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Coming in the Next Issue

Banff String Quartet Competition
Rattle’s New York Trifecta
Dudamel and Bolivar Open Carnegie
Salonen and Philharmonia Orchestra
Met’s *Tristan* and *William Tell*
Reich and Glass at 80

Premieres:
  Sheng: *Dream of the Red Chamber*
  Yiu-Kwong Chung: Red Cliff Concerto
  MacMillan: Symphony No. 4
  Lang: *The Loser*
  Mazzoli: *Breaking the Waves*
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American Record Guide                        Music in Concert 1
November 1 + 5-27
Following Steve Reich's 80th birthday on October 3, David Robertson conducts ICE, So Percussion, and Synergy Vocals in his Quartet, *Three Tales*, and the world premiere of *Pulse* at Carnegie Hall Nov 1. Then Matthew Aucoin conducts Los Angeles Opera's production of his *Akhnaten* with Anthony Roth Constanzo in the title role at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion Nov 5-27.

November 3-5
Incoming Music Director Gianandrea Noseda leads the National Symphony in Prokofiev’s complete ballet *Romeo and Juliet* at Washington DC’s Kennedy Center.

November 9-23

November 13-December 3
Andrew Davis conducts Christine Goerke, Sophie Koch, and Brandon Jovanovich in the Lyric Opera of Chicago’s production of Berlioz’s *Trojans* at Chicago’s Civic Opera House.

November 16, 18, 20
Steven Osgood conducts the Juilliard Singers and the Juilliard Orchestra in Dow’s opera *Flight* at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater in New York. James Darrah is stage director.

November 17-19
Yannick Nezet-Seguin leads Paul Jacobs and the Philadelphia Orchestra in the world premiere of Christopher Rouse’s Organ Concerto at Verizon Hall. Also on the program: Respighi’s *Fountains of Rome* and Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4.

November 17-19
Incoming Music Director Jaap van Zweden leads principal Cynthia Phelps and the New York Philharmonic in Julia Adolphe’s new Viola Concerto [world premiere reviewed in this issue]. Also on the program at David Geffen Hall: the Prelude to Wagner’s *Lohengrin* and Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4.

November 18-19
Santtu-Matias Rouvali, 31, incoming Music Director of Sweden’s Gothenberg Symphony, leads the Cincinnati Symphony in Smetana’s *Moldau*, Salonen’s Violin Concerto with Jennifer Koh, and Sibelius’s Symphonies Nos. 6 & 7 at Cincinnati’s Taft Theatre.

November 26-29
The Boston Early Music Festival performs two chamber operas, Charpentier’s *Plaisirs de Versailles* and Lalande’s *Fontaines de Versailles*, at Jordan Hall in Boston Nov 26-27 and at the Morgan Library in New York Nov 28-29.

November 30-December 3
So Percussion, choreographer Emily Johnson, and a decommissioned Russian army rifle are central to the bucolic setting for *A Gun Show* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival.

December 1-3
Edward Gardner leads Sasha Cooke, Robert Murray, David Soar, and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and Chorale in Elgar’s *Dream of Gerontius* at Benaroya Hall.

December 1-29
Menlo, Mozaic, and Carmel Bach
Richard S Ginell

Music@Menlo

13 years ago, the classical music power couple Wu Han and David Finckel co-founded Music@Menlo, which quickly expanded into a three-week festival in July and August of chamber music, master classes, lectures, and public discussions based on a theme. It hasn’t wavered from that concept since, staying at the same limited scale, giving an injection of well-played classical music to an affluent region (the San Francisco Peninsula) that used to have next to nothing going during the summer. Last summer’s edition was from July 15 to August 6.

The biggest change that has taken place over the festival’s history is in locales, which have definitely undergone an upgrade. No longer are the main concerts confined to non-air-conditioned churches; much of the festival now takes place in the asymmetrically modern 492-seat Menlo-Atherton Center for the Performing Arts, opened in 2009 and built to the tune of $29 million yet situated on the campus of the local public high school (this is Silicon Valley, after all). In the near future the festival may have another facility at its disposal as well—a proposed 380-seat hall on the campus of the festival’s headquarters at the nearby Menlo School (the hall is said to be up to five years away from completion).

Meanwhile, Da-Hong Seetoo, the iconoclastic engineer who believes fervently in the versatility of digital recording and designs his own equipment, diligently continues to record the performances, working with six microphones suspended prominently over the performers. The multi-disc boxed sets that document the festival continue to pour forth each winter; the output of just the last ten years comes to 70 discs! Also, ticket buyers continue to be presented with free Audio Notes CDs that allow them to prepare for the concerts in their cars, relieving some of the tedium of commuting from various parts of the Bay Area.

Up to now Music@Menlo has given wide-ranging programs through the prism of a single mainstream composer—Bach, Brahms, Mozart, Dvorak, or, as in last season, Schubert. Last summer, the emphasis shifted to examining the output of an entire nation—Russia—
trying to establish links backwards and forwards to musicians and influences from other countries. The programs covered the ground fairly thoroughly from Glinka to Shostakovich, but that’s where the timeline pretty much petered out; I counted only two works by Russians after Shostakovich. One more-or-less contemporary Russian was given considerable attention in a Cafe Conversations discussion where Finckel let us in on what it was like to study with his force-of-nature role model, Mstislav Rostropovich.

The opening program July 16 was under the umbrella title “Towards the Flame”—perhaps from Scriabin’s short piano piece ‘Vers la Flamme’ and perhaps referring to the warping of Russian music from the romantic verities of Tchaikovsky to the barbaric rhythm-oriented explosion of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring. For me it seemed like a chamber-music program that desperately wanted to be an orchestral one, and it created that illusion often.

Rachmaninoff’s Suite No. 2 for two pianos is so sweeping and orchestra-like in its writing that it could easily have been converted into another great piano concerto, with the composer working at peak inspiration. It isn’t played very often; and, looking at the score, one would think that it requires two pairs of big hands. Lucille Chung and Gloria Chien were certainly adept at putting their hands on this one, though they could have generated more clarity and dynamic contrast in the opening movements and more rhythmic momentum in the finale. In an amusing silent commentary on the evolution of score reading in the 21st Century (invented right here in Silicon Valley), Chung played from a traditional paper score with a traditional page-turner on hand, while Chien read her part from an iPad mini.

Then the two pianos were wheeled out and 15 string players, with the violas anchored by Paul Neubauer, whipped up a delicious, even wild and wooly rendition of Tchaikovsky’s Serenade For Strings, playing out passionately and physically. From a seat in the lower level, it was a bit disappointing to hear how under-nourished the strings tended to sound in this space. I imagine that once Da-Hong gets through with it, the recording will have more bloom, more in line with what I have been hearing on Music@Menlo recordings.

Then came a brief demonstration of how Scriabin evolved, with Chung first playing a pair of romantic early preludes, followed by the sudden language change of late Scriabin in ‘Vers la Flamme’, which opens in a moody, restless chromatic blur and gathers orgasmic momentum a la his Poem of Ecstasy. Wu Han and Chien, now both reading from tablets, rumbled through Stravinsky’s own two-piano arrangement of The Rite Of Spring, which took more than a half-century to emerge onto concert stages after 1913 but has thoroughly established itself in the piano repertoire. The performance hit its stride in Part 2, which rocked and rolled with incisive fervor and even savagery, demonstrating how far the cutting edge of Russian music had moved just two decades after Tchaikovsky passed from the scene.

The next day the festival’s Carte Blanche series extended the Stravinsky thread with the piano-four-hands arrangement (again by the composer) of Petrouchka, with the husband-and-wife duo of Alessio Bax and Chung doing their dexterous best to keep their hands out of each other’s way. Although a few themes were buried in the balances, the couple did really well when locking into the grooves of the
‘Danse Russe’ and the fourth tableaux, making us aware that this is music conceived on and written idiomatically for the piano, and not just a converted orchestral score.

Earlier, on his own, Bax played Scriabin’s Piano Sonata No. 3 where the composer began working out his chromatic language while still maintaining a four-movement classical structure. Bax followed this by dashing off Mussorgsky’s tiny ‘Hopak’ in a Rachmaninoff transcription and then the latter’s extremely pianistic and flashy paraphrases on Fritz Kreisler’s violin bonbons, ‘Liebesleid’ and ‘Liebesfreud’, which banished all traces of the violin and drained the music of its street cafe sentimentality (not a bad thing for some of us).

Though clarity of texture wasn’t Bax’s strong point, Menlo-Atherton doesn’t seem to be a terribly sympathetic hall for the romantic piano, especially the high-calorie gushing splashes of virtuosity that the Russian romantics lavished on their music. Bax and Chung returned after the Stravinsky with a Rachmaninoff Polka as one encore and broke format entirely with a Piazzolla tango as a second encore before dashing off to Europe on the red-eye.

Two days later, while attending one of the festival’s free afternoon Prelude Performances with young, well-coached musicians in Beethoven’s First Trio and Shostakovich’s Quartet No. 7, I ascended into Menlo-Atherton’s upper tier and found that the sound improved considerably, gaining in body and projecting better. (I noticed that Wu Han and others sat there as well; clearly the word is out among musicians that it is the best place to be.) Back downstairs for the evening concert, the sound was also better than it was before—a possible contributing factor being that the upper tier looked almost empty. There was a reason for this; the concert was originally scheduled for the small Stent Family Room in the Menlo School; but, after the brochure went out and the tickets were sold, the Stent was closed for renovations and they had to move it to Menlo-Atherton.

Of course, other reasons for the lower attendance might have been the day of the week (Tuesday) and the programming—a paradox of highly enterprising choices of deeply conservative music that one doesn’t encounter every day. There was Shostakovich’s “other” Piano Trio, No. 1, a brief, kaleidoscopic, romantic product of his teen years where the hallmarks of the personality that soon would emerge so strongly in the Symphony No. 1 are only fleetingly noticeable. Of similar length and assured yet anonymously romantic prove-nance was the Piano Quartet movement of the teenaged Mahler, the only piece of his before Das Klagende Lied that survives. These pieces served as prefaces to a pair of longer works with more specific points of reference: Arensky’s Trio No. 1 lives in the long shadow of Tchaikovsky, and Dohnanyi’s Trio No. 2 is most indebted to Brahms.

Everything was beautifully, cohesively, and passionately played by four different expert ensembles who were clearly playing out for the audience and undoubtedly for the ever-present recording microphones as well. Cellist Finckel relished the sudden shifts in direction in the Shostakovich; in tandem with pianist
Wu Han, violinist Paul Huang, and violist Matthew Lipman, they produced an unabashedly opulent, deeply-felt account of the Mahler fragment. This interesting combination of esoteric selections would have stumped many a Name That Composer contestant.

Festival Mozaic

Festival Mozaic is still somewhat under the radar as far as summer festivals go, even after 46 summers of continuous operation. One of the reasons is that it often occurs at the same time as a stack of other California festivals. Another is that it doesn’t go out of its way to attract big stars.

Nevertheless, Festival Mozaic is slowly gaining momentum and spreading its wings a little more. It remains a genuine mosaic of a festival, both in terms of its content and the many places in San Luis Obispo County where it occurs. In 2015 there were 22 events in 11 days. This past summer from July 13 to 24 there were 27 events in 17 locales, including colleges, churches, the San Luis Obispo Mission, a synagogue, private homes, and a ranch, spread across the county and several climate zones from Paso Robles in the north to Avila Beach in the south.

Festival Mozaic still has the distinct advantage of being in the center of California’s Central Coast, whose reputation as a wine destination continues to grow. The festival is evidently happy with its personable, protean music director since 2005, Scott Yoo; they just extended his contract through 2020, the festival’s 50th anniversary season.

Yoo came up with an umbrella concept this time, a festival that theoretically revolved around Gustav Mahler. On the face of it that’s an ambitious step, but a look at the programs suggested that it was a rather diffuse unifying notion: a little Korngold and Wolf here, a little Berg and early Schoenberg there, Mahler’s Piano Quartet fragment (also played at Music@Menlo upstate in July), and Mahler’s arrangement of Schubert’s Death and the Maiden quartet (also played by iPalpiti downstate in July). This led to a culminating performance of Mahler’s Symphony No. 4 in SLO’s sonically refurbished Performing Arts Center on the Cal Poly campus July 23, the day I parachuted into SLO County.

Mahler’s Fourth is usually the shortest of his ten symphonies, and there were no other pieces on the program. But Yoo amply filled the 50 minutes before intermission with one of his Notable Encounters sessions, allied to the festival’s Orchestra Series for the first time. Notable Encounters looked as if it were modeled on the example of Leonard Bernstein’s Young People’s Concerts. The full orchestra was on stage, and Yoo was seated on a stool, lecturing, conducting musical examples, playing musical games.

Yoo went well out of his way to connect Mahler’s methods with what he thought his audience was interested in, delightedly citing one pop culture signpost after another: “Downton Abbey”, “Seinfeld”, “Friends”, Sylvester Stallone. You really had to be up on current television to know what Yoo was talking about in certain spots. One of his comparisons, placing the film “The Godfather” in an ABA structure like the first movement of the Mahler, struck me as a little far-fetched at first, but it began to make some strangely generalized sense days after the concert. Yoo also went to the trouble of making his own speculatively playful arrangements: how the first movement’s climax would have sounded had Mahler followed the “rules”, or interpolating ‘Row, Row, Row Your Boat’ into ‘Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star’ to demonstrate the struc-
ture of the second movement. With all of the work that Yoo put into this presentation, you had to wonder how he found the time to watch all of that television.

The performance of Symphony No. 4 showed that Yoo, working from memory, had as solid a grasp of the score as his elaborate lecture-demonstration indicated. Choosing middle-of-the-road tempos all the way, he shaped the first movement's development to a satisfying peak, anchored by a huge bass drum. He also brought out much of the strangeness of the second movement and gave a straightforward account of the third. The orchestra remains a very good ad-hoc ensemble, staffed with players from the Cleveland Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Baltimore, Detroit, St Louis, and Atlanta symphonies, among other groups. They produced a robust bass-rich texture with the reinforcing help of the hall's Meyer Sound Constellation System.

The main novelty of the performance came in the fourth movement, where, in another throwback to Bernstein, Yoo used a boy soprano—Bobby Hill, 14, from Philadelphia—whose soft-hued, pure high soprano amply conveyed the innocence, if not the wonderment, of the text. (Only two days later, Hill opened the Democratic National Convention in his hometown by singing the National Anthem beautifully.) Using a boy soprano in this work will always sound otherworldly to me, but maybe that's the point of what this child's depiction of heaven implies.

At the festival's concluding afternoon chamber concert (July 24) at the smaller, modern Cuesta College Performing Arts Center halfway between SLO and Morro Bay, there was a stimulating chronological progression of highly contrasting pieces, falling back on Brahms after intermission. After pianist John Novacek explored the dark, nearly keyless recesses of Liszt's visionary 'Lugubre Gondola No. 2,' Robert Walters essayed Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* on the English horn, which was perfectly suited for the lovelorn first song and doleful pastoral mood of the fourth, though not so much for the angst of the third. Nielsen's Wind Quintet found five wind players responding humorously to the quirks, buzzes, and bumps in the night that are familiar from Nielsen's later symphonies, particularly No. 6. A rhythmically alert rendition of Shostakovich's Quartet No. 7 brought us to the middle of the 20th Century.

As for Brahms's Piano Quartet No. 3, Yoo claimed that the main reason he chose it was because it would take only one rehearsal to put it together. Whether that was true or not, violinists Yoo and Novacek, violist Maurycy Banaszek, and cellist Jonah Kim tore into the first two movements and latter half of the fourth movement with an enthusiastic ferocity that suggested the bracing shock of plunging into a pool before you are used to the water's temperature. But the piece is muscular enough to take it.

**Carmel Bach Festival**

Under the stewardship of the engaging British conductor Paul Goodwin, the repertoire for the venerable Carmel Bach Festival—79 editions and counting—has been freshened, expanded, and sent into some unpredictable territory. This wasn't really expected when Goodwin took over in 2011. His reputation as a period performance man (associate conductor at the Academy of Ancient Music, etc.) preceded him. And, yes, it's true that he did introduce genuine period instruments to a festival that, under his predecessor Bruno Weil, had employed the techniques but not the hardware. But a closer look at his bio reveals that Goodwin also has a yen for new music, opera, British music, and other things besides early music, and that he likes to put together unusual combinations of things. Ditto the latter for Carmel Bach's Associate Conductor Andrew Megill, who is in charge of the festival's choral division.

So for the curious music lover who was also looking for a way between July 16 and 30 to escape the oppressive heat dome smothering much of the nation, cool, foggy, artsy Carmel was a fine place to land for a couple of enterprising concerts by Megill and Goodwin. I was there toward the end of the festival's first week.

Megill's annual choral concert took place in the historic Carmel Mission Basilica, a long, narrow, rectangular room with church pews (many veterans of the festival did not forget their seat cushions). His program was a brilliantly conceived set of variations on a consistent thread, Bach's influence over the centuries—and don't bother us with rigid categories. The Festival Chorale and Chorus, a
combination of professional singers and local ones, produced a rich, golden sound in these ancient walls.

There was pageantry: a processional of choir and attendants with candles slowly entered the basilica as the concert began, singing Bach’s chorale ‘Komm, Süsser Tod’ (Come, Sweet Death). This gave way to the Norwegian composer Knut Nystedt’s ‘Immortal Bach,’ where the words of the chorale were stretched out and the notes slowly warped a la Ligeti, the voices emanating from in front and in back of the audience, surround-sound style.

Megill, the choir, and a period-performance group (much improved over what I heard at Carmel in 2012 during Goodwin’s second season here) performed Bach’s Cantata No. 196, followed immediately by Mendelssohn’s setting of Psalm 115. This was the same psalm that Bach set in No. 196 but with Mendelssohn thickening the textures and continuing the counterpoint in his own manner.

The most radical example of bridging the centuries came next: a Bach sandwich of chorales from the Christmas Oratorio and St. Matthew Passion wrapped around a lovely choral arrangement of a song by the American pop singer-songwriter Paul Simon, ‘American Tune.’ Now why would Megill pull an off-the-wall trick like that? Easy! All three pieces use exactly the same tune. Go complain to Bach’s lawyers if you want, but remember that Bach himself borrowed the tune, circa 1601, from Hans Leo Hassler. Any choral director who wandered into the Mission that night should have wondered, “Why didn’t I think of that for my choir?”

There were two more music history lessons that night. First came a pair of motets, Brahms’s austere ‘Warum Ist das Licht Gegeben’ (Why Has Light Been Given) and the livelier counterpoint of Bach’s ‘Lobet den Herrn, Alle Heiden’ (Praise the Lord, All Pagans). Then Karina Schmitz was the plaintive soloist in Hindemith’s micro-concerto for viola, Trauermusik, which, as you may have guessed by now, would have something in common with Bach’s ‘Vor Deinen Thron Tret Ich Hiermit’ (Before Your Throne I Now Appear) because Hindemith used Bach’s chorale on the last page of his score. Midway through the Hindemith, the lights went on and the singers filed out in a recessional, taking up the Bach chorale on the way out. A lovely presentation in all, lasting about 75 minutes.

Back in the Gothic-arched Sunset Center near downtown Carmel, Goodwin’s program “A Mighty Fortress: Bach Inspires a Great Symphony” had some enterprising touches to go alongside the main premise: the links between Bach and his leading 19th Century advocate, Mendelssohn. The latter’s Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, a product of his 19th year, was played in what Goodwin claimed was the first US performance of an early draft that seemed a little longer than the standard version. The miraculous opening choral fugue of Bach’s Cantata No. 80 that followed a bit later might not have been airborne, but the Festival Chorale and Orchestra did well by the rest of the work.

Villa-Lobos’s Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5 served as an interlude between Bach and Mendelssohn without entirely straying off-topic, with the Scottish soprano Mhairi Lawson delivering a subtly sexy rendition of the vocalise. Here Goodwin had to deal with a shortage of cellists (the festival had hired only five), so he concocted an arrangement for five cellos, four violas, and a double bass that opened up the textures somewhat. They left out the Brazilian-flavored ‘Dansa,’ performing only the famous Aria.

All of this led to Mendelssohn’s mighty Reformation Symphony, whose fourth movement happens to use the same Martin Luther hymn that Bach used in Cantata No. 80. For this performance Goodwin decided to reseat the orchestra according to Mendelssohn’s original plan, with the first violins on his right, the seconds on the left, the violas far back center right, and the cellos and basses right in the center. Yes, this did result in a darker sound, with the lower strings bursting up through the middle, the brasses very loud, the violins taking a back seat in the picture. Goodwin’s conception was vigorous and rugged, with good rhythm and a coda that was passably grand enough.

The Brits had the last word in the form of Holst’s orchestral transcription of Bach’s Organ Gigue a la Fugue,’ which swung playfully as the accumulating orchestral weight gradually kicked in. With that, the cycle of seven main Carmel Bach concerts repeated the following week, this time with smoke from a rampaging wildfire near Big Sur reportedly fouling the fresh Carmel air. Even Paradise is not exempt from the effects of climate change.

American Record Guide

Music in Concert 9
A Contemporary Trip down Memory Lane

Jeff Dunn

I had never seen anything like it. Was there rebellion from the orchestral ranks? Just as Marin Alsop, already on the podium, was about to start the concert on August 13, Concertmaster Justin Bruns rose up and insisted that she stop the proceedings and leave. Ellen Primack, executive director of the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, suddenly wheeled out a huge easy chair on the orchestra floor, and the bewildered Alsop was told to sit in it. It was time for the orchestra’s members to dispense with baton wielders. They then played the most beautiful piece of the festival on their own, bringing Alsop and many in the audience to tears.

The surprise work was Last August, a six-minute rhapsodic hymn commissioned secretly by the orchestra for this, the last festival concert of Alsop’s 25-year tenure. Kevin Puts was its composer, providing heartfelt material for each orchestral section and many solos for principals. Her voice breaking afterwards, Alsop finally muttered into the mike, “What can I say?” A bellow then emerged from the audience: “JUST STAY!”

Alas, while Alsop hinted she may return for guest appearances in a few years (she was named conductor laureate for life by the festival board), her brand of music making here must succumb to the inevitabilities of change. That brand was has been aptly characterized for the most part by the San Francisco Chronicle’s Joshua Kosman as the “staking out of a small and specific area of the contemporary musical world and cultivating music of a particular kind—kinetic, accessible, rhetorically forthright, and often brightly colored—that is executed at a remarkably high technical level. The result has been an artistic profile that makes up in rigor and clarity whatever it may lack in variety or the possibility of surprise.”

That last word, “surprise”, is the rub. I would say it’s a rare piece of new music that surprises any seasoned reviewer these days, especially music associated with the high expenses of large orchestras. And anyone familiar with the manifold musical experiments in the 20th Century will find it difficult to hear anything very new anymore. Newness comes in bits and spats of interpretation, orchestration, “personality”. All of these characteristics abounded in the festival’s 2016 program, despite its failure to revisit exhausted experimental genres of the past.

From the get-go, it was no surprise that Alsop was appreciated by patrons, her orchestra, and festival organizers. Every concert this
past summer began with or included a several-minute video of admirers sharing what her tenure had meant to them. Some of the four concerts I attended had two videos, one for each half of the concert.

Most of the works this year were by composers represented in many previous festivals. Opening night on August 5 began with Thunderstuck (2014), the 21st piece by Christopher Rouse to be performed here. His eight-minute “love letter to the exuberance and inventiveness” of rock music from the mid-1960s to the strung-together riffs with a hymn-like mid-section. More substantial was Rouse’s 2004 Oboe Concerto, wonderfully executed by soloist Katherine Needleman. The music alternated between sequences of animatedly virtuosic passages punctuated with catchy orchestral flourishes on the one hand, and slower, soaringly rhapsodic, near-Eastern-sounding melismas accompanied by harp and celeste on the other. I would rank this work as one of Rouse’s most beautiful creations.

Following intermission came a 13-minute James MacMillan crowd-pleaser that should give Maxwell Davies’s Orkney Wedding a run for its money. The Death of Oscar (2012) was inspired by a monumental sculpture of the same name soon to be carved in west Scottish rocks. The fictitious hero was the son of Ossian, a pseudo-Homer fabricated by the 18th-Century poet James MacPherson. The stirring and highly colorful program music depicts the hero’s ineffective single combat with High King Cairbre. Opening low horn grumbles move into sweet violins and harp with Scottish snaps. About five minutes in, baroque-ish trumpets announce the duel. Chimes are belted during the helter-skelter battle proper, followed by a plangent English horn lament.

Anna Clyne’s Rift (2016), a festival commission, ended the evening. Dull orange projections of a seemingly dying sun in a polluted atmosphere did a little to set the scene of impending ecologic disaster. Choreography consisted of visceral and anguished movements by the six members of the appropriately named Hysterica Dancers. The three sections—Dust, Water, and Space—seemed fairly indistinguishable from the gestural standpoint over the work’s 20 minutes; but there was plenty of variety in the music, despite its minimalist antecedents. The high point of the piece was a “moment of peace and resolve”, a peculiar yet memorable melody that sounded like the theme to Mendelssohn’s Fingal’s Cave Overture with a Bach prelude tacked onto the end.

The second concert the next day was devoted to another Cabrillo regular with the 19th and 20th John Adams works played at the festival and one by an Adams protege, Michael Kropf. The first was a four-minute premiere, another (non-secret) commission by orchestra members for Alsop, Lola Montez Does the Spider Dance. The music did not do justice to the Gold Rush-era dance itself, which can be viewed in several re-creations on YouTube. Instead, it depicted creepy crawly spiders, with upsailing trombones and climbing clarinets. I would have liked to have heard more of Montez’s stamping of the animals she famously produced from her skirts and dropped to the floor.

Adams’s Absolute Jest (2011) followed. Written for the 100th anniversary of the San Francisco Symphony, the piece celebrates Adams’s long fascination with Beethoven’s music. The title is derived from the Latin gesta, “exploits,” and is replete with exploited motives from the Bonn master’s quartets (14+16), piano sonatas (Hammerkлавиер and Waldstein), and even the tattoo from Symhony No. 9’s scherzo. It’s a concerto for string ensemble and orchestra, played furiously, passionately, and accurately by the Attacca Quartet. The work offers many felicities of sound management and integration between the orchestra and quartet. Yet the specter of post-minimalism haunts the music, making it seem far longer than its 26 minutes.

Michael Kropf, sponsored by Adams and the Pacific Harmony Foundation, weighed in after intermission with the premiere of his Spinning Music. In Alsop’s introduction to the composer, she pretended to still be rankled from Kropf’s reminding her at lunchtime that he was born the year she started at Cabrillo, 1992. “I asked him if he could drive yet, but was more interested in him voting”, she quipped. However young, Kropf proved to be a talent worth tracking. Unlike his mentor’s opus, Spinning never flagged over its seven minutes. Attractive ascending phrases structured its discourse, and its effective use of dynamics suggested that similar considerations were lacking in JEST.

The evening concluded with another Puts

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work, *The City* (2016), a festival co-commission. Planned as celebration of the history of Baltimore and the positive and negative aspects of American urbanization, the Freddie Gray incident, which occurred after the work was 25% written, changed its direction considerably. What might have been a Chamber of Commerce slide show (images and video were added by James Bartolomeo) evolved into a Black Lives Matter essay a la Joseph Schwanter's *New Morning for the World* about Martin Luther King. Puts's music was appropriately cinematic and powerful—four sets of drums pounded away during the "riot" portion of the piece, where projections were absent—but the somewhat amateurish visual material detracted from the overall effect. Audience response, as with almost every Cabrillo entry, was highly favorable. At a talkback held immediately afterwards, Alsop lamented there was only one black member of her Baltimore Symphony, but cited dedicating her MacArthur genius grant to musical outreach in the city's minority communities.

The following week's Friday concert began with *Scherzo Crypto* by Alexander Miller, an oboist in the orchestra. This was a gimmick work. The audience was supposed to guess which instrument it was referring to. The title page of the score says it is "spelled out" somewhere in the music, but the audience was told only that it was "somehow woven into the sound." The "spelling" turned out to be VIOLA in Morse code, a language detectable by such a small minority it was hardly worth arousing audience hopes for a solution. The seven-minute samba-like music was pleasant enough and needed no distracting puzzle.

Jennifer Hidgon's *Violin Concerto*, a Pulitzer Prize winner, followed. Concertmaster Bruns was the soloist. Originally written for the extraordinary technician Hilary Hahn, the work allowed Bruns to competently tackle every challenge but not match her amazing tone. I found the excessive virtuosity distracting and much of the piece too dense, especially the indecipherable Chaconne. A favorite part, however, was the (inadvertent?) use in the first movement of the tattoo from the end of Liszt's symphonic poem *Mazeppa*.

*The B-Sides* by Mason Bates concluded the concert. Inventive orchestration, including the use of a broom, was its chief asset, though it seemed weak in memorable motifs.

After the surprise beginning of the final concert, the programmed works that followed almost verged on anticlimactic. Marlos Nobre's *Kabbalah* (2004) was chosen to reflect Alsop's growing love affair with Brazil, where she is now the music director of the Sao Paulo Symphony. Nobre is a well-known composer there and should be better known here. While espousing mathematical and serial interests, he relies on rhythm and repetition to get his points across. Interested readers should check out his *Passacaglia on YouTube*.

Next, also in the Latin American mode, was Osvaldo Golijov's *Oceana* (1996) for vocalist, boy soprano, guitar duo, chorus, and small orchestra. The seven-movement suite is a sensual evocation of the sea and its spirituality. There are caressing waves but no storms. Pleasant, but too long (27 minutes).

Anticlimax was avoided by the last work, one that makes everyone think "adieu" to loved ones, moving on or deceased. John Corigliano's Symphony No. 1 was first played at the festival in 1993, and it is the only work to be repeated since. Prompted by the loss of many friends and colleagues to AIDS, the work remains fraught with, as Corigliano puts it, "feelings of loss, anger, and frustration". It is multifaceted, with fabulous orchestration and stunning explosions of rage and woe, along with offstage reminiscences of deceased musicians. Corigliano was present, tense hands grasping his forehead, as the music unfolded. A fitting, if somber—and superbly played—conclusion to the monumental contribution of new music that Alsop has burned into Cabrilian memories. No surprise: these are the gifts that outlast lifespans.
Breath of Fresh Air
Charlene Baldridge

La Jolla SummerFest’s season, August 3-26, comprised 15 concerts that had a wide spectrum of music including works by Bach, Britten, Bolcom, Brahms, and the SummerFest-commissioned world premiere (August 24) of Marc-André Hamelin’s Four Perspectives played by the composer and cellist Hai-Ye Ni. Combined forces (conductors, lecturers, trios, quartets, and soloists) numbered nearly 80. There were so many eminent artists and such a variety of works that choices had to be made. My attendance was determined by lust for the unusual.

La Jolla Music Society (LJMS) titled one program “Bohemian Rhapsody”. Before the Danish Quartet (all members were born in the early 1980s) performed Leos Janacek’s four-movement Quartet No. 2 (Intimate Letters), the audience was reminded at a pre-concert lecture that Janacek had a serious woman problem. Premiered six months before his death in 1928, the four “letters” were addressed to Kamila Stosslova, a much younger married woman (with children and husband) with whom the composer became smitten some 11 years earlier. So far as we know, he wooed unrequitedly, sending as many as 700 letters, sometimes three per day. There is some evidence that he received an 11th hour reward (a kiss perhaps?), but Kamila never attended the composer’s concerts, never responded to his wordy and “notable” wooing, and never acknowledged that she was his muse or showed the slightest interest in him, his words, or his music, even Intimate Letters itself, which the composer described as “a work carved out of living flesh”.

Violist Asbjorn Norgaard described Intimate Letters as “the weirdest music of the entire festival” and “completely out of control”. By turns it soars and crashes melodically, makes eerie and unearthly sounds, and limns the composer’s obsession from first sight to a passionate, imagined consummation. But it was not the weirdest piece at SummerFest 2016.

Also on the program were Smetana’s elegiac 1854-55 Trio with the incomparable pianist Jon Kimura Parker, violinist Chee-Yun, and cellist Ben Hong; and Dvorak's String Sextet with violinists Martin Beaver and Cho-Liang Lin, violists Che-Yen Chen and Heiichiro Ohyama, and cellists Carter Brey and Eileen Moon. The Dvorak was a sentimental gathering. SummerFest celebrated its 30th anniversary this year. Ohyama was the first music director (1986-97), followed by David Finkel and Wu Han (1998-2000), and Cho-Liang (Jimmy) Lin (2001-present).

To whet the concertgoer’s appetite for the August 9’s “Evening with the Zukerman Trio”, the Verona Quartet, a SummerFest resident ensemble, played Mendelssohn’s Quartet No.
1 at the 7 PM prelude. Then violinist Pinchas Zukerman, cellist Amanda Forsythe (his beautiful wife), and pianist Angela Chung played Brahms’s Scherzo for violin and piano (*Sonatensatz*), Dvorak’s (*Dumky*) Trio, Gliere’s Duets Nos. 1-7 for violin and cello, and Mendelssohn’s Trio No. 1. Like the “Bohemian Rhapsody” program, the evening was ultra-melodic. If the overall effect was too much dessert and no meat and potatoes, it may be chalked up more to the fault of the menu than the playing. The singing quality and luscious nature of Zukerman’s tone—always a pleasing shock—were on display from his first entrance. Cheng proved forceful and alert, if a bit loud sometimes. And Forsythe’s playing matched her beauty. Before the couple’s playing of the Gliere duets, Zukerman said pillow talk about the work determined the order was incorrect; but they left Nos. 1 and 7 in place. Whatever the order, the duets were the evening’s highlight. The audience was exceptionally pleased and insisted on an encore.

Regardless of Absjorn Norgaard’s proclamation that Janacek’s Quartet No. 2 was “the weirdest music of the entire festival”, the “Viennese Giants” program of August 12 outdid it. One can suppose the evening began with Mozart’s Piano Quartet No. 1 to supply an anchor to demonstrate the Viennese roots of what came later: Zemlinsky’s Quartet No. 4, Webern’s Six Bagatelles, and Korgold’s Piano Quintet. There was the thrill; there was the weirdness; there, the ravishing beauty of freedom.

Pianist John Novacek, violinist Kristin Lee, violist Yura Lee, and cellist Clive Greensmith played the Mozart badly. It lacked delicacy, beauty, precision, and playfulness. They sounded like they were sight-reading. But the most exciting and transporting performances followed: the wonders of Zemlinsky’s mold-breaking Quartet No. 4, brilliantly played by the Escher Quartet, who clearly love the work; the absolute “weirdness” of Webern’s Six Bagatelles, joyously assayed—twice—by the Verona Quartet; and the luscious beauty of Korgold’s Quintet, where the Eschers were joined (a marriage made in heaven) by extraordinary Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen. Such power, precision, and perceptiveness! Korgold is having a renaissance currently. The Eschers demonstrated his extreme lyricism and passion (try letting that wash over you), infused with an undeniable modernity. The audience was ecstatic.

My final SummerFest concert was on a Sunday afternoon, a retrospective of commissions, among them Augusta Read Thomas’s *Bells Ring Summer*, a work for solo cello premiered in 2000 by then Music Director David Finckel. Here Felix Fan, a member of the resident FLUX Quartet that played David Lang’s tedious String Quartet *Almost All the Time* (2014), reprised *Bells Ring Summer*, which is a showpiece for cello.

Before the concert Music Director Choliang Lin said that, at the time of its premiere in 2000, *Bells Ring Summer* was SummerFest’s third commission. At the close of the August 14
concert, total commissions stood at an admirable 55. Though the Commissions Showcase is still a hard sell, over the years the SummerFest audience has developed an appetite for new works and is now attending in increasing numbers. SummerFest is sincerely dedicated to new works and living composers.

Among the most enjoyable works of the afternoon was George Tsontakis’s *Stimulus Package* (2009) performed by cellist Fan, pianist John Novacek (the piano was “prepared” on the spot by Novacek and his bench assistant, with some inside piano-string playing), and percussionist Aijun Huang equipped with marimba, bells, gongs, and drums. The exotic work—gleeful, syncopated, ever imaginative—is tinged with East Indian modes and rife with string harmonics. Huang holds a Doctorate from the University of California, San Diego, known for its excellent percussion department headed by Stephen Schick. *Stimulus Package* was originally commissioned by the La Jolla and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festivals for the group Real Quiet (in residence at SummerFest 2007-10), with which Fan is also affiliated.

The other accessible work on this program was Richard Danielpour’s Clarinet Quintet (*The Last Jew in Hamadan*). The Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Burt Hara was the clarinet of the hour with the Verona Quartet. Though Danielpour was born in New York City, he lived in Iran for part of his childhood. *The Last Jew* was given impetus by a New York Times article several years ago that said there were only 13 Jews left in Hamadan. Tinged with aural reminders, Danielpour’s work is homage to arts, culture, and a tradition that once were.

SummerFest is more than just concerts. The village of La Jolla, on the Pacific Ocean coast just north of San Diego, is certainly one of the most beautiful spots in the world. It is filled with boutique hotels, little shops, art galleries, coffee houses, bookshops, restaurants—all in walking distance—and has ideal weather year round.

SummerFest currently takes place in Sherwood Auditorium at the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art’s branch in La Jolla. Worth a visit, it is found just above the coast, right off the heart of the village. Renovations at the museum will eliminate Sherwood Auditorium, so LJMS is building a new 500-seat concert facility, set to open in 2018. Just a few blocks from Sherwood, it will be known as The Conrad in honor of its benefactor, Conrad Prebys, who died in July.

SummerFest also has free pre-concert lectures, free coaching workshops by artists for young artists-in-residence, open rehearsals, and encounters with select artists. There were at least 20 such events in 2016 plus a free outdoor concert beside the Pacific Ocean. More to come next summer.

Charlene Baldridge spent part of her young adult life in La Jolla. She has been a resident of San Diego since 1962 and has written for La Jolla Village News since 1975.
For almost half a century the Oregon Bach Festival, based at the University of Oregon, a big university in the small Willamette Valley city of Eugene, was synonymous with the great Bach scholar Helmuth Rilling. Change came in a big way with Rilling’s retirement in 2013 and the appointment of Englishman Matthew Halls as artistic director. The fare for Halls’s third summer included everything from solo recitals and chamber music to Brahms’s *German Requiem* and add-ons like a performance by Punch Brothers with Gabriel Kahane, in an attempt to lure new listeners. The Festival assembles musicians from around the Pacific Northwest and beyond for an orchestra and chorus. Last season saw the addition of the Berwick Academy, a high-level training orchestra for young period-instrument players. Guest artist Robert Levin, the renowned musicologist and pianist, was on hand this summer to work with this cadre of excellent performers; and his July 1 concert, held in the intimate Beall Concert Hall on the U of O campus, was an emphatic demonstration of the sterling worth of the project.

Levin’s programming looked ultra-traditional—Beethoven’s *Creatures of Prometheus Overture*, Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 24 (with Levin as soloist on fortepiano), and Haydn’s Symphony No. 103—but the performances were anything but conventional. Orchestral seating, for example, reflected 18th-Century practice with first violins on the left and seconds on the right—which made many elements speak with extra effect, particularly in Haydn’s *Drum Roll Symphony*.

The Berwickians were clearly enamored of Levin, who, while no master of conventional conducting technique, was a thoroughly engaged director. One of the most telling bits of the presentation was how Concertmaster Rachel Podger directed much of the orchestra during the Mozart, while Levin offered extra dollops of encouragement from the keyboard. Is this how it might have been with Mozart as soloist? I think so.

Levin’s approach to detail was exemplary. Of course there were the expected radical differences in tone color and, it must be admitted, occasional gaffes in tuning, as instruments responded to the changing humidity and temperature of the small full room. Dynamics, articulation, and accents were scrupulously observed with telling effect, and considerable ornamentation was encouraged. Levin’s fortepiano playing had such joy that every bit of his body seemed to say to his young performers, “I’m having the time of my life! You should be too!” An enlightening experience for all.

The following evening it was time for Halls to show his stuff as conductor in a new commission from James MacMillan, who wrote his Alleluia for the Festival in 2013. The world premiere of his *European Requiem* took place in the large Silva Concert Hall at the Hult Center, an 1980s arts complex designed by New York’s Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates that may well have seemed beguiling and fresh when it opened but is now losing its charm.

The evening opened with Bach’s *Magnifi-
cat, performed by a mismatched complement of soloists, large choir, and a modern-instrument orchestra—a performance that could just as well have graced the festival in any of its earlier decades. Hall’s conducting was inefficient and, far worse, inconsistent; he had trouble meshing obbligato instruments with soloists, and his platform excesses in the post-Bernstein mode might have been exciting to watch but didn’t deliver consistently.

Halls was far more impressive in *A European Requiem*, MacMillan’s 45-minute setting of traditional Latin texts. By sharp contrast to the current glut of vapid, undemanding, and forgettable choral writing, MacMillan’s work was fiercely memorable and sometimes terrifying. In an articulate pre-concert chat, the composer explained that the scheduling of the premiere during the chaotic days following the UK’s disastrous Brexit vote was mere accident. Nevertheless, his title inescapably referred to the idea of the decline, even death, of two millennia of a certain notion of Europe and the civilization it engendered.

MacMillan uses a large, often noisy orchestra. The work starts with a raucous but minuscule orchestral prelude, deliberately heavy on a sort of tawdry, possibly pop-inflected percussion. Countertenor Christopher Ainslie began the Kyrie, a florid cantillation at once historically charged yet unexpected and arresting. A dualism emerged as the work unfolded: dark, disturbing outbursts, often from the orchestra, against nervously lyrical segments. The composer’s view of life, death, judgement, and (just possibly) eternal life is filled with drama, even a measure of calculated bombast. The music is clearly in the service of ideas: here is a committed work that makes no concessions to contemporary inclusiveness or comforting notions of universal values.

A single hearing was hardly enough to grasp the whole picture, but striking individual moments abound, including fierce Alleluias and wonderful moments for brass (homage to the composer’s grandfather, a miner who played in the colliery band?). As the work approached its climax, a trio of violins offered an ecstatic tangled bit of counterpoint reminiscent of Tippett. The Requiem concludes with a chilling reminder of mortality: heartbeat-like strokes on the bass drum, gradually fading to silence.

The audience was conflicted: attention flagged during the performance, but the sense of moment produced an obligatory standing ovation. Conductor Halls unfortunately had a well-meaning trick up his sleeve: an a cappella performance of MacMillan’s *Alleluia* as an ill-conceived bonus. The flagging choir was under-rehearsed with poor blend. Far worse, the encore blunted the power of MacMillan’s brilliantly conceived trajectory and reminded us of the exigencies of the concert hall, not the great verities of life and faith he had just so memorably explored.
For its festive 60th anniversary season, Santa Fe Opera offered an especially rich bill of fare with an impressive list of conductors and interesting casts. Best of all, five classic operas were scheduled, some of them rarely heard. It looked promising.

In the doing, all did not work out quite as hoped. Indeed, the most celebrated of the summer’s repertory, *Don Giovanni*, seemed to reach an all-time low in vocal and musical quality and in a most puzzling set design. But I am getting ahead of the story.

Samuel Barber’s *Vanessa* and Puccini’s *Girl of the Golden West* (1910) were the rarities, and they were also the most satisfying. I well remember the premiere of *Vanessa* in January 1958 at New York’s Metropolitan Opera. Much drama had surrounded the new piece by one of America’s most highly regarded contemporary composers, Samuel Barber. Superstar Maria Callas had originally been invited to sing the title role, and she went to Barber’s studio at Mt Kisco NY to run through the role with him and librettist Gian Carlo Menotti. She turned them down, stating that the *seconda donna* role of Erika was “the more interesting, a better role than Vanessa”. But it was for mezzo-soprano.

Chosen next was celebrated Bosnian soprano Sena Jurinac, who first said yes, but in late November, before a January opening, decided she was “unwell”. In desperation the Met turned to its stalwart house soprano Eleanor Steber, busy with roles such as Donna Anna and the Marschallin, who read through the score and immediately accepted. “I felt Sam was writing it for me all along”, she wryly commented.

A marathon of preparation ensued, and the opening night brought general critical and public approval. But soon there were dissenting voices, especially the noted and influential critic Irving Kolodin, who disdained the score (while approving the production and performance), calling the opera “old wine in old bottles”. This view gradually took hold, and in just a few years *Vanessa* disappeared. There wasn’t much that was innovative or harmonically original about the opera’s music, and the story of an abandoned spinster and her romantical-
ly inclined niece in “a northern country” (think wintery Sweden) was dreary, to say the least.

I give this little history because I call the opera “a classic”, owing to the passage of many decades and an increasing familiarity with its technically skillful score. The public gradually regained some interest in the piece. Santa Fe Opera had wanted to produce the opera for years, so 2016, a celebratory season, supplied the occasion. It turns out that the opera is pretty good after all, especially with thoughtful casting and a strong production, but it is quite demanding to sing. Here is where Santa Fe Opera did the right thing.

Canadian soprano Erin Wall made a handsome and fully qualified Vanessa. She sang with honesty and good tone, but was occasionally a bit loud in her upper register. The celebrated Wagnerian bass, James Morris, now more than middle-aged, was the old Doctor and proved the audience favorite with his little ballad, ‘Under the Willow Tree”—he even danced a few turns. His performance was richly communicative. The attractive young Virginie Verez, in the celebrated role of Erica’s niece and romantic rival, proved fresh and first rate in every way; and the mysterious old Baroness gained strength from the fine performance of contralto Helene Schneiderman. As the young Anatol, son of Vanessa’s former suitor who left her, the new romantic lead Zach Borichevsky was a handsome asset and sang sweetly, until he showed a weak upper range in his tenor voice.

The production was directed by James Robinson, artistic director of Opera Theatre of St Louis, and Allen Moyer and James Shuette supplied the atmospheric sets and costumes depicting a gloomy country mansion of wealthy Scandinavians of perhaps the 1930s or a bit earlier.

True, the setting was a little abstract, but it was in the expected bounds and essentially representational in dress and style, making it easily understood and enjoyed by the enthusiastic audience. Leonard Slatkin contributed a well-modulated and accurate orchestral performance that worked effectively with the cast.

So Vanessa is back. She goes off to Paris with her young lover, Erika is reconciled to living in the big gloomy mansion with the grandmother Baroness until, well, maybe one day Mr Right will come along. When Barber’s opera is well done, it works, and this time it worked. Yet it still strikes me, as it did Kolodin, as an opera of only middling interest, though there are some lovely moments, the best being the really fine quintet, ‘To Leave, To Break, To Find, To Keep’ that closes the show—a marvel of beauty in Santa Fe’s performance.

The other interesting opera of the season was also about a single woman who seems to have little past and not much future; this one runs the Polka Saloon in the high Sierra country of gold-rush California. I refer, of course, to Puccini’s great Fanciulla del West, perhaps his most beautiful and sophisticated score, with its memorable creation of the tough but gentle Minnie, a woman of maybe 35 or a little more “who has never been kissed”. She had once seen a man called Dick Johnson on the road to Monterey, liked him, and remembered him (as he did her) when he walks into her Polka Saloon. Their mutual interest is immediately revived, and Minnie begins to enjoy waltzing and perhaps having a kiss or two as never before. Alas, Dick turns out to be Remirez, a disguised outlaw on the run. The burly local sheriff, Jack Rance, who longs for Minnie himself, discovers Dick’s true identity and vows to see him hanged. In an only-in-opera moment, Minnie swoops in on her horse and prevails on her friendly miners to spare Dick, which they
do, and our heroine and her new lover ride off into a promising California sunrise—all of this set to a lovely melodic score holding great rewards for an able cast.

Santa Fe fortunately fielded such a cast with soprano Patricia Racette, just right as the sentimental but gutsy heroine, singing as strongly as I have ever heard her. The covetous sheriff Jack Rance was the able veteran baritone Mark Delavan. There were two weak spots in the production. One was English tenor Gwyn Hughes Jones as Dick, who offered no visual charisma, and, woefully, a far too light—oratorio Gilbert-&-Sullivan tenor voice, ill-suited to the needs of such a pungent Italian role. Strange casting for sure.

The other problem came from conductor Emmanuel Villaume and stage director Richard Jones, who could not supply the necessary excitement and suspense for the opera's several quite dramatic moments. Minnie's entrance into the saloon in Act 1, with the orchestra booming out her big theme, fell flat as she fired her gun into the air to quell the quarrelling miners—it turned out to be a child's toy that went only "pop", causing the audience to laugh. There were many other such slips, like later in the dramatic climax during a fateful game of poker between Minnie and Jack, Dick's life being in the balance. There was little tension in the pit or stage as Minnie extracted the winning, if cheating, ace from her bodice rather than the top of her stocking—all wrong.

The Old West set was obtained from the English National Opera, and looked it. The many miners—two dozen or so of the opera company's male apprentices—had trouble moving on an unusually small and crowded stage that had little room for action. Still, they sang most beautifully. In the end, instead of riding steeds off into the California mountains, Minnie and Dick (whom she just saved from hanging) simply held hands and walked off down the street. Again, all wrong.

The most glorious thing about Fanciulla—its elegant, innovative score—was intact and sounded as fine as ever. Puccini himself said at the premiere in 1910, "You have to hear this three times to 'get' it." Maybe so, but it took me about ten times with five or six productions over the years. Finally I "got" it, and it is forever stuck in my heart and brain.

Santa Fe essayed three other operas to complete their season: Gounod's Romeo and Juliet and Richard Strauss's Capriccio, both with attractive young casts and good production quality. Alas, Mozart's Don Giovanni was the sour apple of the summer, lacking vocal talent, flawed with a nonsensical set and production and inconsistent conducting.
There’s a local opera maven, a well-traveled gentleman with decades of experience in the arts world, who’s fond of calling Opera Saratoga “the home team”. While that’s an endearing term, it also evokes something that’s provincial and struggling, and even suggests that we should all pull together and support our own because they’re really doing the best they can.

In 2015 Opera Saratoga’s new Artistic and General Director Lawrence Edelson made a giant leap away from such notions by putting together a summer season that included an elegantly staged baroque opera plus a world premiere [Nov/Dec 2015]. What a pleasure to report that with Opera Saratoga’s 2016 season the new repertoire and production standards have been maintained and even improved. In fact, after having covered most of this company’s productions for the past 15 years, I can say that the opening night of Il Postino in July was the most satisfying single night of opera that they have delivered. With all systems firing by singers, orchestra, and designers, one’s full attention could go to the opera at hand.

Il Postino was my first exposure to the

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work of Mexican composer Daniel Catan. The piece, which premiered at the Los Angeles Opera in 2010 with Placido Domingo in the cast, is an eloquent mix of comedy, romance, and pathos and ends on a moving note. Based on the 1994 Italian film, it tells of an imaginary relationship between poet Pablo Neruda and his young letter carrier, who wants to write poetry in order to win over a woman. The music is supple and lyrical, and the whole work adheres to the best conventions of traditional opera while remaining fresh and original. What a loss that Catan, who also wrote the Spanish language libretto, died at age 62 only a few months after the opera’s debut.

Edelson, who served as stage director, and others in the new production were friends with the composer and obviously poured heart and soul into their effort. In the title role, the fine tenor Daniel Montenegro grew from timid to buoyant and finally brave. Tenor Richard Troxwell sang the part of Neruda with a mix of wisdom and discovery. Soprano Cecilia Violetta Lopez had a radiant voice, and her acting was both seductive and soulful.

Opera Saratoga’s home base is the Spa Little Theater, a house that’s intimate but has no orchestra pit. Over the years the ensemble has been placed to one side of the stage or the other, sometimes even on a balcony above the singers, which usually wreaked havoc on balances. With Il Postino the orchestra was pretty much front and center, with a simple set built above and around it. The instrumental sound was prominent but never tiring to the ear or overbearing on the singers. Conductor James Lowe’s pacing was sure-footed, and Catan’s rich orchestration was leavened with unexpected instruments like the tuba and accordion.

The action takes place on a small Italian island. Caite Hevner’s single unit set was copiously draped with fishing nets. Thanks to some subtle lighting by Josh Epstein and varied blocking by Edelson, the eye remained continually engaged.

The big novelty this summer was The Witches of Venice by Philip Glass and Beni Montressor. Of course, yet another opera by Philip Glass can hardly be called a novelty. But the curious thing is that the piece lasts about 70 minutes and has less than 15 minutes of singing. So it’s hard to call it an opera. On the other hand, the musical structure is more strict and deliberate than is typical for pure dance, and there’s still a fair amount of singing. So it’s tough to think of it as a ballet either. The piece debuted at La Scala in 1995, was released as a combination storybook and CD about 10 years ago, and has otherwise been pretty much forgotten. Thus it was both daring and smart of Opera Saratoga to take on the American premiere.

Finding a label was really the only quandary left at the end of the show. The quirky story about a lonely boy has a happy ending. There was a huge cast of children and adults that paraded around in colorful and lavish costumes by Martin Lopez. Modern dance choreographer, Karole Armitage, who staged last year’s Dido and Aeneas, returned to take on the challenge of telling the story almost entirely through movement. At the start, her production appeared to be all about costumes and choreography. Pantomimes by the boy and the king, some philosophers, and such all seemed to demand thought and attention. But

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Capital Improvements
Joseph Dalton

I

t was impossible not to take notice of the 50th anniversary season of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, since every ticket on every night had a gold embossed anniversary logo. Also, new stars were added to the “walk of fame” for George Balanchine and Eugene Ormandy. Plus, there were some long overdue capital improvements, including the complete re-sodding of the vast amphitheater lawn (alas, it appeared to be a mud slick once again by mid-July).

Most important of all, the programming of the classical season was decidedly more interesting. It’s been six years since Charles Dutoit ended his 21-year tenure as music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra’s SPAC residency, but his legacy of one warhorse after another has largely carried on. Portents of change came last August with the announcement of a Michael Torke commission for the anniversary year. Torke was a fitting choice, since he’s been a regular visitor at Yaddo, the nearby artist colony, and also has a history of collaborating with another summer resident, Peter Martins and the New York City Ballet, as well as the nearby Albany Symphony.

Torke’s Unconquered debuted on August 5 with conductor Stephan Deneve. The composer went back a couple of centuries in local history to find inspiration in the great Battle of Saratoga, which changed the course of the Revolutionary War. The piece opened with a fanfare that was elegant, but also was suggestive of military endeavor, as were the pounding timpani and surging strings that followed. Though a narrative was suggested by the movements’ titles—Summon, Dawn, Advance, Liberty—the entire piece carried much the same buoyant attitude. That’s one of Torke’s trademarks, actually. He’s at his best writing music that is upbeat, crisp, and bright. But this was no token overture. In fact, its 25 minutes would have benefitted from more darkness, turmoil, and struggle. Actually, during the third movement the brass did have some struggles. But performance difficulties really weren’t what I was longing for.

A more detailed and nuanced presentation
of Torke’s score would surely have brought out more of its varied characteristics. The week before, when the New York City Ballet revived Torke’s *Ash* (1991), the score felt positively baroque in its staccato detail. But *Unconquered* was pretty mushy. That happens a lot with Deneve, who a few years ago started becoming a summer regular with the orchestra and more recently became its principal guest conductor. I don’t understand his frequent presence and new prominence. No matter what score is in front of him, Deneve’s beat is loose and casual, translating into playing that’s both expressive and aimless. The Philadelphians can deliver almost anything, no matter what’s happening on the podium; but when Charles Dutoit was giving the umpteenth performance of this or that masterpiece (the Torke was followed by Ravel’s *Daphnis and Chloe* Suite No. 2 and *La Valse*), he would charge the tempos forward or demand more bite, and generally make something happen. Such moments are rare from Deneve.

A more commanding presence was Keith Lockhart. His one appearance on August 10 was a concert titled “Track & SPAC” (Saratoga being the home to the nation’s oldest race course). I’ve been longing for the Philadelphians to give us some Copland, and it finally happened on this program with the *Outdoor Overture, Billy the Kid,* and some of the *Old American Songs.* It was all stylish and clear, and the powerful young bass-baritone Justin Hopkins was impressive. The concert’s second half was also picturesque, with ‘Ride of the Valkyries,’ two selections from Grof’s *Grand Canyon Suite,* and Rossini’s *William Tell Overture.* Yes, the war horses continued, but it does help when they’re selected with some kind of theme or idea in mind.

For another premiere, SPAC teamed up with five other summer festivals to commission a staging of Stravinsky’s *Firebird.* The result, performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra on August 11 and 12, was unexpectedly elaborate, fresh, and earthy. SPAC’s dance audiences have had plenty of exposure to Balanchine’s *Firebird,* which is rich in color and populated by animal costumes. But director Janni Younge and choreographer Jay Pathe went in a different direction with a restrained palette of white, beige, and tan. The racially varied company of 14 dancers performed in front of the orchestra, conducted by Cristian Macelaru. The choreography blended expressive folk gestures with stunning modern displays. A video component sometimes made for visual overload; and the numerous references to fertility, the womb, and birth became repetitious. But this was an undertaking admirably grand in scale. And it ended with a theatrical coup, as the circular video screen was reconfigured before our eyes into the giant firebird that spread its massive wings to hover above the orchestra.

Today’s Philadelphia Orchestra really isn’t complete without its prized Music Director Yannick Nezet-Seguin. He has fortunately become a regular presence at SPAC. This was his fourth summer to lead a full week of concerts, and his connection with the orchestra just gets better and better. The best evidence came in Sibelius’s Symphony No. 5, which concluded the August 17 program. It had a unique calmness and presence, a depth and soulfulness that the orchestra rarely achieves without him.

It’s an ineffable thing, the rare magic that comes from a well suited, long-term collaboration. “Spark” might be a word to describe it, but that implies momentary heat and fire,
which usually translates into loud and pounding climaxes. Yet it was when the brass delivered that leaping but lyric phrase for the third or fourth time in the Sibelius that something stirred and crossed over from pretty to touching.

The concert opened with a restrained and organic account of Suite No. 1 from Grieg’s Peer Gynt. Has a ringing triangle ever entered with such subtlety? One briefly feared that the tenderness would continue into ‘Hall of the Mountain King’ but Nezet-Seguin burrowed in for a rousing climax.

Czech pianist Lukas Vondracek, 30, was the guest artist in Rachmaninoff’s Concerto No. 3. He was a substitute for an ailing Andre Watts, who was to play the Rachmaninoff 2. No. 3 is demanding, and not just because of all the complex finger work. The first movement was too long, in this case running just short of 20 minutes. Vondracek had all of it well in hand and in mind. The way he leaned so far forward over the keyboard evoked the pose of Glenn Gould. But he didn’t keep things so cooped up forever. A velvety series of rolled chords was the tease before the third movement’s stirring and long awaited payoff.

The following night marked the Saratoga debut of soprano Renee Fleming. “I’m happy to have a debut left”, she joked as she greeted the sizeable and enthusiastic crowd. She sang the opening of Act IV from Verdi’s Otello, some Spanish and Italian songs, plus an encore of ‘O Mio Babbino Caro’.

The concert’s first half was a study in contrasts. Tchaikovsky’s Francesca da Rimini was dark, violet, and toiling. After that, the Verdi was an ocean of calm. It was an interesting and generous choice, short on coloratura display, concentrating on the long line and intense acting. Fleming carried the material with more chest voice than expected. The audience was with her all the way. It felt like the most concentrated listening I’ve ever felt in the amphitheater.

The songs that came after intermission were full of life. Fleming hammered it up a bit during the Spanish numbers, imitating the drums and castanets with her hands. One came away with a full picture of her vocal character at its most pure and vibrant, if not quite its most agile. The orchestra ended the night with more Tchaikovsky, Romeo and Juliet. SPAC regulars have heard it countless times, but not with Nezet-Seguin, who notched up the tempos and goosed the climaxes. Besides the ballet and orchestra, another resident company for SPAC’s classical season is the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Since 2014, the group has been offering a half dozen concerts each August.

“American Rhapsody” on August 14 was pure delight from start to finish. The first half had a clever pairing of Schubert’s Violin Sonata, Op. 162, followed by John Harbison’s November 19, 1828, a piano quartet that is a haunting tribute to Schubert’s passing. The music was all-American after intermission with the fine soprano Michelle Arreyzaga in Andr’ Previn’s Vocalise and some of William Bolcom’s cabaret songs. Another young artist, violist Matthew Lipman, just couldn’t stop grinning during a Marc O’Connor jig, performed in duet with Ani Kavafian. The grand finale was Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue for piano four hands with Wu Han and Alessio Bax. Just seconds into the piece, Ricardo Morales, principal clarinet of the Philadelphia Orchestra, waltzed out to deliver the opening riff. He then waved “bye-bye” and left the stage. It was probably my favorite moment in the entire summer.
Ever since 1991, when Seiji Ozawa began leaving Tanglewood early for Japan, the Boston Symphony and its teaching arm, the Tanglewood Music Center, have completed the summer season without a music director. This summer, Music Director Andris Nelsons, who terminated his contract at the Bayreuth Festival and extended his commitment to the BSO until 2022, spent August immersed in musical life on the Berkshires estate—even stepping in for the ailing Christoph von Dohnanyi to lead the annual concluding Symphony No. 9 by Beethoven. Things were the better for it.

Nelsons, who turns 38 on November 18, is growing up. His puppy-like enthusiasm is tempered, and he is gaining control of his podium gestures, which are becoming pointed and precise. He was most effective in opera, ballet scores, and the wrenching drama of Mahler’s Symphony No. 9.

For glamour night in the Koussevitzky Music Shed, Kristine Opolais, who is married to Nelsons, sang the title role in the first two acts of Verdi’s Aida (with supertitles). The Tanglewood Festival Chorus sang resonantly from memory, as did others in solo roles—but not the two leads. Last year Opolais didn’t perform Otello’s Desdemona from memory either, sending a possible message that, pretty face, pretty voice, and all, she was practicing and flipping pages on the ticket-holders’ dime. She didn’t use music in solo passages and high notes, but in the finale (a lengthy ensemble) she held on to the music stand. Had there been elephants on stage as Verdi intended, her insecurity would have been less noticeable.

Smaller concerts and recitals with adventurous programing, often with musicians on tour, took place in Ozawa Hall. The Emerson Quartet, who recently released a 52-CD box set of all their recordings on DG, performed two concerts on their way to the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center, and also Aspen. After 40 years, the last three with cellist Paul Watkins, it is clear that this untiring quartet will never phone it in. By now Watkins has proved that his seamless incorporation into the group is of permanent value. With Watkins in mind, Mark-Anthony Turnage composed Shroud for the Emerson, which was premiered in Akron, Ohio on September 27.

The Emerson’s Tanglewood concerts were a full-evening wallow in Haydn’s complete Opus 76, and also an elegant, peculiar program of the Brahms’s Quartet No. 2, Berg’s Lyric Suite, and Egon Wellesz’s Sonnets by Elizabeth Barrett Browning with soprano Renée Fleming. Wellesz, who fled Vienna in 1938 and settled in Oxford, England, was once...
a pupil of Schoenberg, as were Berg and Webern. (He is related to the family depicted in the film, *Woman in Gold.*) Meticulous as the performance was, the audience hadn’t signed on for more Second Viennese School, and was halfway out the door when Fleming came running back on stage, waving her hands and shouting, “Wait, wait, we have an encore!” That’s surely a first for this famed opera diva.

With Nelsom’s extended visit not planned, Tanglewood’s linchpin was its talented, creative artistic administrator, Anthony Fogg. Fogg arranged for famous pianists to perform in August recitals, and also in concerts with the orchestra. Despite changes of soloist, listeners were interested; piano players had their hands on some of this repertory, so they were attentive and full of opinions.

On August 3 the fascinating Brazilian introvert, pianist Nelson Freire, played Bach arrangements, Brahms, Debussy, and Chopin as if he wanted nothing but to be alone, playing and practicing. He knows he can master a demanding passage next year—or the year after—and had no problem sitting there until he did. He also showed that with good aim he could drop onto a note from a distance, increasing volume and resonance.

Not so the next night, when Marc-Andre Hamelin, who turned 55 on September 5, stepped in for Daniil Trifonov, who had withdrawn because of an ear infection. Hamelin’s playing of Mozart, the post-impressionist Russian Samuel Feinberg, Beethoven, and Liszt left some of the audience cold. There’s a difference between fast and rushed, and this playing left no time to feel the spaces between notes. I wanted to run up to the 72-year-old Freire, who was sitting shyly in the audience, and bark, “Young man, don’t you ever dare play Mozart like that.”

No need to worry. With the orchestra Freire took on Mozart’s Concerto No. 9, composed when he was 21, and there was space between notes, no matter how speedy the passage. Playful and lyrical, it would be heard more often had Mozart not composed so prolifically in his remaining 14 years. Because of the change, Hamelin did not have a concerto ready, so the soloist for the already-scheduled Chopin No. 2 was Ingrid Fliter, the only woman ever to win the coveted Gilmore Award. A graceful artist, Fliter (pronounced FLEE-ter) was a lucky choice. The piece is notoriously far from first-rate; but, listening to her delicate proficiency, that wasn’t noticeable.

Under the polished, vigorous Giancarlo Guerrero, music director of the Nashville Symphony, Yefim Bronfman played Liszt’s messy single-movement Concerto No. 2. It was composed by a star as a showpiece for himself; but the muscular Bronfman, sometimes faulted for pounding, tossed off its lightning-quick twin-
kes, keyboard-plowing passages, and roller-coaster double glissandos, taking listeners along on the concerto’s journey.

The parade of pianists continued when 92-year-old Menahem Pressler was helped to the piano to perform Mozart’s Concerto No. 23. After decades of music-making with the Beaux Arts Trio and other groups, his teaching experience, knowledge, and insight softened the prickle of unplayed notes or scales that were left to the imagination. (This concert was not broadcast.) Conductor Charles Dutoit, recently appointed Koussevitzky Artist in recognition of his years of commitment to Tanglewood, was alert, holding the orchestra in check. By the time Pressler performed a Chopin nocturne as an encore, he had warmed to the task.

The brilliant pianist Jeremy Denk, who projects power without strain, has Bach’s Goldberg Variations in one back pocket and Ives’s Concord Sonata in the other. His tour program, called “Medieval to Modern”, began with his transcription of Binchois, proceeded through history to Ligeti (with only one break), and ended with a little Binchois piece. Denk was retooling and tweaking, but it was a thrilling traversal. (This list of stellar pianists does not even include July’s: Yuja Wang, Garrick Ohlsson, Jonathan Biss, Emanuel Ax, and Paul Lewis.)

The Tanglewood community memorialized several significant losses in different ways. Steven Stucky planned and coordinated this year’s July 21-25 Festival of Contemporary Music before his sudden demise last February at age 66 from a brain cancer that no one saw coming. His 2009 Chamber Concerto generously showed off the orchestra’s sections. Harp and strings in high register for told a story narrated by the clarinet. Muted horn continued the tale with the strings providing pleasing melodies.

There are string quartets whose beauty equals the one heard the next day, by former Stucky student Joseph Phibbs, but none are more beautiful than his Quartet No. 1, here in its US premiere. Astonished listeners exchanged comments like “stunning” and “marvelous”, but describing sonorities and rhythms does not convey what made it the real thing. Gentle outreach of old to new, fluidity and suddenness, dissonance and chromatics—what does this tell you? Nothing. Find a recording.

In the middle of the five days of new sounds came a moving memorial for the beloved violinist, BSO concertmaster (1962 to 1984), teacher, and conductor Joseph Silverstein, who died in November. In addition to videos of Silverstein, an A-list of musicians performed, including Yo-Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, Peter Serkin, Richard Goode, and Hilary Hahn. An A+ list—Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Robert Levin, and Andr’ Previn—sent video remembrances. The music was from the 19th Century.

Phyllis Curtin, the renowned soprano who died in June, spent more than 50 summers teaching at Tanglewood. She sang at the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera—where she created the title role of Carlisle Floyd’s Susannah—and major European houses, became a professor at Yale, and afterward Dean of Boston University’s School of the Arts. But it is her measured, articulate speaking voice that decades of Tanglewood students carry with them. They recall sitting on folding chairs in a wooden shed where an elegant lady, wise and gentle and sly, who knew absolutely everything about how to be a singer, illuminated singing as part of living.

