of those pieces, most of them only a few years old. Andrew Boysen's cheerful, 8-minute December Dance (2005) is the lively opener. Ralph Hultgren's 3-movement, 12-minute Wind Ensemble Concertino (2011) is fierce in I ('Con Forza'), calm in a low-register flute-solo II ('Semplice'), then alternately fierce and joyous in III. Nigel Clarke's Mata Hari (2002) presents three speculative scenes from her life: exotic 'Dancer in the Shadows', World War I spy ('Deceit and Seduction'), and eventual 'Evasion and Capture'. The work ends by portraying her defiance in the face of a firing squad.

Two of the works have soprano soloists. Carrie Henneman Shaw is heard in Dana Wilson's How Very Close (2013), settings of six poems that deal with love at its most intense. The texts (included) are by disparate poets: Sappho (5th-Century BC Greek), Rumi (13th-Century Persian), Emily Dickinson, and so on. Ms Shaw's consonants are not always audible (her diction is clear at solo moments but often obscured when accompanied), and her expressiveness often seems suppressed, but her voice is lovely and pure—often sounding like a solo instrument.

Casy Barker is the wordless soloist in the program's biggest piece, Boris Pigovat's 5-movement, 41-minute Lights from the Yellow Star: Music of Sorrow and Love (2011). The piece is about Robert Fisch, who survived Holocaust concentration camps and the Soviet-crushed 1956 Hungarian Revolution, then moved to the US, and became an artist and physician in the Minneapolis area. The Introduction is portentous and beautiful. 'When the Stones
Weep’ is first brutal, then lovely and mournful in solos by bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, and flute. ’1956’ begins as a happy march that turns ugly. ’Silent Music’ and ’Song of Love and Hope’ present many challenges to instrumental soloists and sections, and except for occasional lapses of tone or intonation, these young musicians pass the tests.

Luis Serrano Alarcon’s evocative Duende (2010) has become a wind ensemble favorite (two recordings are reviewed in J/F 2016: 213). Composer Jesus Santandreu is tenor saxophone soloist in his own Oneiric Discourse (2011), a 20-minute excursion into jazz-based harmonies and gestures. He is a fine player with warm tone and the ability to shift easily from standard to extended playing techniques; and his musical ideas are interesting. So are the ideas in Aldo Raphael Forte’s 17-minute Dalí (2003), the last piece on this three-hour program, where each of the five movements depicts an artwork by the Spanish surrealist.

A few of the pieces didn’t do much for me. In Shamir Tandon’s 11-minute Desi Jhalak (2012) the Indian flavors and musical ideas seem shallow—or at least they seem odd as played by a Western concert band. Victoriano Valencia Rincon’s Sínu (Origenes) (2012) tells the sad tale of the Zuenes, a South American people who fell to the invading Spanish in the 16th Century. Here my response seems tied to the performance, at least as much as to the actual music. When the playing is quiet—when tone qualities and intonation are unsure—the music itself seems rather mediocre. But when the playing is animated or intense, the music seems most interesting.

This university band and its director Matthew George deserve praise for bringing a very large project to fruition.

Images & Mirrors

Hindemith, Gaida, Villa-Lobos, Picqueur
Peter Bruns, vc; Clair-Obscur Saxophone Quartet; Saxon Wind Philharmonic/ Thomas Cramer
Genuin 16419—62 minutes

This is one of those albums that immediately tells you it is first-rate. The brass players in the opening measures of Paul Hindemith’s Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber sound so clear and clean and in tune that there is just no doubt. This first impression did not waver in the next hour. The Saxon Wind Philharmonic (M/A 2014: 210) is a band that sounds as skilled and refined as a symphony orchestra.

The big piece is the 5-movement, 31-minute Cello Concerto (1980) by Friedrich Gulda (1930-2000). The work is a polystylistic potpourri, and several ARG reviewers have enjoyed it (J/A 2014, S/O 2010: 146, J/A 1999: 198). Add me to the list. The Overture is in a clever slow-movement sonata form (no development section) with contrasting themes—one in rock style with rhythm section and full band, the other a lyrical thing with woodwinds that sounds like something from a Mozart serenade. II (’Idylle’) begins with a beautifully blended brass chorale that reminds me of the opening of Tannhauser Overture, then shifts to a lighthearted, lederhosen sort of dance. III is a 6-minute cadenza with lots of special effects, and it leads directly into IV, a courtly Minuet where the cellist alternates high-pitched melodies with solo woodwinds. V is a comical March, all oompahs and brassy dogfights, the cellist playing obbligatos, introducing a double-stopped theme in the Trio section, then bringing back the rock feeling from I. The ending is all show-off enthusiasm, like an old summer-in-the-park cornet solo where the audience cheers at the end. All in all, I find it a very entertaining work, with enough beauty and virtuosity to overcome any prejudice against the notion of embedding American popular music in American classical music.

Frank Bongiorno’s excellent arrangement of the Aria from Villa-Lobos’s Bachianas Brasileiras is scored for the most unusual combination of cello and saxophone quartet. The playing by cellist Bruns and the Clair-Obscur Saxophone Quartet is superb.

Clair-Obscur is the solo group in Bart Picqueur’s 4-movement, 21-minute Jeu de Cartes (Card Game, 2013). It opens with a ‘Queen of Hearts’ that has the character of a lively Elizabethan ceremony. ‘Jack of Spades’ plays on the saxophone’s heritage as a raspy-voiced jazz and rock ’n roll instrument. ’10 of Diamonds’ has a Kurt Weill-like music-hall sound. The album ends with ‘The Fool’, all wacky melodies in mixed meters.

Cellist Peter Bruns, professor at the Leipzig Academy of Music and music director of the Mendelssohn Chamber Orchestra, plays a 1730 instrument once owned by Pablo Casals. Clair-Obscur Saxophone Quartet studied chamber music with a violinist in Berlin.

KILPATRICK

September/October 2016
Harmonie & Turcherie

**HAYDN:** Turkish March; 7 Last Words Introduction to Part 2; **MOZART:** March of the Janissaries; **WITT:** Oboe & Winds Concertino; **ROSSINI:** Turk in Italy Overture; **DONIZETTI:** Wind Sinfonia; **MENDELSSOHN:** Nocturne; **SCHUBERT:** Funeral Music; **SPOHr:** Nocturne

Ensemble Zefiro—Arcana 391—79 minutes

The Harmonie in this release’s title refers to an ensemble assembled by the Austrian Emperor Josef II, consisting of two oboes, two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons, which were primarily used to accompany banquets and impress visitors and often performed arrangements of popular operas. The term Turcherie refers to the 18th Century European vogue for all things Turkish. The overlap of this period is emphasized on this recording, with “Turkish” music of Michael Haydn, Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, and Spohr. There are works by two sets of brothers: Michael and Joseph Haydn and Gaetano and Giuseppe Donizetti. Although many listeners may know of Michael Haydn, few are acquainted with Gaetano’s brother Giuseppe, who spent his musical career in Turkey under Sultan Mahmoud II.

The Ensemble Zefiro performs these pieces on period instruments (adding flutes, trumpets, percussion, and contrabassoons). The ensemble puts it together well, playing with superb precision and unexpectedly fine intonation. There are a couple of more familiar works on this release, including the Introduction to Part 2 of Haydn’s Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross and Rossini’s overture to The Turk in Italy (arranged here by bassoonist Alfredo Bernardini). The Witt Concertino was previously attributed to Weber, and it’s good, foreshadowing some of Schumann’s horn writing. The Mendelssohn Nocturne and Schubert’s Funeral Music, written when the composers were 15 and 16, are little-known jewels and quite lovely. In Louis Spohr’s Nocturne for Harmonie and Janissary band, several movements are specifically “Turkish”, but the others more closely resemble the composer’s refined chamber writing for strings.

**Conductus 3**

John Potter, Christopher O’Gorman, Rogers Covey-Crump

Hyperion 68115—61:35

This is the final release in a distinguished series of recordings of medieval Latin songs, commonly termed conductus. As in the two earlier recordings (J/F 2013: 205 & M/A 2014: 217), the “three tenors” for this project are very effective in conveying the intricacy of the often dense polyphony, but each is given monophonic songs to sing unaccompanied, which help the listener appreciate their unique timbral qualities. The booklet notes, slightly adapted from ones in the first two recordings, emphasize the musical aspects of these pieces and the problems of performance, but do not expand on the literary qualities of these songs, including the scholarship that has attributed ‘A globo veteri,’ ‘Olim sudor Herculis,’ and ‘Vite perdite’ to Peter of Blois, a 12th Century cleric eventually named Chancellor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and ‘Homo natus ad laborem/tui status’ to Philip the Chancellor. Texts and translations are included.

The selections on the three recordings of this series only scratch the surface of this rich and expansive repertoire of medieval song. I can only hope they will inspire others to search out and perform them.

**BREWER**

**Chronicle of a Medieval Voyage**

Capella de Ministrers, Musica Reservata Barcelona/Carles Magraner

Licanus 1637—66:37
Licanus 1638—64:19

These are the first two recordings (Vol. 1: Ars Antiqua and Vol. 2: Peregrinatio) of a trilogy containing music from the lifetime of the 13th Century philosopher and theologian now most commonly named Ramon Llull, who was born on the island of Majorca. The third volume (Mediterraneum, Licanus 1639) was not sent for review. The selections on each recording were chosen to reflect the different stages of Llull’s life and thought and are a mixture of Cantigas de Santa Maria, Italian laude, and troubadour and trouvere songs, with an occasional motet or polyphonic conductus. The interpretations by Magraner emphasize the instrumental flexibility of his ensemble through elaborate accompaniments added even to chant and through the frequent performance of vocal music by instruments alone.

The booklet is very informative concerning Llull’s life and thought and includes texts and translations. While there are perhaps more effective recordings for some of the selections, some are quite useful, such as the first complete commercial recording of Guiraut Riquier’s song, ‘Pus sabers no’m val ni sens,’ with its unusual form.

**BREWER**
Although the future Emperor Charles V lost his parents at a young age, he had a model upbringing by one of great luminaries of the period. In 1507 Charles's aunt, Margaret of Austria, became his guardian and raised him at her palace in Mechelen. She ensured that he got the best training in the arts and sciences to prepare him for his destiny to become the most powerful ruler in the Western World. At Mechelen, Charles encountered the music of some of the most eminent composers; and he would, in turn, employ some of the most famous composers of his era: Thomas de Crequillon, Clemens non Papa, Nicolaus Gombert, Pierre de la Rue, Josquin des Prez, and many others. And Katharina Bäuml notes that the Spanish musicians, like Antonio de Cabezón, he inherited from his maternal grandfather, Ferdinand of Spain, would also become part of Charles's Capilla Flamenca.

This release celebrates wind and vocal music from the “Golden Age” of the Spanish Renaissance, played “as it would have sounded in Charles V’s lifetime”. Bäuml’s final comment, “it was unusual in Europe at this time for such music to be written as often for religious occasions as for secular ones, but this was the case in Spain”, is a bit confusing. It does not appear in the corresponding notes in German. I suppose it means that while wind instruments were seldom used in northern church music, they were in Spain. Certainly we do know that instruments accompanied voices in Spanish church music, and the Capella de la Torre does bring together a fine program of instrumentally accompanied vocal music interlaced with dance music (Pavanes, Galliards, etc.) and keyboard intabulations.

One sometimes hears the familiar ‘Danza Alta’ by Francisco de la Torre (c. 1500) played at a faster tempo, but it is played here by reeds and trombones at a slower tempo that gives the piece a majestic poise. The ‘Pavana y Gallarda’ by Luis de Milan has a similar bearing. Sebastian Knebel, playing the organ, offers some of Antonio de Cabezón’s intabulations of French chansons—‘Si Par Souffrir’ and ‘Triste Depart’—by composers he might have encountered in the Capilla Flamenca. There are also some gorgeous performances for bass voice accompanied by trombones and reeds, where Matthias Gerchen sings the prevailing melody, as in Johann Walther’s ‘Ein Feste Burg

For Charles V
Matthias Gerchen, b; Capella de la Torre
Coviello 91602—59 minutes

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16th-Century Spain Courts & Cathedrals
Seldom Sene Recorder Quintet
Brilliant 95304—68 minutes

The program consists almost entirely of 16th-Century transcriptions of polyphonic vocal music composed by some of the most famous Spanish and Franco-Flemish composers of the late Renaissance. The combination shows how thoroughly Spaniards like Morales, Victoria, Vasquez, Pecalosa, and Guerrero had integrated the relentless imitative style of Josquin and his French contemporaries. Antonio de Cabezón created a number of arrangements for the organ, and they were published posthumously by his son Hernando in the collection Obras de Musica para Tecla, Arpa, y Vihuela (Madrid 1578). Only the ‘Danza’ by Francisco de la Torre appears to have been originally composed for instruments.

The Seldom Sene Recorder Quintet selected works to show off the pure harmonies inherent in Franco-Flemish polyphony. To make the most of this nuance, Maria Martínez Ayerza notes that the ensemble uses a “vocal” way of playing that brings out the phrasing and ornamentation that suit the voice. The results are striking. Using well-matched recorders in every vocal range gives the music a thoroughly homogenous sound.

Passions of St Matthew & St John
Ensemble Triagonale/ Michael Paumgarten
CPO 555025—56 minutes

Their bios are amusing, and also a bit kooky, but these are a serious and talented bunch of singers. Their program explores choral music from the borderlands between German and Italian Europe through the works of two little-known masters of the late Renaissance: the Matthäuspassion of Johannes Heroldt (c. 1550-1604); and the Passio Secundum Ioannem by Teodorico Clonio or Clingher (c. 1548-1601). Heroldt, born in Jena, was one of many German Lutherans who found work in the south. He divided his activities in Carinthia from 1593 between the Church of St Egidius in Klagenfurt and as cantor at the evangelical collegiate church. His six-voice German Historia of 1594 is composed in the style of the counter-Reformation, verses in polyphony and chant sung in alternatim. Heroldt’s music does not
show much affection. Günter Antesberger notes choral recitation on Christ's exclamation "Eli! Eli!" and descending figures on the words "Come down from the cross". Still, Heroldt's writing is skillful, made of rich sonorities and learned counterpoint. It is a pleasure to listen to, because the singing is so fine.

Clinio began his musical career in Venice and travelled considerably between posts in Italy and Austria before ending up in the position of maestro di cappella at the cathedral in Treviso. His St John Passion of 1595 also fits well in the counter-Reformation, with its declamatory text settings. Clinio is able to create more drama than Heroldt through reduced textures to form what seems like direct dialog between singers, as in 'Ego Palam Locutus Sum'. These moments of dialog are often rather brief, taking the form of choral interjections between passages of recitative. This kind of alternation between recitative and chorus energizes the drama in nearly every movement. The dramatic effect simply would not be as convincing without the singers' careful attention to detail. Notes offer valuable background about composers, and texts in English.

**La Muse Profane**

Accademia del Ricercare/ Pietro Busca

CPO 777608—57 minutes

The program explores the wide variety of instrumental music in Germany in the years before the 30 Years' War (1618-40). The music derives from two discrete sources: *Musicalischer Tugendtspiegel* (1613) by Erasmus Widmann (1572-1634); and Michael Praetorius's *Terpsichore Musarum* (1612). Pairing the two composers' works allows listeners to compare the well-known music of Praetorius with Widmann's, which is little known.

The 17 pieces selected from the more than 300 instrumental dances in Terpsichore Musarum clearly display their connection to dance in their titles. Widmann's music has no clear purpose but "were intended for the decoration of honorable reunions". Praetorius's dances may be readily arranged into suites, as was common, and so we hear them in familiar arrangements of Courantes, Bransles, Gavottes, etc. Widmann disguises the character of his works with the names of women like Helen, Magdalena, Agatha, and so on, making it possible for performers to play them in whatever order they prefer. But the fact that they really are dances is plain enough to hear.

Busca has organized some of them into suites to underscore their thematic similarity (Sofia Anna-Christina) or contrast (Barbara-Ursula).

Busca has arranged these very fine players into families to emphasize contrasts and homogeneity among strings, winds, and reeds; percussionists improvise their parts. For example, a phrase played by one family might be repeated by another, and then they might all come together in the next phrase. In this way, one may appreciate the rich palette of instrumental sounds independently and in concert. Giovanni Tasso's notes in English elucidate the history of German Baroque instrumental music and Widmann's contribution in particular.

**Wunderkammer**

Acronym—Olde Focus 906—67 minutes

This program of ten sonatas, for ensembles ranging in size from two to eight instruments, offers a fine representation of the state of the art in 17th-Century Germany. The organizing principle for the recording appears to have been twofold: to expose the inherent rhythmic and harmonic eccentricities and structural curiosities of the repertory, and to compare the works of canonic composers with ones off the beaten path. For example, the sonatas of Bertali and Krieger are relatively well known, but this is the first recoding of music by Georg Piscator (early 17th Century) and Daniel Eberlin (1647-c. 1715). Between these extremes we have the works of Andreas Oswald, Adam Drese, Philipp Jakob Rittler, Alessandro Foglietti, Clemens Thieme, and Samuel Friedrich Capricornus.

The repertory is taken from the four most important collections of the period: the Parti-腾buch of Jacob Ludwigs (1623-98); the Liechtenstein Music Collection of Karl II von Liechtenstein-Kastelkorn (1623-95); the Rost Codex, copied by Franz Rost (c. 1640-88); and the huge Düben Collection of 2300 manuscripts gathered by Gustav Düben the Elder (1628-90).

Acronym's stirring performances of these sonatas on string instruments gives them an overall homogenous character, yet Kivie Cahn-Lipman notes that scribes anticipated many other possible combinations of string, reed, and brass instruments.

Each sonata is remarkable in its own way. The eight-part Sonata in A minor by Capricornus exhibits a style similar to Johann Rosenmüller, the way he quickly shifts from rich sonorities to quick contrapuntal passages.
Compare, for example, the recordings by the Johann Rosenmüller Ensemble (Christophorus 77333; J/A 2011) and Ensemble Masques (ATMA 2660; S/O 2013). Perhaps the most curious sonata is the five-part Sonata in F by Philipp Jakob Rittler, which includes nearly 40 tempo changes in the span of 90 measures. Piscator’s seven-part Sonata in A minor is also rather appealing for its stunning harmonic curiosities and sudden dynamic changes.

**Dresden Passion**
Cappella Sagittariana/ Norbert Schuster
Rondeau 612122 [2CD] 97 minutes

In this program Norbert Schuster undertakes the complex task of reconstructing a late 17th-Century Passion in the style of an 18th-Century Passion Oratorio. The centerpiece is the Passion of St Mark by Marco Giuseppe Peranda (c. 1625-75), who was Heinrich Schütz’s vice Kapellmeister in Dresden in the 1660s. In fact, the work was long thought to have been by the elder master until doubts began to be raised by 19th-Century historians.

According to tradition, all church music at the Protestant court of Duke Johann Georg II was to be performed without accompaniment in Passion Week. Therefore, Peranda’s *St Mark Passion*, first performed on Good Friday of 1668, has the same austere musical qualities as Schütz’s *St John Passion* (Augsburg, 1656; J/A 2005). It is dominated by a strict setting of the Gospel narrative with unaccompanied recitative and polyphonic choruses. But tastes changed in the 18th Century; the Passion Oratorio required operatic elaboration of the scriptural narrative, with accompanied arias and choruses. Schuster intersperses movements of Peranda’s Passion with several sinfonias by Schütz and vocal concertos by Schütz, Peranda, and Christoph Bernhard (1628-92), another one of Schütz’s vice kapellmeisters. The results are glorious.

Christoph Koop claims, in his notes, that Peranda’s style may be discerned as more “galant” than Schütz’s, but that is very difficult to tell with dry recitative. Only the brief choruses offer enough harmonic information to display the lucid textures one associates with early Classicism. Still, the best works on this release are the beautiful concertos with accompaniment. The singing and instrumental playing is tops in every way.

Texts and notes are in English.

**Buxtehude & His Circle**
Theatre of Voices/ Paul Hillier
Dacapo 6.220634—75 minutes

Jakob Bloch Jespersen notes that the purpose behind this recording is to explore Dietrich Buxtehude’s Danish roots and the expansive network of composers and musicians who became part of his Baltic circle. It is a outstanding program of Latin and German motets by Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707), Christian Geist (c. 1650-1711), Nikolaus Bruhns (1665-97), Franz Tunder (1614-67), and Kaspar Förster (1616-73).

Each work is a gem in its own right, which performers manage to polish to perfection. Both singers and instrumentalists have a sensitive approach to this music.

Bruhns’s *De Profundis Clamavi* is a virtuosic showpiece for bass voice (Jakob Bloch Jespersen), as is *Confitebor tibi Domine* by Kaspar Förster. Word painting in *De Profundis Clamavi* is particularly striking for its downward chromaticism. Buxtehude shows his penchant for melancholy in *Gott HIlf Mir*, from the pulsating sinfonia in the violins, through their partnership with the bass voice, to the choruses. In *Jesu, Meine Freude* Buxtehude affects melancholy with unusual harmonic progressions. Texts and notes are in English.

**Baroque Enchantment**
Ensemble Chiaroscuro
Concerto 2095—55:34

This anthology of Italian violin music (except a single piece for unaccompanied viola da gamba by Tobias Hume) jumps from the early 17th Century to the mid-18th Century. The program begins with two of the earliest known violin sonatas by Giovanni Paolo Cima (1610) and two by Dario Castello (1629) and ends with violin sonatas by Antonio Vivaldi (Op.2:3) and Michele Mascitti (1664-1760) (Op.3:10). Aside from the Hume there are two short works for lute, a toccata by Frescobaldi and an arrangement of a work titled 'Casandra' by the early-17th century lutenist, Pietro Paolo Raimondo.

The members of Ensemble Chiaroscuro—Fabrizio Haim Cipriani, violin; Antonio Fantinuoli, cello and gamba; Giangiacomo Pinardi, theorbo and lute; Sirio Restani, harpsichord—are quite proficient on their period instruments. Cipriani might not be as elegant as Rachel Podger (he plays with a little too much scratch for my taste), but he is never unpleas-
ant and his ornamentation is very tasteful. I would also commend the extensive use of only a lute or theorbo for the basso continuo; it is a nice contrast to the overuse of harpsichord, and Pinardi is a very inventive accompanist—as is Restani, though the harpsichord has a very noisy action.

There are some minor problems with the production; the notes include a long discussion of a Telemann unaccompanied Fantasy for violin that is not included on the final disc (it seems the Raimondo was a replacement), and when the notes were prepared the tracks were apparently in a different order. The printed track listing on the cover is correct. While I might recommend other recordings for the Cima (Ensemble Sonnerie, Virgin 45199) and Castello sonatas (J/A 1996: 266), I was very interested in the Mascitti and would like to hear more by this composer.

**BREWER**

**Battaglie & Lamenti**

Montserrat Figueras, s; Graham Pushe, ct; Harry van der Kamp, b; Hesperion XX/ Jordi Savall

DG Archiv 479 6217—54:36

The folk at DG Archiv are busily scouring their storeroom for recordings to reissue, mostly in bulk boxes. Here we have a curious single, its contents recorded in June and November 1981. It was issued in a single LP in the "silver" series of albums (2533 466), the only appearance by Savall and his group in that series. Though the contents were occasionally pillaged for inclusion in other releases, the complete program has not been released on CD until now.

The program is called "Battle-Music and Laments." With some strain, it attempts to link three idioms of 17th Century music: evocations of battle (after Jannequin’s famous chanson), exploitation of echo effects, and the monodic lamentation of dramatic characters.

For the first category, we have two battaglie, each for eight voices. One is by Annibale Padovano (1527-75), the other by Francesco usur (bc.1560), the latter including a setting of the Psalm *Laudate Dominum* for two singers (here countertenor Pushee and bass Van der Kamp). We have two examples of "echo" works: one for eight voices by Bastian Chilose (15??-16??) and a truly sumptuous eight-voice canon by Giovanni Gabrieli (c.1554-1612).

The rest of the program is given to laments. In the Pianto d’Erinna by Nicolo Fontanei an Arcadian nymph deplores the loss of her lover. In the more substantial Lamento, ‘Sul Romano severo’, the Marquis de Cine-Mars, a once-favorite of French King Louis XIII, deplores his unjust killing, as portrayed by Barbara Strozzi (1619-77). And the Lamento di Iole is the only preserved fragment of an unfinished opera (1628) by Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), composer of the earliest surviving opera—a real historical treasure.

These laments were all composed for soprano with continuo, and the singer is Savall’s wife, the late Montserrat Figueras. Her achingly expressive voice is so apt here and wonderful to hear again.

Amid the laments there is an added piece, the Anonymous four-voice *Pavan El Bisson*. Its presence here is not explained, but it functions as an attractive intermezzo.

Despite the somewhat feeble idea of connecting all this music thematically, this remains a fine program of really interesting music, beautifully performed. What more could we ask?—especially with full vocal texts and translations.

**BREWER**

**Concerti Bizarri**

Irish Baroque Orchestra/ Monica Huggett

Linn 526—73:37

In her new life with her Irish ensemble, the superlative violinist Huggett was struck by the suite that the composer Telemann titled *Le Bizarri*. She has assembled a program of 18th Century concertos that she apparently thinks are "bizarre".

Well, they are mostly unusual in scoring, not to say even eccentric sometimes, but understandable for an era where the concerto grosso format was being expanded and rethought in a wide range of experimentation.

There are seven concertos, written by five composers. The earliest is Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), whose three-movement Concerto in G minor for two cellos with strings and continuo (R.53) exemplifies his love of trying out varied solo combinations. Then there is Georg Philipp Telemann, a one-man machine for experimenting with solo mixtures. We have here a four-movement Concerto in D with two violins and bassoon as the solo protagonists.

From Johann Heinichen (1683-1729) we have nothing more odd than a three-movement oboe concerto. Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688-1758) contributes two items: a three-movement Concerto in B minor for flute and oboe—a not unusual combination in this
era—and a four-movement Concerto in G for two oboes da caccia, two violas, bassoon, and continuo, without strings—an extension of the kind of “chamber concerto” of which Vivaldi had been such an exponent.

Then there is Christoph Graupner (1683-1760), also represented by two works. One is a three-movement Concerto in C for solo bassoon, a somewhat uncommon choice for a solo role, but hardly astonishing. The other is more of a curiosity: a four-movement Concerto in G that combines flute d’amore, oboe d’amore, and viola d’amore as solo instruments with the strings—a certainly novel combination of three instruments that were on the way into obscurity.

The music for all these works is most enjoyable: full of game-playing with the varied colors brought together in various ways, but carried out in otherwise quite conventional styles of ensemble writing, and without a grotesque note to be heard.

So, where is the bizarria? Can’t we just forget about eye-catching hype and be honest? This is an extremely fine program of 18th Century concertos, filled with a wide variety of coloristic explorations and combinations typical of the time. Nothing more. The performances show absolute perfection of technique and style, brought off by a basic string band of 12 players with harpsichord, plus 5 wind players, several of them distinguished guests (like bassoonist Peter Whelen and flutist Lisa Beznosiuk). And in beautiful sound, to boot.

Arias for Domenico Annibali
Flavio Ferri-Benedetti, ct; Il Basilico/ Eva Saladin
Pan 10341—65:16

Among 18th Century singers, Domenico (or Domenichino) Annibali is not one of the best remembered, but he was an admired alto castrato in his time. There are some gaps in our information about his life, but he is thought to have been born about 1705, and we know he died some time around 1779. His main base was the court and opera in Dresden, where he sang a procession of leading roles in operas by the best composers of the day. He ended his service in Rome. He also spent a season (1736-37) in London serving in Handel’s company. For Handel Annibali created roles in three operas and sang in revivals of three or four others of his works.

There are two Handel selections in this program, one of them an aria from Arminio (1737) that the composer reworked substantially as the Air ‘He was despised’ for Messiah. There are also two selections by a composer of particular importance to Annibali in Dresden, Johann Adolph Hasse. Also represented twice each are Giovanni Alberto Restori and Nicola Porpora. Francesco Feo, Jan Dismas Zelenka, and Gaetano Latilla are accorded one selection each.

All of this music was specifically tailored to Annibali’s voice, which must have been very impressive. He had a wide range and could deal with any virtuosic demands made of him. Ferri-Benedetti proves a strikingly convincing champion of Annibali’s memory. I don’t think I have encountered this young countertenor before, but I want to hear a lot more of him. He has a nicely rounded tone, with resources of colors, and pitch-perfect intonation, even in the most florid runs. He digs into the various roles with gusto. While not all of the selections are of equal merit in musical terms, this singer makes them all interesting, and I was quite captivated.

(Eva Saladin leads a total of 18 period players from the concertmaster’s desk. There are some interesting obligatos in some arias, notably an elaborate one for horn in the first of the Hasse selections, delivered with wondrous panache by Olivier Picon.

The sound is notably vivid. The booklet includes good notes and full texts with translations.

Now this is the way to revive the reputation of a once-great singer!

Bien que l’Amour
Les Arts Florissants/ William Christie
Harmonia Mundi 8905276—80 minutes

The rather rarified repertory of French Baroque serious and drinking songs is not that well known. While there have been a few distinguished recordings of the earlier air de cour (N/D 1999: 271, M/A 2001: 223, S/O 2006: see Praetorius, and S/O 10: 279), the secular works by later composers such as Marc-Antoine Charpentier and François Couperin have been overlooked, and only Michael Lambert has earlier recordings in the ARG index (S/O 1992 & 1998). It is to be noted that the earlier of these two older recordings was also led by William Christie.

September/October 2016
The five young singers on this new release from Les Arts Florissants respond with exuberance and sensitivity to the shifting lyrics of these sometimes passionate and sometimes ribald songs.

Only Lisandro Abadie (bass) does not have a solo, but he adds a solid foundation to most of the ensemble songs. As might be expected from William Christie, even these songs have been arranged for the most effective dramatic performance, through his inventive use of instruments and contrasting lyrics and singers.

The booklet contains a short overview of this repertoire and complete texts and translations. While the more risqué texts might not be as titillating to an anglophone listener as an English catch, everything on this new release allows an informed sonic peek into the more intimate vocal works by Couperin, Charpentier, and Lambert.

**Dresden Concertos**
Les Amis de Philippe/ Ludger Remy
CPO 777 780—59:38

These six anonymous concertos written for solo flute, violin, cello, and continuo are delightful works in the style of Telemann’s Paris Quartets. Their concerto-like quality is also similar to Vivaldi’s chamber concertos, where instruments take turns as a soloist or an accompaniment. While five of the concertos are recorded in their original instrumentation, Concerto 7 is in a Dresden version arranged for two harpsichords, and this is so effective that it is hard to believe it wasn’t written originally for keyboards.

Remy and CPO are to be commended for making these anonymous works available when most major-label marketers would have demanded a name. Any listener who takes the risk will find, if not profundity, delight.

**Comedy and Tragedy 2**
Tempesta di Mare/ Gwyn Roberts, Richard Stone
Chandos 810—73:29

This is the second volume of suites of instrumental music from French dramatic works. The first (J/A 2015: 208) included Lully, Marais, and Rebel; and this new release contains excerpts from Marc-Antoine Charpentier’s *Malade Imaginaire* (1673), Jean-Marie Leclair’s *Scylla et Glauclus* (1746), and Jean-Philippe Rameau’s *Fêtes de Polymnie* (1745).

The sonic quality of this release has improved greatly over the first volume, though you still need to turn up the volume more than most other recordings of classical music. Overall, the quality of the interpretations has also improved, though they still have not reached the dramatic elan of by William Christie and Marc Minkowski (Charpentier, M/A 1991 & S/O 1990), John Eliot Gardiner (Leclair, J/F 1993), or György Vashegyi (Rameau, Glossa 923502).
undoubtedly has to do with the engineering. In both cases the soloists are adequate but not exceptional.

The one piece common to both programs is Pearsall’s ‘Lay a Garland,’ and here the differences are instructive. The Armonico Consort gives the most lugubriously slow performance I’ve ever heard (4:38). This piece is built on tonal suspensions. In this performance those suspensions remain suspended too long. Royal Pleased me; the harmonic lushness of the Hyperion program enchanted me.

Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

Evening Hymn
GARDINER: Evening Hymn; TALLIS: Te Lucis Ante Terminum; SHEPPARD: In Pace; MENDELSSOHN: Hear My Prayer; BOHM: Still Wie Die Nacht; BRAHMS: Der Gang zum Liebchen; ELGAR: Serenade; DOVE: Seek Him That Maketh the 7 Stars; RAMINSCH: In the Night We Shall Go In; TORMIS: 4 Estonian Lullabies; RINDFLEISCH: To His Music; FORREST: Good Night, Dear Heart; LA BARR: Grace Before Sleep
Maria Valdes, s; Erin Ellis, vc; Erin Palmer, p; Nicole Marane, org; Georgia State University Singers/Deanna Joseph—Gothic 49298—76 mins

This is music composed to separate day from night, to invite rest, and to reassure us that the blessings of the night far outweigh any irrational fear of the dark. There are no runts in the repertory litter, as the program takes us from Tallis and John Sheppard, through Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Elgar to Tormis, Esenvalds, Dove, Rindfleisch, and a few other talented composers of our own day.

The Georgia State choir of 40 is very good at all of it: radiant as dusk approaches, but hushed and sensitive to the coming darkness as shadows deepen and fall. Ms Valdes, the soprano in Mendelssohn’s ‘Hear My Prayer,’ is a Georgia State alumna who has won a Met Regional Audition and a fellowship with the San Francisco Opera. There’s not much wrong with her either, including her picture. Add lovely cello playing in Imant Raminsh’s ‘In the Night’ and some adept accompaniments from both keyboards and it’s impossible to escape the conclusion that the Georgia State Department of Music has put forth its best. Helpful notes plus full texts and translations seal the deal on a handsome release that is emphatically not for GSU parents and alumni only.