Here are Curtin’s thoughts on Cherubino’s aria, ‘Voi Che Sapete’ from Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro: “This boy, 15 or 16, is at the same level as the Count. He is singing an aria to the only woman he will ever love, by whom he will have a child. He is an elegant young man with humor, wit, and certain awkwardnesses that go with inexperience. The Count senses danger and wants him out. This is a charade of singing a proper song. Something happens there. Susanna and the Countess never discuss the depth of Cherubino’s feeling. They must do something before the recapitulation, to break the mood. If you understand this, you understand the next play.”

Curtin once said, “Oy is a wonderful syllable! Ahoy! Rejoice! Freude!” The season ended with freude when Nelsons led an excellent Beethoven Ninth. Why he felt called on to improvise vapid pre-concert remarks about peace and love is not clear, but the performance had tone and body, dynamics were dramatic, and attacks and cutoffs were cleaner than those of either of his predecessors. He plans a ten-concert return next summer, with the Beethoven and two operas.

Things are looking up.

November/December 2016
Gerard Schwarz and the Eastern Music Festival
Perry Tannenbaum

If you haven’t heard about Julia Adolphe before, expect to hear more about her soon. The 27-year-old composer is the 2016 winner of the Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award, and her Viola Concerto was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic for Cynthia Phelps, their principal violist. Come this November, when Jaap van Zweden leads his first concert at David Geffen Hall since being appointed the NY Phil’s next music director, her concerto will get its first performance with that orchestra (to be reviewed in Mar/Apr 2017).

But Phelps played the Viola Concerto’s world premiere on July 16 at the 2016 Eastern Music Festival in Greensboro NC. Van Zweden plans to surround Adolphe’s concerto with works by Wagner and Tchaikovsky. The Eastern Festival Orchestra’s Music Director Gerard Schwarz fit Adolphe’s concerto into a program that was a generous 20th-Century sampler of works by Ravel, Rodrigo, and Janacek.

Three interacting orchestras keep EMF humming, this year from July 1 to 20. They presented 45 concerts, idle only on July 4. Members of the professional 64-member Eastern Festival Orchestra hail from around the country, most on summer furlough from symphony and university posts. They double as mentors for the students of two Young Artists Orchestras. Only a fraction of the daily campus bustle of rehearsals, student instruction, sectional rehearsals, and chamber music is evident as one walks to Guilford College’s Dana Auditorium for an evening concert.

The white acoustic shell at Dana is as ugly as I had remembered from the last time I visited EMF during its 50th anniversary in 2011. Perhaps the better word is incongruous, for the white shell is like an interior of 2001: A Space Odyssey plopped down into the royal palace of The Lion in Winter. Projections appeared on the back wall, promoting future events and blazoning sponsor logos.

When Schwarz and the Eastern Festival Orchestra opened with Ravel’s ‘Alborada del Gracioso’, the value of the acoustic shell was immediately apparent. Pizzicatos maintained their crispness at the start, and the mellow sound of the single oboe didn’t struggle to reach me in Row L. The first big orchestral sforzando leaped from the stage with a rousing wallop, so the soft interlude that followed had a luxuriant repose. I was barely satisfied as the bassoon, clarinets, and muted trumpets set up the closing, but the percussion and brass at the end were very convincing.

There were no program notes for Adolphe’s Viola Concerto—not even an indication that it is in three movements. Only a condensed version of Adolphe’s biography
Unearth, Release, the work’s official title, apparently wasn’t decided on before the 124-page EMF program book went to press.

Anyone familiar with Adolphe’s Dark Sand, Sifting Light, played at the NY Phil Biennial 2014 (it can be downloaded from the orchestra’s website or streamed on Spotify), has heard the textures and moods Adolphe likes to work with. The swirling eeriness at the start of the concerto’s first movement isn’t as soft and subdued as Dark Sand, and Phelps’s first two entrances plunged the piece into darkness, urgency, and anguish much sooner. Both the orchestra and Concertmaster Jeffrey Muler had answers for Phelps’s agitated cadenza. Cellos dominated the orchestral palette until drums, cymbals, violins, and brass swelled into a majestic cacophony, dissolving into a calm dominated by the high woodwinds. A tinkling piano under a harmonics-infused outburst from Phelps closed the movement after a volley of timpani.

In contrast to the dense and spooky outer movements, the second movement is less brooding, more scherzo-like, with a bright flute, jaunty brass, woodblocks, and thin harp passages leading up to a flurry of trumpets.

The concluding movement starts with sweet sounds of the second violins over eerie flutes. Muler shone in some harmonics-laced passages before soft trumpets signaled more bravura from Phelps. There was more delicacy here as bass clarinet, chimes, and oboe glissened in the texture before the final fadeout of the viola. Adolphe’s concluding “release” was more of a weary escape than a celebratory triumph, yet it came in the wake of substantial struggle and suffering, so I could detect a glimmer of sublimity in the outcome. Van Zweden will need to be at the top of his game to match this performance, and I suspect that both he and Schwarz will want to record the piece.

Rodrigo’s Fantasia for a Gentleman generally plays second fiddle to his famed Concierto de Aranjuez. I’ve heard it on recordings but never before in concert. Despite a smaller orchestra than used in the Adolphe, I still wondered what balances would be like. For the most part, Rodrigo deftly avoids clashes between the soloist and the orchestra. When the orchestra swells, the guitar part usually diminishes to rhythmic strums or simple arpeggios; when the soloist takes the spotlight, the orchestra is often hushed. When that didn’t happen, Schwarz was discreet without being self-effacing.

The effect was very natural in the opening ‘Villano y Ricercare’ as warm strings and softly student winds preceded Vieux’s entry. As the winds began chirping more assertively, Vieux took to strumming, his muted presence still counting underneath in accompaniment until he emerged gracefully at the close. There was a festive feeling from both soloist and orchestra from start to finish as well as a couple of affinities with the Concierto de Aranjuez. In the penultimate ‘Dance of the Axes’ some interplay between Vieux and the oboe echoed the other work’s Adagio, and the final ‘Canario’ had a frolicsome quality akin to the Allegro Gentile that closes Aranjuez, while dancing a little livelier. Vieux almost sounded like he was playing electric bass just before some nice bits of trumpet introduced his final cadenza.

Janacek’s Sinfonietta was inspired by the sounds of a brass band he heard in Brno after Czechoslovakia declared its independence on October 28, 1918. The five-movement piece is astonishing, teeming with trumpets and fanfares. Schwarz reveled in its colors and its American-like brashness. There were rich sounds from the French horns over a snare drum complementing the brass in the opening ‘Fanfare’. Flute, piccolo, and clarinet swirled in ‘The Castle’, and ‘The Queen’s Monastery’ actually sounded quiet and monastic with chaste violins before turning brassy and scherzo-like. Violins cast a tone of anxiety over the quieted trumpets’ dance in ‘The Street Leading to the Castle’, and ‘Town Hall’ was steeped in sorrow. Sometimes timpani and pulsating brass weren’t sculpted to simulate as much joy and jubilation as I might have wished, settling into a more bellicose battlefield tattoo, but I was pleased when Schwarz and the Festival orchestra captured the majesty and grandeur of the ending.
The Exterminating Angel

Above a swirling orchestra, the drooping slides of an ondes martenot, and chiming bells, a gilded wall closes in on the guests of Edmondo and Lucia de Nobile. “Why is nobody leaving?” asks the host. The Exterminating Angel is a classic film by Luis Buñuel that Thomas Ades has re-created for the opera stage with the director Tom Cairns. In it a formal dinner party dissolves into savage confinement as the visitors find themselves unable to leave the living room. The young lovers Eduardo and Beatriz escape through a suicide pact. The elderly Señor Russell falls into a coma and dies. Those who are left lose all sense of civilized mores, burning a cello and roasting lamb until the opera singer, Leticia, guides the group across the threshold.

Ades and Cairns condense the story into a breezy two hours, using key elements of the story and bringing the characters to life with immediacy. Eduardo (Ed Lyon) and Beatriz (Sophie Bevan) are given particularly intimate treatment. Their final duet, ‘What Is Today?’

Choice, and he began germinating what is his third opera over a decade ago. I saw the world premiere production at the Salzburg Festival on August 1; it will travel to Covent Garden in April, the Metropolitan Opera in autumn 2017, and the Royal Danish Opera.

The prospect of adapting Buñuel’s film, which includes 17 characters, a baby bear, and—most of all—a fantastical approach to human psychology, may seem daunting. For Ades, bred on the ideas of surrealism through his mother, an art historian, it was a natural
was sung from death to melting harmonies as their bodies were illuminated in a chamber that floated across the dark stage.

As Ades’s second opera, The Tempest, made clear, he has a gift for the emotional depths and pictorial narrative that the stage demands, all the while integrating extended techniques into a cohesive journey. His score for The Exterminating Angel brings the listener from familiar terrain onto a no-man’s-land and back again, from shamelessly romantic pathos to raw uncertainty. From distorted waltz melodies to the stabbing rhythms of a neo-baroque chaconne and a furious marching interlude before Act II, Ades has seemingly endless material at his disposal to achieve his dramatic ends. Conducting the Vienna Radio Symphony himself, the composer never failed to keep the emotional tension high and draw attention to the score’s meticulous details.

His high-registered vocal writing underscores the angst and other-worldly circumstances of the characters, but it can also prove grating. As Leticia, American soprano Amanda Echalaz, who sang the stratospheric role of Ariel in The Tempest, once again seemed to defy reality as she dispatched wild leaping melodies. Soprano Amanda Echalaz sounded pushed to the limit in Act I. Doctor Carlos Conde (the legendary bass John Tomlinson), who diagnoses the guests with abulia (a clinical lack of motivation), became a counter-weight with low, earthy textures in the strings. As his patient, Leonora, who becomes de-ranged in Act III, the outstanding mezzo Anne Sofie von Otter also brought a dose of warm, grounded tones. Further stand-out performances, both vocally and dramatically, came from soprano Sally Matthews and countertenor Iestyn Davies as the siblings Silvia and Francisco.

Through the interpersonal dynamics onstage, Cairns managed to recreate Buñuel’s dark take on the bourgeois world of the characters. The production was most effective in the first two acts, moving swiftly from the dinner, where a waiter drops a tray of liver, to a living room of gaudy 1970s furniture (sets by Hildegarde Bechtler). The Brancusi sculpture “Bird in Space” tellingly sits on the coffee table and will become the weapon that Raul Yebenes (the charismatic Frederic Antoun) hacks open a water pipe with in the third act. But other elements from the film—a bear that wanders in (here a costumed dancing actor), a disembodied hand that appears to the delirious Leonora (a video projection above the stage)—were reduced to cliches. Ades and Cairns do, however, find an fascinating solution for the ending by reinforcing the role of Leticia: it is through song that she leads the group across the threshold. When the living room’s entrance way pushed upstage, it was as if to imply that we, the spectators, are trapped in an illusion of which we are not aware.

A chamber music evening at the Mozarteum offered another opportunity to explore an aesthetic that musicologist Richard Taruskin famously identified as surrealist. Ades’s Piano Quintet (2000), where the composer accompanied the Calder Quartet, has consciously distorted harmonies, melodies, and overlaid Ivesian textures where one has the impression of seeing the music through a prism. Ades produced floating, impressionist atmospheres at the piano; and the Calder players were so homogenous that at one point I had the impression of hearing a glass harmonica.

They were also consummate in Arcadiana (1994), a theatrical work for quartet inspired by the 17th Century Poussin painting “Et in Arcadia Ego”, where shepherds gather around a tomb. The third movement, ‘Auf dem Wasser Zu Singen’, where the lyrical melodies of the first violin (Benjamin Jacobson) melted like the clocks in a Dali painting, had an exciting mix of furious exchange and intuitive communication. The players also mastered the harsh attacks of the tango mortale in the fourth movement. In the fifth, ‘O Albion’, which nostalgically alludes to a melody in Elgar’s Enigma Variations, the melodies were kept appropriately understated and tossed seamlessly between instruments. By the following and final movement, ‘Lethe’ (the river of forgetfulness in Hades), the melodies lost their way before dropping into nothing.

Ades’s works were thoughtfully paired with Kurtág’s Moments Musicaux, which refer to everyone from Samuel Beckett to the violinist Tabea Zimmermann and Schubert’s Death and the Maiden quartet and song. The Calder Quartet’s slick, rhythmically crisp playing lent a modern touch to the romantic work, also communicating the composer’s yearning and desperation. If the final movement at first seemed rushed, it communicated a struggle for survival, which resurfaces time and again in Ades.

32 Music in Concert

November/December 2016
Conductor and pianist Jeffrey Kahane, 60, signed a three-year contract and became music director of the Sarasota Music Festival on August 1. He is in his last season as music director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

American conductor and composer Jayce Ogren, 37, signed a two-year contract in July and became artistic director of Orchestra 2001 in Philadelphia. The ensemble, dedicated to performing 20th- and 21st-Century music, was founded in 1988 by James Freeman, who is now artistic director emeritus.

German Eckart Preu [Proy], 47, signed a three-year contract to become music director of the Long Beach (CA) Symphony in 2017, succeeding Enrique Arturo Diemecke, who resigned in 2014. Preu currently holds the same position with the Spokane (WA) and Stamford (CT) Symphonies, but will leave the Stamford post in 2017.

Scott Yoo, music director of California’s Festival Mozaic since 2005, extended his contract to 2020, when the festival celebrates its 50th anniversary. He was recently appointed music director of the Mexico City Philharmonic.

Conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen signed a five-year contract that began this season as artist-in-association for the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. Among his duties are conducting, selecting new works, and being artistic advisor and ambassador for the companies. He also is principal conductor and artistic advisor of London’s Philharmonia Orchestra.

Israeli Lahav Shani, winner of the 2013 Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition, signed a five-year contract to succeed Yannick Nezet-Seguin at the Rotterdam Philharmonic. He will be 29 when he launches the orchestra’s 100th season conducting the 2018 New Year’s concert, his first as music director. He will also become principal guest conductor of the Vienna Symphony in 2017.
Zubin Mehta, 80, resigned as music director of Teatro San Carlo in Naples, becoming its honorary music director. He will be replaced by Juraj Valcuha, who is also chief conductor of the National Radio Symphony in Turin.

Gary Hanson agreed to become interim CEO of the Toronto Symphony in September for up to two years. The Toronto native replaces Jeff Melanson, who resigned five months earlier amid allegations of personal and professional impropriety. At age 62 Hanson retired as planned in 2015 after 12 years as executive director of the Cleveland Orchestra.

Elizabeth Sobol became president and CEO of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in October. She was previously president and CEO of Universal Music Classics and before that was IMG Artist’s North & South America managing director for 30 years.

William Rhoads, 49, became executive director of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia in September, succeeding Janelle McCoy, who is now executive director of the Oregon Bach Festival. Rhoads was vice president of marketing and communications for the Orchestra of St Luke’s since 2006.

Zak Vassar, 36, became president and CEO of the Toledo Symphony in July, succeeding Kathy Carroll, who encouraged him to apply for the job, even though he worked for the past 10 years as a marketing consultant for Fortune 500 companies and non-profits.

Mexican-born Enrique Carreon-Robledo became general and artistic director of Opera San Antonio on August 1, succeeding Tobias Picker, who left in January 2015. Carreon-Robledo was suddenly fired in December 2014 after nearly four years as music director of Houston’s Opera in the Heights; he won numerous awards in 2013 for his work there.

Finnish composer Einojuhani Rautavaara, 87, died on July 27 in a Helsinki hospital following complications after hip surgery. The composer of 14 concertos, 8 symphonies, and 7 operas, among many other works, he wrote in a rather mystical style employing romanticism, 12-tone, and recorded music and was the country’s most famous composer since Sibelius.

Choral conductor Robert Page, 89, died of a bone infection in Oakland PA on August 7. He took over the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus in 1971, and from 1979 to 2005 he transformed the Mendelssohn Choir in Pittsburgh into one of the nation’s best.

Choral conductor Gregg Smith, 84, died of a heart attack on July 12 in Bronxville NY. For over 50 years he led the Gregg Smith Singers, whom he founded in 1955. He was especially interested in works by contemporary composers active in America as well as theater, folk song, chamber opera, and reviving American works no one else was interested in. He recorded over 100 albums for various labels.
Soprano Maralin Niska, 89, died on July 9 at her home in Santa Fe NM. She was a mainstay at New York City Opera beginning in the 1960s, debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in 1970, performed in the first “Live from the Met” TV broadcast in 1977, and sang the role of Madame Butterfly when Santa Fe Opera opened its second opera house in 1968 (the current one is the third). From 1978 she lived in Santa Fe, where she was renowned as a teacher.

Violinist Paul Robertson, 63, died in England from heart disease on July 26. He was lead violinist of the Medici Quartet, which he founded in 1971.

after about 20 minutes the music took on a sweeping power. Witches and skeletons flew down the aisles and filled the stage. At that point, there was no choice but to stop grasping for a plot and just delight in the pageantry. Perhaps The Witches of Venice is just a good old-fashioned fairy tale.

The music, performed by six offstage players and conducted by Viswa Subbaraman, was tuneful and easy to like. There was fine singing and clever dancing, and every passageway in the theater got taken over by the action. 12-year old boy soprano Oliver Nathaniel sang with the resonant purity of an old world choir boy. Members of the company’s Young Artist Program handled the balance of the singing duties. The Capital District Youth Chorale joined in the final scenes.

The principal dancers were drawn from Armitage’s own company. Kira Petersen and Yusaku Komori had numerous interesting pas de deux as the wind and the pigeon. The tall and elegant Randall Smith filled a variety of roles. As the Chandelier (you read that right), he had a clever duet with Akhila Venkat, the plant girl.

Wondering again how to classify this creation, a comparison to The Nutcracker comes to mind. As in that masterpiece the plot gets set aside midway through for sundry frivolities, and the finale is a procession celebrating young love. There’s really nothing new under the sun, is there?
Vienna VA

Welcome to a behind-the-scenes look at the production of a new opera, L’Oranzebe. There’s a jumble of show-stopping arias performed by singers frantically trying to vivify stock characters in a rather murky drama. The choreography is nonsensical, and the undulating dolphin costume props are a bit lascivious. Not to worry! L’Oranzebe is a fictitious opera, the launching of which is the central concern of L’Opera Seria by composer Florian Leopold Gassmann and librettist Ranieri de’ Calzabigi. This show-within-the show design pulls back the curtain on how opera operates, with all the nuts and bolts exposed. Almost every character is a diva, whether performing on stage, laboring away from the spotlight, or raving through the theater as claqueurs. The lunatics run this asylum, and the audience is caught in a web of irresistible madness.

A prolific composer of operas and instrumental music, Gassmann had become a specialist in opera buffa when this three-act comedy for music had its premiere in Vienna in 1769. As luck would have it, the US premiere also occurred in Vienna (Virginia) at the intimate Barns at Wolf Trap on July 15, 2016. Director Matthew Ozawa oversaw the editing of a work that normally lasts four hours with two intermissions. The action flows quickly and demands constant attention, lest you miss a sight gag or a zinger. Ozawa’s setting is in a modern European opera house with the characters sporting a contemporary look until L’Oranzebe turns the clock back to the 18th Century of Gassmann. This striking contrast further accentuates the comedy, whose broad targets appeal to the serious opera fan and the casual listener alike.

The expression “a fish rots from the head down” applies to this hapless company of kooks determined to stage L’Oranzebe. Impresario Fallito, played by bass-baritone Richard Ollarsaba, is a shady, slick con man who seems to possess a new silk scarf for every hour of the day. He takes great pride in messing with the oversized egos of composer Sospiro (tenor Jonas Hacker) and librettist Delirio (baritone Kihun Yoon). Pages are ripped from the score; new arias and lyrics are demanded on the day of the premiere. No problem. Simply recycle past ideas and insert some “goat trills” for the tenor lead, Ritornello (Alasdair Kent), then pander to the sopranos Stonatrilla, Smorfiosa, and Porporina (Clarissa Lyons, Mane Galoyan, and Amy Owens) with glitzy vocal ornaments. Ritornello, unfortunately, is a dolt who can’t learn a new lyric to
save his life. And all the eardrum-shattering high notes awarded the sopranos won't satisfy them or rescue *L’Oranzebe* from failure on opening night.

Amid all the zaniness on stage, Wolf Trap Opera Orchestra conductor Eric Melear reassuringly led his trimmed forces and delivered a decisive fist pump during Act 1 in response to the line, “A diva can always marry a conductor.” Harpsichordist David Hanlon remained an unflappable presence off to the side of the stage, supporting the orchestra and assisting in the rehearsals for the new last-minute arias. Yet it was bass Christian Zaremba as the dancing master Passagallo who drew the loudest applause during the curtain call. A chain-smoking schemer, he talks Fallito into hiring additional dancers. One “hoofer” looks like a refugee from a Jane Fonda Workout video, while another adopts Run DMC-style hip-hop poses. Fallito (translation: failed) splits, leaving the cast high, dry, and broke. What’s in a name? Stonatrina — caterwauling, out-of-tune; Smorfiosa — a simpering coquette; Poporina — purple-faced. At the tumultuous end of Act II, the cry rings out, “Opera was invented by a devil to be a curse on mankind.” That explains why *L’Opera Seria* is so devilishly funny.

CHARLES MCCARDELL

**Mascagni: Iris**

**Annandale-on-Hudson NY**

“God himself couldn’t have written better music than Pietro, but that story is impossible.” Thus Puccini on Mascagni’s “Japanese” opera, *Iris*.

Puccini was Bard College’s core composer for the latest Summerscape festival. Puccini was right about the scenario. It can be a symbolist mess, with a hapless, barely teenaged heroine whose sordid sexual abuse suggests pedophilia. Its murky metaphors include personifications of Japanese cities to baffle the audience.

But Puccini was also right about the music. It has some of Mascagni’s most inspired work, beginning and ending with his glowing chorus, ‘Hymn to the Sun.’ The music has a few Japanese touches, including an offstage samisen; but generally it’s more like a musical version of Stile Floreale—that splendid Italian outgrowth of Art Nouveau. Mascagni’s vocal idiom is a continuous arioso that, if it lacks detachable arias, is always attractive. His work contains real innovations too, as in the whole-tone harmonies and themes of the prelude to Act III.

The production was first-rate musically. Soprano Talise Trevigne in the title role sang beautifully with steady pitch. Her acting was a match—every gesture just right. Matthew Bohler as her father and Douglas Williams as the pimp Kyoto were both forceful and convincing in unsympathetic roles. Gerard Schneider as Osaka, her ambivalent lover, sang with touching emotion. Bard’s chorus was musically and dramatically up to its several challenges, and the American Symphony was responsive to Mascagni’s most delicate and complex scoring. Botstein’s conducting gave the music room to breathe, opening up splendidly at the climaxes.

Two words describe Director James Darrah’s vision of the work: utterly radiant. It was among the most beautiful opera productions I’ve ever seen. Despite its setting, *Iris* isn’t especially Japanese; thus the sets avoided Early Benihana kitsch. Japanese touches were subtle; for examples, the elegant use of pantomime and silhouettes and the working girls’ quarters in Act II finished with dark red lacquer.

*American Record Guide*
The handling of the finale was representative. It can be a depressing scene: Iris is dying in a garbage pile. As the day dawns, the chorus recaps the opening ‘Hymn to the Sun’. Darrah had Iris gradually ascend to the peak of the heap, and as the sun rose—here, a refulgent effect—her dying gesture was a salute to the sun. The choir, now gold-lit, surrounded her, singing some of the greatest music Mascagni ever wrote. The effect was overwhelming, a musical and visual climax of the highest order.

Over the years, Bard’s opera productions have sometimes mired down in awkward or obscure symbolism. But never has the audience’s intelligence been insulted by Eurotrash stupidity or Regietheater’s aggressive idiocy—Valkyries on tricycles, Tosca taking place in Borneo, etc. Bard’s directors respect the operas they mount. Because of artists who know their theater, even Iris’s dubious story was transfigured into something poignant and inspiring.

Indeed, there is a recurring problem with operas made from powerful popular American plays (Andre Previn’s Streetcar Named Desire is an example): it’s hard for the score to compete with the searing, soaring text. The audience is caught up in the play, and the score becomes part of the background, as with movies. Still, Ward’s score for The Crucible is pretty good stuff, reminiscent of Korngold at his theatrical best. Perhaps no American composer has had a better knack for setting words naturally. And though much of The Crucible is lightly sung text, the orchestral counterpoint is symphonic in sweep. It’s old fashioned but full of tension and sting, and there are just enough fine solos and ensembles to open things up.

Artistic and General Director Francesca Zambello, who directed The Crucible, made as good a case for this opera as I’ve encountered; it was beautifully sung in a fine, classic production with superb acting.

Librettist Bernard Stambler was quite faithful to Miller’s script, often using the same phrases. In the necessary paring down, he tightened the theme onto the triangle between John and Elizabeth Proctor and their servant girl, Abigail Williams.

As John Proctor, baritone Brian Mulligan portrayed the pathos of his character with searing intensity. Jamie Barton has become a sought-after mezzo-soprano, and it was easy to see why: her Elizabeth Proctor was a complex character, wholly sympathetic and radiant; and her voice was rich and powerful. Brazilian soprano Ariana Wehr was impressively fierce as Abigail. Like much of the large cast, Wehr is a member of the Young Artists Program here, one of the largest such programs in the world. Tenor Jay Hunter Morris was ferocious as Judge Danforth.

Zambello’s period production was atmospheric. Its strength lay in the taut dramatic portrayals she elicited from each of the singers. This is an opera that demands acting skills of the highest order, and that’s what we got here.

The biggest recent change at Glimmerglass is the sound from the pit. Under the stewardship of Joseph Colaneri, who took over as music director two seasons ago, the orchestra has become more robust, with finer texture. For The Crucible conductor Nicole Paiement led a tight, energetic performance.

The season included a very traditional Bohème, directed by E Loren Meeker, with

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**Ward: The Crucible**

**Cooperstown NY**

Robert Ward’s 1961 opera, The Crucible, was the most effective and interesting opera of last summer’s adventurous season at the Glimmerglass Festival, near Cooperstown NY. Based on the classic Arthur Miller play, recently revived on Broadway to considerable acclaim, the Pulitzer-winning opera has never disappeared from the repertory, yet has never enjoyed anything like the success of the play.
singers from the Young Artists Program in most of the roles. It was a nice tradeoff: the production lost some of the virtuosity that comes with established singers, but younger artists brought vigor and authenticity to the characters—who are, after all, young artists. Colaneri conducted with great energy.

La Gazza Ladra (The Thieving Magpie, by Rossini) is rarely performed. One reason is that it’s hard for modern audiences to take it seriously as a melodrama. Director Peter Kazaras tried to solve this problem by ignoring the serious aspect of the plot and adding a whole absurd avian subtext with “the magpie” (a dancer) on stage orchestrating things, with many of the characters costumed outrageously as birds and generally camping it up. It didn’t really work.

Christopher Alden’s production of Sondheim’s Sweeney Todd, updated to what seemed to be the 70s, was dark, surreal, and seditious; but the added layers eventually got in the way. Sometimes less is more.

THEATRE OF EARLY MUSIC
TORONTO

How very curious to be in North America’s most multicultural city and attend a performance (somewhat like music theatre with two actors joining conductor Daniel Taylor and the choir and orchestra of the Theatre of Early Music) of The Coronation of King George II, as the Republicans’ raucous love-in in Cleveland had concluded and the Democrats were in their second day of systemic acrimony with a little help from Russian hackers. The late July concert was part of the Toronto Summer Music festival.

The participants on both sides of the footlights were almost exclusively WASP (myself amongst them). Why would other races and cultures want to witness a re-enactment of a king, whose wealth, power, and privilege stemmed solely from heredity, ascending the throne? Well, for the music, of course!

Already knowing Taylor as a countertenor of the first rank, I was more than a little interested in seeing and hearing how his extraordinary vocal skills translated into conducting. There was little to quibble with. The varied repertoire spoke with much more authority than the interjections of the Archbishop (Alan Gallichan, well-robed and stately) and the “congregation’s” dutiful replies. Bill Coleman was the resplendent monarch. Neither player added anything to the artistic result.

After a lively verbal greeting from Taylor to the assemblage, which included a “dress rehearsal” of the coming Jerusalem’ by Hubert Parry (feeling like the classical version of the hope-it-never-sees-the-light-of-day reality show, “So You Think You Can Sing”), the hour-long pageantry began in earnest.

The opening trumpet fanfare on period instruments proved yet again that their modern counterparts yield far more accurate pitches per bar. The procession of drums ushered in the instrumentalists with appropriate pomp, followed by the choir’s full-blooded rendition of Parry’s ‘I Was Glad’. The orchestra served up its contributions with zest and spirit, beginning with one of several works by Handel, the Overture and March from Ode for St Cecilia’s Day.

The choir was a finely balanced ensemble wherever it was placed around the hall; particularly effective was the surround sound setting facing inwards from opposite aisles. Only very occasionally (for example, in Handel’s ‘The King Shall Rejoice’) were the final consonants somewhat untidy, but Taylor never failed to ensure that the last words and sounds of all the choral offerings were perfectly rendered. Zadok the Priest was nothing short of thrilling, demonstrating Handel’s ability to rise to any occasion with magnificent art.

A coronation of a different type was also in the works as Canadian violinist Jonathan Crow prepares to begin his tenure as Toronto Summer Music’s new artistic director next season. He is also concertmaster of the Toronto Symphony and a founding member of the New Orford String Quartet. “We have a responsibility to keep the art form going,” he said during a recent interview. “You can expect more collaborations than ever before.” Those forward-thinking sentiments seemed at one with the Coronation’s final offering, ‘Worthy Is the Lamb’, which Taylor infused with reverence and passion.

With “Amen” still ringing in my ears, I made my way out to the street, immediately in the company of “all men” from every corner of the planet. Here’s hoping that Crow and his colleagues will find the ways and means to bring a greater variety of audience members and performers under his artistic tent.

JAMES PAULK

American Record Guide

Music in Concert
Sometimes I wonder if people are right when they accuse me of being a closeted conservative. Since I have always voted democratic and probably always will, I don’t think I’m a political conservative. In fact, I’m not even sure I approve of the constitution and the way our government is set up. I think the parliamentary system is better, and I don’t think the idea of a president is necessarily good. (It certainly hasn’t worked out very well, because the congress can be of the opposite party and block everything he tries to accomplish.) I even like the idea of a king and queen. Some of my best friends are monarchists. “Democracy” (as practiced less than preached) doesn’t strike me as all that attractive. It means allowing all my stupid neighbors as much say in the way the country is run as my favorite intellectuals have. Or, to be realistic about it, it gives everyone the illusion that because he votes for a candidate every few years he has some say in how things are run. In reality, he has no say. Democracy is largely an illusion—but one that most Americans seem to believe in.

I have attended Episcopal and Methodist churches all my life. Neither was a hotbed of conservative theology, and the Episcopal Church is still quite liberal on matters of morality and justice. I support the church wholeheartedly.

But I am a social conservative in some respects, and I am certainly a cultural conservative. I want to conserve the best elements of our society and our culture. I dislike consumerism and want to promote healthy neighborhoods and human interaction. I don’t like the idea that everything is bought and sold—that we can shop for a husband or wife or friends (or even our church) the way we shop for everything else. And I have always been absolutely sure that the “taste” of the masses is a lack of taste. One can hardly go wrong by avoiding anything popular—from music to restaurants to supermarkets—and of course, fashions. Anything trendy or fashionable is probably—by definition—stupid and mindless.

I found myself agreeing with a recent article that said we should never drink anything that people didn’t drink 500 years ago. That leaves us with beer and wine, tea and coffee, fruit juices and milk.

I don’t think the great achievements of our culture are subject to “the market”. Shakespeare is great, and we must teach our offspring to read and respect him. There is a lot of other great literature (including the Bible), and none of it has anything to do with popularity. Of course the same applies to music. The music that seems to “sell” is junk—but so is almost anything that sells in huge, massive quantities. Most people have no taste or judgement, and they must be trained or shamed into paying attention to the great things. An elite must lead the way.

The same applies, of course, to language. It is utterly blind to argue that “language is always changing,” and we just have to change with it. How can anyone be stupid and naive enough to believe that change is always good, always benevolent? Given human nature, change is usually degeneration—it’s almost always for the worse. Here I am a screaming conservative. English is a glorious language, but we are going to have to fight to keep it that way. The way it is changing now (say, over the last 30 or 40 years) it is losing a lot of its power and punch. Vocabularies get smaller and smaller (even on the SAT tests!); people are less and less exact in what they say and in word choice, and where we used to have 10 or 15 words to cover a situation—with their various shades of meaning—now we have one or two. Language is becoming impoverished, and language is the necessary basis for culture—and even thought! As the language goes, the culture goes—and it is going, believe me.

I blame television for much of this. TV news (and almost everything else on TV) is notorious for miserable usage. The only way to write well is to read a lot. Ignore the latest books, which are poorly written (probably by TV watchers) and hardly edited at all. But good reading is the essential thing for good writing. You absorb grammar and usage best from the written page—from reading. But people really don’t read anymore, so naturally they are picking up their grammar and usage from elsewhere—mainly television, but also mass-ignorant places like the Internet and “social media.”

My strong convictions on this matter cause
me to react with positive hatred to linguistic relativists and anyone who says “Well, language is always changing”—as if we should accept that; as if all change is good and necessary. Since language is losing its precision, and in our egalitarian hell we allow any idiot to write and speak almost anywhere, I want to grab those linguists and English teachers by the throat and yell in their faces, “Don’t you care that a whole culture is going down the drain—language, music, art, and literature? Why didn’t you teach the rules?” Yes, the rules. Language, like anything else (including music) has rules that must be mastered and obeyed before anything creative can happen. Rock guitarist who have “mastered” three chords are not gifted or charismatic or creative—they are duds, and anyone in a position to say so should—and loudly! The so-called “contemporary composer” of would-be “classics” also has to learn to write traditional music before he can offer anything creative or original, just as a would-be poet must master plain English before he can add anything to it. And an “artist” must master traditional drawing and painting before anyone needs to bother with his latest ideas.

In other words, tradition is necessary. It is the basis for everything else. Tradition can be alive, needn’t be hidebound; but there is no creativity without tradition and out of continuity with tradition. And true creativity and freedom is strongest where tradition is most secure. Think of religion—classic Judaism, the Episcopal Church—and our readers know many examples among artists and composers.

The people at the symphony who run the May Festival have decided that tradition is dead. To replace James Conlon, who essentially respected the tradition and hardly ever stepped outside of it, they have developed a “new leadership model.” The conductors will mostly be “guests”; and some will be specialists (as in PPP—ugh!). And they have hired someone to “curate immersive concert experiences”. Is that English? What can it mean? They gave an example: a May Festival is planned with the theme, “Dream Project”. It will include Mendelssohn’s Midsummer Night’s Dream music and Elgar’s Dream of Gerontius. How brilliant! The word “dream” turns up in both! Wow! So that’s what it means to “curate” something! You could have fooled me. Any idiot can make theme programs by putting words together.

“To curate immersive concert experiences” is pure nonsense—and it’s not English. It’s trendy talk; it’s TV language. It’s another vain attempt to popularize music that will never again be popular. And no one who understands such talk could possibly be interested in an orchestra or a choral festival.

Excuse me, I have to go curate dinner now (marinated flank steak, fried kohlrabi, whole wheat linguine).

I have complained in this space that our orchestras are being encouraged to hire “rap” performers for their concerts. Now it seems that a composer (Mike Mills) has written a “Concerto for Violin, Rock Band, and String Orchestra,” and it has been performed by the Toronto Symphony and at the Aspen Festival—and is scheduled all over the country. Most American orchestras are perfectly happy to prostitute themselves in the hope of attracting young people. As we have pointed out before, you can’t build a loyal audience for classical music by playing rock or rap. The most you can do is get a few more youthful faces at one concert. And what have you told them? That rock is the great music—so great that the orchestra is putting it where Beethoven usually resides. That the orchestra management wants popularity, and their usual music is no longer popular. That all musicians aspire to the exalted height of rock and rap musicians. (I am sure a lot of the people who work in orchestra publicity really think that!)

In fact, it’s not about the music anymore. It’s about the organization. But why keep the symphony orchestra alive? The orchestra exists for the music, and if that is degraded the orchestra might as well die.

So here I am again, the cultural conservative, nagging the orchestras to preserve the great music and not to smear themselves with excrement. Let them accuse you of living in the past and playing “old music”. You know it’s a lot better than currently popular music, so why should that bother you? And if fewer and fewer people seem to know that, your audience will be shrinking—and you have to accept that, too. You can’t build an audience for a symphony orchestra by playing pop. Years and decades of “Pops” concerts have proved that: almost no one starts there and moves on to “Symphony” concerts.

VROOM
**ABEL: The Drexel Manuscript**
Petr Wagner, gamba
Accent 24305 — 77 minutes

Carl Friedrich Abel (1723-87) was an important player of the viola da gamba and wrote a number of works for that instrument. 29 pieces make up the manuscript collected by Joseph William Drexel and now in the New York Public Library, and they are played in order on this recording. The first 21 are in D, followed by 6 in D minor and ending with 2 in A.

There are two previous issues of this material on my shelves—by Suzanne Heinrich (Hyperion 67628; Jan/Feb 2008) and by Paolo Pandolfo (Glossa 920410; July/Aug 2009). Comparing these three recordings isn’t easy, since they are all arranged in different orders. Pandolfo gives us two 10-movement suites in D, separated by a 6-movement suite in D minor and finishing with the two A-major pieces. He gives us the original numbers in the manuscript, as does Wagner. Heinrich gives us WKO numbers that differ entirely from those in the Drexel manuscript, though most of them are the same pieces. All of these players do a good deal of improvisatory decoration, with markedly different effect. Pandolfo has a certain roughness of articulation that tends to turn me off in rapid passages, yet he has a variety of interpretation that is in some ways more attractive than Wagner’s fine yet less varied interpretations. Wagner is a bit more accurate overall and more consistently lively and amusing. Heinrich comes perhaps the closest to Abel’s original notations and is more consistent in taking the written repeats, resulting in only 24 pieces rather than the 27 and 28 played by the others—yet perhaps we get closer to Abel with her than with the boys.

As you see, there is a lot to study here. I find virtues in all three recordings as well as occasional vices and am happy to have all three, though Wagner is the liveliest of the bunch. On the other hand, his improvising makes me feel I’m perhaps getting more of him than I am of Abel. These are fine pieces full of imagination and variety and can take a number of different approaches. The recordings are fine in quality and played to the hilt.

_D MOORE_

**ABOS: Sacred Pieces**
Cologne Academy/ Michael Alexander Willens
CPO 777 978—68 minutes

Though Girolamo Abos (1715-60) was born on Malta, his professional career was in Naples. While he was known as an opera composer, this selection of his sacred music with orchestra, subtitled “A Maltese Christmas”, includes settings of the Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel (the Canticle of Zachariah, Luke 1:68-79) for a five-voice choir, a Magnificat for four-voice choir, both with an orchestra, and the Messa a due cori from 1756 with a double-choir of five voices each and a double orchestra. Many of the melodic gestures in his music will be familiar from the more often recorded sacred music by Pergolesi.

The choirs are one voice per part, and the number of violins is also relatively small (eight, divided into first and second parts); only the Magnificat includes a separate part for violas. Pairs of oboes, horns, and trumpets are added for occasional color. The instruments never over-balance the voices on this recording, made at a concert at the Valletta International Baroque Festival on Malta. All performers are quite capable and blend well, and Willens has a clear understanding of the importance of melody in this Neapolitan Galant style and even makes the obligatory fugues sound interesting.

The booklet offers an excellent introduction to this obscure composer and full texts and translations. There may not be any real connection between these specific pieces and Christmas, and the whole recording would be enjoyable anytime of the year.

_BREWER_

**AKIMENKO: Violin Sonatas & Pieces**
Tatiana Chulochnikova; Anastasia Dedik, p
Toccata 352—65 minutes

Theodore Akimenko was born in Pisky, Ukraine, in 1876 and died in Paris in 1945; Balakirev, Liapounov, Liadov, and Rimsky-Korsakov were his teachers. He taught composition and theory in St Petersburg from 1914 to 1923 and was Stravinsky’s first composition teacher. 1924 found him in Prague at the Dragomanov Ukrainian Higher Pedagogical Institute. Though he went to France in 1928 and
remained there until the end of his life, he became more and more a specifically Ukrainian composer, setting folk songs and writing nationalist music.

I’d never guess that the First Violin Sonata, from 1907, was written by a graduate of Russian schools. The first movement is full of long, singing melodies, and it reminds me some of Schubert, in soul though not in body. The other three movements have a marked impressionist harmonic influence, and the finale is the only one that has a noticeably Slavic feel. The textures are very clean. He took no ravishing flights of emotion, but contented himself with the clarity of his ideas and a refined, gentlemanly approach.

‘Melodie Russe’ and the first of the Three Pieces (c. 1909) are pleasant miniatures; but the third, based on the hopak, sounds artificial. The other Three Pieces, written sometime before 1912, are heartfelt, polished masterpieces. The Second Sonata is from 1911; the harmonies are more advanced than in the First; it’s more episodic, and there’s more subtlety, mystery, and artful hesitation. In fact, it reminds me a bit of Janacek’s chamber music. Akimenko’s melodic gifts are once again on display.

The playing is listenable, but definitely not the greatest. The violinist has a thin tone, and her intonation is often wide of the mark. In a few places, the pianist’s hands aren’t coordinated; I don’t know if that’s supposed to be an interpretive choice, but it sounds like she’s struggling with a slightly awkward passage instead of practicing it out. The sound is serviceable; notes are in English.  

**d’ALBERT: Quartets (2)**

Reinhold Quartet

CPO 555 012—66 minutes

Eugene d’Albert (1864-1932) was born in Glasgow to an English mother and a father with Italian and French roots. Much of his early training was in London, but he disliked England and its language, settling later in Germanic areas (Vienna, Weimar, Berlin); around World War I he became a Swiss citizen. His career was divided between piano performance and composition (mainly opera), though he was better known in his time as a pianist—indeed, a student of Liszt. He led what is described as a tumultuous life, and I would be remiss if I failed to mention he tallied six marriages before all was said and done.

These are his only string quartets, and both are early (1887, dedicated to Joachim; 1893, dedicated to Brahms). The two works met with guarded enthusiasm from the dedicatees, and both quartets would probably have benefitted from a reworking based on their suggestions. But that was not to be, and indeed chamber music became no more than a passing fad for d’Albert. The quartets show debt to Brahms and Beethoven, but also contain passages of great rhythmic complexity and fast harmonic rhythm, where triads are swiftly juxtaposed. I will go against the grain, though—countering Joachim and Brahms—by asserting that these are quite fine pieces. Unlike works of, say, Reger, where indisputably finely crafted music can become turgid and a bit boring, these quartets are exciting and engaging, easily able to hold one’s interest. If one shows up on the second half of a program, don’t leave at intermission.

The Reinhold Quartet, all members of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, plays with lots of energy and enthusiasm. Certainly a lot of my admiration for the music comes from their forceful playing, which shows the quartets in the best light. Warmly recommended to lovers of late romantic chamber music.

**ARIOSTI: Arias**

Filippo Mineccia, ct; Ensemble Odyssee/ Andrea Frigg

Glossa 923506—75 minutes

The title of this release is “London”, and a good amount of the music here is from operas that Attilio Ariosti (1666-1729) wrote in that city. The instrumental forces in Ensemble Odyssee (including pairs of trumpets, oboes, recorders, and bassoons) are modeled on the Haymarket Theatre orchestra that Handel, Bononcini, and Ariosti wrote for. It’s important to have such a robust ensemble to animate this theatrical, crowd-pleasing music.

Countertenor Filippo Mineccia takes on Ariosti’s operatic characters with a mix of gusto and finesse. He’s quite at home in the ringing power and beauty of ‘Sorga Pur L’Opressa Roma’ (from Vespasiano, London 1724); and he sets his mysteriously clouded and masked voice over a stealthy instrumental walking bass in ‘Bella Mia, Lasica Ch’io Vada’ (I Gloriosi Presagi Di Scipione Africano, Vienna 1704).

Ariosti was a Servite monk who travelled among courts in Europe as a diplomat and was
also a virtuosic viola d’amore player. Overtures burst with energy, strong text depictions abound, and the music is varied and of high quality. For example, ‘Aure Care’ (from Tito Manlio, London 1717) conjures up a bucolic scene set to a triple-meter pastoral lit with recorders; and the Mother’s aria ‘Quando Il Mondo Fabbrico’ (from the oratorio La Madre De’ Maccabei, Vienna 1704) is a somber reflection on the resignation of a grieving parent.

Drama, variety, superb technical ease, vocal acting, fearless execution. It’s all here in Filippo Mineccia’s carefree command of a powerful voice and Andrea Friggi’s strong conducting. Notes, texts, translations.

C. MOORE

AUBER: Overtures
Cannes Orchestra/ Wolfgang Dorner
Naxos 573553—64 minutes

Daniel-François-Ésprit Auber had a unique talent, one less common among composers than you might think: the ability to make audiences smile. His music is mostly light, effervescent, and full of high spirits. There isn’t a lot of introspection or emotional depth—well, basically none in the pieces on this program—but who cares? Many composers can make us cry; far fewer can lift our spirits. The music here is all lively, bouncy, vigorous, and well-crafted—great curtain-raisers for the operas comiques they once introduced. Except for Fra Diavolo, occasionally, and a ballet version of Marco Spada, none of these operas are still performed. Auber’s comic style had its place and time in mid-19th Century France, and maybe it no longer travels well in the early 21st Century. The good news is that the overtures are still a barrel of fun. I’ve enjoyed the bits of Auber I’ve heard over the years, and was happy to see this disc in my review pile; but actually, listening to an hour-plus of rollicking, bouncy, snare-drum-cymbals-bass-drum goodness is a bit much. Better to take two or three at a time.

Conductor Dorner keeps the energy up, but sometimes it gets a little dutiful and generic—more Germanic than Gallic, but still with plenty of thrust and parry in the vigorous passages. All of this is helped by Naxos’s resonant, warm, slightly bass-heavy sonics. The big bass drum, so critical in this music, comes through with satisfying floor-shaking power without being boomy.

Some of these—Fra Diavolo, Le Domino Noir, The Bronze Horseman, and Marco Spada—have been recorded before, sometimes in performances with more wit, French insouciance, and charm. I’m thinking in particular of a blistering Chicago Symphony/Fritz Reiner reading of Fra Diavolo from one of the CSO’s annual fund-raiser CDs. But you’re going to have to do a lot of searching and collecting of bits and pieces to get so much Auberian goodness in one place. For a lot of us, Naxos has short-cut the task by offering one-stop shopping. Oh—the label also calls this “Overtures 1”, so expect more overtures to come.

HANSEN

BACEWICZ: Quartets (7)
Silesian Quartet
Chandos 10904 [2CD] 133 minutes

Born of Polish and Lithuanian parents, Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-69) studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and began writing in a vivacious, energetic, often mercurial or playful neoclassical idiom that teems with invention and polyphonic intricacy, sometimes to the point of a barely-in-control manic exuberance. Her tunes and rhythmic inflections are often drawn from Polish folk songs and dances (much as Bartok and others reworked indigenous music of their homelands in the early decades of the last century). The upheavals of World War II darkened her music somewhat (especially noticeable in, for example, the grave poignance of the magnificent III in her 1952 First Piano Quintet). Later, with the emergence of the post-War Eastern European avant-gardists like Penderecki and Lutosławski, she somewhat tentatively explored post-tonal chromatic and sonoristic techniques. This stylistic evolution is reflected in Bacewicz’s seven quartets, which are evenly spaced out from 1938 to 1965—most of her career—and constitute her biggest contribution to the chamber music genre, though she wrote prolifically in many other genres, turning out half-a-dozen violin sonatas and much solo piano music as well as seven violin concertos and many symphonic works. (Most of this music is by now on CD—see our index for reviews.)

Chandos’s annotations offer a thorough description of each of the quartets, and I won’t try to summarize that here. Suffice it to say that there’s much to attract and hold attention in this quartet cycle, and anyone drawn to modern-era examples of the medium should hear it. Bacewicz does not rival Bartok or Shostakovich or for that matter Hindemith or...
Piston. But she will certainly interest and please anyone who likes the quartets of Tippett and Martinu; and, indeed, her quartets might be loosely described as mid-way between those two in style and personality.

Collectors will want to be aware that all but the first two of Bacewicz’s quartets came out on Muza LPs (from Poland), and there are now CDs of them on Olympia, Acte Præbable, and other labels, as well as a new complete cycle on Naxos. I haven’t heard all of the recent releases, but the ones I have heard are quite good. The Silesian Quartet on this new Chandos is certainly competitive, playing with verve, engagement, and polish, and is recorded in detailed, warm, airy sonics that rival or surpass any others I know.

BACEWICZ: *Violin Concerto*; see Collections

BACH: *Cello Concerto*; see Collections

BACH, CPE: *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3*

The six cantatas that make up the challenges of the six cantatas that make up the Christmas Oratorio series for the feast of Pentecost. There is a total of ten surviving cantatas for that feast, but most of them were intended for the two festivals that followed Pentecost itself, and it is from the latter group that these have been selected. The four are: 68, *Also hat Gott die Welt Geliebt*; 173, *Erhohntes Fleisch und Blut*; 174, *Ich Liebe den Höchsten von Ganzem Genute*; 184, *Erwunsschter Freudlichen*. All four are of modest length—the longest just over 21 minutes, the shortest 13.

They make an interesting program of their own, thanks to the variety of materials they bring together. The standard groupings of recitative with aria are modified in two of the four cantatas, where two arias enclose a recitative between them. One cantata employs only two soloists, two of them call for three, and only one uses all four. One cantata (173) has an initial recitative and then four “arias” (two are duets). A chorus is called for in each, but in different ways.

Only one has an opening sinfonia, but that proves to be a fascinating surprise. Cantata 174 opens with—what is that I hear?—oh, why yes, it’s the first movement of the *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3* expanded with three oboes and two horns. A wonderful puzzler for your next name-that-tune party!

As does Kuijken in his series, Milnes follows the Rifkin Doctrine and uses one singer per part in the choral sections. There are pros and cons to that, but it does suggest the intimacy of small and carefully controlled church performances of Bach’s day—vocally, anyway, since Milnes can muster as many as 13 string players, plus 13 others, all led by him from the organ.

Among the singers here Mauch is clearly the strongest personality, and her singing is outstanding. Bertin and Daniels are quite fine, but Saragosse has a somewhat undistinguished voice. But all of them approach their assignments with a fine sensitivity to the texts.

The instrumental work is very fine. Milnes offers incisive leadership, but not without a feeling for rhythmic subtleties and even grace. Fine sound. Excellent notes, with full texts and translations.

BACH: *Christmas Oratorio*

Rachel Harnisch, Anke Bondunng, Maximilian Schmitt, Christian Immler, Bavarian Radio Choir, Berlin Academy/ Peter Dijkstra

BR 900512 [2CD] 144:20

I recently reviewed Dijkstra’s BR recording of Handel’s *Messiah* (M/J 2016). I was most impressed by his treatment of choral movements, pointing up interesting details and achieving unusual nuances. His conducting was sensible and intelligent, often effectively brisk and vigorous, but with only occasional displays of new insights—mainly in those choruses.

I find myself reacting much the same way this time. Everything is tidy and efficient. But the challenges of the six cantatas that make up this work are much fewer than with *Messiah*. The maturing of the period-performance movement has given musicians reliable standards and the technique to function confidently. All that is needed now is solid musicianship to produce a thoroughly satisfying performance.

Certainly there is solid musicianship here. The four soloists are not familiar to me and are
not truly exceptional, but their work is reliable and satisfying. The chorus is again superb, and the period orchestra is full of sensitive and alert players. There were some moments that caught my attention as outstanding, such as the tender and moving Sinfonia to the second cantata.

Period-style recordings of this work have been rare in the last few years, so it is good to have this new one. As with his Messiah, one will not be cheated by investing in this recording. I would place this Bach set a little higher in its competition than I did the Handel release. In this case, the “period” competition goes back to Suzuki (BIS), to which I am particularly partial, as well as to Gardiner (DG) and Herreweghe (Virgin). Dijkstra’s recording seems to me competitive if not superior.

I will say, though, that the booklet is muddled. There are good notes in German and English, but the text is given only in German, without translation—a very foolish omission for a label seeking international circulation—and the track information is not connected to the text pages, making selections difficult to find. These things could be done much better.

BARKER

BACH: Concertos (all)
Musica Amphion/ Pieter-Jan Belder; Amsterdam Bach Soloists/ Henk Rubingh; New Bach Collegium Musicum/ Burkhard Gläetzner; Netherlands Bach Ensemble/ Krijn Koetsveld; St Christopher Chamber Orchestra/ Donatas Katkus; Insieme Strumentale of Rome/ Giorgio Sasso; Leipzig Gewandhaus/ Masur
Brilliant 95303 [9CD] 9:15

This album contains all of Bach’s concertos, including the Brandenburg Concertos. JS was the master recycler. In this collection we have recordings of the same work transcribed for different solo instruments, some with different catalog numbers (e.g., Brandenburg Concertos as keyboard concertos), some with the same one (four different transcriptions of S 1055).

The period-instrument Musica Amphion, which Pieter-Jan Belder conducts from the harpsichord, has an ensemble in Brandenburg Concertos 2 & 3 that is so perfect the players sound utterly at ease with one another. Their playing is a model of articulation, phrasing, rhythmic lyricism, concerto grosso-type contrasts, and balances that make the counterpoint among trumpet, flute, oboe, violin solo, strings, and especially the bass line not just clear, and not just an intellectual exercise, but an easy, natural absorption of all that’s going on because there is no spotlighting or showboating.

What a pity, then, that the 2006 engineering in a Dutch church destroys the ability to hear these qualities in the other four Brandenburgs. This is especially true in 1 and 4, where hooty ambient flutes bury the thin strings, and in 6, where all those lower strings producing a garbled muddle. The larger the ensemble, the more blurred the music. Only 5 feels under-rehearsed. The Brandenburgs take up two of the nine albums. For the complete Brandenburgs, I enjoy the modern Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center on Delos and the period Giardino Armonico’s 1996 set on Teldec (also in a huge Warner box).

What a relief to turn to Thomas Zehetmair’s stunning 1994 performances of the four solo violin concertos. Superbly engineered ambience and balances reveal light, crisp, short-stroked, exquisitely lyrical phrases, filled with expression that inhales and exhales like natural breathing. Rhythms are buoyant, yet the lyricism floats on air. The Amsterdam Bach Soloists use modern instruments, but Zehetmair gives them the transparency and crispness of the finest period instruments. As a soloist, he uses vibrato most judiciously—one has to listen carefully to be aware of it (indeed, good use of vibrato does not draw attention to itself). He also has a gift that evades many conductors: he gives S 1041, 1042, 1052, and 1056 (the last two reconstructions of Keyboard Concertos 1 & 5) each its own set of tempos and thus personality. Alina Ibragimova adds S 1055 to the mix on her recent album on Hyperion (May/June)—stunning but for an inferior performance of S 1052, which Zehetmair absolutely masters.

For completeness, Brilliant added Kurt Masur’s Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra’s 1977-78 heavy, slow, rather plodding, unimaginative, very reasonable, and very old-fashioned performance of S. 1043 to the Zehetmair collection. Should you want just the Zehetmair, it’s available as a single album on both Brilliant and Berlin Classics.

Concertos S. 1052-1055, 1056, and 1058 for one harpsichord, 1057 for two flutes and one harpsichord (really, Brandenburg 4), and 1060 for two harpsichords have Christine Schornsheim as principal soloist with the New Bach Collegium Musicum conducted by Burkhard Gläetzner, its director since 1998. The players are members of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and play the way Kurt Masur taught them to (see previous paragraph). Schornsheim plays with even less uplift than the orchestra. They take these concertos at what I
call Bruno Walter tempos (or as Otto Klemperer once instructed the Philadelphia Orchestra in a rehearsal of Beethoven’s Eroica, “Nooo, nooo, noooo, youuu must plaaaaay gioooo-cooooo0000-so”). S 1056 is so slow it’s practically at death’s door. In general, soloist and conductor set a pattern immediately and don’t vary; the playing becomes rote, void of playfulness or imagination. The two flutes are really recorders without an ounce of vibrato. Like Zehetmair, Glaetzner claims to adapt period-instrument principles to modern instruments, but what a difference in quality! Only in S. 1065 for four harpsichords do they vary their style—I actually began tapping my toes. For the seven concertos using for one keyboard instrument (S 1052-1058), Murray Perahia’s 2001 to 2003 recordings with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields on Sony are simply unbeatable.

In two concertos for two harpsichords, S 1061 & 1062, and two for three harpsichords, S 1063 & 1064, Musica Amphion returns with Pieter-Jan Belder again conducting from the harpsichord and sharing the lead keyboard position with Siebe Henstra. What a relief after Schornsheim and Glaetzner! Here are four energetic toe-tapping performances with full balanced sound, intelligently articulated phrases, lively rhythms, and a nice stereo spread for the keyboards. Belder and Henstra read each other’s rubato as if they were one body with four hands. Inner articulation remains clear and upbeat even in the concertos with three harpsichords, where Belder knows how to quicken a phrase just when it seems thickened textures are about to bog things down. Part of the secret is that Belder seems to have reduced his orchestra to only two musicians per part. Also, these recordings, from the same month as the less-good Brandenburg Concertos, were made in a different hall. My only gripe is that two of the concertos sound as if they’re pitched too low, muting some of the sparkle. Musica Amphion tunes a full half-pitch lower than the modern 440.

Krijn Koetsveld directs solists and the Netherlands Bach Ensemble in S 1044 for flute, violin, and harpsichord. The strings and flute are modern instruments. The 1999 recording has good transparency and balances, but the basic approach is slow with minimal vibrato and romantic phrasing. II borders on lethargic. This is one concerto that didn’t get recycled.

“It seems to me I’ve heard that tune before” fits the rest of the works: they’re all transcriptions. The modern-instrument Amsterdam Bach Soloists, here without Thomas Zehetmair, is the orchestra in two works recorded in 1998. S 1055 with oboe d’amore soloist Rob Visser is very transparent and upbeat, like Pinchas Zukerman at his best—very romantic but alive with good rhythm and beautiful phrasing. II is really lovely. S 1064 arranged for three violins (Rainer Kussmaul, Henk Rubingh, and Thomas Hengelbrock) is very spry but constantly presses slightly forward, making it sound efficient rather than felt.

One disc has five oboe concertos—all reconstructions—of keyboard concertos S 1053, 1055, 1056, 1060 and one with each of the three movements based on arias from Bach cantatas. Soloist Andrius Puskunigis and Donatas Katkus’s modern-instrument St Christopher Chamber Orchestra of Vilnius use a lot of legato phrasing, yet textures are clear. They play very well except for one bad habit: they sound rushed from start to finish because, when phrases begin, they can’t wait to get to the clusters of 16th notes. In all five concertos I kept saying, “Relax! What’s the rush?” Of the nine discs in this album, this is one that I will never return to.

On the final disc Giorgio Sasso conducts his period-instrument Insieme Strumentale di Roma. S 1052, Bach’s famous Keyboard Concerto in D, sounds absolutely weird arranged for organ and oboes. Sorry, a period organ playing bass arpeggios sounds like a weak calliope. Another concerto for harpsichord and oboe, partly S 1059, sounds really cluttered—is it the performance, the arrangement, or the resonance in Rome’s Basilica of St Alessio? The engineering is close and balanced, but the resonance leaves the orchestra sounding like basilica mush. The same thing is true in S 1064, here for three violins, two oboes, and a bassoon; one hears only the melody lines (violins and oboes), but the bassoon and orchestra are background mush. The only exception is yet another arrangement—the fourth on this album!—of S 1055, here for viola da braccio, with Sasso himself as soloist. Spritely, spiffy playing and much clearer sound makes this the best performance by these players.

The 19 pages of liner notes, which have no information on the performers, are a very readable and detailed discussion of the works themselves and their sources. Now I head for the medicine cabinet; as the old Alka-Seltzer ad said, “I can’t believe I ate the whoooole thing!”
**BACH: Flute Sonatas S 1020, 1030-1033**
Peter Holtslag; Ketil Haugsand, hpsi
Aeolus 10246—64 minutes

For better or worse (for my money, worse) almost every flutist who plays professionally feels compelled to make a recording of at least some, and often most, of the Bach flute sonatas. Among these few scraps from Bach’s table, only the famous B-minor Sonata, S 1030, (and perhaps the E-minor continuo sonata) is really a masterwork—and even so, is not gratefully written for the instrument (the C-minor Trio Sonata from the Musical Offering may be hostile to the player). Further, the paucity of works for flute that are securely attributable to Bach means that flutists often include pieces that are certainly not by him, such as the two sonatas with obligato cembalo, S 1020 and 1031, and the C-major continuo sonata (most likely originally for traverso unaccompanied), S 1033. And the securely attributed A-major Sonata is missing a section in the autograph.

Soloist Peter Holtslag is perhaps better known as a recorder player than as a specialist on traverso, having studied recorder at the Conservatory in Amsterdam. That was the instrument on his earlier recordings (he has one previous CD with flute—of Blavet sonatas). Here he chooses a historical instrument in ivory by JA Crane for S 1030, and to my ears the combination of its thin and rather insubstantial tone with Holtslag’s interpretation does not lead to the best results (the opening motive, which should be insistent, instead seems to be always falling backwards). This reading cannot compare, for example, with the more assertive performance of Jana Semeradova of the work on Supraphon from 2012. Holtslag sounds more at home on the Hoeprich copy of a Scherer traverso in the other works. Haugsand’s accompaniment is secure.

**T MOORE**

**BACH: Organ Pieces**

*Art of Fugue: Contrapunctus 9; Trio Sonatas 1+3; Prelude & Fugue in B minor; French Suite 5; O Mensch, Bewein dein’ Sünde Gross; Passacaglia & Fugue; Invention 8*

Cameron Carpenter—Sony 17826—73 minutes

Give me a break. How can Sony waste money on a production like this? It’s a classic example of the cult of “personality” that has been infecting classical music for some time now. Carpenter is known for his outrageous approach to anything he plays. I suppose he sees himself as the 21st Century Virgil Fox: “edgy”, “over-the-top”, a “Rock Star” of the organ. “Forget about the music, it’s all about me!” If a pianist took the same approach to Beethoven sonatas, or a singer turned Schubert lieder into something resembling Beyonce, they would be shouted down. But organists who distort the music self-indulgently seem to get a pass. It is a shame, as he is supremely talented and has an astonishing technique.

If you like your Bach with hyper-fast tempos, an ornament in every bar (yes, on every note), and kaleidoscopic registration changes; if you delight in larding a fugue with a “Stokowskiesque” orchestration, and have nothing much to say about the music, then this is for you. What is the point of playing a French Suite and an Invention on the organ, if simply to distort the original?

Carpenter plays on a giant digital organ whose sound gradually becomes wearisome. The same kind of instrument was tried at Trinity Wall Street in New York—replacing the Aeolian-Skinner with a digital wonder—how has that worked out?

All you need is Bach. True, but he is nowhere to be found.

**D MOORE**

Many of the quotations used as fill in this issue are from a collection of essays by WH Auden published as *Forewords and Afterwords*.  

**DELCAMP**

November/December 2016
BACH: Partitas
Sergey Schepkin, p
Steinway 30062 [2CD] 132 minutes

When I republished a number of my reviews in book form with Rowman & Littlefield (Jan/Feb 2016) I knew I wanted to include the ones of Sergey Schepkin’s wonderful Bach performances for Ongaku. I pronounced his recording of Partitas 1-4 the best on piano (July/Aug 1997); what I liked, in particular, was his artful blending of the best qualities of the harpsichord with an essentially pianistic approach.

His Steinway recording, I should hasten to add, is not a reissue but a new installment in a series that will collect all Bach’s non-organ keyboard music; like the previous release of the French Suites (Mar/Apr 2015), it is thoroughly engaging and often unmatched by any other pianist. He uses the pedal generously and employs varied articulation—when non-legato playing appears, it seems logical and well considered, not like the default setting that most pianists resort to when they play Bach. The interpretations are often fresh and surprising without seeming mannered or perverse. Some examples include the rather sprightly and childlike Praeludium from Partita 1, the aggressive but never monochromatic Fantasia from Partita 3, the emotionally probing Allemande from the same partita (including thoroughly convincing embellishments in the repeats), and the compelling gigue from Partita 6 with its marvelous, understated violence.

In works as rich as the partitas, it will be hard to find one performer that will please listeners on all counts. (I wish Schepkin had taken a gentler approach in the gigue from Partita 5, for instance.) Even so, among a number of recordings of the partitas I have heard thru the years, no pianist I know comes as close to perfection. He stands head and shoulders above more famous pianists like Gould (July/Aug 1994—one of his least satisfying recordings), the prissy Andreas Schhoff (Nov/Dec 2009), the dutiful Angela Hewitt (no ARG review). The only pianists who approach Schepkin are the very fine Igor Levit, whom Schepkin surpasses in depth and maturity, and Murray Perahia—and I even prefer Schepkin to my beloved Murray.

BACH: Solo Violin Sonatas
Midori Seiler
Berlin 721—68 minutes

Solo Sonata 2; Partitas 2+3; Largo; Contrapunctus 14
Eduard Melkus, Thomas Weaver, v; Ann Greff, va; Eugene Eicher, vc; Egbert Ennulat, hpsi; Julius Levine, db
Particleboard 0—71 minutes

The Solo Violin Sonatas are usually packaged with the Solo Violin Partitas. Midori Seiler has apparently seen fit to Sunder them from their usual companions. Overall, these are good performances, but I would not rank them among the best. Seiler can be exciting, but she is a bit monochromatic. I found her opening Adagio from Sonata 1 lugubrious, and her Siciliana from the same sonata doesn’t have the rhythmic rocking motion that I like to hear. Seiler plays a violin made by Andrea Guarneri around 1680. The violin is in 18th-Century setup, and she uses a baroque-style bow.

When I was in high school I discovered the period performance practice (PPP) movement mainly through the recordings of Eduard Melkus and the influence of my last violin teacher, who often performed with him. Melkus took a middle-of-the-road approach to PPP. He used a metal E string, a chinrest, and plenty of vibrato (not necessarily un-PPP, according to Francesco Geminiani), but he played a violin made by Aegidius Kloz around 1760 that had miraculously survived in original condition. I enjoyed then and still enjoy the recordings that Melkus made in the 1960s and 1970s for DG’s Archiv label. He played with more exuberance than any of the other PPP performers I knew (Sigiswald Kuijken has always sounded dour or at best bland to me), and I have always felt that spirit and intelligence were greater musical virtues than adherence to some antique text that PPP people often follow with misguided fanaticism, like Tartini’s peculiar advice not to use vibrato on sustained notes played with messa di voce swells in the middle.

Melkus plays with his characteristic enthusiasm here, but I cannot warm to these performances. They are too headstrong and monochromatic. He plays with plenty of gusto, but does not try to encompass the music’s remarkably wide range of moods. He is best in the cheery Partita 3, but worst in the slow movements.

One special aspect of this release is Melkus’s completion of Contrapunctus 19

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from The Art of Fugue. It is recorded by a sextet he assembled at the University of Georgia in 1976. The performance is fine, but the sound is not clear. The sound in the sonata and partitas is better, but it is thin. The sound in the Largo from the Solo Violin Sonata 3 is close-up and clear, but it could have been recorded in a closet. Melkus can be heard to advantage on his old DG recordings, especially of the Corelli violin sonatas and the Biber Rosary Sonatas.

The Melkus can be purchased through Marais-Music.com and from James Thornton, PO Box 206, Wausauke, WI 54177, (715) 856-5330. For an extra $2, you can purchase the score of Melkus’s completion of Contrapunctus 19.

**BACH: Sonatas & Partitas**
Markku Luolajan-Mikkola, vc
Linn 548 [2CD] 2:38

What? Yes, you read it correctly. Here we have Bach’s famous collection of music for violin solo played on the cello. This gives us the basis for a lot of major complaints. I think I’ll begin with the positive aspects. Luolajan-Mikkola is a fine player who covers all the notes of these highly demanding pieces with accurate intonation and musically intense phrasing. Everything is, of course, played at a much lower pitch. The concentration on the lowest register of the cello, with material full of low-register double- and triple-stops that the cellist cannot play with both clarity of voice-leading and fast action, results in frequent vagueness among the voices and a strain on the listener to hear the subtleties of Bach’s writing. This is somewhat alleviated by some slow tempos, but that tends to make everything drag and loses the attention of the listener. I am impressed with his notational and intonational accuracy, but not at the expense of the musical flow.

The playing style is early music, with very little vibrato. I am reminded of the recording by Monica Huggett (Virgin 45205, J/A 1998), who takes a similar approach. Mr Magil liked it in principal but found it much too leisurely in tempos. Yes, and this one takes a good five minutes longer! All repeats are observed, though very few of the dynamics are. The recorded sound lacks clarity. I cannot recommend this, though I would like to. These great pieces just don’t come off as presented here.

**D MOORE**

**BACH: 6 Trio Sonatas; Passacaglia & Fugue**
Anthony Newman, hpsi, org
Soundset 1076 — 66 minutes

The best thing here is the Passacaglia and Fugue, played on pedal harpsichord. Newman first recorded it on a 1968 Columbia LP. He was in his late 20s and near the beginning of his career. It had the drive of a brilliant young man on a mission to make a tremendous splash. It followed by E Power Biggs, in a more staid performance. Biggs had the same company and a similar instrument from the same builder (John Challis), but not as much flair. Newman upstaged him. Biggs retaliated with two vigorous albums of Scott Joplin rags.

In this 2004 recording, Newman still has his dexterity and brashness, but it seems he doesn’t have much new to say about the piece after more than 35 years of further experience with it. I’d welcome a proper CD release of his Columbia albums from the 1960s and into the hippie 1970s. They were exciting. Newman has also recorded this piece on organs over the years. I’ve heard some but liked his pedal harpsichord playing better.

The trio sonatas are a loss, unfortunately. Newman plays the middle movements on pedal harpsichord, but the outer movements on an unidentified organ. This choice is jarring, eccentric, and becomes too predictable. The harpsichord is at a slightly lower pitch than the organ, and that rift is disconcerting every time they switch back and forth. Newman’s facile performance on organ makes the trio sonatas sound superficial and inconsequential. Tempos are fast and headlong, especially in the first sonata.

The Challis harpsichord has an odd tone, too. It has eight(!) sets of strings, and is made mostly of aluminum(!!) instead of wood. That novelty might make this album attractive, as an opportunity to hear this instrument of uncommon construction. There is a nice photo of it on the back cover. The packaging fails to tell the buyer that Newman spends more than half this album’s time not playing that pedal harpsichord. There is no booklet, but only several short essays in the cardboard fold-out. The temperament sounds like equal, making the music bland.

Luc Beausejour’s pedal harpsichord recording of the Passacaglia (Analekta, J/A 2011) is on a better-sounding instrument and in a more interesting program. Beausejour included only one trio-sonata movement; I wish he or Elizabeth Farr would record them...
all. All of these players are more engaging with Bach's music on pedal harpsichord than Biggs was. Biggs's pioneering trudge through the trio sonatas is still available on a Sony CD. His tempos were OK, but his legato articulation was boring.

BERNHARD LEHMANN

Bach: Trio Sonatas (5)
Jan van Hoecke, rec; Jovanka Marville, fp, hpsi
Alpha 237—63 minutes

Lightness and transparency are said to characterize these trio sonatas. They were originally written for one player at the organ, most probably the composer's oldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann. In recent years many people have transcribed the sonatas for other combinations. To hear them in their original form, William Gatens recommends the recordings by Marie-Claire Alain, Margaret Phillips, or Olivier Vernet. I've recently enjoyed renditions on baroque flute and flute d'amore with harpsichord from Mario Folena (Brilliant) and for mixed ensemble performed by members of the period-instrument group Tempesta di Mare (Chandos, both May/June 2015).

Here a variety of recorders offers an assortment of timbres with fortepiano or harpsichord. Spirited playing and excellent sound make these performances easy to like, and you’ll relish the interplay in these renditions. Five sonatas are presented on this program. Both players are prizewinners in the Musica Antiqua International Competition in Bruges and faculty members at the High School (Haute Ecole) of Music in Lausanne. A 26-page booklet offers further detail about the sonatas, instruments, and players in English, German, and French. Add this to any of the recommendations above and you bring more enjoyable Bach into your life.

BRUCE GORMAN

Barber: Ballade; 3 Sketches; Interlude 1; Souvenirs; LISZT: Hungarian Rhapsody 2; YEDIDIA: Etude; Fantasy
Stephen Beus, p
Centaur 3446—59 minutes

This collection of pieces appears quite out of the ordinary, anchored by over 30 minutes of Barber’s solo piano music. It is a concert recording that opens with a couple of large works by Ronn Yedidia (b.1960): his 7th Grand Etude, subtitled ‘The Flight Over the Ocean’, followed by the world premiere performance of his Fantasy. Barber follows and as one who has played a lot of his song accompaniments and regularly hears Souvenirs in its original piano 4 hands version, I enjoyed his lesser known solo piano music here quite a bit. Horowitz’s version of the very familiar Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody 2 turns more virtuosic tricks than you are probably used to, but it’s a suitable bang-up encore to the recital.

Beus, a Juilliard graduate, teaches at the University of Oklahoma, where this November 9, 2014 recital was recorded. He has ample technique (he was a Juilliard Concerto Competition winner who made his Carnegie Hall debut playing Prokofiev’s Concerto 3). His romantic spirit works quite well with everything here. Yedidia is a new composer to me, and he could not have wished for more convincing performances than what we have here. The six-minute Etude hearkens back to the 19th Century with its virtuosic requirements, but there is some dissonance and even the hints of pentatonic scales that recall Debussy in particular. The Fantasy is almost 13 minutes long and a big multi-sectioned work that occasionally recalls Debussy as well. These are modern compositions well worth hearing many times.

Samuel Barber (1910-81) is probably best-known (in the piano world) for his sonata (1949). Here, the Ballade (1977) and Interlude No. 1 (1931) are substantial works that are very rarely heard and full off brooding, even mournful music. The Three Sketches (1923) are very early works, written when Barber was only 13 years old. They are charming and leave you wanting more. This is the first time I have heard Souvenirs (1953) on solo piano, and I was quite impressed. It works quite well, though I do miss some of the fuller sounds that only 4 hands can accomplish. The light-hearted 17-minute set of six dances contains some of Barber’s most engaging music. The arrangement was by the composer.

Outside of nearly a minute of applause after Souvenirs at the end of the recital, I was impressed by the production values: recorded sound quality and booklet essay are top-notch. Beus is a pianist I will watch for in the future, and this recording is one that I will continue to enjoy and use as a reference.

HARRINGTON

American Record Guide

Nothing that is without effort and attention is likely to be of much value.

WH Auden

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**BARBER:** Violin Concerto; Piano Concerto; Choral Pieces; Adagio
Ittai Shapira, v; Tedd Joselson, p; London Symphony/ Andrew Schenck; Russian Philharmonic/ Thomas Sanderling; Joyful Company of Singers/ Peter Broadbent
Alto 1309—74 minutes
Recordings from 1996 and 2001 originally released on ASV 8501 and reviewed by Mr Haldeman (Jan/Feb 2003). His response was mixed, though he seemed most taken with the choral pieces and the piano concerto. The performance of the violin concerto is fine but a little too careful for me. Things become more interesting with the piano concerto, but the sound is distracting.

HASKINS

**BEDNALL:** Stabat Mater; Marian Suite; Ave Maria
David Bednall, org; Jennifer Pike, v; Benenden Chapel Choir/ Edward Whiting
Regent 481—74 minutes
I haven’t been this affected by a new musical composition in a long while. The text of the *Stabat Mater* is a familiar one, one that many composers have responded to in different and eclectic ways. David Bednall’s setting was given its British premiere only a few months ago, after its world premiere here in the United States in March of 2015.

Though the prelude wasn’t heard until after the premiere, its addition is striking. The violinist is given scraps of phrases that gradually coalesce into a moody, foreboding introduction. When the chorus enters for the initial Stabat Mater they sing in lyrical, wounded phrases of melody, the organ throbbing under the text as if in genuine pain. Bednall’s musical imagination is equal to every twist and turn of the text. The composer himself writes so eloquently about his own music in the accompanying booklet that I won’t try to surpass him here.

Ultimately, it’s what one hears and how it affects one’s soul that determines whether a piece of art has succeeded. This one gets right to the heart of this age-old text and reveals the rawness of feeling so often missed by other composers. For example, I love the Rossini and Poulenc settings of this text (and once sang the Poulenc under Robert Shaw), yet somehow they don’t seem to grasp the pain as Bednall does.

The performing forces are marvelous. Jennifer Pike deserves all the acclaim she has won so far, and she performs beautifully here. The Benenden Chapel Choir is perfect, their pitch and blending first-rate. The composer himself is at the organ and all are strongly led by Edward Whiting. If you enjoy contemporary choral music, you owe it to yourself to hear this. If you love the text of the Stabat Mater, get this. Maybe it won’t change your musical world, but it will certainly make it more complete.

Also included here are Bednall’s *Marian Suite* for violin and organ (written especially for Pike and played here with the composer) and Bednall’s ethereal *Ave Maria*. All this and the *Stabat Mater* too! Texts and translations are included.

REYNOLDS

**BEETHOVEN:** Cello Variations; Sonata 3; MOZART: Adagios, K580a; MOZART, FX: Sonata 3
Julius Berger; Margarita Hohenrieder, p
Nimbus 6319 — 68 minutes

*Inspired by Mozart* is the title of this release. It is part of a series including a 2-disc album *Inspired by Bach* (July/Aug, p 225). This program gives us an unusual slant on the relationships between Mozart, his son Franz Xaver, and Beethoven.

Leaving the details of this subject to Berger’s fascinating liner notes (in English and German), I suspect that the two sets of Beethoven variations on arias from Mozart’s *Magic Flute* would have been sufficient to make the point all by themselves. Berger next plays a fragmentary setting of *Ave Verum Corpus*, originally written for English horn and strings, that he relates to a passage in the first movement of Beethoven’s great Sonata 3 in A, which they play next. I don’t quite make the connection myself, but it is a worthy piece. There are Bach quotes in the sonata as well.

Finally we have the sonata by Mozart’s son Franz Xaver, born the year his father died. This piece was written for violin but has been recorded several times by cellists, notably by Suren Bagrutani with Christopher Harding (Equilibrium 115, May/June 2014) and by Peter Horr and Saiko Sasaki (Divox 29309, March/April 2011). Both are fine interpretations of a quite remarkable piece written in 1814 by an almost unknown composer.

That brings us to these performances. Berger and Hohenrieder work well together. They have lively minds and play with a lucid and sometimes surprising sensitivity while

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pushing the tempos along at a rapid rate. I might prefer a little more depth of tone from both, though that may be the recorded quality—it’s a little raunchy. The concept of the program makes up for a lot.

D MOORE

BEETHOVEN: Missa Solemnis
Laura Aikin, Bernarda Fink, Johannes Chum, Ruben Droste; Schoenberg Choir; Concentus Musicus/ Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Sony 31359—82 minutes

This was recorded in Graz in July 2015. Harnoncourt retired in December of that year and died on March 5, 2016 at the age of 86. The liner notes tell us that the conductor wished this to be his last released recording, and indeed this performance has a valedictory feel. Here Harnoncourt uses his Concentus Musicus, a period-instrument group he founded with his violinist wife Alice in 1953. The forces are rounded out with good, if not particularly memorable, soloists and the top-notch Arnold Schoenberg Choir.

The first period-instrument recording of Missa Solemnis came, I believe, in 1988—the Hanover Band on Nimbus, conducted by Terje Kvam. Ever since, I have been railing against performers who take this grandest, deepest expression of Beethoven’s genius and cut it down in size, trivializing it at every turn. Later conductors (Gardiner) have compensated by making the work very dramatic, and the recent Herreweghe (on Outhere, not the Harmonia Mundi) is OK if you really want period instruments. This Harnoncourt recording, though, is quite slow and reverent in tone. The soft-grained approach, where accents are minimalized and a lot of the singing is deliberately soft, erodes much of Beethoven’s uncompromising toughness and—if I can put it this way—over-humanizes the music. This setting, which along with Bach’s is the greatest Mass ever, needs to present a formidable challenge to all who approach it and should never feel easy or sentimental. With Harnoncourt the music sounds like his personal testament, and I suppose listeners devoted to his work will find this a heartfelt expression. For me, though, it doesn’t measure up to Klemperer (whom I’ve been recommending for more than 40 years!). If you must have something more modern, I also liked the Blomstedt recording (J/A 2013).

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: Octet; Rondino; Quintet
Il Gardellino
Passacaille 1016—54 minutes

It is startling to hear these early chamber works, composed by Beethoven when he was in his 20s. More familiar early Beethoven such as the First Symphony and first two piano concertos hover between the classicism of Haydn and the new sounds of the Beethoven to come; but these works—the Haydnesque Octet and Rondino and the Mozartean Quintet, all in E—are distinctly 18th Century in style and sensibility. The amiable tooting of these period instruments makes them sound all the more chaste and classical.

SULLIVAN

BEETHOVEN: Symphonies
Gundula Janowitz, Hilde Rossl-Majdan, Walde-mar Kmentt, Walter Berry; Vienna Singers, Berlin Philharmonic/ Herbert von Karajan
DG 479 5977 (Blu-ray) 6 hours

This is a classic recording. It’s Karajan’s 1963 cycle and we’ve written about it many times. In short, it seeks to combine Toscanini’s rhythmic tautness with Furtwangler’s orchestral sound.

The Blu-ray issue has spectacularly clear sound and 9 symphonies (plus rehearsal excerpts) on a single disc. If you like these performances and can play Blu-ray, don’t hesitate.

CHAKWIN

BEETHOVEN: Symphony 9
Elza van den Heever, Janina Baechle, Robert Dean Smith, Georg Zeppenfeld; Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno; Beethoven Orchestra Bonn/ Stefan Blunier
MDG 937 1899 [SACD] 68 minutes

This appears to be part of a set of Beethoven symphonies that employs a standard modern orchestra and a light, quasi-HIP approach. Stephen Chakwin liked the recordings of 6 and 8. I have not heard them, but I can imagine both faring well. The grand and majestic Ninth is another matter. Then again, two issues ago, I reviewed a set of Beethoven symphonies played by a chamber orchestra that mostly treated it as a joyful miniature, so maybe an “in-between” performance can work, too.

Or maybe not. Blunier’s lean-textured, vertical, and heavy on the downbeats interpretation lacks the flow necessary for this piece. Too often it is prodded by an overpowering HIP-
infected timpanist using hard sticks (or so it sounds to this nonpercussionist). The beginning misses the mystery of those open harmonies entirely. The rest is so vertical that it gets in its own way to the point where there is no grandeur or mystery—and nothing positive to replace those qualities. The result is labored and boring.

Molto Vivace is light, fleet, and even pretty in its way, but it is also metric and annoyingly driven by that punchy, intrusive timpani. The Adagio lacks flow as it steps from moment to moment without seeming to know where it is going or why. Each moment is precious and not in a good way. The violins’ long lines wander aimlessly. The effect is like chamber music in scale but without the intimate communication of that form. This is not something you want to listen to if you are even slightly nervous, because its lack of direction defies patience.

The opening trumpet fanfare of the finale hammers away with even, downbeat-emphasized duplets. The rest of that section is slightly choppy in the low strings, and there are some overdone ritards. The cellos take the piano marking of the main theme to mean not only soft but timid. Once the trumpets and horns enter with more of those accentted downbeat duplets, it is clear that one must get used to that device, because it is employed whenever that melody is played. At 5:50 the appoggiatura-like figure in the violins that usually blends into the texture comes out clearly, but like a smear, to no good effect. At the Alla Marcia, the early little trumpet motifs are lost, and the tenor solo sounds forced. From there, things go well enough until the choral passage, which sounds metric. On the plus side, the Andante Maestoso (beginning where the bass trombone doubles the men) and the following choral Adagio are slow, noble, and sublime. The fugue is quite good, too. Alas, starting with the Allegro ma non Tanto, Blunier falls into the trap of taking the fast parts really fast and the slow ones really slow, creating a jerky, impulsive effect that lacks cohesion. The fast choral section before the ending is so aggressive that it sounds more angry than joyous.

Stefan Blunier has been the Music Director of the Bonn Beethoven Orchestra since 2008. Their recordings of Schreker’s Irreloah and D’Albert’s Golem are excellent. The orchestra’s pre-Blunier recordings of the Shostakovich symphonies were not a critical success, but they had a nice Germanic sound. This time around Blunier seems to be trying too hard to be different, and the orchestra sounds uncomfortable, as if it is not convinced its hometown composer’s Ninth Symphony should go this way. The sound is very good but I have heard better from MDG. The notes are informative but say nothing about Blunier’s ideas of this work.

HECHT

BEETHOVEN: Violin Sonatas 2, 4, 9
Lorenzo Gatto; Julien Libeer, p
Alpha 240—73 minutes

These sonatas have been recorded by every important violinist since Fritz Kreisler. All I can say is that these are very fine performances. If this selection appeals to you, you couldn’t go wrong with this. Lorenzo Gatto and Julien Libeer play with plenty of imagination, variety of tone color and attack, and a wide dynamic range. Others have done just as well, but few if any have played this music better. I look forward to hearing more from this duo. Lorenzo Gatto plays a violin made by Nicolo Amati in 1682.

MAGIL

BERKELEY: Stabat Mater; Mass for 5 Voices; Judica Me
BERKELEY, M: Touch Light
Marian Consort; Berkeley Ensemble/ David Wordsworth
Delphian 34180—61 minutes

I sang something by Lennox Berkeley years ago, liked it, and proceeded to not give him much thought until this arrived from Cincinnati. I’m pleased to have re-made his acquaintance because this is a very nice release.

Born into Britain’s upper crust, Berkeley (1903-89) studied with the formidable Nadia Boulanger, who encouraged him to find his inner voice as a composer and his inner soul as a practicing Catholic. Though Berkeley’s religious impulses were deeply felt, he kept them at the service of a streamlined, rather self-effacing compositional style. The Mass introduces the composer to us as he was rejecting the 12-tone idiom he’d been fooling with, turning instead to England’s mainstream choral tradition, albeit in dissonant, rather angular form. It’s a worthy 15-minute traversal of the liturgy (in Latin) set in predictable boundaries; a grim plea for mercy, a Gloria that dances a bit, a plaintive Benedictus—you get the idea.

The longest and most accessible work here is the Stabat Mater, which Berkeley splits into ten movements for soloists and combinations

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of voices, all accompanied by bits of percussion plus quintets of winds and strings. Sounds and textures remind me of Stravinsky’s 1948 Mass (which is scored for double-wind quintet); though in Berkeley’s idiom, the English pastoral style is never far off. The results are lyrical, but there’s an intensity about the writing that lets you know the composer is right there with the Virgin as she contemplates the sadness of the cross. ‘Judica me,’ an a cappella motet, gives us some of the loveliest music of the program before working itself up into a dissonant lather.

*Touch Light* is an 8-minute work for soprano, counter-tenor, and string quartet crafted by Lennox’s son, Michael (b 1948). Even as the dissonances became more trenchant in the next generation, the British sense of calm linear flow remained in the family.

The musicians honor the Berkeleys, as do the engineers. I suspect Lennox will enjoy a longer stay in my memory this time around.

**BERLIOZ: Romeo & Juliet**

Olga Borodina, mz; Kenneth Tarver, t; Evgeny Nikitin, bar; Guildhall School Singers; London Symphony/Valery Gergiev

LSO 762 [2SACD] 90 minutes

I enjoyed most of this performance, but it is probably not recommendable for most people. Although the conductor is Russian, this concert interpretation from London’s Barbican leans to the Anglican. The playing by the London Symphony is extraordinarily clean and alert and is aided by deft singing by the small group of Guildhall School Singers and two of the soloists. The concert reviews were good, too. In its way, this is impressive—perhaps too impressive.

The Introduction is fast, tight, exciting, and gripping. The execution of ‘Intervention of the Prince’ in the trombones and tuba may be the best I have heard it done, with great, even sound, perfect intonation, wonderful phrasing, and snappy strings at the end. After a somber and muted, ‘Romeo Alone,’ Olga Borodina sings with a rich, dark, and slightly Russian-colored tone. Her execution and phrasing in the high-range passages are exquisite, and she is lithely answered by the English-style chamber choir. Her slight wobble and poor French diction did not bother me that much. The exchange between tenor Kenneth Tarver and the choir is deft and darting, and the sudden darkening of the choir’s singing about Death at the end of their passage is arresting. The usually festive party music is slow pomp bordering on square—to the point where it takes on the air of a tame coronation by the time the brass plays its long line.

After an ethereal chorus, ‘Scene d’Amour’ is exquisitely played with a sheer string tone, but its chamberlike ambiance is restrained and inward, more like a nocturnal tone poem than a love scene. It might even be called beautifully cerebral. Note the careful conversation between winds and strings. ‘Queen Mab’ is predictably light, fleet, and very Mendelssohnian. Juliet’s eerie funeral procession ends exquisitely, and the soft and expressive clarinet solo depicting her breath as she “comes alive” is amazing. The chorus then excels at recreating the instrumental scrapping between Montagues and Capulets that opened the work.

The one outright disappointment is the static Friar Laurence scene. Evgeny Nikitin (a last-minute replacement in the role) sings well enough, but his voice—perhaps too light, perhaps too evenly sung, perhaps lacking the conviction of his words—lacks the magnetism that must be humane and imperial enough to stand over and unite two warring families even after tragedy. Gergiev’s suddenly detached conducting does not help. The percussion at the end is impressive, this time like a pompous but restrained celebration.

The sound of this recording is like the performance: somewhat distant, clean, accurate, and full but not rich or lush. The booklet discussion of the work by the eminent Berlioz biographer David Cairn is fascinating and well written.

The Gergiev is not for everyone, so anyone interested should sample before buying. If the famous Charles Munch Boston recording (the one in stereo on RCA) is available, it is a safe first choice. It is romantic, beautifully played by the Boston Symphony in its French heyday, and was at the top of our *Berlioz Overview*. I also like Colin Davis’s first recording, the one from his Berlioz project on Philips from the 1970s, also with the London Symphony. He leans to the classical side of Berlioz and misses some of the ardor of the love scene, but he is larger in scale than Gergiev, as well as more lively and flowing. Davis is also much better in the Friar Laurence scene, though Gergiev could teach Davis a bit on the use of percussion at the end. The Overview writes that Davis never “got” this work, but I find it close to Munch in many ways. If you want Davis, make
sure you get the right one. He also recorded a
tired version with the same orchestra on LSO
Live and another on Philips with Vienna Phil-
harmonic that was summarily dismissed on
the Overview. Another possibility for a British
Romeo is the new one coming out on Chandos
led by Andrew Davis.

BERTALI: La Maddalena
Scherzi Musicali/ Nicolas Achten
Ricercar 367—68 minutes

Mary Magdalene was the perfect subject for
17th-Century artists. “Painters, writers, and
musicians took hold of her personality and
made her a creature of great pathos and of
strongly contrasting emotions.” Composer
Antonio Bertali (1605-63) chose the “other”
Mary as his main subject in composing an orato-
torio in the sepolcro genre. As the name
implies, this was a very specific type of orato-
rio for Holy Week, and Bertali’s action does
take place at the sepulchre, not at the more
commonly depicted foot of the cross. There
are three sources for the music here: Bertali’s
1663 oratorio; musical interludes by Mont-
everdi, Salomone Rossi, and others that were
part of a 1617 theatrical presentation about
Mary Magdalene; and Domenico Mazzocchi’s
solo lament ‘Maddalena Ricorre Alle La grime’
from around 1640.

The large basso continuo cohort in Scherzi
Musicali, along with a few solo instruments,
supplies color and depth as partners with the
seven singers. From the use of a consort of
viols to accompany singers and play short
introductory pieces, to the vigorous passion
and drama as the six allegorical, Biblical, and
secular characters (Repentance, Love For God,
Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and two pris-
oners) act out the story in the Bertali oratorio,
and to the jolly short dance by Rossi among
the 1617 interludes, this is very fine music,
exquisitely interpreted. At the very end of the orato-
rio, the mood is dark, somber, engulfing: the
final text takes us underground to the world of
graves, penitence, worms (vermi), and terror.
Mazzocchi’s lament is an apt coda, opening
with a mournful cornetto plaint.

In addition to the excellence of the per-
formances here, the CD is packaged in an
exemplary way, with the music-loving collec-
tor in mind. The 60-page booklet (perfect-
bound with a reinforced matching pocket in the
digipak case) contains detailed notes,
including a “Keys to Listening” essay by direc-
tor (and baritone) Nicolas Achten where he
comments on the choices of repertoire, per-
formance practice decisions, and how power-
fully attracted he was to Bertali’s oratorio
when he read the score the first time. We are in
Achten’s debt because he turned this initial
attraction into such a strong recording.

Texts and translations.

BIZET: Carmen & Arlesienne Suites
London Symphony/ Neville Marriner
Pentatone 5186234 [SACD] 65 minutes

These are quadraphonic recordings from 1978,
made by Philips. L’Arlesienne has the usual 8
movements, but the Carmen suites are unusu-
ally complete: 11 movements.

The greatest recording of L’Arlesienne has
always been and probably always will be
Beecham’s from 1956. Nothing has come near
it, and it still sounds great. Don’t be deceived:
sound engineers then could be just as good as
they are now, and miking and acoustics were
always more important than technical
improvements. Beecham’s Bizet symphony is
also still the best recording ever made.
Beecham at his best and EMI at their best
remain unbeatable.
Beecham recorded the opera Carmen with
a wonderful cast, but the orchestral suites he
didn’t bother with very much. He did conduct
and record four movements of Suite 1, but he
never recorded Suite 2. Marriner gives us 11
movements in 2 suites (6 and 5), and they are
very well played and recorded, but I never lis-
ten to them because if I want Carmen I want
the opera.

This is all great music; and although there
was an Ormandy in the same class, Marriner
does it as well as anyone—except Beecham.
The playing and sound are superb.

Boccherini: Flute Quintet;
Brahms: Piano Quintet

Marya Martin, fl; Frank Huang, v; Richard
O’Neill, va; Paul Watkins, vc; Peter Stumpf, vc
(Boccherini); Gilles Vonsattel, p; Frank Huang, v;
Anthony Marwood, v; Richard O’Neill, va; Paul
Watkins, vc (Brahms)

BCMF 2015—60 minutes

The Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival,
on the eastern end of Long Island, was found-
ed in 1984. It was purely a summer festival
until 2015, when they added a spring series.

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This is the seventh release they have made of their concerts. Naxos distributes them.

The unusual work here is the Boccherini, one of six quintets for flute, violin, viola, and two cellos that are known as Op. 57. (According to Yves Gerard’s thematic catalog, Boccherini wrote about 26 quintets for flute—or sometimes oboe—and strings, but some are perhaps spurious.) At any rate the BCMF is in the process of doing all six from this set, and this particular one, in G, is a delightful piece with a particularly high and challenging cello part, beautifully played by Paul Watkins. The piece is in the Viennese classical style and sounds like minor Mozart (whose life, incidentally, Boccherini straddles almost perfectly; he was born in 1743, about a dozen years before Mozart and outlived him by roughly another dozen, dying in 1805).

The performance here could hardly be better in bringing this music to life. If you like Boccherini’s chamber music (and there’s a lot to like: about 100 string quintets, 100 quartets, and 100 other chamber works!) you’ll enjoy this easy listening in the classical style. There are, we should note, other recordings of his flute quintets, but they’re not always the same pieces. This particular piece (and others from Op. 57) is included in a recording by Rampal and friends on Sony (M/J 1997).

No less impressive a performance is the Brahms. Both of these pieces were recorded in concert, and with the Brahms it really sounds spontaneous and “in the moment”. Tempos are a little quick and the playing sounds somewhat impulsive, but in the end it is really exciting and passionate. If I say the music sounds unguarded and impetuous, do not think the playing is the least bit sloppy or uncontrolled. This is a terrific performance, one that brings youthful enthusiasm to Brahms, rather than a more measured, sober approach.

Congratulations, then, to the BCMF and their artistic director Marya Martin for a fine job all around.

ALTHOUSE

Boccherini: Stabat Mater; Quartet
Francesca Boncompagni, s; Ensemble Symposium
Brilliant 95356—58 minutes

This recording pleasantly surprised me. Ensemble Symposium opens with String Quartet Op. 41:1 in C minor, G214, and plays well. Boncompagni’s voice is gentle and clear, perfectly suited for the music. She gets a little thin across the top but otherwise sings with even tone and color in each piece.

The Boccherini Stabat Mater reminds me of the often-performed (and much earlier) Pergolesi. Moments in the ’Cujus Animan’ sound nearly like quotes, but the following ‘Quae Moerebat’ has quite a bit more flourish. ’Quis Est Homo’ ends with a near-recitative section that moves right into the ’Pro Peccatis’, a very different take than the Pergolesi.

Perhaps it’s unfair to consider Boccherini’s setting only in comparison to Pergolesi, but as I’ve performed the Pergolesi several times, it’s hard to hear this without the other ringing softly in the ear. Nevertheless, the Boccherini setting has its own merits and is worth hearing. It is performed here with skill and grace. Notes and texts but no translations.

HEISEL

Braga Santos: Cello Concerto; see Collections

Brahms: Liebeslieder Waltzes; 14 Songs
Andrea Rost, Magdalena Kozena, Matthew Polenzani, Thomas Quasthoff; James Levine, Yefim Bronfman, p
DG 479 6044—81 minutes

What a wonderful program idea this is! Four singers in a Brahms concert where the tenor opens with three solo songs, then the mezzo with three more. The first half ends as all four perform the first set of Liebeslieder Waltzes. After intermission the soprano gets her three, then the baritone, who actually gets five, closing with all the singers in the second Liebeslieder set. This concert took place on July 30, 2003 at the Verbier Festival in the Swiss Alps.

Great as this idea sounds, the four singers do not match very well, their vibratos always fighting so that chords don’t tune well. The biggest offender is tenor Polenzani, not so much because of vibrato, but because his tone cuts through textures and doesn’t blend. His charming duet with Quasthoff (“O die Frauen”) is like oil and water. The women are somewhat better, but when the four are singing, Quasthoff is scarcely audible. I know many prefer the Liebeslieder as a choral piece, and this performance will only fuel their fires.

My feelings are mixed with the solo songs. Polenzani doesn’t seem a natural lieder singer. He’s too stentorian for me in ’Botschaft’, and ’Wie bist du, meine Königen’ needs more warmth. Kozena is better in her group, which
includes ‘Feldeinsamkeit’ and ‘Immer Leise’, but her fast vibrato becomes wearing. Andrea Rost’s voice is fine for lieder (and she has the wonderful ‘Wir Wandeln’), but her range of color isn’t very wide. Most satisfying is Quasthoff. He does have five songs, the entirety of Opus 94, which includes the ‘Sapphische Ode’ and ‘Kein Haus, meine Heimat’ (Brahms’s shortest song!). These he characterizes very nicely, with a wide range of dynamics and expression, as well as a keen sensitivity to the texts.

The pianists are very good in the waltzes; they tend to keep things moving. Levine accompanies all the solo songs, and he never follows the singers. His playing sounds impulsive, and he’s always a split second ahead of the voice. It seems pretty clear to me who was calling the shots. (How like a conductor!) A lovely idea, then, and one with many attractive moments, but, I’m afraid, too many liabilities. Texts and translations.

Brahms: Symphony 2; Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto
Chloe Hanslip, v; Buffalo Philharmonic/JoAnn Falletta
Beau Fleuve 9500—74 minutes

Brahms’s 2nd is his most difficult symphony, demanding sensitive and careful phrasing and constant little ritards and accelerandos—especially in I and II—to preserve flow and lilt; it certainly doesn’t “play itself”. Ms Falletta lets us down in every respect, with inflexible metronomic tempos, square rhythms, and arbitrary and careless orchestral balances. I marches forward impatiently, more allegro than non troppo, and the finale, Allegro con spirito, is aggressive and martial rather than joyous. Even the concluding brass fusillade of IV feels belligerent instead of triumphant. These are concert recordings and the audience applauds right away, but it’s more polite than rapturous. Falletta either dislikes or doesn’t understand this work.

The opening phrases of the Tchaikovsky concerto prove the BPO and Falletta capable of the sensitive and transparent flexibility absent from the Brahms. This performance is conventional and pleasing in every way, except that soloist Chloe Hanslip is recorded very close—the cover shows a microphone perched just 3 feet from her violin—so we hear the concerto from her perspective; the concert audience heard something much different. It’s to Hanslip’s credit that even at close range her tone is as beguiling as her Medtner and Bowen sonatas (Hyperion 67963 & 67991) and Bazzini recital (Naxos 570800) recorded at greater distance. Her phrasing in the concerto is smoother, less percussive than some, but she hits all the notes in the manic, high-wire finale. It’s not the most exciting, but it is satisfying.

Sound is excellent and the orchestra impressive. This will appeal to fans of Ms Hanslip who want to hear her up close and intimate in this most extroverted concerto.

Wright

Brahms: Trios 1+2
Vienna Trio—MDG 9421962 [SACD] 63:30

Crude and clunky; in-your-face sound. No sweetness or warmth.

Vroon

Brahms: Piano Quintet; see Boccherini; Quartet 1; see Herzogenberg

November/December 2016
BRAUNFELS: Prelude & Prologue to The Birds; 2 Hölderlin Songs; Auf ein SoldatenGrab; Abschied vom Walde; Don Juan

Valentina Farcas, s; Klaus Florian Vogt, t; Michael Volle, bar; Weimarer Staatskapelle/ Hansjörg Albrecht—Oehms 1846—68 minutes

Are we in the midst of a Braunfels revival? Judging from the ARG index, a Braunfels recording appears about once every two years. Two releases were reviewed in July/August 2016, one more (by me) in September/October, and now this recording of orchestral songs.

Walter Braunfels (1882-1954) was a pianist and opera composer who in the 1920s and 30s was second only to Strauss in number of operatic performances. His music was banned by the Nazis, and after the war his music was seen as old-fashioned (i.e. tonal) and fell into neglect. Fortune has not dealt fairly with Braunfels. But, as I said last issue, this is quite good music, emotionally powerful and effectively orchestrated.

This is billed as Orchestral Songs, Vol. 1, and indeed the second volume is already advertised as Oehms 1847. That said, there isn't a whole lot of singing here. The pieces are for the most part orchestral music (and indeed Don Juan, based on Mozart's opera, is a 30-minute set of variations with no singing, based primarily on the 'Champagne Aria'). All of these pieces were written between 1913 and 1924 and range from a light and exciting Don Juan to a deeply expressive 'Auf ein Soldatengrab' on a text of Hermann Hesse.

The soloists are all excellent, particularly soprano Valentina Farcas, whose music from The Birds has coloratura writing reminiscent of Zerbinetta's music in Strauss's Ariadne auf Naxos, written about one year earlier. All of this strikes me as fine music, creative and "new" sounding, but accessible enough to take in on one hearing. If you like music in the Mahler and Strauss vein, give Braunfels a try. Notes in German and English, but texts in German only.

BRITTEN: Bridge Variations; see Collections

BRUCKNER: Symphony 5

London Philharmonic/ Stanislaw Skrowaczewski
LPO 90—79 minutes

Skrowaczewski was 93 when he recorded this performance, but still alert. His Bruckner has been highly praised in these pages. The LPO has played lots of Bruckner under Tennstedt, Haitink, and other fine conductors. So this looked like a promising release.

It's actually a mixed bag. Its virtues outweigh its shortcomings, but it's not going to be anyone's first recommendation for a Bruckner 5 recording.

Let's start with the field. There are many, many outstanding Bruckner 5s. Leaving Furtwangler's performances, which are in a class of their own, aside, we have Karajan from Berlin, Dohnanyi from Cleveland, Haitink from Vienna (and other places), Celibidache from Munich, and (a special favorite) Schuricht from Vienna. These are all great performances and there are many more available that rival them. They all have superb playing by orchestras who know the music deeply. They all have conductors with powerful visions of how the music should sound. They are all full of conviction.

My sense of this performance is that the conductor was trying to pace his players (and maybe himself) through almost 80 minutes of demanding music.

The first movement, which blazes with intensity for Karajan, is more measured here, and the big climaxes sound underplayed. And
this is not the players: the mass of sound is there, but the volume is less. And that flattens the range of the movement. The sudden change from loud emphasis to the mysterious sound of the solo flute, so striking from Dohnanyi and Haitink, loses some power. The building to the coda with the pizzicato strings and a huge gathering of forces is a little subdued here as well. Karajan, Celibidache, and Schuricht all made this a hair-raising moment.

Everyone is a little more caught up in the music in the slow movement and some of the sheer sound of the strings, especially the violas and cellos, is eloquent.

The real test of the scherzo, as in so many other Bruckner symphonies, is in the trio. The outer section is active and has a hunting feel to it. But what happens in the scherzo? In Schuricht’s performance—the best I know of this movement—we have one of those strangely visceral time distortions that the VPO is so good at (maybe it comes from all those waltzes). Time just changes, everyone relaxes, and the hunt stops for a midday meal (and maybe a snooze) in the beautiful countryside. It’s not quite Haydn 88 with the flies buzzing around, but it’s not very distant. There’s magic to be made. But it isn’t quite magical here. It’s a good, solid performance of the trio of a scherzo. But the clock keeps ticking.

The finale is good. There’s lots of excitement, and Skrowaczewski delivers a taut and grand performance.

Had I attended the concert that became this recording, I would have enjoyed it. As a recording for repeated listening the rules are different. There’s nothing here that will make me play it instead of the others I mentioned when I want to hear this symphony.

The sound is good. The cover photo of the inside of the Pantheon is strikingly good. If you’re a Skrowaczewski fan you may want this as a supplement to earlier recordings.

CHAKWIN

**BRUHNS:** Cantatas
Marina Bartoli Compostella, Karin Selva, s; Elena Biscuola, a; Richard Resch, Johannes Weiss, t; Christian Hilz, b; Harmonices Mundi/ Claudio Astronio

Brilliant 95138 [2CD] 139 minutes

Nicolaus Bruhns (1665-97) served as composer and violinist in Copenhagen and in 1689 took the post of organist at the Stadtkirche in Husum. But he died only eight years later at the age of 32, leaving behind only 17 extant works. 12 of them are sacred cantatas, 2 of them in Latin—Paratum Cor Meum and De Profundis Clamavi—the rest in German. Presenting the complete cantatas here on a single program, and performed by such a capable ensemble, gives one the rare opportunity to examine the breadth of Bruhns’s achievement.

It is difficult to know in what order Bruhns composed his cantatas, but they appear to be a product of his time in Husum. They are all conceived for vocal soloists and orchestra. The opening Sinfonias tend to be substantial pieces, often with virtuosic passages for violin. The addition of trumpets and a full complement of vocal soloists lends a festive atmosphere to O Werter Heiliger Geist and Muss Nicht Der Mensch Auf Dieser Erden Im Steten Streite Sein. Texts and notes are in English.

**LOEWEN**

**BUTTERWORTH:** Banks of Green Willow; Shropshire Lad songs; Shropshire Lad Rhapsody; 2 English Idylls; Quartet Suite; Love Blows as the Wind Blows; Fantasia James Rutherford, bar; BBC Wales/ Kriss Russman

BIS 2195 [SACD] 76 minutes

On the morning of August 5th, 1916, a German sniper’s bullet ended the life of George Butterworth, aged 31. Thus one of England’s most promising musical talents was snuffed out. It was one of a flood of tragedies resulting from England making the most catastrophic blunder in its entire history—entering World War I.

Butterworth plainly had all the makings of a major composer, not least a voice of his own. This release, no doubt intended as a centennial tribute, has most of his best works, giving a good cross-section of his music. The Banks of Green Willow, a concise orchestral idyll, and the unforgettable orchestral rhapsody A Shropshire Lad are familiar works, but the performances here examine them anew. Their sonorities are leaner and more concentrated but not at the cost of grandeur, especially in the rhapsody. Russman’s readings have freedom of pulse while reinforcing the music’s audible structural backbone.

The six songs from a Shropshire Lad, which share material with the orchestral piece, use Russman’s orchestration. Not only does baritone Rutherford sing them movingly, but their scoring perfectly picks up Butterworth’s characteristic sound. Rutherford is also gripping in his traversal of the mini-cycle Love Blows as the Wind Blows.
Two of the tracks are premiere recordings: the Suite for Quartette and the Orchestral Fantasia. The first uses Russian's arrangement for string orchestra. The Fantasia is the conductor's completion and orchestration. Butterworth had completed 92 bars of full score—roughly a third of the work. There was a complete short score, but it has yet to turn up. An oboe motif in the opening bars forms an important germinal element in the music. Later, a dance-like segment with a trumpet fanfare expands into a full-blooded tune. The work ends with a decrescendo that includes a shadow of the trumpet fanfare. The effect is one of nostalgic power. Butterworth was able not only to integrate folk tunes into a work, but also to build from them convincing structures. All the more must we regret his loss.

Parenthetically, on this centenary of the Great War, it's depressing to read recidivist Brit historians reviving the discredited cliches of those times—the cause was just, Kaiser Bill was the Antichrist, the Germans' imperial ambitions made them the sole cause of the war. (The latter charge is rich coming from a nation occupying over 25% of the world's land mass.) Just cause? It was more like a ghastly episode of Family Feud. The Euro-royals by then were so inbred, it's surprising they weren't all born with six toes and tails. The whole gaggle of them together weren't worth one George Butterworth.

O'CONNOR

CAMpra: Requiem: De Profundis
Salome Haller, Sarah Gendrot, Rolf Ehlers, Benoît Haller, Philip Niederberger; Ensemble 3/ Hans Michael Beuerle
Carus 83391—60 minutes

Born to a family of Italian origin in 1660, Andre Campra unquestionably possessed an excellent knowledge of liturgical music. He composed no fewer than five books of motets scored for only a few soloists, a large number of motets for chorus, soloists, and orchestra (only five of which found their way into print in his lifetime), and the magnificent concer tante Messe des Morts (Requiem) recorded here. It is a rather enigmatic work; despite extensive research no source has come to light concerning its origins—the person or place for which it was written, its date of composition, its first performance, or its original reception.

Campra's use of the solo voices in and around the chorus reveals considerable dramatic flair, though none of the solo parts require the virtuosity required by other composers of this period. A listener not familiar with Campra's music (or the Latin text) might have difficulty recognizing this as a requiem; the music—while lovely and relaxing—rarely sounds the depths of terror and despair that many of us are accustomed to hearing when listening to a requiem mass.

If the date of 1723 inscribed on the autograph of the De Profundis is correct, this work must be among the first composed for King Louis XV. It is lovely and unexpectedly dramatic, especially towards the end.

If you are interested in Campra and music of this period, the performances are excellent. It's a very musical period group, well conducted by Hans Michael Beuerle. The soloists are all good, but are what I would call "wispy": they sing well in the Baroque fashion so in vogue right now, but are not memorable. They sound like a loud C-major chord could easily blow them away.

Complete texts and translations are included, as are some excellent notes.

REYNOLDS

CATOIRE: Violin Sonatas 1+2; Elegy
Laurence Kayaleh; Stéphane Lemelin, p
Naxos 573 345—53 minutes

Gyorgy Catoire was a Russian composer of French descent. His youthful talent earned him the praise and support of Tchaikovsky. He became an able teacher; Kabalevsky was his most famous pupil. What I've heard of his music has little Russian sound, or if it does, it's in the vein of a Russian cosmopolitan like Medtner.

Sonata 1 (1906) begins with explosive, forceful rhetoric on both instruments. It has calmer moments but the overall impression is turbulent. The movement mounts coherently to an impressive peak. II, a barcarolle, has an extended violin theme over the piano's "waves". It begins as a relief from the activity of I, but has an impassioned mid-section. III has a touch of whimsy, its changing meters causing added and dropped beats in the themes. The pace and mood gradually change to the larger scale of the beginning of I, with some fine writing for the violin's lower range.

Sonata 2, Poème, has three sections played continuously. The beginning is rather impressionist, with a languorous melody and gentle coloring. The music evolves to more forced pages and a structured theme appears. The questioning theme from Franck's symphony is
embedded in its development. The music passes through a wide variety of moods, but hangs together well.

The ‘Elegy’ is a brief work of some emotional power.

The performances are fervent and convincing. Kayaleh’s tone is rich and dark with a bit of an edge that works fine in this music. Pianist Lemelin’s accompaniment is informative, packing a maximum of background into a minimum of space. Sound is fine, but the music apparently was recorded up close. The opening of Sonata 1 really leaps out at you, so a volume adjustment is advised.

Kayaleh’s tone is rich and dark with a bit of an edge that works fine in this music. Pianist Lemelin’s accompaniment is an ideal foil for her artistry; it’s well phrased, with fluid fingering and transitions. Notes by Katy Hamilton are informative, packing a maximum of background into a minimum of space.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704) was one of the most important French Baroque composers, but it has only been since the middle of the 20th Century that his works have attracted the attention they deserve. His surviving output is considerable—the New Grove work list runs to 18 pages. The greater part of it consists of sacred vocal works for small ensembles like the pieces recorded here. To a great extent this is explained by the circumstances of his employment.

As a young man, Charpentier studied in Rome with Carissimi. On his return to France in the late 1660s, he entered the service of the Duchess de Guise and remained until her death in 1687. The musicians of the Guise chapel consisted of 15 players and singers of the highest quality, and much of Charpentier’s sacred music was intended for them. He never held an official appointment at the court of Louis XIV, though he did briefly serve the private chapel of the Dauphin. It has been conjectured that the Italian ingredients in his compositional style put him at odds with the royal musical establishment. From 1687 to 1698 he directed the music at the Jesuit church of Saint-Louis-en-l’Ile, where perhaps there was less antipathy to Italian influences. From 1698 until he died he directed the music of the Sainte Chapelle. On rare occasions he wrote for the court such works as his famous Te Deum (H 146) for soloists, choir, and an orchestra that included woodwinds, trumpets, and timpani. But that is not typical of his large output.

The vocal works recorded here are for two to four voices with accompaniment of two obbligato instruments and continuo. The two lengthiest ones are the Miserere (H 157) and Recordare, Domine (H 95). The sources suggest that they were composed together. Miserere is a setting of Vulgate Psalm 50, a text that figures in Lenten and Passiontide liturgies. Recordare Domine from the Lamentations of Jeremiah is the third lesson at Good Friday Tenebrae. Nisi Dominus* (H 150) and Laudate Dominum (H 159) are psalms for Vespers. ‘Beata Es Maria’ (H 25) and ‘Sub Tuum Praesidium’ (H 20) are motets on Marian texts. The recorded performances are by solo voices with a small instrumental ensemble. It is liturgical chamber music.

These performances are not at all bad, but I would not rank them among the best. The vocal soloists’ tone is not as refined or seasoned as the finest early music singers; nor are the pacing and expression always what they could be. For example, the performance by Agnes Mellon and Gerard Lesne with Il Seminario Musicale of Recordare, Domine (Virgin 59295) is far more poignant and with better phrase trajectory than the present one. Much of this music consists of arioso declamation that must be delivered with the utmost sensitivity. My first impression of the overall tone of the present recording was that the sound is dark and dense in comparison with the transparency of most early music ensembles. On repeated hearings I came to admire the richness of the dark tone, but sometimes it can impede the flow. Charpentier did not always specify obbligato instruments, and in this recording a pair of rather wooly-sounding transverse flutes are heard in nearly all the pieces, both vocal and instrumental. The Latin diction is what I would call default Vatican, not the French style of pronunciation employed by most early music singers when in this repertory.

Latin texts are given, but translations are in Italian only. There is an English translation of the program notes. The recording dates from 2005 and is dedicated to the memory of Alessandra Saba, the soprano who is heard in several of these pieces.

GATENS

November/December 2016
CHOPIN: Nocturnes & Mazurkas
Jane Coop
Skylark 9601—68 minutes
Polonaise-Fantasy; Ballades 1+4; Berceuse; Nocturnes; Fantasy
Imogen Cooper
Chandos 10902—81 minutes

More than any other 19th Century composer, Chopin elevated timbre in his music to an extraordinary degree. The textures he devised for the piano, and the glorious harmonies that often populated them, are to my mind unprecedented and hardly matched even by composers like Debussy and Boulez. He was in my day the composer most beloved by all professional and would-be-professional pianists. We all played Chopin. Some of us actually did a good job. Others, like me, learned early on that we’d do better moving on to other composers. Having made this decision, I never looked back, though I hope one day to finish learning all of his nocturnes—a promise I made to my final piano teacher, Lillian Freundlich.

Each of these recordings suffers from an insufficiently vibrant tonal palette. Jane Coop, who teaches piano at the University of British Columbia, takes an understated approach to Chopin that I think is appropriate and brings out the intimate qualities of his music. That sense of intimacy manifests itself, too, in her choice of music: all mazurkas and nocturnes, some of which are not often performed. On the whole the performances of the nocturnes are strongest. The great C-minor Nocturne (Op. 48:1) begins a little slower than other performances I’ve heard, but works just fine. (The tempo also enables her to manage the “doppio movimento” recapitulation with the finesse it needs.) In the central section she plays with a nicely hushed tone; this might be an artifact of the concert-style acoustic or other aspects of the mastering, and it enhances the tenderness of her performances. Sometimes, though, I find the emphasis on midrange and lower frequencies tiresome. The same sound suits the somewhat subdued, mysterious moments in the C-minor Mazurka, Op. 56:3; here too I become aware that her piano sound has very little attack, which is quite appealing. In sum, Jane Coop’s Chopin program is a strong recital taken by itself, but will not dislodge some classic performances that I love (for instance, Ashkenazy).

Imogen Cooper’s program is better conceived, including as it does some of the most impressive pieces in his output (even two of my favorites, the Polonaise-Fantasy and the F-minor Fantasy). But her sound is wrong for this music—a little glassy in loud passages, a little too pale in the soft ones. (It’d work fine for Beethoven.) And the interpretations are respectful and unsurprising—and finally unconvincing. From time to time, as in the opening theme in the F-minor Ballade, I think they’re a little too mannered, as well.

HASKINS

CLEMENTI: Piano Sonatas 4
Susan Alexander-Max, fp
Naxos 572664 — 78 minutes

History and Mozart have not been kind to Muzio Clementi (1752-1832). His music is little known, except for the ubiquitous six piano sonatinas of Opus 36 that young children study. Mozart competed with Clementi in an improvisation contest and famously dismissed him as a “mechanicus” without any taste or feeling. He did well financially as a performer and composer, though, and had a business selling pianos in England for most of the last 37 years of his life. He had a teaching studio as well.

There are about 110 sonatas and sonatinas. Vladimir Horowitz and a few others have championed these. There are 18-disc sets by Spada (on modern piano) and Mastroprimano (on fortepiano) that I have not heard, beyond short samples. Susan Alexander-Max got 19 of them recorded, including the four here in this Naxos Volume 4, but she died in January 2016 before the release of this album. The booklet has her obituary. It praises her as a teacher and performer mostly in university circuits and festivals. On the evidence here, she was an excellent musician. Her three other volumes have not been reviewed in ARG, other than Volume 1 (M/J 2003, Haskins).

The sonatas here aren’t any of the Horowitz selections. Op. 50:3 is a sprawling piece 30 minutes long, rather along the lines of Beethoven’s Tempest and Appassionata sonatas. It goes through scenes in the story of Dido and Aeneas, with quick changes of emotion. It might work as incidental music for a stage production. Clementi published this in 1821, his last published music. Op. 50:2 is also here, slightly shorter, and doesn’t have an explicit program. I like its tender slow movement. The other two sonatas, Op. 1:3 and 8:2, are smaller and less histrionic. Alexander-Max plays all of these with great technique and
drive, bringing out expressive nuances as appropriate. Mozart would have been pleased with playing like this.

One of the two English pianos here is by Longman and Broderip, the company Clementi invested in in 1795. Haydn played it and took it back to Vienna. The other is a Broadwood-Cramer piano from 1816, used for the Op. 50 sonatas.

**B LEHMAN**

**COLES:** Coniston Suite; Musicas Latinas; Irish Suite; Pilgrim’s Tale; Venezuelan Suite; solos

Ian Watt, g—Nimbus 6329—73 minutes

When I reviewed another Nimbus release of Paul Coles’s music (M/J 2008) I found it strange—derivative of various sources, mostly Hispanic for that recording, without a clear individual personality. I also found his longer works did not cohere particularly well.

This is better. First of all, there’s no problem with longer works not cohering because there are no larger works—the four suites are sets of miniatures. Most are around 3 minutes, with only the ‘Pilgrim’s Tale’ stretching to nearly eight minutes (and it does meander).

All the pieces are tonal and so accessible that a mass audience would enjoy them. None is especially challenging—though that’s not a criticism.

It does seem that Mr Coles, who was born in Wales and resides in England, has a knack for mimicry. His earlier recording was especially evocative of Turina, with a bit of Torroba and Rodrigo, none of it completely convincing. Here he evokes his native England in the Coniston Suite, produces a convincing set of Celtic sounds in the Irish Suite, and isn’t too far off the mark with Musicas Latinas and Venezuelan Suite, each of which calls to mind parts of South America.

Ian Watt is clearly enthusiastic about Mr Coles’s music—sometimes too much so, when he gets a bit of a twang to his playing. I find his music a bit superficial, but with this could be quite popular.

**KEATON**

**COMES:** O Pretiosum

Amystis Chamber Choir/ Jose Duce Chenoll

Brilliant 95231—62 minutes

Juan Bautista Comes (1542-1643) was one of the transitional musicians who bridged the late Renaissance idioms of the “Golden Age” of Spanish music into the early phases of Iberian Baroque. Born in Valencia, he spent most of his life and career there, as a greatly admired church musician. His extensive musical output has been rather bypassed in the spotty attention given to him and his generation of musicians.

I believe this is the first release devoted entirely to his music. The program is divided into two parts. In the first we are given four extra-liturgical motets for Corpus Christi, their Latin texts taken from writings of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. All are for eight-voice double choir. The second half is devoted to six examples of what constitutes a major portion of Comes’ output. These are spiritual villancicos, with devotional texts in Spanish, mixing voices and instruments. They range in scoring from 4 to 12 voices.

Chenoll draws on a pool of 8 singers and 8 varied instrumentalists. In the motets, the 8 singers, one per part, do not blend very smoothly. Given the serious nature of their texts, the villancicos are generally serious, lacking the vivacity and even ebullience we often find in secular examples of the type. Solo roles are rotated among the vocalists, who are adequate if undistinguished. But they sing diffidently, with little spirit. And the motet performances are somewhat lacking in vitality, for all the polyphonic exchanges.

All this does not make the strongest case for the music of Comes, who deserves better champions. And add to this the latest hiding by Brilliant behind the Law of False Economy. The skimpy booklet contains full Latin and Spanish texts but NO TRANSLATIONS, and no advice on where to find them. C’mon guys! What is the point of bringing out a debut recording of vocal works that set unusual and impossible-to-find texts without giving buyers a way of understanding them? This is the kind of irresponsible thing that Brilliant and other labels do regularly these days. Is the recording industry trying to help dig its own grave?

**BARKER**
COOMAN: Organ Pieces
Canzonas II-VI; Sinfonia; Sonatina 2; Concertino II; Preludio Quieto; Rondo Ecstatico; 3 Renaissance Dances; Tambourin; 3 Ricercari; Ricercare Piccolo; Tiento; Rondeau; Preludio; Roundelay; Bedfordshire Voluntary; Diapason Voluntary; Prelude, Fughetta & Allegro; Canto & Fugato; Concertino; Kleine Spielmusik; Toccata Sequenziale; Plaint; Verset; Passacaglia Semplice
Erik Simmons
Divine Art 21229 [2CD] 141 minutes
Another program in Simmons’s exploration of music by the prolific American composer Carson Cooman (J/A 2015). His works number in the hundreds and include solo instrumental pieces, operas, orchestral works, hymn tunes, and numerous works for organ. In the words of the composer “The works included on this album are largely bound together by inspiration from various facets of early music; they explore historical styles, but in the context of contemporary musical language.”
He is an excellent craftsman who has developed his own voice. These pieces are mostly short, tonal, and somewhat neo-classical in style and harmonic language—pleasant, unassuming music, well written for the organ. Simmons again delivers fine performances, this time on an 18th Century Michael Engler organ (restored in 2005) in the Basilica Maria-Himmelfart in Krzeszow, Poland. Extensive notes on the music by the composer and specifications of the organ.

CORIGLIANO: Symphony 1; COPLAND: Appalachian Spring Suite; TORKE: Bright Blue Music
National Orchestral Institute/ David Alan Miller
Naxos 559782—74 minutes
This is the first recording of the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic, a group of upper-level students of our best conservatories and schools of music. The three works are classics or near-classics of American repertoire.
John Corigliano’s grim Symphony 1 (1989) is the big work. The piece deals with personal encounters with the AIDS epidemic, memorializing a number of friends affected. I is alternately sober and angry, II a Tarantella with slams and episodes of looneyness (the dance is an Albeniz piece a friend liked to play), III a chaconne with solo cello in remembrance of another friend who was an amateur cellist, and the finale is a morose funereal epilogue with chimes.
On a more engaging note, Michael Torke’s Bright Blue Music (1985) is a cheery, lyrical little essay in D. Unassuming and gentle, it will ruffle no feathers and likely disappoint fans of this fine composer’s more significant work. The sluggish performance certainly doesn’t help.
There are a zillion recordings of Copland’s Appalachian Spring (1945), most of them better than this one. This band is not ready for prime time.

COUPERIN, L: Harpsichord Pieces 3
Bob van Asperen
Aeolus 10124 [SACD] 71 minutes
This is part of Van Asperen’s complete survey of music by Louis Couperin (c1626-1661), who was part of a large family of expert musicians. As with the recently-completed series of Froberger’s music by this same performer and label (reviewed later in this issue), the performances are terrific and the documentation is worthy of scholarly journals. As Andrus Madsen wrote about the release of Volume 1 (S/O 2007): “This is a truly magnificent recording. The music of Louis Couperin is exquisitely beautiful, and Van Asperen’s playing is brilliant—full of personality and grace at every turn.”
This Volume 3 is from 2007, released 2013. The two remaining volumes of the five-disc series are yet to come. For comparison I have Blandine Verlet’s set (Astree, completed in 1992) and many single discs by other players. I have heard part of Richard Egarr’s 4-disc set from 2011, but it appears to be difficult to obtain already.
This album begins with the Couperin prelude that quotes Froberger’s music (Toccata 1 at the beginning of Volume 8 from that series). There are six suites here. Van Asperen plays from Davitt Moroney’s modern edition, augmented by consulting various manuscripts. There are a few items here not in Verlet’s set: a recently discovered Prelude in D minor and several pieces by other composers brought in for direct comparisons with Couperin’s elaborated arrangements of them.
Van Asperen’s performances are more moderately tuned than Verlet’s, and he makes the ornamentation sound more tender, less twitchy. His phrasing catches all the gentle moments, and the lively parts have plenty of
Czerny's pianistic abilities, would be able to write this kind of work. At Beethoven's request, Czerny gave the world premiere of his Piano Concerto 1 and six years later (1812) the Vienna premiere of the Emperor Concerto. Czerny wrote that his musical memory allowed him to play all of Beethoven's works by heart. Czerny's Concerto 1 has many moments that would pass for Beethoven, but nothing of Beethoven's genius. Boldrini gives a suitably big performance in I, has some impressive quiet moments in II, and the requisite bounce in the concluding Rondo.

The 4-Hands Concerto (1824) is practically unique in the concerto repertoire. While there are a number of famous works for two pianos and orchestra, two performers at one piano is rare. Malcolm Arnold and Oliver Knussen also wrote works for this genre. While Czerny is still quite predictable here, there are more flashes of originality; and Boldrini and Pinciarioli are at their best. The music is very accessible, with the requisite flash and nice, if not memorable tunes.

Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824) was a contemporary of Mozart and has a very complex life story. His primary importance in music history centers around his skill as a violinist and as a composer of 29 violin concertos. Even though both of his works here are arrangements from their original, I found them quite enjoyable and musically more interesting than the Czerny. They have wonderful melodies, with occasional unexpected harmonies. As with the Czerny pair, we have here a straight piano concerto and one for an unusual ensemble: piano, violin, and orchestra. This arrangement of a violin concerto basically extends the violin part to the piano, gives the violinist (Vismara, who seems quite at home in this style) a break by alternating the melody, and occasionally relegates the piano part to accompaniment for the violin. It is only two movements long. It certainly doesn't rise to the level of Mozart's Ch'io mi Scordi di te? for voice, piano and orchestra, but the precedent of using the piano along with another soloist is there.

The music here, especially Czerny, is guaranteed to make you smile, but not because of its genius. It's because of its construction and the compendium of pianistic writing that evokes memories of all those exercises. I always thought that Beethoven could extend a final dominant-tonic cadence beyond what was necessary to end a movement. The big first movement of Czerny's Concerto 1 sounded like it was close to ending until I looked at the timing digits on my CD player and saw that it still had three minutes to go. The final movement of Beethoven's Symphony 5 reaches a similar point less than one minute before it ends.

Performances are all good, even sparkling, as this type of music should be. Recording and program notes are also good, but no information is provided about the performers. I have to compliment the translator of the Italian
booklet essay. Most translations from Italian to English end up with some awkward, even laughable writing, but not here. All of the music is hard to find on disc and the Concerto for Piano 4 Hands is something piano duos should look into.

HARRINGTON

DADDI: Andante Cantabile; Douce Illusion; Barcarolla; Il Lamento; DA MOTA: Cenas Portuguesas; Serenata; Ballada

Soñía Lourenco, p
Grand Piano 725 — 79 minutes

The liner notes paint a picture of 19th Century Portugal as dominated by Italian opera, alongside salon music. Against this background, piano prodigies Jose Viana da Mota and Guilherme Daddi worked to promote concert opportunities in Portugal.

Though the movement to advance instrumental music was inspired by Franz Liszt, many of these works sound conventional in comparison. While the playing is competent if not the most virtuosic, and while Lourenco does an adequate job of trying to make the most of the material, works such as Barcarolla pale in Liszt’s shadow. The thematic materials of ‘Lamento’ are weak, and the playing could have more fluidity and playfulness in rhythm. I do find the first movement of Cenas Portuguesas, Op. 9 charming with its brisker tempo. Lourenco’s playing sounds heavy-handed, as in III of Cenas Portuguesas; some of the light, delicate texture is lost.

KANG

DAMASE, FRANCAIX: Flute Pieces
Ransom Wilson; Jean-Michel Damase, p; Orpheus Chamber Ensemble
Nimbus 6304—76 minutes

One of the greatest flutists of his generation is joined by one of the greatest French composers of our time at the piano. The results are predictable, and the sound is as delicious as the writing. You can place this release between recordings of Muczynski’s flute works made with the composer by Alexandra Hawley (May/Jun 1999) and the Variations by Robert Beaser performed by their dedicatee Susan Rotholz on Bridge (Nov/Dec 2014). It happens only rarely, but life gets this good. For more of the good life, see KROMMER.

GORMAN

DAVIES: Piano Pieces
Richard Casey
Prima Facie 17 [2CD] 124 minutes

Most (if not all) of Peter Maxwell Davies’s solo piano pieces are gathered on this nicely performed and recorded two-disc set that draws from 60 years (1949 to 2009) of his long and very productive composing career. Davies (1934-2016), or “Mad Max” as he was affectionately called, was for many years associated with his compatriots Harrison Birtwistle and Alexander Goehr. Though each member of this trio is too individual—indeed eccentric—to be considered part of a group, all three began as fellow students at the Manchester School Music, where they acquired a deep interest in ancient myths and antiquated Medieval tropes, combining these with a highly chromatic, disjunct, and complex language that took Schoenberg as a point of departure. (See our index for reviews of their music.)

Schoenberg’s influence is obvious in Davies’s 1955 Five Pieces for Piano and Five Little Piano Pieces of 1964, with their terse, atonal epigrammatic outlines and expressionist intensity. Davies’s “big” piece came later: his nearly-half-hour-long 1981 Piano Sonata in seven movements. This is an unrelenting monster that churns out densely interwoven pinwheels, cataracts that splash up and down the keyboard, and dazed interludes of punctuated calm. Annotator Stephen Pruslin (who was also the pianist on the first recording of the piece) explains in his annotations how it all makes perfect sense as an aesthetic structure based on sonata form and at same time embodies a serenade-like scheme, how it pursues a logical large-scale harmonic progression, and how it’s inspired by and reflects Beethoven’s late Piano Sonata 31. Without disputing any of this, I can only say that I’ve listened to the sonata several times over the years, including the original Aurel LP, the Centaur CD (David Holzman on Centaur 2012), and now here, and it still sounds like a lengthy, meandering improvisation lacking any detectable shape or communicative purpose. It isn’t actively repellant to me—I’m fairly tolerant of protracted pointillist scurryings as long as they don’t start pounding too insistently, and I occasionally even enjoy the avant-garde skitterings of Cecil Taylor—but I can’t retain a single phrase from Davies’s sonata. So now, dear reader, I trust you’ll be able to tell if it’s something you need to hear or to avoid.

Having said all that, the unprepared listen-
er to this program is likely to fall out of his chair if, after making it through the sonata, he hears what follows: *Three Sanday Places*, a trio of dulcet, gentle, and quite tonal folk song-like miniatures presented with a simplicity and directness that will charm the most truculent of anti-modernists. These were written as late as 2009, and are well in the technical abilities of student pianists.

So we see that Davies has at least three widely disparate styles, and further acquaintance will soon show that he can combine these in many different ways when so inclined. *Six Secret Songs*, from 1996, for instance, are tuneful tonal pieces that, unlike the simpler *Sanday Pieces*, deploy surprising chromatic deflections, where the harmony slips slyly away from the tonal home base (Prokofieff did this often to exceptionally pleasing effect—as indeed so did Schubert). The numbers in this set remain tranquil and melodic, though the later ones are more exploratory in their materials.

Then there’s the haunting and lovely *Farewell to Stromness*, an elegiac lullaby that rocks gently into the night, lamenting the threatened contamination (from uranium mines) of the Orkney Islands, Davies’s home. This so-beautiful piece, with its unforgettable melody and swaying rhythms, was written in 1980 and has by now endeared itself to uncounted music lovers (there are hundreds of different performances on YouTube to which hundreds of thousands of people around the world have listened). Davies’s *Farewell* may well outlast everything else in his huge output of much more demanding and imposing creations—symphonies, fantasias large and small, string quartets, theatrical works. Long after much else is forgotten people will hear, remember, and love this heart-breaking but also consoling “God be with you” (as “goodbye” once meant). That, at least, is this listener’s prophecy.