GREENFIELD

Songs of Life and Death
MISKINS: And Death Shall Have No Dominion; SCHUBERT: Gesang der Geister; Grab und Mond; RUHE, Schonstes Gluck der Erde; STRAUSS: 3 Male Choruses; ENGLER-BRECHT: Der Feuerreiter; VALVERDE: Darest, O Soul; MAUERSBERGER: Herr, Lehre doch Mich; NEUMANN: Es Fiel ein Reif; SILCHER: Ich habe den Fruehling Gesehen; GOLLNAX: 7 Last Words; VAN INGELGEM: Magnificat; SCHIRONEN: Stufen Ensemble Improanta; Ensemble Vocale Limburg/Tristan Meister
Rondeau 6102—75 minutes

Vom Werden und Vergehen is the title; and an apt one it is for this thoughtful program of comings and goings that was crafted to describe our collective mortality from a number of musical viewpoints. Friederich Silcher’s lyrical and gentle ‘Ich habe den Fruehling gesehen’ passes along the wisdom that while the life of the flesh is impermanent, nature’s cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is eternal. In ‘Ruhe, schonstes Gluck
der Erde’ Schubert depicts the peace of a soul at death. But his Gesang der Geister joins the choir with a complement of low strings to aver that the soul can take on the restlessness of swirling winds and waters once it has left the body. (That 11-minute song is, without question, the high point of this program.)

In a contemporary vein there is Nikodemus Gollnau’s ‘Seven Last Words’ that quotes the final utterances of seven notable people (Jesus is one) and arranges them in an eerie sequence that approaches the great beyond to the sounds of sticks breaking and matches lit. Also of our own day are songs by Vytautas Miskinis who sets English texts by Shakespeare (When I Consider) and Dylan Thomas (Death Shall Have No Dominion) In a more lyrical, less jarring manner than the ‘Last Words’. The poems, needless to say, have been known to moisten the occasional eye all by themselves. (“Though lovers be lost, love shall not”, wrote Dylan Thomas, “and death shall have no dominion.”) The music is worthy of the poetry, so how could you not be moved?

Germany is ground-zero for adult male choirs, and I doubt you’ll argue that proposition after hearing these guys in action. There’s real variety in these offerings, which goes all the way from the plush Brahmsian timbres of Rudolf Maurersberger’s ‘Herr, lehre doch mich’ to the dissonant shouts of alarm in Bernd Englebrecht’s ‘Fire-Rider.’ (“Look! There he rides furiously through the gates, the fire-rider on a bony horse, like on a fire ladder.”) Exemplary notes, plus texts, translations, and adept engineering clinch the deal on a unique and probing anthology.

GREENFIELD

This Evening Hour
Bertie Baigent, Benjamin Morris, org; Jesus College Choir, Cambridge/ Mark Williams
Signum 446—78 minutes

This Cambridge collegiate choir may have a lower profile than King’s and St John’s, but it has been putting out some excellent recordings (N/D 2013, J/F 2015, J/A 2015). This is another. Jesus College has two choirs: (1) the mixed voice College Choir and (2) the Chapel Choir of men and boys. (With King’s and St John’s it is one of three all-male collegiate choirs of Cambridge University. Jesus College has no choir school like the other two; their boy choristers are recruited from local schools.) The combined choirs sing this program, and the results are up to their usual high standard.

The program is a mixture of familiar and less familiar works from the 16th and 20th Centuries. Works of John Shepard, William Byrd, Robert Whyte, Orlando Gibbons, John Bithem, and Thomas Tallis alternate with works of Edward Bairstow, Richard Rodney Bennett, Gabriel Jackson, Lennox Berkeley, Balfour Gardiner, Gustav Holst, John Tavener, William Harris, and Philip Moore.

Of the less often heard pieces Holst’s ‘Evening Watch’ has a striking contemporary quality. There are stirring performances of Gardiner’s ‘Evening Hymn’ and Bairstow’s grand ‘Blessed City, Heav’nly Salem’, two staples of the Anglican choral tradition. Tallis had a way with complex choral textures. While his ‘Misere Nostri’ isn’t as astonishing as his ‘Spem in Alium’; it is an ingenious work described in the notes as “a compositional tour de force” with the top two lines in canon half a measure apart while “simultaneously four others voices sing another melody (two of them in inversion) at four different speeds”. That piece alone makes this worth getting.

These choral forces can hold their own against their better known Cambridge collegiate choirs. The sound is well balanced, with both tenderness and fire from the singers as needed.

Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

O Sacrum Convivium
COOKE: O Lux Beata Trinitas; Veni Sancte Spiritus; O Sacrum Convivium; BACH: Von Himmel Hoch; Meine Seele Erhebet den Herren; Fantasy in C minor; O Mensch Bewein; TALLIS: If ye Love me; O Nata Lux; VICTORIA: O Magnum Mysterium; O quam Gloriosam; WEELKE: Hosanna to the Son of David; PURCELL: Hear my Prayer; Thou Knowest, Lord, the Secrets of Our Hearts; LOTTI: Crucifixus; STAINER: God so Loved the World; STANFORD: Justorum Animae; TAVERNER: The Lamb; MEALOR: Locus Iste; HUDSON: Ukrainian Carol; LAVOY: Ave Mari Stella
King’s College Aberdeen/ David J Smith
Vox Regis 1—71 minutes

A recording by the chapel choir of King’s College, Aberdeen, Scotland, which was established by Bishop Elphinstone at the foundation of the University in 1425 to sing the Daily Office. The 16 choral scholars exhibit a beautiful blend, secure intonation, and excellent ensemble. They have been well trained by director David J. Smith, who also plays the organ pieces.

This is standard a cappella fare, drawn from the liturgical repertoire and recorded many times. The most interesting are the
pieces from "the Aberdeen school of choral composition" by Philip Cooke, Paul Mealor, and two Americans living in Aberdeen, John Hudson and Thomas LaVoy. These are beautifully crafted pieces and are given excellent performances with some fine solo singing. I could have done without the Bach pieces, which really don’t make sense in the context of the program. I would have preferred some more substantial works from this fine choir. The beautifully produced booklet contains notes on the music, translations, but not the specification of the 2004 Bernard Aubertin organ, touted as "of international distinction".

DEL CAMP

In Memoriam


Alexander May, Graham Thorpe, org; King’s College London/ Gareth Wilson

Delphian 34146—80 minutes

David Trendell (1964-2014) was a conductor, organist, teacher, singer, producer, and scholar whose untimely death was deeply mourned in British musical circles. His Choir of King’s College, London honors him here with an anthology of works sung, composed, chosen, and conducted by his students and colleagues.

Trendell was devoted to Renaissance fare, and in these beautiful performances of Palestina, Byrd, and Clemens we can hear that love passed on to his choir. The exquisite ‘Nigra Sum’ composed by Jean Lheriter (c 1480–c 1551) and edited by Maestro Trendell gives us the loveliest five minutes of the program.

There are worthy offerings, too, among the contemporary works, Francis Pott’s ‘Nigra Sum’, Matthew Martin’s ‘Invocation’, and Robert Busiakiewicz’s ‘Ego Sum’ among them. I suspect, though, that the remainder of the program will have more effect on people close to the departed conductor than on ones from outside his circle. Fine engineering adds to the tribute along with texts, translations, and affectionate notes.

GREENFIELD

Miss: Choral & Organ

LASSUS: Mass, Osculetur Me; HASSLER: Toccat a in G minor; FRESCOBALDI: Verses from Mass of the Madonna; MISKINS: Angelis Suis Deus; COOK: Fanfare; WHITACRE: Alleluja; MASTUSHITA: Ubi Caritas; Pater Noster; O Salutaris Hostia; ERBACH: Canzona, 4th Tone; FELLER: Te Deum

Peter Bader, org; Carl Orff Choir/ Stefan Wolitz

Oehms 1843—67 minutes

This program of unaccompanied choral works and solo organ pieces takes its shape from the liturgy of the Mass, both Ordinary and Proper. It is not a liturgical reconstruction, but by following the liturgical outline, director Stefan Wolitz intends that the listener "be able to sense the dramaturgy of a Mass" as he says his program notes.

The principal work here is the parody Mass Osculetur Me by Orlando de Lassus. It is in eight parts for double choir based on one of the composer’s own motets. It does not include a setting of the Creed.

Wolitz brings together music “composed about the same time as the Council of Trent (1545-1563)” with pieces written after the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965). The director’s claim is not quite accurate. Of the early composers recorded here, only Lassus (1532-94) was alive during the Council of Trent. The others were born later: Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612), Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643), and Christian Erbach (1570-1635). The modern works could not be described as avant-garde. They are accessible pieces whose musical language is relatively conservative: triadic and tonal with varied flavors of harmonic color.

The program begins with the Toccata in G minor by Hassler as an instrumental Introit. The Kyrie and Gloria from the Lassus Mass follow. The Liturgy of the Word continues with the first of three organ verses for Masses of the Madonna from Frescobaldi’s Fiori Musicali. The first is a canzona to follow the reading of the Epistle. The other two are a ricercar to follow the Creed and a toccata at the Elevation. Also associated here with the reading of the Epistle is the motet ‘Angelis Suis Deus’ by Lithuanian composer Vytautas Miskinis (b 1954). Its text from Vulgate Psalm 90 is the Gradual for the First Sunday in Lent.

In Masses outside the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent, the reading of the Gospel is preceded with a liturgical Alleluia. In this program they are the Fanfare for organ by John Cook (1918-1984) and ‘Alleluia’ by American composer Eric Whitacre (b 1970). Whitacre’s
piece is not explicitly liturgical. Like the well-known 'Alleluia' of Randall Thompson, it is a setting of the single word followed by an Amen, 'Ubi Caritas,' the first of three motets by Japanese composer Ko Matsushita (b 1962) is inserted at the Offertory. It is not an Offertory text but one of the antiphons sung at the foot-washing rite on Maundy Thursday. His other motets are 'Pater Noster,' a text that is part of the Eucharistic liturgy, and the Benediction hymn 'O Salutaris Hostia,' inserted as a communion motet, or perhaps in the place of a Communion Antiphon. Following the Sanctus & Benedictus of the Lassus Mass comes the Frescobaldi Elevation Toccata followed by a Canzona by Christian Erbach included here as another organ piece at the Elevation. Matsushita's 'Pater Noster' and 'O Salutaris' are sung on either side of the Lassus Agnus Dei. The program concludes with the virtuosic 'Te Deum' for organ by Harald Feller (b 1951), professor of organ at the Academy of Music and Theater in Munich.

The Carl Orff Choir consists of singers with connections to the Markoberdorf Grammar School. Stefan Wolitz has been their director since 2008. The booklet lists 40 singers. They produce a modern concert choir sound rather than sounding like a specialist early music choir. I find their tone moderately bright, but the blend is good. They seem as much at home with the Lassus Mass as they do with the works of living composers, and that is rare. The choir was recorded at the Collegiate Church of Sts Philip & James in Bad Grönenbach. The organ pieces were recorded on the four-manual Sandtner organ (1982) at the Basilica of Sts Ulrich & Afra in Augsburg. The instrument incorporates pipework from an earlier organ of 1903. It is eclectic enough to be convincing in both the early pieces and ones by Cook and Feller. Cook's 'Fanfare' would be most at home on a large English cathedral organ; Feller's 'Te Deum' constantly reminded me of Jehan Alain. Both are played with stylistic assurance by Peter Bader.

GATENS

Bushes & Briars: Folk Songs
St Charles Singers/ Jeffrey Hunt
MSR 1606—70 minutes

25 arrangements of well-loved selections culled from the Oxford Press Folk Songs for Choirs, which was edited by the estimable John Rutter. Most of the songs are from the British Isles; as in 'Early One Morning,' 'Green-sleeves,' 'Brigg Fair,' 'Londonderry Air,' 'Ca' the Yowes,' and 'Swansea Fair.' The arrangements come from the likes of Rutter, Holst, Willcocks and, of course, RVW.

The St Charles Singers hail from Chicago, and they do well with the music. The singing is spirited, especially in tunes like 'Bobby Shaftoe' and 'Dashing Away With the Smoothing Iron,' which are up-tempo ditties to begin with. My only quibble is that the Brits themselves have been more convincing in their own folk realm than these Chicagoleans. Take for example a similar release titled 'Early One Morning' recorded by the Choir of New College, Oxford for Erato (M/A 1998). Not only is the singing stylish to a fault, but the recorded sound is warmer and more flattering than it is here.

GREENFIELD

St Louis Firsts
JONES: Psalm 23; MACLEAN: Slow Gold; CHIL-COTT: Before the Ice; POTT: Good Day, Sir Christmas; HELVEY: Evening Song; MANNING: Ode to Love; BINGHAM: Solomon & Love; AGUILIA; PRAULINS: Iam Ver Egelidos; GUILLAUME: Le Dernier Voyage
St Louis Chamber Chorus/ Philip Barnes
Regent 472—76 minutes

The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus makes it its business to commission works from contemporary composers, and here are several of them. It may not be the most compelling choral anthology of this September/October lot, but there are some things to admire. Trevor Jones's dark, brooding 23rd Psalm has some dramatic flair to it; and the works by Bob Chilcott, Howard Helvey, and Sydney Guillaume may also sit in the memory for a time. For this to be of genuine interest, though, you would have to be an avid St Louis Chamber Chorus fan, or a choral aficionado always ready to explore new repertoire.

GREENFIELD

The Deer's Cry
BYRD: Diliges Dominum; Christe Qui Lux es et Dies; Emenemus in Melius; Miserere Mih; Domine; Ad Dominum cum Tribularer; O Lux Beata Trinitas; Laetentur Coeli; Tribue, Domine; TALLIS: When Jesus Wept; Miserere Nostri; PART: The Deer's Cry; Woman With the Alabaster Box; Nunc Dimittis
The Sixteen/ Harry Christophers
Coro 16140—67 minutes

We reach choral nirvana here, with celestial sacred fare sung for us by one of the world's elite choirs. Whether a deceptively simple 2-
voice canon like Tallis’s ‘When Jesus Wept’, or a more intricate 7-part ‘Miserere nostrí’ that may have been worked on by Tallis and Byrd together, or Byrd’s ingenious 8-part ‘Diliges Dominum’—a musical palindrome that comes out the same way sung backwards or forwards—the musicianship is as gracious and unforced as can be.

Three works by Arvo Part add even more spiritual depth to the program. Inspired by the words of St Patrick, ‘The Deer’s Cry’ was crafted in minimalist form, with the recurring invocation of Christ’s presence in all things sung in a plaintive, disembodied tone more redolent of Platagenets than of Tudors and Stuarts. In ‘The Alabaster Box’ (from Matthew 26), timbres and phrases are cuddled more gently than in other selections, and the music achieves a diaphanous effect. Part’s ‘Nunc Dimittis’ shimmers with the bell-like effects that make his music so distinctive and accessible.

I have listened to this program five times now; three times in the living room and twice in the car. Not once did I write anything down, or even catalog a remark for future use. I just listened, quietly in awe of the music. GREENFIELD

**Zurab Anjaparidze**

Puccini, Verdi, Leoncavallo, Donizetti, Tchaikovsky

O Klenov, bar; Tamara Milashkina, s; Valentina Levko, a; Bolshoi Theater/ Mark Ermler, Boris Khaikin—Melodiya 2373—68:24

This is a selection of familiar Italian and Russian operatic excerpts by the Georgian dramatic tenor Zurab Anjaparidze (1928-97). He spent seven years with the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet and debuted with the Bolshoi Theater as Don Jose in 1957. Two years later he joined the Bolshoi’s troupe, where he remained as a lead tenor until leaving in 1970 to return to Georgia, where he taught, directed, and performed with the Tbilisi Opera. The program includes recordings made in 1967, 1968, and 1970. He toured Italy with the Bolshoi in 1964; his performance of his signature role Hermann in Tchaikovsky’s *Queen of Spades* earned him the title “the Soviet Franco Corelli” (the Italian press).

This collection shows Anjaparidze possessed of a clarion dramatic tenor, with enough squillo for the brass section of a symphony orchestra. The size and ring of the instrument is reminiscent of Mario del Monaco, with a clarion top range. He sings with passion and intelligence, inhabiting his various roles.

There are five thrice-familiar Puccini selections. ‘Recondita Armonia’ without the Sacristan is well sung, though some listeners may prefer a less declamatory and more legato style for this aria, and it includes more slightly accented Italian than the others. He follows with an impassioned ‘E lucevan le stelle’. As Des Grieux, Anjaparidze performs ‘Donna non vidi mai’, ‘Ah Manon’, and ‘Guadarte!’ with inspired passion. He shows an ability to sing softly in the imploring final part of ‘Ah Manon!’ in ‘Guardate!’ he mercifully eliminates the sobs that sometimes mar the mid point of the aria, but he rather incomprehensively lets loose with a stentorian high note over the recapitulation of the love theme ending the scene—a note Puccini never wrote.