**LEHMAN**

**DEBUSSY**: Preludes I; *L’Isle Joyeuse*;
**RAVEL**: *Gaspard de la Nuit*
Arseny Tarasevich-Nikolaev, p
Acousence 12616—73 minutes

Here is a program containing some of my favorite French piano music from the first decade of the 1900s. Both the Ravel and *L’Isle Joyeuse* are virtuosic works with incredible musical substance. Debussy’s first book of Preludes (1910) is known to almost every pianist and runs the range from the easy ‘Fille aux Cheveux de lin’ to the wild ‘Ce qu’a vu le Vent d’ouest’. *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908) is on a short list of very difficult music that most young 20-something pianists feel the need to learn as soon as they are able. Stravinsky’s *Three Movements from Petroushka* would be another in that group. *L’Isle Joyeuse* may not be on quite that same difficulty level, but it is very tricky and its energetic joy and beautiful melodies have made it a favorite of concert pianists and their audiences since its publication in 1903.

Young Tarasevich-Nikolaev (b.1993) comes from long line of great Russian pianists and has a number of competition awards to his credit already. He is probably on a course to become a Tchaikovsky competition winner next time around. Tatiana Nikolaeva, a legendary pianist in Russia (and part of the jury that gave Van Cliburn his gold medal), was his grandmother. On this disc he plays one of those huge Shigeru Kawai pianos. They are certainly at the same level as the best Steinways, Faziolis, Yamaha CFX, and a small group of European top names. Recorded piano sound is excellent, and the booklet notes are more than adequate.

We have here a 23-year-old playing advanced repertoire much better than one would expect. He does not yet have quite the technical facility of Hamelin (whom I heard play an incredible *Gaspard*, followed by the Liszt Sonata last spring at Carnegie Hall), but who does? We have a very effective performance here. The Debussy Preludes are suitably varied from the lightest touch in ‘Voiles’ to the violence of the sea in ‘Le Vent d’ouest’ to the full bell tolling in the middle of ‘La Cathedrale Engloutie’ to the impish Puck. As a program closer, *L’Isle Joyeuse* has all the youthful vigor Debussy could ask for and builds to a suitable climax, if a bit too broadly stated. This has been a consistently satisfying recording and one I can recommend for “I heard him before he became famous”.

**HARRINGTON**

**DEBUSSY**: Boîte a Joujoux; see STRAVINSKY

**DELLA CIAIA**: Lamentations
Roberta Invernizzi, s; Laboratorio 600/ Franco Pavan—Glossa 922903 [2CD] 106 minutes

This 1650 collection of music by Alessandro Della Ciaia (c 1605–c 1670) is the only “surviving source of sacred music composed specifi-
cally for Sienese nuns”. The nuns in Siena must have been highly accomplished singers, as “these works require a singer with a two-octave range, the dramatic ability to deliver forceful, declamatory phrases, and the pure technical skill to unleash dazzling flights of melismas”.

Soprano Roberta Invernizzi is certainly up to the task and sings with plenty of vigor and expression. Sometimes there’s a little sliding to the notes and some extra vibrato, but the beauty of her singing in long sustained lines (as in the second lamentation for Good Friday) eloquently captures the swooning, ecstatic reverie and profoundly affecting experience of Holy Week devotion.

The nine vocal settings of the Lamentations texts (for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday) alternate with eight lute toccatas (by Saracini, Michelangelo Gallilei, Della Ciaia, and Bernia), which are subtly, thoughtfully, and elegantly played by ensemble director Franco Pavan.

Even with the lute toccatas as a contrast to the vocal pieces, the music can sound rather the same after a while. Listen in segments, perhaps three at a time. Notes, texts, translations.

**D O H N A N Y I:** **Piano Pieces**
Daniel Rohm
CPO 777970—65 minutes

This unusual album of piano works by the composer-pianist Ernst von Dohnanyi moves from dense, luscious material toward something more playful. Pianist Daniel Rohm, a talented musician, moves deftly from one style to the other. The program opens with a Passacaglia from 1900. It is somber and sonorous, rising to a series of formidable climaxes. It is fascinating to read a review quoted in the excellent notes calling it “an entirely modern work”. To our ears it is no such thing, but stubbornly 19th Century, full of lush harmony and finger-breaking passages.

The rhapsodies are in the same mold, though without the references to Bach. 4 is the liveliest and lightest. 5, an andante lububre, is a grandiose culminating work. Here Rohm is at his best with color and dynamic contrast.

The Three Singular Pieces come from half a century later, and singular they are. They flirt with modernist tendencies but don’t really mean it. Dohnanyi was a thorough-going romantic, though he lived far beyond that period. The perky ‘Burletto’ plays with variable meters. The Nocturne, ‘Cats of the Roof’, has extreme chromatic turns, though it is much more peaceful than the howling nocturnal cats in my neighborhood. The exhilarating finale, a perpetuum mobile, has an “ad infinitum” repetition at the end followed by an “emergency exit” in the form of a “coda per terminare”, a witty ending to an album that glories in the heavy and the heaven-storming.

**A m e r i c a n R e c o r d G u i d e**

Many emotions which look simple and natural are nothing of the kind; they result from cultivated self-control, so consummate as to seem instantaneous.

S U L L I V A N

IA Richards
DOMINGUEZ: Legend of Joaquin Murieta
Santiago Philharmonic/ Jose Luis Dominguez
Naxos 573515 [2CD] 96 minutes

Jose Luis Dominguez is the resident director and principal conductor of the Santiago, Chile Philharmonic. After years of studying and playing film scores by Korngold, Rozsa, Williams, and Herrmann, Dominguez wrote this ballet, which premiered in 2009. The notes indicate that he not only wanted to write a story ballet, but to have the score act as separate symphonic work.

I also recognized influences by Rodrigo, Khachaturian, and Prokofieff. Dominguez's music is tonal and very melodic—something you don’t often hear in new works. It may not all be instantly memorable, but you can’t deny his effective use of melody and tempo and excellent orchestration. It is an original score that is compelling. There are action scenes, romantic dances and pas de deux, sweeping waltzes, and comic interludes. He uses many specialized instruments (Chilean harp and flute) in the very large orchestra. Repeated hearings have only increased my admiration for the score. Hollywood should take notice.

The story involves Joaquin Murieta (a real person), who is a Mexican bandit. In Chile, where Murieta was supposedly born, he is considered a Zorro-type folk hero. In Spanish-era Southern California, Murietta (spelled like that) was considered a bandit, robber, and murderer and was eventually hanged. Many of his exploits occurred around where I live in Los Angeles, so he is a familiar figure. Stories have circulated for years that Murietta buried stolen treasure in the Cahuenga Pass, which is now covered by the Hollywood Freeway. People still sometimes search for the treasure.

Dominguez uses the friendlier Chilean folk version where Murieta has various confrontations with rival bandit gangs and a stalwart girlfriend, Teresa, for the romantic scenes. There is also a fiesta with habaneras, boleros, and waltzes. Murieta conquers all his enemies and returns to Teresa, where they dance a beautiful pas de deux. This is all very colorful and the music fits the scenario. The music is far more inventive than the story. There is cinematic sweep and grandeur to it. Dominguez knows how to blend the dance and action elements together in a cohesive score. You will recognize the styles of the composers who influenced him, but his score is original.

This type of cinematic score requires outstanding sound and Naxos delivers. The sound is demonstration quality, possibly the best I’ve ever heard. The Santiago Philharmonic plays expertly. The English and Spanish booklet describes the ballet scenario, the composer, and some history about Murietta.

FISCH

DVOŘÁK: Serenade for Strings;
TCHAIKOVSKY: Serenade
St Cecilia Strings/ Luigi Piovano
Eloquentia 1550—57 minutes

The Dvorak is lovely—sweet and gentle. The 23 strings make a beautiful sound. There are exaggerated contrasts in the Finale.

The Tchaikovsky is less striking, and there are many reasons. For one thing, it is much more recorded, so the competition is stronger. It is also extremely familiar—that doesn’t help if you want to make an impression. Tempos are slow here, but there doesn’t seem to be much majesty. Remember that Tchaikovsky’s attitude was “the more strings the better”, and there are only 23 here.

If you skip this because of the Tchaikovsky, will you be sorry? I think the Dvorak has been recorded a few times just as beautifully as here. There are Czech recordings, which sound more idiomatic. And there is the priceless Stokowski recording, once on EMI CD.

VROON

DVOŘÁK: Trios 3+4
Busch Trio
Alpha 238—77 minutes

Trio 3; SMETANA: Trio
Atos Trio
Farao 108093—72 minutes

The Busch Trio is named for violinist Adolf Busch, partly because Dutch violinist Mathieu Van Bellen is using Adolf Busch’s 1783 Guaragnini. Cellist Ori Epstein and his pianist brother Omri are from Israel. The group met in London where they were studying, and they formed their trio in 2012. They are now in residence at Queen Elizabeth Hall, Kings Palace. This appears to be their first recording and the first in a projected set of Dvorak’s chamber music with piano.

The trio plays with a dark, almost orchestral sound that brings these works into the world of Brahms. If done soulfully, that approach suits Dvorak well. The playing is full of ebb and flow, and the crescendos are nicely paced. Although they allow time for pensive pauses and the like at transitions, their structure is taut, and their line keeps moving. A
good example is cellist Ori Epstein’s first entrance in Trio 3. Note the slowdown and then the way it emerges so naturally and eloquently, with dark coloring bolstered in the piano. Omri plays with a river-like flow, and his tone is rich and matches his brother’s dark cello timbre. Toward the end of I, the weighty skipping rhythms recall similar moments in Brahms’s *Tragic Overture* without sounding heavy.

The Allegretto manages to be playful while maintaining flow, often propelled by the pianist. Early on, Omri displays a nice touch with his melody over his brother’s busy but subtle accompaniment. Later we get a bit of the *pesante* of rural Bohemia. The Adagio is a slow lament (the piece was written after the death of Dvorak’s mother) that is more patient than sad. Even at this slow tempo, Omri keeps things moving along. Toward the end, his series of chords is eloquently Brahmsian, and the string solos that follow are touching. In the finale we can almost think orchestral. All of this sounds thought-out and hangs together unerringly.

Good as the Opus 65 is, the Busch Trio performance of Opus 90 (*Dumky*) is more remarkable because the work’s brooding nature makes it harder to pull off. The soft playing is breathtaking, not only in how quiet it gets but the control and extension of the phrases. The Adagio is both eerie and serene, and the first Andante keeps that going. The interpretation is intimate, rapt, and lyrically expressive, with excellent control. The Andante Moderato often works like a conversation between instruments. The ending of that section is gorgeous, with the dark tone of the piano more felt than heard. After that, the sudden outpouring of the Allegro elicited a “wow” from me. Ori’s cello is outstanding on those beautiful chord changes. The Busch nicely captures the Hebraic nature of the opening of the Lento Maestoso and proceeds from there.

The recording is big and spread in a way that fits the interpretation. It favors the cello and piano, augmenting the overall darkness of the group—something they don’t really need. That is a minor quibble.

The name of the Atos Trio is based loosely on the first names of its members; Annette von Hehn, violin; Thomas Hoppe, piano (getting two letters), and Stefan Heinemeyer, cello. They are German born and reside in Berlin, though two of them obtained much of their training in the United States. The trio has been well received in ARG since their forming in 2003 (July/Aug 2008, Jan/Feb 2010, Nov/Dec 2011, Jan/Feb 2015). This Czech Album was preceded by a Russian Album and a French Album.

Atos adds a very subtle French hue to Dvorak, and I am curious as to how they sound in actual French trios. The effect is produced mostly by pianist Hoppe’s slight lean to light jewel-like playing. I am not a pianist, but his use of the sustaining pedal seems minimal and less than Omri Epstein’s. Compared to the Busch, Atos is more intimate and chamberlike, with a smaller but warm sound and an inner intensity. The result is not as immediately impressive but is gripping in a way that grew on me. The group is also slightly better balanced, though that may be a result of the recording.

After a slow start in II, the playing is intimate and sparkling. III is quiet, inward, and in a way modern in style, keeping its emotions under control but still managing to be expressive. With IV we have strong contrasts between soft and loud. The Atos’s Dvorak is heartfelt, moving, and well controlled. If it is not as burnished and dark as the Busch’s or as gleaming, silvery, and folk-like as Czech performances, it strikes a solid position of its own.

Smetana’s Trio in G minor (1855) was written after the death of his 4-year old daughter. The girl seemed to have a gift for music and was very close to her 31 year-old father. Atos seems more involved in the Smetana than the Dvorak. They seem to dig in more, their sound is darker, and they shift moods with the music. This is a very discerning performance, full of expressivity and emotional response.

I contrasts what sounds like stormy anger over a child’s death with a sweetly lyrical second subject that was apparently a favorite tune of hers. Atos does very well with characterizations here, and they play with a darker, more concentrated sound than they do in Dvorak.

II comes off as noble and Brahmsian, particularly in the march-like second theme. III has a quick section that Atos takes fast, summoning some of that lightness from the Dvorak. It then looks back on that sweet theme from I. Death takes over at the end with a funeral march that Atos does very well, before shifting effortlessly to an ending that may be a gesture of triumph over despair.

There is a lot of competition. The Busch Trio’s account tops my list. The Dvorak *Overview* (Sept/Oct 1998) favors Fontenay, A-Ma-Kim, and Suk. Fontenay catches the spirit
and power of these works and is a solid recommendation, though I am not as fond of it as the Overview is. Ax-Ma-Kim sounds too much like a collection of soloists to me. The Suk Trio is a way to go for a Czechish performance. Don Vroon laid waste to the Florestan performances of the first two Dvorak trios. I have not heard those, but their disc with 3 and 4 is one of the better ones I have heard, and I like their Smetana too. Florestan is a somewhat restrained British group. Fans of Beaux Arts might like Florestan even more. Mr Wright was very unhappy with Triple Forte, another British ensemble. It is more reserved and restrained even than Florestan. I find it an enjoyable supplement, if not for everyone.

Atos's Smetana is outstanding and a good supplement to Czech groups like the Smetana, Suk, and Guarneri. A very interesting and different alternative is the dark, almost covered, and mysterious reading by the Boston Chamber Players.

**HECHT**

**DVORAK:** String Serenade; see Collections

**DVORAK & ELGAR:** String Serenades; see LHoyer

**ENESCO:** Nocturne; Pieces Impromptues; Piano Sonata 1

Josu de Solaun
Grand Piano 705 — 79 minutes

The Grand Piano label has issued complete works by less-known composers. George Enesco, a composer and violinist from Romania, was active for the first half of the 20th Century. Unlike the Nocturnes by Chopin, his Nocturne is a large-scale work of about 20 minutes. Often Scriabin-esque, the piece unfolds beautifully under De Solaun’s fluid playing, with a wide range of colors and sounds. The ‘Melodie’ from the Pieces Impromptues sounds very romantic, with rubatos, arpeggiated notes, wide leaps, and resolution of dissonant harmonies. ‘Appassionato’ contains Wagnerian climaxes. De Solaun’s technique is excellent here. The concluding Sonata 1 is shot through with harmonic twists and driving rhythms, handled expertly.

This is the first volume of the complete works, and I look forward to the next.

**KANG**

**ENESCO:** Violin Sonatas 1+2; Impressions of Childhood
Stefan Tarara; Lora Vakova-Tarara, p
Ars 38212 [SACD] 65 minutes

George Enesco may be best remembered as the teacher of Yehudi Menuhin, but he was also a gifted composer. His first two violin sonatas were written while he was still a student at the Paris Conservatory, and though they don’t show the level of mastery and imagination that his late works would, they are very accomplished. Enesco believed that Sonata 2 (1899) was his groundbreaking work where he found his voice as a composer. As good as Sonata 1 (1897) is, 2 is clearly a step beyond that in technical assurance and individuality.

The Impressions of Childhood are from a different world. Gone are the rules that Enesco learned at the Conservatory. We are in a world of pure sound and emotion and the kind of overwhelming, indelible impressions that come to us in earliest childhood. These works could have been written by no one but Enesco, so startlingly individual they are.

These are good performances of the sonatas, but they have also been played very well by Vilmos Szabadi and Marta Gulyas (Jan/Feb 1999). The Impressions are played very well too, though I still like Gidon Kremer and Oleg Maisenberg (Sept/Oct 1997) best in these pieces. Good sound.

By the way, when Stefan Tarara is pictured holding a violin, it is a small, child’s violin. That the joke on the Impressions of Childhood. Tarara plays a violin made by Nicolo Gagliano.

**MAGIL**

**ERKIN:** Symphony 2; Violin Concerto; Kocekce
James Buswell, Istanbul Symphony/ Theodore Kuchar
Naxos 572831—68 minutes

Ulvi Cemal Erkin was born in Istanbul in 1906 and lived until 1972. He studied piano with Isidor Philipp and Camille Decresus and composition with Nadia Boulanger. I came across his Symphony No. 1 a few years ago, paired with Tchaikovsky’s Little Russian, and I’ve enjoyed listening to it several times. His writing is fairly nationalist and straightforward, and there’s a pronounced French accent—echoes of Ravel and Roussel are apparent. Diederek De Jong reviewed the Budapest Philharmonic recording of the Second Symphony, Kocekce, and Sinfonia Concertante (Hungaro-
ton 31528, Nov/Dec 1993) and said it was a fine introduction to Erkin’s music, especially the Symphony. He was puzzled by the notes, which said the koceks was a male dancer, while an 18th-Century illustration he found in Groves depicted female dancers. The Naxos notes solve the problem: a kocek was a male dancer dressed in female clothing, usually handsome and of non-Muslim stock.

Both symphonies are well worth hearing, if not quite hidden masterpieces. The First is very hard to find, but a few people have uploaded it to YouTube. Erkin’s orchestrations are effective, and he was good at setting folk tunes, harmonies, and rhythms in the context of the Western symphony—it’s more than mere exotica. The middle movement of the Second builds for the first six minutes with Oriental harmonies, shifting polyphony, and crashing cymbals; at the peak, it suddenly quiets and becomes prayer-like. The finale is a vigorous dance in mixed meter; some quieter passages for the high winds remind me of Borodin’s Second. Kokeck, a dance rhapsody, is similar to the finale, but more lighthearted.

In the Violin Concerto I takes too much time trying to develop its unpromising themes. II has a pizzicato bass line that sounds like the Largo from Vivaldi’s Guitar Concerto in D, of all things; the passacaglia and some of the suspensions and resolutions add to the Baroque feeling. There is a gentle, airy, rhapsodic part in the middle of the movement that’s very touching. III has the same faults as I, including stops and starts that do nothing but impede the flow. The soloist doesn’t have the most polished technique, either, and sometimes his vibrato is so slow that it starts to sound like a wobble. His tone and expression are generally fine, though. The orchestra is more than competent, and Kuchar has both vitality and restraint. The sonics are excellent; notes are in English.

**Esenvalds**: St Luke Passion; Drop in the Ocean; First Tears; Litany of the Heavens
Sinfonietta Riga; Latvian Radio Choir/ Sigvards Klava
Ondine 1247—68 minutes

Eriks Esenvalds is a Latvian composer born in 1977 and educated in his homeland. He spent two years as composer-in-residence at Trinity College, Cambridge, and has the usual list of awards and commissions.

The St Luke Passion sets Catholic and Byzantine church prayers, the *Shema Yisrael* in a movement where Mary prays over her young son, James Weldon Johnson’s *Prodigal Son*, and a Christina Rossetti poem, in addition to the usual gospel texts about the crucifixion. The first notes throw us into a neo-tonal maelstrom with the crowd shouting, “Crucify him!” A short movement reflects on Jesus’ youth as a carpenter, and in the next the Son of Man warns the daughters of Jerusalem to weep for themselves, not for him. The *Shema Yisrael* soars to effective heights, and its climax leads straight into Jesus crying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” After the slow, lushly-set conversation with the two malefactors and the parting of Jesus’ raiments, the story of the prodigal son is told. The soloist brightens and widens his sound to portray the young man’s brashness; the music is mostly ethereal and restrained, and his demands sound vindictive rather than merely lustful or rebellious. The prodigal’s last line is swallowed up in the acoustics (I think the soloist walks offstage while singing), and the transition into the penultimate movement, with the soldiers mocking Jesus, doesn’t flow like the rest. Jesus’ famous death cry is cut off: “Father, into thy hands,” and then the miracle of the calming of the sea is recounted. The Rossetti poem forms the final movement: Can you hear the One who is calling, who has called you through the ages, the One who is love?

Esenvalds is good at creating moods, but his orchestrations lack personality. For some of Jesus’ words he uses too many repeated notes; in one movement, the Son of God just repeats himself slowly up a chromatic scale, and it sounds like lazy writing. The Hebrew melody is the only one that makes an impression.

*A Drop in the Ocean* consists of the *Pater Noster*, the peace prayer of St Francis (Lord, make me a channel of your peace), a quote from Mother Teresa, and a song from the Sisters of her Calcutta Mission. There is creepy whispering beneath the *Pater Noster*, and it makes a crescendo to a Penderecki-like cacophony before turning into ravishing measures that would make Eric Whitacre jealous.

The *First Tears* is an Inuit folk tale scored for choir, percussion, jaw harps, and whistles. The voluptuous textures and thick, steamy chords obscure the diction and turn the piece into an overgrown garden of effects with little drama.

*Litany of the Heavens* is for choir, tuned...
water glasses, overtone singing, chamber orchestra, and a recording of an old man chanting in a remote Latvian Catholic church. The writing is again lush, slow, cinematic, and rather New Agey, but the work is beautiful and shining—to me the most compelling of them all.

The *Pater Noster* is in Latin and *Litany of the Heavens* is in Latvian; the rest are in English, and texts and a translation of the Latvian are included. Notes are in English only. The performances and sonics are exemplary.

**ESTEP**

**FANO:** Piano Sonata in E; 4 Fantasies  
Pietro de Maria  
Brilliant 95353 — 56 minutes

Italian composer and pianist Guida Alberto Fano composed these works mainly in the late 1800s. De Maria makes a case for Fano’s importance in the context of Italian post-Unification efforts to renew nationalism. The works are reminiscent of Richard Strauss or Karol Szymanowski in harmonic texture and lyricism. The sonata is romantically charged and has many brilliant and technically challenging moments. The Fantasy seems more lyrical, often like a Song without Words, with thick textures and delicate runs that must be elegantly voiced.

Though conventional in form, as one might expect from late-romantic works, they are highly dramatic and forward-thinking in tonality. To perform these works one needs to be very expressive, and one needs the muscle to maneuver the dense textures. De Maria’s warm sound and careful voicing is well suited to this mus.

**KANGIC**

**FARINA:** Consort Music 1627  
Accademia del Ricercare/ Piero Busca  
CPO 555034—72 minutes

Accademia del Ricercare is an impressive ensemble, and the repertory Pietro Busca has chosen gives everyone a chance to shine. This program of dance music and one sonata derives from Carlo Farina’s third book of dances, published in 1627 while he was employed as a violinist at the court of Dresden. Even in this highly competitive musical environment, Farina’s music stood out for its refined Italianate style, which he, no doubt, learned while studying in Mantua under Salomone Rossi.

Most of the dances excite the ear with frequent alternation between the various families of instruments: strings, winds, and reeds, often supported by percussion. The flutes struggle a little with intonation in the ‘Corrente Seconda-Quarta-Seconda.’ Other than that the quality of music and the playing is universally excellent. Excitement in the Sonata Prima titled *La Greca* obtains through all of the wonderful divisions in the violin parts. The ‘Galliarda Prima-Tertia-Sesta’ explores extremes, from the lively passages for reeds and percussion to the delicate use of recorders and strings.

**LOEWEN**

**FAURE:** Songs I  
Lorna Anderson, Janis Kelly, Joan Rodgers, s; Ann Murray, mz; Iestyn Davies, ct; Ben Johnson, t; John Chest, Nigel Cliffe, bar; Malcolm Martineau, p  
Signum 427—77 minutes

Signum seems intent on following the pattern set by Graham Johnson for Hyperion in recording all the songs of a composer with one pianist and a cast of singers. Last year Signum completed its survey of Poulenc songs in five volumes following Hyperion’s release of all the songs in one 4-CD set. (The two projects had slightly different ideas of “complete”)

Now Signum has released the first volume of a projected 4-volume Fauré series. Hyperion released Johnson’s Fauré project in four volumes, which won mostly praise from critics, though some of the singers were found wanting in our reviews (M/J 2005; S/O 2005; J/F 2006; M/J 2006). Each Hyperion volume had a theme (love, flowers, water, and earth). It is not clear what Signum’s organizing principle will be for the series, but the pattern may follow the Poulenc series of including songs from all through the composer’s life in each volume.

This volume includes songs in mostly chronological order from his early years (Op. 1 of 1861) to later (Op. 106 of 1914). As with his Poulenc series, Martineau has assembled experienced singers and some early in their careers.

Fauré surely could not have imagined his songs sung by a countertenor, but Iestyn Davies delivers superb readings of ‘Lydia’ and ‘Tristesse’—high points of the program. Close behind is Ann Murray’s appealing reading of ‘Apres un Reve.’ The women sing about two-thirds of the songs. The bright-voiced Janis Kelley is especially good in ‘Aurore.’ Joan Rodgers concludes the program with a con-
vicing reading of the eight songs called Le Jardin Clos, though her choppy and fluttery sound may not appeal to all listeners. Lorna Anderson sings only two songs.

Ben Johnson has a pleasing voice for his two songs, ‘Serenade Toscane’ and ‘Nell,’ and sounds at home in them. Nigel Cliffe’s gruff and craggy voice lacks enough delicacy for the two songs he sings.

John Chest, the one American here, sings six songs, including Poems d’un jour, with a voice of both mettle and tenderness.

Primary praise goes to Martineau for his elegant and lithe accompaniment.

Notes, text, and translations.

R MOORE

FLOYD: Wuthering Heights

Georgia Jarman (Cathy), Susanne Mentzer (Nelly), Heather Buck (Isabella), Kelly Markgraf (Heathcliff), Vale Rideout (Edgar), Chad Shelton (Hindley); Florentine Opera/ Joseph Mechavich

Carlisle Floyd wrote Wuthering Heights in 1958; this recording was made by the Florentine Opera of Milwaukee in January of 2015. In the years between, the opera has had few revivals, never coming close to the popularity of Floyd’s two big successes, Susannah and Of Mice and Men. The libretto (by the composer) seems to be a good reduction of the novel to dramatic form, but the music is simply not as instantly accessible as the two popular works. Floyd has not found a musical language for the English moors as he did for Susannah’s Tennessee mountains. To be sure, there are some fine moments—a short duet for Cathy and Nelly in Scene 1 and a sort of love duet in Scene 2—but the music falls short of truly memorable.

In the last half of the opera the music seems to get better. In Act III the party scene boasts a pleasant waltz, an aria for Heathcliff, and a good ensemble before the gambling begins. Cathy and Nelly have another good duet at the end of Act III, Scene 1. In the second scene of Act III there is an aria for Isabella and a climactic quartet of despair for Cathy, Nelly, Heathcliff, and Edgar. The final scene may be the strongest, with Cathy’s opening aria and the final tragic duet between Heathcliff and Cathy. So there is a lot of interesting music, enough to make this an enjoyable theatrical experience, but not the kind of thing you want to hear again and again.

The performance is quite good. Georgia Jarman and Kelly Markgraf make a very good Cathy and Heathcliff, Jarman with her clear, secure soprano and Markgraf with his rich, wide-ranging baritone. I have seen Kelly Markgraf in other performances and can attest to the fact that he would be physically perfect as Heathcliff. The veteran Susanne Mentzer makes a wonderful Nelly, and the rest of the singers are quite satisfactory. Joseph Mechavich conducts ably.

The recording comes with two booklets—a full libretto (with some errors) and a smaller book with bios and essays by Floyd and the director of Florentine Opera.

SININGER

FRANCAIX: Flute Pieces; see DAMASE

FRANCK: Symphony; see GRIEG

GRIEG: Holberg Suite; FRANCK: Symphony

Thomas Murray, org
Delos 3525—66 minutes

When one thinks organ transcription, the name Thomas Murray immediately comes to mind. He has been instrumental in reviving interest in the art of the organ transcription—has been a tireless advocate through his long career of performing and recording. Organ transcriptions are very popular now, and there is rarely an organ recital these days that does not include one. The art has a long history, beginning with Bach’s Vivaldi transcriptions, through the Wagner transcriptions by Edwin Lemare in the early 20th Century, to today’s practitioners who don’t hesitate at transcribing Berlioz, Mahler, and Stravinsky.

Murray plays two 20th Century examples. The Grieg suite was transcribed by Richard Ellsasser, an organist many have probably encountered. He was Virgil Fox’s main competitor, and he possessed a photographic memory, which allowed him to have the entire organ repertoire at his fingertips. One of his most acclaimed pieces was Flight of the Bumblebee—on the pedals! The Holberg Suite is a delightful arrangement and Murray plays it with keen understanding. The Franck has always sounded to me like organ music that had been transcribed for orchestra. It makes a marvelous organ piece in this transcription by the American organist Calvin Hampton. Murray brings it off with great elan, particularly the brooding slow movement. I wish he would have been a bit faster in the last movement.

He plays the 2004 Schoenstein organ in St Martin’s Episcopal, Houston. He uses it in a
masterly way, bringing endless nuances of color to these wonderful transcriptions. The booklet offers the specification of the organ and Murray’s intelligent and illuminating notes on the music.

**Froberger:** Keyboard Pieces

*vol 7: Capriccios*

Aeolus 10701 [SACD] 79 minutes

*vol 8: Toccatas*

Aeolus 10134 — 77 minutes

Bob van Asperen, hpsi, org

I don’t have much to add to my enthusiastic review from a few months ago (J/A 2016), where I greeted the reissued volumes 3 and 4 of this terrific series. The new volumes 7 and 8 complete it. Aeolus sells these discs singly or in two bundles of four volumes or as a single box of everything. Because it has two vocal rarities and several newly-discovered keyboard pieces, it is the first complete recording of Froberger’s music. Volume 8 was recorded 2001-3, but issued only now in 2016. Volume 7 from 2002 and 2010 is a hybrid SACD.

In Volume 8, Van Asperen plays most of the toccatas on harpsichord, but three on organ, and he fits Froberger’s two vocal pieces (not toccatas) into the sequence for interesting variety. Those two sound like contemporary motets by Heinrich Schutz, for three voices plus instruments. They are sung with beautiful expression and clarity in this world-premiere recording. The harpsichord pieces are more interesting than the organ ones, with quicker contrasts of mood and tempo. To be fair, two of the organ pieces were designed as background music for Holy Communion, not to draw much attention.

Froberger’s toccata formula here, like Frescobaldi before him, is to set up a series of short contrapuntal sections interspersed with freer passages of decorated harmonic progressions. It’s like brilliant improvisation. The music in this fantastic manner catches Van Asperen at his expressive best, with great sweep and quick changes of character. The harpsichord is the famous and anonymous “F.A. 1677” owned by Kenneth Gilbert. The two organs are in Bologna and Pistoia, but they don’t get much playing time in this album.

Turning to Volume 7, the music is more arcane. Froberger’s capriccios are tougher compositions to listen to than his toccatas. It is also difficult to hear how they are much different from canzonas and ricercars. As mostly-severe counterpoint they are not very capricious. Richard Egarr’s recording (Globe, 1994) has 17 of the extant capriccios, omitting a doubtful one, and he chose to use harpsichord for most of those, instead of organ. They are for manuals; pedal is optional and makes a few spots more convenient. I like the extra verve that the harpsichord brings.

Van Asperen has all 18 of them together on one CD. That total of “18” needs a bit more explanation. There is no Capriccio 11, as the one printed with that number in Guido Adler’s 1896 edition is really just a section from Canzona 1. But there is a newly discovered capriccio 19 (not available to Egarr). So, the roster here has 18 of them, skipping number 11. The booklet presents an analysis of each piece, mostly in Adler’s sequence. It is difficult to follow along with this while listening to the recording, as Van Asperen has resequenced them for performance. The organ in Volume 7 is the magnificent three-manual Schnitger instrument in Norden, restored by Ahrend in the 1980s. All the registrations are in the booklet.

As in the earlier volumes, the scholarship of this Froberger Edition is brilliant and the presentation is deluxe in every way. Bravo to Van Asperen and Aeolus for completing this important set over the many years it took!

**Galuppi:** Organ Sonatas (21)

Luca Scandali

Brilliant 95140 [2CD] 140 minutes

Venetian composer Baldassare Galuppi (1706-85) was extraordinarily prolific, with about 100 operas as well as many oratorios, liturgical works, and instrumental compositions to his credit. Venice was his home base for nearly the whole of his life, but he traveled widely in Europe with three-year stays in London and St Petersburg. Manuscript sources of his works are scattered among 59 libraries.

Among Galuppi’s instrumental works are 175 keyboard sonatas. Some are single-movement sonatas on the model of Scarlatti, while others are multi-movement pieces. In general, they are more-or-less equally suitable for the harpsichord, organ, or fortepiano. Galuppi was himself noted as an accomplished performer on the harpsichord and organ. He worked extensively as a church organist, and it seems likely that he sometimes performed his sonatas on that instrument. The notes with this recording do not indicate why these par-
particular 21 sonatas were chosen, but it seems a reasonable conjecture that musical quality and suitability for the organ were the chief considerations. Annotator Marco Ruggeri characterizes Galuppi's compositional style as the Italian version of the style galant. The sonatas recorded here are charming, elegant, and well crafted, but they can hardly be called profound.

The sonatas are performed here on two historic instruments built by Gaetano Callido in Macerata. The organ at the Collegiate Church of St Bartholomew dates from 1804, and the instrument at the Collegiate Church of St Paul from 1792. The two organs have nearly identical stop lists, and both were restored in 2011 by Michel Formentelli. They are characteristic single-manual Italian instruments of the period with a very rudimentary pedal. The treble and bass of many of the registers can be drawn separately. I do not find the tone agreeable. Fuller registrations are strident; and individual stops, even the quieter ones, are raw and blatant. As I recall from other recordings of Formentelli restorations, such qualities are typical of his work. Judging from this recording, St Paul's has a livelier reverberation than St Bartholomew's, and that somewhat mitigates the stridency and rawness of tone. Also it seems that the St Paul's organ is recorded at a greater distance, so the sound is better blended and not quite as aggressive. Apart from these factors, the two organs are barely distinguishable. Their aggressive tone is not well suited to project Galuppi's lyrical melodies. It tends to draw my attention away from the music. Luca Scandali's playing is fluent, stylish, and animated; but on instruments like these, it is a losing proposition.

Jazz pianist Giorgio Gaslini (1929-2014) has released over 100 records and has written film music, including the score to La Notte by Antonioni. He is apparently well known in Italy. He is not particularly known here.

Jazz is not particularly what this music is about, though it all has an improvisational character that gives the work the impression of noodling. Murales Promenade (2006) is a four-movement tone poem for piano and orchestra depicting a walk through a Spanish art museum—a Pictures at an Exhibition—though the actual pictures involved are not described in the fuzzy notes by Alberti. There is a hideous opening chord, an angular melody, some jazzy solos, dreamy cadenzas, and a recap. It consists of “andante after dark”; III begins with an amused stroll, encounters dramatic flailing, and resumes the stroll. The finale continues rambling until the cadence.

Adagio is Beautiful (1998), for 16 strings, is 9 minutes of nondescript slow music.

The Piano Concerto (2013) develops a seven-note theme all through its four movements. Again the music moves from one idea to another without much sense of inevitability.

It’s not unpleasant, but I can’t imagine it pleasing anyone with standards or much of an attention span. Performances are dutiful. I’d skip it.

In a previous article on Gernsheim’s Symphonies 1 and 3 (Nov/Dec 2013), I’d queried, re their competent dullness, how much can sound technique overcome lack of inspiration? The question remains valid, as these works from the textbook viewpoint are fine, but neither has much unique or beautiful to express. They’re tasteful, well harmonized with skilled transitions, but seem to be the work of someone with nothing better to do than fill up a pile of manuscript paper.

Gernsheim was a Brahms epigone, and the resemblance of one page after another to pages in Brahms’s symphonies becomes amusing. Moreover, Brahms’s symphonies have their share of grit in both harmony and scoring. These are Brahms Lite, with all the seasoning left out. The performances are good, with warm tone quality and alert ensemble. Maestro Baumer’s conducting does all it can to present the merits of the music. The scores are in the Petrucci online library.

For education to happen, people must encounter worthwhile things outside their sphere of interest and brainpower. Knowledge grows, skills improve, tastes refine, and conscience ripens only if the experiences bear a degree of unfamiliarity.

Mark Bauerlein, The Dumbest Generation
GERSHWIN: Rhapsody in Blue; Concerto in F; I Got Rhythm Variations; 8 Preludes
Mark Bebbington, p; Royal Philharmonic/ Leon Botstein
Somm 260 [2CD] 85 minutes

Here are three of my favorite works for piano and orchestra with a bonus CD of all of Gershwin’s solo piano Preludes. For over 50 years, Earl Wild’s recordings with Fiedler and the Boston Pops (RCA 68792, Nov/Dec 1997) have been the yardstick by which I measure all other performances. Wild’s 1993 Concerto in F with Giunta and the Des Moines Symphony (Chesky 98, Jan/Feb 1994) benefits from superior sound and shows that a talented mid-level American orchestra can knock the socks off this work in a way I doubt any British orchestra could ever manage, no matter how well conducted.

It is worth quoting Gershwin’s description of the concerto before going further with the current release. “The first movement employs the Charleston rhythm. It is quick and pulsating, representing the young enthusiastic spirit of American Life. The second movement has a poetic nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues, but in a purer form than that in which they are usually treated. The final movement refers to the style of the first. It is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping to the same pace throughout.”

Bebbington and the Royal Philharmonic do not have a good feel for this music. Botstein does, but he is hampered by Bebbington’s exceedingly slow tempos (total for the three works with orchestra here is 67:47—Wild takes 53:11). The pianist’s constant use of rubato and his slowing of the tempo at the ending of almost every small section of the works robs this music of its essential rhythmic vitality. The big sections and climaxes are approached with such major ritards that I found myself shouting “Keep moving, please!” While there are some nicely shaped phrases and wonderfully sensitive and musical moments, there is little drive or energy, and nothing swings.

The second disc presents all the works that were published as Preludes and others that have come to be accepted as Preludes: Novellette in fourths, Rubato, Fragment, and Melody 17. The Prelude based on ‘Sleepless Nights’ as reconstructed by Kay Swift is simply another version of Melody 17. The Fragment is the opening of the Concerto in F’s final movement. All have been recorded before, but I do believe, as advertised, this is the “first integral recording”. The best known and published, Three Preludes (1927) have great recordings by pianists from Gershwin himself to William Bolcom (Nonesuch 79151) and many, many others. They are performed in five or six minutes by Gershwin and Bolcom, but Bebbington takes seven. Enough said. The best aspect of the current recording was that it gave me the opportunity to pull out some old favorites for the comparison. I will not listen to this one again.

HARRINGTON

GIORDANI: Sacred Pieces
Marinella Pennicchi, Chiarastella Onorati, Carlo Putelli, Davide Malvestio; Alessandro Albenga, org; Petral Si Choir/ Stefano Cucci
Tactus 750702—59 minutes

Giuseppe Giordani (1751-98) was educated at the Santa Maria di Loreto Conservatory in his native Naples and spent the greater part of his career as a composer of operas and oratorios. In 1789 he was appointed director of music at Fermo Cathedral and from 1791 combined that with a comparable position at the oratory church of Santo Spirito. His later years as a composer were devoted mainly to liturgical music and oratorios. After he died, the manuscripts of his works, sacred and secular, were collected as part of the archives of Fermo Cathedral in token of the great esteem he enjoyed there. The liturgical pieces on this recording were written for Fermo Cathedral, and they are claimed as first recordings. There is currently a project in progress to publish his collected works.

The works on this recording are for solo voices, choir, and organ. The organ parts are no mere continuo support for the voices, but fully composed and thematically significant writing that engages in dialog with the singers. One might easily take the organ writing to be a reduction of an orchestral score. In style, the music may remind the listener of Mozart’s early Salzburg masses. Giordani generally avoids rigorous contrapuntal writing, but the music is lively, imaginative, and well crafted. He does not hesitate to give the soloists, especially the soprano, vocal lines of operatic virtuosity.

The program opens with Mass and Vespers, evidently intended as a single composite work. The mass consists of Kyrie and Gloria only. Vespers opens with the versicle and response ‘Domine ad Adluvandum’ followed
by settings of two Vulgate psalms, each set as two movements: 109 (‘Dixit Dominus’) and 112 (‘Laudate Pueri’). The work concludes with a Magnificat, the canticle at Vespers, set as three short, contrasted sections.

Next on the program is a setting of the Benediction hymn ‘Tantum Ergo’. This work survives in two versions: one with orchestra and one with organ alone—recorded here.

Giordani wrote a set of 85 Offertories for the Entire Year. The Offertory is an antiphon that is part of the minor propers of the mass. It comes at the natural dividing point of the liturgy, directly after the Liturgy of the Word. This is when the altar is ritually prepared for the Eucharistic celebration. As this can take some time, it is an appropriate place for elaborate music. Giordani’s Offertories are brief motets for soloists, choir, and organ, well adapted to this interval in the liturgy. Eight of these works are given on the present recording, and not all are settings of Offertory texts. One of the most touching is ‘Tui Sunt Caeli’ for Christmas Day, set in the style of a pastoral siciliano. ‘Gaudeamus Omnes’ is the Introit for All Saints; ‘Constitutus Eos’ is the Offertory for SS Peter & Paul; ‘Justitiae Domini’ is the Offertory for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost; ‘Oravi Deum’ is for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost; ‘O Gloriosae Mary of the Assumption is the patron of the Entire Year.

The choir sounds amateurish. The vocal soloists are quite respectable, but I would stop short of calling them outstanding. But listeners who want a recording of this music have no other choice. Texts and translations are not included, but may be obtained from the label website. The booklet gives an advertisement for a recording of Giordani Offertories, presumably for solo voice, sung by mezzo-soprano Daniela Nuzzoli with organist Marcello Rossi (Tactus 750701—not reviewed in ARG).

Critical Judgement and Personal Taste are different kinds of evaluation which always overlap but seldom coincide exactly. Critical Judgement is a public matter; we agree as to what we consider artistic virtues and artistic defects. Our personal tastes, however, differ.

WH Auden

**American Record Guide**

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**GLAZOUNOV: Violin Concerto;**
see SHOSTAKOVICH

**GODARD: Symphony 2; Symphonie Gothique; 3 Pieces**
Munich Radio Orchestra/ David Reiland
CPO 555044—69 minutes

Benjamin Godard (1849-95) was a child prodigy, once thought to be promising on the level of Mozart. Though he wrote several serious works, including symphonies and operas, he never fulfilled that promise. His early death at 46 from tuberculosis had something to do with that, as did the distractions of his varied interests. In the end, he was best known for such light forms as salon pieces, songs, and piano works. Godard was a contemporary of the French Wagnerians, but as a part-Jew he despised their idol and turned toward the German romantics, especially Beethoven and Mendelssohn. His music was also influenced by the band music and French opera of his time. It even had a touch of English breeziness and some serious yearning that anticipates Elgar. Godard’s work is entertaining, but generally not profound, and sometimes it runs on too long. (For a somewhat different view, see Steve Haller’s review of Symphonie Orientale in Sept/Oct 2011.)

Symphony No. 2 (1886) is a piece with German textures combined with French elegance and color. The first influence that comes to mind is Saint-Saëns in that composer’s more dramatic moments. There are also hints of Franck scattered about plus Elgar in some reflective passages and the grandiose ending. The way Godard treats the theme-and-variations II mildly suggests Brahms, though Godard’s theme remains more in the forefront as a solid edifice. A lighter variation even looks to Tchaikovsky, as does similar music in the A sections of the Vivace. The slow B sections also have a Russian flavor, leaning toward Rimsky-Korsakov in their treatment of hymnlike material. The stirring Allegro con Moto, with its flowing theme, color, and melodic turns, subtly combines Tchaikovsky, Borodin’s harmonies, and the flourishes of Elgar’s marches. The one problem with the finale is that it becomes repetitive and runs on too long.

The first of the Three Pieces (1879), the stately ‘Marche Funebre’, is not a passacaglia, but it unfolds with the steadiness of one. I doubt that it began as an organ work, but it sounds like it could have, partly because it treats the theme-and-response opening idea...
in a way that Bach might approve. ‘Bresilienne’ (Brazilian) sounds like a pleasant interlude on Brazilian themes. The title ‘Kermesse’ is from the Dutch for church and mass, but it has come to connote a festival to celebrate the opening of a church. Its beginning sounds a little like the opening music to Cavalleria Rusticana, but the work goes on to be more vigorous, lyrical, and festive. Its rousing march is one Berlioz might have enjoyed. In some ways Kermesse is similar to the finale of the Symphony No. 2, including that music’s repetitiveness and excessive length.

Symphonie Gothique is not a symphony so much as a suite. It is also far more Baroque than Gothic. The Maestoso lives up to its name with the big brass opening and, like Marche Funèbre, sounds like an organ piece. Andantino Quasi Allegro presents a pleasant exercise in woodwind and string counterpoint in Baroque style. The Grave is a solemn, moving piece that sounds uncannily Elgarian, sharing much of the English master’s skill with melody, string writing, and wind coloring, to the point where one passage faintly precursors the opening theme to Elgar’s First Symphony. After a sprightly Mendelssohnian Presto (right down to the starring role of the flutes), we are back (sort of) to Elgar, this time the Wand of Youth Suites (‘Tame Bear’ and ‘Giants’).

The booklet notes are very good, though not quite up to CPO’s standards as far as describing the music is concerned. They do take considerable note of how some of the works were received. Godard’s French audiences seemed most impressed with flashier light music. They did not care for ‘Marche Funèbre’; and they thought that the Largo was the weakest movement of Symphonie Gothique. Perhaps Godard’s major fault is that he knew his audience? The sound is excellent.

Granados: Goyescas Intermezzo; Dance of the Green Eyes; Gypsy Dance; Night of the Dead Man; Dante
Gemma Coma-Alabert, mz; Jesus Alvarez Carrion, t; Barcelona Symphony/ Pablo Gonzalez
Naxos 573264—57 minutes

Granados found his unique compositional voice late, in his 40s, so collections of music spanning his career can be frustrating, even confusing. This program begins with three pieces in his Spanish nationalist style, spicy and vibrant—13 minutes. The other 44 minutes hail from 10 and 20 years before and inhabit a rather faceless international style about halfway between Debussy and Strauss, sometimes resembling Schoenberg’s early symphonic poem Pelleas et Melisande.

The text of the 1897 Night of the Dead Man, a time of intensifying belligerence leading to the Spanish-American War, promises “Those who die defending their country will be glorified and will not die,” set ironically in Granados’s generic late-romantic style untouched by any Spanish flare. It’s a bit of trite jingoism that hasn’t aged well and was my least favorite work here.

The largest piece is the 33-minute Dante symphonic poem of 1908, and I’d bet that every last bar is clotted with sharps and flats. The orchestration is colorful, bold, and intricate, every theme and gesture chromatic—and not a note of it lingers in the memory after the last note fades away.

Other than a touch more warble than I’d prefer from mezzo Coma-Alabert, both vocal soloists are pleasant and full of character. The orchestra is gorgeous, flexible, supple, recorded close and detailed. Maestro Gonzalez’s leadership and control is impressive: he starts the three Spanish pieces deliberately, then slowly ratchets up the tension until the last bar, and his band is always alert and engaged, even through the longueurs of the two big tone poems.

GRIEG & TCHAIKOVSKY: Piano Concertos
Denis Kozhukhin; Berlin Radio Symphony/ Vassily Sinaisky
Pentatone 5186 [SACD] 65 minutes

The Tchaikovsky is, of course, the First, and it opens the program. I’d like to be enthusiastic about it, but it is staid, measured, bland. Both soloist and conductor pull their punches. There are dozens—probably hundreds—of other recordings just like this one. Everybody’s very professional. There are no errors, gaffs, or missteps that I can discern, but everybody involved seems to be...uninvolved. It’s another run-through of Tchaikovsky 1. The problem is that if you’re going to send a new recording of this piece, of all concertos, out into the world, it has to say something new, or be spectacular, or at least be as spectacular as one that’s already in general circulation.

The first movement is the hardest to listen to here. We can be candid and say Tchaikovsky’s form here is not the tightest and most organized, but good heavens! Just

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because the movement rambles a bit and has connective passages that are a little too long and less than thrilling does not mean the soloist has to (figuratively) throw up his hands and give up! Yawn. It is a much less strenuous interlude, so it goes a little better but still, yawn. III is about pure virtuosity; not every pianist has to tear through it as fast as Horowitz with Toscanini (RCA), but there is a point where the tempo feels just too slow and the movement fails to make its effect. Going by the clock alone, Kozhukhin and Sinaysky should be fine, but somehow the whole movement feels tentative and lacks vigor.

This performance has a lot of the weaknesses of the Kirill Gerstein account (July/Aug 2015)—a low-voltage approach and a first movement that comes off more rambling than necessary.

What's a fellow to do if he wants to spice up his life with a new recording of Tchaikovsky I? My current recommendation is Natasha Paremski's (Mar/Apr 2014). I've had the good fortune to hear two white-hot Tchaikovsky Firsts from Ms Paremski, one with the Minnesota Orchestra and the other with the Des Moines Symphony, where she managed NOT to be upstaged by the world premiere of Peter Hamlin's loving musical depiction of the Iowa State Fair (a big thing here in Iowa), the Symphony on a Stick. If you're like me and expect that a stand-out interpretation of this concerto requires the soloist to push the music to the threshold of flying out of control but not cross it, the Paremski approach is far more satisfying than earnest Mr Kozhukhin's. (I get a kick out of Mark Koldys calling Paremski's recorded First "not the most thunderous" and marked by her "reluctance to pound the keyboard"—which I somewhat agree with—an example of an artist noticeably more careful in the recording studio than in an actual performance.)

As a more rhapsodic, less hard-driving piece the Grieg goes distinctly better. I suspect its tone world is more in line with Mr Kozhukhin's talents. It's still rather low-key and lacking in romantic fervor, but I can see how somebody who does not like high-octane Grieg would enjoy it very much.

Pentatone has been doing a spectacular job in the last decade refurbishing parts of the old Philips and Decca analog back-catalog in hybrid SACD sound. Their new productions, like this one, sound good and lack the "digital" harshness of standard CDs we complained about a lot back in the 90s. The piano is captured very well, is not hard or clangorous, and maybe that also reflects Mr Kozhukhin's playing style. But as I listen to this I can't help thinking the SACD format has more to offer in depth, clarity, and richness of instrumental tone than we're getting here.

**Guinovart:** Conte de Nadal; Nadalenca Suite
Unio Children's Chorus; Camera Musicae Orchestra/ Tomas Grau
LMG 2130—60 minutes

Albert Guinovart is a Catalan composer who writes in a very tonal, accessible style. Rhythms are simple, melodies are easy to follow, and the harmonies are straightforward and often interesting—they're in Andrew Lloyd Webber territory, but they are better than his. These two pieces sound like well-written school productions; Noyes Fludde they're not, but they have their charm. Conte de Nadal is based on Dickens's Christmas Carol, and Nadalenca Suite is a setting of live Catalan carols, ending with 'Fum, Fum, Fum'.

The orchestration and playing are deft, but the children's choir has an unvarying sound—they're blended well but there's never any real drama and rarely any real phrasing in Conte. Nadalenca is better performed, and the music is more engaging, almost a cousin of Canteloube's Songs of the Auvergne. Even so, I don't think too many people—other than the parents of the kids—would be eager to snap this release. There are no texts—not even in Catalan. Notes are in Catalan, Spanish, and English; the sound is fine.

**Haken:** Viola Sonata; Polonaise; Fur Fritz; Fantasia; Solo Suite
Rudolf Haken; Rachel Jensen, p
MSR 1609 — 66 minutes

Romancing the Viola is the title of this issue and it fits the program well, if you can ignore a number of dissonant chords that Mr Haken wakes us up with along the way. Not that we have gone to sleep. He is a lively and colorful composer. All of these works except the opening 1990 Polonaise were written around 1981. Of course this is impossible, since Haken was born in 1965. Well, let's see how it comes out.

There are certain negative moments. Haken is not the most polished viola player around, but hearing him playing his own music with conviction is enjoyable. The music itself is good if you aren't expecting anything...
too subtle. The solo viola suite is modeled on Bach’s cello suites in its formal structure, though without repeats; and five of the seven movements are in three beats to the bar, by the sound of it, making it hard to tell one movement from the next sometimes. The Fantasia is an enjoyable piece, and the D-minor Sonata that ends the program is a half-hour adventure in three movements including a lovely theme and variations in the middle.

The sound is a mite less rich than it might be, but the instruments are done justice to, and I am happy to have the project. There is more of Haken’s music on a Centaur CD, where he also plays. That was recorded back in 2002. Try this one. You might like it.

D MOORE

HAKIM: Organ Pieces
Overture Libanaise; Suite Norvégienne; Esquisse Persane; Suite Française; Basque Dances

Naji Hakim
Signum 463—59 minutes

Hakim is a Lebanese-French organist, composer, and improvisor. He succeeded Messiaen as organist at Sainte-Trinité in Paris, where he played from 1993 until 2008. His extensive output includes works for organ, orchestra, chamber ensembles, concertos, vocal and choral music, liturgical songs, arrangements, and pedagogical treatises.

This is the second volume where he plays his own music and demonstrates that he is a virtuoso of the first order. The sheer energy and drive of his playing is hard to resist. His style is unique: bold harmonies, Stravinskian rhythms, exotic colors, and an endlessly inventive musical imagination. Save for the 2001 Overture Libanaise, these works all date from the past five years.

Part of the effect of this music is due to the wonderful, ultra-modern Schuke organ in the Palacio Euskalduna in Bilbao, Spain. The power and brilliance of the reed stops and the delicious colors of the flutes are a perfect complement to the music and his playing. Turn up the volume and strap yourself in. Composer’s notes on the music and specifications.

DEL CAMP

Cooking is an art, and its appreciation therefore is governed by the law which applies to all artistic appreciation. Those who have been subjected too long and too exclusively to bad cooking become incapable of recognizing good cooking if and when they encounter it.

WH Auden

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Frederic Hand has been a respected member of the guitar community for many decades. He is based in New York and has been the official guitarist of the Metropolitan Opera for two decades. As a composer, he is best known outside the guitar world for the theme of "Kramer vs. Kramer". Guitarists know him as a warm player and a composer—his works are tonal, beautiful, often with jazz or folk influences. He writes idiomatically for guitar—his music can be challenging, but it always lies well on the instrument.

With the exception of his highly effective Sony recording Baroque and on the Street (released back in the LP era), he has not often recorded, so this is a real delight. All the works here are his music or his arrangements; in the latter category we have one of Alfonso el Sabio’s ‘Cantigas’, a set of four Sephardic songs, a Scottish folk song ‘The Water is Wide’, and the Gluck. The others are often occasional pieces—‘Sophia’s Journey’ was written for his granddaughter, ‘Odyssey’ for the Greek Duo Evangelos and Liza, ‘For Julian’ in celebration of his teacher Julian Bream. Devotion is another recurring theme, heard in the Marian Cantiga, the Sephardic songs, along with ‘Prayer’ and ‘A Psalm of Thanksgiving’. Guitarist David Leisner joins him on ‘Prayer’ and flutist Jayna Nelson on the Psalm.

The playing here is all warm, beautiful, and tasteful (well, except for the Gluck, which he plays like Tarrega). The original composer is not always the finest performer of his own music, but I can’t imagine anyone doing this better. It’s like listening to an old friend.

KEATON

New Zealander Ross Harris’s Fifth Symphony uses three poems by Panni Palasti, a Hungarian who survived the siege of Budapest in World War II. Long Adagio movements begin and end the symphony; the first seems to depict an oppressed mind, dull and confused but trying to survive. II is ‘The Line-Up’, where Palasti wonders if her father would hide her under his body and whisper, play dead, child, play dead to stay alive. III is the first of two Scherzo movements, a little more tonal than the dissonant, polyphonic Adagio I; it is violent, though, and has hints of Shostakovich and German expressionism. ‘Candlelight is a recollection of scraping up old wax to make new candles, soiled offering(s) to the God of Air Raids. Russell is accompanied mostly by eerie harp and strings. Scherzo II is jittery and squirming, not jack-booted like the first one; it often slips into a delirious waltz. In ‘Lessons Learned from My Father’, Palasti recalls him talking about the hole in his hip from the butt of a gun, about sliding over bodies in squelching mud. “He taught me how to stay alive...to smile, and above all to wait until the devils fall.” Adagio II is also very dissonant, and even though the lines often shift and slide over each other, the movement is much more confident and settled than Adagio I; the climax is defiant. It’s a potent, worthwhile symphony. My only real complaint is that the vocal writing only serves to present the lyrics—it doesn’t elevate or enhance them. Ross tends to write brainy music, but it has a real heart to it, and it’s not a trial to listen to.

The Violin Concerto is more challenging. Fragmented, hesitant phrases from the violin open the work, and they are soon joined quietly by other instruments. I flows into the faster II, which goes on an abstract, energetic ride before settling into the lyrical III. IV is vigorous and direct, and it just flies by. V gets quieter.
and quieter until all thats left are wisps of notes that vanish into nothing. The violin part is difficult but not ostentatious, and it’s almost never out of the picture. When I hear a concerto like this, romantic in scoring but almost atonal in harmony, its hard not to compare it to Berg’s. They aren’t too far apart, but Ross’s is not quite as plush, and it’s more cerebral, without the Berg’s emotional mountains and valleys.

In the symphony, Russell’s voice doesn’t have much expression; I wouldn’t want to hear her sing Mahler, but then again, Mahler would give her more line and emotion to work with. Gringolts, Walker, and the orchestra are excellent—they always know exactly where the music is going. Notes are in English.

**Haydn: Cello Concertos**

Pavel Gomziakov, Gulbenkian Orchestra

Onyx 4151—60 minutes

The news here is that this is the first recording ever made on the “King of Portugal” Stradivarius cello of 1725, which resides in a museum in Lisbon.

But, though cellists may want to hear the instrument, the rest of us should be content with the recordings we already have of these concertos—or buy the Audite recording by Mark Coppey (July/Aug). The cello here is miked very close-up, and its sound is sometimes brown, sometimes rough, sometimes nasal. The orchestra (no conductor) is very plain and adds little to the picture. They need more vibrato much of the time. Needless to say, no cellist plays without vibrato (it would sound terrible), so one wonders why they didn’t come closer to matching his tone.

The program opens with the delightful Adagio from Haydn’s Violin Concerto in C. It is played on the cello here, and it sounds really good that way. Between the two concertos we are given a beautiful performance of the Adagio from Symphony 13, the cello again in the lead.

**Henze: Being Beauteous; Chamber Music 1958**

Anna Prohaska, s; Peter Gijertsen, t; Jurgen Ruck, g; NDR Symphony/ Peter Ruckicha

Wergo 7334—64 minutes

*Being Beauteous* (1963), a setting of the poem by Rimbaud from the cycle *Les Illuminations* scored for coloratura soprano, four cellos, and harp, is appropriately dreamy and druggy. In spaced out 60s Darmstadian style, Rimbaud’s “snow of being” and “circles of secret music” “rise, expand, and quiver” with the assistance of Ms Prohaska’s unearthly soprano. Henze is unexpectedly Francophile in this work, and could be easily paired with the work of his nemesis Boulez.

*Chamber Music 1958* sets Holderlin’s *In Lielicher Blaue* for tenor and chamber orchestra with guitar. The gloomy musings are given in a romantic modernist style that caused a furor at Darmstadt when it was premiered. Today it sounds mainstream—and rather beautiful in its way. Mr Gijertsen sings it with finesse, and the fine orchestra accompanies artfully. Wergo does not grace us with translations of the texts, evidently assuming that people who buy this are European and bilingual. Texts are available online, if you choose to pursue them, but CD buyers pay for these things. Notes, though, are in English, so chalk this up to poor production values and disregard for American audiences.

**Henze: 3 Tentos; Royal Winter Music**

Andrea Dieci, g

Brilliant 95186—73 minutes

Hans Werner Henze has written several works for guitar and other instruments, but only these three solo works. These, and the chamber music, were given fine performances by Franz Halasz and others on two Naxos discs (S/O 2006 & M/A 2011). The *Drei Tentos* from 1955 are important, but the two sonatas he dubbed *Royal Winter Music, on Shakespeare Characters* are huge—and some of the most important works of the last century for guitar. They were written for and first recorded by Julian Bream. The two works make considerable demands on both the performer and the listener; perhaps because of this, there have been few recordings, but all of them are excellent. In addition to Bream’s and Halasz’s, we have outstanding recordings by David Tannenbaum (J/A 1990) and his student Elliot Simpson (J/F 2013).

I am happy to report that Andrea Dieci’s new recording can stand proudly among those—and, indeed, he finds things in the music I had not heard before. One does not normally think “beautiful” is an apt description of these thorny works, but that very word was what I kept thinking through the performances. It’s not just that his tone is beautiful, but
Dieci finds beauty in phrases and form, no matter how harshly dissonant the music.

One other new thing here—in the original manuscript of the first sonata Henze inserted a ritornello between each of the movements. It doesn’t quite function like the “promenade” in Moussorgsky’s Pictures because it’s the same each time—which is what ritornello means. Henze did not include this in the final print version of the score, but I rather like it. It brings additional unity to the sprawling work.

You won’t go wrong with any of these performances, but Dieci is sufficiently different that I recommend it even if you already have another,

**KEATON**

**HERZOGENBERG: Quartets, op 42; BRAHMS: Quartet I**

Minguet Quartet

CPO 777 084 [2CD] 129 minutes

Heinrich von Herzogenberg (1843-1900) was a well-trained composer who absorbed influence from others—Schumann, Wagner (only in his youth), and particularly Brahms. He also held earlier music—Bach and Schütz—in high regard and, along with Spitta and others, was a founder of the Bach Society. He is perhaps best remembered as a composer who allied himself with the Brahms camp and constantly sought approval from the master. This was a tangled relationship, because he also was husband to Elisabeth, a pianist who was a student and close, lifelong friend of Brahms. Brahms seemed to have been more polite and lukewarm than genuinely enthusiastic about Herzogenberg’s music. At any rate the correspondence between Brahms and the Herzogenbergs gives a nice glimpse into Brahms’s personal life.

Of all the influences on Herzogenberg’s music, Brahms was far and away the most important, and we can only guess why Brahms was so sparing in his praise. Herzogenberg certainly tried to help things along by dedicating these three quartets (out of five total) to Brahms, and indeed, they are all very much in Brahmsian style. His command of counterpoint is fine, and the harmonic language, while not very adventurous for the 1880s, is solid and without misstep. He uses motives exhaustively and employs all the traditional classical forms. The music lacks the concentration and density of Brahms, who can say a lot in a short period of time, but these are altogether pleasant pieces.

The Minguet Quartet does a lovely job with these works; everything is laid out with beauty and romantic warmth. This makes a nice companion to their recording of the Herzogenberg quintet and quartet (Op. 18) reviewed by Don O’Connor (M/J 2010). I am less pleased with their Brahms quartet, which seems a little harsh and scrappy in the outer movements, though the inner two are fine. So, buy this for the Herzogenberg and use the Brahms as a reminder that, pleasant as Herzogenberg may be, he was not quite Brahms!

**ALTHOUSE**

**HILDEGARD: Chants**

Oxford Girls Choir/ Richard Vendome

Gift of Music 1289—65:18

Though titled “Music for a Medieval Abbey” and given a release date of 2016, this is a reissue of “Angelic Voices” (Gift of Music 1028) from 1998, and it contains a selection of the chants composed (or arranged) by Hildegard of Bingen. The Oxford Girls’ Choir and their director Richard Vendome were involved in the first two releases of Hildegard (Sept/Oct 1996 & Jan/Feb 2000—Vol. 3, Celestial Harmonies 131129, was not sent for review and does not include the choir).

The tracks sung by the young women of the choir are consistently excellent, though the extreme range of ‘O Vos Angeli’ (two octaves plus a fifth) stretches their voices in the extreme upper register. The soloists in four of the chants (‘Studium Divinitatis’, ‘O Orzechis Ecclesia’, ‘O Nobilissima Viriditas’, and ‘Laus Trinitatis’) are also impressive. Five chants (‘O Successores’, ‘Columba Aspexit’, ‘O Pater Omnium’, ‘O Quam Mirabilis’, and ‘O Eucharis in Leta Via’) are sung by an unidentified group of men (perhaps including Richard Vendome). These sound less assured and lack the blend of the young women. The track labeled as Ordo Virtutum is actually only the last “scene” of Hildegard’s morality play, beginning with the Devil’s question as he attempts to break into the circle of the Virtues, “Que es, aut unde venis?” (Who are you, and from whence do you come?). If I have one complaint, it is that the Devil sounds too restrained in his speeches rather than angry.

Some of the tracks are accompanied by a hurdy-gurdy drone, and a high shawm is added in the Ordo Virtutum excerpt; but it is the beauty of the young women’s voices that is most impressive.

**BREWER**

**American Record Guide**

85
HINDEMITH: Der Damon; Herodiade; Kammermusik 1+2
Gisela Zoch-Westphal, narr; Florian Henschel, p; Ensemble Varianti/ Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau
Hanssler 16014 [2CD] 92 minutes

This collection of relatively rare Hindemith is from a concert given at the 1995 Schwetzinger Festival in Germany in recognition of the composer’s 100th birthday. The first two Kammermusik works and Hindemith’s first ballet Der Damon are from 1922, around the time that he abandoned the influence of Richard Strauss for the experimental phase of his career. It was a period that the composer did not look back on fondly, according to conductor Gerd Albrecht, who has recorded some of that music. Herodiade (1944), Hindemith’s last ballet, is from the middle of his neoromantic period.

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau conducted briefly in the 1970s, and his few recordings have achieved a cult status. I do not recall hearing them, but they have been described as lyrical interpretations one would expect from a conductor who was a great singer. After retiring from singing in 1993, he resumed conducting, mostly as an accompanist for his wife, soprano Julia Varady. Ensemble Varianti, named after Luigi Nono’s unaccompanied violin sonata, was a chamber orchestra devoted mostly to contemporary music. It worked from 1994 to 2001.

I discussed these works in my review of a five-disc set recorded for CPO by Werner Andreas Albert (July/Aug 2001), but some comments are in order here, particularly about Herodiade: Orchestral Recitation after Mallarme. Hindemith’s idea, expressed in the score, was to integrate a poem by Stephane Mallarme into the orchestra, allowing instrumentalists rather than singers to express the text. To help with interpretation, he printed the French text into the score over notes, breaking the words up according to note values. According to his biographer Geoffrey Skelton, the idea of using a narrator came up when Robert Craft wanted to record the piece for Columbia with Norwegian ballerina Vera Zorina reading the poem. Hindemith reluctantly gave permission: “These people are my friends. What can I say to them? Let them do it.” I read the Skelton biography long after I reviewed the Albert disc, and I never saw this information in any CD booklet notes for Herodiade. That includes the Albert, even though it presented both versions of the work.

Hearing the Craft-Zorina much later was revelatory in the way Zorina’s delivery for the most part actually matches the rhythms of instrumental soloists who are playing those rhythms under the words in the text. The effect is uncanny. In reviewing the Albert, I wrote that I preferred the music-only version, “partly because Anne Gicquel’s broad delivery... sounds overbearing.” I now think overbearing is a bit strong, but I may have felt that way because I had no sense of her delivery matching those rhythms of the text even though she is a pianist. Part of that is her fault, but after hearing the piece with smaller orchestras closer to what Hindemith called for, it becomes clear that Albert’s use of a large orchestra does not help. What this comes down to is that anyone interested in the piece with the text must hear the Craft.

As for this recording, Gisela Zoch-Westphal reads a German translation so all those rhythmic effects are lost, but far worse is her hammy, over-the-top reading, which draws way too much attention from the music. For a performance without text, Albert’s large-orchestra reading is OK, but for good performances closer to what Hindemith had in mind, I know of only James Sedarés’s recording on Koch and one from a group named Inscape, available only by streaming.