GREENFIELD
The tenor moves to Verdi in one of his most celebrated Italian roles with ‘Celeste Aida.’ His large voice handles the tessitura effortlessly, singing with meaning and conviction. The only flaw—and it is not a small one to today’s listeners—is that he takes the famous concluding pianissimo B-flat in elongated full voice—exciting, but not what Verdi had in mind. He follows with a number traditionally with interpolated ringing high notes, ‘Di quella pira.’ Two episodes from Otello demonstrate his mastery of this summit of the Italian dramatic tenor literature with a towering portrait of the tormented Moor. He performs the entire conclusion of Act II starting from “Desdemona real” and culminating in a tempestuous ‘Si pel cie! He is partnered by the serpentine lago of O. Klenov, whose almost whispered rendition of ‘Era la notte’ contrasts vividly with Anjaparidze’s full-voiced tormented ravings. The tenor uses his vocal acting ability in a fully realized death scene, without resorting to sobs or melodramatics.

He shows the same vocal and dramatic ability while eschewing histrionics, including even the customary laugh, in ‘Vesti la giubba’ from Leoncavallo’s I Pagliacci. Canio’s torment and despair is etched into every note. From tragic verismo, the artist moves on to the only bel canto selection, ‘Una furtiva largima.’ He does not allow his large voice to overwhelm the material and ends with an effortless cadenza.

The final three selections are from perhaps Anjaparidze’s best known role, Hermann in Tchaikovsky’s Queen of Spades: the arioso ‘I don’t even know her name’ from Scene 1 of Act I; his deadly confrontation with the aged Countess and ensuing short duet with Liza at the end of Scene 2 of Act II; and the entire Scene 1 of Act III from the Entr’acte through the wind-swept appearance of the Countess’s ghost. The tenor delineates the anti-hero’s haunted progression into obsessive madness with a full dynamic range. Domingo studied Anjaparidze’s recordings while preparing to sing Hermann himself in 1999. Anjaparidze is ably assisted by fellow Bolshoi artists Tamara Milashkina as Liza and Valentina Levko as the Countess’s ghost. The brief appearance of a choir for the off-stage funereal dirge as Hermann’s mind deteriorates is a high point of the ghost scene.

The orchestra supports the singer under the batons of Mark Elmer for the Italian numbers and Boris Khainkin for the Queen of Spades sequence. The orchestra really comes into its own with its incisive performance of the Entr’acte. We are given a brief booklet in Russian, French, and English that includes a short biography of the artist, but no texts. The sound quality is adequate.

This is an artist who deserves to be better known in the west. Lovers of full-voiced dramatic tenor singing and of Russian opera will want to discover him.

ROSEN

**Laudato Si**

In the Spirit of St Francis
Charlene Canty, s; Andrey Nemzer, ct; Nicolas J Will, org—Navona 6036—55 minutes

The major works of this program are settings by Eli Tamar of three St Francis of Assisi texts, recorded here for the first time. Tamar was born in Russia and grew up in Israel before moving to the United States and eventually becoming a professor at the Mary Pappert School of Music at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. He writes in a tonal but clearly contemporary style that I find engaging.

The first half of the program is an odd presentation of the Stabat Mater with each of the eight lines of the text set by a different composer—Vivaldi, Traetta, Boccherini, Rossini, Haydn, Poulenc, Dvorak, and Palestrina. It’s not “early music”; these are full-throated performances. The one that works best is the Rossini duet ‘Quis est Home Qui non Flere.’

The performances are vibrant, especially in Tamar’s music. Canty is a luxuriously-voiced soprano. Her vibrato gets wide sometimes, but mostly her singing is warm and beautifully nuanced. Nemzer is a terrific singer with a robust operatic style countertenor voice, very different in tone from the traditional English choral voice and, in the spacious acoustics of the church, sounding sometimes like a female alto. His performance of ‘The Prayer of St Francis’ shows exceptional vocal beauty. Their duet, ‘Canticum Fratris Solis,’ the longest work of the program (18:36), ends sublimely with its message to praise and bless the Lord, give thanks, and serve with great humility.

Will is a faculty member at Franciscan University and director of music at St Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Carnegie, PA where the program was recorded with Will accompanying splendidly on the 28-rank 2012 instrument by Patrick J Murphy & Associates.

This is my first encounter with Tamar’s music, and on the basis of hearing these fine works I searched the internet for more and
found a dozen recordings of solo vocal, choral, and instrumental works.

Texts, translations, and biographical notes.

R MOORE

KAMPI

Songs & Satire from Teresienstadt
Amelia DeMayo, mz; Kurt Buchler, bar; Sergei Drezini, p—Analekta 8789—61 minutes

Teresienstadt (or Terezin) was used by the Nazis to promote the illusion of a more humane treatment of prisoners; it was sometimes facetiously called "the town the Führer gave to the Jews". The notes give a clear and well-detailed account of this deception. In the valley of the shadow of death, "Jews spiritually resisted their oppressors by creating art and culture even in the face of almost certain death."

Don’t expect this to be a program of serious music as on others recordings of music from Teresienstadt. Judith Sheridan (Divine Art 25044, S/O 2007) sings a fine album of songs by various Terezin composers. Otter and Gerhaher (DG 4776546, J/A 2008) present considerably more variety of music—and sing it superbly. Holzmair’s recording (Bridge 9280, N/D 2009) is the most consistently gritty and searing of the three, but each of them is worth having.

This program is a "reconstruction of the cabaret of Terazin" in an English translation of a 1992 German production. Comedy and satire was a way of coping with the heinous and dehumanizing predations of the concentration camp; it allowed its performers and audiences for the moment "to forget where they were, and where they might be the next day."

The World Jewish Congress sponsored this recording in the “hope that all who listen to it will feel linked to composers, authors, performers, and audiences who perished at Terezin, at Auschwitz-Birkeneau, and elsewhere during the holocaust, and whose memory this disc honors.”

This is a cabaret show with biting satire. Many of the songs were well-known popular hits of the time with new words. The performers are from the world of musical theater.

Notes, photos, and texts are supplied.

R MOORE

Songs
Grieg, Wolf, Strauss, Backer-Grondahl
Mari Eriksmoen, s; Alphonse Cemin, p
Alpha 207—47 minutes

This is a lovely program of songs by Grieg, Wolf, Richard Strauss (including the Ophelia group), and Norwegian singer and composer Agatha Backer-Grondahl (1847-1907). It’s a great mix of familiar music and unknown gems.

The most interesting parts of the program are the Norwegian songs, perhaps in part because I’ve just heard a lot of Wolf (Harmonia Mundi 902245) and there is no dearth of recordings of the Strauss Ophelia songs (Bridge 9451, M/A 2013, LAWO 1067, S/O 2015, Aparte 54 & Profil 13050, J/A 2014, Berlin 566, N/D 2014—to name a few). Of the latter, there isn’t the same legato here as in others, but this is still a good performance.

It’s always a treat to hear Grieg in Norwegian, and I enjoyed the Backer-Grondahl pieces. The notes tell us she is the “most important Norwegian female composer of the late 19th Century” and that she wrote some 200 songs. The songs are light and interesting. My favorite was ‘Mot Kveld’ (At Dusk), with its gentle, twinkling pattern in the accompaniment. It paints a beautiful picture of twilight.

Eriksmoen has a silvery, clear voice. She has a tendency to take breaths in unusual places but still manages to carry the line through. Cemin’s playing is warm and supportive. I enjoyed this program very much.

Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

Music & Poetry
Respighi, Martucci, Ponchielli, Pinsuti, Liszt
Rosa Feola, s; Iain Burnside, p
Opus Arte 9039—61 minutes

This is a lovely program exploring the relationship between text and music in (mostly) Italian music. The program begins with Respighi’s Quattro Rispetti Toscani and Dieta Silvane.

The two pieces make use of, as the notes call it, the “old-style ‘sung recitation’”. I found the approach to the text delicate and speech-like, with occasional broader, soaring line, especially in ‘Viene Di La, Lontan Lontano’. I loved the sprightly fourth song, ‘Razzolan, Sopra l’ Aja, le Galline’, performed with great energy and spirit.

Dieta Silvane (Woodland Deities) is musically more complex than the other group. It creates a mystical world of sound around the woodland creatures depicted by the poetry.

Italian composer and pianist Giuseppe Martucci’s (1856-1909) Tre Pezzi are introspective, slightly dark and dramatic, with a range of emotions and colors. It’s a terrific group that should be performed more often.

Two settings of Dante’s masterpiece ‘Tanto Gentile e Tanto Onesta Pare’ follow, by opera
composer Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-86) and
Ciro Pinsuti (1829-88), who was a student of
Rossini.

The program closes with Liszt's lovely
Petrarch Sonnets—another terrific recording
of a demanding piece.

Feola has a silvery, clear voice and excel-
Houtzeel has a rich, warm, clear voice and
Spencer plays each piece with support and character. The pair
finds the essence of each piece, whether it be Buchardo's playful 'Prendidos de la Mano', Ives's clever 'Ann Street', or Mahler's gentle (and indeed, nostalgic) 'Ich Atmet einen Lin-
den Duft'. They manage Ginastera's exposed 'Triste' with control and sensitivity. Piazzolla's famous 'Pajaros Perdidos' is the perfect end to this thoughtful and beautifully executed pro-
gram. Notes and texts but no translations.

**Nostalgia**

Mahler, Ives, Ginastera, Buchardo, Guastavino,
Piazzolla.

Stephanie Houtzeel, mz; Charles Spencer, p

Capriccio 5262—51 minutes

This interesting program juxtaposes Mahler and Ives, citing in the notes Mahler’s interest in Ives’s Third Symphony and his intention to perform it. The songs are interspersed with music from Argentinean composers Alberto Ginastera, Carlos Lopez Buchardo (1881-
1948), Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000), and Astor Piazzolla. The result is an imaginative,
varied, cosmopolitan program.

The performances are great. Houtzeel has a rich, warm, clear voice and Spencer plays each piece with support and character. The pair
finds the essence of each piece, whether it be Buchardo’s playful 'Prendidos de la Mano', Ives’s clever 'Ann Street', or Mahler’s gentle (and indeed, nostalgic) 'Ich Atmet einen Lin-
den Duft'. They manage Ginastera’s exposed 'Triste' with control and sensitivity. Piazzolla’s famous 'Pajaros Perdidos' is the perfect end to this thoughtful and beautifully executed pro-
gram. Notes and texts but no translations.

**Von Ewiger Liebe**

Brahms, Dvorak, Jenner

Angelika Huber, s; Kilian Sprau, p

Bayer 100316—65 minutes

A great programming idea that falls short. Brahms and Dvorak were friends and col-
leagues; German composer, conductor, and academic Gustav Jenner (1865-1920) was a student of Brahms who wrote about their relationship.

The program begins with the Dvorak Op 83
*Liebeslieder*. That is followed by Jenner’s Op. 1
songs, assorted songs of Brahms, Jenner’s Op. 7
songs, and the Brahms Op. 105. I particularly
like to hear full opuses of Brahms performed in order. They have cyclic tendencies.

But these performers just aren’t up to the demands of this repertoire. Huber’s voice is
thin, and the occasional intonation problem is distracting. Sprau fares better but without the warmth and depth I like in this music.

If you’re really interested in the Jenner, this might be worth it; there are certainly better recordings of the rest of the program. Notes and texts but no translations.

**Songs**

Korngold, Goldmark

Cornelia Hubsch, s; Charles Spencer, p

Capriccio 3004—58 minutes

An interesting pairing of Korngold and Hun-
garian-born composer, violinist, and writer Karl Goldmark (1830-1915). Korngold’s
*Unvergänglichkeit* is a terrific cycle, colorful and beautiful. Karl Goldmark’s songs are very interesting. The style is like a more harmoni-
cally ambitious Schubert; the emphasis is always on the text and vocal line, with some interesting activity for the piano. Speaking of Schubert, Goldmark’s ‘Die Quelle’ recalls Schubert’s ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade’ in a very clever way. It’s a shame Goldmark doesn’t get more attention on concert programs; the music is pretty great and gives the singer and pianist plenty to do.

Hübsch has a lovely, silvery voice and
Spencer is, as usual, great. No notes, texts, or
translations—a shame, since some back-
ground would certainly be interesting.

**Dich Maria Heut Zu Preisen**

Rathgeber, Königsperger, Hertel, Terziani, Bach,
Rheinberger, Reger, Biechteler

Mechthild Kiendl, s; Anne Dufresne, ob; Norbert
Duchtel, org—TYArt 15069—71 minutes

This program is subtitled “The Most Beautiful Compositions in Praise of the Virgin Mary by South German and Italian Masters of the 18th
and 19th Centuries”. That indeed sums it up, despite the fact that only one Italian composer (Pietro Terziani (1765-1831)) is represented.

Different instrument combinations and the wide variety of colors possible with an organ make for an interesting program with good pacing. The German composers here are Valentin Rathgeber (1682-1750), Fr. Marianus Königsperger (1708-69), Johan Wilhelm Hertel (1727-89), Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901, born in Liechtenstein), Benedikt Biechteler (1689-
1759), as well as Max Reger and JS Bach, who need no introduction.

The performances are quite good. The bal-
ance with the organ is perfect; I can hear the
different colors of the organ as well as the oboe and voice clearly all the time. Kiendl has a lovely, bright voice; and Dufresne’s oboe playing is warm as well as clear. But the real star here is Duchtel, who is able to play the role of both supportive accompanist and virtuosic soloist and whose registration choices create a wonderful sonic variety that makes the program work. Notes and texts but no translations.

**HEISEL**

**Female Roles & Figures**
Schubert, Rossini, Verdi
Cornelia Lanz, mz; Stefan Laux, p
Hanssler 16019—78 minutes

The best thing about this release is the unusual programming of songs, concluding with the longest work of the album, Rossini’s cantata *Giovanna d’Arco* (17:37). The performance, unfortunately, falls short. Lanz’s voice is adequate but not especially felicitous. She sounds better in the Verdi and Rossini songs, but even then her voice has a quavering quality; it is sometimes unpleasant and rarely winsome.

This is not the right voice for lieder, certainly not the voice of a young nun, the song to begin the program. Her voice is more fitting for ‘Der Zwerg,’ but her interpretation there lacks a sense of menace. Everything sounds too much the same.

The accompaniment lacks sufficient variety from strophe to strophe, and the sound of the piano is thuddy. There is nothing captivating about this program. Notes, texts, translations

**R MOORE**

**Notes from the Asylum**
Purcell, Abrams, Brahms, Wolf, Rorem, McNeff
Clare McCallin, mz; Libby Burgess, p; Catriona Scott, cl—Champs Hill 111—80 minutes

This explores female madness in music and poetry by both male and female composers and poets. It’s an interesting, but not new, idea for a program. What is refreshing here is the collection of music and poetry.

The Britten arrangement of Purcell’s ‘Mad Bess’ opens the program. I don’t know why the Britten Purcell arrangements don’t get more attention; they breathe new life and warmth into Purcell’s sensitive text settings. The inclusion of English soprano and composer Harriet Abrams’s (c. 1760-1821) setting of English poet Monk Lewis’s (1775-1818) poem ‘Crazy Jane’ gives voice to a composer and poet history has all but forgotten. Catriona Scott handles the virtuosic writing for the clarinet with great aplomb.

I love the inclusion of the Brahms Ophelia Lieder. After so many recordings of the Strauss over the past two years, it’s nice to hear a different take on these texts.

The most interesting program choice here is the group of songs by Hugo Wolf. The five songs are all from the perspective of Agnes, from the notes, “an Ophelia-like character as she appears in Mörike’s 1832 novel *Maler Nolten*.”

The Rorem comes a surprise; it’s usually sung by a soprano. McCallin handles it well. Her voice is darker and heavier than what I’m used to in this piece, but the range is no problem.

The program closes with Vivienne, “an opera in six songs” by British composer Stephen McNeff (b. 1951). The text is by actor and playwright Andy Rashleigh (b. 1949). The piece is from the point of view of Vivienne Haigh-Wood, wife of TS Eliot, whose unhappy marriage was complicated by her physical and mental health struggles. The couple separated in 1933, and her brother had her committed to an asylum in 1938, against her will. She was there until her death in 1947. Here, Vivienne is in the asylum reflecting on moments from the marriage. It’s a wonderfully imaginative, theatrical piece. My favorite moments are the gentle and intimate ‘Land of Lost Content’ contrasted by the following comic patter song ‘Bertie’, about Bertrand Russell, “with whom Vivienne had an affair”. The last piece, ‘Beladonna’, is a real tour de force. It’s not a stretch to call the piece an opera; it would certainly be interesting to see it staged.

The performances are excellent. Clare McCallin is superb. The voice is clear, warm, and even. She’s not afraid to take risks and she portrays each character with sensitivity and respect. Libby Burgess plays with wonderful warmth; her playing rounds out each character’s story. Terrific notes by McCallin and Paul Conway. Most texts and translations included.

**HEISEL**

**Bouillabaisse**
Jacquet de la Guerre, Visee, Blavet, Rameau
Marie-Sophie Pollak, s; Julia Stocker, fl; Johannes Otzbrugger, theorbo; Tizian Naef, hpsi
PB 1603721—47 minutes

Simply a terrific program. French composer Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729) is the stuff of music history textbooks but rarely makes it to the concert stage. It’s a shame; one
of the few known female composers of the 17th Century (the other who comes to mind is Barbara Strozzi), she was a child harpsichord prodigy and composed in a variety of forms. The cantata performed here, Semelé, is a dramatic miniature for voice and obligato instrument.

Three traditional songs follow: the haunting 'La Fille au Roi Louis', the lilting 'La Furstenberg' delicately played by the ensemble, and the tender 'Une Jeune Fillette'. The notes explain the somewhat improvisational approach the ensemble takes to realize music that survived largely through oral tradition. A brief but warm prelude by court musician and composer Robert de Visée (1660-1732) offers Otzbrugger a chance to show the expressive potential of the theorbo as a solo instrument.

French composer and flutist Michel Blavet's (1700-1732) charming and virtuosic Sonata 3 gives traverso player Julia Stocker a chance to shine.

Rameau's Cantata Pour le Jour de Saint Louis is another knockout for this ensemble. The notes suggest that it may originally have been intended for violin obligato, but the traverse works. The program closes with another traditional song, the gentle 'Quand Je Menai les Chevaux Boire'.

The ensemble plays quite well and Pollak's voice is nicely suited to this music. It's a light voice that sometimes seems to fade away in the lower register but in the middle and upper registers is clear and bright. She sometimes falls into that annoying early music habit of slightly withholding vibrato at the onset of sustained notes, but for the most part she sings with color and excellent phrasing. People interested in early music, particularly French, won't want to miss this. Helpful notes (by Naef) and texts but no translations.
Settings of three liturgical texts by André Caplet begin the program: ‘The Lord’s Prayer’; ‘Hail, Mary, Full of Grace’; and ‘The Apostles Creed’. Three settings of Verlaine poems by Debussy are also included. The major work is Lili Boulanger’s *Clairières dans le Ciel*, a stunning cycle of 13 songs for tenor and piano. The sun comes out in six sprightly songs by Cécile Chaminade to conclude the program.

This is a marvelous album. Spence is a singer of exquisite taste and sumptuous voice—perfect for these songs—and his performance is ravishing with vocal shading that is both tender and fervent. Martineau, recently honored with an OBE, is a praiseworthy collaborator as usual and offers sparkling accompaniment, particularly in the final Chaminade song ‘Été’, to match Spence’s nimble singing.

Notes, texts, translations.

R. Moore

**Widmungen**

Schubert, Liszt, Schumann, Godowsky
Isabelle Catherine Vilmar, s; William Youn, p
Genuin 16416—64 minutes

This is a lovely program of solo piano music and song. Youn begins with Schubert’s energetic Wanderer Fantasy. It’s a great showpiece, and his playing is perfectly clear and appropriately sensitive.

Songs by Schubert and later Robert Schumann fill out the program between solo piano (of Schubert and Schumann songs) by Liszt and Polish American pianist and composer Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938).

I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: I don’t like song transcriptions. It’s hard to enjoy a text-free appropriation of an art form dependent on text. That said, this program acknowledges and reconciles this in the best way, by simply including performances of the original songs before the transcriptions. It’s a terrific programming idea that really works.

Youn is the star of the recording, managing the occasionally virtuosic demands of the transcriptions and the gentle intimacy of the song accompaniments with equal aplomb. I could listen to him play all day. Vilmar’s voice has a bit of an edge to it, but she’s a good storyteller with clear diction. Notes and interviews with the artists but no texts or translations.

**Songs to the Moon**

Brahms, Fauré, Saint-Saëns, Schumann
Mary Bevan, s; Clara Mouriz, mz; Allan Clayton, t; Marcus Farnsworth, bar; Joseph Middleton, p
Signum 443 [2CD] 81 minutes

These artists perform together as The Myrthen Ensemble, and this is their debut recording. The program includes 28 works for one, two, or four voices by a wide range of composers, each song about some characteristic associated with the moon. It is a captivating and enchanting program with superlative performances by a group of outstanding young singers.

We hear a seldom heard song by Peter Warlock, ‘The Night’, and then 8 songs of Brahms and 5 of Schumann. There are two English language songs, Samuel Barber’s ‘Nocturne’ and Elizabeth Maconchy’s ‘Sun, Moon, and Stars’. There are French songs by Szulc, Mompou, Saint-Saëns, Debussy, Chausson, Hahn, Duparc, Massenet, and Fauré.

Everyone’s singing is exemplary. Bevan and Clayton are especially commendable. Their duets in Schumann’s ‘In der Nacht’ and Massenet’s ‘Repons, c’est l’heure’ are ravishing. Her ethereal singing with effortless soaring is sublime, as in Debussy’s ‘Apparition’. Mouriz has just the right sound for Mompou’s ‘Damut de Tu Nomes les Fleurs’ and joins Bevan in Fauré’s ‘Tarantelle’ for a sprightly, nimble, and rousing finale. As in “This Other Eden” (M/A 2016), Middleton is an assured and first-rate collaborator.

The ordering of songs—solos, duets, and quartets—makes for an engaging and captivating program. The German songs are radiant; the French songs are intoxicating. The three quartets of Brahms are especially entrancing. Everything about this release is magical.

It makes some sense to put this program on two CDs since one is mostly sung in German and the other mostly in French, but the whole program could be put on one disc if just one short song were omitted. I notice that prices vary greatly, so you may want to shop around.

Notes, texts, translations.

R. Moore

**Collections**

[Collections are in the usual order: orchestral, chamber ensembles, brass ensembles, bassoon, cello & double bass, clarinet & saxophone, flute, guitar, harp, harpsichord, miscellaneous, oboe, organ, piano, trumpet & brass solos, viola, violin, wind ensembles, early, choral, vocal.]

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Brahms: Violin Sonatas
Leonid Kogan; Andrei Mytnik, p
Archipel 355—80 minutes

Leonid Kogan’s (1924-82) heyday was in the 1950s and 1960s, and these recordings date from 1955 (Sonatas 1 and 3) and 1956 (Sonata 2). Kogan had to suffer under the label of second-best Soviet violinist after David Oistrakh, but his Brahms Sonatas do not at all take second place. Oistrakh recorded all three of them, but his recordings pale next to Kogan’s. Kogan may lack Oistrakh’s crushed-velvet tone and broad tonal palette, but his understanding of these works far surpasses Oistrakh’s. Kogan’s phrasing is also worked out more carefully in tandem with his pianist, as it should be in this music considering that Brahms himself played the premiere performances of Sonatas 2 and 3, and Brahms would hardly allow himself to be eclipsed by another. This is one of the best sets of these works that I know.

The sound of Sonatas 1 and 3, which were recorded in Moscow, is a bit wiry, but Sonata 2, recorded in London, is smoother and fuller. I’m pretty sure that all of these are monaural, but the sound is always clear.

Mendelssohn: Midsummer Night’s Dream; Schubert: Symphony 8
Vienna Symphony, Bamberg Symphony/ Clemens Krauss
Opus Kuru 7076—66 minutes

They do these things well in Vienna, where for many decades Clemens Krauss (1893-1954) was a fixture in both opera house and concert hall. This recording of the incidental music from A Midsummer Night’s Dream is among the best of the best. The Vienna musicians are superb, but it is the poetry of the performance that puts it over the top. For all the emotional warmth and lyrical energy of the playing there remains a cool moonlit stillness hovering about as a reminder that the pastoral scenes are the product of high art and brilliant fantasy. The dream is, for all its earthy realism, but a dream in the end, and the better for that.

The pair of sylvan sirens, Dagmar Hermann and Ilona Steingruber, entice the listener away, away into the fields and forests with a most courtly perfection of sound and style. It is rather like John Keats’s ‘Ode to a Grecian Urn’ in reverse: there we see the dancers and imagine the music; here we hear the music and imagine the dancing. Both performances create a profound yearning for an otherworld quite beyond the reach of mortal perception. What a lovely thing this jewel-like performance is!

The Schubert symphony is boldly shaped but not so memorable. One might prefer that other Viennese conductor, not so well treated in Vienna as Clemens Krauss—Bruno Walter.

Schubert: Impromptus, all; Moments Musicaux; Schumann: Waldszenen; Symphonic Etudes
Walter Gieseking
Urania 121223 [2CD] 129 minutes

No, this is not a new recording from the great beyond. These (monaural) European Columbia recordings date from 1951 and 1955 and have probably appeared before—many times. For this occasion they have been remastered in what this label calls its “Widescreen Collection” (whatever that means). The Schumann released by Music & Arts (J/A 1998) may or may not be these same recordings. Our illustrious critic Harold Schonberg said, “The great man is off form here”.

Starting with the Schumann I can report that the sound, if hardly state of the art, is more than bearable. It’s slightly muffled, but distortion in loud passages is minimal, though I cannot be generous with praise, especially in terms of the balance. Waldszenen is imaginatively presented and is well up to the Gieseking we know and love. The Symphonic Études (only the original 12) is skillful and affectionate. My conclusion is that they are not the same performances as reviewed previously, though a few dropped notes may annoy some listeners.

Schubert’s Impromptus from 1955 leave little to criticize in terms of sound reproduction, except an uncomfortable closeness that makes loud sound excessively so. The performances are exceptional—beautifully phrased, elegantly presented, and technically assured. Schubert is well served here, and the Gieseking legend continues in this superb remastering. There are no notes.

American Record Guide
Mengelberg

**MOZART:** Magic Flute Overture; MEYERBEER: Coronation March; BEETHOVEN: Egmont Overture; Symphony 3

New York Philharmonic
Opus Kura 2115—70 minutes

Willem Mengelberg and Arturo Toscanini shared the podium of the New York Philharmonic in the late 1920s, creating what was later recalled as a battle of the titans. Listening to these New York recordings, all made in 1930, one is at first impressed with how much like Toscanini they sound. Instead of the maestro of minute detail, Mengelberg comes across as aggressive and hard-driving in the way one associates with Toscanini—or perhaps one should say “New York.”

But there the resemblance ends, for more here than in his later recordings Mengelberg impresses with his mastery of the grand romantic style then beginning to pass into history. The portamento is strongly marked—and very effective in the slow movement of the *Eroica*—but even more telling are the massive, dramatic variations in tempo which, along with rhetorically inflected phrasing, make for electrifying performances of the sort only to be enjoyed via historical recordings.

The *Magic Flute Overture* is too hell-for-leather for my taste, not top-drawer for this conductor. Mengelberg makes amends with the swinging rhythms of the Meyerbeer overture with its splendid trumpet part. In Beethoven he is most impressive—sublimely excessive from first to last. The surging, propulsive strains in the *Egmont Overture* are physically overbearing, “titanic” in a way calculated to impress even Toscanini’s admirers. But the *Eroica Symphony*, while just as powerful, is more subtle in its shapely fluidity, the conductor a sly raconteur rhetorically embellishing a dramatic narrative structure with a whole arsenal of shifting voices and postures. This was what the Toscanini faction could not abide, particularly when executed with such willful and in-your-face zest.

Mengelberg was a thorough master of the extreme, late-romantic way with Beethoven, and since not so much of it survives in electrical recordings this disc is worth seeking out despite the fact that the sources used are not all one might hope for. Listen to Mengelberg back-to-back with Toscanini and recreate an important moment in the history of musical performance.

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**Stokowski**

**HOLST:** The Planets; SCHOENBERG: Verklarte Nacht; BARTOK: Music for Strings, Percussion, & Celeste; LOEFFLER: A Pagan Poem; TURIANA: Oracion del Torero; BARBER: Adagio

Los Angeles Philharmonic, His Symphony Orchestra—Urania 121.158 [2CD] 2:30

These late-Stokowski, early-stereo recordings were made for Capitol Records and. Since the stereo originals from that era can be pricey, it is useful to have them gathered here in a well-presented program. The sound quality is variable—nothing special in the Holst, exquisite in the Barber, and a little odd sometimes in some of the others. One must make allowances for “his” orchestra performances where the upside is a hand-picked collection of musicians and the downside artificial means used to make the orchestra sound larger than it was. The conductor and the engineers might be accused of bad taste, but where Stokowski is concerned what might otherwise be considered a flaw may be a plus. From first to last, this is full-bore Stokowski: lucid performances, erotic textures, glowing sound.

Since with the exception of the Schoenberg these are Stokowski’s first and only studio performances, perhaps there was less temptation to mannerism. It may seem odd that he had not recorded *The Planets* earlier; Holst (1874-1934) was a near contemporary and the work an ideal vehicle for such a demonstrative conductor. But it was only late in life that Stokowski began to identify as British, and on the whole he seems to have avoided English composers. For the popularity of *The Planets* we must thank the championship of Adrian Boult and the odd conjunction of high fidelity with the Space Race in the 1950s—Stokowski recorded his *Planets* in Los Angeles less than a year before the launch of Sputnik, making it a timely affair. It is a glorious performance by any standards. Perhaps it is just as well that Stokowski waited for high fidelity to record his breath-taking performance of the Bartok. The sound of the strings in the Barber Adagio is all one might wish for. The 75-year-old conductor who made these brilliant late recordings is as youthful and charismatic as ever.

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.

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SCHOPENHAUER

RADCLIFFE

September/October 2016
White: She Lost Her Voice That’s How We Knew
Nordeval, s; Elizabeth Brown, shakuhachi
Ravello 7915—44 Minutes

Pisaro: A Mist is a Collection of Points
Phillip Bush, p; Greg Stuart, perc; Michael Pisaro, sine tones
New World 80772—58 minutes

Mercer: Sound Portraits; Friends...Flowers; Mourning & Loving; Auctioneer; Citytudes; Quilt
Janis Mercer, p, electronics
Centaur 3417—75 Minutes

Postcard Sessions
Schumann: 3 Romances; Piazzolla: Ave Maria; Oblivion; Vaughan Williams: English Folk Song Studies; Francaix: 5 Danses Exotiques; Ibert: Histoires; Benson: Aeolian Song; Maurice: Tableaux de Provence
Allen Harrington, sax; Laura Loewen, p
Ravello 7934—64 Minutes

Couloir
Maxwell: Serere; Muhy: Clear Music
Ravello 7932—56 Minutes

PubliQuartet
Kent: Impetuous Old Friend; Montgomery: Break Away; Voodoo Dolls; PubliQuartet: Bird In Paris; Epistrophy; Birman: Quartet; Biedenbender: Surface Tension
Concert Artists Guild 115—53 Minutes

Mckinley: 3 Portraits; Quartet 7
Martinu Quartet; SOLI Chamber Ensemble
Navona 6040—72 Minutes

Chen: Er Huang; Enchantements Oublies; Un Temps Disparu
Chun-Chieh Yen, p; Jiemin Yan, erhu; Taiwan Philharmonic/ Shao-Chia Lu
Naxos 570614—70 minutes

Guang: Symphony 2; Earth Requiem: I Gazing at the Stars: Meditation; Sorrowful Dawn
Nuremberg Symphony/ En Shao
Naxos 570618—72 minutes

Yi: Chinese Rap; Chinese Folk-Songs; Romance & Dance; Tu: Momentum
Helen Kim v; Robert Henry, p; KSU Chamber Singers/ Leslie J Blackwell; KSU Symphony/ Michael Alexander—Centaur 3440—48 mins

One way to describe experiences of wonder, awe, trauma, or disbelief is as moments that leave you speechless. France’s White’s opera for solo voice explores the “necessity of putting into words experiences that are beyond words, or where words have been suppressed”. This is difficult to implement well. Electronics are muted pulses with occasional flute transformations or percussion. Space and quiet are the most heard devices in the atonal work. The slow tempos and melancholy mood easily allow for the attachment of universal matters not intended and thus the work could come to touch many individuals.

“A Mist is a Collection of Points” is both as highly descriptive and as far from informative as a title can get. This makes sense considering he’s a member of the totality-resisting Wandelweiser Collective, an international group of people “committed, over the long term, to sharing their work and working together” with no other unifying characteristics. Pisaro’s “mist” is sine waves and his collection of points are piano keys and percussion. The initial attack of each note brings it to your attention and then it recedes until it, too, becomes a part of the mist. The interesting aspect of Pisaro’s work is how he rotates the mist before you, allowing you to inspect parts before something new occurs. Notes gradually decay to the point where their endings are imperceptible or hidden by other entrances. What is not interesting about Pisaro’s work is the actual notes. II has the benefit of containing more of them resounding and repeating, but repetition itself doesn’t create melody. III is the most active but the piano is active in all registers. This denies the listener any attempt of traversing the registral differences to create a composite melody. Pisaro then has the percussionist drop handfuls of rice on cymbals at ever decreasing speeds for the last five minutes of the piece.

While Pisaro’s electronics are limited to the creation of sine waves, Janis Mercer’s are more about the transformation of human voices. ‘Auctioneer’ uses recordings of two auctioneers as source material for the creation of a Gregorian chant. The natural melodic and rhythmic aspects of the trade are brought to the fore before transformations of the voices into parallel organum. Sound Portraits is altered answering machine messages. She says her interest is in “the assumptions people make based on the sound of the voice as to gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, level of education, etc” and

American Record Guide
I can only imagine her manipulations of the source material as an attempt to play on and confuse those assumptions. The problem with this is that she is making assumptions concerning the assumptions of others. I had not thought about the actual person in the sound collage owing to the frequency of cuts and level of altering until I read the liner notes. Quilt is a sonic tapestry using recordings from the 1950s to 2013 to portray a family in the Midwest through the ears of a child. The actual piece is slightly confused as to what it wants to primarily be for the listener. Most of the piece is a stitched together story made from source audio; but there is also an attempt to use different registers, musical material, and the repetition of certain fragments to create the form and semblance of a musical work. This is not to say that a work cannot be both, but when a piece like that is crafted well there isn’t a question as to intention.