Der Dämon is drawn from a libretto by Max Krell and concerns a demon taunting two sisters. The work is full of seedy atmosphere, dark harmonies, ostinato, and jazz elements. The scoring is for pairs of winds and brass, piano, and string quintet. The performance captures the bite and jazzy elements, but it is metric, aggressive, and leans towards harshness, especially in the fast sections. For some listeners that will be fine, but I find it annoying. I leaned to the Albert when I reviewed it and still like it, but I now think that Gerd Albrecht and his mid-sized orchestra capture the spirit of the piece better, with more warmth and finesse. I do not know the recording by Lothar Zagrosek.

The reading of Kammermusik No. 1, a piano concerto, is OK but pianist Florian Henschel’s tone is too bright and crisp and his rhythm too metric, especially in I. Kammermusik No. 2 is the best thing on this set. The playing, with its suggestions of Stravinsky, especially Petrouchka, is suave without losing the spirit of the piece. For alternatives, I know only complete sets. My favorite is the hard to find Manfred Reichert (Harmonia Mundi). Albert’s (spread among the set referred to
above) is similar, though more laid back and less interesting. Chailly and the Concertgebouw earned many good reviews, including here (May/June 1993), though I find No. 1 too austere and aggressive. I don’t know the Concerto Amsterdam (Mar/Apr 2012) or Stenz (Mar/Apr 1996), though both were well received in ARG.

The sound here is good for a concert performance. Kammermusik No. 1 is less defined than some others, but its greater integration has benefits. The notes by Raoul Morchen are extensive, except about Herodiade, where he fails to write one word about the history of presenting the work with a narrator, let alone one speaking German.

This issue promises more than it delivers, given the program and participants, and charging for two full-price discs for 92 minutes does not help. Some listeners might like the performances, but I would pass.

IRELAND & MOERAN: Choral Pieces
David Owen Norris, p; Carice Singers/George Parris—Naxos 573584—78 minutes

John Ireland (1879-1962) is known for his piano works and art songs, but precious few of us have come in contact with his choral fare. This collection will remedy that. But I suspect most listeners will be more affected by Ernest John Moeran (1892-1950) who turned out elegant fare you’ll be pleased to come back to again and again. Before The Great War, Moeran was a student of the eminent Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. Following the armistice, he continued his studies at the Royal Conservatory under John Ireland, who had a strong influence on his work. (The wonderful cover photo here is of the two of them sitting by a lake.) But more lasting influences would come his way from the writer and critic Philip Heseltine (composer Peter Warlock), who turned Moeran on to Elizabethan songs and letters and the creative possibilities they could inspire.

Ireland’s part-songs, mind you, are nothing to sneeze at. He could spin out chromatic lines worthy of a barbershop quartet (‘They Told Me, Heraclitus’) and feisty songs of the sea like ‘Sea Fever’ and ‘In Praise of Neptune.’ For the most part, though, his songs are lyrical, pastoral, and not especially memorable. Moeran, by contrast, wore his heart further out on his sleeve. He was a 20th Century madrigalist at heart, infusing Elizabethan pizzazz into his writing with great flair. Moeran’s wordplay is intense, his daffodils are fair, and his fountains weep, even as they turn their heads upward towards heaven’s sun. This composer was on intimate terms with the ups and downs of life, and was exceptionally good at turning both into song.

The singers are nicely attuned to both composers. The Carice sopranos can be shrill in animated interludes; a more controlled and covered sound would have been nice. Naxos’s ever-variable engineering is pretty good here, and the annotation is fine. EJ Moeran! Who knew?

GREENFIELD

JOHANSEN: Piano Pieces
Rune Alver—LAWO 1101—60 minutes

One of the perks of reviewing for the American Record Guide is discovering composers that I’ve never heard of before. Some of these composers are forgettable, but others turn out to be worthwhile and have supplied me with repertoire that I can then program in concerts. Born in the late 19th Century, Norwegian composer David Monrad Johansen is one of the great discoveries.

Most of the works are suites for piano. ‘Kvaern-Slatt’ is a very engaging miniature with a strong rhythmic pulse. The first movement of the suite Nordlandsbilleder is somewhat amorphous, and played sensitively. II is full of different textures, packed with atmospheric sounds and rapid tempos. Alver seems completely at home with the piece. With the suite To Portretter fra Middelalderen, folk song motifs come through in this abstract, hauntingly beautiful work. If swivels in and out between contrasting themes, with sensitive pianism from Alver. Fra Gudbrandsdalen is very different in style, more akin to Grieg’s Lyric Pieces. The work sounds more challenging compared to the other works, yet Alver is fully in control.

I do wish that Alver had included translations for the work titles, as I wasn’t sure what aspect or landscape of Norway they were supposed to summon. This is a fine recording.

KANG

JUON: Quartets (4)
Sarastro Quartet
CPO 777883—131 minutes [2CD]

Paul Juon (1878-1940) was born in Russia of Swiss parents, spent much of his career in Berlin, and retired to Switzerland. Like his
contemporary (and friend) Rachmaninoff, he continued to write in the romantic, 19th Century language he was trained in, though slightly updating it by removing some of the Victorian drapery and adopting leaner, more transparent instrumental textures. Quite a bit of his music has been recorded, much of it for chamber ensembles, and ARG’s reviewers have consistently found it admirably made and easy to enjoy, as do I. It’s full of melody, brighter (and more relaxed) than Rachmaninoff, and closer to Dvořák than to Brahms.

Still, for all the craftsmanship in his music, all the evident warmth it radiates, and all the pleasure that it gives, I wouldn’t claim that Juon is a major figure. Perhaps, as David Moore shrewdly points out in his review of a program of Juon’s chamber pieces (Gallo 876; July/Aug 1997), this may be partly because “like many composers whose music cannot be strongly coupled with a country, there is something missing or undecided that makes the music seem to lack personality”.

CPO’s new release is billed as Juon’s complete string quartets. There are four of them, arranged in ascending opus numbers so presumably also in chronological order, though I didn’t try to slog through through the inanely rambling liner notes (in tiny font, of course) to determine their dates of composition. The Sarastro Quartet plays them with aplomb and affection, and the sonics are excellent. Lovers of romantic-era chamber music will enjoy this without feeling the need to add Juon to their pantheon of great masters.

Kallembach narrates some of the Passion chorally, and some of it through his Evangelist, soprano Kaitlin Foley. The choir gives us plaintive lines of chant intoned over drone harmonies and punctuated by tingsha bells imported from the East. Ms Foley’s expressive narration is animated by interjections from the strings—often menacing, sometimes sympathetic, always of interest. Soloists play the roles of Pilate and the non-Gospel characters. The utterances of Jesus, though, are sung by trios of women’s voices in haunting, exquisitely sad harmonies that are the high point of Kallembach’s tautly-paced score. (Only at the moment of death do the voices become male.) I don’t think the solo writing for Goethe, Shakespeare, and Dante is as riveting as the rest, but there are telling moments there as well.

This was handsomely recorded in Rockefeller Chapel, and a full text is supplied. Death and resurrection are never far off from birth in Christianity’s other trinity, so Kallembach’s St John could add some spiritual weight to your contemplation of Christmas. Or perhaps you could put it aside until it’s time to craft a musical “To Do” list for Easter. Either way, I think you’re going to want to hear it.

Kallembach narrates some of the Passion chorally, and some of it through his Evangelist, soprano Kaitlin Foley. The choir gives us plaintive lines of chant intoned over drone harmonies and punctuated by tingsha bells imported from the East. Ms Foley’s expressive narration is animated by interjections from the strings—often menacing, sometimes sympathetic, always of interest. Soloists play the roles of Pilate and the non-Gospel characters. The utterances of Jesus, though, are sung by trios of women’s voices in haunting, exquisitely sad harmonies that are the high point of Kallembach’s tautly-paced score. (Only at the moment of death do the voices become male.) I don’t think the solo writing for Goethe, Shakespeare, and Dante is as riveting as the rest, but there are telling moments there as well.

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large collections *Les Chants de Nectaire*, Opp. 198–200 by Charles Koechlin.

This is the first recording of any of these works, to my knowledge, though the scores have been available commercially since the 1970s. Probably performers are put off by the lack of barlines and engraved score and parts. Leach-Sparks wrote her doctoral work on the pieces for the University of Cincinnati (2012), and she is a fine flutist, who coaxes expression from these soft-spoken works. Not even readers allergic to dodecaphonic music will necessary find such limitation of means compelling, though Leach-Sparks clearly hopes to add them to the usual flute literature.

**T MOORE**

**KAVIANI:** *Te Deum; Tous les Matins du Monde*
Martina Kralkova, Barbora Polaskova, Juraj Nociar, Jiri Pribyl; Karel Martinek, org; Moravian Philharmonic, Janacek Opera Choir / Petr Vronsky
Navona 6021—30 minutes (with DVD)

I removed this elegantly packaged disc from the box our editor sent me with real curiosity: a handsome young man poised at the piano and promising to deliver a new *Te Deum* for full orchestra, choir, and soloists. Opening it up, I discovered two discs: one was the CD with the music and the other purported to be a “Making of” documentary DVD. I couldn’t find a lot of information about Nicolas Kaviani on line other than that he has spent a large part of his career studying in France and is now based in Los Angeles working at UC Santa Cruz with David Cope. He is currently developing a large scale work called *Les Saisons* (The Seasons) and is also composing a cappella settings of some contemporary poetry.

Perhaps I got a pre-publication copy, but other than two minutes of some choral music there was nothing on the DVD.

The *Te Deum* opens with an blast of melody that would not be out of place in movie about the sweeping beauty of some glorious landscape as we are lifted through the air to observe the sheer wonder of it all. The soloists enter with some fragmentary phrases that blend artfully with the choir. This is very tonal, majestic music that should appeal to any listener who isn’t afraid of C major. Kaviani doesn’t seem to be striving for anything profound. He creates a tonal world that is warm and inviting, one where all of us can feel comfortable and at home.

Half way through the piece, I figured out what was bothering me. I got the impression that, musically speaking, we weren’t going anywhere. There are few changes of tempo; and the music, while continuously melodic, seems to meander aimlessly. One wants to get the feeling that we’re going somewhere on a musical journey. I began to be tired of the pretty music and longed for a Stravinskian crash of some kind. At about 16 minutes in, Kaviani sends his soprano soloist up to what sounds like a couple of high Cs. Then the tempo changes (finally) and we get a dance rhythm that doesn’t last very long before we return to the pomp and circumstance of the first part.

The soloists are good, but they don’t have much to do. Orchestra and chorus do their jobs well. Though I enjoyed Kaviani’s music I can’t say I found the *Te Deum* very memorable.

The second piece is the a cappella *Tous les Matins du Monde* (All the Mornings of the World) and is much darker. Here the 16 voices blend together to rail against death, the inevitability of losing those we love, and what we are left with when all is said and done. The bass voices are used with great effect here, arguing with and then uniting with the other voice parts.

The sound is good enough, though I got the impression that certain parts were tracked in later. I wish someone had thought to supply the *Te Deum* text. (*Tous les Matins* at least gets an English translation.)

Kaviani has a lot of talent and I want to hear more of his work. With a good libretto, he’d probably compose an excellent opera. In the meantime, I’ll look forward to hearing *Les Saisons*.

REYNOLDS

**KHACHATURIAN:** *Symphony 2; Lermontov Suite*
Russian Philharmonic / Dmitri Yablonsky
Naxos 570436—63 minutes

The symphony is perhaps the piece where Khachaturian sounds most like Shostakovich. That’s not surprising, since it was written during WW II in 1943 at the same time, with the same wartime events going on around the composer, as Shostakovich’s Eighth. So it’s not a lightweight work. It’s a long (50 minutes), bold, powerful statement.

We tend to think of Khachaturian as a purveyor of music bolstered by lively, Armenian tinged themes, but this is pure music, and the

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composer has the chops to pull it off. Just as important, the RPO and conductor Yablonsky deliver an interpretation that's thrilling, moving, powerful, and thoroughly engrossing.

Yablonsky & Co. keep the long, sprawling first movement from lapsing into the episodic, propelling it forward with a dark, driven, Shostakovich-like urgency. Likewise, the rau- cous scherzo that follows is an urgent, clangorous call to arms, followed by a brooding Andante sostenuto that comes in about two minutes shorter than the composer's own Decca recording from about 1960 (I'm still working with the 1985 London LP release, 414 109)—with a slightly tighter, more concentrated effect in the new performance. Again, Yablonsky is more forceful in the finale, pushing the tempos more and giving us a more forceful, perhaps emotionally unsettling, conclusion to the work.

Naxos helps out a lot with open, spacious, slightly reverberant sonics that really support Khachaturian's rich, deep, colorful orchestration, right down to nicely integrating the substantial piano part into the orchestral texture.

If this piece is new to you, this recording is a superb introduction to it. I still have a fondness for the composer's recording, even though it's with the Vienna Philharmonic—which, at the time (c. 1960), seems exactly the wrong ensemble for the work. And Khachaturian, though a capable conductor of his own music, was perhaps not a complete master of the podium (in common with many composer-conductors). Naxos has done an admirable job giving Decca's sound (in the orchestra-flat- tering Sofiensaal, I think) a run for its money from the Russian State TV & Radio Company's Studio 5 in Moscow. Still, maybe because Khachaturian was working so much closer to the time when the music was created, the ter- rible stress of World War II, maybe that also struck an emotional chord with the Vienna musicians, many of whom had undergone much wartime hardship as well.

So if you simply want one solid recording of one of the 20th century's under-performed symphonic masterpieces, Yablonsky will serve you well. If you can complement it with Khachaturian's own account, so much the bet- ter!

Oops, I almost forgot the filler. The short, three-movement Lermontov suite was written to accompany a play about the short-lived 19th Century poet, who is regarded as second only to Pushkin in talent. (Curiously enough, both of them died in duels, Lermontov well before his 30th birthday.) If the music sounds a lot like the familiar Masquerade Suite (originally written to accompany the play by Ler- montov), it is very close, partly because Khachaturian worked some of the Masquerade music into the later score. The good news is that he included only new material in the suite recorded here. It concludes with a waltz that sounds very much like a more elaborate version of the waltz from Masquerade. It does sound a bit more like the Khachaturian we're more familiar with—a good counterweight to the heft of the main work.

Hansen

Khachaturian: Masquerade; Symphony 3; Piano Concerto; Rachmaninoff: Symphonic Dances; The Bells
Yakov Flier, p; Moscow Philharmonic/ Kiril Kondrashin—Urania 121.303 [2CD] 2:25

Do you like Rachmaninoff or Khachaturian (or both) at all? If any part of your answer is "yes", my recommendation is simple: GET THIS ALBUM! Last year when I reviewed the Gurzenich Orchestra/ Kitaenko recording of the Symphonic Dances (July/Aug 2016), I noted that I was pleased to hear it replicated and actually exceeded the long, drawn-out decay of the gong at the very end, as in this 1963 Kondrashin recording. Now, you can hear the original in resplendent remastered sound. Kondrashin certainly imparts an urgency to the Dances that Kitaenko doesn't quite match, though that performance has even better sound!

Just as welcome is the also urgent, eloquent account of The Bells, with not just a Russian orchestra but Russian soloists (Yelizza- veta Shumskaya, Mikhail Dovenman, Alexei Bolshakov) and a Russian chorus. Pronunciation of the text doesn't get more idiomatic than this. Other recordings have lusher sound (Ashkenazy on Decca) or better overall balances between orchestra and vocalists (Slatkin on Vox), but few will exceed the emotional intensity and dramatic effect of this 1962 recording.

The second disc switches over to Khachaturian: the familiar RCA Victor recording of the Masquerade Suite and a far less familiar traversal of the short (24-minute) Symphony No. 3—a vastly different work from the large-scale Symphony No. 2 (reviewed above), though more ambitious in other ways, with parts for organ and 15 trumpets. Kondrashin & Co. don't meet the standards set by Stokowski in
his RCA recording, but not many do. Likewise, in the Piano Concerto, Yakov Flier gives a creditable account of the solo part, but does not achieve the level of perfection of Nareh Arghamanyan on Pentatone.

KHACHATURIAN: Flute Concerto; see RAUTAVAARA

KODALY: Marosszek Dances; Piano Pieces

JANACEK: In the Mist; Overgrown Path

Klara Wurtz—Piano

107—66 minutes

This pianist has only one color: everything she plays sounds the same. One cannot listen too long to monochromatic playing.

There’s also the problem that I don’t like Janacek’s piano music anyway—but this performance of it doesn’t help a bit. Perhaps a Czech pianist can make it livelier.

I do like Kodaly’s piano music. The Marosszek Dances can be wonderful, and I have heard it played really well by a Hungarian pianist. This pianist (born in Budapest!) has no idea what to do with it and no feel for the Hungarian rhythms and rubatos.

VROON

KROMMER: 3 Flute Quartets

Andreas Blau; Christoph Streuli, v; Ulrich Knorz-er, va; David Riniker, vc

Tudor 7199—74 minutes

Krommer wrote an abundance of music good enough to play often, and a quick check of our index will indicate what you may be missing. A 1986 recording of flute quartets by Peter-Lukas Graf (July/Aug 2013) has to be heard for the sheer beauty of the playing. Two of those quartets, Opp. 92 and 93, are duplicated here. The programs differ by having Op. 17 on Claves and Op. 90 on this one. Both are four-movement works of bewitching substance and surface.

These players are from the Berlin Philharmonic—hardly a step down from the fine Swiss musicians on the other recording. So both releases are truly superb choices, and the 49 minutes of difference between the two may be enough to justify having both.

GORMAN

There is one evil which...should never be passed over in silence but be continually publicly attacked, and that is corruption of the language.

WH Auden

KUHLAU: Violin Sonatas 1–3; Allegro Pathetique, Adagio & Rondo

Giorgio Leonida Tosi; Frontini-Porto Piano Duo

Brilliant 95220—62 minutes

I reviewed another recording of these sonatas almost two years ago by Duo Astrand (Jan/Feb 2015). That also included an arrangement for violin of the composer’s Flute Sonata; this disc contains the three sonatas originally written for violin.

Friedrich Kuhlau (1786-1832) was a contemporary of Beethoven and Schubert, and these violin sonatas sound a bit like Schubert’s early ones, though I wouldn’t put Kuhlau in the same league as the illustrious Viennese. As far as the performances go, they employ what purports to be period performance practice (PPP). Like so many PPP types, Giorgio Leonida Tosi eschews vibrato on long notes but uses it on shorter notes, which strikes me as backwards. Few violinists can make sustained notes played without vibrato sound beautiful, and Tosi is not one of those. I feel like I’m listening to a cat whining. His piano partner is Paolo Porto, who sounds like he is playing a fortepiano, though the booklet notes are silent on that point. The sound of the instrument doesn’t bother me. The Allegro Pathetique and Adagio and Rondo are played by Ileana Frontini and Paolo Porto. I find these works more interesting than the sonatas. I prefer the Astrand Duo in the sonatas.

MAGIL

KUMMER; SCHUBERT, F: Duos

Friedemann Eichhorn, v; Alexander Hulshoff, vc

Naxos 573000 — 60 minutes

So who are these guys? Frederic Kummer (1797-1879) was a well-known cellist (and oboist) in Dresden. He became cellist in a string quartet that also contained Francois Schubert (1808-78), with whom he played a number of duo concerts, resulting in these curious collaborations, mostly based on operatic tunes. They were really fine technical players, and the results are some of the most virtuoso pieces I know of. They are extended and demand not only fingers and bow-strokes but subtle balances and timing between the players. There are three sets of two duos here, two pairs by Kummer and Schubert together and one by Kummer himself—shorter but no less ear-catching.

Eichhorn and Hulshoff are quite remarkable players. They seem to enjoy what they are
doing, and they do it well. The music is showy rather than serious, but they put it across with such vim and vigor that one follows it with interest.

The recording is clean and clear. It was made in two sessions a year and a half apart, and the microphones were at a better distance for the first session. The second sounds a little rougher and closer to the instruments. Both are good, so don’t let that stop you from hearing a really impressive production by two fine players.

**LACH:** Viola d’amore Sonatas 1-3; 9 Lyric Pieces
Valerio Losito, va; Jiao Chen, p
Brilliant 95321 [2CD] 2:26

Meet Robert Lach and guess what his dates are. He must be of the 1700s or he wouldn’t be writing for the viola d’amore. Right? Wrong! He was a Viennese composer whose dates are 1874-1958, and these sonatas and pieces were written from 1913 to 1923. But they don’t sound like that. They are all romantic and sound as if they come from the late 1800s or even earlier. I don’t know if all of Lach’s music gives that impression. The early 1900s are a very odd period when everything was getting mixed, tonality and atonality, and some composers were trying to hold onto the lovely past. Lach is clearly one of them. These pieces are not intended to sound original, but evoke the instrument as it once existed. These four-movement sonatas are quite lovely and ruminative in nature. The slow movement of Sonata 2 lasts over 21 minutes. Does Lach make that work? Well, not really, but the emphasis in these pieces is on the sound of a string instrument that covers the range from a violin down to a cello, and Lach does that with an interesting blend of registers that often sounds as if we had two instruments answering each other. He may not be the world’s most interesting creator of melody and development, but he gives us the sound of the viola d’amore to fine effect.

Losito and Chen seem to be enjoying their task, and I much enjoyed listening to them. This is clearly an unusual and very listenable project, and the recording is excellent.

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**LANDINI:** Cantasi Come
Lauds & Contrapuncta in 14th-Century Florence
Ensemble San Felice/ Federico Bardazzi
Bongiovanni 5188—48 minutes

In the six vocal and nine instrumental pieces here there’s a fine mix of spirited playing and singing by Ensemble San Felice. There’s a nice variety of sounds, such as the imaginative and delicate use of glockenspiel (campanelli) to accompany the voice in ‘Ciascun Ch’el Regno Di Gesu Disia’. Intricate rhythms, sinuous lines, and dance patterns, as in the instrumental ‘Ghaetta’, are all attractive and well played.

The music is drawn from two of the major sources of medieval music, the Squarcialupi Codex and the British Library Add MS 29987, sometimes called the Manuscript of London. Francesco Landini (1325-97) was a leading composer of the time.

Notes, texts, translations.

**LANG:** The National Anthems; Little Match Girl Passion
Los Angeles Master Chorale/ Grant Gershon; Calder Quartet
Cantaloupe 21119—57 minutes

I was anxious to hear Lang’s Little Match Girl Passion, which I knew had won the Pulitzer Prize. Unfortunately the work was preceded by The National Anthems. (Both performances are excellent, by the way.) Very little context for this work is furnished in the liner notes, but it “takes one line or phrase from the national anthem of every member nation of the United Nations” and “the excerpts run in alphabetical order, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe”. In five movements, the music unfolds in a very peculiar fashion. There is a short musical phrase and a pause. Then another short musical phrase and a pause. Then another. Sometimes there’s a little counterpoint. The idiom is tonal and ingratiating, with the kinds of poignant sonorities popularized by Morten Lauridsen and Eric Whitacre. But the halting style of the music makes the whole seem emotionally vacant and, frankly, disingenuous.

Imagine my surprise hearing the Passion. It has more variety, but it also has those short phrases with pauses. Some of them sound very similar to the ones in the Anthems. I don’t get it. And I’m bored. Sorry.

HASKINS
LEGNANI: Flute & Guitar
Sara Ligas & Omar Fassa
Brilliant 95141—54 minutes

Both the repertoires for flute solo and for guitar solo from the first half of the 19th Century are immense beyond the ken of either performers or musicologists. The instruments were inexpensive and appealed to both professional and amateur. The literature for flute-and-guitar duo is little-known. Legnani, like other, better-known guitarists of his day (Carulli, Giuliani) was active in Vienna, where the earliest work here (the duet, Op. 23) was published. The grand duo, Op. 87, somewhat later, was issued in Italy in 1836 and the two works based on Verdi's Ernani in 1845.

The Arius Duo (formed 2013, modern instruments) is based in Italy and emphasizes the brightness and brilliance in these works, which have flashy writing for both partners. The sound is clear and flattering. Their competition on CD is the Heim Duo (American) with a 2012 disc of the same works and the lagrima of a solo guitar work (Jan/Feb 2013). The Heim's work is very similar and perhaps a little more inward in the slow movements.

T MOORE

LEHAR: Giuditta
Christiane Libor (Giuditta), Laura Scherwitzl (Anita), Nicolai Schukoff (Octavio), Ralf Simon (Perrino); Munich Radio/ Ulf Schirmer
CPO 777749 [2CD] 142 minutes

Giuditta was Lehar's final operetta (1934) and is considered by many people the end of the operetta era. It was the only Lehar work to be premiered at the Vienna Opera and was so anticipated that it included a radio broadcast and extensive media coverage. The glamorous cast included Richard Tauber as Octavio and Jarmila Novotna as Giuditta. The operetta contains some of Lehar's most mature music and beautiful melodies, along with the standard operetta trappings of a complicated plot with a minor secondary comic couple.

Giuditta is a cabaret singer who has affairs with various men—sort of a Carmen, Violetta, Dietrich, and Garbo rolled into one. Octavio is Giuditta's sometime boyfriend, whom she professes to love, before running off with other men in a series of implausible situations set in exotic locations. As in many early 1930s movies, the femme fatale character was popular; and Lehar and his librettists, Paul Knepler and Fritz Lohner-Beda, played up the cinematic qualities as much as possible. To add to the cinema effect, Giuditta is in five scenes, rather than acts.

The story begins in Sicily where Giuditta is a tavern singer unhappily married to Manuele. Octavio is her Italian army lover. Octavio is deployed to North Africa, and Giuditta and the two minor characters, Anita and Pierrino, follow Octavio hoping for a better life. In North Africa, Octavio and Giuditta are deliriously happy. There is a famous sultry tango scene (hints of Rudolph Valentino) that thrilled the Vienna audience.

Octavio is moved again to a desert camp and Giuditta is left alone. Always resourceful, she becomes the main attraction in the Alcazar of a North African city. She attracts the interest of wealthy Lord Barrymore, while Octavio, who has deserted the army, watches them from behind a curtain. Four years later, Octavio is a pianist in European hotel, when Giuditta and Lord Barrymore arrive. Giuditta still professes her love for Octavio, but it is too late for a reunion. Octavio is left alone in the hotel muttering the words, “It was a fairy-tale”.

Giuditta’s plot was criticized from the beginning. Despite the criticism, the operetta was an huge success owing to Lehar’s lush score played by the Vienna Philharmonic and the popularity of the two stars. Strauss's much anticipated opera Arabella also premiered the same season playing only 20 performances to Giuditta’s 44. Giuditta broke house attendance and receipt records, much to the chagrin of the State Opera director Clemens Krauss, who begrudgingly presented it only because of the Opera’s dire financial condition. Although Lehar was favored by the Nazi regime, Tauber and Novotna would soon leave Nazi-controlled Austria.

Lehar’s score is full of exotic sounding music and complicated musical underscoring that becomes more interesting as the operetta progresses. The two unnecessary minor operetta characters break the dramatic tension with pitter-patter songs (similar to the minor character songs in Lehar’s earlier Land of Smiles) that only pad out the long show. There’s not much dramatic tension anyway, but the singing is impassioned. There are three deservedly famous songs: Octavio’s entrance song ‘Freunde, das Leben ist lebenswert,’ Giuditta’s ‘Meine Lippen, sie Kussen so Heiss,’ and their tango (actually a habanera) duet ‘Schön wie die Blaue Summernacht’—all have been recorded by many famous singers.

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In this 2012 performance Nikolai Schukoff’s Octavio is the only consistently good singer, with a pleasing voice and good acting. Christine Libor’s Giuditta starts out rough, but she improves as the performance progresses. The two minor characters are minor league. Ralf Simon’s Pierino is acceptable, but Laura Scherwitzl’s Anita struggles with the notes. Ulf Schirmer conducts the orchestra and chorus effectively, though the orchestra sounds thin (I had to increase the bass). You only know there’s an audience from the few audible laughs. The interesting English and German booklet describes the original production, the politics involved in the storyline, and the difficulties of presenting an operetta at the State Opera. There is no libretto.

A better recording is on EMI, with impeccable singing from Nicolai Gedda and Edda Moser in good sound, but no libretto or synopsis. There are also highlights recordings, which, given the disposable dialog sequences, minor character songs, and military marching songs, might be enough. A German recording on Eurodisc 258374 with Sylvia Getsyky and Rudolf Schock has all the big hits, but may be hard to find. More complete English highlights in excellent sound are on Telarc 80436 with Jerry Hadley and Deborah Riedel, though the translation is somewhat awkward. There was also a 1942 recording with Lehar conducting (M/J 1996), which I haven’t heard and is probably difficult to find.

There is a good tenor aria in Act III, but no real aria for the title character. She is on stage almost the whole opera, but her best music comes in duets, as in Act II with Cascart (reminiscent of the Silvio-Nedda duet) and the final duet with the tenor, when she finally gets to show off some high notes. Perhaps the lack of a big aria may have kept some sopranos from taking on the role. The first two acts contain very lyrical melodies, but nothing that is truly memorable, and some of the music for Anaide and Cascart in Act II is rather dull. Dramatically, the title role is an actress’s dream; perhaps if the work were better known, some famous soprano would champion it (as did Farrar) and the opera could find popularity again.

As usual, Opera Rara has produced a very good recording. The soprano Ermonela Jaho sings Zaza’s music beautifully. Riccardo Massi displays a lovely lyric tenor as the deceitful Milio. As Cascart, the opera’s most sympathetic character (a spiritual cousin to Michonnet in Adrianna Lecouvreur), baritone Stephen Gaertner sings well and projects the character’s kindness. Patricia Bardon has the somewhat bizarre role of Anaide, Zaza’s alcoholic mother. She creates a believable character, though her top voice can turn a bit shrill. The large supporting cast, chorus, and orchestra all perform well under the expert guidance of Maurizio Benini.

The booklet has a full libretto, a fine essay, synopsis, timings, and several pictures of the singers, but no bios. This is definitely a fine recording if you want to hear Zaza.

LEONCAVALLO: Zaza
Ermonela Jaho (Zaza), Patricia Bardon (Anaide), Riccardo Massi (Milio Dufresne), Stephen Gaertner (Cascart); BBC Symphony/ Maurizio Benini Opera Rara 55 [2CD] 136 minutes

 Except for Puccini, most of the composers of the Italian verismo period are known to us by one opera, so a new recording of one of the other operas by these composers is always welcome. Leoncavallo’s Zaza was somewhat popular in its early years, especially at the Met, when Geraldine Farrar sang it in the last years of her career to wild acclaim. Since those days, it has been produced now and then, but never with any lasting success.

The popularity of an opera is almost always directly related to its music. The music of Zaza is unfailingly tuneful and easy to listen to. But the most famous aria is the baritone Cascart’s ‘Zaza, piccola zingara’ in the last act.
often—Giuliani favored variations, and Sor (with a few exceptions) favored fantasias, variations, etudes, and character pieces. The minuet comes second, and both are in a minor key.

Lhoyer’s music is not as interesting as those two, though it’s more ambitious and attractive than most of, say, Carulli or Carcassi, so it’s hard to understand the music’s neglect. This is the first recording of his trios and the quartets. I have reviewed two recordings of his Duos Concertantes for two guitars—by Mela and Micheli (J/A 2007) and by the Heinrich Albert Duo (M/J 2013). The earlier disc really convinced me of his worth as a composer—the performances were exciting, and wildly virtuosic. This one is not.

Now, to be sure, these are different works; and none of the three is as purely virtuosic as the duos, though the last variation of the quartet did finally generate some excitement. Yet I kept feeling that the players had a big sign, constantly flashing “ma non troppo!” while they were recording. Each of the players has a good reputation, with well established careers (Mr Pells has been active since the early 80s). The playing is clean, ensemble good, but it lacks any sense of occasion, excitement, joy. And the tone is awfully flat—I had to check to see if they were using period instruments with gut strings, but the picture of the group recording shows them on modern instruments. They are not a named group, so may have been brought together for this recording.

Again, maybe the music just isn’t that memorable—Lhoyer doesn’t seem to be a great melodist, in any case. But we do have the earliest quartet and two really substantial trios. I’d like to hear someone else take a shot at them. For now, this is of interest mainly to expand the guitar’s chamber repertory.

LHOYER: Guitar Concerto in A
with DVORAK: Serenade for Strings; ELGAR: Serenade
Stephan Schmidt, g; I Tempi/Gevorg Gharabekyan
Genuin 16418—57 minutes

An odd combination. A comparatively unknown guitar concerto coupled with two very well known (and well loved) string serenades.

There are few guitar concertos from the 19th Century and almost no interesting ones. Giuliani’s first concerto was written in 1812, just before this one, and it remains the most popular from the era. I review above some of Lhoyer’s works for guitar trio and quartet, so I refer you to that about his style. This work is mildly charming, but only mildly. It was written in two movements, and the performers here have added a slow movement adapted from one of his guitar duos. It works well, and Schmidt plays well on a period instrument. But the music lacks excitement and invention, and the muted tones of period strings don’t help.

As for the serenades—well, who can help being charmed by Dvorak’s delightful early work? And the Elgar is one of his more attractive pieces—I find most of his music rather stuffy. Gharabekyan and I Tempi play well enough, but the competition in these works is a bit too much. The orchestra plays everything on historical instruments, but I have to wonder what that means when performing composers as late as Dvorak and Elgar. The sound is just too thin for my tastes.

How often do we get a chance to rediscover a 19th Century concerto? This is only the second review of the work in these pages—it was done by Rabemananjary (S/O 2004), though I’ve never heard that performance. It’s worth knowing, even if it doesn’t qualify as a lost masterwork.

LIEUWEN: Cello Concerto; Romance; Vivace; Piano & Marimba Concerto
Nicholas Jones, Misha Quint, vc; Andrzej Grabiec, v; Carlo Alessandro Lapegna, Leonel Morales, p; Jesus Morales, marimba; Slovak Symphony, Texas Music Festival Orchestra/ Franz Anton Krager
MSR 1582 — 64 minutes

Peter Lieuwen (b. 1953) was born in the Netherlands, grew up in New Mexico, and teaches now in Texas. He is getting a bit of attention from MSR. This is Volume 2 of his music as recorded by that company, and it continues a series of warmly emotional and lively works performed with enthusiasm. The most recent one presented here is the Cello Concerto of 2012, a two-movement, 22-minute work of lively character, written in a basically romantic idiom but with imaginative use of harmony and in a style that is always going somewhere and gets there. Jones plays with passion, though he is not always totally accurate in his intonation in rapid passages.

The 10-minute Romance for trio follows, also a rapid-fire but lyrical work written in
Lindgren: Chamber Pieces
Theresa Pope, fl; Ian Greitzer, cl; Greg Vitale, Sasha Callahaman, v; Donald Krishnaswami, va; Jennifer Lught, vc; Rob Caplin, db; Soomi Lee, Erik Lindgren, p; Vessela Stoyanova, Gary Fieldman, perc.
Albany 1632—79 minutes

Erik Lindgren is a studio engineer, producer, composer, owner of the ARF! ARF! record label, and a founding member of the new-music ensemble Birdsongs of the Mesozoic. This album is called Bespoke: Chamber Music for the Now Generation. I suppose some people do write chamber music for the then generation.

Lindgren’s autobiographical sketch in the booklet is a badly-edited jumble of clichés and attacks on things safe to attack. “The musical world was my oyster and instinctively I shook things up by switching hats at the drop of a dime.” Or, speaking of his days in the studio, “I saw through the trickery and planned obsolesce (sic) of the constantly changing hardware and software updates. Music had finally devolved into an exhaustive technological chore while I witnessed the art of nuanced live acoustic sound relegated to a dying art form.” He condemns the overuse of electronics and software; he decries pop music that lacks subtlety; he takes a shot at the good ol’ boy network of academia and the new art music that often resembles the emperor’s latest wardrobe.

Well, the proof is in the pudding, and the pudding doesn’t cut the mustard. There’s certainly nothing wrong with smiling in the concert hall, and Lindgren isn’t the first to bemoan grating and over-written modern music. His own music is square, shallow, and often tedious. The two longer pieces—Progressive Music for String Quartet and Dark Garden (flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano)—have some thoughtful moments, and they don’t rely as much on repetitious pop-music figurations. Still, they’re not worth going out of your way to hear. Other than the string players, the performers do all they can to avoid phrasing their melodies, making the smaller pieces even less artful.

Liszt: Poetic & Religious Harmonies; Consolation 3
Roberto Plano, p
Decca 481 2479 [2CD] 95 minutes

Poetic & Religious Harmonies is Liszt’s longest expression for piano solo of his faith—10 multifaceted pieces ranging from 2 to nearly 20 minutes—so it’s unlikely any one pianist can “own” this work. The Overview picked no definitive recording, praising the perhaps “inappropriate” large-scale drama of Roger Murarro and the restrained and lyrical Brigitte Engerer.

Roberto Plano hews to the style of Murarro, relishing the mighty climaxes and heady virtuosity of the six technically challenging pieces. He treats Liszt’s long and repetitive stretches of octaves and massive chords rhetorically, freely, as expressive intensifiers, a lush sonic tapestry studded with explosive and declamatory shouts of joyful noise—there’s never a sense he’s counting notes or bars. His left-hand arpeggios are imaginative, unpredictable, sometimes starting long before the beat without impeding the flow, or on the beat and stretched halfway through the measure, yet other times interrupting the flow to emphasize a poignant harmony. His Benediction soars, the layers of feathery left-hand figuration and mid-perspective tenor melody steady while the soprano arpeggios move little by little from backdrop to radiant foreground. It’s deftly and transparently managed.

The four easier, slighter pieces are played with patience and lovely colors, but the spare melodies are pounded out too heavily and stand out too much from the accompaniment, as if Plano doesn’t trust we’ll hear the important notes unless he holds our hands. And any piece that wordlessly sets scripture or prayers in a cantorial style is bellowed through his fingers like a caricature of a lousy church celebrant. So, like the pianists noted in the Overview, Plano is not master of every mood here, and this is no definitive performance.
plays Consolation 3 as encore, and it’s OK but doesn’t float as effortlessly as it should.

He plays a Fazioli 278, a wonderful instrument that can take a serious thrashing without ever sounding coarse or clattery—perfect for Liszt.

Plano quite blows away the only other integrale I’ve heard, Philip Thomson on Naxos, who, as the Overview notes, is bland and prosaic. In contrast, you can tell Plano really cares about this music. Note: Mr Plano must have small hands because he arpeggiates all chords extending beyond a ninth; it’s mildly distracting and undermines a few climaxes.

LISZT: Opera Fantasies
Mark Viner, p
Piano Classics 106 — 72 minutes

Viner has previously recorded the operatic paraphrases of Thalberg and continues with Liszt’s “opera fantasies” of moments from Norma, Lucrezia Borgia, and Hexameron. This is a good recording. He has immense technical chops with what are some exhausting works, both to play and to hear. I admire his musical sensibility, which refuses to allow these pieces to sound simply bombastic and cheesy.

KANG

LISZT: Angelus: sacred piano music
Irene Russo
Brilliant 95196 [2CD] 148 minutes

This is incredibly boring music—and probably part of it is the player. But Via Crucis (the stations of the cross) takes up 47 minutes of one disc and seems never to end. It’s a choral work, not a piano work, but Liszt arranged and published absolutely everything for piano.

There are also here two transcriptions of themes from the Mozart Requiem, two Ave Marias, the two St Francis Legends, and three excerpts from the Poetic and Religious Harmonies. There is more—but it’s a really dull program—the flamboyant Liszt replaced by one of sober religiosity. I guess there are people (including this pianist) who think that “spiritual” means funereal.

It is worth getting to know the Poetic and Religious Harmonies, but there are complete recordings, as well as better recordings of the pieces represented here. The St Francis Legends we have reviewed a number of times (see the Overview also). This program is deadly.

VROON

American Record Guide
instrumental pieces represent several styles, such as solo organ canzona and toccata and viols and violin playing a ricercar. One five-voice madrigal, ‘Lucenti E Chiare Stelle’, is arranged (by director Elam Rotem) for solo voice and harpsichord, with diminutions by the countertenor soloist Doron Schleifer. All the singing and playing is of the highest order, and the repertoire is well chosen and sequenced.

Notes, texts, translations, bio.  

MACHAUT: A Burning Heart  
Orlando Consort  
Hyperion 68103—59 minutes

This third volume of “The Orlando Consort Machaut Edition” is a welcome continuation of the two earlier releases (Jan/Feb 2014 & May/June 2015). Both volumes 2 and 3 include the first recordings for a number of Machaut’s songs, and it is hoped future releases in the series will complete the composer’s discography. This new release includes virelais 1, 15, 28, and 31, ballades 13, 15, 27, 30, rondeaux 2, 6, 8, and motets 2 and 5 (using the new numbering of the forthcoming Complete Works of Guillaume de Machaut; http://machaut.exeter.ac.uk/).

I still find the texts, when sung by the Orlando Consort’s countertenor, Matthew Venner, to be unclear; compare the diction between the first track, Mark Dobell’s unaccompanied performance of ‘Hé, dame de vailance; Virelai 1, with track 2, ‘Cinc, un, trese’, Rondeau 6, sung by Venner and Angus Smith. This is exacerbated by continuing the use of neutral vowels by the accompanying voices as suggested by Christopher Page (which is the case in the interpretation of both ‘Cinc, un, trese’ and the two-voice ‘Plus dure que un dya- mant’, Virelai 31). In both of these works it required an upward transposition to match the countertenor’s range, while it would have been suitable for a high tenor (such as Rogers Covey-Crump) near its original notated pitch. This is less a problem if you carefully follow the texts and translations in the booklet than if you just listen to the recording, which I enjoy doing. Still, I look forward to hearing more of Machaut that I’ve only been able to listen to in my imagination.

BREWER

MAHLER: Symphony 3;  
PROKOFIEFF: October

Valentina Levko, a; Moscow Philharmonic & Choirs / Kirill Kondrashin  
Urania 121.308 [2CD] 122 minutes

Kondrashin (1914-81) was considered an important Soviet conductor. He was music director of the Moscow Philharmonic from 1960 to 1975. He was entrusted with first performances of important Shostakovich works (Symphony 4, 1961, and Symphony 3, 1962). He sought asylum in the Netherlands in 1978 and became the Permanent Guest Conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra until he died. He also conducted the Vienna Philharmonic in a number of memorable concerts and recordings.

The Mahler (1961) and Prokofieff (1966) both come from his Moscow Philharmonic period.

Kondrashin gets credit in my mind for conducting Mahler 3 in 1961. There weren’t a lot of performances back then. That said, this is a rather basic performance, stark if not crude in its outlines and sometimes coarse wind playing.

I is massive and stark—not a lot of nuance. Some good solo playing: the trombone phrases his part like an operatic soloist; the trumpet sounds like a high-strung Russian tenor; the concertmaster has the sound and personality of a concerto soloist.

II is manhandled: pressed forward and coarsely phrased.

III is more of the same. After the good trumpet work in I, the posthorn solo is ordinary. There’s little magic from anyone in this movement.

IV has Nietszche in Russian. It sounds more mysterious than the English in Mitropoulos’s New York performance, and the alto soloist has a rich, deep voice. Good but not great.

V has some strange balance problems in the opening measures that get sorted out a few minutes in. We’re still in Russian. The chorus is fine, though the women overbalance the children. The storm doesn’t amount to much.

VI is the best movement. The strings are eloquent and throbbing with emotion. They dominate the sound. The trumpets come forward for the coda, but the saturated, glowing sound that the best performances offer in this music isn’t here.

The Prokofieff work is a sorry thing. It was an act of artistic subservience to the evil Stalin

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dictatorship. It’s written in a musical language a step or two down from Alexander Nevsky. Lots of brass. Lots of motive rhythms. Lenin yelling through a megaphone, sirens, guns. It was written for the 20th anniversary of the Revolution (it conveniently forgets that the revolution started without the Bolsheviks and was taken over by them later on).

Prokofieff realized when he had finished this that even this kind of music might get him in trouble. It sat unperformed until 1966 (this may be the first performance), by which time both the composer and Stalin had been dead for 13 years.

I can’t imagine it better performed than here, though there are other recordings. Kondrashin is energetic and straightforward. He does the best that can be done with this music. For my part I wish I could retrieve the time I spent listening to it.

So, nothing new or worthwhile in this Mahler 3. Stick with Horenstein, Paavo Jarvi, Solti Chicago, Lopez-Cobos, and our Overview recommendations.

The sound is not refined but works well with the string sound of the last movement of the Mahler. It’s more distant and airy in the Prokofieff.

No useful notes or texts.

American Record Guide

Mahler: Symphony 10
Seattle Symphony/ Thomas Dausgaard
SSM 1011—72 minutes

I’ve known the Seattle Symphony from a series of recordings, mostly under Gerard Schwarz, where it sounds like a decent, but not outstanding, ensemble. I’ve known Dausgaard from recorded performances (mostly from Denmark) where he sounded like a competent but dull interpreter. Mahler 10 is a hard piece to bring off. It’s easy to get lost in the outer movements (one of the reasons that this symphony got played first-movement only for so long was that the movement can sound like a complete work by itself) or to trivialize the three inner movements.

So my expectations were low. I got quite a surprise.

The eerie, shadowy sound of the violas at the beginning caught my attention right away. That was Mahler’s voice. The full orchestra sound that follows is lovely—much more colorful than I had remembered from before: singing high strings, powerful bass, ringing solo horn, sweet winds. And the pacing and voicing are superb. This is a great match of music, orchestra, and conductor.

Melinda Bargreen reported on the performance (M/A 2016) and praised the “extraordinary detail” of every line and phrase in the interpretation and remarkable expression and unity of the performances themselves. That’s what I hear, too.

The first movement is rich and warm with a huge climax and properly shadowed recovery. Maazel was even richer in sound, Kubelik even more expressive, Boulez in London was massive—but these are all single-movement performances.

If is rounder than most I’ve heard. While the norm seems to be more stark and Hindemithian, this approach, like a Bruckner nightmare about what music was going to become, works well.

The innocent-sinister Purgatorio interlude is perfect here with a dramatic sweep at the end and the ironic emptiness of the bass and ring of the gong stroke.

IV heralds Shostakovich and is full of ironic malice and bits of lyricism that may be real or may be mock. I’ve heard performances with more active elbows and sharper knees, but this less blatant approach is very effective; and the drum stroke is huge and terrifying.

The finale is both effective and difficult. The powerful emotion of the opening and closing and the return of the wrenching climax from the first movement practically leap off the page. But there are other pages as well, pages that seem to be missing something, whether it’s a melody, an inner voice or two, or something going on in the bass. Finding a way to integrate these thinly-populated stretches into the richer textures of the more complete measures is a challenge that Dausgaard handles well.

A good performance of Mahler 10 is a wrenching emotional experience. It can, and probably should, leave the listeners drained. This performance has that power. I had to sit quietly for a time after I first heard it.

This performance, which uses the second Cooke reconstruction, joins the Frankfurt/Inbal (last seen as part of a very cheap complete set on Brilliant) and the two EMI Rattle performances (I like the freshness of the Birmingham more than the richness of Berlin) in the top rank of Cooke-version performances. I cannot imagine anyone regretting buying it.

If you are not committed to Cooke, remember that there is a fine performance of the Remo Mazzetti reconstruction with Jesus Chakwin.
Lopez-Cobos and the Cincinnati Symphony on Telarc.
Also, remember that Inbal conducted the Concertgebouw in that orchestra’s memorable complete symphony cycle on video. He’s even better there than in Frankfurt.

MARAIS: Gamba Pieces
Book 2: 12, 19-21, 24, 25, 28, 40-1, 63, 101, 110, 118, 132
Alberto Rasi; Patrizia Marisaldi, hp; Beatrice Pornon, theorbo
Stradivarius 11004 — 58 minutes

Marin Marais (1656-1728) is perhaps the most famous of all composers for the viola da gamba. His music is often recorded and by the best of players. On the other hand, there are so many pieces in all of his five books that assembling a suite is up to the performers and unlikely to be duplicated. This release sticks to D minor for pieces 12-41, and there’s an E-major ‘Pavane’ and a ‘Fugue Gay’ in E minor played on harpsichord alone and ‘La Gracieuse’ in G and ‘Sarabande a l’Espagnole’ in E minor on theorbo. Then we return to the viol and D minor for a 17-minute Couplets de Folies and finally relieve ourselves by moving into D major for Les Voix Humaines.

All of this is quite lovely to listen to and is played with thoughtful warmth by all. The release is called Les Folies d’Espagne. The liner notes are in Italian and French only.

MARTEAU: Berceuse; Andantino; Chaconne; 8 Songs; Partita; REGER: 2 Pieces; Aria
Reiner Ginzel, vc; Hans Kalafusz, Yi Li, v; Harolf Schlichtig, Juergen Weber, va; Julie Kaufmann, s; Andrea Lieberknecht, f; Gitti Pirner, Yumi Sekiya, p
Solo Musica 229—60 minutes

Henri Marteau (1874-1934) spent much of his life in conflict. Though French-born, his mother was German, thus he lived mostly in Germany. A violin virtuoso from childhood, he eventually replaced Joseph Joachim on the faculty of the Berlin College of Music in 1908, also forming a friendship with Max Reger—probably the reason some of Reger’s work is included here. Marteau’s compositions include a symphony, an opera, and a cello concerto. During WW I, as the son of a French industrialist and a reserve officer in the French army, he was arrested as an enemy alien. After the war the French regarded him as a traitor. He said “France has never forgiven me for becoming Joachim’s successor.” For a while he lived in Scandinavia before eventually returning to Germany. Some of his music had Nazi connections, and he died in hope of being reappointed to the Berlin post. His widow wrote a worshipful biography that hurt more than helped his reputation. A more scholarly work by Guenther Weiz in 2002 restored some balance.

His music is well made, but shows little French influence. The Berceuse, Andantino, and Chaconne have elegant themes, often with suave harmonization. In the Chaconne, the ground theme first appears on the viola, then the piano, while the viola adds deft variations over it. The songs are in German, with grateful vocal lines and apt accompaniment. His clever use of pizzicato in ‘Teardrops’ is expressive. ‘When Love Came’ has a nearly Expressionist instrumental part with an effective, conciliatory close. The Partita for Flute and Viola (1930) is in the vein of many neo-baroque composers of that time. In I, the Partita and Fugue, the contrapuntal writing is good, the lines seemingly improvised, yet always under control. III, a funeral march, has the viola play a multi-stop “drum beat” while the flute adds a syncopated eulogy. Its Phrygian close completes the somber ending, IV, a minuet, has an unusually graceful relief melody, the work finishing in a concise gigue.

All the performances are excellent, though the notes are vague on just who plays what. Soprano Kaufmann sings with good pitch, diction, and style. Her dynamics (as at the end of ‘Dreams’) are so precise that the song ends in barely a whisper. My copy of the disc had some skips. No texts or translations, but the biographical material is informative.

MARTINI: La Dirindina; see SCARLATTI

MARTINU: The Shadow
Dorota Szczepanska, s; Anna Maria Staskiewicz, v; Agnieszka Kopacka, p; Sinfonia Varsovia/ Ian Hobson
Toccata 249—67 minutes

Bohuslav Martinu is known today for his six great symphonies, orchestral and instrumental works, chamber and solo music, and several operas, most notably Julietta and A Greek Passion. Most of his music is neoclassical but with the strong coloring and rhythm of Czech folk music. Not much of it looks back to the music written by the young Martinu who was...
expelled from the Prague Conservatory at age 20 because he spent more time at the National Theater than on his violin studies. As it turned out the National Theater was far more influential on the young man than the conservatory ever could have been. It was the Theater that exposed Martinu to the many contrasting musical influences in the air in pre-World War I Europe. They included Strauss (Elektra and Ariadne) and Debussy (Pelleas et Melisande, though La Mer would be a stronger influence), followed by Stravinsky, jazz, and folk music. Martinu’s early works displayed all those influences at one time or another, sometimes changing from one piece to the next.

Another product of Martinu’s interest in the theater was his ballets. Typical of his work at the time, they came in different styles. Among his early ones, there is the large-scale ballet mainly on the grounds that the light-hearted music did not fit the grim story. His successor, Otakar Ostrcil, who ejected the hearted music did not fit the grim story.

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It is The Shadow that concerns us in the second volume of Toccata’s series of Martinu’s early orchestral works. One of the attractions for Martinu at the National Theater was the Russian dancer, Olga Vladimirovna Gzovska, whom the young composer hoped would dance in one of his works. Her seeming agreement encouraged him to finish The Shadow. When it turned out that Gzovska would not dance in it, Martinu wrote Karel Kovarovic, recently retired from the National Theater (and the conductor whom Leos Janacek had to deal with to get his Jenufa performed in Prague). Kovarovic passed the request on to his successor, Otakar Ostrcil, who rejected the ballet mainly on the grounds that the light-hearted music did not fit the grim story.

Ostrcil had a point. The setting of The Shadow is an evening in a park with a fountain. A girl appears, hears another girl singing, and plays with a ball. The ball gets away from her and drops into the fountain. When she tries to get it back, she sees her reflection in the fountain and dances until the reflection rises out of the fountain and dances along with her. At first frightened, the girl begins to imitate her shadow’s movements until she collapses, exhausted. Three figures appear. One is Death. The shadow continues dancing, approaching the Death figure, which throws a cloak over it. The girl falls to the ground dead. All of this is danced to some of the most light-hearted and cheery music that Martinu ever wrote. Later on, he would declare this ballet a failure.

As a ballet with that story, The Shadow may well be a failure, but the music is lovely, sometimes rapturous, and always elegant, with a wonderful sheen. It is also inventive, and it is amazing to hear what a melodist Martinu was in his 20s. The colors he draws from his small orchestra are impressive in ways you don’t hear in his later music. Note also his use of the celeste, something I don’t associate with him. The extensive use of the piano certainly looks ahead. It is hard to believe that the composer at work here turned into the neoclassicist that he became. As for influences, the main one is the Strauss of Ariadne, Rosenkavalier, and Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, never mind that the latter was completed the year after The Shadow. Some of the oboe writing looks forward to Strauss’s Oboe Concerto. The violin solos are also Straussian, as are those sweeping downward intervals. Perhaps we can look to Debussy also for that sheen. There is also a strong classical influence in some of the dances, particularly Mozart and maybe early Beethoven. It can be argued that there is a sameness to all this, but there is nothing wrong with listening to a long work in two sessions.

This Toccata series of the early orchestral Martinu is a promising enterprise. Volume I was more interesting than I expected. The performances here are first-rate. Ian Hobson and the Sinfonia Varsovia have been an excellent vehicle for several interesting composers, such as Don Gillis, Quincy Porter, and George Walker. Martinu may seem off that path, but they serve him just as well. The sound is excellent, and the notes by Michael Crumb (author of Martinu and the Symphony) are thorough and very well written. The tracking separates each movement or dance. There is a fine recording of suites from Istas on Supraphon. Perhaps Toccata will turn to Noc?

HECHT

MATTHEWS, C: Violin Concerto; Cortege; Cello Concerto 2
Leila Josefowicz, v; Anssi Kartunen, vc; BBC Symphony/ Oliver Knussen, Rumon Gamba; Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Riccardo Chailly
NMC 227—66 minutes

Colin Matthews’s Violin Concerto (2009) is written in a modern, Second Viennese Schoolish style, somewhat similar to Berg, atonal but with ample romanticism and formal ingenuity. Its expository section opens with a Dies Irae—
like motive and moves into passionate declamation. After the requisite contrast, intricate development follows, leading into a tolling slow movement, bleeding into the energetic finale that ends with recapitulation of the previous materials. The effect is involving, though the expressive content is primarily gray. Ms. Joseflowicz is as usual a skilled and committed interpreter.

The earlier *Cortege* (1988) inhabits the same turgid sound world. Opening with a pounding three-note motive, the cortege is funereal and relentlessly black. No specific subtext is given, but Mr. Matthews seemed to have been disturbed by something tangible.

*Cello Concerto 2* (1996) was written for Rostropovich. As with everything else on the program, there is ample gloom and despondency. The piece is in five movements: a passionate exposition, a gloomy slow movement, an arid scherzo, a lonely cadenza, and an inconsolable conclusion. Mr. Kartunen gives it his all.

This music is typical of the currently rather tired British National Music Council modernism.

**MATTHEWS: Piano Quintet; SHOSTAKOVICH: Piano Quintet**

Villiers Quartet; Martin Cousin, p

Somm 157—52 minutes

Quite a bit of David Matthews’s large output has been recorded, and he’s obviously a technically secure musician. Still his music tends to leave me (as well as other ARG reviewers) with mixed feelings. If he’s often subtle, intricate, supple, and unpredictable, he’s also just as likely to lapse into note-spinning that feels generic, undifferentiated, evasive. Too little of his music stays in memory; it lacks the strongly profiled themes that his essentially traditional language seems to require, especially at climactic points of departure and arrival.

These failings are on clear display in his 2004 Piano Quintet. This isn’t to say that there aren’t some nice moments in this four-movement, 20-minute-long work, but the overall impression is of a four movements casually and arbitrarily strung together, and one can’t help but notice specific miscues, as for example in II, a sloppy and too-repetitive tango that’s oddly cut off in mid-phrase, as if the composer just got fed up with his material and didn’t bother to write a conclusion. Yes, the mood of the quintet is relaxed and easy-going, but even so, too much sounds phoned in.

This impression isn’t helped, I should add in fairness to Matthews, by the string players’ just-bad-enough-to-be-annoying struggles with intonation, nor by the blurred and recessed recording. A really-well-played-and-recorded performance might make a more persuasive case for the piece.

As for Shostakovich’s 1940 Piano Quintet, a true masterpiece, there are many better recordings (March/April 2006 Overview).

**LEHMAN: Overtures**

*Cora; Mennone e Zemira; Arianna a Naxos; Raul de Creci; Ercole in Lidia; Gli Americani; Lasso e Lidia; La Passione; Il Segreto; Sinfonia (2)*

Bavarian Classical Players, Concerto de Bassus, Virtuosi Italiani/ Franz Hauk

Naxos 873484—67 minutes

These are all overtures, except for the short *Sinfonia* in B-flat and the even shorter one (two minutes!) in E-flat. The liner notes describe Franz Hauk as a choral conductor—that’s it! In fact, he specializes in unearthing and recording the choral works (so far, cantatas and operas) of Johann Simon Mayr (1763-1845). So he is experienced with orchestral conducting, but, judging from these recordings, it’s not his forte.

Hauk also is publisher of all of the above works, writer of the liner notes, and one of the editors of the recordings. So this album is probably part labor of love and part vanity project.

The Bavarian Classical Players are a chamber orchestra of musicians from the Bavarian Radio Symphony. Pitches and tempo often sag, and the mediocre playing lacks character. The flattened sound doesn’t help. *Cora* and *Arianna a Naxos*, interesting pieces with the wit and style of Rossini, come off better than *Mennone e Zemira*, which was recorded at a different time.

The other overtures are performed by Concerto de Bassus, mainly period performance students and graduates of Munich’s Hochschule for Music and Theater. Donald Trump would describe the playing as “sad”: foursquare rhythms, sagging tuning, no interpretive interest, and a hollow sound from the engineers. More mediocrity. This is no way to judge the quality of Mayr’s overtures.

It’s a shame I Virtuosi Italiani are heard only in the two short sinfonias, which are quite
good. The playing is alert, in tune, neatly phrased, highly rhythmic, and alternates nicely between full ensemble (17 players) and a group with one person per part. I heard just one wrong note, a really obvious one by the bassoonist at the end of the E-flat work. That would have been so easy to fix.

**FRENCH**

**M**EIST**E**R: *Il Giardino del Piacere*

Ensemble Diderot/ Johannes Pramsohler
Audax 13705—67 minutes

At the core of music history is a story about migration. When composers and musicians, spurred on by unrest or opportunity, moved from one region to another, they carried the tastes and techniques of their culture to another. Because of its central location in Europe, Germany formed a natural crossroads, where musicians traveling to and from England, Italy, France, and the Netherlands encountered one another. Many stayed, enriching German musical culture with what Reinhard Goebel calls a “vermischten Geschmack”—a “mixed taste”. Goebel’s account of the music of Johann Friedrich Meister (1638–97) fits well into this story of “cultural transfer”.

The program includes 6 of the 12 sonatas published in Hamburg in 1695 under the title *Il Giardino del Piacere* (1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12). Meister’s sonatas closely resembles Corelli’s chamber sonatas in that they consist of a suite of French dances written for the three-part ensemble favored by Italian composers (two treble instruments plus basso continuo). The suites are between six and eight movements long, and most movements have dance titles.

Meister’s writing sounds quite brilliant in the hands of these young musicians. Johannes Pramsohler and Roldan Bernabé (violin), Gulrim Choi (cello), and Philippe Grisvard (harpsichord) play each movement with complete dedication to the style and ornamentation of the time. Bow strokes are light and crisp in fast movements, which shows off the dizzying contrapuntal design of the music. The slow movements do not rely as much on the fascination of dissonance (through suspension) as Corelli’s slow movements do. The one outlier might be the third movement of the ‘Musica Prima’ in G, but the dissonance results from chromatic motion rather than from suspensions.

Johann Friedrich Meister came from the area of Hanover. In 1678 he landed a position as organist of the Marienkirche in Flensburg. There he composed mainly sacred vocal music and organ pieces. Other instrumental works, including the sonatas on this program, appear to have been composed for a nearby ducal family at Schloss Glücksburg. Had Germans rejected the foreign influence of French and Italian composers, the mixed style of these trio sonatas would have been unthinkable. What would the music of any culture be without its foreign influences?

**LOEWEN**

**M**EL**A**RT**IN**: *Dream Vision; Marjatta; The Blue Pearl*

Soile Isokoski, s; Finnish Radio Symphony/ Hannu Lintu

Ondine 1283—57 minutes

Erkki Melartin (1875–1937) was a Finnish composer of considerable gifts and yet another outstanding student of the Austrian Robert Fuchs. He was able both to use and depart from the influence of Sibelius. His superb Symphonies 3 and 4 can hold their own against anyone’s from that region. His tone poem *Traumgesicht* (*Dream Vision, 1912*) is a fine piece of orchestral writing. It’s an expansion of his incidental music to D’Annunzio’s play *Drama of a Spring Morning*. His scoring is impressionist, showing familiarity with Debussy and Ravel. Formally, it’s in two large segments, the latter incorporating a funeral march with broadly expanding harmony giving way to a powerful oration whose afterglow has a beauty worthy of Delius.

*Marjatta* has been described as both a symphonic poem and a symphonic song because of its virtuoso soprano part. Melartin sets verses from Runo 50 of the *Kalevala*. He uses a large orchestra in a pointillist manner, with ever-changing dabs of color, the vocal line tying everything together. A clarinet’s cuckoo-call is both a motif and an ostinato. The singer’s difficult part is one of sustained rapture and expressiveness. Resembling Sibelius’s *Luonnotar*, it can stand honorably alongside that masterpiece.

The notes include texts and translations. The latter are of questionable value, as Melartin himself cut most of the connecting narrative verses about Marjatta’s virgin birth of her son Floret, meant as a parallel to the Christian story.

The *Blue Pearl* is a suite arranged by conductor Lintu and engraver Jani Kyllonen from a 1931 ballet. The episodes are tuneful and well scored. I, ‘Entrée with Pantomime’, has
more of Sibelius. 'The Tempest' has a graphic, grinding depiction of the storm. 'Fish in the Net' includes a seductive string melody with sliding chromatics, and the finale is a richly orchestrated, rather deliberate mazurka. It’s light, but satisfying music.

Performances and sound are excellent. Isokoski’s spectacular singing is further proof of her reputation as one of the outstanding sopranos of our time. She handles her role with consummate skill; and, complete text or no, listeners can immerse themselves in 14 minutes of glorious song.

O’CONNOR

MENDELSSOHN: Symphonies 1+4; WIDMANN: Ad Absurdum
Sergei Nakariakov, tpt; Irish Chamber Orchestra/ Jorg Widmann
Orfeo 914161—72 minutes

The cover says "In this performance...the Mendelssohn symphonies sound as fresh as when they were composed." That is a dead giveaway. It means they are fast and crisp—and that means "no feelings allowed," which obviously also means "utterly unromantic" and therefore a travesty.

And it is.

No one who likes the trumpet can help liking Nakariakov—and I’ve had dinner with him and found him charming—but this conductor’s concerto for him is completely a matter of showing off what outrageous things the instrument can be made to do. Nakariakov naturally breezes right thru it, but I’ll never listen to it again. The music is as unrewarding as this reading of the Mendelssohn.

VROON

MERTZ: Guitar Pieces; see SCHUBERT

MERULO: Motets
Modus Ensemble/ Mauro Marchetti
Brilliant 95243—46 minutes

These sacred motets were published in 1578 when Claudio Merulo (1533-1604) was in a leading professional role—first organist—at San Marco in Venice. There’s a good amount of variety in the 20 short pieces here, with solo and multi-voice works accompanied with nice subtlety by gamba, violone, theorbo, and organ. Even though there is a separate conductor (he neither plays nor sings) the interpretations often need more leadership. Sometimes there’s a tentative, held-back quality that makes it seems as though each individual

singer and player wonders who is supposed to set the pace and flow, and each is waiting for the others. Pieces in slower tempos are not as good because of this, and pieces that are quicker and use more voices (such as ‘Ave Maria’) are quite good.

Notes, Latin texts.

C MOORE

MERULO: Organ-Alternatim Masses
Federico Del Sordo, org; Nova Schola Gregoriana; In Dulci Jubilo/ Alberto Turco
Brilliant 95145 [2CD] 134 minutes

As their name implies, these compositions are Masses where organ and vocal passages alternate. The vocal passages are chant (by a male octet in Apostolorum and In Dominicus Diebus, and—appropriately—a female octet in Virginis Mariae) and the organ pieces are fully-fledged compositions in the style of toccatas, ricercars, and other genres of the period. The resulting Masses are long works (30, 43, and 60 minutes) with plenty of opportunity for the listener to savor and reflect on the meaning of the texts. For example, after the women chant one line of the Gloria, there are two to three minutes of organ music. It’s important for the listener to be prepared for a sense of timelessness.

The music was published in 1568 as Messe l’Intavolatura, and there are plenty of examples of intricate and elaborate figuration and virtuosic diminutions in the organ settings. Organist Federico Del Sordo chooses registrations that engage with and respond to Merulo’s writing, from the soft and wistful (as in the “Qui tollis peccata mundi” passage in the Virgini Mariae Mass) to the splendid full glory of the organ’s full ripieno elsewhere.

Conductor Alberto Turco has led the music at the Cathedral in Verona since 1965, and this recording was made there. It’s very clear that his expertise in performing this music in this location is matchless. As you listen, take note of the transitions from the vocal to the organ sections. Listen to how the singers respond to the organ and vice versa.

Notes, bios. There’s a note in the booklet that texts are on the label website, but they aren’t. It’s worth following the Mass text in detail. The organ was built by Costanzo Antegnati (1565-1606) and restored in 1992 by Barthelemey Formentelli. It would be nice to have a bit of information about it in the booklet.

C MOORE

November/December 2016
Leone Ghezzi. Tanari did not publish his own music, and not very much of it survives. Two collections were charming and illuminating caricature by Pier published by the Amsterdam company of Le important enough to be the subject of a Cene, apparently without his authorizaton, each labelled "Opus 1". One of these, published about 1726 and dubiously attributed to a Francesco Montanari, was a group of six sonatas for violin and continuo—apparently by our Montanari. The other, published about 1730, was a group of eight concertos, somewhat flexibly characterized as four each for one and for two violins with strings and continuo. That set is the subject of this recording.

The way that it was published, in the form of seven partbooks, creates ambiguities. It sometimes allows the options of either one or two solo violin(s), even in possible recreation of the concertino of the concerto grosso. Only five of the eight works in that publication are offered here, plus an unpublished one preserved in a Dresden manuscript.

Two of the concertos here (one the Dresden outrider) are in the standard Vivaldian form of three movements (fast-slow-fast), but the others are in four movements (slow-fast-slow-fast). The musical style is a kind of transitional post-Vivaldi one, with some anticipations of Tartini. In structure, the fast movements usually follow the Vivaldian “ritornello” alternation of ensemble and solo writing, or in contrapuntal fugalisms, whereas the slow movements aim at more expression. The solo writing does not offer too much that is novel, but testifies to what Montanari’s own playing would have been like.

Pramsoher is a facile and artistic soloist, and he leads a group of nine players, the strings one per part. They perform with vivacious spirit. They are enthusiastic advocates for this music, though they do not prove that it is much more than of marginal significance historically.

Another obscure composer brought into the light! Antonio Maria Montanari (1676-1737) was a greatly respected violin virtuoso who pursued his career entirely in Rome, under the shadow and in the wake of Corelli. He was important enough to be the subject of a charming and illuminating caricature by Pier Leone Ghezzi.

Whether by design or circumstance, Montanari did not publish his own music, and not very much of it survives. Two collections were published by the Amsterdam company of Le Cene, apparently without his authorization, each labelled "Opus 1". One of these, published about 1726 and dubiously attributed to a Francesco Montanari, was a group of six sonatas for violin and continuo—apparently by our Montanari. The other, published about 1730, was a group of eight concertos, somewhat flexibly characterized as four each for one and for two violins with strings and continuo. That set is the subject of this recording.

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This release comes in a lavish, multi-lingual, bound-book album, with elaborate notes, including interviews. But we are still not informed as to why these five concertos were selected for performance, or if the others are to follow.

BARKER

MOERAN: Choral Pieces; see IRELAND

MONTANARI: Violin Concertos (6)
Johannes Pramsohler, Ensemble Diderot
Audax 13704—60 minutes

Monti’s only other surviving work is the cantata Nelle Ore Desolate di Maria Santissima (1829), a vernacular equivalent of the Stabat Mater: a series of meditations on the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin at the time of the Crucifixion. A bound autograph manuscript survives, but it is missing the last movement. Giacintucci produced a conjectural reconstruction based on earlier musical material. It is scored for a mixed choir with soloists and orchestra. The music is quite attractive. In some ways, it is rather old fashioned. It may remind the listener of Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater, but Monti employs a later harmonic language more typical of bel canto opera, though no one would mistake it for Bellini or Donizetti. It is possibly Monti’s last composition.

The performances leave a great deal to be desired. The singing is amateurish and the playing is wooden. There is very little in the
way of subtlety or nuance. Two churches are listed as the recording sites. The sound for the Miserere is sumptuous and warm, but not enough to mitigate the shortcomings of the performance. The acoustic for the cantata is less reverberant. Texts are not given in the booklet. I could not find them on the label’s web site. The English translation of Giacintucci’s notes in the booklet is so dreadful as to be incomprehensible in places.

GATENS

MOSZKOWSKI: Early Piano Concerto; SCHULZ-EVLER: Russian Rhapsody
Ludmil Angelov; BBC Scottish Symphony/ Vladimir Kiradjiev
Hyperion 68109—65 minutes

Moszkowski wrote two piano concertos! This early concerto, discovered just a few years ago, was completed in 1874 when the composer was 20 and performed a few times, but the mature composer disliked it, calling it worthless, and so he never had it published.

It’s an exceedingly harsh verdict against this ambitious 54-minute leviathan in four movements. The opening theme (reappearing all through the concerto), so expansive, brooding, and unhurried, promises a dramatic adventure, largely fulfilled by the young composer. The fluent piano writing is much influenced by Chopin—no surprise there—with a touch of Liszt. Each movement ends abruptly, unresolved, in mid-phrase, flowing right into the next. Not even Brahms’s second concerto of 7 years hence is this seamless and through-composed.

The scoring is itself essential, well-judged, and colorful, the orchestra often playing long stretches without the soloist, including lots of attractive and important woodwind solos.

The bubbly scherzo (III) breaks the pathetic, heroic spell of I and II for a few minutes of light entertainment before the mighty, epic struggle of the 20-minute finale held together by a memorable, aggressive staccato motif that made me think of gypsy war music, if there is such a thing. This sprawling movement is perhaps a rondo, though structurally episodic and resisting analysis, that reprises the charming Offenbachian scherzo III and themes from I, finally achieving hard-earned and satisfying triumph by the closing pages.

This concerto alone makes this among the most interesting and rewarding volumes in Hyperion’s series, and it is the best I’ve heard since Volume 46, York Bowen (March/April 2009). If you have even the slightest interest in the series, this Volume 68 is a must-buy.

The Russian Rhapsody of Adolf Schulz-Evler, he of Blue Danube Arabesques fame, is an exciting trifle that’s about as Russian as Anton Rubinstein—more Mendelssohn than Rachmaninoff.

The pianist is sensitive and commanding by turns, and the orchestra under Mr Kiradjiev plays with clarity and tight ensemble so that every orchestral detail is audible. Sound is excellent, with a good balance between piano and orchestra. I’ve heard over half the Romantic Piano Concerto series, and this is one of the best so far—definitely in the top five.

WRIGHT

MOZART: Abduction from the Seraglio
La Scintilla dei Fiati
Solo Musica 244—60 minutes

In July 1782, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote to his father: “I have no small task ahead. By Sunday week my opera must be arranged for the Harmonie, lest another come before me and secure the profit instead. And you wish me to write a new symphony in addition! How is this possible? You can have no idea of the difficulty of arranging for the Harmonie, so that it befits the wind instruments, yet loses thereby none of its effect.”

The symphony in question, a Salzburg commission secured by Leopold Mozart, became the Haffner (No. 35). The opera in question, the hit rescue singspiel The Abduction from the Seraglio, is the more interesting story.

Born in early 1782 at the court of Emperor Joseph II in Vienna, Harmoniemeusik consisted of an octet of double oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns, and the sheer range of tone color quickly turned the ensemble into a vehicle for popular theater music. Without copyright laws as protection, several composers witnessed other musicians turn their hard wrought scores into easy and entertaining wind transcriptions for personal profit. And while the Harmoniemusik era left behind several notable wind versions of classical operas, the promised transcription from Mozart’s own hand of the The Abduction from the Seraglio had yet to appear. Had his obligation to write what became the Haffner Symphony thrown his Harmonie plans off course?

In 1977, a respectable Harmoniemusik edition of The Abduction from the Seraglio was discovered in the Schwarzenberg Chapel in

November/December 2016
BOHEMIA. The style of the transcription matched the work of late 18th Century oboist Johann Went, a Schwarzenberg court musician, and several scholars wondered if Mozart had been beaten to the punch after all. In 1984, though, the Princely Furstenberg Archive in Donaueschingen yielded a thoroughly amazing and artistically superior Harmoniemusik adaptation. An 1827 inventory listed it as the product of Donaueschingen oboist Franz Joseph Rosinack. Did Rosinack nurse a secret talent unknown to his contemporaries or was he simply taking credit for someone else’s work? When scholars took a harder look at other Rosinack arrangements of Mozart operas, the latter looked much far more likely than the former. In one case, Rosinack put his name on a transcription clearly rendered by Johann Went.

Today, most scholars consider the 1984 Donaueschingen discovery the real deal, the very Abduction from the Seraglio Harmoniemusik arrangement that Mozart himself pledged in the July 1782 letter to his father. Here, the period instrument ensemble La Scintilla dei Fiali, an extension of the Zurich Opera, offers a complete performance: the overture, 15 selections, and a two-minute finale.

The enthusiastic listener will applaud how La Scintilla digs into the power and vitality of the score, but the fastidious one will bristle at the group’s abrasive timbres, sour intonation, and persistently loud dynamic range that rarely ventures below a mezzo-forte. Mozart deserves better.

MOZART: Harpsichord Duets
Basilio Timpanaro & Rossella Policardo
Stradivarius 37045 — 69 minutes

All over corporate America for the past ten years, and still going strong, there is the single-question satisfaction survey known as “Net Promoter Score”. This fad is supposed to deliver a direct and succinct measurement of value. The question is: “From 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend this to your friends?” Well, I’ve already spontaneously recommended this Mozart harpsichord album enthusiastically to more than five friends. It’s such a delight, it’s a clear 10 on that NPS scale.

These brilliant musicians play an arrangement of the Fantasy in F minor, K 608, originally for a mechanical clock. The program also includes a set of variations in G, K 501, and three sonatas for piano duet. Performed on harpsichord, all this music is lucid and rhythmically exciting. Because of the instrument’s high overtones and crisp attacks, the middle parts of the texture emerge brightly. The last sonata here, K 358, has low tenor parts for the second player’s right hand. On a modern piano it is challenging to avoid muddy heaviness here.

Most of this music is easy enough for teenagers to play, as Mozart himself did with his sister. It’s great to hear it moderately embellished here by harpsichord experts. Rossella Policardo, still in her early 20s, was Basilio Timpanaro’s student in Palermo. Their tempos are mostly quick and articulations crisply precise. Timpanaro explains this and other performance considerations in a cogent essay, arguing at length for Mozart on the harpsichord. The instrument here is by Cornelius Bom, in the style of Dulcken.

MOZART: The Marriage of Figaro
Christiane Karg (Susanna), Sonya Yoncheva (Countess), Angela Brower (Cherubino), Anne Sofie von Otter (Marcellina), Luca Pisaroni (Figaro), Thomas Hampson (Count Almaviva), Maurizio Muraro (Bartolo), Rolando Villazon (Basilio); Chamber Orchestra of Europe/ Yannick Nezet-Seguin
DG 479 5945 [3CD] 174 minutes

This is the fourth in the series of Mozart’s seven major operas planned by Yannick Nezet-Seguin, who conducts, and Rolando Villazon, who takes a tenor role in each opera. Already recorded are the other two DaPonte operas and Abduction from the Seraglio. Still to come are Idomeneo, Clemenza di Tito, and Magic Flute. I have heard only Abduction, and while it is very good, it doesn’t match the standard set in this Figaro.

There is almost nothing to complain about. The work is complete, even including the usually cut last act arias of Marcellina and Basilio. The cast includes some of the brightest stars singing Mozart today. If you’re in the market for a Figaro, this is it!

Much of the credit for the performance must go to the conductor. Nezet-Seguin favors fast tempos; he also keeps his orchestra sounding light, so one never feels that the work is too serious. Even the Countess’s arias, probably the most serious moments in the score, move at a pace that prevents their sinking into near tragedy. The arias are sung without ornamentation, except for a little in ‘Se
vuol ballare’ and ‘Voi che sapete’; thus they flow more freely and rapidly.

The speed and lightness make the idea that it all happened in one day seem more plausible.

The conductor is aided by an excellent cast. Luca Pisaroni has lately been singing the Count; here he returns to Figaro, the role that fits him like the proverbial glove. He sings it perfectly, and his entire demeanor suggests Figaro’s good nature, intelligence, and kindness. I have been lucky to see him play Figaro in the theatre, and I think he may just be the best Figaro around today. His Susanna is the pert-voiced Christiane Karg, whose singing makes one think she’s a worthy match for Pisaroni. The Countess, Sonya Yoncheva, is a beautiful woman with a beautiful voice—ideal for many roles, including the Countess. While I might prefer a younger Count, Thomas Hampson certainly understands and projects the role, and his voice has enough youthful freshness to make it convincing. Angela Brower is one of a long list of excellent mezzos today; her Cherubino needs no apology. In the roles of the older folk, Anne Sofie von Otter, Maurizio Muraro, and Rolando Villazon all triumph; Ms von Otter and Mr Villazon prove that their restored last act arias don’t need to be cut if you have the singers to do them justice. In the minor roles, the excellent French character tenor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt (Don Curzio), Philippe Sly (Antonio), and Regula Mühlemann (Barbarina) round out the truly all-star cast.

The booklet contains the full text in four languages, timings, a synopsis, and a little essay.

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**Mozart: Piano Concertos 12+17**

Alfred Brendel, Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields/ Neville Marriner

Pentatone 5186236 [SACD] 56 minutes

Alfred Brendel recorded these two concertos twice for Philips. Both times they were coupled, and both recordings were wonderful. This is the first time, with Marriner. It was 1970, but the sound is 4-channel and still outstanding.

Mr Brendel said back in the 60s that he didn’t care for tinkle-delicate, super-poetic Mozart—the Mozart of “insipid charm”. So often in his complete set with Marriner he seems deadpan—too cool and uninvolved. But, as we pointed out in our Mozart Concerto Overviews (the last was May/June 2008), he was terrific in these two concertos. These recordings are among the best ever of this music, and if you don’t have them here’s another chance.

It is amusing to hear these delightful interpretations and to realize that in 2016—46 years later—Brendel sounds quite poetic and delicate. (But he still has delicious “snap” in the final movements.) There has hardly been a good Mozart piano concerto recording in this century, so reach back and get this one from 1970.

**Vroon**

**Mozart: Piano Concertos 11,12,13**

Kristian Bezuidenhout, Freiburg Baroque Orchestra/ Gottfried von der Goltz

HM 902218—70 minutes

After Brendel this is miserable. Squeaks and scrapes pretend to be an orchestra, and they have all the other PPP mannerisms, like weird swelling in the middle of held notes. Listen to No. 12 in both recordings and let me know if you can honestly prefer this nonsense.

**Vroon**

**Mozart: Piano Sonata 4; Rondos; Fantasy; Unser Dummer Pobel Meint Variations; Minuets; Gigue**

Jane Coop—Skylark 8801—65 minutes

Coop’s Mozart is marked by lightness, evenness, and sensible taste. With the opening Rondo in D, her tempo is lively, and her delicate yet firm touch conveys the airiness of the work. Though I have heard the Gigue in G performed faster, her rhythmic reading works well and has a very Baroque feel. Though the Rondo in A is a bit labored for my test, she does take great care with the voicing, phrasing, and sound balance. The Adagio movement of Sonata 4 is beautifully rendered, and Coop brings a comforting sense of ease. The 10 Variations are solid.

Coop’s Mozart playing is very intelligent and sensitive; everything feels right at home.

**Kang**

**Mozart: String Quintets**

Auryn Quartet; Nobuko Imai, va

Tacet 217 [3CD] 3 hours, 24 minutes

The Auryn Quartet has recorded all of the Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, etc. quartets on Tacet and a number of more contemporary works on CPO. For this new release they have added the fine violist Nobuko Imai to the stew.
As one might predict from the large number of recordings already made by all, this turns out to be a highly detailed series of interpretations. Repeats are observed, including the almost never played development and recapitulation ones. These work well here since they are played with conviction and a variety of approach. Of course, the main reason for including them is that Mozart’s music is so full of contrast and lovely melodies that one finds something new every time you play them. Mozart’s own transcription of his Wind Quintet, K406, is an effective addition.

There have been fine recordings of these works by the Juilliard Quartet, Hausmusik, Fine Arts Quartet, and more. The Auryn makes a good case for theirs by playing them with sensitive phrasing and technical perfection and including those repeats. The recorded sound is clear and clean, and these are compositions that should be in everyone’s listening library.

D MOORE

**MOZART FX:** Cello Sonata; see BEETHOVEN

**MUFFAT:** *In Labore Requies Mass*

Cappella Murensis, Les Cornets Noirs/ Johannes Strobl

Audite 97.539—71:36

Though a contemporary reported Muffat had written three settings of the Mass, only the “In Labore Requies” Mass survives, in a manuscript now in Budapest. It is among the most festive Central-European Masses with trumpets, and while it lacks the spectacular size of the Salzburg Mass attributed to Biber (Mar/Apr 2000 & Jan/Feb 2010), it is very much a model of its style on only a slightly smaller scale, with only two four-voice choirs of soloists and ripieno singers, cornets and trombones, a choir of five trumpets and timpani, and strings, with continuo ensembles.

The first recording of Muffat’s Mass that I know was led by Konrad Junghänel (May/June 1999, see BIBER), who used only eight voices divided into two four-voiced choirs, along with single instruments on each part. The small ensemble also allowed him to take relatively fast tempos. More recently Gunar Letzbor released a recording of this mass (2014, Pan 10301), also without ripieni vocalists, though he may have occasionally divided the four boy sopranos (two for each choir) and two altos from the St Florian Boychoir (for Choir 2). Letzbor’s tempos are more stately than Junghänel and allow some of the rich details of Muffat’s writing to be appreciated, though he sometimes overemphasizes the rhythm.

Strobl is the first to actually combine the four plus four vocal soloists with eight ripieno singers for each choir, adding significant weight and contrast to Muffat’s constantly shifting textures and sonorities. But there are two small ways that this recording misses the mark. With the larger number of vocalists, the string ensemble, with just single players on each part, lacks the presence it has in the two earlier recordings, though it balances well with the soloists. And my nit to pick is that Strobl doesn’t have a bassoon for the continuo, as called for in the score. Of the three versions, Letzbor makes the most of Muffat’s use of muted trumpets (“trumbe sordine”) and dampened timpani (“timpani tecta”) in the Credo at the mentions of Christ’s burial, the judgement of the living and the dead, and the resurrection of the dead.

While Letzbor recorded just the mass, Junghänel’s recording included Heinrich Biber’s *Litanie de Sancto Josepho* and the same composer’s Sonata ‘Sancti Polycarpi’ for eight trumpets, timpani, and continuo. Both Junghänel and Strobl include two sonatas by Antonio Bertali (Sonata a 13 and ‘Sancti Placidii’), both scored for cornets, trombones, trumpets, and strings. Junghänel again has distinctly faster tempos and omits a final repeat in ‘Sancti Placidii’ that Strobl includes. In addition, Strobl’s recording includes two sonatas for strings by Biber (VI a 5 & VIII a 5) and Schmelzer’s Sonata XII a 7 for two trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, and continuo.

The instrumentalists in all three recordings are excellent, especially in the incredibly virtuosic and stratospheric parts for the cornets; and the vocalists are well-chosen, though I will admit to a slight preference for the sound of Letzbor’s boys. Only the booklet for Junghänel’s recording includes texts; most of us are familiar with the text of the Mass. All three include informative background notes; Junghänel and Strobl include essays by the editor of the Mass, Ernst Hintermaier, and Letzbor wrote his own. I enjoy all three recordings, but Strobl has a slight edge by more closely matching the indications in the score.

BREWER

The seas are vastly overfished already, and we will run out of seafood entirely by 2048 at the rate we are going.

American Record Guide
OFFENBACH: Cello Duets, op 54:1-3
Paul Christopher, Milovan Paz
HMP 106-2016—70 minutes

Jacques Offenbach (1819-80) was not only a composer of operas but a well-known cellist who wrote a large number of works for that instrument, most of them by 1847. The largest collection is the cello duets, given the opuses 49 to 54 and working their way up in difficulty. Opus 49 sticks to the first position; Opus 54 is highly demanding of both players. This recording gives us the entire Op. 54. It marks the completion of a recording by this company of all of the duets plus more on six CDs. Do you want to invest in them all?

Well, these are not the most sensitive performances; though technically accurate, they don’t hold this listener’s interest as strongly as do the ones by Andrea Noferini and Giovanni Sollima, who also include the six duos from Op. 49 and the three of Op. 51 on a two-disc album (Brilliant 94475; July/Aug 2014). That reading is more intense and dramatic and makes more of the music. Christopher and Pax are a little dull in their phrasing, causing Offenbach to sound repetitive rather than imaginative.

These works are really quite elaborate; the main movements take 13 to 14 minutes apiece in each duo on the Brilliant set. Here they take about a minute longer than that, but somehow they don’t come across as well. There is a feeling of physical effort here that is less evident in the earlier recording. The playing is good, but there is a lack of polish that turns me off. The recording is clear and full, but the Brilliant is more ear-catching.

ORFF: Carmina Burana
Anna Shumarina, s; Tilmann Unger, t; Stepan Drobit, bar; Ukrainian Chorus, K&K Philharmonic/ Mathias Georg Kendlinger
Du Capo Austria 2024—62 minutes

This is certainly one of the most popular classical choral works of the 20th Century. It was written in 1935 and 36 by a Bavarian composer and is based on Medieval texts from a Benedictine Abbey at Beuren. After a 1937 premiere it was conducted in Dresden by Karl Bohm in 1940, then in Berlin in 1941 by Herbert von Karajan, and in Vienna in 1942 by Andre Previn. And ever since it has been conducted by the greatest, with the greatest orchestras.

This is not one of the greatest conductors or orchestras—or even chorus. It’s a decent performance, but next to the great ones it leaves me cold. Even the sound—very recent—seems inferior to the great recordings of the 1960s.

The tenor is amazing; he is German and has had a lot of operatic experience. The other two soloists (Ukrainian) are not as good and make me long for the ones we recommend in our Choral Overview (Nov/Dec 2000). The choir (also Ukrainian) seems weak and distant compared to the best ones. The orchestra is also on the small side.

I hadn’t listened to this music in a long time, and I have always enjoyed it immensely; but this time I was unmoved.

ORTIZ: Heroes; see RUIZ.

PANUFNIK: Violin Concerto; see Collections

PART: The Deer’s Cry
Vox Clementis/ Jaan-Elk Tulve
ECM 25382—53 minutes

This is a collection of 13 choral works by Arvo Pärt. These are songs of Christian praise and lamentation, translations apparently assumed (texts are included in various languages without translations or transliterations, at least in the review copy). Most are for a cappella chorus and are generally sullen and worshipful; a few are biblical excerpts. ‘One of the Pharisees’ (1992) recounts Luke 7:36-50. They date from 2000 to 2014; a couple are first recordings, the others “seldom recorded”, though ‘Summa’ (1977) and ‘Da Pacem Domine’ (2000-2006) are well known.

This beautiful group is noted for their early music performances, and they are perfectly suited to this music. These are short pieces for the most part and make excellent contributions to the standard church repertoire. The composer was present for rehearsals and recording.

PEKIEL: Masses & Motets
Aldona Bartnik, Matthew Venner, Maciej Gocman, Tomas Kral, Jaromir Nosek/ Andrzei Kosendiak
Acousense 222—66 minutes

This is an outstanding performance of two masses and several motets by the 17th Century Polish master Bartomiej Pekiel (d. c. 1666). The program includes his Secunda and Pulcherrima masses and the motets ‘Ave Maria’,
‘Sub Tuum Praesidium,’ ‘Assumpta est Maria,’ ‘Magnum Nomen Domini,’ and ‘Resonet in Laudibus.’

Pekiel’s music is typical of the stile antico, which shows the enduring relevance of Palestrina and his generation. Pekiel’s counterpoint shows considerable refinement and subtlety, the way he braids together voices into textures that shift easily from imitation to chords. Polyphony drives the text forward, while chordal writing, often sung like recitative, shows sensitivity to the text. Suspensions permeate his musical language, but he also uses them to draw attention to poignant details in the text.

These singers know how to blend. Polyphonic passages reveal the contributions of individual singers—their articulation and thoughtful shaping of phrases. Yet they move together and perform in perfect sonority, as though they were singing with one voice. Texts and notes are in English.

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Niccolò Piccinni (1727-1800), though born in Bari and dying in Paris, was one of the last of the Neapolitan masters that made that school so important in 18th Century Italy. A prolific composer of operas, he produced Italian ones and then, in a career transplanted to Paris, significant ones in French.

His production of sacred music was limited and sporadic. The two Latin works presented here are quite obscure in origin and seem to have been composed for Queen Marie Antoinette. One is a 20-minute cantata setting the Lord’s Prayer for solo soprano with strings and continuo. The other is a compilation, over 37 minutes long, that is really a series of five different three-voice settings, each in four movements, of the Creed.

For some reason, this program has been given the title—in wildly big print—of “Sakros.” I don’t know where the producers came up with this skewed title or what they meant by it. But it serves as the symbol of this badly screwed-up release.

One may find some passing interest in the vocal writing here, which is rather incongruously operatic in the Pater Noster and flatly unimaginative in the part writing of the Credo. I can discover little musical substance in these compositions, at least in the present performances. The two sopranos are rather squally and the bass quite bland. The small instrumental ensemble is undistinguished and the leadership faceless. The booklet is unhelpfully pasted into the cardboard packaging. No texts are included, perhaps on the assumption that they are so common they can be found anywhere.

I can find no real reason for the existence of this release.

Michael Praetorius never composed a Christmas Vespers, Jeannette Sorrell has set about compiling one—in her words, “a vivid and compelling concert experience . . . that presents highlights from typical 17th Century Lutheran Advent and Christmas Vespers services”. What results is a program of vocal concertos for both adult and children’s voices, German Christmas carols, and instrumental pieces.

The program, in two parts, includes recordings made in the Cleveland area in 2005. The first part is music for Advent services. ‘Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland’ is sung first as chant and then in an elaborate concerto setting for choirs, soloists, and instruments. The divisions played by cornettists (Jean Tubery and Kiri Tollaksen) in ‘Wachet Auf’ are wildly exciting. Instrumental works come from Praetorius’s Terpsichore. The second part includes music for Vespers on Christmas Day—‘Quem Pastores,’ ‘Chistum wir Sollen Loben,’ the carol ‘Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming,’ and Magnificats. The program concludes with a large arrangement of ‘In Dulci Jubilo’ for voices and instruments. Texts and notes are in English.

Prokofieff wrote chamber music all through his career, though never much of it; and this illuminating album clearly shows his shifting styles. The program opens with Overture on Hebrew Themes, from the composer’s New York period. Filled with melodic invention and gratifying solos, it has always been popular,
though Prokofieff thought it too conventional. The jaunty opening sounds a bit like vernacular music from *Fiddler on the Roof*—I mean that as a complement. The piece also has moments of touching lyricism.

The 1924 Quintet is the avant-garde Prokofieff, less ingratiating but by no means alienating. I recently heard a superb performance with players from the New York Philharmonic and am still reeling from the work’s sheer oddness, especially the gruff bass solo opening in II and the violent slashing in the Allegro precipato. It’s good to hear it again in this jaunty performance, though the piece is hard to sort out.

There are also fascinating tidbits, including an incomplete cello sonata, elegantly played by Gen Yokosaka; a wacky humoresque scherzo for four bassoons with a mournful trio; and a chamber music arrangement of the *Visions Fugitives* by M. Ucki. The 1947 sonata for solo violin, played with great verve by Kei Shirai, was written under Soviet supervision, so it is properly tuneful and simple: one can’t, the authorities believed, tax the brains of virtuous Soviet workers. And Prokofieff was perfectly capable of writing ingratiating tunes.

All the performances are lively and engaging, enhanced by a warm recording. The Ludwig Chamber Players have only been around since 2013, but they are rapidly establishing themselves as a first-class ensemble. The addition of the exotic ‘Swing Fagotteta’ for the bassoon scherzo completes a delightful picture.

SULLIVAN

**PROKOFIEFF: Piano Concertos 1+2**
Anna Shelest; Janacek Philharmonic/ Niels Muus
Sorel 6—50 minutes

I’ve always liked the headlong impulsiveness of the opening and closing of Concerto 1. Prokofieff points back to his romantic predecessors, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, but it’s clear that he’s a new voice and it’s a new century. The performance here is perhaps a bit more grand and measured than I prefer it. The extra weight they give it makes it seem like a more substantial statement than some of the more impulsive performances, like Ashkenazy/Previn (Decca) or Argerich/Dutoit (EMI).

Sorel’s firm, well-balanced, rich recorded sound certainly backs up the musicians and is another selling point for this album. Bass is solid but not boomy, the strings have a nice sheen—welcome especially in the sometimes acidic-sounding orchestration of Concerto 2—and the piano sounds great. We hear the soloist clearly without excessive spotlighting—the way a concerto sounds in an actual concert. Nicely done.

Oh—Concerto 2. As pleasing as Gerstein’s account (July/Aug 2015) is, I prefer the extra power of Ms Shelest’s playing and the stronger orchestral backup from Muus and the Janacek Phil. I like the lack of unnecessary keyboard pounding in II and IV, especially since it is not accompanied by a lack of power or expressiveness.

There are a lot of recordings to choose from. If you have some that serve your needs, Sorel’s release isn’t a must-have, though it is highly rewarding to hear a young pianist master these demanding, sometime prickly works so well.

HANSEN

**PROKOFIEFF: Piano Sonatas 6, 7, 8**
Peter Donohoe
Somm 259—70 minutes

Often referred to as *War Sonatas*, Prokofieff’s three masterpieces were conceived and written 1939 to 1944. Taken as a group, it could be argued that they are the best trio of piano sonatas composed in the 20th Century. They are widely performed and often recorded as a group since they fill a single CD quite well. They test the measure of a pianist in many, many way—technical, emotional, and musical. This release competes Donohoe’s acclaimed set of all the Prokofieff sonatas (1 to 5 are on Somm 249, 9 and 10 plus 2 Sonatinas and the Cello Sonata are on Somm 256). We seem to have missed the first two installments.

I know these works quite well, have heard them all in concert, and have a number of recordings of each. While I have my favorite performances (6—DeGrado: Centaur 2770, Jan/Feb 2007; 7—Pollini: DG 447431, July/Aug 1996; 8—McDermott: Bridge 9298, Sept/Oct 2009), as a group Donohoe’s efforts here put him in the top two or three available. His variety of touch and color serves the music well. His sense of architecture is sure, and there is never any doubt about the direction of the music and the big picture in each movement. His technique at age 63 remains clear, brilliant, and unfazed by the many difficulties here. (I wish I could say the same about mine—we are the same age).

All too often I hear these works performed as if they were written in a bunker at the height of the siege of Stalingrad. Prokofieff was two
years into the creative process before Nazi Germany launched its attack on Russia in the middle of 1941. He had already played the premiere of Sonata 6 in March of 1940. After the attack by Germany, Stalin moved many creative artists including Prokofieff to the countryside, away from the large cities and the fighting. These were very bad times for Russia, and the stress and strife of the times are reflected in all three sonatas. The composer invited Sviatoslav Richter to premiere Sonata 7 in January 1943, which the astounding pianist learned in four days! Sonata 8 was premiered by Emil Gilels in December 1944.

Donohoe is the second British pianist to share an award at the Tchaikovsky competition with a Russian named Vladimir. John Ogdon and Ashkenazy were joint gold medalists in 1962. Donohoe and Ovchininikov shared the silver medal in 1982, a year when no gold was awarded. Few would argue that after more than a 40-year career, Donohoe has been the leading British pianist since the retirement, illness, and death of Ogdon. On the strength of these performances, I will get the other two very soon to complete an outstanding set of Prokofieff sonatas.

HARRINGTON

PROKOFIEFF: Symphony-Concerto; Cello Sonata
Zuill Bailey; Natasha Paremski, p; North Carolina Symphony/Grant Llewellyn
Steinway 30057—62 minutes

For more than a few music lovers, Rostropovich has “owned” the Symphony-Concerto, either in his 1987 Erato recording with Ozawa or the earlier 1956 EMI with Malcolm Sargent. Even the newer of the two is nearly 30 years old, and maybe it’s time for a successor—or at least another one as fine.

Zuill Bailey’s playing is that impressive. He digs into the brooding Andante (I) and plumbs emotional depths that no earlier recording except for Rostropovich comes close to. The trickiest part of this concerto, at least for the listener, is that after the 10-minute opening movement, we get a combination scherzo and slow movement that’s almost twice as long. I’ve got to admit that my attention tends to wander in this movement, even when Rostropovich is playing. But Bailey imparts a cogency to it—and sensuously elegant playing—that kept me in rapt attention. I wondered if he’d be just as adept with the witty charm of the theme-and-variations III—very different. Yes, he is.

Sometimes a performer like Rostropovich becomes so predominant with his instrument that we don’t notice how he raises the bar for later generations and how the younger musicians meet or even exceed the standards he set. Then a performer like Bailey comes along and makes a recording like this one, and we realize that our old idols can be surpassed.

What about the orchestra? Is the North Carolina Symphony really a rival for the London Symphony? It is. Perhaps this is partly because Grant Llewellyn is a livelier, more alert conductor than Seiji Ozawa; but I find the accompaniment here at least as compelling as the old Erato recording, and actually more so. The recorded sound is definitely deeper, richer, and more resonant. It flatters the whole orchestra, not just the soloist and the other strings. And there’s more!

Shortly after I got this disc to review, I heard Bailey and Natasha Paremski in a recital at the Ravinia Festival. One of the works on the program was the Prokofieff Cello Sonata (along with Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky). Is it bad form to go to a cello recital to hear the pianist? I “discovered” Ms. Paremski purely by accident at the Minnesota Orchestra’s Sommerfest when she knocked me—and most of the rest of the audience—out of our seats with a stunning performance of the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto 3 of the sort that comes along once or twice in a lifetime. I’ve heard her more times since and can say that she is truly one of the most prodigiously gifted pianists I’ve ever heard. Some critics have likened her to Martha Argerich. So I signed on for the Ravinia recital with no clue as to who Zuill Bailey was. Turns out he’s a cellist of equal stature, who can perform this Prokofieff sonata with no fear of being overshadowed by his accompanist!

Like the concerto, the sonata begins with a brooding Andante, followed by a shorter, lighter movement, and then a speedy but not driven finale. Both performers handle the different moods of each section with exceptional aplomb; and, even more important, there’s a give-and-take between them that makes me pay attention to this piece in a way that I never did before.

Sometimes I worry I’m becoming the jaded Critic, for whom no new artist or recording can measure up to the standards of my long-standing favorites. Then artists like Bailey and Paremski come along, and as I anticipate their next performance, I feel like I’m discover-
ing the music all over again. If I ever find myself packing for a one-way trip to the proverbial desert island, I’ll be sure I include this disc.

HANSEN

PROKOFIEFF: Violin Sonatas; 5 Melodies
Franziska Pietsch; Detlev Eisinger, p
Audite 97.722—68 minutes

I reviewed Franziska Pietsch and Detlev Eisinger’s recording of Grieg’s violin sonatas in the January issue. I enjoyed them, and I found Pietsch especially affecting at lower dynamic levels. I have always been impressed by musicians who can hold the listener’s attention without having to resort to loud playing and bold, heroic gestures—though there’s certainly nothing wrong with those when they are called for. She again offers her sensitive phrasing at low dynamics here but also much, much more.

Pietsch was born into a musical family in East Germany at Halle (near Leipzig) in 1969. She studied with special state support until 1984, when her father escaped to the West. She suffered reprisals from the state until she was able to move to West Germany with her mother and younger sister in 1986. She continued her studies in the West with celebrated teachers like Ulf Hoelscher and Dorothy DeLay.

The booklet notes point out that she has an affinity for Prokofieff, and I can only add after listening to this that she has it in spades. I hear this in Sonata 1. She is completely inside this music, which is reputed to be a monument to the victims of Stalin’s purges. I know of only two other performances of this masterpiece that I can place in the same league as this one: Kai Gluesteen and Catherine Odonneau (May/June 2004) and David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter (Jan/Feb 1999).

Although I can think of two other recordings of Sonata 1 that I can place in the same league as this one, I cannot say the same for Pietsch and Eisinger’s performance of Sonata 2. It is in a class by itself. Arranged from Prokofieff’s Flute Sonata, it is a very beautiful work, though it has always stood in the shadow of its illustrious companion. Pietsch plays it as if it is the greatest violin sonata ever written. She finds contrasts of light and shade that others miss, and her very expressive nuances are timed to split-second perfection. One of the most notable things about this reading is that she and her partner make more of the tempo changes indicated in the score than any other duo I’ve heard. As in her Grieg recording, her playing at low dynamic levels is unusually expressive.

I have heard the Five Melodies many times before, usually included with recordings of the sonatas. I had never paid much attention to them until now. Pietsch plays these works as if she is playing five masterpieces. She makes you hang on every note. It’s as though I had never heard these works before. As in the sonatas, the playing is so expressive that it is impossible not to be riveted to the music.

I have loved the sonatas since I was a boy and first heard them on Itzhak Perlman and Vladimir Ashkenazy’s RCA recording. Those are very fine performances, but I couldn’t say that their reading of either work is one of the absolutely best available. I can say that about this recording though. Pietsch and Eisinger’s reading of Sonata 1 is among the very best available, and their reading of Sonata 2 is easily the best that I know. Add to these remarkable performances of the sonatas the also remarkable performance of the Five Melodies, and you have one of the greatest recordings of this or any music that I have ever heard.

Eisinger plays a brand of piano that I had never heard of before, Steingraeber and Sons, which was founded in 1820 in Germany and is found in Bayreuth. It sounds very good. Pietsch plays a violin made by Carlo Antonio Testore in Milan in 1751. Some millionaire should give her a Stradivarius or a Guarnerius. She deserves one.

MAGIL

PROKOFIEFF: October; see MAHLER

PUCCINI: Tosca
Renata Tebaldi (Tosca), Mario Del Monaco (Mario), George London (Scarpia), Fernando Corena (Sacristan); St Cecilia Chorus & Orchestra/ Francesco Molinari-Pradelli
Urania 121.236 [2CD] 151 minutes

This studio recording, made in 1958, was issued in the US on the London label. A rather lengthy bonus on CD 2 contains three excerpts (one from each act) from an earlier London Tosca recording made by Tebaldi in 1951 with Giuseppe Campora as Mario, Enzo Mascherini as Scarpia, and conducted by Alberto Erede. The complete 1958 recording is simply one of the best Toscas from the mid-century “Golden Age” of Verdi and Puccini singing. The three leading roles are taken by three of the greatest singers of the era, each at a vocal peak. Tebaldi’s Tosca is gorgeous. She has the
youthful beauty of tone, the power for the big climaxes, and the ability to scale her big voice down to a near-whisper when the composer specifies a pianissimo. She also brings the character completely to life, whether in her love duets with Mario, her fear of Scarpia, or her confidence in the planned escape of Act III. None of the pitch problems or hard-edged sound that would later plague her high notes is yet in evidence. This is the legendary Tebaldi at her best.

Also wonderful are Mario Del Monaco and George London. Del Monaco’s powerful dramatic sound produces great high note climaxes and an amazing cry of ‘Vittoria’, but he also excels as the romantic lover in the first act love duet and the delicacy of ‘O dolci mani’ in Act III. London’s great bass-baritone proves ideal for the wicked Scarpia. The supporting cast includes the comic Sacristan of Fernando Corena and the Spoletta of Piero De Palma, both well known for their roles. The Santa Cecilia chorus and orchestra supply excellent support.

There is no accompanying material except the timings. The 1951 excerpts present an even-more-youthful Tebaldi. She sings very well, but by 1958 her Tosca had acquired world class status, and she just sounds more confident and authoritative. Campora and Mascherini are a good tenor and baritone, but not as good as Del Monaco and London. One would want this for the complete 1958 performance, and it is worth it.

RACHMANINOFF: Songs
Julia Sukmanova, s; Elena Sukmanova, p
Hanssler 16024—58 minutes

The Russian-born German siblings Julia and Elena Sukmanova are both great in this program of songs by Rachmaninoff (spelled Rakhmaninov on the album cover). Julia Sukmanova’s voice has a hint of metal in its fullness. It’s a little spread on the top sometimes, but she sings with terrific line. Elena Sukmanova’s playing is supportive and clear. My favorite moments were in ‘O Never Sing To Me Again’, where Elena plays with exquisite sensitivity, and ‘Daisies’, where Julia’s top sounds effortless and bright.

There is another great recording of Russian songs I know of, Melodiya 2319 (J/A 2015), but that only includes a few Rachmaninoff songs. If it left you hankering for more, pick this up. This is, in any case, a worthwhile addition to your song or Russian song library. Notes but no texts or translations.

RACHMANINOFF: Variations
(Chopin & Corelli)
Marianna Prjevalskaya, p—Fanfare 8—52 mins

Rachmaninoff ventured into the variation form just three times in his compositional life. The two for solo piano are presented here, while the third is the famous Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini for piano and orchestra. With the playing time of a CD regularly touching the 80-minute mark, it is a shame that Prjevalskaya does not include some additional works here. Earlier this year I reviewed Daniil Trifonov’s marvelous disc (DG 479 4970, Jan/Feb 2016) that used the full 80 minutes by adding the Paganini Rhapsody and a solo work by the pianist to the two sets of variations we have here. Two other discs in my library have both sets of variations and 5 to 15 minutes of additional piano music: Howard Shelley (Hyperion 66009, not reviewed) and Earl Wild (Chesky 58, July/Aug 1992).

Prjevalskaya (b. 1982 in Moldova) has quite a distinguished resume with over 15 competition top three placements over the past dozen years and earned degrees from the Royal College of Music, Indiana University, Yale, and a PhD from Peabody in progress. She plays these works quite well, and I hope she will make more Rachmaninoff recordings. Her tempos are a little under what I am used to; her 52 minutes can be compared to Wild’s 44 minutes and Shelley’s 46.

She has the technique, so the tempo is an artistic choice. There is a clarity of voicing and large dynamic range. She seems to be well in control at all times, and I’d like her to take a few more chances.

SYINGER

RACHMANINOFF: Bells; Symphonic Dances;
see KHACHATURIAN

RAMEAU: Harpsichord music, all
Simone Stella
Onclassical 1308 [2CD] 155 minutes

Stella plays with moderate tempos, offering an interpretation that is free of eccentricities, full of delicacy and grace. The overall character is gentle geniality, not aggression. His rendition of ‘La Poule’ has good characterization, and the ending has an interesting rallentando—it’s not abrupt. Elsewhere, he plays unequal notes...
Died toward the end of July. His concerto, titled "Dances With the Winds," was written in 1973 in memory of her mother Vicky, but it also now commemorates the Finnish composer, who died toward the end of July. His concerto, titled "Dances With the Winds," was written in 1973 for Swedish flutist Gunilla von Bahr (1941-2013) on commission from her and her husband Robert (b 1943), founder of the BIS record label. The concerto uses four flutes: piccolo, the concert instrument, alto, and bass. Rautavaara soon rewrote the solo part to incorporate the bass flute parts into alto flute, making a concerto that only required three instruments. Both forms are recorded here, and it would only be in 1996 that he gave the work its present title. It opens with a long Andantino movement, followed by a very short Vivace (under 2 minutes), then an Andante moderato and Allegro roughly equal in size. Bezaly is a fantastic player on any member of the flute family. She brings zest, spirit, and poetry to her role as the soloist. Much of this piece is quiet and moody, with thin textures accompanying the flute. Rautavaara's work is quite different in character from the popular concerto by Lowell Lieberman. I like concertos with punch and dislike flute writing that avoids intensity as much as this. There's nothing wrong with being a petunia, but the world isn't filled with petunias, you know? Although I wish it had more drama, this concerto does rank with works of similar scope by Christopher Rouse, David Maslanka, and Peteris Vasks among the best of our time.

There are two major composers who might have written flute concertos but didn't. One was Samuel Barber and the other was Aram Khachaturian. The American case led to Corigliano's "Pied Piper Fantasy," and this one led to permission for French flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal to alter the 1940 violin concerto as he saw fit. There are significant differences between the flute and violin despite the range they share, and this disparity complicates making violin music work on the flute. Sometimes it just doesn't, and a few passages here illustrate that. Also, the composer breaks a primary rule of orchestration by doubling the soloist with an instrument in the orchestra: English horn. As a result of these problems, Bezaly sounds buried and unclear at the beginning. Elsewhere, her gentle (or you could call it inadequately forceful) approach to playing and the overall nature of the flute lack the bite, tension, and greater substance available from the violin, at least to render writing in the same range. Soviet music often calls for grim determination or digging in that few flutists can express adequately; Clara Novakovka, Demarre McGill, and Leonard Garrison are three examples that come to mind who can and do. As a rule, it is more satisfying to hear this from a violinist.

The SACD sound brings a welcome clarity to passages that can become middlet, and Mexican conductor Enrique Diemecke does wonderful things with the Brazilian orchestra. A booklet with nine pages in English makes a better case for this program than I do.

RAVATVAARA & KHACHATURIAN: Flute Concertos
Sharon Bezaly; Sao Paulo Symphony/ Enrique Diemecke; Lahti Symphony/ Dima Slobodeniouk
BIS 1849 [SACD] 79 minutes

The soloist has dedicated this recording to the memory of her mother Vicky, but it also now commemorates the Finnish composer, who died toward the end of July. His concerto, titled 'Dances With the Winds,' was written in 1973 for Swedish flutist Gunilla von Bahr (1941-2013) on commission from her and her husband Robert (b 1943), founder of the BIS record label. The concerto uses four flutes: piccolo, the concert instrument, alto, and bass. Rautavaara soon rewrote the solo part to incorporate the bass flute parts into alto flute, making a concerto that only required three instruments. Both forms are recorded here, and it would only be in 1996 that he gave the work its present title. It opens with a long Andantino movement, followed by a very short Vivace (under 2 minutes), then an Andante moderato and Allegro roughly equal in size. Bezaly is a fantastic player on any member of the flute family. She brings zest, spirit, and poetry to her role as the soloist. Much of this piece is quiet and moody, with thin textures accompanying the flute. Rautavaara's work is quite different in character from the popular concerto by Lowell Lieberman. I like concertos with punch and dislike flute writing that avoids intensity as much as this. There's nothing wrong with

RAVEL: Gaspard de la Nuit; see DEBUSSY

REDFORD: Chamber Music
Phantastes; Dream Dances; 5 Songs for Flute & French Horn; Via Giota; Diminuitae; Waltzing With Shadows
John Barcellona, fl; Calvin Smith, hn; Peter Kent, Sharon Jackson, v; Stephen Erdody, vc; Alison Edwards, George Boesflug, Randy Kerber, p; Amy Shulman, hp—PDS 104 — 61 minutes

"Waltzing With Shadows, Chamber Music Vol. 1" is the official title of this disc of pieces by Jonathan Alfred Clawson Redford, a composer primarily of arrangements of music by others,

B LEHMAN

GORMAN

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particularly for Thomas Newman in the Bond films and James Horner. Left to his own devices, Redford has written a number of chamber works, mostly for the musicians that perform them here.

Starting with the most recent piece, we have Phantastes (2008) written for and played by pianist Alison Edwards. This is a 12-minute composition that demonstrates both the pleasure Redford can give to the ears in his writing for instruments and, on the other hand, the feeling that it is relying on color and changes of mood rather than having anything really intense to tell us. All of his longer movements—this and Dream Dances (1982), a nine-minute piece played by Peter Kent, violin and Amy Shulman on harp, the 10-minute Via Gioiosa (2006) with Boespflug on piano, and the title piece, Waltzing with Shadows (2000) by Erdody on cello and Kerber on piano—are nice to hear but hard to follow since there is not enough evident direction or real intensity to the music.

The suites, the 5 Songs (1982) and the 4 Diminutiae (1986) played by Kent and Jackson on violins are a bit more convincing since the short movements are well arranged.

The players are fine and the recording works well. I must say that Kent is a little less than perfect in his intonation sometimes, but otherwise these are well-played recordings of pleasant music.

D MOORE

REGER: Songs
Sophie Bevan, s; Malcolm Martineau, p
Hyperion 68057—67 minutes

An album dedicated to the songs of Bavarian composer Max Reger (1873-1916). In her album notes Susan Youens calls him “a bridge between Brahms and Schoenberg”. It’s impossible to disagree. Rich, harmonically varied, full of warmth and depth, this music has much to admire. Youens writes, “we typically hear shifting inner voices, incessant harmonic fluctuation, frequent changes of dynamics and tempo, and the smudging or blurring of metric emphasis”. The constants in this performance are commitment to the text (by Reger as well as the performers) and simply beautiful music-making.

It’s interesting to listen to Reger’s settings of poems we know from, in particular, Richard Strauss. Reger’s ‘Träume, Träume, Du Mein Süsses Leben!’ (Wienenglisch) is soaring and dramatic—a far cry from Strauss’s ethereal lullaby. Reger’s ‘Morgen!’ brings to mind some of the meandering intimacy of Strauss’s but in a much darker harmonic landscape.

I think it safe to say that a better recording is not coming along. Bevan’s voice is perfect for this music, clear and bright with wonderful phrasing. Martineau is, as usual, sublime. Notes by Susan Youens make this not only an artistic achievement but also a solid addition to performance scholarship. Notes, texts, and translations.

REGER: Viola Suites; see Collections

REICH: Double Sextet; Radio Rewrite
Ensemble Signal/ Brad Lubman
Harmonia Mundi 907671—40 minutes

In his liner note for this superb performance of two recent Reich works, composer David Lang comments that “[Reich’s] Music for 18 Musicians is one of those pieces that changed the musical world.” (No argument from me.) He then observes that, in contrast to John Cage, Reich “has always moved forward by working on the elements that interest him, isolating them, concentrating on them, and pushing them farther”. This is a very diplomatic way of describing Reich’s recent work, which indeed identifies and isolates elements and concentrates on them but does not always push them further.

The Double Sextet (for which Reich won the Pulitzer—a nice compensation, I guess, for not winning it with Music for 18) is a very uneven work: the basic plan for the two fast movements alternates fast and rhythmically asymmetric harmonic cycles with short, decidedly non-melodic gestures in the upper instruments. Every now and then he switches to longer rhythmic values, producing a strange and unsatisfying contrast to the more driving music. Somehow the last movement is more effective than the first, for which I’m grateful. The slow movement is another dud—Reich’s best slow movements are perhaps the one in WTC 9/11 (Nov/Dec 2011) and the Proverb (no review); there really aren’t too many.

To be fair, I was more positive about these works when I first heard them performed by Eighth Blackbird (Nov/Dec 2010) and Alarm Will Sound (Jan/Feb 2015). But they have not aged very well, and this in spite of the superior readings of Ensemble Signal. (I’m amazed how well they do performing Double Sextet without tape.) As they demonstrated in their revelatory account of Music for 18 (Sept/Oct 2015), they
have a masterly control over the characteristic sound of Reich’s music; but in the earlier work, Reich’s rhythmic structure was ambiguous and endlessly fascinating—in these new works the musicians simply have much less to work with. I long for a new Steve Reich piece that actually makes a decisive aesthetic statement, as he did in 18, *Tehillim*, *Triple Quartet*, and *WTC 9/11*; it could easily happen again.

Robert Haskins

**Reicha:** 3 Sonatas; 2 Fantasias
Henrik Lowenmark, p
Toccata 8 — 67 minutes

Anton Reicha was a contemporary of Beethoven from Prague. Lowenmark’s comprehensive liner notes tell us that “the picture that posterity holds of him remains incomplete”. He writes that in Reicha’s uneven compositions one finds both dry exercises and works of depth—an assessment that could characterize many composers.

His playing is respectable. Sonata 1 has interesting elements, but is simple and straightforward in its presentation of themes and harmonies. It has blocked harmonies and a light melody, similar to a typical sonatina movement by Beethoven or Mozart. I do wish the tempo in III had been crisper—the work is a bit heavy sounding.

Sonata 2 is pleasant if dry, and has a touch of the theorist. The playing seems academic. For a nice contrast, though, Fantasia 1 has a very different style and presents many changes in mood and character. Lowenmark seems more at ease with the freedom of the piece. He plays with more care and attention and a lighter touch.

Kang

**Resanovic:** Clarinet Works
Andrew DeBoer, Matthew Miracle, Katherine Palmer, Melissa Vaughan, c; Qing Nadia Feeken, p
Potenza 0 (13040 Eastgate Pkwy Ste 108, Louisville KY 40223)

University of Arkansas Fort Smith clarinet professor Andrew DeBoer leads four of his former Arizona State University graduate schoolmates in a presentation of clarinet chamber pieces by noted University of Akron professor Nikola Resanovic (b. 1955).

The program includes the Clarinet Sonata (2011); the clarinet duet *The Ox and the Lark* (2003); the Four Miniatures for Clarinet Trio (2012), originally for three oboes; *Thunder-Blossom* (2014) for solo clarinet, written for DeBoer; *Analogues* (2003) for clarinet and bass clarinet, requested by Jacksonville Symphony principal clarinet Peter Wright and performed by Wright and JSO colleague and current Ball State University clarinet professor Elizabeth Crawford at the 2004 International Clarinet Association ClarinetFest in Washington D.C.; and *alt.music.ballistix* (1995) for clarinet and CD, written for Swedish clarinet soloist Hakan Rosengren during his tenure at the University of Akron.

Resanovic may be best described as an eclectic modernist. His themes and harmonies are vividly post-romantic, whether pushing toward a haunting dissonance or bursting into an unpredictable and semi-improvisational dance. His toolbox is open to almost anything, and his music freely borrows from and moves easily between popular idioms, ultramodernist ideas, and the modal scales and asymmetrical rhythms of Eastern European music. He writes very well for the clarinet, and even in his experimental efforts he always seems to have something to say.

These performances, though, fall short of the full potential of the music. DeBoer and his friends play with vigor and solid technique, and they craft some nice moments, particularly with their blend and intonation at the composer’s poignant cadences. But the general clarinet tone is rather thin and diffuse, and most of the music-making stays in a very narrow range of dynamics, colors, and emotions. At nearly 13 minutes, the concluding *alt.music.ballistix* may be daunting to listeners suspicious of electronic music, but it is a clever satire on technology; and for people who grew up in the 1980s and early 1990s, it is a humorous trip down memory lane.

Robert HanuDEL

Ottorino Respighi completed his massive *Sinfonia Drammatica* in 1914, just before the outbreak of the Great War in June. The work was first performed in January 1915 to an appreciative audience but a divided critical corps. The trend was to admire his use of the orchestra but complain about the heavy German influence—Richard Strauss and Wagner. The latter criticism took on a negative dimension after Italy joined the Triple Entente against Germany three months after the premiere. Almost
anything German-influenced was viewed harshly. It did not help that Elsa Respighi, the composer’s wife and first biographer, wrote that “Fountains of Rome [written over a year after the premiere of Drammatica] was the first entirely characteristic orchestral work by Respighi”.

The composer’s mood was grim when he wrote Drammatica. War was imminent. He had just suffered a broken engagement, was homesick in Rome, and longed for a return to Bologna. All of this may have led to a big, sprawling, and very serious display of rippling orchestral muscle. The German influence, particularly Strauss, is prominent but not alone. Annotator Jean-Pascal Vachon noted signs of Respighi’s main teacher, Martucci, along with Frank’s D-Minor Symphony in the way three movements center around an idea stated in the first movement. The three completed symphonies of George Enesco (1905, 1914, 1918) are similar, too. One oft-mentioned likeness is Mahler, but like Don Vroon (July/Aug 2013), I do not hear much of his influence.

The orchestra for Sinfonia Drammatica is huge and includes organ pedal. Strauss is especially apparent in the vigorous I, beginning with an urgent motif that sets the tone of the first theme. The second idea is romantic and searching, with signs of the Fountains to come. The development begins with an interesting passage for English horn and timpani, and there ensues a struggle between the lyrical and violent parts. The ending sounds like either a sunrise or the first indicators of Pines. Debussy has been heard in the moody, nocturnal, and long-building Andante; but some listeners (though probably not Respighi) might think more of Arnold Bax. Also apparent are Gregorian chant in the glorious brass chorales and Rimsky-Korsakov, whom Respighi studied with. The first part of III is stormy and cinematic, looking back to I as well as forward to Miklos Rozsa’s Roman film scores and even more to the symphonies of William Alwyn and similar English composers. The second is a slowly building and eventually powerful procession that concludes the symphony with massive, ominous power, as if Respighi were looking over his shoulder, feeling the war approaching.

The new John Neschling recording is miked fairly close with a big, broad, and deep soundstage, amazing bass for those organ pedals, and excellent detail for such a broad sonic picture. Even a mediocre performance might be impressive with such engineering, and this is no mediocre performance. It grabbed me immediately and never let go. I can only imagine what it sounds like on an SACD system. When I reviewed Neschling’s recordings of Respighi’s Fountains, Pines, and Festivals with the Sao Paolo Symphony, the darkest of the three, Festivals, came off best. I have not heard his other Respighi with the Liege orchestra. It could be that Liege is better than Sao Paolo, but it might be that Neschling has a greater flair for Respighi’s dark side than the composer’s more optimistic and showy works. In any case, Respighi’s so-called excesses do not seem excessive here. Neschling believes in this work, and his orchestra seems to be giving everything it has.

This is the fourth recording of Sinfonia Drammatica after Edward Downes (Mat/Apr 1994), David Nazareth (Sept/Oct 1999), and Francesco LaVecchia (July/Aug 2013). I do not know the LaVecchia at all. In his reviews of the Downes and Nazareth, Mr Haller found that Nazareth was more detailed and Downes richer and more expansive. He added that things revealed in the Nazareth were missed in the Downes and vice versa, so in a way the two complement each other. I would add that Nazareth is more “tactile” and Downes is more optimistic, and that both approaches are legitimate. Nazareth’s Slovak Philharmonic sounds as good as I have heard them, but readers with good audio systems will appreciate the larger-scale Downes and the superior BBC Symphony. I am glad to have all three. If forced to settle for one, my order would be Neschling, Downes, and Nazareth. Neschling grabbed me more than Downes or Nazareth, and his tempos work a little better, though Downes sometimes is more subtle.

It certainly does not hurt that only Neschling of the three includes a coupling: the delightful, colorful, and sometimes exciting Bellafior Overture in a splendid performance. He also has the most interesting booklet notes.

HECHT

Reusner: Lute Suites
Toyohiko Satoh
Carpe Diem 16310—62 minutes

I have long loved performances by Toyohiko Satoh, and this is no exception. I first heard him in a concert performance 35 years ago in Toronto and was struck by the theatricality of both his interpretations and his stage manner—qualities I found quite attractive. As he has aged, he has become more contemplative.
and restrained. Perhaps he is returning to his Japanese heritage of Zen and the haiku—he explicitly compares Esaias Reusner’s music to haiku. These performances are indeed like haiku, with quiet but intense concentration in deliberately restricted frameworks.

You won’t find a lot of fire and obvious emotion here. You will find quiet beauty, touching moments, perhaps even an extension of consciousness into the nothingness and infinity of Zen thought (mu and mugen in Japanese).

In the notes, Satoh says that Reusner was the first to structure a suite from the sequence of allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue, in the same tonality. That is usually credited to Johann Jakob Froberger, who predates Reusner by more than two decades, and who left 35 suites, most in that sequence. Each is more boring than the others, but he does seem to have done it first.

KEATON

RILEY: In C; Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector
Ragazze Quartet; Slagwerk Den Haag; Kapok
Channel 37816—58 minutes

This appears to be a late addition to the slew of recordings celebrating Riley’s 80th birthday. The performance of In C is mixed. The texture at the beginning is too precious, replete with high string harmonics and glockenspiel. Things begin to improve around 8 minutes, but I’m not convinced by the percussion choices in particular and the somewhat staid playing from the string quartet.

The account of Sunrise involves the quartet with the jazz trio Kapok. I don’t have a score of this work in front of me, but I presume that Kapok’s contribution is somewhat free (rockin’ drum kit, twangy guitar). They’re very good players and I like what they do; the quartet seems more comfortable with the music too. I’ll probably keep the disc for this reading and turn to other recordings of In C when I’m in the mood for it: the original on Sony (July/Aug 2009) or—for newer possibilities—the ones by Ars Nova Copenhagen (May/June 2007) and the Salt Lake Electric Ensemble (May/June 2011)—still the greatest of the recent recordings of Riley’s best-known work.

HASKINS

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: Symphonies 1+3
Berlin Radio Symphony/ Gerard Schwarz
Naxos 573581—58 minutes

These symphonies aren’t unknown to records. The earlier recordings are divided between Russian—Svetlanov, Kitaenko—and European, Yondani Butt and Jarvi (of course!). The First is a slight, 25-minute work that sounds like Mendelssohn—maybe Mendelssohn through the Nordic filter of Berwald, but not Russian at all. No. 3 is longer, with more substantial thematic material, and sounds a bit more Russian, though not as much as No. 2. It’s more of a combination of Balakirev and Kalinnikov. Both works are a long way from the masterly orchestration and arresting original melodic voice of Scheherazade, and neither is a masterpiece. Still, they’re worth hearing as examples of Rimsky on the road to becoming the unique, defining voice of Russian nationalism in music. They are enjoyable to listen to and entirely forgettable once you’re done.

Svetlanov elicits more on-the-edge urgency than Schwarz, but overall these new accounts are well-managed and quite exciting. The Mendelssohnian element in No. 1 plays to one of Schwarz’s strengths, as anyone who’s heard his recording of Mendelssohn’s Symphony No. 2 can attest (Delos). With a first movement that runs nearly 14 minutes here, No. 3 is altogether more ambitious, but also less compact. The added length does not necessary bring more musical substance.

I had the good fortune to hear Mr Schwarz guest-conduct the Des Moines Symphony last winter in a program that included Rimsky-Korsakoff (the Snow Maiden Suite) plus Brahms 4 and the Shostakovich Cello Concerto 1 with the conductor’s son, Julian, as soloist. He certainly knows how to get players to give their best, and such is the case here. The BRSO may play with a bit less intensity than their counterparts on the earlier Russian recordings, but the performances here are also more polished, perhaps a bit more German sounding, at least in No. 1. Since young Rimsky was certainly following Central European models (though he extensively revised both works later on), this works out well.

Naxos’s full-bodied sonics impart a spaciousness and grandeur to both scores that are less noticeable in the scrappier-sounding Russian recordings. Bass is solid and firm, so the foundational low parts of the orchestra, both strings and winds, come off with more than adequate weight. Strings and woodwinds

To be well bred means to have respect for the solitude of others.

WH Auden

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are not a bit shrill, and there's plenty of depth and breadth to the sound-field.

**HANSEN**

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF:** *Holy Week Chants;* see STEINBERG

**RIPPE:** *Lute Music*

Gabriele Palomba—Stradivarius 33928—56 mins

Alberto de Rippe (1500-51) might have been the most famous lutenist of his day. He appears to have developed his skills in Mantua working alongside the well-known frottolists Marchetto Cara and Bartholomaeo Tromboncino. He was among the many Italian artists King Francis I enticed to the court of France around 1528. His celebrity appears to have been bolstered by his journeys with Francis I to England and around the Continent; and his music was roundly praised by French literati like Jean Antoine de Baif and Clement Marot.

A few of Alberto de Rippe's works appeared in print in his lifetime, but most of his music for the six-course lute was published posthumously: 26 fantasias; 59 in tabulations on chansons, madrigals, and motets; and dances. The fantasias have become famous for their deeply expressive character. According to Victor Anand Coelho's *Grove* article, even they are based on borrowed materials from madrigals and chansons. The program includes Fantasias 2, 6, 7, 15, 16, 17, and 18. There are also dances (Pavanes and Galliards) and in tabulations of the motet 'Ave Sanctissima' and some of the most famous French chansons of the day, like Pierre Sandrin's 'Douce Memoire'.

Gabriele Palomba’s playing is so supple that one hardly notices the technical demands of the music. He takes his time developing ideas; he allows the ear to savor Rippe’s counterpoint, which leads the ear from independent strands of melody to the gorgeous sonority of the six-course lute.

**LOEWEN**

**ROLLE:** *David & Jonathan;* see TELEMANN

**ROMAN:** *Flute Sonatas 6-12*

Dan Laurin, rec; Paradiso Musicale

BIS 2155 [SACD] 82 minutes

The flute sonatas of Johan Roman (1694-1758) are not widely known, but ought to be. Charles Brewer praised Volume 1 (July/Aug 2015), and I enjoyed a program of French baroque sonatas and suites from these same players last issue. Here comes the rest. It's just as good, and Roman's future is secure with performances like this.

**GORMAN**

**ROOTHAM:** *Symphony 2: Ode to the Morning of Christ’s Nativity*

Teresa Cahill, s; Philip Langridge t; Michael Rippon, b; BBC Singers; Scottish Philharmonic Singers; Trinity Boys Choir; BBC Concert Orchestra; BBC Scottish Orchestra/ Vernon Handley

Lyrita 2118 [2CD]—81 minutes

Cyril Rootham (1875-1937) was a respected English composer, conductor, and teacher. His friends included Ralph Vaughan Williams and his students Arthur Bliss and Patrick Hadley. In late 1935 he suffered from a progressive muscular atrophy, affecting his limbs and even his speech. His Symphony 2 had to be dictated to others, mostly Hadley, some of it even on his deathbed.

The work has three movements. I, running 18 minutes, is about half the work and has a thoughtful, ruminative character. Its opening theme reappears in the next two movements. The horns open the second subject, a Celtic-sounding melody forcefully developed. The movement ends with a Baxian epilogue. For all its scope, the music sounds well-knit and concentrated.

II is a five-minute interlude, starting at a mild pace. It has two faster relief episodes—they’re too short to be called trios. They resemble the sort of contrasting passages Havergal Brian would put in a movement. The start of III has a reminiscence of the main theme from I. A processional section working up to a powerful passage cedes to a calmer one. The basses introduce a segment with dissonances as of a troubled soul, but they evolve from good voice-leading rather than just being tacked on to sound “modern.” The symphony has a choral ending, using the Revelation verses beginning “Behold, there shall be no more death.” Rootham’s setting is an ethereal one. The choir’s final line over a regular timpani pulse—“no more death, neither any pain”—is even more poignant given the composer’s condition at the time.

The Ode (1930) uses a Milton text. As the poem has 216 lines, it’s largely a line-by-line setting, which fortunately leaves no time for the kind of padding that Virgil Thomson used to call fly-y-y-y-ing in vain. The music is technically superior, with skilled scoring underlying an exceptional deployment of every choir section’s range. Rootham uses the boychoir to add a crisp edge to some sonori-
ties and a honed echo to others. This is real invention, as opposed to the cutey-poo crap so often laid out for the kiddies. The parts tend constantly to interweave, rather than displaying clear-cut melodies. It’s music good choir directors and singers would deeply appreciate, but there are hefty stretches that would impress any listener. After a strenuous climax, the last verse is serene, females and boys ascending to the Empyrean over a sustained chord on the muted brass and bass violins.

Performances of both works—the Ode especially—are excellent. Handley’s conducting—how he is missed by serious musicians—is, as usual, first-rate. The Ode is listed as monaural, but it still has fine sound and spacious presence.

O’CONNOR

R OSNER: Piano Concerto 2; Gematria; Pastoral Dances; From Diaries of Adam Czerniakow

Peter Riegert, narr; Peter Vinograde, p; London Philharmonic/ David Amos
Toccata 368—76 minutes

Arnold Rosner (1945-2013) belongs on the ever-increasing list of composers who were vehemently opposed to the academic modernism that marginalized the careers of so many brilliant American musicians. He taught for years at Kingsborough College of Staten Island, where my tragically deceased friend Ted McIrvine, an Eastman classmate in the 70s, was a longtime colleague. I met Rosner once many years ago, but with only a handshake: I had no idea of his accomplishments. Apparently I was not entirely alone, but he is now finding some substantial recognition. He studied at SUNY-Buffalo when that was a hotbed for avant-garde modernism, but they could not entirely squash him; he was just too talented—and had a math degree to boot. His dissertation was on Hovhaness, and his heroes were Vaughan Williams and Nielsen. All those facts should tell you something.

Piano Concerto 2 (1965) was written when he was an enthusiastic lad of 20. It is a lovely, friendly piece in the traditional 3 movements: a lifting dancelike opening, a slow movement opening plaintively and turning dramatic, and a jocular rondo finale, which keeps leading to a noble chorale. The ending is victorious. Piano writing is distinctly unassuming, with the piano not appearing in the first movement terribly often, but it is a notable accomplishment for such a young composer at that dreadful time.

Gematria (1991) refers to a technique of the Kabbalah involving substituting tones for letters, though Rosner denies any such systems in the music itself. There is a distinctly Jewish ambience, swirling ostinatos (his stile estatico apparently influenced by minimalism, which he was ambivalent about), and the middle section is distinctly mystical. The chorales return, turning dreamlike by the end.

Pastoral Dances (1968) is a terrific neo-baroque suite that makes a nice alternative to the wide variety of pieces of this type (Ravel et al.) It certainly deserves more performances. It’s a fine, well-executed neoclassic entry, a sturdy, fully competitive baroque style suite.