A conservative program by the Harrington-Loewen Duo, “The Postcard Sessions”, is a recital for saxophone with mainly melodic, tonal pieces. Schumann’s 3 Romances sounds fine with sax standing in for the originally intended instrument. Piazzolla’s works seems to use the minds of numerous small ensembles these days, and their beauty despite the setting is really a credit to the composer. Jean Franaix’s 5 Danses Exotiques and Jacques Ibert’s five-movement Histoires offer a number of short, upbeat pieces for amusement. This is a release I would skip unless I were specifically looking for saxophone recordings of these pieces.

As far as duos go, I rarely see cello and harp. Couloir—Ariel Barnes and Heidi Krutzen—perform James Maxwell’s Serere, a concert music version of a ballet from 2012 concerning identity, writing, authorship, and calligraphy, in two versions. The version with electroacoustics includes the sounds of pencil on paper to tie into the concepts of writing and calligraphy; but, aside from a few sections where the electronics are quite active, the addition is minimal. The cello still alters bowings constantly, and the harp is generally an instrument of percussive force first and stepwise harmony second. Nico Muhly’s Clear Music is 9 minutes of one bar of Taverner’s Missa Christi Sanctissima. Muhly explores the bar in many ways, extending the bright character of the piece with the celeste far above the harp and cello. The piece is enjoyable on many levels. On the surface, the timbre and tone are warm and inviting and there is always a sense of motion. Below the surface, the repetitions of subtle passages reveal the extension techniques used.

Beginning with Howie Kent’s strident ‘Impetuous Old Friend’, PubliQuartet’s program bounces, bangs, scratches, scrapes, hits, and plucks all over the string quartet’s instruments. Jessie Montgomery’s ‘Break Away’ is five movements of sharp hints and quick phrases. II actually seems like an extended quotation of James Bond’s theme while IV concentrates on klangfarbenmelodie and techniques. The longest work on the program, a quartet by Eugene Birman, is the serious, no-fun piece that allows the group to delve into shifting harmonics and almost completely forget about melody. The chord structure is quite pretty and the subtle shifts in tone are welcomed; but I’m rarely a fan of concert program releases with filler pieces. PubliQuartet sounds best in the churning and whirling of pieces like David Biedenbender’s ‘Surface Tension’ or when humourous, as in the funky, disassembled hoe-down section of their own ‘Bird In Paris’.

It’s rare to see the notation on a program that a piece is “reggae-pop”. Elliot Miles McKinley’s II of 3 Portraits is definitely infused with pop sensibilities, though I’m not sure where the reggae is. The clarinet’s bopping melody in its low register is relaxed. The piano is bright and offbeat. The movement is drastically different than the more Messiaen-colored I. The electronic drum track in III, ‘Groove Variations’, ties it to the pop melodies of II and offers a source of energy and propulsion to the chamber group. The low-end heavy piano does seem directly at odds with the late 90s drum track, though, and the piece doesn’t come into its own until the drum track is dropped and the instruments pick up the pace on their own. McKinley’s String Quartet 7 is six movements of perfect fifths and relationships between and around them. I is repeated pairings as rhythmic intervals decrease in size. II, a scherzo and fugue, is syncopated and constantly shifting meter. V, ‘Riding into The Sky’, offers repeated eighth notes and a return of the perfect fifth pairings before venturing into a swung melody. The concluding coda, VI, repeats the opening of I before descending by thirds and dissolving.

The last student of Messiaen, Qigang Chen, was born in China, underwent “ideological re-education” for three years when the Cultural Revolution broke out in Beijing in 1966, and gained French citizenship in 1992. Chen’s Er Huang is emotional and sentimental. The piano led orchestra takes its time with
darkly-tinged passages, plaintive melodies, and nostalgic underpinnings, but when it decides to rise above these aspects there’s no stopping the sheer operatic power of its catharsis. Un Temps Disparu, originally for cello and orchestra, replaces the cello with the erhu and really pushes the instrument beyond its traditional employment. Harmonics, extended cadenzas, difficult lines, and passagework that must emerge between orchestral motives are handled as effortlessly as the singing melodies by Jiemin Yan. Chen’s music blends Eastern and Western melodies and practices well while he traverses tonal and chromatic atmospheres. The power and might of the full orchestra are harnessed only for the biggest of moments—and is done splendidly.

Another Chinese composer with grandiose moments of humanistic music is Xia Guan. Symphony 2 is “for those who are sincerely in pursuit of their dreams.” The inspiration is the coexistence of good and evil in mankind; the mix of trumpet fanfares and melodic winds over chromatic strings and brass reflects this. I attempts to break from bleak harmonics and burst into triumph but is held back more than once. It is more pleasing and gentle, with pastoral melodies depicting warmth. The finale allows the opening fanfares of I to return even bigger and with more pomp before the schmaltz shows up in the strings. Some nice development material goes by a bit too quickly before returning to the large-scale orchestral climax and soaring strings that accompany it. Guan’s Sorrowful Dawn sounds harmonically similar to his symphony, complete with dramatic brass flourishes after reflective string and wind melodies. Guan’s works are uplifting and pleasant with sweeping melodies and lots of bombast from the brass.

While Guan’s compositions are somewhat bluntly orchestrated and mostly tonal, Chen’s concentrate more on subtext than the big moments and use more chromatics. A third Chinese composer, Chen Yi, is more atonal than Chen, and the sense of hope that permeates the works of the other two composers is not a major point of inspiration. Momentum is deeply chromatic, with forceful figures in the percussion and scrappy strings. Chinese Rap is a delight. The piece is a ten minute reel of rhythmic interplay and infectious melody interspersed with darkly engaging slaps, booms, fanfares, and a violin solo. Fire and the fiery nature of various things are a large source of inspiration for works on Yi’s program; and Tu, a Chinese character relating to burning, poison, and fiery, is a work for the New York firefighters who died as a result of 9/11. It attempts to express compassion for victims and their families before asking for peace in the future. The explosive opening is followed by high mallet percussion, disjointed, high melodies in wind instruments, and harp. The piece sinks until only the double basses are heard chewing out a rough motive that begins to build as more instruments repeat and paraphrase it. Thunderous timpani and staccato attacks from the entire wind ensemble bring the work to its conclusion.

KOTCHE: Drumkit Quartets
So Percussion
Cantaloupe 21116—54 minutes

WEN: Orchestral Pieces
Bruno Weinmeister, vc; Vienna Radio Symphony/ Gottfried Rabl
Naxos 570619—70 minutes

PRADO: Cartas Celestes 1
Aleyson Scopel, p
Grand Piano 709—73 minutes

WALKER: Orchestral Pieces
Novaya Rossiya Symphony/ Alexander Walker
Toccata 283—58 minutes

NELSON: Watercolors
Sonja Bruzauskas, mz
Delos 3499 74 minutes

Danish String Quartet
Ades, Norgard, Abrahamsen
ECM 24848—47 minutes

Wilco drummer Glenn Kotche’s Drumkit Quartets is a collection of percussion works, none of which sounds like just a quartet of drumkits. The first on the record, Drumkit Quartet 51, is arranged for marimbas and some recorded sounds—with some drumkit about halfway through. Each marimba repeats similar descending melodic fragments, more or less different to its companions’ tempos. The effect is a scattered yet smooth surface, punctuated by assorted sounds like construction, a baby(?), a reading of a haiku, etc. Another realization of the piece appears at the end of the record, substantially reworked. While the notes are the same, the re-arrangement of so many of the other elements yields a different form that feels much less meditative than the first. It’s not clear exactly what goes into a realization of the work, but it would seem that there’s a lot of indeterminacy or improvisation involved—or
perhaps Kotche just decided to move some things around. Drumkit Quartet 1 consists of much more straightforward drumkit playing—hi-hat, snare, kick—but with some aggressive, crunchy electronic noises layered on. Everything is in time and beat-driven, with simple polyrhythms and metric play to spice things up a bit. Drumkit Quartet 3 is in three movements. I is the sound of four hi-hats playing a few simple rhythms back and forth; II is a variation on I but for triangles; III is a combination of bells and high hat. Kotche obviously enjoys writing and tinkering with this music, and his fame affords him the opportunity to work with ensembles of So Percussion’s caliber. But while these little pieces sound nice enough, he isn’t exactly breaking new ground. I enjoyed short stretches, but without a more developed sense of form or structure—something interesting or new—there isn’t much reason to come back for more.

Deqing Wen’s record of orchestral works is a fairly conservative, predictable fusion of standard Western orchestral music with elements of Chinese traditions. The musical surface changes quite a bit over the course of individual works and over the course of the record. Loud, boisterous orchestral fanfare gives way to more modern-sounding, floating, ethereal textures led by murmuring strings. Low, tender points are invariably followed by a climactic release of noisy energy—a formula that is impressive once, but already old the second time. The newest piece is called the Shanghai Prelude (2015). It is the most stylistically developed of Wen’s music presented here, yet still it lacks subtlety. The compositional strategy is to bombard the listener with bold melody and lush orchestration, but also to give the listener no opportunity to dwell before being whisked away to somewhere new. And the real problem I have with this kind of music—which is really in no way bad music—is that it’s been done. I come to new music wanting to find something that I haven’t heard or that I didn’t already expect. Wen pursues a kind of musical quality that is “vivid, emotive, and accessible” with what feels like brute compositional force.

The record of solo piano music by Brazilian composer Jose Antonio Rezende de Almeida Prado is the first volume in a set of his complete Cartas Celestes. (15 of these are for solo piano; the other 3 are for 2 pianos and symphonic band, violin and orchestra, and piano, marimba, and vibraphone.) Numbers 1, 2, 3, and 15 are presented here; each is a free, fantasia-esque meandering through triadic-but-definitely-not-tonal harmony. Everything sounds like a stream of consciousness that has in fact been meticulously composed. Melodic gestures are flashy and grand, colorful and expressive, but without falling into tired predictability. This music is clear but not too familiar, amorphous and long-winded but listenable in the moment. One of these pieces is enough for a sitting, but four on the same program gets to feel like a bit too much. These four do sound remarkably similar to one another. Scope’s performances are fine. A collector of Prado’s music will be pleased with this record, though a more casual listener may wish for something more varied.

Robin Walker’s record of orchestral music is yet another set of works that adds nothing new or particularly interesting to the expanding pool of neoclassical contemporary music. The compositional style—what Walker himself calls “passionate classicism”—is clear, obvious, and cliched. Harmonies are largely tonal and all melodies and themes are simple, bold, and unmemorable. Having visited Walker’s website, I suspect I am who he is writing about when he proposes “the need to correct an overweening intellect” and he aspires to “the wisdom of the classical rituals of making pattern out of passion.” Not for lack of trying, I find myself unable to give in to the waves of feeling that Walker tries to evoke. Instead, the music sounds to me like the product of someone who’d really like to score low-budget Hollywood films. This isn’t to say that there aren’t merits to the music, and writing as much as Walker has isn’t easy. But I can’t imagine needing or wanting to listen to this record again.

Robert Nelson’s Watercolors is a collection of songs for mezzo-soprano that includes two cycles: Zoo Stories and the title work, Watercolors. With Bruzauskas’ over-enunciation and the instruments’ goofy mimicking of animal noises, Zoo Stories is plainly meant for children. The sound of the horn works perfectly for the elephant’s role in the song, but I am still not exactly the target audience. Everything is very cartoon-ish, from the harmonies to the orchestration. If this were only the case for the children’s music, then perhaps the record would be more interesting to me, but the rest of the songs are in a similar mold. The Watercolors cycle depends upon a sort of monotonous, post-Debussy piano style and a floating soprano voice that move at the same pace in all five songs. This, I think, is where the record falls short: even the individual songs all fall into a
very similar harmonic rhythm and general affect. Without stylistic contrast, the record blurs into one long song that isn’t very satisfying.

The formidable Danish String Quartet here gives superb performances of music by two Danish composers, Per Norgard and Hans Abrahamsen, joined by Thomas Ades. Each of these now well established composers is represented by a work from early in his career. Ades was in his early 20s when he wrote Arcadiana (1994), a set of seven short pastoral movements for string quartet. These pieces are dissonant but not jarring, with an emphasis on timbre and orchestration. There is a bold, weighty quality to the gestures, showing a dedication to expression and gravity that would persist in his career. Per Norgard’s first string quartet, Quartetto Breve (1952) is, indeed, brief. Its two movements contrast light and dark, smooth and rhythmic, pleasant and harsh. Neoclassical tropes are abundant: I is constructed largely around a melody-and-accompaniment style; II has plenty of motivic development. If this sounds unlike Norgard, it’s because this piece is from before the composer’s turn toward serial techniques, the “infinity series”, and a specialist aesthetic. But this short quartet does not lack for substance, even if it is predictable. Finally, in Hans Abrahamsen’s ten preludes for string quartet—his Quartet No. 1 (1973)—each more or less revolves around one or a couple of simple concepts, principles, or ideas. For example, the fourth prelude is driven by a motoric rhythm, underscored by dark pizzicatos. One of the set is an exploration of very simple klangfarbenmelodie—the splitting of a melody between instruments. While it’s easy to chalk such didactic organization up to it being a student work (Abrahmsen was a student of Norgard’s), this structure and guiding compositional technique holds the collection together and makes it all very listenable. The general style is far more conventional and traditional than his later work, which is largely devoid of the unison melodies and repetition. This is a fascinating record, with phenomenal playing by the Danish String Quartet.

**VIDEOS**

**BACH: St Matthew Passion**
Peter Schreier, narr; Bernd Weikl, Jesus; Mitsuko Shirai, s; Marga Schiml, a; Franz Grundheber, b; St Michaelis Orchestra/ Günter Jena
Arthaus 109219—211 minutes

John Neumeier was born in Wisconsin, but has made his career largely in Europe; he has been a dancer, choreographer, and director for the Hamburg Ballet since 1973. His ballet based on Bach’s Passion dates from 1980, when it was performed with the above musicians. Since that time it has been done in much of the ballet world and continues in Hamburg to the present day; it was performed in 2016 and is planned again for 2017. For these later performances I presume that taped music has been used, for reasons of complexity and cost. This video combines the musical performance from 1980 with a dance performance from the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus in 2005.

This Passion-Ballet is an unlikely combination for several reasons. First and foremost the *St Matthew Passion* is a contemplative work where, really, not a whole lot happens. Furthermore it is very long, and one could easily argue that the music is rich enough to not need any further commentary. (Contrast this, if you will, to many fine songs and operas built on fairly ordinary material; there the music supplies a depth that the poetry lacks.) If Bach were a necessary component for a ballet, wouldn’t it have been wiser to choose the St John, which is more dramatic and shorter? In any case this is a remarkable achievement and a testimony to Neumeier’s deep creativity.

Here we see only the stage; we don’t see the musicians at all. For larger, dramatic numbers (mainly choruses) we see the full complement of about 40 dancers, headed by Neumeier himself, who portrays Jesus; much of this is very effective, particularly in the section leading up to the crucifixion. Otherwise we see smaller groups (mainly for arias), and some of these tend to be less interesting, probably because the length of the arias does not easily allow for variety. At its best, though (often in the chorales), the dancing is astonishingly moving in its response to the text and music. It is true that over the course of 3-1/2 hours the repertory of anguished expressions, full of longing, can get a little tedious. At its best, though—the flagellation at ‘O Haupt, voll Blut und Wunden’ or the pain in ‘Geduld, Geduld”—the performance is heart-wrenching. I pick two examples here, but dozens could be cited where the agony of the text is wonderfully amplified by the dancing. The whole piece is presented without a set; there is

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simply a blank stage with a few risers. Men are dressed in off-white jump suits with sleeveless undershirts, while the women have matching off-white dresses.

The musical contributions of Jena, his chorus, and soloists are quite good; this comes before the period instrument revolution, so tempos are moderate. Nonetheless, you would hardly buy this for the musical performance. This is for people who love dance and want to witness one of the most ambitious projects of recent times. As a non-dance guy I can say I found much of it emotionally gripping, and it added a new dimension to my admiration for this piece. Do note, by the way, that no text is included, so if you don’t already know the piece well, get the text!

**Beethoven: Fidelio**
Camilla Nylund (Leonore), Jonas Kaufmann (Florestan), Laszlo Polgar (Rocco), Alfred Muff (Don Pizarro), Elizabeth Rae Magnuson (Marzelline), Christoph Strehl (Jaquino), Gunther Groissbock (Don Fernando); Zurich Opera/ Nikolaus Harnoncourt—Arthaus 109223—128 minutes

This production was presented in Zurich in 2004, only a couple of years after the same director, Jürgen Flimm, had staged a new production of the same opera at the Metropolitan Opera (recorded on DG video). The Met production has more detailed, realistic scenery; in Zurich the scenery is minimal and abstract. Both productions share some of the director’s ideas, such as Fidelio/Leonore’s replacing of an engagement ring with her real wedding ring. This production has no totally strange directoral touches; at the end, the embarrassed Marzelline contemplates suicide, but Jaquino quickly wrests the gun from her hands, comforts her, and avoids what would have been a disastrous ending. Otherwise, dramatically, this is a pretty traditional production.