On a far more serious note, From the Diaries of Adam Czerniakow (1986) finds Rosner entering the world of Holocaust horror. Czerniakow was a local government chairman of the Warsaw ghetto. His diaries document the years before the exterminations took place. Rosner sets them with narration, with gloomy but expressive orchestral commentary. He steers clear of the expressionist distortions of Schoenberg’s Survivor from Warsaw and other such essays. This is more immediately accessible, and as such carries its own brand of horror. It is effectively read by Mr Riegert.

Readers unfamiliar with Mr Rosner’s work—likely most of you—should find this release of much interest.

GIMBEL

Word Police: Experience

Aren’t you sick and tired of “experiences”? I just saw an article that began by referring to “a cutting-edge shopping experience”. Churches talk about a “worship experience”. I guess restaurants brag about the eating experience they offer you (or “culinary”, but that’s rare, because they haven’t the vocabulary), just as orchestras brag about the concert experience. There is something narcissistic about all that. Then there are weather reports that the “farmland is experiencing flooding”. How can land experience anything?

You don’t experience music; you hear it or listen to it. It’s not a “listening experience”--as I often have to remind some of our writers. If you can hear it or see it, why use the vague “experience”? All of this is pitiful, if trendy.
ROSSINI: *Il Viaggio a Reims*
Alessandra Marianelli (Mme Cortese), Laura Giordano (Corinna), Sofia Mchedlishvili (Countess Folleville), Marianna Pizzolato (Marchesa Melibea), Bogden Mihai (Belfiore), Maxim Mironov (Libenskof), Bruno Pratico (Trombonok), Bruno De Simone (Don Profondo), Mirco Palazzi (Lord Sidney), Gezim Myshketa (Don Alvaro); Virtuosi Brunensis/ Antonino Fogliani
Naxos 660382 [3CD] 157 minutes
Rossini wrote this as an occasional work—that is, for a special occasion: the coronation of Charles X as King of France in 1825. The composer did not expect the opera to have a life beyond the occasion; he even later re-used much of the music in *Le Comte Ory*. But the opera has survived, and in the current Rossini renaissance, its productions are becoming more frequent. It is especially difficult to produce, since the cast requires ten singers able to do justice to the florid vocal lines found in all Rossini works. 50 years ago one would have been hard put to come up with one cast in the world. Now singers routinely thrive on this difficult music.

In the last few decades, several good recordings have been made, with some starry casts and conductors, including Sam Ramey, Lucia Valentin-Terrani, Lella Cuberli, Cheryl Studer, and Claudio Abbado. While I have not heard any of those recordings, I am sure they give good accounts of the music. This new recording is a product of the Rossini at Wildbad Festival in 2014. While the singers are not as famous as the ones mentioned above, the end product is quite satisfactory. Most important, according to the booklet, the music and text on this recording are more historically what Rossini wanted than what we get in earlier recordings.

All the singers mentioned in the heading have important parts, and all give at least adequate performances—which, with Rossini’s difficult vocal writing, is quite an accomplishment. I was less than overjoyed at Laura Giordano in the role of Corinna; generally she sings well, but she tends toward shrillness on high notes. The tessitura for Lord Sidney seems a bit high for Mirco Palazzi. I noticed that Sam Ramey sang this role for Abbado; few basses have the top notes that Sam could produce, but they are needed here. On the other hand, I was impressed by the soprano Alessandra Marianelli and the tenor Bogden Mihai. Bruno De Simone shows himself to be a master of Rossini’s fast-talking patter songs. Best of all are the excellent tenor Maxim Mironov and the gorgeous-voiced contralto Marianna Pizzolato, both as good as any singers in this repertoire today. I only wish they had more to sing.

The conductor Antonino Fogliani leads all with authority, proving that this opera is indeed a great celebration of Rossini’s ability to produce endless and inventive melody. The booklet has timings, a synopsis, bios, and a good essay, but no text.

ROUSE: *Odna Zhiza; Symphonies 3-4; Prospero’s Rooms*
New York Philharmonic/ Alan Gilbert
Dacapo 8226110—76 minutes
These works are compiled in relation to Christopher Rouse’s 2012-15 New York Philharmonic residency. Three of them were written for Maestro Gilbert.

*Odna Zhiza* (2008) is the earliest piece on the program and was written before the residency. The title means “a life” in Russian, and is dedicated to “Natasha”, a deceased friend of his. It is in 3 parts (the traditional slow-fast-slow), with the outer sections appropriately elegiac (with birds), and the central section more active—a frenetic scherzo filled with violence and confusion. Rouse speaks of a “secret language” that pervades the piece, so details can only be surmised, though it seems that Natasha had been through a traumatic life, filled with what seems like political oppression (there are some marches flying by, and some blasts). It’s an effective 16 minutes and evokes anguish and sorrow.

Symphony 3 (2011) was co-commissioned by the orchestras of St Louis and Stockholm. Prokofieff Symphony 2 is said to be the primary inspiration. In fact, this work could easily be a supplement. Rouse’s language is markedly similar to Prokofieff’s, and in this case the formal scheme is identical: a wild allegro followed by a set of opaque variations. Listeners who love the Prokofieff 2 are advised to investigate this.

Rouse offers a discussion of musical meaning as preface to his Symphony 4 (2013), but begs off specific information about this piece in particular. This is more obviously American in outlook, fresh and optimistic as opposed to the more sinister angularity of 3, but this segment is followed by a grim slow movement to close. There is obviously a subtext afoot, but Rouse quotes Tchaikovsky, who said “Let them
guess” in relation to his Symphony 6. OK, be baffled and await the scholarship (it may take some time).

The program closes with Prospero’s Room (2012), a 10-minute tone poem on Masque of the Red Death. Dark and sinister, with continuous contrasting segments representing the individual room colors in the castle, the piece ends with a ferocious climax.

The symphonies in particular are significant, ultra-virtuosic works requiring the utmost in orchestral acrobatics and endurance. I get the impression that the Philharmonic is giving it their all, but I can imagine better performances (overwork? lack of rehearsal time?). I wonder what the competition will show when it appears, which I suspect might be sooner than you think. Commentary by the composer.

GIMBEL

RUBBRA: Songs; Chamber Music
Tracey Chadwell, s; Danielle Perrett, hp; Timothy Gill, vc
Lyrita 353—68 minutes

A lovely program of music for voice and harp (including some for cello) by British composer Edmund Rubbra (1901-86). Rubbra had a lifelong interest in Eastern thought and became a Catholic in 1948. This is reflected in the music, with themes rooted in Christianity as well as Chinese and Japanese thought. The harp is the ideal instrument; it has roots in both Western and Eastern art.

Gentle and interesting, the sound combinations of the three instruments here, drawing from Western and Eastern traditions, is almost meditative. The music for solo harp, especially the ‘Pezzo Ostinato’ (1958), is exquisite. His unaccompanied vocal piece, ‘The Mystery’, text by Ralph Hodgson, is haunting. The cycle The Jade Mountain (1962) sets poems of the T’ang Dynasty in a mystical, spiritual way. The music for cello, a 1964 piece called ‘Improvisation’ and a piece for cello and harp, ‘Discourse’ (1969) adds a musical depth missing from the pieces for harp and voice. The latter especially is quite beautiful.

The program ends with pieces for solo harp by Sir Lennox Berkeley (1903-89) and Herbert Howells (1892-1983). Programmatically, it’s a little strange to see two unrelated pieces for solo instrument end a program of chamber music dedicated to another composer. But the pieces are lovely and Perrett plays them with great sensitivity.

Chadwell has a light voice and sings with nice phrasing, though she loses her shimmer on the top. Perrett is terrific; I love all the colors she uses. Timothy Gill doesn’t have much to do here but plays with grace and warmth.

Notes and texts.

HEISEL

RUBINSTEIN: Piano Concerto 1; Don Quixote
Grigoris Zamparas; Martinu Philharmonic/ Jon Ceander Mitchell
Centaur 3462—64 minutes

Interminable. The concerto is clearly the work of a young composer who wants to say more than his material actually warrants—way, way more. Think of the least original, least interesting connective passages of the Chopin concertos strung together and inflated into a 38-minute behemoth. Yes, it’s that painful. No, wait, I’m understating how tiresome it is. The first movement runs a full 18 minutes and would probably outstay its welcome if it were one-third that length. At 7 minutes, the slow movement’s length is about right for the material; and it opens with a pleasant horn solo. But the repetitive finale stretches out to nearly 13 minutes, and even with a slow interlude starting about 7 minutes in, it is too much.

This is all very disappointing. What I wanted to report, at least, was that this was a pleasant example of music from a second-tier composer and a nice break from endless repetitions of, say, the Tchaikovsky or Grieg concertos. According to the album notes, the soloist and conductor put quite a lot of earnest effort into working out a usable score of the concerto from four different sources. And maybe that’s part of the problem: earnestness is no substitute for inspiration, both from the composer and the performers.

As with the earlier installment in this series (Concerto 2) I’m less than thrilled with the execution. Obviously, it’s not a work I’ve heard before, so it’s a bit hard to gauge; but I can’t help getting the impression that a more forceful, energetic, and concentrated performance would make a better case for the music. This time I do find the performers less “under-rehearsed” than on that earlier album.

The well-written but uncredited album notes try to make a case for some level of parity between Rubinstein’s Don Quixote tone poem and Richard Strauss’s—but the music doesn’t support it. Written in 1870, 20 years after the concerto, it shows a surer hand and is

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generally well-crafted, but it strikes me as stodgy. I listened to it several times to give it a fair hearing before writing this review: not every unfamiliar piece yields all of its charms or thrills or secrets on the first hearing. But I really don’t ever need to hear this again.

Recorded sound is open and spacious, though a little thin. It doesn’t have the firmness of the best current recordings. Maybe this is partly a reflection of the size and, also, the scrappiness of the orchestra. But overall the sonics are not the weak link here.

With another birthday a few days in the rearview mirror, my assessment here may be reflecting my age somewhat. As I become ever more aware that I have less and less time to experience the greatest works in the repertoire, I find myself less patient with the music that missed the cut of posterity. If you have more years ahead of you than I do, you may want to stroll down the Rubinstein by-way and explore it a bit. But I still think a better case can be made for both of these pieces.

RUZ-PIPO: Concerto 3; Jarcias; Tiento por Tiento
with MOREL: Preludio & Staccato Dance; SUNG: Modinha; BRETT: Danzon; MISLAN: Tu y Yo; ORTIZ: Heroes; CARRENO: Fantasia; GONZA-LEZ: Introduccion y Pasillo
Eladio Scharonn, g; Carrie Wiesinger, fl; Budafok Dohnanyi Orchestra/ Laszlo Marosi
Nueva Venezia 14271104—61 minutes (800-BUYMYCD)

Eliado Scharonn is on the faculty of the University of Central Florida in Orlando. He was born in Puerto Rico and is the music director of the International Guitar Institute of San Sebastian there. He studied under Ernesto Cordero, Alberto Ponce, and Nicholas Goluses—he earned his doctorate under Goluses at Eastman. He performs in a guitar and flute duo with Ms Wiesinger, who has been an active orchestral player and soloist.

The real find here is the Ruiz-Pipo third guitar concerto. It’s a short work—not quite 14 minutes in its 3 movements—more neo-classical than Spanish. It was dedicated to Falla, the composer’s musical hero. (Falla also had considerable neo-classicism in his music.) After it was composed, the composer’s friend Narciso Yepes passed away, so the dedication was changed to both Yepes and Falla.

Guitarist Scharonn has a long relationship with Ruiz-Pipo, and the work was written for him. This is its first recording. It’s always nice to have a new work for guitar and orchestra, though whether this gains any popularity remains to be seen. It can be rather harsh—more in terms of timbre than harmony. That’s certainly how Scharonn approaches it. It does have an interesting rhythmic character, but otherwise isn’t particularly memorable.

The rest of the works vary in quality. The two pieces by Ruiz-Pipo are, like the concerto, rather stark. ‘Mondinha’by Stella Sung, another UCF faculty member, is a lovely, if dark and moody work. The two works by Antonio Brett and Angel Mislans are so simplistic that nothing would have been lost if they were omitted.

The most interesting work here is Alberto Rodriguez Ortiz’s Heroes, written for Scharonn and Wiesinger. It is also a dark work, a four movement sonata remembering the struggles of a Puerto Rican political prisoner. The titles of the movements—Love, Sedition, Jail Cells, Glory—give some idea of the mood.

But the only work I really loved was Jorge Morel’s ‘Preludio and Staccato Dance’. Morel also resides in the Orlando area, and his music is impossible not to love. I’m glad it was included. But get this for the concerto.

SAINT-SAENS: Organ Symphony; Rondo Capriccioso; Muse & Poet
Jan Kraybill, org; Noah Geller, v; Mark Gibbs, vc; Kansas City Symphony/ Michael Stern
Reference 136 [SACD] 61:24

In our Overview (March/April 2000) we recognized that people seek different things in a performance of the Organ Symphony. Some want flair and excitement, some want poetry, and some just want a glorious organ. There are performances that stand out for each of these: Munch, Ansermet, and the EMI Pretre. I like all three, plus the Bernstein, plus two or three more. It’s actually a four-movement work, and certainly the Adagio must be poetic, both allegro exciting, and the final Maestoso majestic. For sheer organ sound it is hard to beat Durufle at St-Etienne (with Pretre).

Perhaps Michael Stern is trying to be all of those things—and perhaps that means he won’t rise to the top of any heap. The organ is a very big Casavant and sounds impressive, but it’s an odd sound (congested?), not as seductive as a Cavaille-Coll. The strings are good, but again not outstanding—not as sweet and poetic as Ansermet’s. I think the scherzo is very well conducted here and comes forth clearer, more rational and convincing, than on
most other recordings—yet still very lively. I
usually just want it to be over, but here I
enjoyed it.

Obviously, a piece recorded so much has
often been recorded well. In terms of the
music itself, this is pretty good. In terms of
sound it is excellent. But I’m not sure I would
replace old favorites in my library with this
one—though I will keep it long enough to hear
it a few more times.

The symphony comes last here, as it
should. The work right before it is from 25
years later. It is 16 minutes for violin, cello, and
orchestra; the violin is the muse, the cello the
poet. It’s very pleasant listening, but has never
been recorded well. The work is by Sarasate,
Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso. Since it
was written for a major virtuoso, I’d
recommend getting a recording of it by one.

Neither of these added works adds to the
value of this release, though if you don’t have
the Muse and Poet you will find this a pleasant
performance.

VROON

SCARLATTI, D: La Dirindina;
MARTINI: La Dirindina
Tullia Pedersoli, Camilla Antonini, Carlo Torriani,
Filippo Pina Castiglioni, Paula Quagliata; Solisti
Ambrosiani/ Enrico Barbagli
Bongiovanni 2482—59 minutes

It was common in 18th Century opera houses
to intersperse brief, comic (buffo) interludes
or intermezzi between the acts of full-scale
“serious” operas. Thus, in 1715, when
Domenico Scarlatti—son of the famous operatic
master Alessandro, and not yet off to
Spain—was to present in Rome the premiere
of his opera Amleto (don’t ask!), he also
prepared a two-part intermezzo for it. This had
a libretto by one Girolamo Gigli. It’s a silly farce
about the flighty young singer, Dirindina, her
music teacher and suitor, Don Carissimo, and
Liscione, a castrato singer and impresario to
whom she is attracted, and who wants to use
her in star-making schemes in Milan. As jealousies mount over Dirindina, Don Carissimo
misunderstands a dramatic scene that Bis-
cione is trying to teach her, and everything
blows up in some racy banter.

Because of papal censorship in Rome,
Scarlatti’s production was cancelled and the
intermezzo was put aside until 1968. But in the
1730s, Gigli’s libretto was taken up again in a
new setting. The composer was Giovanni Bat-
tista Martini, early in his career (not only in
composition but as a venerated theorist and
teacher, with Mozart briefly as one of his
admiring pupils). (That fact does stimulate
thinking of Mozart’s own Der Schauspieldirek-
tor, despite differences.)

Scarlatti’s setting has had a number of
recordings. The first one documented the 1968
revival under Riccardo Muti (Nuova Era 2253:
S/O 1989), together with a Cimarosa comedy.
Subsequent recordings were for Bongiovanni
(2026: S/O 1990) under Fabio Maestri, and
under Matthew Dirst for Sono Luminus
(92159: J/F 2013)—the last perhaps the best
one for musical values.

The two post-Muti releases rounded out
their programs with other music by Scarlatti.
Here, Barbagli has taken the clever step of
combining the original Scarlatti setting with
Martini’s later one. Comparisons are interest-
ing. The compositional styles are not very far
apart, but Scarlatti’s setting (which runs 26
minutes) is brisk and punchy, whereas Marti-
ni’s 42-minute treatment fleshes things out,
developing the five concerted numbers (three
arias, two trios) with more musical elabora-
tion.

There are differences in casting as well.
Both make Dirindina a soprano. Scarlatti uses
a bass for Don Carissimo and a tenor (who
sings one aria in falsetto) for Liscione. Martini
makes Carissimo a tenor and the castrato Bis-
cione a mezzo-soprano (at least in this edi-
tion).

Of the two Dirindinas, Pedersoli is the
more fluent, Antonini just a bit edgy. In the
Scarlatti, Torriani is a fine buffo bass for Carissi-
mo, and Castiglioni an aggressive Liscione.
Martini’s casting of Carissimo as a tenor allows
the promotion upwards of Castiglioni, the only
singer who appears in both versions, though I
do not think the shift makes the character
work so well. Quagliata works hard as Martini’s
Liscione, but her voice does not really fit the
role. Nevertheless, all these singers are quite
capable and do musical justice to their assign-
ments, in lively, even funny performances.

The 12-member orchestra plays commen-
dably, and the recorded sound is vivid.

Recommended for opera fans who would
like to learn more about 18th Century tradi-
tions of the comic idiom.

BARKER
CARLATTI: Piano Sonatas 4
Carlo Grante
Music & Arts 1293 [5CD] 348 minutes

Volume 4 of Grante’s Scarlatti sonata series maintains the high standards of the others (I reviewed Volume 1, July/Aug 2010). Performing on a Bösendorfer Imperial, Grante inflects many performances with a great deal of nuance in the phrasing and beautiful voicing of the keyboard sonorities. I wish he’d used the pedal, which would give the sound more resonance and, carefully applied, not reduce the clarity.

K 347 (G minor) unfolds very slowly compared with Scott Ross’s performance on Erato; it gives the music a mysterious and often sly quality. On the other hand, the opening of K 377 (B minor) moves along at a brisk clip; he then relaxes the rather insistent approach as the music settles into D. The very famous K 380 (in E) benefits greatly from the sweet tone and gentle phrasing Grante employs so effectively: the phrasing is subtle and somewhat deliberate, but the overall effect retains a kind of inner warmth that’s ideal. On the other hand, I can’t completely agree with the performance of K 420 (C): Grante downplays the martial character of the opening gesture, and the second idea (with running 16th notes) is too delicate. In fact, when played on the harpsichord, Scarlatti’s sudden move to the bass register has a very powerful, almost strident quality that brings out the humor of the music very effectively and that would translate if a pianist played it loudly.

Still, it’s gratifying to hear performances of these magnificent pieces by a single pianist, and especially one who, like Carlo Grante, takes great care to introduce a lot more expressive contrast in them than is customary for pianists. The sound—as in the earlier volumes—is lovely, too.

HASKINS

SCHOENBERG: Quartets (4)
Asasello Quartet
Genuin 16429 [2CD] 143 minutes

The New Viennese atonal revolution launched by Arnold Schoenberg was a brutal shock to symphonic music. Other rebellions had happier results. The Rite of Spring ignited a riot, but a few weeks later it was wildly cheered, its vivid colors and intoxicating rhythms triumphant. The same pattern held for La Mer, The Miraculous Mandarin, and other modernist masterpieces that were at first renounced, then gradually accepted. The works of Schoenberg, after all these years, still elicit hostility with general audiences—the ones who pay for classical music to remain alive.

I don’t think that is hard to explain. Too many Schoenberg pieces have an unremitting dourness, a lack of charm, that many find alienating. Schoenberg later blamed the hostility on the density of his ideas and on poor performances, but that was a dodge. Berg is much better received today.

Listening to all four of Schoenberg’s string quartets is a particularly daunting challenge. The medium itself is relatively austere, making Schoenberg’s stark abstractions seem more so. But there is a bright spot: the earlier quartets, though they are already veering away from tonality, are poetic, lyrical, and relatively accessible, even though they are heavy-breathing and humorless. That’s the irony: the closer Schoenberg came to his goal of creating a new system, the more cold and systematized his music became. His music is more compelling in its formative stages. The search is more engaging than the fulfillment.

The four quartets, composed between 1904 and 1937, allow us to see the whole picture, from the earliest experiments to the “modern classical” fusions, where everything was supposed to come together. This album presents the quartets in reverse order, beginning with the works that are 12-tone but bolted together with classical Viennese structures. In these lucid performances, everything is laid out with clarity and conviction, and people who like the later music will have much to appreciate. Listen for example, to the separation of voices in the finale of Quartet 3. Many quiet moments in these icy pieces have a ghostlike effectiveness, and the Asasello Quartet seizes on them. The tremolos in the Largo of Quartet 4, premiered in 1937 by the Kolisch Quartet, are goose-pimply. The aggressive attacks are strong but not strident—a quality hard to achieve in Schoenberg’s late music; the insistent, sustained chords in IV, for example, are round and full-bodied. This music is rough going for players—and listeners as well. Schoenberg described the Fourth Quartet as “more pleasant” than the Third. For many of us, this just means less grim. The anxiety and acidity of the Third Quartet, from 1927, recall the expressionism of the early atonal pieces, but without the theatrical colors, unpredictable structures, and melodramatic effects.

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Putting on disc 2 after hearing the desiccated classicism in disc 1 is startling. What a difference a decade makes! Quartet 2, written in 1907, is surely the most memorable and poetic of the four. Composed in the period of Schoenberg’s “Friede auf Erden”, when his late-romantic style was on the verge of disintegration, it has chromatic harmonies that move inexorably toward the atonality for which he is famous. One can hear the collapse of an older world and the struggle toward a new one. A tenuous but stubborn tonality keeps asserting itself, pulling Schoenberg’s music out of the atonal abyss—but only barely. The struggle is moving, and the addition of a soprano soloist (singing poems by Stefan George) throws the piece into an otherworldly dimension, especially in this intense performance by contemporary music specialist Eva Resch. This music has an eerie beauty that Schoenberg never attained again. The mysterious way he manages to arrive at a tonal ending is one of the many frissons of the piece.

The Asasello Quartet, Walter Levin’s former students, plays this music with color and conviction. Even the quasi-Brahmsian Quartet 1 makes a strong impression. Levin heard these quartets—written by a fellow Jew who, like himself, barely escaped annihilation—in Palestine in a private recording by the Kolisch Quartet in 1940. If this relatively young quartet (founded in 2000) can’t supply the “uniquely existent ambience” from that experience, as the notes put it, they nonetheless communicate something fresh, thoughtful, and personal. The LaSalle and New Viennesse readings remain competitive, but this is a worthy addition to the catalog. The recorded sound is warm, especially good for cello sonorities, and ideal for this repertory. A cold, aggressive acoustic is the last thing we need in Schoenberg’s music.

**SCHUBERT: Piano Sonata in C minor; Impromptu**

Luisa Guembes-Buchanan
Del Aguila 55312—39 minutes

This is a short program, but the quality is solid if restrained. Guembes-Buchanan’s Impromptu is more cantabile than I would prefer, but she still offers lyricism. The first movement of the sonata could have cleaner playing; the left hand runs and some of the pedaling could have more clarity. I do like that her playing, as in II, is not too dramatic and is more subdued and straightforward. Still, I felt as though the movement dragged. The final movement is tight and intelligent; there is no doubt that Guembes-Buchanan is fully in control. Is this the most exciting recording of Schubert? No, but it is satisfactory.

**SCHUBERT: Songs**

Florian Boesch, bar; Malcolm Martineau, p
Onyx 4149—74 minutes

Florian Boesch and Malcolm Martineau have recorded Schubert’s three great song cycles for Onyx (Winterreise, M/J 2012; Schwanengesang, M/A 2015) and have established an outstanding partnership in lied performance. Having admired their recordings, I eagerly attended a Schubert recital they gave at Wigmore Hall in 2014 and was confirmed in my opinion of their high performance standards.

This program of 24 songs is so well constructed that it is like another song cycle about the complexity of adult life and relationships. It is so carefully sequenced that this can’t merely be my perception. The excellent notes by Richard Stokes give background on the individual songs but offer no rationale for the order of the program.

‘Der Fischer’ sets the tone of warning: life can overwhelm you when you don’t expect it, even when things seem simple and innocent; a water nymph may arise and lure you to your death.

The challenges of life are laid out in the next sequence of songs. We hear about living with grief when the one you love dies (‘Der König in Thule’). We hear how jealousy and obsessive desire have deadly consequences (‘Der Zwerg’); that a broken heart is part of life (‘Im Frühling’); that the beauty of life can be accompanied by injury (‘Heidenroslein’); that sorrow and love are intertwined (‘Nachvöilen’ and ‘An den Mond’). You may feel as free as a bird (‘Die Vogel’) or be like the happy fisherman who is not bothered by human cares—even though he’s aware that the shepherdess on the hill may be trying to hook him (‘Fischersweise’).

What particularly struck me was the sequence of tracks 12-16. You can have happy confidence that your sweetheart’s look tells the world that you are the one she loves (‘Geheimnis’), but know that laughter and tears are both part of life (‘Lachen und Weinen’) and that your first loss is part of growing up (‘Erster Verlust’). Know also that the healing power of
music eases life's hurts ('An Die Musik') and that there is a gift of rest, peace, and solace to meet you in your pain and hurt ('Du Bist die Ruh').

The next songs set forth the reality of anxiety and present some of the stages of death and dying: grief ('Gruppe aus dem Tartarus' and 'Der Gott und die Bajadere'); fear ('Der Tod und das Mädchen'); anger ('Die Liebe Hat'); depression ('Abendstern'); and acceptance of life's hurts through getting the promise of peace after having experienced life's brokenness ('Litanei auf das Fest alle Seelen').

The final two songs express (1) the hope of being "rapturously transfigured" in death as symbolized by the swan's song, which comes at its death ('Schwanengesang') and (2) coming to what Eric Ericson identified as the final stage of life when wisdom comes with a sense of integrity strong enough to withstand physical disintegration ('Der Sieg').

On the strength of the program alone this would be a wonderful Schubert album even if it weren't so miraculously performed. This is a quietly intimate but intense approach to the songs. Sometimes it's almost like Boesch is in the room whispering in your ear. This might be what it was like when Schubert's songs were first sung in homes.

Most of the time this works well. Sometimes he is right on the verge of too quiet. Sometimes his notes are almost inaudible (e.g. the final low note in 'Der Tod und das Mädchen').

I wondered at first if there was too much quiet singing, but I found his use of vocal shading, varied dynamics, and assiduous attention to textual detail riveting. And he shows compelling power when needed (e.g. 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus'). Here is a gifted storyteller-singer in the style of Fischer-Dieskau.

I've never been more impressed with Martineau's accompaniment, so perfectly in accord with Boesch's readings. Much of the energy and narrative expression of certain songs comes through Martineau's splendid playing (e.g. a young man's agitated heart following a failed romance in 'An Mein Herz'). His fine attention to detail is evident everywhere.

Together their exquisite shaping of phrases, discreet tempo variations, and prudently applied rubato are in service to the text and never at the expense of the musical line. The long ballad 'Der Gott und die Bajadere' (8:52) offers a great lesson in how to make each stro-
especially deadly in ‘Erlkonig’—she sings the narrator, father, son, and evil elf with more or less the same sort of expression. Actually, that one should probably never have been transcribed; the guitar falls short of the driving sonority needed for such a dramatic work, and I suspect it would in anyone’s hands. Further good news—the balance is excellent. Neither singer overwhelms the guitar.

Sonnen Schmidt and Harald Knauss have performed in Ensemble Sefira since 1984—that’s a group that specializes in early Baroque music. Knauss is a lute specialist, and here he plays a period instrument. From his sound, and from his work on lute, I’d guess he’s playing without nails. He’s an expressive player, but his range of tone and especially dynamics is limited. The four Mertz pieces from Bardenklange really need a more dramatic approach.

I’m glad to have these recorded, even with my reservations about the playing, and I will return to Pfeiffer’s beautiful performances often.

KEATON

SCHUBERT: Trios
Rachmaninoff Trio
Tudor 7601 [2CD] 108 minutes

The scourge of vibrato-free strings continues apace. As a rule, by default and habit, string players should vibrate on every long note whenever possible, but these musicians take the opposite tack and apply vibrato just here and there, thus spoiling Schubert’s gemütlich Viennese charm. To top it off, the strings are recorded very close, louder than the piano, so there’s nowhere to hide. The trio’s phrasing is sometimes creative and original, sounding strange at first but then inevitable and right after a couple of hearings; but that’s the only thing this recording offers. My ears felt assaulted by this.

WRIGHT

SCHUBERT: Violin Sonatas
Hyejin Chung; Warren Lee, p
Naxos 573579—64 minutes

Schubert wrote these sonatas when he was 19 years old. Although most 19-year-olds are still trying to figure out what to do with their lives, Schubert was already a seasoned composer, as these sonatas attest. They lack the invention and contrapuntal sophistication of his later works for violin and piano, but they are still enjoyable and impressive.

Hyejin Chung is a fine violinist who studied with Takako Nishizaki and S1 Kravchenko, who also taught Viktoria Mullova. She is a very good violinist capable of very refined playing. She is well attuned to Schubert’s idiom, and this is one of the better recordings of these works. I still prefer the exceptionally expressive recording of Gidon Kremer and Oleg Maisenberg (Nov/Dec 2011). Good sound.

MAGIL

SCHULZ-EVLER: Russian Rhapsody;
see MOSZKOWSKI

SCHUMANN: Cello Concerto; Trio 1
Jean-Guillaume Queyras, vc; Isabelle Faust, v; Alexander Melnikov, p; Freiburg Baroque Orchestra/ Pablo Heras-Casado
Harmonia Mundi 902197 —55 minutes + DVD

Combining a concerto with a piano trio is not your customary way of producing recordings. We haven’t heard the last of it, either. The release includes a DVD of a performance of the concerto by the forces on the CD. Since there is no indication of a DVD on the cover one presumes that it is included free of charge. And this is part of a series that includes the other two of Schumann’s piano trios with his violin and piano concertos.

These are highly sensitive performances. In the concerto, soloist and conductor work together in every phrase as in an intimate and serious conversation. This is made clear to the eye as well as the ear in the really excellent DVD. That is well worth the price of admission, leaving us with a good deal to think about. This is an unusually powerful reading of a very individual composition.

The trio is another fine performance of another work with personality. The players do it full justice as well. This is a series I would like to hear more of. I can recommend the present issue with no reservations. The recorded quality is fine, and the performers balance each other with great intensity.

D MOORE

SCHUMANN: Songs
Charlotte de Rothschild, s; Adrian Farmer, p
Nimbus 5932—63 minutes

This puzzling volume of Robert Schumann’s songs is better for these performers than their recent Quilter album (Nimbus 5930, S/O 2016) but the programming is strange. While I appreciate Schumann’s epic wedding present to Clara, Myrthen, if you are familiar with it you...
will be perplexed by this presentation. Rather than present the group in its entirety, or simply extract the most familiar songs (this gets tiring), the program begins with the settings by Robert Burns. Farmer’s notes say, “In this recital they are organized into a loose narrative. The eighth song ‘Niemand’ is left out because it should be sung by a man.” That raises my hackles. It’s hypocritical and sexist; after all, by extension, it could be argued that a man should perform the entire cycle. I know the poem and yes, it is one of the more gender-overt of the songs Schumann set. But does anyone really care about this sort of thing anymore?

I would like to think that this absurd approach to performance practice is a thing of the past. We’ve had male singers sing the Frauenliebe und -Leben and female singers have, for some time, been singing the cycles of Schubert. Lotte Lehman first started singing excerpts from Winterreise in the 1930s! Wake up! An artistic choice that simply tosses the song owing to antiquated, binary, gendered thinking is a cop-out. This was a great opportunity to explore the evolution of performance practice and engage in some reflection on contemporary literary and social issues. Art does not exist in a vacuum. Who is to lead the way into more nuanced, thoughtful, and contemporary thinking about gender in art if not artists themselves? I’m far afield of the album at this point.

The album also includes the Liederkreis. There are some nice moments; but again, perhaps in part owing to my frustrations in how they handled the excerpts from Myrthen, it was hard for me to enjoy. There are dozens of albums of Schumann songs, and many are better than this. Notes and translations but no texts.

HEISEL

SCHUMANN: Trios & Quartets; Fantasy Pieces
Matteo Fossi, p; Savinio Quartet
Brilliant 95041 [3CD] 178 minutes

Schumann’s trios and quartets, but mainly his three quartets, have come in for some criticism. All the quartets were written in a matter of weeks in 1842, so they lack the refinement that might have come from rethinking and revision. Schumann studied quartets of earlier composers, and he sometimes parroted Beethoven very closely; the Adagio from the first quartet, for example, copies the beginning of the slow movement theme from Beethoven’s Ninth. A further strike against the quartets comes, oddly enough, from their instrumentation—because it avoids the piano, Schumann’s instrument. This would seem a minor genre, a summer experiment that the composer was never to revisit.

But now, having trashed the music, I have to say I really like these quartets. They cover a wide range of emotion, but always with an undercurrent of youthful ardor and romantic yearning that characterizes so much of Schumann’s music. Unfortunately I am not altogether pleased with the Savinio Quartet. In quicker movements they go with the long line, and expressive details are sometimes buried. Too often I sense impatience and an unwillingness to yield to the bittersweet quality of Schumann. Their publicity, quoted in the liner notes, declares the Savinio to be the “true heir to the Quartetto Italiano”. A quick comparison will show that the Italians find more beauty and pathos than the Savinio. Add to this Brilliant’s sound, which makes the strings too harsh and lacking in warmth—maybe we should shoot the engineers.

The three trios fare better. One could argue they are stronger pieces, if only by virtue of using Schumann’s natural instrument, the piano, and by having a fine pianist—Matteo Fossi. The outer movements of the first trio are quintessential Schumann, and the slow movements are full of romantic yearning. These trios, all coming later than the quartets, are among the composer’s finest late works. The approach taken here is very similar to the Karenine Trio, reviewed last issue; tempos are almost identical. The trios were not recorded in the same place as the quartets, and the sound is better, though the cello needs more prominence much of the time.

A nice bonus to the Savinio issue is the four movements that make up the Op. 88 Fantasiestücke. These were written for amateurs playing in a private home, so they are simpler and less intense than standard Schumann. Delightful music, nonetheless.

Schumann’s chamber music doesn’t get extensive press, and indeed no one would place these works above the songs and piano music. No matter. This is lovely music that helps us complete the picture, as they say.

ALTHOUSE

In order to give everyone an opportunity we are sacrificing the most gifted ones.
Schwantner: Flute Pieces
Sarah Frisof; Daniel Pesca, p; Ji Hye Jung, Lee Vinson, perc
Centaur 3458—52 minutes

Not long ago (Mar/Apr 2016), Stephen Estep heard an all-Schwantner, all-flute program he couldn’t praise. Not all flute music from our time is that hollow and unsatisfying, but here, Looking Back for flute and piano is the definition of empty gestures. Taking Charge (2012) is much longer and far better; having percussion seems to make a big difference and manages to rescue this writing from the idle chatter it sometimes threatens to become. Two short works fill out the program. I don’t understand how a piece so busy could be called Soaring when it’s all sprinkles and flutters. How about ‘Hummingbird’ instead? No eagles in “sonic sight” here! Black Anemones (1980) places the same musical sprinkles in a context that is soulful and touching. When Schwantner’s music works, it is truly lovely.

A command of the exterior, decorative element does not guarantee bones beneath the garb. After Mel Powell studied with Paul Hindemith at Yale, the elder heard a piece for string quartet from the younger. “I see you have gone over to der enemy,” he said after the performance.

“No”, Powell asserted, “I learned that from you.” “I do not teach interesting noises.” But apparently Schwantner does.

Sarah Frisof has mastered and internalized this challenging and expressive music. She plays piccolo very impressively in the middle and final movements of Taking Charge. I’m just as impressed with her collaborators, who have credentials from the University of Michigan, Peabody, Eastman, and Yale. Schwantner himself has contributed the notes on these pieces, and the sound picks up all the softest intricacies with sympathy and presence.

GORMAN

Scriabin: Piano Pieces 5
Pervez Mody
Thorofon 2632—66 minutes

This is another great installment in Mody’s project to record all of Scriabin’s piano music. We have favorably reviewed three of the previous four volumes: Vol. 2, Mazurkas, Piano Sonatas 1 and 9 (Thorofon 2579, Nov/Dec 2011); Vol. 3, Preludes, Etudes, Piano Pieces, Piano Sonatas 2 and 7 (Thorofon 2590, Mar/Apr 2013); and Vol. 4, Preludes, Etudes, Piano Sonatas 3 and 10 (Thorofon 2612, Sept/Oct 2014). Somehow we missed Vol. 1, Preludes, Piano Pieces, Piano Sonata 4 (Thorofon 2570 2CD). There are probably three more volumes to completion and I am enjoying the ride.

The point here, as in the others, is to put together a good program that flows well. One disc with all the etudes or two discs with all the preludes or all the sonatas have been a common way to present Scriabin’s music. By putting together actual programs, Mody goes back to the first all-Scriabin recitals given as a memorial to the composer after he died by his long-time colleague and friend, Sergei Rachmaninoff. The two lived together as teenagers under the strict tutelage of piano teacher Nikolai Zverev. They graduated from the Moscow Conservatory together, Rachmaninoff taking the gold medal in composition and silver in piano, Scriabin the reverse. This program includes a number of works that Rachmaninoff performed in 1915 and 16, among them the two big works here: Sonata 5 and the Fantasy in B minor. The other pieces are selected and grouped for best musical effect: Morceaux, Preludes, Etudes, Poems, Dances, Impromptus, and a Scherzo. Some are complete for their opus number, others are a selected group.

The performances are just what I expected, knowing the earlier volumes in this series. Mody was born in India, trained in Moscow, and currently lives in Germany. He has plenty of other music recorded and performed, but the Scriabin project had its roots in his Russian training and has been going for several years. I suspect that he plays Scriabin somewhat like Rachmaninoff did—which did not please everyone at the time. The prevailing feeling about Scriabin then was how mystical and impetuous it should be, with flashes of color and sound. Rachmaninoff brought it solidly to Earth, allowing the compositional abilities of the composer to be heard in his clear and distinct style.

Mody is much the same. His Sonata 5 is balanced and a little slower than I am used to, but I heard more inner voices and thematic development than usual. Same for the Fantasy, which Rachmaninoff noted was a very difficult piece and that it took him nearly a whole day to learn it. Only in my dreams is it playable, and then only with months of work. I will look for future volumes in this series and expect that Mody will be my reference and comparison pianist for any other complete Scriabin

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piano recordings and many single-disc recitals. Thorofon continues to impress me with excellent piano sound and great booklet notes.

HARRINGTON

SCRIABIN: 24 Preludes, op 11
with Vers la Flamme; Piano Sonata 10
LISZT: 4 Late Piano Pieces
Philipp Kopachevsky
Piano Classics 103—66 minutes
with Mazurka; Sonatas 2, 4, 9
Filippo Balducci
DCT 56—65 minutes

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) composed 90 Preludes for piano in his short life, the earliest in 1888 and the final set in 1914. They are grouped under 22 different opus numbers, and only Opus 11 contains more than 7 preludes. These 24 were modeled after Chopin’s Preludes and arranged in the same key sequence: C major, its relative A minor, up a fifth to G, its relative E minor, and so on through the circle of fifths, ending with an appropriately large final one in D minor. But Chopin’s were written as a set, and Scriabin actually drew together a number of pieces composed over the course of eight years (1888-96). He even transposed a couple so that he’d have a complete set in all the major and minor keys. Strong requests from his publisher, Belaieff, and a need for some cash at the time were also inspirations. They are all short, many under one minute and only two or three run to a little over two minutes. They were originally published in four volumes of six preludes each. Like Chopin’s, in terms of mood, tempo and technical difficulty, they run the full gamut, though most could be described as lyrical.

Scriabin’s good friend and classmate (since their early teens), Rachmaninoff, frequently programmed a group of these preludes, as did Horowitz in more recent times. I am sent new recordings of the complete set on a regular basis, and have a few individual ones in my own repertoire. Earlier this year, I was very pleased with Klara Min’s recording (Steinway 30045, May/June 2016). Kopachevsky and Balducci give us good performances of the Preludes with quite different programs. Listening to these CDs back to back, one immediately notices the difference in microphone placement and recording level. Balducci’s is the louder recording, very dry and close to the piano, with a pronounced bass. Kopachevsky seems recorded further away, clear and at a lower level, but with a wide dynamic range. Neither can match the nearly perfect piano sound on Min’s Steinway disc.

Kopachevsky’s Preludes are the quickest and most exciting, but only by a small margin. As beautiful as Min’s playing is, her set takes about 38 minutes, while Kopachevsky is about 30 and Balducci 33. There is certainly room in my musical world for three performances, and I would not consider learning a new Prelude from this set without carefully listening to all three. Piano Classics seems to always have a good, informative essay. The additional items on Kopachevsky’s program all involve trills and tremolos.

Piano Sonata 10 and Vers la Flamme are very good examples of how Scriabin sustains harmonies on the piano and how he can build tremendous sound and energy. These work very well here, but it’s not quite the same white-hot level of playing that Horowitz manages (CBS 42411), and he takes about a minute less time to reach the flame. The four late Liszt pieces that follow also make use of trills and tremolos. They are far beyond the traditional harmonies of the romantic era, sometimes rivaling the atonal nature of late Scriabin. The juxtaposition of the two composers shows how far ahead of his time Liszt was.

Balducci fills out his program with Piano Sonatas 2, 4, and 9—a very respectable group that gives the listener a wide range of Scriabin styles. With a deft touch and plenty of technical fire, Balducci brings all of these off with style and flair. As with Kopachevsky, there are others that capture more in this repertoire. Specifically, Sofronitsky’s Black Mass Sonata (9) is the most terrifying I have ever heard (Vista 93, July/Aug 2007) and few come even close to matching its intensity.

We have a tough choice here. If you can only get one, I’d pick Kopachevsky, but would be happy with either.

HARRINGTON

SEGERTAM: Symphony 288;
BRAHMS: Symphony 1
Turku Philharmonic/ Leif Segerstam
Alba 390 [SACD] 72 minutes

Maestro Segerstam expresses his enthusiasm for Brahms’s grand introductory symphonic salvo with an astoundingly long, complicated, and semiliterate paragraph almost worth the price of admission.

This is lean, young Brahms, not the fat round one. I is small-scale, chamber music-
like, non-bombastic. It is crystal-clear, somewhat matter-of-fact, and strikingly reminiscent of his friend Schumann. The slow movement is gentle and lyrical, like the intermezzo it might have been meant to be. III is lean and gentle as well. The finale takes its time to unfold. Its introduction is not forbidding. The chorale is resigned and distantly holy. The big tune is more gracious than overwrought. The orchestra is smaller than what you usually get in the normal Teutonic readings. I think most listeners and readers of this magazine will be disgusted, but they probably wouldn’t buy this anyway. I loved every minute of it. It is a fresh and stimulating view of this well-trodden work, which I love dearly, like most of you, but if you reject it out of hand I think you’ll be missing something.

Segerstam is an excellent conductor, a champion of Pettersson (his BIS Symphony 8 is incredible), and a formidable musician. His output as a composer may be another matter entirely. This work (no, the number is not a misprint) is a typical example of his schizoid avant-garde-ism. In four continuous sections, corresponding somewhat to the classical norm, the piece takes on the character of a nightmarish dream, with abstract vagaries appearing randomly. His Symphony 288 (Lettıng the FLOW Go On) (no date) opens with pounding timpani, like the Brahms, and goes on to chaos filled with chimes, weirdness, slaps, slide whistles, and fanfares. The second section functions as a “slow movement”, with ghostly fragments. The scherzo has allusions to Beethoven 7. The finale develops previous motives in turgid fashion before it eventually peter out. True, it is pretty wacky, but by no means incoherent.

Not for everybody, but a fascinating release.

GIMBEL

SHAWN: Cello Quartet Suite; Blues & Boogie; 3 Pieces; Miniatures for Duo; Serenade
Maxine Neumann, Mark Humburg, Tom Calabro, Michael Severens, Jared Shapiro, vc; Allen Shawn, p
Albany 1626 — 67 minutes

Allen Shawn (b. 1948) is a New Yorker who moved to Vermont. He wrote his own liner notes for this release and plays fine piano here as well. He has worked with Maxine Neumann, of the Bennington Cello Quartet, for many years, and she is the primary cello soloist here. They make a well-balanced musical pair, fine technicians full of enthusiastic drama.

These compositions are all for cello and cellos and are fine listening, dramatic and lyrical by turns. Shawn is a composer with imagination and feeling, covering the gamut of styles from lyrical to classical to jazz. The Suite that opens the program is a 19-minute 5-movement work played by the Bennington Cello Quartet (a reissue of the 1989 Opus 1 148), and played to the hilt. Blues and Boogie is another reissue—from a 1994 Northeastern CD. It was written in 1991 and is very satisfying.

The rest of the program is new to records, including the cello-piano Serenade, a 19-minute piece written back in 1990. I find that one a little hard to hold onto, but I like the rest of the music. The 3 Pieces are well contrasted, and so are the 5 Miniatures.

The playing is generally excellent. Neumann’s work in the Serenade is not altogether in tune. Otherwise, this is a well played and well recorded collection of some really fine music for cello(s).

D MOORE

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphonies 5, 8, 9; Hamlet Suite
Boston Symphony/ Andris Nelsons
DG 479 5201 [2CD] 2:38

I did a double-take as I typed the headnote because it’s been so long since I’ve had a chance to do a review of a major orchestra on a “major” record label. But then I realized how little the major-minor dichotomy means nowadays. The good news is that the BSO has released a new double album with its new music director. Maybe the anticipation and excitement elevated my expectations a little too high. These are solid, sturdy, well-executed performances of three of Shostakovich’s most popular symphonies. The BSO plays beautifully—what a splendid orchestra it still is!—and the recorded sound is spectacular, reminding us why Symphony Hall is regarded as one of the world’s greatest concert halls.

I almost said “DG’s recorded sound is spectacular”, but of course, the “major” record companies no longer make the recordings they sell, and long gone are the days of permanent technical staff who travel around the world working with the greatest ensembles and soloists. If you read the back of this box carefully, you’ll see that the BSO actually made these recordings and has licensed them to DG. So thank the BSO’s recording staff for produc-

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ing such spacious, resonant sound from these concert performances.

As for the interpretations themselves, I can’t help feeling that they don’t have enough urgency. I tend to prefer Shostakovich played on the razor’s edge, on the verge of flying into chaos (maybe actually doing it), rather than restrained and “safe.” Nelsons makes the music a little too steady and stolid, without the cut-and-thrust of expecting the Cheka to crash through the door at any second. For example, as I’ve observed in previous reviews, the Fifth can be either nervous and lightning fast (Rodzinski) or massive and juggernaut powerful (LSO/Bernstein, Sony). But either way the conductor has to hammer home the underlying drama and raw emotion. And the back-to-back scherzos in the Eighth are a bit short of the urgency and chaotic fury that Mravinsky (Philips) and Rodzinski (Jan/Feb 2008) imbue them with.

What I hear on these discs seems a bit detached, less than emotionally direct and raw. This may be a matter of taste. If you do not like “razor’s edge” Shostakovich, these interpretations may please you.

Of the three symphonies, the performance I like the most may well be the Ninth, maybe because the music is driven far less by drama than the other two symphonies and is more like chamber music. Also enjoyable is the suite of seven short movements from the incidental music for Hamlet. Again, maybe the less epic scale of the score is more in keeping with this conductor’s approach to the composer.

HANSEN

SHOSTAKOVICH: Trios; Viola Sonata
Vladimir Ashkenazy, p; Zsolt-Tihamer Visontay, v; Mats Lidstrom, vc; Ada Meinich, va
Decca 478 9382—72 minutes

This recital brings together Shostakovich’s first and last chamber works, plus one of his most popular pieces, Trio 2, from the middle of his career.

The players keep the irony at arm’s length and indulge the teenage Shostakovich’s perhaps ingenuous sentimentality in Trio 1, a 13-minute stand-alone sonata movement. It’s an apt choice, and I think the right one: the 17-year-old wasn’t yet in his post-graduation enfant terrible phase of the Piano Sonata 1 and Symphony 2. The fortissimo Lisztian piano tremolos of the closing bars never sounded so humane and vulnerable rather than imperious.

Everything about Trio 2 goes right, especially the lonely and forlorn cello harmonics of I, Ashkenazy’s skeletal, chattering piano commentary, and the stomach-churning, precipitous string crescendos of II. Their approach is brittle, searing, not romanticized at all, emphasizing the dissonant grotesque elements, and all the more harrowing and moving by contrast with the earlier trio. Neither string player is too much concerned about intonation (though intonation is pretty good anyway) concentrating instead on expression. Ashkenazy played this trio for the composer in the early 1960s, so he has some authority.

The Viola Sonata of 1975 is haunted by Shostakovich’s earlier music and also by the long-short-long rhythm of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata in III. I is spare and desolate, fragmentary; and II draws its spunky tunes from Shostakovich’s unfinished opera The Gamblers, written shortly before Trio 2. The finale, such as it is, looks back on his symphonies, though I cannot recognize a single motif, and I know Shostakovich’s symphonies pretty well—the quotes are well disguised. It’s a heartbreaking work, especially and perhaps only when we keep in mind that Shostakovich knew death was near and intended this as his swan song. So it asks the listener to indulge a bit of biographical sentiment, as Shostakovich indulged a bit of his own sentiment in Trio 1. In that light, it is a deeply moving work, though a bit puzzling divorced from the composer’s biography.

Ashkenazy plays with clarity, minimal pedal, and insight rather than comforting beauty—an approach familiar from his recording of the 24 Preludes & Fugues (Decca 460666)—still my favorite. The string players are of the same mind, not greatly concerned with beauty in itself, but not averse to it. This is an exceptionally moving concert, a journey from the plush, romantic Trio 1 to the stark, minimalist Viola Sonata. The sound is lovely: close and intimate.

WRIGHT

SHOSTAKOVICH: Violin Concerto 1; GLAZOUNOV; Concerto
Nicola Benedetti; Bournemouth Symphony/ Kirill Karabits
Decca 4788758—59 minutes

Benedetti has a good grasp of the shape of the line in the first movement of the Shostakovich, but she lacks control of her tone. Single notes will squeal, and then the next few will be so
covered that they are almost inaudible over the orchestra. Sometimes her sound is rich, the low notes are positively viola-like, and sometimes it is thin or gravelly. The uneven engineering often makes the orchestra boomy or indistinct, but then it's too bright, as in the tambourine-driven part of the Scherzo. Later in the movement, the horn melody is nearly buried.

Our Overview (Mar/Apr 2006) puts the Vengerov recording at the peak (Teldec 92256). The pell-mell tempo in II here is exciting, but Vengerov and Rostropovich find more logic in this argumentative movement. And though Benedetti still has trouble with consistency and occasional harshness, she is very compelling in III. Sparks fly in the cadenza, and everything is so right in the Burlesque that it almost redeems the other faults. This won’t unseat the Vengerov, but I’ll return to it. Benedetti is always emotionally engaged, never boring. Problems of engineering and balance aside, this Decca has a broader soundstage than the Teldec, and the orchestra blooms a little more in the Passacaglia.

The Glazounov is quite good. Benedetti’s cadenza has some mellifluous moments. The sonics are still off—the trumpets at the beginning of III sound cartoonishly distant—but overall its a fine recording. Benedetti and the orchestra are congenial and sparkling.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Piano Quintet; see MATTHEWS

SIBELIUS: Symphony 2; Finlandia; Karelia Suite
Bavarian Radio/ Mariss Jansons
BR 900144—70 minutes

I like the Bavarian Radio Orchestra and some of their new recordings led by Mariss Jansons, but not this one. It is true that Sibelius was a Wagnerian for a while and that he admired Bruckner’s Symphony No. 3, but this performance takes Teutonicism way too far. The first movement, with its heavy weight and thick textures makes that clear from the start. As if to confirm, Jansons (I presume) bolstered a subdued but important line in the basses and bassoons with a bass trombone that sticks out more than supports and takes the mystery completely out of this passage. The Adagio is worse. The opening timpani rolls sounds like thunder, and what follows is heavy-handed, with fat low strings. It is hard to say if this movement sounds ponderous or if things get more labored as the music proceeds, but it seems like it will never end. The Vivacissimo should supply relief, but transparency is lacking, and some accents are more whacked than accented. Even the haunting trumpet solo sounds a little forced. Nothing improves in the finale. Textures are so thick that important brass parts get lost, which is hard to believe, and I do not think the problem is entirely the recording. Everything is too rounded off, Jan- sons indulges too much, there are too many slowdowns, and the final fanfare is almost lost in the murk. Listeners who want a Germanic Sibelius 2 should try Lorin Maazel’s Vienna Philharmonic recording.

One would think Finlandia would fare better with this treatment, but it does not. The best thing here is the Karelia Suite, which has some spunk and a moving slow movement.

Max Lerner, America as a Civilization
SIBELIUS: Symphonies 3,6,7
Minnesota Orchestra/ Osmo Vanska
BIS 2006 [SACD] 82 minutes

None of these are “popular” Sibelius symphonies. Symphony 3 can seem episodic, 6
nothing but atmosphere, and 7 a mere tone poem. I can’t say that Osmo Vanska achieves
anything greater than that in the first two.

No. 3 just meanders and never seems to go
anywhere. When it finally ends, it doesn’t con-
clude, if you know what I mean. I have a num-
ber of other recordings, and I certainly prefer
the BIS with Neeme Jarvi to this one—even the
sound, which is warmer (Gothenburg).

Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis has never had
warm sound. I am also fond of Okko Kamu
(1973), Saraste (RCA), and the recent Stor-
gards (July/Aug 2014).

Symphony 6 doesn’t have a slow move-
ment, but Vanska conducts II (Allegretto) as if
it is. It just dies. Again—and in the whole sym-
phony—what should be atmospheric fails
because of the sound (orchestra and hall both,
I think). He tries to stir up some kind of a cli-
max in IV, but it seems artificial, not an out-
growth of the music. I don’t think this sym-
phony has a climax. And the whole thing
comes across as prosaic. But this is not a poet-
ic conductor—never has been. There’s Kar-
jan, Saraste, and Storgards; and even Colin
Davis is better than this (and I have never liked
that conductor).

I think No. 7 is the best thing here. The
orchestra almost blooms in warmth and
expansiveness, and there’s a feeling of contin-
uity. It is a much easier piece to put across
than No. 6. There’s a lot more slow music,
more legato, and it’s more concise and coer-
cent—less a matter of atmosphere. Of course,
that means there are many very good record-
ings, from Beecham and Ormandy and Kar-
jan thru the recent Storgards. So even though
this one is excellent, you probably already
have a fine recording or two of this 20-22
minute work.

American Record Guide

SMETANA: Trio; see DVORAK

SORABJI: Transcendental Studies, Vol. 5
Fredrik Ullen, p
BIS 2223—79 minutes

Ullen’s fifth volume contains Studies 72-83,
and there are still two more to go before this
monumental set is complete. I was quite taken

with Volume 1 (BIS 1373, Nov/Dec 2006), Mr
Becker somewhat less so with Volume 4 (BIS
1853, Nov/Dec 2015). It seems we agree on
Ullen’s amazing technical facility and superb
musicianship, but the music itself is challeng-
ing to listen to and absorb. I have to admit that
I am quite enamored of his description of the
dense accompaniment textures as “twisting .
. . labyrinth of ornament and embellishment”.

I admit that I enjoy Alkan’s Etudes, and
they range in length from 5 to 30 minutes.
They are firmly rooted in the romantic virtu-
osic style, which suits me well. The 12 Studies
in this group show that Sorabji can be concise:
6 pieces are from 1:10 to 2:28. There is also an
18-minute Choral Prelude and a mammoth
29-minute Passacaglia in the form of 100 vari-
tions. I refer back to Mr Becker’s quote above
for a good take on what it is like to listen to 100
Sorabji variations. Only a handful of pianists
would invest the time required to master a
work like this, especially considering the
adverse reaction a normal concert audience
might be expected to have. On the other hand,
if one wanted to show off technical and musi-
cal skills with modern-sounding music, a
small group of the shorter studies here would
probably work quite well.

No other pianist today could give a more
dedicated, musical, and technically proficient
performance than Ullen. Complemented by
BIS’s state of the art sound and informative
booklet essay, he is well on his way to comple-
ting all 100 Studies in fine fashion. The set,
when finished, will be the definitive reference.

HARRINGTON

SPINEI: Meet Me under the Clock; Bootleg
Sugar Lips; Some Breaking+
Voxare Quartet; Pala Garcia, Joan Plana, v;
Amanda Verner, va; Sari De Leon Reist, v;
Colleen Phelps, marimba; St Michel Strings/ Jose
Serebrier

Toccata 371—63 minutes

Cristina Spinei counts Christopher Rouse as
one of her teachers and spent some of her
formative years studying ballet; she has writ-
ten much work for choreographers—some it is
collected here. Spinei writes in an agreeable
tonal idiom and has a nice feel for gesture and
expression. She also has a good sense of emo-
tional range: From and Perspective are lyrical
but somewhat somber works; at the other end
of the spectrum are works like Bootleg Sugar
Lips, which very consciously draws on some of
the same gestures and processes of Adams’s
Shaker Loops. (Indeed, its original title was

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Bootleg Shaker Loops, which was misheard by the dancers as the current one.) The buoyant rhythms—even in slower works—must make it a delight for choreographers.

The instruments sound too closely mixed (in spite of their excellent playing).

HASKINS

SPOH: Symphonies 1+5
Slovak Philharmonic/ Alfred Walter
Naxos 555500—65 minutes

Why would Naxos bother recycling this 1990 recording from the original Marco Polo release? It’s a reminder of how awful the early recordings from these two labels often were. Walter is a third-rate conductor, a master of mediocrity. The provincial orchestra sounds provincial, with occasional sour tuning and weak ensemble. It’s the kind of orchestra that can sound good with a good conductor, but here balances are so bland that little pops out from the rather flat sound. Indeed, in 1 the strings are buried whenever the woodwinds and brass play. Spohr wrote these works when he was 27 and 53, but it takes better performances than these to make them worth hearing.

FRENCH

SQUIRE: 20 Miniatures
Oliver Gledhill, vc; Tadashi Imai, p
Naxos 571373 — 67 minutes

William Henry Squire (1871-1963) was one of the more prominent early 20th Century British cellists. One can mix up his name with prominent music librarian William Barclay Squire—I did, at any rate. Dr Gledhill emphasizes in his liner notes that Squire was particularly involved with portamento, a matter of sliding between pitches. He goes into this in detail and plays the cello in a way that brings out this aspect of the compositions in an effective way.

The program is ordered chronologically and gives us compositions written from 1890 to 1904. The latest opus is 26, though several later pieces do not have opus numbers. One presumes that there are more to come. These are all relatively light in mood, though some are fairly demanding technically. They make pleasant listening and are played well by Gledhill and Imai. Five of them have not been recorded before. I am glad to have this and hope that we will hear more from Dr Squire.

D MOORE

STEINBERG: Passion Week
Clarion Choir/ Steven Fox
Naxos 573665—55 minutes

with RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: Holy Week Chants
Cappella Romana/ Alexander Lingas
Cappella Romana 414—62 minutes

Passion Week is a choral work composed by Maximilian Steinberg (1883-1946), a student and eventual son-in-law of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakoff. Born into a cultured Jewish family in Vilnius, Lithuania (then under Russian domination) Steinberg moved to St Petersburg where he, Stravinsky, and a few other notables studied at the conservatory under Rimsky’s tutelage. Steinberg soon became his great teacher’s most trusted assistant. He would remain loyal to his mentor stylistically as well as personally, eschewing the modernist trails blazed by Stravinsky. Leaving his Jewish heritage behind, Steinberg proceeded to join the Rimsky family, embracing Russian Orthodoxy and marrying Nadezhda Nikolaevna just eight days before her father’s death in 1908. (You hear can the family connection at work in the Cappella Romana program that places Steinberg’s Passion alongside Rimsky’s Chants for Holy Week. Like father-in-law, like son-in-law.) Steinberg stayed in Russia for the remainder of his life, surviving both the Revolution and the Great Patriotic War. He became a noted pedagogue at the Leningrad Conservatory, where he taught Shostakovich among others.

Passion Week was composed 1920-23. Needless to say, it took guts to write it given the Soviet regime’s hostility toward religion and the Russian church. Published in 1927, the work was not performed in Steinberg’s lifetime. Eventually it wound up in the possession of the Russian-American conductor, Igor Buketoff (1915-2001), who apparently was given it by Shostakovich when he visited the US in 1957. Several decades later, it was the Buketoff family that brought the work to the attention of the two conductors whose efforts led to these recordings.

remind you of Gretchaninoff’s *Passion Week* crafted a decade earlier; though Steinberg based most of his melodies on chant, unlike his colleague who gave us much the same liturgy in freer form. While Steinberg’s writing may not soar to the heights of, say, ‘Bogoroditsa Deva’ or other peak moments from Rachmaninoff’s *All-Night Vigil*, his *magnum opus* is a meticulously crafted, spiritually-charged affair that’s worthy of our admiration and patronage.

Steinberg’s handiwork inspired both of these American choirs to great heights. Based in the Pacific Northwest, Cappella Romana devotes itself to sacred music from both east and west, especially early and contemporary repertoire. Alexander Lingas has been a lecturer and adviser for the Institute of Orthodox repertoire. New York-based, with its conductor Steven Fox specializing in both Russian music and period performance practices. He and his choir premiered *Passion Week* in October, 2014, and recorded it right after that. (The *Times* saluted Steinberg and the Clarion performance in a highly positive review.) I’d say everyone knew what they were doing.

Given all this preparation and anticipation, it’s a pleasure to report that both recordings are terrific—though they are not carbon copies of each other. The voices of the Cappella Romana sound darker and more covered from top to bottom. With them, it’s the verticality of the harmonies that hits you. Imagine, if you will, a rich, multi-layered musical torte with all the voice levels balanced on top of each other, creating thick, imposing wedges of sound. That’s what I hear from Maestro Lingas and his forces. The Clarions, by contrast, sound less covered and a bit brighter overall. More to the point, Steven Fox imbues Steinberg’s writing with linear energy as he urges the melodic lines to follow their ebbs and flows more autonomously than in the other account. Sticking with food metaphors, it’s less a stacked-up torte than it is the pulling of rich harmonic taffy. Whether these analogies work for you or not, Clarion’s handsome voices and the maestro’s Slavic sensibilities honor Steinberg’s intentions with grand singing and total conviction.

I don’t think there’s a “best” here, especially since both are captured in affecting sound and complemented by full texts, translations, and annotation. I will be keeping both, as Maximilian Steinberg enters my collection in fine style.

[Note that Clarion will be performing this in St Petersburg and Moscow this fall. They will follow those premières with the British one in London.—Ed]

**STRADELLA: Santa Editta, Vergine e Monaca, Regina d’Inghilterra**

Veronica Cangemi (Editta), Francesca Aspromonte (Nobilita), Claudia Di Carlo (Umilita), Gabriella Martellacci (Grandezza), Fernanda Guimaraes (Bellezza), Sergio Foresti (Senso), Ensemble Mare Nostrum/ Andrea De Carlo

Arcana 396—56:35

Only recently did I review a premiere recording of one of Alessandro Stradella’s six Italian oratorios, *San Giovanni Crisostomo* (M/A 2016). That was, in fact, the second volume in what appears to be Arcana’s intention to record all of them with De Carlo and his ensemble. The present release is the third.

The subject of this oratorio is Saint Edith of Wilton, an Anglo-Saxon princess who grew up in a cloister and was determined to remain there, pursuing charitable devotion, despite efforts to install her on the throne. (The oratorio’s awarding her the title of “Queen of England” is a misrepresentation of that failed hope.) As with *Crisostomo*, such subject matter is quite alien to Italian liturgical practice. In this case efforts are made to connect the composition with at least two possible political queenly personalities of the day, as a topical commentary.

There is no real action in the libretto by the Roman aristocratic poet Lelio Orsini. Instead, this is an example of what we might call the “debate-oratorio”, where a character has discussions with, or is argued over, by allegorical personifications. Editta strenuously and unyieldingly defends her religious vocation against the arguments of Nobilita (Nobility, soprano), Grandezza (Grandeur, contralto), Bellezza (Beauty, tenor), and Senso (Sense, bass), with backing only by Umilita (Humility, soprano). The score is the predictable procession of recitatives with arias (17 of them, including ariosos), duets (4) and trios (4), invariably brief. Editta herself is the clear protagonist, with 11 of the arias and 1 duet assigned to her, as she answers the blandishments one by one.

Though there is not a great deal of musical development, by later standards, many of the
arias are melodically attractive. Though there is a plenitude of sopranos, and they tend to sound similar, the cast consists of very effective soloists. Cangemi is the best known of them, and her strong, fervid protestations are brought off beautifully. The instrumental functions are taken over by seven players (two gambas, cello, archlute, theorbo, harp, harpsichord). Full Italian text is printed, with translations.

Not a great masterpiece, but an interesting transitional example of the genre.

BARKER

STRAUSS: Till Eulenspiegel; see ZEMLINSKY

STRAVINSKY: Choral Pieces
Threni; Requiem Canticles; Dove Descending; Da Pacem Domine
Christina Landshamer, Eva Wolak, Maximillian Schmitt, Magnus Staveland, Florian Boesch, David Soar; Collegium Vocale Ghent; Flemish Philharmonic/Philippe Herreweghe
Phi 20—47 minutes

Threni, a take on the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and the mini-Requiem Stravinsky called Canticles are proof the composer could be a serialist when he wanted to be. Excellent liner notes explain what he was up to in both works, and in neither case was he out to charm anybody. In both he served up thorny, highly dissonant fare that’s tough on singers and their listeners. I’ve always liked the Canticles, which bring evocative touches of color to the Roman Liturgy for the Dead. ‘Threni,’ I have to admit, I could gladly live without. But ‘Da Pacem’ ends the program with a jolt of contrast, since it’s the warmest, most affirming choral embrace ever Stravinsky left us. What a glorious 3 minutes! (He was saluting his hero, Carlo Gesualdo, which explains why he was in such a good mood.)

Herreweghe brings the same probing acuity to the 20th Century that he brings to the 18th, and that’s good news for devotees of Stravinsky’s music. I sense deeper colors in the Canticles Neeme Jarvi recorded for Chandos two decades ago (J/A 1996), but the Collegium Vocale creates many affecting moments as they confront the liturgy in staunch, uncompromising fashion. They do some amazing things with ‘Threni’ as well. Roger Hecht wasn’t thrilled with Herreweghe’s Stravinsky (Symphony of Psalms and the Mass) as recorded in concert and released on Pentatone 5186349 (S/O 2010). He found it heavy, unidiomatic, and bland. I wonder if another go at those works in the studio—maybe with a first-class engineering team like this one on the job—would produce snappier results. I don’t hear anything blah about Herreweghe’s Stravinsky this time around.

GREENFIELD

STRAVINSKY: Petrouchka
Basel Symphony/ Dennis Russell Davies & Maki Namekawa, p—SOB 11—75 minutes

Stravinsky’s great second ballet for Diaghilev has been recorded many times. I grew up listening to Boulez’s recording with the New York Philharmonic (poorly produced in its CD transfer) and later with the one he did for DG with the Chicago Symphony (May/June 1993). Davies’s performance with the Basel Symphony is very good, but does not measure up to Boulez. Some of his tempos are slower (Scenes 1 and 4)—not necessarily a deal-breaker in itself, because great pieces should work at different tempos. The warm recorded sound obscures some of the marvelous touches of Stravinsky’s orchestration (for instance, the bright piccolo writing when the tipsy merry-makers happen by in Scene 1).