The tempos of Nikolaus Harnoncourt are less traditional. The conductor speeds up the ending of the overture in the same way many conductors rush to the end of the Ninth Symphony. He also takes the entrance march of Pizarro’s men at a very fast clip. Oddly enough, the great burst of joy, ‘O namenlose Freude,’ after the rescue moves at a snail’s pace—destroying part of the joy and relief of that great moment.

I am much happier with the individual singers than with the conductor. Camilla Nylund makes a noble Fidelio. The difficulties of her Act I aria hold no terror for her; she sails through them with ease. Her Florestan is Jonas Kaufmann, here still on the verge of his great international career, but singing the short but fiendish role already as well as the great Florestans of the past. These two make a perfect heroic couple.

Among the other singers, I particularly like Laszlo Polgar as a very sympathetic Rocco, his fine bass voice perfect for this role. Alfred Muff creates a villain who is easy to dislike (dramatically), but who sings the part well. The Marzelline of Elizabeth Rae Magnuson and the wonderful bass Gunther Groissbock (Don Fernando) also deserve praise.

If I could own only one of Flimm’s Fidelios, I would choose the one from the Met for Levine’s more traditional tempos and Karita Mattila’s remarkable performance in the title role. But this is also a commendable performance. Its booklet has a short essay about the origins of the opera, a synopsis, and timings.

**Beethoven: Leonore III, Piano Concerto 4; Wagner: Tristan Prelude & Liebestod**
Wilhelm Backhaus; Birgit Nilsson, Vienna Philharmonic/ Hans Knappertsbusch
Arthaus 109213—79 minutes

According to the case and booklet, this program was supposed to include a 1963 Walkure Act 1 in addition to the 1962 Beethoven and Tristan excerpts, but there is no sign of them.

What IS here is a lovely hour and a third of music-making. Knappertsbusch, Backhaus, and the VPO knew one another and the music very well for decades. The performances are mellow, graceful, and completely natural—no hype, no pretense, powerful climaxes, singing lyric sections.

Nilsson is the newcomer to this club, but she had already sung I solde with Kna many times.

This is a concert where you know everyone will get things right and you can just relax and enjoy it.

The recorded sound is limited even for the early 60s (this was a televised concert) and the video production is somewhere between rudimentary and clueless—you can’t even count on the camera being on the instrument with the tune at any given moment.

No matter, just relax and listen. This concert played in my head for days after I last played it.
In an essay in the booklet Mark Pappenheim interprets the stage setting and some of the action symbolically. While his ideas make sense, I’m not sure one needs to grant them to enjoy this performance. For example, Mr Pappenheim describes the dancers as representing “spirit beings”, but I believe they can simply be seen as tribal dancers performing rituals to enhance the pearl hunting. This is a reason-ably traditional production. It takes place on the beaches of Ceylon; the people are dressed as they would have been in ancient times.

The performance is quite satisfactory, but not exactly definitive. Patrizia Ciofi certainly understands and conveys the conflicting feelings of Leila. She sings the coloratura well, though sometimes her voice shows a tinge of shrillness. Tenor Dmitri Korchak, as her lover Nadir, displays a light but penetrating sound that may be a bit too nasal for some tastes. Generally, their singing is commendable, and physically they fit the roles of the lovers quite well. I was most impressed by Dario Solari, the one singer in the cast totally new to me. He has a big commanding baritone voice and the acting ability to bring out the emotional roller-coaster of Zurga, who from the end of Act II becomes the central character in the opera. Roberto Tagliavini does all that one can with the short role of Nourabad.

The chorus, dancers, and orchestra of the San Carlo Opera perform very ably under Gabriele Ferro. The booklet contains a synopsis and timings as well as the essay.

**BIZET: The Pearl Fishers**
Patrizia Ciofi (Leila), Dmitri Korchak (Nadir), Dario Solari (Zurga), Roberto Tagliavini (Nourabad); San Carlo Opera/ Gabrielle Ferro
C Major 719508—118 minutes

**AY: The Beggar’s Opera**
Roger Daltrey (Macheath), Stratford Johns (Pea-cham), Patricia Routledge (Mrs Peacham), Carol Hall (Polly Peacham), Rosemary Ashe (Lucy Lockett); English Baroque Soloists/ John Eliot Gardiner—ArtHaus 109221—135 mins [Blu Ray]

This was a 1983 BBC Television production, a film by Jonathan Miller. The 1728 original by Gay and Pepusch has been arranged here by Jeremy Barlow and John Eliot Gardiner. It’s a merry romp. It’s not a stage production, but a film, with every tiny detail in place, as real as any Masterpiece Theatre production.

Rock star Roger Daltrey (a big attraction in 1983) does not have the operatic voice of his colleagues but manages well, crooning his way through the music. The others excel as singers and actors, though none are well known on this side of the Atlantic. With Gardiner at the helm, a musically authentic performance is assured.

**GOUNOD: Faust**
Charles Castronovo (Faust), Ildefonso Abudrazakov (Mephistopheles), Irina Lungu (Marguerite), Vasily Ladju (Valentin); Teatro Regio Turin/ Gianandrea Noseda—C Major 735108 [2DVD] 180 mins

This production, done in Turin in 2015, must be counted as a typical European staging, where the audience is left with many questions but is satisfied only by the excellence of the musical performance. The booklet attempts to describe the staging of Stefano Poda but actually does little to explain its meaning.

From beginning to end, the stage is dominated by a huge ring (the booklet suggests it means the circle of life), which revolves, rises, and lowers. At the beginning we see Faust accompanied by a scattered library inside the ring. Later the ring becomes the boundary for Marguerite’s garden, the setting for the church, part of the devil’s domain, and the prison.

Several unusual elements are not really explained. The chorus in Act II (including Wagner and Siebel) is dressed all in red, as if they are in a cahoots with the devil. Martha is no next-door peasant, but a rather sophisticated lady.

**BRUCKNER: Symphony 9**
Staatskapelle Dresden/ Christian Thielemann
C Major 733404—66 minutes [Blu-ray]

The basic checklist for Bruckner 9 is simple. Pacing is fine here (not too slow, not too fast—first movement just under 25 minutes, II just over 10, and finale a hair under 27). Orchestral playing is spectacularly good here: rich, expressive strings, lovely horns, winds like operatic soloists, solid, massive brass, sturdy percussion. The sound is Blu-ray at its best: you’re there with the orchestra. Sensible camera work.

So, why do I find this performance impressive but not very moving? I can’t name anything that Thielemann is doing wrong here, but I don’t feel much warmth, tenderness, or mystery. It’s not as interpretively dead as the Concertgebouw/Jansons performance that I wrote about in J/A 2016, but a Bruckner performance that lacks humanity is hard to live with.

Stay with Furtwangler, Giulini, Karajan, Schuricht, and the others that I and my colleagues have recommended.

**CHAKWIN**

**PARSONS**
who looks much like Bebe Neuwirth. In Act IV the soldiers return, singing their march while pantomiming getting shot. Mephistopheles sings his serenade while popping balloons worn under the skirts of presumably pregnant women. Most of the village scene of Act IV is played on such a dark stage that one simply loses interest in trying to figure out what’s going on. The following church scene is extremely dark. For the Walpurgisnacht, the stage is filled with almost nude dancers of both sexes performing jerky movements around Faust and the devil. At the very end both Faust and Mephistopheles are given hourglasses, apparently by a heavenly messenger. Do they get another chance at life? Does the devil want or need another chance? Why?

Musically, as with most of these productions, things are much better. I have heard Charles Castronovo in Mozart (Tamino and Don Ottavio) but never in a role as heavy as Faust. Here he uses his fine lyric voice to create an elegantly-sung portrayal of the philosopher. In his aria ‘Salut, demeure’ he hits the climactic high C perfectly, followed by a model diminuendo—the kind of singing one associates with Gedda or Bjoerling. In the ensuing love duet, his exquisite soft singing also recalls those great Fausts of the past.

As the Devil, Ildar Abdrazakov confirms his place as one of the finest basses on the world’s opera scene. A new name to me, Irina Lungu, makes a fine impression as Marguerite, her vocal beauty matched by her physical appearance. The lesser roles are all more than satisfactory, and the chorus and orchestra of the Teatro Regio perform well under their music director.

One of the best things about this Faust is its near-completeness. Even part of the first scene of Act IV (Marguerite’s aria about being abandoned) is included. You get a lot of music for your money, and the stage picture—while confusing—is never boring. The singing is really good, and (who knows?) maybe you can figure out what the big ring is all about.

HANDEL: Hercules

Joyce Di Donato (Dejanira), Ingela Bohlin (Iole), Malena Ernman (Lichas), Toby Spence (Hyllus), William Shimell (Hercules), Les Arts Florissants/William Christie—BelAir 213 [2DVD] 190 minutes

It was inevitable that, in the rush to stage every scrap of opera Handel ever wrote, someone—actually, many someones—would decide to stage his oratorios. Thus, in 2004, William Christie and his Arts Florissants teamed up with stage director Luc Bondy to stage this oratorio. Because of the nature of the oratorio form, there is much less recitative than in the normal Handel opera, and a chorus is present during much of the action. (The operas often have little or no choral music.) There are arias aplenty. It never seemed to occur to the Baroque opera composers that vocal ensembles could be effective and would become perhaps the chief glory of later opera.

This work is really the story of Dejanira, Hercules’s wife, whose jealousy must be the female equivalent of Otello’s; the story follows her from one bad judgement to another, until she ends the opera in madness after inadvertently killing her husband. Her rival, the princess Iole, probably has the second most important role. A third important character is Hyllus, the son of Dejanira and Hercules, whose kind nature seems totally at odds with the savage society where he lives. The title character actually does not have that large a part, though his presence is felt in the whole opera.

Musically, this is typical Handel: a long succession of da capo arias. Often Handel arias are very original and beautiful; it seems to me that the composer was less inspired by the story of Hercules than in some of his other works. There is a monotonous sameness about many of the arias; several times it seems as if they are written to show off the virtuosity of the singer without much attention to the character. If you love Handel arias, this is obviously a work for you.

The entire cast sings very well. William Shimell does his relatively short title role quite ably. In the role of Lichas, a sort of messenger-confidante, the mezzo Malena Ernman displays a voice of lovely quality. As the rival princess, soprano Ingela Bohlin sings beautifully and shows the dignity of the noble hostage. As Hyllus, Toby Spence, who looks as if he is barely of legal age, reveals a tenor with enough flexibility for the Handelian runs and ornamentation. Then there is Joyce DiDonato. At this relatively early moment in her career (2004) she is singing with the same authority we hear today.

SINGER
Her control of her coloratura is simply amazing. From the aria ‘Begone my fears’ in Act I to the Mad Scene in Act III she is in full control of her marvelous voice, all the time giving a dramatic performance that shows why Dejanira is really the central figure in this opera.

This recording is a must for Handel fans and for those of us who have seen Ms Di Donato only in bel canto works. She is completely at home in this role; she owns the stage when she is on it; there is probably not a better singer today.

SININGER

**HANDEL: Giulio Cesare in Egitto**

Andreas Scholl (Cesare), Cecilia Bartoli (Cleopatra), Anne Sofie von Otter (Cornelia), Christophe Dumaux (Tolomeo), Philippe Jaroussky (Sesto), Ruben Drole (Achila), Jochen Kowalski (Nirena), Il Giardino Armonico/ Giovanni Antonini

Decca 743856 [2DVD] 249 minutes

*Julius Caesar in Egypt* has become one of the most often presented among Handel’s operas these days. As with so many others, it has attracted attention of those konzept directors that infest our opera houses. So many updates and modern settings have been the result of the idea that 18th Century operas require “modern” relocations to make them “relevant” to present-day audiences.

**Giulio Cesare** has been subjected to such treatment in several productions of this type that can be had on video. David McVicar’s widely circulated Glyndebourne production of 2005 (Opus Arte 950, 3DVD: S/O 2006) transfers Caesar’s intrusion into Egypt in 48–47 BC to something like the British imperial intrusion into Egypt in the early 20th Century. Such a transfer is plausible and fascinating, and McVicar handled it quite responsibly.

Not long after, we were given two even more bold-faced ventures into making this opera “relevant”. One was a 2005 production by Thomas Grimm for the Royal Opera Theater in Copenhagen, conducted by Lars Erik Mortensen (Harmonia Mundi 9909008, 2DVD). The other was a studio taping in Dresden in 1990 that recreated a production done for the Theatre de La Monnaie in Brussels by that supreme opera-trasher, Peter Sellars (Decca 7253, 2DVD). I reviewed both of those video releases together (J/F 2008), pointing out the often incredibly cockeyed visual idiocies of otherwise well-sung performances.

This newest video production was taped at the Haus für Mozart in May 2012 at the Salzburg Festival. It was directed by Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier, two dedicated practitioners of regietheater. They have decided that Caesar’s expedition to Egypt fits right into our world of war in the Middle East. So the overture is given a pantomime of a bombed and burning city, and the opera ends with tanks and assault weapons pointed at the audience. In between, every opportunity is taken to make Handel’s opera “relevant” to the gullible modern audience. Cleopatra’s beautiful ‘V’adoro pupille’ scene (viewed by Caesar in 3D glasses) climaxes as Bartoli (in her latest wig and swathed in feather fans) is launched into the wings astride a guided missile.

Just in case you don’t recognize Ptolemy as a really mean fellow, he is shown spitefully tearing up a big dummy of Caesar (gratuitously set up when Cesare arrives). Dressed like a slimy punk-rocker, he masturbates twice (in two different arias), demands oral sex once, and rapes Cleopatra on stage. Sex is generally very much on the directors’ minds. A well-made bed appears regularly on the sparse set, and Caesar is seen trying to seduce the disguised Cleo. The opera’s final scene is turned into a cocktail party for the characters, in the course of which Caesar and Cleo roll around amorously on the floor together. (And much of set is dismantled by the stage crew, apparently to save overtime costs.)

There are so many other cheap effects (display of EU symbols; a large model crocodile into whose jaws peoples’ heads are occasionally thrust; the garish view of Ptolemy’s harem; a dead snake handled to assure us of sneaky intentions; a suicide belt for Sesto; and the normal recourse to writhing dancers here and there). This is not the place to argue anew the fallacies of “modernizing” old operas through contextual misrepresentation, with silly sight gags or jabs. Carefully though-out updating can make good points in some cases, as the McVicar production suggests. But most of the directors who perpetrate these zany travesties do not trust either the operas or their audiences, and can end up distracting the latter from the former.

Handel’s opera is not about war, in the Middle East or elsewhere; and its setting, which has nothing to do with our time, is a Baroque theatrical convenience. What the opera is about is characters and their relationships and interactions. Those are timeless and do not need to be given “relevance” by anchoring them in some redefined time and place. Handel was a master of musical portrayals and interactional representations, and this opera in particular is so rich in them that it...
does not need to be freighted by irrelevant entanglements.

It was a struggle for me to watch these two discs all through. If I averted my eyes, I could discover that there were some interesting musicians at work here. Antonini runs a tight reading, when the staging does not interfere (as when the lovely stage band at the beginning of Act II was almost inaudible). And the entire score is performed—even the usually cut aria for Nirena. (This confidant of Cleopatra was written as a male role, but here it is turned into a female Nirena, sung by a countertenor, with a considerable expansion of the role.) Some embellishments are attempted here and there, with mixed results.

As for the cast, primary attention is likely to be on Bartoli. She is in excellent voice: strong, still agile, and clear. She makes efforts to realize Handel’s artful transformation and maturing of her character—her rendering of ‘Piangerò la sorte mia’ (under a veil) is really moving. But all that is compromised by the silly representation of her getting receipts and lots of money when her navicella comes in, as an isolated over-enactment of an aria metaphor. One is often distracted from her singing by her constant romping about the stage, throwing her ample endowments all around—for the groundlings, perhaps, but not one of the great Handel Cleopatras, I fear.

Scholl is a veteran video Caesar from the Harmonia Mundi production. Vocally he carries off his assignment with artistry, but he is constantly handicapped by the silly things he is supposed to do. The sprightly Dumaux is another countertenor of distinction, but is the saddest victim of the direction. Singers in the lesser roles (including countertenor Kowalski as Nirena) are very good, but perhaps the finest performances are offered by the portrayers of Cornelia (a god-given role) and her son Sesto. Von Otter is still beautiful to see and hear: again, the excessive violence of her stage treatment is distracting, but she presents a moving portrayal of suffering. Jaroussky’s rich countertenor voice has never sounded better and he captures the stresses and struggles of an adolescent determined to avenge his murdered father.

There is a reasonably extensive booklet whose notes make this production out to be the cat’s pajamas, but at least a thorough synopsis is given.

I think you can understand from the foregoing that I cannot imagine suffering through this trashy video ever again.

PARSONS

PUCCINI: La Rondine

Dinara Alieva (Magda), Charles Castronovo (Ruggiero), Alexandra Hutton (Lisette), Alvaro Zambrano (Prunier); German Opera Berlin/ Roberto Rizzi Brignoli—Delos 7011—105 mins [Blu Ray]

In 1916 Monte Carlo Opera commissioned an operetta from Puccini. Some still argue if that is what he delivered. As I hear it, La Rondine is an opera. Puccini may have had an operetta in mind when he began to compose the work; but, Puccini being Puccini, he could only be true to his melodic genius and his penchant for women. The music is as beautiful as any he ever composed, just of a less general variety. It is highly sentimental.

The musical performance is highly attractive. Alieva is a big-voiced Italianate soprano capable of taking on the big Puccini roles (Butterfly, Minnie). Castronovo pulls off Ruggiero with romantic aplomb, singing with ease the role’s low tessitura. But then we hit problems: Lisette and Prunier. The characterization of Prunier is ambiguous: which team is he playing on? Straight? Not so straight? In this 2015 production stage director, tenor Roland Villazon, fields the question: Is anybody straight in this production? Ruggiero definitely is, but the others? Including Magda! Magda sure does have a lot of lesbian friends, including her maid, Lisette. Or is she bi? It’s confusing. It’s uncomfortable. It does not fit the text. It’s not Puccini’s idea. It’s a beautiful setting, period costumes from the 20s; but I don’t like watching it.

PUCCINI: Turandot

Maria Guleghina (Turandot), Marco Berti (Calaf), Alexia Voulgaridou (Liu), Alexander Tsymbalyuk (Timur), Fabio Previti (Ping), Vicenc Esteve (Pang), Roger Padulles (Pong), Javier Agulio (Altoum); Valencia Opera/ Zubin Mehta

Cmajor 750104—120 minutes [Blu Ray]

Zubin Mehta has an impressive track record in Turandot. In 1999 he took the forces of the Florence May Festival to Beijing for a spectacular outdoor production in the Forbidden City. It’s a worthy performance but simply overwhelmed by the fantastic sets and costumes. It is still available. For Decca Mehta recorded a luxury superstar cast of Joan Sutherland (Turandot), Luciano Pavarotti (Calaf), Montserrat Caballe (Liu), Nicolai Ghiaurov (Timur), Tom Krause (Ping), and veteran tenor Peter Pears as Altoum!

From Valencia’s new opera house comes another stage spectacular. Chinese film-maker

250

September/October 2016
Chen Kaige directs a production filled with sumptuous costumes and sets designed in China. Guleghina is a veteran Turandot. Extensive experience gives her characterization a calm, cool, and cruel look. Hers is not the most beautiful voice, but she knows how to use it effectively. Someone forgot to tell Berti to act, but it matches his robust bull-in-a-china-shop singing. The Liu of Voulgaridou is beautifully sung, softly suave, with a courageous characterization. Tsymbalyuk sings a regal Timur. The three ministers are a well-matched group vocally with a mean, nasty streak. Mehta leads a powerful, full-blooded performance from the chorus and orchestra.

Kaige's staging is standard but with several strange oddities thrown in. There is nothing "divine" about this emperor. He is a fat pig of an alcoholic. Nothing to praise here. There is an unconvincing suicide for Liu. Does she strangle herself or break her neck with a long veil grabbed from Turandot? It is a good idea to associate Liu's death directly with Turandot, but the method just looks silly.

A 36-minute bonus, "The Making of Turandot" is a backstage look at the production.

**REVUELTAS: Redes**

Postclassical Ensemble/ Angel Gil-Ordonez

_Naxos 2110372—174 minutes_

*Redes* (Nets) is a Mexican film from 1935, and it was Silvestre Revueltas's first film score. It was commissioned by the Mexican government but shot by photographer Paul Strand and co-directed by Fred Zinnemann (*From Here to Eternity*) and Emilio Gomez Muriel.

Since the soundtrack is rarely used at the same time as the dialog and there are almost no ambient sounds like waves crashing, it was pretty easy for the Postclassical Ensemble to record the music. Part of the last 15 minutes do have dialog over music, so the restorers left out the speaking parts in favor of the new recording.

The first time through, I watched it with the original audio track, and seeing it again with this new performance made a world of difference. Revueltas's writing was suddenly clear, with the tension, the atmosphere, and the plaintive melodies undistorted by wobbly sound. The film transfer is excellent, and it deserves a score to match. Most of the music has few overt ethnic touches; it seems Revueltas wanted to complement the universality of the film, which also has little that stands out as specifically Mexican.

The movie is fittingly somber. The actors often look stoic, proud, and stately even in the most grievous situations, which strikes me as an artistic choice—and an effective one—rather than a realistic portrayal of how poor Mexican fishermen might act and react.

Miro, the protagonist, goes out by himself and catches one measly fish; then his son dies for lack of medicine. One fishing team makes a good haul and distributes their catch to all the villagers, and Miro joins them when they go out again. Upon their return with another boatful, they take them to the buyer but get very little money for their work. A slimy political candidate sees their discontent and promises he'll fix things if they vote for him, but the fishermen aren't having it. The workers argue about what to do, with one older man saying there's nothing to be done; another old man counters him, saying that it's God's will. The first becomes enraged and begins to slash the nets they had just mended. Miro stops him and says that they need to have a meeting to decide what to do.

The politician gets wind of it and reports to the boss, who bribes him to fix things. The fishermen gather, a sea of straw hats, and Miro gives an impassioned speech denouncing their predicament and their exploiters. He accuses the men with the nets, the boats, and the money of blocking them from trading their fish with others and declares that their fight will start with tomorrow's catch. The politician then speaks, invoking the vote and the "majesty of revolutionary conquest" and warning them that they're not considering the rest of the nation. But the fishermen walk away.

The foreman, on the boss's orders, leaves Miro out of the next day's work, but Miro meets the fishermen coming back with their catch. They argue about what to do, and Miro knocks some of the fish to the ground. Several of them start fighting, and the politician sneaks into a building, pulls a pistol, and shoots Miro in the chest from his hiding spot. Miro collapses in front of the candidate's campaign posters, which also happen to look like "wanted" posters. The fishermen row his body to an island, where they decide to unite around Miro's ideals. They move to go into town, take the nets and boats and work for themselves and "show everyone what oppression really is". As they row back to the shore, other fishermen see them and join them. The boss's mansion comes into view, but instead of showing an assault on it, the film fades to a violent breaker crashing onto the shore.
The artwork claims this is the “world-premiere recording of the full Revueltas score”, so I assumed there’d be a stand-alone audio recording. The performance is excellent, and I’m sure many Revueltas followers would want it. There are four interviews with scholars and musicians, though “Revueltas and Politics” gets chopped off right after one of the men starts to answer an interesting question. Subtitles are in English, and I don’t think you can turn them off; the audio is standard stereo.

STRAUSS: Elektra
Ingela Brinberg (Elektra), Ingrid Tobiasson (Klytemnestra), Susanna Levonin (Chrysothemis), Thomas Lander (Orest), Magnus Kyhle (Aegist); Norrlands Opera/ Rumon Gamba C Major 731904—108 minutes [Blu Ray]

A fool and his money are soon parted. The Norrlands Opera and Swedish Television were the first to part with some big bucks. The audience’s pockets were then robbed. Don’t be the next victim by buying this monstrosity!

Recorded in performance in Umeå, Sweden, August 19 & 21, 2014, the video preserves for posterity (and as a mighty rebuke) one of the most obscenely ridiculous productions ever. The Catalan theater collective La Furadels Baus, stage director Carlos Padrisa, takes responsibility for the show. The “stage” is a city block long platform on which fireworks and flames spew along with copious amounts of water that turns to “blood”. Cranes carry grotesque mechanical humanoid figures with singers standing inside their chests. Elektra appears in an elaborate dark red and black evening gown more appropriate for Klytemnestra. That deformed queen is clad in a full body naked fat suit, anatomically correct down to the last... Orest seems to have returned from a distant planet clad in a silver power ranger’s space suit. With all the fal-de-rol to distract the eye who cares about the music? The singers are Scandinavians of no international repute. They must work cheap.

The La Fur production is indeed unique, as extolled by the program notes. Unique, but worthy? No! No! No!

PARSONS

It has always been so that the first performance of any piece of music is not very good. The performances that follow are bound to be better, because the musicians know all the traps and problems and can prepare for them.

VERDI: I Due Foscari
Maria Agresta (Lucrezia), Placido Domingo (Francesco), Francesco Meli (Jacopo), Maurizio Muraro (Loredano); Royal Opera/ Antonio Pappano—Opus Arte 1207—122 minutes

This early Verdi opera has been revived when an artist wants to do one of its roles; lately, it has been Placido Domingo, who has added the role of Francesco Foscari to the list of baritone roles he has assumed in his “second” career, even though, as he jokes, he’s too young for the role, since Francesco is supposed to be 89.

The opera deserves more revivals; it has three great roles: the baritone Francesco, his tenor son Jacopo, and the difficult soprano role of Lucrezia, Jacopo’s faithful wife. Perhaps the clue to its lack of performances lies there, because she is on stage much of the time, singing the kind of soprano music Verdi wrote for Abagaille in Nabucco and Lady Macbeth. The only other role of any importance is the villain Loredano, who has to join the club of worst people in opera, along with Scarpia, Iago, and Don Pizarro—people with no redeeming qualities at all.

This production comes from the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. It is further evidence that some of the best opera is done at the main British opera house. The conductor is music director Antonio Pappano, and there is simply nothing to complain about. The production is fairly traditional and is even lit brightly enough that one can see it. The chorus and orchestra are fine, as are the opulent costumes and sets, including some filmed scenes accompanying the introduction.

The three major roles are well taken. One may prefer a baritone in the role of the elder Foscari, but no one can deny that Domingo sings it well—with great feeling for the paternal emotion so important for this character. As his son, Francesco Meli does not possess the world’s greatest tenor voice, but he sings securely with great sensitivity and attention to detail. The villain Loredano is well served by bass Maurizio Muraro, and the few minor roles are well done.

This production for me is the “Maria Agresta Show”. The Italian soprano sings this early Verdi soprano role as if it were easy. She dominates the ensembles with her clear, strong spinto soprano; and she throws herself into the role of the unhappy wife with all the passion one might associate with Leonore in Fidelio. I have encountered Ms Agresta only as Mimi at the Met; it is good to know that here is a soprano
with much more far-reaching talents. We should be hearing a lot from this lady for a long time.

The musical performance is excellent, as well as the visual production. The booklet has a good essay and synopsis.

SININGER

VERDI: Giovanna d’Arco
Jessica Pratt (Joan), Jean-François Borras (Charles), Julian Kim (Giacomo); International Orchestra of Italy/ Riccardo Frizza
Dynamic 37676—117 minutes

In Europe this early Verdi take on the Joan of Arc story seems to be having a bit of a revival, especially if a star soprano wants to sing the title role. Recently it was Anna Netrebko who headed a cast including the baritonal Placido Domingo; now here is a production from an Italian festival in 2013. The same cast can be heard on a CD release (Dynamic 7676). Normally I would recommend a DVD over a CD; but this production’s virtues lie in what you hear, not what you see.

I would guess it to be an outdoor performance. In the prologue several of the costumes include billowy veils. Perhaps this is in an area of strong winds, or maybe a storm was brewing. At any rate, several singers have trouble controlling their veils in the wind. I’m sure the blowing veils do not make singing or following the conductor easier. The set is minimal, often very effective, but the stage is so darkly lit most of the time that there might as well be no set at all. In the second act I could make out only about half of what was happening.

Since one cannot watch much of interest, one concentrates on the music. Here the news is much better. The orchestra and chorus perform well under Riccardo Frizza. The opera’s success depends on the three main characters: Joan, Charles, and Giacomo (Joan’s peasant father). A very high standard was set for these roles a few decades back in the Philips recording with Montserrat Caballé, Placido Domingo, and Sherrill Milnes. This current cast, while good, doesn’t measure up to that standard. As Giacomo, Julian Kim displays a nice lyric baritone, but not the heavier sound most Verdi baritone roles need. At one point Giacomo describes himself as a “hoary old man”. Mr Kim looks no more hoary and old than his daughter. He is a good baritone, but not quite right for this role.

The same could be said for Jean-François Borras, who sings tastefully and well but in a voice more suited to French opera heroes (Werther, Faust, Romeo) or lighter Italian fare than this.

The one reason to own this set is the British-Australian soprano Jessica Pratt as Joan. Ms Pratt, a handsome young woman, has a voice of great beauty and power and enough coloratura to make one begin to make comparisons with another great Australian singer. No, Ms Pratt is not a “new Sutherland”, but she is a very gifted soprano who is deservedly becoming one of opera’s biggest names. She is already a big star in Europe, and she is making her Met debut in December.

This is a good performance, but to hear the work at its best, stick with Caballé, Domingo, and Milnes.

The booklet has a good essay on the opera’s history and a synopsis.

SININGER

BOOKS

Conducting the Brahms Symphonies from Brahms to Boult
By Christopher Dyment
Boydell Press, 250 pages, $45

For those of us interested in performance, there is an overwhelming curiosity about older music. Wouldn’t you give a month’s pay to hear Bach leading one of his cantatas? To hear a Beethoven premiere? Beginning in the early 20th Century, we can find authoritative evidence in recordings, as in the Elgar pieces conducted by the composer; and from the same period we have many examples of music played by musicians who were known as close associates of earlier composers. As we move further back in time, things become more tenuous; recordings are unavailable, and we have to rely on things like student-teacher relationships. Here is a fairly well-known example: we place considerable value on Fanny Davies’s recorded performance of the Schumann concerto because she studied with Clara Schumann for a few years (1883-5). How is this “authentic”? We would have to assume that Clara carried the authentic torch from Robert, added little of her own musical personality, and then conveyed everything accurately to Fanny, who basically left things unchanged for 40 years until the time of her recording in the late 1920s. Well, I love this sort of thing, but it’s hard to judge how true it is.

American Record Guide 253
Working backward in time, Brahms (1833-97) is the first great composer we meet with a cloudy performance history. This study, amazingly detailed and thorough, can be described in a single question: was Brahms performance basically classical (controlled, emotionally contained, with little tempo fluctuation) or was it romantic (poetic, flamboyant, with extreme tempo fluctuation)? The author makes a compelling case for the authority of Fritz Steinbach, conductor of the Meiningen Orchestra and a close associate of Brahms; but Steinbach made no recordings. Much of what Dymant does is to establish a plausible tradition from Steinbach to later conductors. Even so, Steinbach himself is a bit of a puzzle because he is taken to be on the classical side, yet he also subtly modified rhythm, which we associate with romantics. Where was Brahms on this classical-romantic divide? The question is clouded by two oft-quoted remarks, only three months apart, when Brahms said he approved of Weingartner (the classicist) in Symphony 2 and Nikisch (the romantic) in Symphony 4.

What I find instructive is the realization that different approaches can and did exist at the same time, even when Brahms was still alive. He would certainly have realized that. Was he equally accepting of different approaches? By the end Dymant comes down on the side of the classicists (Weingartner, Toscanini) rather than the romantics (Abendroth, Max Fiedler, Furtwängler), but I don't see that as a prescriptive judgement. We should know about Brahms's desires, but we own this music now, and we may find new or different ways to nourish ourselves with it.

It would be hard, though, to describe how detailed and impressive Dymant's research is. He spends a lot time recounting concert critics in their judgements of early 20th Century conductors, and he discusses several who then need to be rejected owing to excessive distance from the Brahms tradition. This is thick reading, not recommended if you don’t know the symphonies well.

The book includes 40 photographs and copious footnotes, but no musical examples. You will need scores if you want to follow the arguments. Of great interest, then, to lovers of Brahms and followers of early conductors.

Houlihan—from page 48

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

GIL FRENCH
Critics are a culpable group. I have come to this conclusion after reading numerous reviews in American Record Guide, Opera News, and other magazines and newspapers. The sorry state of classical music performance, especially opera, stems from reviewers wanting something new or fresh.

Those two words mean to me that the performer has strayed from the composer’s intentions. In one of your reviews you said that the performance was very good but had nothing new to say. A good performance of a work is what I look for, not some distortion by the performer. True, I have heard performances that clarify certain points in a musical score. I have said to myself that I did not remember hearing that before. I have gone back to other recordings of the score and noted that that point was there all along. But the performer did not distort the music; he played what the composer intended.

The worst area for new and fresh is opera. Recently I attended a performance of La Damnation de Faust at the Paris Opera. Stephen Hawking wandered around the stage in his wheelchair. The chorus, wearing blue jump suits, were preparing for a flight to Mars. Poor Sophie Koch got a round of laughter at the beginning of her big aria. She was pushing Hawking in his wheelchair and above her head were two large snails having sex. The audience hated the production and booed the creative team. I have never heard an audience so upset.

If a composer writes anything near tonal, critics call him out-of-date, conservative, old-fashioned, and a throwback to the past. Review a musical work for what it is, not what you want it to be.

CHARLES FLYNN, CLEVELAND

Editor’s Response

"Nothing new to say" is a valid comment; it means simply that this new performance is not better than the older ones we know. We should tell readers that so they will not buy the newest performance just because it is new! If we all have recordings that present the work as it should be heard, why go for a new one?

This doesn’t invalidate your basic point, of course!
A few rare copies of issues not listed here are still available. We do not list them because there are not many. They are $5 each.

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