Of course, the release is also interesting in that it includes Stravinsky’s four-hand piano arrangement. Here, too, some of the tempos are more deliberate than Stravinsky’s marked ones, and two pianists—even ones as good as Davies and Namekawa—simply can’t render some of Stravinsky’s music as fluidly as possible with a full orchestra (the entry of the organ-grinder, for instance). In short, this recording is of value chiefly for listeners, like me, who want to keep track of Maestro Davies’s distinguished and vital career.

HASKINS

STRAVINSKY: Petrouchka;
DEBUSSY: Boîte à Joujoux
Seattle Symphony/ Ludovic Morlot
SSM 1010—69 minutes

The best performance here is of Debussy’s Toy Box ballet. Morlot seems to be in his element with this very impressionist score, giving the music flow and character and letting expression bloom. The only problem is with the music itself; it is so motivic and short-phrased that it’s obvious a story line is needed. Indeed, it works only as a ballet, not as sit-down-and-listen (or even background) music. This is also a rare Benaroya Hall performance (2015) on Seattle Symphony Media that was not recorded in concert. Perhaps that’s why the engineer-
ing here is exceptionally rich, warm, transparent, and balanced, as if on a three-dimensional sound stage.

What a contrast to Petrouchka (1947 version), which was recorded in concert a year earlier! Some crucial elements like piano and triangle lines in Scene 1 or the important piano and harp in the Russian Dance are missing, I presume, because of badly judged engineering. In quiet moments it seems that the microphones were too far from the stage.

There are other problems as well. In Scene 2 (‘Petrouchka’) Morlot seems so involved in the moment that there’s no long-range flow. And Scene 3 (‘The Blackmoor’) also lacks sparkle. ‘The Shrovetide Fair’ moves along nicely, though the waltzing bear lacks character. Also, the flute solos (especially the central cadenza in Scene 1) are played with uncontrolled, constant vibrato by “an extra musician for this recording” who has poor breath control, judging by the frequent breaks in long legato lines. (The flutist is vastly superior in the Debussy. The orchestra’s principal flute was on leave during both of these recordings.)

There are sections in Morlot’s Petrouchka that sound deceptively excellent until compared with Chailly’s vibrant recording with the Concertgebouw Orchestra on Decca and Temirkanov’s incomparable 1975 performance with the then Leningrad Philharmonic, originally on Melodiya but released in 1996 on RCA. On the whole, ballet dancers would find Morlot’s interpretation rather heavy-going and oafish. In Toy Box, despite Morlot’s excellence and the superior engineering, I still prefer Simon Rattle’s spontaneity and flexibility with the Berlin Philharmonic on Warner. Jun Märkl and the Lyon Orchestra on Naxos, though excellent, are my third choice.

**FRENCH**

**STRAVINSKY:** Apollo; see Collections

**TAVERNER:** Mater Christi Sanctissima Mass; Western Wynde Mass

Westminster Abbey Choir/ James O’Donnell

Hyperion 68147—59 minutes

When Cardinal Wolsey founded Cardinal College, Oxford (later refounded as Christ Church), he needed a director for its musical foundation of 16 boy choristers and at least 12 adult men—quite possibly the best choir in England at the time. In 1525, the Bishop of Lincoln recommended John Taverner (c1490-1545) for the job. Taverner, who was perhaps the most gifted English musician of his day, was at first reluctant to leave his native Lincolnshire, but in 1526 he accepted the appointment as music director of Wolsey’s magnificent new foundation. It was the climax of Taverner’s musical career, but it did not last long. By 1530, Wolsey had fallen out of favor with Henry VIII, funding for the Oxford choral foundation was severely curtailed, and Taverner resigned his position and returned to Lincolnshire. By 1537 he was no longer working as a full-time church musician.

The five-part motet ‘Mater Christi Sanctissima’ and the parody mass based on it date from Taverner’s years in Oxford. Annotator Jeremy Summerly points out the apparent influence of the Franco-Netherlandish polyphony of the time, especially in the frequent dialog between the two upper voice parts with the three lower ones. In spite of some apparent emulation of continental rhythmic and melodic character in the dialog sections, Taverner’s music is decidedly English in style, especially in the full sections, and would not be mistaken for Mouton or Feyn. Both the motet and the mass survive in the Peterhouse Partbooks, a source associated with Magdalen College, Oxford in the 1530s. The tenor partbook is missing. The motet survives intact in a later source, but not so the mass. Francis Steele has reconstructed the missing tenor part for this recording.

The four-part mass is one of Taverner’s best-known works. It is based on a secular song, and each of the sections of the mass is a set of nine variations on the melody, which appears in three of the four voice parts. The melodic and rhythmic character of the song lend the mass a certain earthy character that contrasts with the more urbane idiom of the Mater Christi Sanctissima Mass. The juxtaposition of the two works on this recording is quite striking.

Over the past 25 years or so, there have been many excellent recordings of the monumental works of Tudor polyphony, including Taverner. Most have been by professional mixed early music chamber choirs. The present recording stands apart from ones by traditional English men and boys—the sound the composer would have had in mind. This may be an important point for some listeners. The choir of Westminster Abbey under James O’Donnell is one of the leading foundations of its kind. Some allowance must be made for minor imperfections from the boys. At the same time, not every foundation would be
capable of singing this challenging music at all. O’Donnell does not impose artificial dynamic shadings on the music, but cultivates a keen sense of flow. To be honest, I would prefer a little more dynamic nuance, since the unvarying approach taken here does eventually become tiresome, leaving the impression that the performance is not as carefully shaped as it could be.

Among the outstanding mixed-choir recordings of the *Western Wynde* Mass, the Tallis Scholars under Peter Phillips produce a sound like no other. Their 1993 recording was included in a 2008 compilation of Tudor church music (Gimell). It is a keen-edged tone but not excessively severe, with an unsentimental delivery of nearly super-human precision but not dispassionate. Harry Christophers and The Sixteen (Hyperion) take a gentler, more nuanced and mellifluous approach to this music that I find very attractive. Their 1991 recording was reissued as part of a 10CD set in July/Aug 2016. Their mixed-choir sound is closer to The Sixteen than the Tallis Scholars, but with greater intensity and vehemence. Each of these recordings, including the present one, is excellent in its way. The choice will depend on the individual listener’s taste.

**Tchaikovsky: Sacred Choral Music**

*NDR Chorus/ Philipp Ahmann*  
Carus 83338—59 minutes

Tchaikovsky is so well known as a composer of great symphonies, ballets, operas, and concertos that it’s easy to forget he also composed some stunning a cappella choral music for Orthodox Church services. He composed his Liturgy, Op. 41 from May to June 1878; after its approval by the Moscow Office of Sacred Censorship in September 1879 the score was published in November. Of the 13 musically autonomous choruses of Op. 41, the present disc offers 4 (tracks 10-13).

The stimulus for the Nine Sacred Choruses came from the Emperor Alexander III, for whose coronation in the spring of 1883 Tchaikovsky had written, among others, a Festive March and the cantata *Moscow*, and who esteemed his music. The single chorus ’The Angel Cried’ was composed in February 1887 at the request of the chairman of the Russian Choral Society in Moscow.

If you love Russian choral music as I do, you’ll find much to enjoy here. There is something so profound and yet so ethereal about this music. Tchaikovsky’s harmonies fall like balsam on the ear, comforting in their promise of eternal life and yet mysterious with so many unanswered questions about the Universe and our existence in it.

The NDR Chorus sings these mini-masterpieces extremely well. There is no shrillness from the sopranos, the basses possess the incredible pedal notes that Russian composers demand of them, and all sections blend beautifully, actively listening to each other and responding to the texts. Yes, a Russian chorus might sound more idiomatic (especially in the low bass section). Nevertheless the NDR is most impressive. Their conductor Philipp Ahmann deserves much of the credit; he knows how to move this music along without rushing it and yet he lingers in the right places just long enough for the listener to be able to savor a delectable turn of phrase.

The sound is very clear but not too resonant. One can easily hear all the choral parts. I’d advise turning off the lights, putting on your headphones and activating that laser. Translated texts are included, but the English translations are in the back of the booklet.

**Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto 1; see Grieg Serenade for Strings; see Dvorak & Collections**  
Violin Concerto; see Brahms

**Telemann: Flute Fantasias (12)**  
Amy Porter—Equilibrium 138—55 minutes

Amy Porter’s playing dazzled me not long ago in a program of American music (May/June 2013) and shortly afterward in another of Bach transcriptions (July/Aug 2014), both on the Equilibrium label. Here she plays Telemann on a modern Muramatsu flute. Since these pieces are unaccompanied, placing weight on important notes and lift on others is crucial to producing the polyphony the music implies. Each fantasia is placed on one track and played with the affection of a player who thoroughly knows them and truly enjoys what they offer. She willingly ornaments the line sometimes, but she is less willing to add slurs when she could have.

There are several baroque flutists whose renditions every flutist should hear because they’re phenomenal: Barthold Kuiken, Rachel Brown, and Jed Wentz. This release is excellent.
too for its stylish playing and true-to-life sound. As a companion to this recording, Porter has produced a DVD study guide of the Fantasias, which is also available from Equilibrium.

**TELEMANN: Recorder Concertos & Suites**

Erik Bosgraaf, Ensemble Cordevento
Brilliant 95248—75:46

This recording includes three of the core concerted works written by Telemann for solo recorder (the concertos in C and F and the Suite in A minor) and one more unusual suite (the Suite in E-flat for “flute pastorelle”). The 13 members of Ensemble Cordevento supply a well-balanced and supportive accompaniment to the virtuosity of Erik Bosgraaf.

As can be imagined, these works have been very popular with recorder players and have been often recorded. I find Daniel Rothert’s interpretation of the concertos in C and F and Suite in A minor rather pedestrian (N/D 2002). There are three comparisons that I would make with this new release. Maurice Steger’s recording of the Concerto in C and Suite in A minor (Sept/Oct 2006) is very good, but the accompaniments by the Academy for Ancient Music Berlin lack finesse. Matthias Maute (Nov/Dec 2002) is very accomplished in the Suite in A minor and has the only competition for the Suite in E-flat. Since Maute is accompanied only by single strings, this interpretation is marked by relatively fast tempos. As a “flute pastorelle” he uses a reconstruction of what appears to a folk instrument found in a museum from Copenhagen, which is somewhat darker in tone than a traditional recorder. While this is not Telemann’s most sophisticated concerto (the solo part is completely diatonic, without accidentals), I find Bosgraaf’s interpretation on soprano recorder has more nuance and is a bit more playful than Maute.

The only recording that matches Bosgraaf is by Dan Laurin (BIS 1185), who includes the concertos in C and F and the Suite in A minor. Both Laurin and Bosgraaf have the technical facility to handle all the challenges of these works and the sensitivity to select tempos that best fit Telemann’s music. Neither interpretation is idiosyncratic just for the sake of novelty and allows the subtleties of Telemann’s writing to be clearly heard. The ensembles are about the same size (10 performers with Laurin and 13 with Bosgraaf), both offering a bit more solo-tutti contrast than Maute’s recording. I would give the edge to Bosgraaf; there is just a bit more playfulness between him and the members of the Ensemble Cordevento—and that brings a freshness to the whole recording.

**TELEMANN: Klopstock Settings (3); ROLLE: David & Jonathan**

Anjé Ruf, Susanne Langner, Tobias Hunger, Ingolf Seidel, Leipzig Concert/ Siegfried Pank
Raumklang 3502—68 minutes

The work by Johann Heinrich Rolle (1716-85) lasts only 12 minutes, as against the 56 minutes devoted to Telemann.

We hardly need more demonstrations of the prolific Telemann’s lifelong interest in experimentation, yet here is another, and a striking one.

Always alert to writers who could supply him with challenging texts to set, Telemann came to learn about the brilliant poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803). The latter’s vast sacred epic, Der Messias (The Messiah) was published in installments beginning in 1748. Telemann was clearly taken by the poet’s imagination, especially in reaffirming strict metrical forms.

A demonstration of interest was displayed in his 1759 cantata for Pentecost, based on Martin Luther’s hymn ‘Komm, Heiliger Geist,’ which appears three times in the work. But Telemann replaced Luther’s words with Klopstock’s poetic parodies. This caused a great scandal in Hamburg’s ecclesiastical circles, and Telemann was required to restore Luther’s words.

The cantata, beginning “Komm, Geist des Herren”, is presented (with the Klopstock substitute words in the chorales) as the opening work in this program, and a joyous and spirited affair it is, spiced with trumpets and timpani.

But in the same year, 1759, Telemann presented in concert, in Hamburg, settings of two segments from Klopstock’s Messias. He prepared yet another in 1764, but that has been lost. The two settings from 1759 are given here. The first of them, Sing, Unsterbliche Seele is fascinating as Telemann’s effort to do justice to the very individual metrical character of the poetry. He does so by alternating four solo voices in vocal treatments ranging from recitative to arioso, with freer musical commentary supplied by a background of instrumental ensemble (pairs of flutes or oboes, strings, and continuo).

The other Klopstock setting of 1759 draws on a different part of the poem, where the Old
Testament figures of Miriam and Deborah sing together their reactions to the martyred Jesus—two sopranos, plus an introductory tenor, against of pairs of flutes, oboes, and bassoons, oboe d’amore, with strings and continuo.

In both of these cases, Telemann’s delicacies in such treatments of texts point to the sensibilities of early romanticism.

The work by Rolle sets a text from different poetry of Klopstock. It is a moving Musical Elegy, cast as a dialog between the young King David (tenor) and the slain Jonathan, Saul’s son and David’s dearly beloved friend (soprano). First performed in Magdeburg in 1766, it was composed as an experiment in moving beyond traditional operatic conventions. It is scored for pairs of flutes and oboes with strings and continuo, and is really very touching.

The four singers heard here are new to me, and they do impressive, expressive work. The 21 players of the Leipzig ensemble perform with poised period expertise, and Pauk leads with clear devotion to all this material. The booklet contains excellent notes in German and English but—the one spoiler in the story—the rare texts in the original German only, without any translations—and they are really crucial.

Otherwise, a really fascinating release, quite essential for Telemann collectors.

BARKER

TELEMANN: Trios Sonatas with Treble Viol
Simone Eckert, viol; Hamburg Ratsmusik
CPO 777968—64 minutes

This is the first complete recording of the nine trio sonatas for the dessus de viole (treble viol) attributed to Georg Philipp Telemann. Simone Eckert devotes her notes substantially to the question of Telemann’s authorship, relying heavily on the circumstances of his occupation in Frankfurt in the second decade of the 18th Century and his association with Christoph Graupner, in whose Darmstadt collection these works were found. As Eckert explains, the popularity of the treble viol among French composers seems not to have transferred to the Germans, and so even this small collection of solo treble viol literature in Graupner’s library is outstanding.

The treble viol is paired with the oboe (Xenia Löffler) in five of the sonatas and with the recorder (Elisabeth Schwanda) in the other four, for which Ulrich Wedemeier (theorbo and baroque guitar), Michael Fuerst (harpischord), and Hermann Hickethier (bass viol) supply the continuo. Most sonatas fit the slow-fast-slow-fast model of the church sonata. The performers evoke deep feeling, inspired perhaps by expressive titles for first movements like ‘Gratioso,’ ‘Cantabile’, and ‘Soave’. The nimble passagework requires dexterity, but it all comes off well. Notes are in English.

LOEVEN

TUNDER: Organ Pieces, all
Emanuele Cardi—Brilliant 94901 [2CD] 92 mins

Franz Tunder (1614–67) is probably better known for having been Dietrich Buxtehude’s father-in-law and his predecessor as organist at St Mary’s church in Lübeck than for his music. He was a significant figure in the North German organ school in the generation after Scheidemann and Weckmann. While 90-odd minutes of organ music may not seem a lot, it is more than survives from many of his North German colleagues. Sometimes sources are lost. Some of Tunder’s works were destroyed in the bombing of Lübeck in 1942. It is also worth bearing in mind that the greater part of an organist’s art at that time consisted of improvisation. It is likely that many surviving compositions began as improvisations and were written out for teaching purposes.

Tunder’s works fall into the classic genres of the North German school. There are four preludes that alternate stylus phantasticus with fugal writing. There is a brief Italian-style canzona. Most of his organ works are based on chorales—most are chorale fantasias involving an expansive treatment of the chorale melody that can go on at considerable length. There is a set of three brief treatments of the melody ‘Jesus Christus, Unser Heiland’ that appears to have been intended for alternatim performance.

The organ was built in 1996 by Glauco Ghiardi for the Church of St Mary of Hope in Batipaglia, Salerno. It is a medium-sized three-manual instrument inspired by the work of Arp Schnitger. Emanuele Cardi is the church’s organist and choirmaster. The sound of full organ is rather thin and sparse, not the full-throated plenum one would expect from Schnitger. The quieter registers, heard to good effect in the chorale-based works, can be very attractive, though mutations and mixtures sound insufficiently supported by foundation tone. Final chords reverberate for a very long time, but as the various pieces unfold the tone is curiously dry. Cardi’s playing is solid and
without any annoying eccentricities, but I cannot say there are any interpretive epiphanies.

Some years ago a recording of Tunder’s organ works played by Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra (Loft 1048; Jan/Feb 2003) on a new instrument in Sweden built collaboratively by several modern builders was reviewed by David Mulbury. He loved the sound of the organ, but found the playing exceedingly tedious. More recently the same recording was reviewed by Gregory Hamilton (Nov/Dec 2015), who shared Mulbury’s admiration for the instrument but was more favorably impressed by the playing.

VASKS: Quartets 2+5
Spikeru Quartet
Wergo 7329—50 minutes
The latest entry in the Spikeru’s traversal of the Vasks quartets.

The three-movement Quartet 2, Summer Tunes (1984), is filled with Vasks’s patented Latvian birds, a symbol of “freedom”. Life marches on for man as in nature, but it ends as elegy.

The considerably later Quartet 5 (2003-4), in two movements, has a distinctly “late work” quality. The anguish-ridden opening movement, with its French overture-like dotted opening rhythms and succeeding violent allegro could be a summary of the history of the composer’s troubled country. The truly stunning finale is a late Beethovenian slow movement fully up to the comparison. It is profound and elevated and earns its place in the serious quartet repertoire. It’s not to be missed for anyone looking to be moved, and if you need an introduction to this composer this is a good place to start.

The decision to program the quartets in the order 5, 2 is utterly baffling under the circumstances. I wonder what producers are thinking these days. This group plays beautifully.

VERDI: Aida
Andrea Bocelli (Radames), Kristin Lewis (Aida), Veronica Simeoni (Amneris), Ambrogio Maestri (Amonasro), Carlo Colombara (Ramfis); Florence May Festival/ Zubin Mehta
Decca 4830675 [2CD] 146 minutes
Aida’s music and plot are always impressive, but this new recording does a pretty good job of sabotaging the opera. It’s not that it’s terrible; it’s just very ordinary and unnecessary. Mostly this sounds like a provincial opera company attempting to perform one of Verdi’s masterpieces.

The recording is for Bocelli’s fans to hear him as Radames. His singing is fair, but not at all interesting. He hits all the notes squarely, though his volume fades when he moves even slightly away from the microphones. Radames is an Egyptian hero and should stand out from the crowd. Bocelli rarely rises above the background. He is not helped by the mushy group sound, where he can barely be heard.

The other singers don’t help. Kristin Lewis’s Aida has a flat, undistinguished sound; and many notes are approximated. She is easily outclassed by other Aidas. Veronica Simeoni’s Amneris wobbles her way through the text. Ambrogio Maestri’s Amonasro and Carlo Colombara’s Ramfis at least have pleasant voices. Rather than leading an exciting performance, Zubin Mehta (who has conducted many of these star-studded recordings) bravely tries to make the performers sound as good as possible. The results are unimpressive.

The recording is on two discs (many recordings are on three), making for a truly awkward disc change in the triumphal scene. The break occurs just after the loud drum beat when Amonasro reveals himself to the King. Amonasro’s speech continues on disc 2. I haven’t heard this type of disc break since the LP days when the drum beat signaled to flip the record.

I have not heard the new Warner recording with Jonas Kaufman and Anja Hateros. Until I do, the 1962 Decca recording (417 416) with Leontyne Price, Jon Vickers, Rita Gorr, and Robert Merrill, conducted by Georg Solti is the best blend of performers and conducting. The cast sings magnificently and are believable characters. Solti may sometimes overwhelm the singers, but it is an exciting, tension-filled performance that allows you to visualize the show just from hearing the recording. There is plenty of competition, and you may have your favorites, but usually the cast or conducting is inconsistent.

Unless you must have everything that Bocelli records, you can skip this Aida. There is little to recommend, including Bocelli’s Radames. The sound is sometimes very clear but sometimes harsh. There is a complete libretto in Italian and English.
VERDI: La Traviata
Victoria De Los Angeles (Violetta), Carlo Del Monte (Alfredo), Mario Sereni (Germont); Rome Opera/Tullio Serafin
Urania 121.145 [2CD] 119 minutes

This was recorded in 1959. It has been released before on EMI, but has not been reviewed here in a long time.

For most opera lovers, the main interest in this recording is the Violetta of the great Spanish soprano Victoria De Los Angeles. Here one can hear the usual virtues of her singing: the very bright sound, the attention to and execution of dynamic variety, the total identification with the role. The coloratura in Act I and some of the high notes (but not all) later also reveal a slight pitch problem and a tendency for the bright tone to turn a bit shrill. But this is a major artist doing a major role, and one gets the feeling of listening not to a soprano in a studio, but to Violetta pouring out her heart (especially from Act II to the end).

Her colleagues perform honorably, if not quite in her league. The tenor Carlo Del Monte reveals a healthy, secure voice if a bit blustery rather than romantic. Mario Sereni is in good voice here, free of the pitch problems he sometimes had; he makes the most of Papa Germont, a role he sang many times. The supporting cast is adequate.

The conductor is Tullio Serafin. This was 1959, so there are no cabalettas for Alfredo or Germont. Serafin’s tempos are quite traditional for three scenes, but in the party scene at Flora’s he seems to want to let the singers have their way. Just after Violetta’s entrance with the Basset horn there is a fast, agitated passage which includes three ascending solo phrases for Violetta. Many conductors slow these down, probably at the request of the soprano, but some notable conductors (Toscanini, Levine) do not, claiming that the longer notes in Violetta’s phrases create a slower effect without an actual ritard. I have always preferred the Toscanini way, probably because I first learned Traviata from the Toscanini-Albanese recording. Here Serafin slows the first phrase a little, the second a little more, and the third a great deal. Later in the act he allows Del Monte to hold high notes much longer than they should be. So, I like Serafin’s conducting minus the scene at Flora’s party.

The recording comes with timings and a cast list—nothing else. It’s worth it for De Los Angeles, but I would not call this one of the great Traviatas.

SININGER

VIALARDO: Mass, Vestiva I Colli
Musica Fiorita/ Daniela Dolci
Pan 10344—62 minutes

Its text a celebration of springtime, scented flora, abundance, and the intoxication of love, the ‘Vestiva I Colli’) madrigal—first set by Palestrina in the 16th Century—continues to enjoy a long and happy life. This 1624 parody Mass by Baldassare Vialardo (active in the 1620s) not only uses the madrigal as its source, but also offers the basis for the Musica Fiorita ensemble to create an extremely fine program. The five Mass movements are spread across the whole disc, and the other 13 tracks include several vocal and instrumental settings of ‘Vestiva I Colli’, ensemble cornettist William Dongois’s expert improvisation on the tune, and a few Latin motets.

All the players and singers in Musica Fiorita are first rate, and the music is varied, well-chosen and sequenced. By turns we hear the rupture of transported devotion (in Giovanni Paolo Cima’s solo motet ‘Veni Sponsa Christi’), the graceful, slow, and tender interpretation of Vialardo’s ‘Gloria’, and diminutions by skilled instrumentalists. To perform Bartolomeo de Selma’s instrumental setting of ‘Vestiva I Colli’, the ensemble chooses a duo of tenor trombone and organ, the latter acting not only as the basso continuo but also as a flute or recorder in the melody lines. Ensemble director Daniela Dolci leads with perfectly-judged tempos, imaginative flexibility, and assured command.

Listen especially for all the ways the two cornettos join with the five singers—dialog, echo, and parallel imitation among them. Keep in mind that one of the aesthetic ideals for music performance in the late Renaissance and early baroque period was for instruments to emulate the human voice as closely as possible. Voices and cornettos here not only intertwine and complement, but become completely spliced together, each drafted—like a plant shoot—on to the other, to beautiful effect.

Notes, texts, translations, bios.

C MOORE

VIERNE: Songs of Spleen & Distress; Piano Quintet
Anaïk Morel, mz; Muza Rubackyte, p; Terpsicordes Quartet—Brilliant 95367—67 minutes

Vierne’s setting of ten Verlaine poems seems intelligent and musically apt. The vocal line is pleasing, with often imaginative accompaniment. In ‘The Sound of a Horn’, the piano harmony imitates horn fifths. ‘Sapho’ is a compact
drama, and in ‘Marine’ the piano creates restless sea music under an arching vocal line that near the end makes an adroit mood change from minor to major. Anaïk Morel sings with an opulent and accurate tone, making the songs a pleasure simply as music, with pianist Rubacyte’s accompaniment enhancing the experience.

There are no texts or translations. Verlaine was one of the most sophisticated 19th Century French poets, so we should have them. But these songs are a string of beautiful—make that very beautiful—sounds. Compared to the French poets, so we should have them. But especially fine. IV has a three times repeated rhetorical ending. III plays off a staccato theme against a violin virtuoso Eugene Ysaye. I has a nimble opening figure before its Franckian main theme contrasted with a suave extended one.

Romanian composer Anatol Vieru’s Sixth Symphony (Troubadisc 1446, Sept/Oct 2015) is one of the ugliest, most nihilistic pieces I’ve heard; but in a way, its supposed to be, describing as it does the atmosphere of the final years of Ceausescu’s rule. Ecran (Screen) is a short poem for orchestra—including electric guitar—that wouldn’t sound out of place on any program of mid-20th Century music. The notes call it a merry soundscape—I beg to differ. The concerto gained Vieru some attention in the West, winning the Prix Reine Marie-Jose in Geneva in 1962. It is dissonant and rather disjointed, though not as much as Ecran, and there is an undeniable playfulness to it. The calm middle section has some beauty to it, soon cut short by the biting dissonances that lead to the dancing, folk-influenced final section.

Sonnenhuh (Sundial) is an aleatory piece, mostly at a ppp except when soloists or small groups interrupt the proceedings. Jocuri (Games), a piano concerto, is relatively playful, at least as far as Vieru’s grim, abrasive language allows it to be. There are stuttering cluster-chords in front of a jittery backdrop, rippling scales in front of a raucous backdrop, then stuttering cluster-chords in front of a panicked backdrop. I made it through the first half—eight minutes—and skipped the rest of the games.

The 17-minute Symphony No. 1, Ode au Silence, grows out of a giant block of sound. Bunches of notes rise out of it as if they are escaping into the atmosphere. Pizzicatos and mild percussion strikes announce a quieter, but still roiling, part. Then trumpets and trombones pierce the air with shrieks and brayings, encouraging the percussion to speak more loudly. There’s a lot more roaring and then several aggressive brass chords at the end. The audience contributes much coughing along the way.

The orchestras and soloists all play well; the sound is constricted and mediocre.

American Record Guide
WAGNER: Songs
Jenni Lattila, s; Karl Kozlovsky, p; Tommi Hakala, bar; Mikko Sateila, t; Suomen Laulu Ensemble/
Esko Kallio
Siba 1018—74 minutes

If you need a reason to get interested in Wagner’s songs (and to be honest, I did, though the Wesendonck-lieder have grown on me over time), this performance is probably it. Besides the Wesendonck songs and his setting of ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade’, most of this was new to me. I had no idea Wagner wrote songs in French—and they’re terrific! Hinting at the Weckendonck songs and his setting of those, his songs (and to be honest, I did, though the operatic scenes. Performances here are pretty great. Lattila has a full, golden voice. The top can be a little inconsistent, but she more than makes up for that with rich line and impeccable phrasing. Hakala brings a wonderful theatricality to his songs; Sateila only sings the jaunty ‘Bauer Unter der Linde’ with the Suomen Laulu Ensemble. Sateila brings plenty of gusto to his small contribution. Kozlovsky’s playing is consistent, clear, and appropriately warm. The only weak link here is the ensemble; the sound is raw, slightly strident, and they’re not always together. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

WAXMAN: Who Wants Love?
Cabaret & Film Songs
Robert Osborne, bar, Richard Gordon, p
Raven 52216 - 50 minutes

These 21 songs by Franz Waxman are from his pre-Hollywood period in Berlin and Paris and his later and much-longer stint in Hollywood. Waxman was an exile from Weimar Berlin, where his movie career started with German film scores, some with songs, and cabaret songs. He fled Berlin after being beaten by Nazi sympathizers and spent a year in Paris, where he wrote film scores and cabaret songs, including the score for the French version of Liliom starring Charles Boyer. Liliom is an added feature on Fox’s DVD release of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Carousel.

The Berlin and Paris cabaret songs were commissioned by Marlene Dietrich and French chanteuses Marianne Oswald and Suzy Solidor. Some of the Berlin songs were translated into French and re-used in the French films and in cabarets. The Berlin and Paris songs are very melodic and performed nicely and with obvious enjoyment by Mr Osborne. Some of the songs are translated into English from the original language.

Impressed by Waxman’s score to Liliom, Universal studio head Carl Laemmle moved Waxman to Hollywood to compose the score for The Bride of Frankenstein (1935). He worked at various times for Universal, MGM, Warner Brothers, and Paramount; he wrote the scores for Sunset Boulevard and A Place in the Sun, winning Academy Awards for these films in 1950 and 1951. He then wrote scores for Fox, including Prince Valiant and Peyton Place.

The seven songs for the Hollywood films were apparently well known when the films were released, though today they are mostly forgotten. The English language booklet notes that one of the songs was recorded by movie actress and comedienne Zazu Pitts, if that’s any recommendation. None of the songs are memorable; and the lyrics, by various writers, are generally terrible.

Mr Osborne’s performance of the Hollywood songs sounds completely different than the earlier and much more melodric German and French songs, even when those songs are translated into English. In the Hollywood songs, Mr Osborne seems uninvolved and is just singing the awful lyrics with no attempt at making them interesting.

I would listen to the Berlin and Paris songs again, but not the Hollywood songs. Mr Waxman’s Hollywood movie scores are often outstanding, but the songs are forgettable. Mr Gordon accompanies Mr Osborne very nicely in excellent sound. Texts and translations are included.

FISCH

WEBER: Overtures (almost all)
Cologne Radio/ Howard Griffiths
CPO 777 831—69 minutes

I guess you’d be forgiven if you thought there were only three Weber overtures—for Der Freischütz, Euryanthe and Oberon. In addition, though, there are overtures to early operas, to incidental music (for Turandot and Preciosa) and the Jubilee Overture, written to celebrate the 50th anniversary of King Frederick August I’s accession to the throne (1768-1818). There are 11 in all, but one is missing (Waldmädchen, 1800) because the score has been “withheld” by the Mariinsky Theater in St Petersburg. Basically these overtures are medleys of the tunes that will follow in the larger work. It is good to have all of these together, even if only to demonstrate the superiority of
Weber’s mature style over the early pieces, which are fairly routine.

The Cologne players and Griffiths take a delightful romp through the music, taking no prisoners. Everything feels crisp and fast, and in one case (Der Beherrscher der Geister) the music just flies. The orchestra manages to keep up, but a little more breathing room and clarity would be welcome. In Freischütz, by contrast, I would have been happy with more urgency in the middle section, though the brass are certainly unrestrained! Generally the playing is exuberant and none too careful, which is probably the best way to go. Better to be exciting than dull in this music.

**Althouse**

**Weber**: Piano Sonatas 1-4
Michelangelo Carbonara
Piano Classics 105 [2CD] 123 minutes

Weber is a composer whose music is often overlooked in favor of other composers, such as Schumann or Chopin, who came to the fore a decade or two later. But he is one of the staples of the early romantics.

To perform Weber, one needs clean technique, not to mention large hands. One possible reason why his repertoire was not popularly performed was the need for giant hands—he was known to have an incredible reach. While Carbonara does seem to have the latter, his technique often sounds uneven. The final movement of Sonata 1 sounds rather choppy. Sonata 2 sounds rushed and needs more natural fluidity to the phrasing. The runs again sound uneven in the Rondo Brillante, which could also be more playful. Carbonara does offer a straightforward reading of these works, but the music needs more imagination.

**Kang**

**White**: So the Night Fall
Psalms 23, 88, 98; Reflections on a Tune; Phos Hilarion; The Invitatory; Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis; The Prayers; Day By Day; So the Day Dawns For Me; Blessed City, Heavenly Salem; Fantare for St Anthony; Arioso; A Second Light; Reflections on Hymn Tunes; Aria; For the Means of Grace and for the Hope of Glory
Adrienne Copeland, fl; Timothy Hester, p; Lachezar Kostov, vc; Brett Linski, ob; Sigurd M Ogaard, org; Palmer Episcopal Church Schola Cantorum/Brady Knapp—Gothic 49299—72 minutes

David Ashley White has been on quite a roll lately, having been named the American Guild of Organists Distinguished Composer for 2016, the recipient of the University of Houston’s highest honor for teaching and creative work, and the 2015 winner of the Raabe Prize for Excellence in Sacred Composition. Our Lindsay Koob has long been an admirer of Mr White’s “lovely and intensely spiritual creations” and his flair for creating fresh, clean settings of hymns and psalm tunes (May/June 2008). Lindsay also admired this same choir and conductor as they took up the composer’s cause in the program that inspired that 2008 review (Gothic 49254).

This time around we get more of the same, though the hints of Early American psalmody noticed in 2008 are out of the frame. Here the Anglican spirit animates all. Two of the most skillful works, in fact, are prayers and responsories that aren’t concert fare at all. One of them (The Prayers) was composed for the Palmer Choir’s residency at Wells Cathedral in 2007. Wells isn’t the biggest name among British cathedrals, but it’s up there with Lincoln, Durham, Salisbury, and Ely among the truly stunning churches of the realm. The choir must have sounded downright glamorous in that setting.

If there’s a problem here, it’s that so many selections are so gently pastoral; I find myself craving more oomph. The placid mood is enhanced by “cathedral sonics” (the Parker Church, actually) that keep loud passages and significant amounts of diction off in the distance. The last several works listed above (from ‘Arioso’ on) are instrumentals; and they speak as eloquently—maybe even a bit more urgently—than the choral fare. Taken together, they confirm that David Ashley White didn’t win all those awards for choral excellence alone.

**Greenfield**

**Wild**: Rachmaninoff Song Transcriptions
Giovanni Doria Miglietta, p
Piano Classics 102—61 minutes

This is labeled “Complete Transcriptions, Volume 2”, but Doria Miglietta’s acclaimed first volume (Piano Classics 69, Nov/Dec 2014) included both transcriptions and original works. According to his website, he is currently recording Wild’s complete piano works. Perhaps not since Liszt has a composer-pianist produced (and published) as many transcriptions and other works based on other composer’s efforts. He was also a strong advocate and performer of transcriptions by dozens of others. With the exception of his concerto per-
formances, I never saw a Wild concert that did not include a transcription. He explored this repertoire all through his long career, as in his 1981 Carnegie Hall recital called The Art of the Transcription (Philips 456991, Sept/Oct 1999).

Wild recorded most of his own transcriptions, and the Gershwin ones dating from 1973 at least twice. There have been some adventurous pianists who have also recorded the Gershwin transcriptions, but to the best of my knowledge, this is the first recording of the complete Rachmaninoff Song Transcriptions since Wild’s original one, released in 1982 (Dell’Arte 7001). Almost any pianist will tell you that the accompaniments to Rachmaninoff songs can be as challenging as his solo piano works. The composer made solo piano transcriptions of only two of his 80 songs: ‘Lilacs’ and ‘Daisies’. Wild’s transcriptions were made as a birthday present for Michael Rol-land Davis, his manager, producer, publisher, and partner. Wild said that he “made an agree-ment with myself that I wouldn’t write anything on the page that wasn’t somewhere in Rachmaninoff’s works either in his decorations or chordal structures.” Needless to say, these are beyond difficult, expertly arranged and played by a young (b.1979) Italian pianist with a true romantic flair that would have certainly brought a smile to Wild’s face.

I have often thought that ‘Dreams’ (Op. 38:4) had an accompaniment that required at least three hands. Beginning the program is a version that also incorporates the vocal line seamlessly. It is on the same level as Wild’s. ‘The Floods of Spring’, dedicated to Rachmaninoff’s first piano teacher and ending this program, has an accompaniment that took me years to fully master; and Wild’s version must be several times more difficult. Make no mis-take, these are fully the equal of Liszt’s great song transcriptions. I continue to be aston-ished at Doria Miglietta’s grasp of these works.

Great program notes and exceptional recorded piano sound complete the package.

HARRINGTON

WOLFF: Songs
Rebecca Broberg, s; Reiner Klaas, p
Thorofon 2631—75 minutes

Another recording of Wolff songs by Broberg and Klaas. I like Erich Wolff’s (1874-1913) music. It’s fairly easy listening but not boring. This program includes solo piano music and settings of Robert Burns, Richard Dehmel, and Michelangelo. It’s a pretty great program. My favorite moments were in Wolff’s Op. 1 songs. The music is melodic and almost folk-like, tuneful but not sentimental or banal.

I’ve been lukewarm about Broberg in other projects (the previous Wolff recording was OK, Thorofon 2619 S/O 2015, but an unfortunate Christmas album—N/D 2015—and a recording of Thuille songs—J/A 2015—were not. I don’t love the voice, but here it is clearer and more even, the diction more expressive. The Dehmel songs have some harder, more harmonically ambitious moments with difficult, broader, and less melodic lines for the voice. Broberg isn’t as good there but still better than the other recordings. The posthumously published Michelangelo songs are almost ethereal; it’s a side of Wolff I didn’t know. It’s terrific.

The piano music includes 12 Slavic Folk Airs, a charming group played adroitly by Klaas. I like his playing a lot, and it’s nice to hear him shine in some solo repertoire.

This would be a decent addition to a library of German songs. Notes, texts, and translations.

HEISEL

YSAYE: Extase; Divertimento; Winter Song; Snows of Yore; A Child’s Dream; At the Spinning Wheel; Lullaby
Svetlin Roussev, Amaury Coeytaux, v; Liege Phil-harmonic/ Jean-Jacques Kantarow
Musique en Wallonie 1681—70 minutes

Eugene Ysaye (1858-1931) was the greatest violinist of his time and one of the greatest of all time. Aside from the recordings that he made in 1912, he is remembered today primarily for the Six Solo Violin Sonatas that he composed in 1923. What is remarkable about Ysaye the composer is that he seems to have had two careers; the second as the composer of the Six Solo Violin Sonatas, and the first as composer of such music as on this disc. I hear no similarity between the two.

The music here is typical of the Symbolist movement of the 1880s to the early 20th Century, but the Solo Sonatas are solidly impressionist and could not have been written before the mature works of Ysaye’s friend Debussy. What else is remarkable about the Solo Sonatas is their greatness. They are the finest set of works in their genre since Bach’s, and they are very individual. I wish that I could give such praise to the works collected here. The music is enjoyable, but the pieces almost blend into one another, failing to make the
kind of highly individual impressions that each of the Solo Sonatas makes. This music is enjoyable, but it doesn’t hold my attention like the Solo Sonatas.

Svetlin Roussev and Amaury Coeufaux are excellent violinists, and Jean-Jacques Kantarow, himself a fine violin soloist, offers very sensitive support with the Liege orchestra. Four works, ‘Winter Song,’ ‘Snows of Yore,’ the Lullaby, and the Divertimento also appear on Albrecht Breuninger’s record of music for violin and orchestra by Ysaye (Nov/Dec 2006). I slightly prefer these performances, and the sound is slightly better.

Svetlin Roussev plays the “Camposelice” Stradivarius made in 1710. The booklet has notes in French, Flemish, and English, plus many rare photographs of Ysaye.

ZEMLINSKY: Seejungfrau;
STRAUSS: Till Eulenspiegel
Luxembourg Philharmonic/Emmanuel Krivine
Alpha 236—61 minutes

Zemlinsky’s Seejungfrau (Mermaid) is one of those rediscovered and reconstructed “lost” works with a puzzling story. I discussed it at length in my review of the first Thomas Dausgaard recording (Nov/Dec 1998). Zemlinsky began Seejungfrau shortly after the end of his passionate affair with Alma Schindler, soon to become Alma Mahler. The composer was crushed and had told Arnold Schoenberg of plans to compose a “symphony of death,” which turned out to be Seejungfrau. Its 1905 premiere shared the stage with Schoenberg’s Pelleas et Melisande and was better received, but Zemlinsky withdrew it for reasons that are not certain. Even Anthony Beaumont’s excellent biography of the composer could only speculate. Annotator Christophe Ghristi’s guess that Zemlinsky withdrew it “out of solidarity” because he believed Schoenberg’s was the superior work is odd but possible. Another is that the work’s association with Alma was too strong for its composer to bear. Zemlinsky did not even include it on a list of works that he submitted to the publisher, Universal. The score became separated when he fled the Nazis for America. Two movements went with him; one remained in Vienna. After the parts were discovered and found to be from the same work, it was reassembled and performed in 1984 by the Austrian Youth Philharmonic led by Peter Gulke. Riccardo Chailly made the first recording. James Conlon used an imper-

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fectly revised score for his recording, and several more have appeared since. I am not sure what score each used.

Anthony Beaumont published what he considers a definitive edition of the original score, from which Zemlinsky had cut two sections for the premiere: ‘Visit to the Merwitch’ and a hornpipe. ‘Visit’ fits the narrative aspect of the work, but Zemlinsky did not think it worked musically. Beaumont restores it, but conductors can go with or without it. He did not restore the hornpipe. Emmanuel Krivine’s reading from the new score adds the ‘Visit’ section, simply proving that Zemlinsky’s decision to remove it was probably correct. The restored music is attractive but it does seem out of place.

I have been hard on Krivine’s recordings, but this one is decent, though hardly great, mainly because he tends to romanticize and linger too often, particularly in the leisurely sections of I and II, making them sound slower than they really are. To his credit, he tightens things up in III. Another problem is the close miking. Seejungfrau is a big, complicated, and often lush score that needs room to fill the space. That closeness affects balances in ways that make it sound like a different piece in places, most obviously at the beginning. It also reveals the Luxembourg orchestra’s lack of sumptuousness and tonal refinement. The result is a loving, dark, and mysterious reading that works well within limits. Substitute a major orchestra and better perspective to the sound, and we might have a serious competitor.

Before thinking about the new score, I would begin with one of Thomas Dausgaard’s two recordings with the Danish National Symphony. D1 is a studio recording on Chandos. D2 on Dacapo is from a concert (Nov/Dec 2006). The interpretations are similar, though D1 is more of an overview, and D2 is a little more “watery.” The Danish soloists took a few more chances in the studio, but the orchestra may be slightly superior in D2. D1’s balances are superior, but D2’s closer, more revealing recording produces a more visceral and detailed result. My choice is D1 by a hair, though couplings might sway you. D1 is with the Sinfonietta. D2 comes with Enna August’s Little Match Girl.

Joanne Falletta (July/Aug 2005) is not the storyteller Dausgaard is, but she and the Buffalo Philharmonic do a good job of turning the piece into a weighty, powerful seascape. Beaumont mounted a strong challenge using the
pre-2013 score, but fell short. Conlon, Chailly, and Zoltan Pesko are out of the running.

Krivine is the second conductor to record the new score. The first was John Storgards with the Helsinki Philharmonic (July/Aug 2015). It too included ‘Visit’. I have not heard the Storgards, but Mr O’Connor ranks it with Dausgaard, and I consider the Helsinki Philharmonic better than its Luxembourg counterpart. In terms of couplings, Krivine’s *Till Eulenspiegel* is good, but it can’t compete with the many *Tills* with great orchestras, several led by eminent Straussians like Karajan, Kempe, and Böhm. Storgards includes Roland Freisitzer’s chamber orchestra version of Zemlinsky’s Sinfonietta, which O’Connor found acceptable. Ghristi’s notes for the Krivine are interesting and well written, but there is nothing in the booklet about Beaumont’s new edition.

On a final note, Krivine left the music directorship of the Luxembourg Philharmonic last year. Next year he takes over the French National Orchestra, a fine orchestra these days. It will be interesting to hear how he fares there.

HECHT

**ZORN**: *Holy Visions; Remedy of Fortune*
Jane Sheldon, Sarah Brailey, Rachel Calloway, Kirsten Sollek; Jack Quartet  
Tzadik 8345—39 minutes

The title of the release bills this as *Sacred Visions*. The first of the two works by John Zorn is called *The Holy Visions*. It was composed in 2013 and runs 23 minutes. Mr Zorn describes it as “a mystery play in 11 strophes concerning the life, work, and philosophy of Hildegard von Bingen”. He uses four female voices singing Hildegard’s own words to bring all that off. Zorn’s second piece is a 15-minute string quartet called *The Remedy of Fortune*. The composer introduces this as a set of “six tableaux depicting the changing fortunes of romantic love”. Pain, desire, devotion, hope, beauty, longing, ecstasy, intoxication, frustration, anger, and despair are the emotional states the music is said to inhabit. No annotation of any kind is included—just the brief descriptions quoted above, Hildegard’s texts, English translations, and some pictures we’ve seen before when Hildegard’s music has taken center stage.

John Zorn (b 1953) is a musician of many talents who, among other things, composes, arranges and performs expertly on the saxophone. Mr Zorn also is a producer; indeed, Tzadik is his own recording label. Moreover, he is active in just about every musical genre you can think of; classical, jazz, rock, hardcore, klezmer, and film scoring.

Hildegard’s odes to humility, sweetness, wisdom, divine radiance, scented beauty, and cosmic awareness speak in many voices here. Bits of chant mutate into hisses, glisses, dissonant clusters, Latin rhythms, undulating pitches, and arpeggiated chords (“bung bung bung bung bung bung bung...”) that bring ‘Mr Sandman’ to mind, together with Bach’s C-major Prelude. But while the *Visions* are clever enough, they don’t hold the interest for 24 minutes. Jane Sheldon, Sarah Brailey, Rachel Calloway, and Kirsten Sollek sing beautifully, though I wish the engineers hadn’t seen fit to drop them in the middle of an echo chamber. Their voices are lovely as they are. Leave them alone!

Zorn’s commentary on fortune was composed for string quartet. It comes off as a dark, depressing, dissonant rant against the chance-ness of life, not as a celebration of its possibilities. Maybe it’s there to counterpose the nasty yang of the temporal world against the spiritual ecstasy of Hildegard’s yin. Whatever the metaphysics, I don’t much care for it, though the little courtly dance that comes out of nowhere is an interesting touch. The attractive pictures of Hildegard and her spiritual mission help the time pass.

GREENFIELD

Meet the Critic:  
Tom Moore

Stephen Thomson Moore lives in Florida. He has degrees in music from Harvard and Stanford (DMA). His main instrument is the flute, but he has directed choirs and early music groups. He has translated music books into English—mainly from Spanish and Portuguese, and that has added to his expertise in Latin American music. He is now translating a book by André Gretry. He was CD review editor for *Early Music America*, and back in the last century he even wrote for a magazine called *Fanfare*. It looks like he can cover quite a wide range for ARG.

(By the way, the four Moores who write for us—there was even a fifth a few years ago—are not related.)
The Bavarian Georgians

LOBODA: Violin Concerto; ASKANELI: Memoirs; Sentiments; Piano Concertino; Mkhedruli; HUMMEL, F: 24 Dance Etudes on a Stumbling Bass
Irakli Tsaadaia, v; Olivia Friemel, p; Ensemble Del Arte/ Fuad Ibrahimov
TYX 16080—55 minutes

What are Bavarian Georgians? They’re members of the Georgian Chamber Orchestra (the nation, not the US state) that took up residence in Germany, where this concert was recorded. They are an excellent ensemble of 26 strings, plush, smooth, and silky despite their size.

The concert begins with the longest and most serious work here, the 26-minute concerto for violin and chamber orchestra of Igor Loboda (b. 1956). The soloist plays almost the whole time, his lines angular and tough, severe, chromatic. The tone is grim all through, like a sermon railing against some sort of personal injustice. It’s very dark and disconsolate. The string orchestra acts as a Greek chorus, sometimes playing in unison to emphasize a point, sometimes repeating the soloist’s gestures while he takes his malediction in another direction. Bartok, Bacewicz, and Holmboe wrote similar masculine, uncompromising, and severe concertos; but Loboda lacks the stimulating intricacy of Holmboe and Bartok and the vulnerable warmth of Bacewicz.

The sentimental high-brow cocktail music of Jimsher Askaneli (b. 1975), though schmaltzy and syrupy-sweet in itself, is comforting after the arid concerto. Pianist Olivia Friemel adds some New Age light arpeggios and splashes of color to Sentiments and the tiny 4-minute Concertino.

Franz Hummel (b. 1939) rounds out the concert with a saucy and galumphing 24 Dance Etudes to a Stumbling Bass. It’s a perfect title and sounds exactly as you’d expect, though 9 minutes is a bit long for the cheeky premise. It got the most enthusiastic audience response, though.

These are all first recordings made before a concert audience that applauds after each work and is otherwise not too vocal. About the worst I can say is, having heard these composers for the first time, I’m in no hurry to hear anything else from them. Excellent warm sound that flatters the small ensemble.

Josef Vlach

DVORAK: Serenade for Strings; Czech Suite;
SUK: Serenade for Strings; TCHAIKOVSKY: Serenade; Andante Cantabile;
MOZART: Divertimento, K 136; Eine Kleine Nachtmusik; ADAGIO & FUGUE: BRITTEN: Bridge Variations; DEBUSSY: Sacred & Profane Dances; PURCELL: King Arthur Suite; Respighi: The Birds; HURNIK: Oboe Concerto; PAUER: Symphony for Strings; STRAVINSKY: Apollo
Czech Chamber Orchestra
Supraphon 4203 [4CD]

There are 15 pieces on 4 discs, and half of the recordings have never been on CD before. A few pieces are rather good—such as the Dvorak Czech Suite—but ARG almost never advises buying a set like this. Look for reviews of individual items instead. Most here is brisk and colorless. The sound—almost entirely from the 1960s—is harsh and metallic. There are better recordings of most of this material.

Overtures

GLUCK: Iphigenie in Aulis; MOZART: Idomeneo & Ballet Music; CHERUBINI: Medea; BEETHOVEN: Ruins of Athens; WEBER: Oberon; MENDELSSOHN: Midsummer Night’s Dream
Bamberg Symphony/ Karl-Heinz Steffens
Tudor 7195 [SACD] 75 minutes

At first glance this looks like a loose grab-bag of curtain raisers, and it actually may be, though the album notes cleverly tie the works together by exploring the evolution of stage music from the mid-18th Century through the first quarter of the 19th. In any case, the performances are quite deft, and the program is pretty satisfying. Particularly welcome is the Wagner arrangement of the Gluck, though Steffens doesn’t achieve the full grandeur and dramatic thrust of Kurt Eichhorn in the old Eurodisc recording of the complete opera. Also welcome is not just the overture to Idomeneo but the post-Act III ballet music as well, though including that seems a bit odd given

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the "overture" theme of the album. Steffens and his players turn in a lively account, though not quite a spirited as Harndoncourt in his complete recording of the opera.

So it goes: each performance here is enjoyable in its own right but outclassed by some earlier recording. But...if you want to hear a fine orchestra in a varied program of late classical and early romantic overtures, there is much to enjoy here.

The recorded sound is a little overblown and perhaps a little too echoey, not fully taking advantage of the SACD format’s capabilities, but hardly offensive.

HANSEN

British Light Classics: Merrymakers
Alto 1192—78 minutes

American Light Classics: Manhattan Playboys
Alto 1206—77 minutes

Orient Express: Europe and Beyond
Alto 1250—78 minutes

Sutherland Orchestra/ Iain Sutherland

These three discs are apparently reissues of music recorded 1978 to 1980 and released in the UK. The booklets note that Iain Sutherland was principal conductor of the BBC Radio Orchestra and of his own orchestra (heard here). He programmed many of these pieces on the “BBC Light Programme”.

The generously timed discs have been classified by composer nationality, though that doesn’t always hold true. For example, the British program has mostly light music by British composers, the American by American composers, and so on, but how did the ‘Mexican Hat Dance’ ended up on the British program? The Orient Express disc contains a grab bag of music by European composers and whatever didn’t fit onto the other two discs. The selections include well-known short pieces (‘Procession of the Sardar’, ‘Humoresque’, ‘Espana’), opera and musical overtures (Secret of Susanne, The Arcadians, Mack and Mabel), and orchestral versions of songs (‘Tea for Two’, ‘Night and Day’). Some of the orchestrations are the originals.

If you want to hear some light music while you’re washing the floor, trimming bushes, or waiting in traffic this might fit the bill. The performances of some of the pieces are good, but overall the material is poorly played by an undersized orchestra in ragged tempos. Arthur Fiedler was good at this; Iain Sutherland is not.

If you like British light music (its own special genre), Naxos has a series of discs that are better recorded and played.

FISCH

String Chamber Music in 18th-Century Bohemia

KAMMEL, GASSMANN, ZIMMERMANN: Quartets; KO CZWARA: Sonata
Sojka Quartet—TYX 16076—62 minutes

Quartet, op 7:2, by Antonin Kammel and the Sonata in C for two violas and cello by Franz Koczvara are formulaic music without melodic, harmonic, contrapuntal, or developmental interest. They sound like student compositions: all the rules are followed without a moment of cleverness. The Quartet 2 (in a collection of six first published in 1804, 30 years after the composer died) by Florian Leopold Gassmann (the only composer on this album you’ve probably heard of before simply because his opera, L’Opera Seria, is reviewed in this issue) uses graduated modulations, and two out of the four movements are fugues.

But all three works fall victim to the Sojka Quartet, students at Prague’s Academy of Performing Arts, who pick a tempo for each movement and never vary, as if glued to the printed page. Their pulse is monotonous, and their “close but no cigar” tuning passes muster but is far from professional.

Then the players suddenly come to life in the Quartet, Op. 3:3, by Anton Zimmermann. They give the music aim by anticipating the beat and add grace notes and accents. Also, their pulse is expressively shaped. If and IV out of five moments are minuets with interesting progressions. Even the opening Andante gets impetus. But don’t get too excited—it’s not enough to redeem the decently engineered album, unless you’re desperate for unknown composers.

FRENCH

Classical String Trio

BACH, JG: Sonata in D, B36; CAMPIONI: Sonata in G minor, op 1.2; BOCCHERINI: Trio in D, op 2:4; HAYDN: Divertimento in B minor; CANNABICH: Trio in B-flat; GIARDINI: Trio in F; CAMBINI: Trio Concertant in A

Elizabeth Field, v; Allison Edberg Nyquist, v, va; Stephanie Vial, vc

MSR 1621 — 72 minutes

This is indeed a pleasant way to explore some little-known classical works written for a not too common instrumentation. The program begins with a two-movement sonata for two
violins and basso by JS Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian (1735-82) that works very well without a keyboard continuo. Then we meet Carlo Antonio Campioni (1720-88) in three movements listed with the option of a harpsichord that again it doesn’t seem to need. Boccherini follows, then Haydn.

Then we meet Christian Cannabich (1731-98) in a two-movement trio. With Felice Giardini (1716-96) the scoring switches from two violins to violin and viola, and the cello gets a lot more to do. Finally a third C takes over, Giuseppe Maria Cambini (1746-1825), and we end as we began with a two-movement trio. All of these pieces except Bach’s begin with relatively slow movements. The music is played with taste and warmth by this female trio, and the gradual changes of style contribute to a program that is beautifully organized and gives us a lot to think about. It is recorded with fine clarity and balance.

D MOORE

In Residence
Morrison, Prokofieff, Wagner, Bizet, Bernstein
European Brass Ensemble/ Thomas Clabor
Genuin 16427—58 minutes

With members hailing from orchestras as distant as Australia, the European Brass Ensemble is very good. Conductor Thomas Clabor, whose Saxon Wind Symphony consistently makes first-rate recordings, draws exciting readings from these players. Best is Bernstein’s West Side Story Suite (arr Eric Crees). Also included are selections from Prokofieff’s Love for Three Oranges and Romeo and Juliet, Wagner’s ‘Liebestod’, Bizet’s Carmen, and James Morrison’s Stift Melk Fanfare.

KILPATRICK

Brass Fanfares
Dukas, Tomasi, Caens, Delerue, Debussy, Jolivet, Roussel, Schmitt, Bach, Barber, Bernstein, Mendelssohn, Piazzolla, Rossini
French Brass/ Michel Becquet
Indesens 80 [2CD] 116 minutes

This double album dates from 1992. It is spectacular. Where has it been for 26 years? How many European recordings never get to this side of the Atlantic?

A year ago I fell hard for a recording by the brass of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw (March/April 2015: 184). It included a stunning account of Henri Tomasi’s Fanfares Liturgiques—so good that it made me proud to be a brass player and thankful to be alive. Well, I had the very same response to this reading.

The music itself is thrilling, with somber and soul-stirring chorales, a procession that approaches as inexorably as the one in Pines of Rome, and glorious brass sonorities. And the playing is superb. The big chords are perfectly tuned and balanced blocks of sound.

The French half of the program includes Paul Dukas’s exciting Fanfare to La Peri, George Delerue’s stirring Ceremonial, and Andre Jolivet’s six Fanfares for Britanicus. I am also taken by Frederic Talgorn’s three-movement Olympus, based on music he wrote for the passage of the Olympic flame through France in 1992.

The other half is a potpourri of arrangements. The Sinfonia from Bach’s Easter Oratorio sounds suitably festive, though the tuba part seems too low and tubby. The same is true in Rossini’s ‘Rendezvous de Chasse’. Mendelssohn’s ‘Funeral March’ (Songs Without Words) is a natural for brass. Debussy’s ‘Girl with the Flaxen Hair’ is given a loving reading, and ‘General Levine—Eccentric’ is played deftly by all, including the tuba player. A suite from Bernstein’s West Side Story sounds terrific.

KILPATRICK

For the Beauty of the Earth
DiLorenzo, Marlatt, Pez, Widor, Dykes, Coakley, Goffin, Vaughan-Williams, Curnow
Gabriel V Brass Ensemble; SharonRose Pfeiffer, org—Artes 61 [SACD] 53 minutes

This church-affiliated brass ensemble always offers soul-stirring works in its recordings, and this (the fourth to come my way, Jan/Feb 2014: 207) is no exception. Some of the pieces—such as Anthony DiLorenzo’s ‘Luminosity’ and David Marlatt’s ‘Earthscape’ and ‘Windscape’—are inspirational originals. Some are hymn settings. Charles Widor’s famous organ Toccata is always impressive, but this brass-organ arrangement is taken rather slowly.

My favorite selection is Widor’s ‘Salvum fac populum tuum’, the very emotional and powerful brass-organ work that he conducted at Notre Dame Cathedral a week after the armistice ended World War I.

Aside from a few moments of slightly shaky intonation, Gabriel V is a good brass ensemble that plays tastefully and with conviction.

KILPATRICK

Our eyes and ears do not lie to us but do not--perhaps cannot--tell us the whole truth, and those who deny this end up actually narrowing their vision.

WH Auden

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Great American Songbook
Porter, Marks & Simons, Joel, Clayton, Gershwin, Davis, Lerner & Loewe, Raksin, Parker, Rodgers & Hart, Handy, Dennis, Williams
Harry Watters, trb; Salt River Brass/ Patrick Sheridan—Soundset 1070—66 minutes

This recording had me hooked immediately, in the first lively phrase of Cole Porter's 'You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To'. This skilled and well-balanced brass band sounds terrific from beginning to end. Harry Watters, close-miked in all of the tunes, is a marvelous jazz trombonist.

Included with classic popular songs are a couple of more recent ones. Billy Joel's 'And So it Goes' is a beauty, though its climax seems too loud to me. Pharrell Williams's 'Happy' is a great way to end the program.

Kudos to all: Watters, the Phoenix-based SRB and its enthusiastic director Patrick Sheridan, and to the engineers for excellent sound.

KILPATRICK

WorldBrass Originals
Blazewicz, Raab, Harrold, Brandmuller, Kella Pentatone 5186 580 [SACD] 60 minutes

It has been a long time since two albums by WorldBrass came my way (July/Aug 1999: 228, Sept/Oct 2000: 243). They were from nine European countries, members of the Jeunesses Musicales World Orchestra who had become a terrific brass ensemble in 1995. Now they are professional orchestral musicians, freelancers, and university professors, and they are even better.

Most fascinating is Tsuumi Sound System Suite (1976), a three-movement arrangement of Finnish folk songs as they were presented by the innovative urban-ethno ensemble Tsuumi Sound System. I ('Hotas') and III ('Meteor') are fast and intricate, with attractive melodies, mixed meters, and ever-shifting instrumentation. II ('Kaytava') is melancholy.

Polish composer Marcin Blazewicz (b 1953) wrote his 3-movement, 12-minute Konzertstuck for WorldBrass in 1998, and it is a technical tour-de-force. The 8-minute No Strings Attached (2013), by Austrian composer Lorenza Raab (b 1975), begins with several minutes of unmuted horn and tuba in duet over rapid, repeated rhythms in mallet percussion and quiet, drone-like fifths in low brass. The work develops from there, with beautiful sonorities, surprising cascade effects, and improvised solos—all over the constant and quietly insistent rhythm. Fascinating work.

Two of the works are discordant. Scottish composer Tom Harrold (b 1991) had cacophony in mind when writing his 11-minute Skittal (2015), which has all sorts of episodes that are interrupted by loud outbursts. In the 3-movement, 8-minute Danses Concertantes mit Choral (1997), Theo Brandmüller (1949-2012) opens with a chaotic 'Pas de deux', gives a difficult part to solo horn in 'Pas de Seule', and ends with a rhythmic 'Pas de Trois'.

KILPATRICK

Italian Bassoon Concertos
Puccini: Symphonic Prelude; Rossini: Concerto; Verdi: Capriccio; Paganini: Concertino; Respighi: La Boutique Fantasque
Patrick Di Ritis, bn; Jose Vicente Castello, hn; Wurzburg Philharmonic/ Enrico Calesso Naxos 573382—76 minutes

This release includes several lesser known Italian bassoon concertos and a pair of orchestral works. I'm not sure why these pieces were combined, as Puccini's early Symphonic Prelude and the Respighi Boutique have been recorded many times to much better effect.

Bassoonist Patrick DiRitis has plenty of technique to tackle the challenges of this music, but his smallish sound becomes constricted and flat in the tenor range. This contrasts oddly with the supple, rich sound of horn player Jose Vicente Castello in the Paganini concerto. In general, this performance falls flat, lacking the wit and fire so necessary to bring these bel canto instrumental works to life. Sometimes it almost sounds as if Di Ritis is playing etudes. The Wurzburg Philharmonic delivers adequate, somewhat plodding accompaniment. It is impressive that DiRitis performs with such impeccable technique.

PFEIL

Sergei Krasavin, bassoon
Vivaldi: Concertos in A minor, F; Mozart: Bassoon & Cello Sonata; Saint-Saëns: Sonata
Yury Loyevsky, vc; Aleksey Nasedkin, p; USSR Symphony/ Temirkanov Melodiya 2355—60 minutes

These recordings were initially released on vinyl in 1981 and 1985.

Despite some nice playing in the Vivaldi concertos, the orchestra sound very thick and heavy. Krasavin plays with nice phrasing and a warm tone, but often lacks the lightness of touch that is so helpful in the Vivaldi concertos. His performance is marred by some intonation problems and squawky mid-range attacks.
In the Mozart sonata Krasavin is joined by cellist Yury Loyevsky, who plays with lovely attention to melodic lines and impressive virtuosity. Krasavin is in better form here, too. The first movement lulls along at a brisk tempo, with fine playing from both artists. The beautiful slow movement shows off singing tone and nice phrasing. But the finale races off in a rushed, frantic tempo, to the detriment of phrasing and breath control.

The program ends with the luminous Saint-Saëns sonata, a staple of the bassoon repertory. The microphone placement is distracting, the bassoon presence is too loud, the piano too soft. Pianist Aleksy Nasedkin, who died in 2014, plays gracefully and sensitively, but Krasavin’s performance is again too heavy-handed for this delicate work and plagued by illty intonation. The scherzo movement is better, showing off Krasavin’s ease with the fiendishly difficult technical passages and a nice high E at the end. The gentle, subtle III has a serious mood but again with many lyrical interjections between the soloist and the orchestra, making it a fine follow-up to the previous music. This work only lasts seven minutes and is over before you want it to be.

The 23-minute Concerto by Joly Braga Santos (1924-88) has been recorded before by cellist Jan Bastiaan Neven (Marco Polo 822571, Jan/Feb 2005). That CD includes several other orchestral works by Santos and is also well played and recorded.

Borralhinho is a cellist of sensitivity and blends well with the fine Gulbenkian group. He is not the most dramatic cellist about, but the music is only momentarily that way and the chamber music effect is sufficient. The orchestral performances are sensitive and exciting, and it is an unusually interesting program that I am happy to have, especially when recorded with such clarity and mood.

D MOORE

**Portuguese Cello**

**COSTA:** Poema; **LOPES-GRACA:** Concerto da Camera; **FREITAS BRANCO:** Cena Lyrica; **BRAGA SANTOS:** Concerto, op 66

Bruno Borralhinho; Gulbenkian Orchestra/ Pedro Neves—Naxos 573461 — 65 minutes

Here are four compositions that fit together well. They are spaced with no more time between compositions than between movements, but that is not as annoying as one might expect, since the idioms give a similar emotional effect.

The program begins with a one-movement Poema by Luiz Costa (1879-1960), originally written for cello and piano in 1956 and never fully orchestrated by the composer. Pedro Faria Gomes finished the job recently, and this is its first recording. It is a considerable work lasting nearly 13 minutes that feels almost like a three-movement concerto in its tempo changes. It is lyrical and lightly emotional, full of poetry, birdcalls, and a general feeling of life as she is enjoyed.

This mood changes a bit in Fernando Lopez-Graça’s chamber concerto, a three-movement, 23-minute work originally written for Mstislav Rostropovich, who premiered it in 1967 in Moscow. The liner notes picture it as describing the composer’s negative attitude towards the Salazar regime that had him imprisoned on two occasions. Yes, there is a good deal of sadness and gloom here, but the idiom is as full of lyricism and lightness of texture as is Costa’s piece. Borralhinho does not employ Rostropovich’s intensity, but he is clear and poetic.

Luis de Freitas Branco (1890-1955) also has a serious mood but again with many lyrical interjections between the soloist and the orchestra, making it a fine follow-up to the previous music. This work only lasts seven minutes and is over before you want it to be.

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The excerpts from older releases vary in sound. *Matteo* was recorded in a large hall judging by the echoing sound of Luciano Berio’s *Sequenza* and the works by Salvatore Sciarrino and Luigi Dallapiccola. One might mention that Du Yun’s 12-minute 2004 piece contains sounds both electronic and by a guitar, not to mention more contrasting cello sounds than can be played simultaneously. The numbers commissioned in connection with 9/11 by David Sanford and Toby Twining are touching, as is Haimovitz’s setting of Jimi Hendrix’s ‘Anthem.’ weird as they are. Other popular tendencies are in Luna Woolf’s imaginative Beatles setting. I should mention Tod Machover’s endlessly energetic improvisational-sounding trip to Paradise (or is it Hell?). It is followed by a similar piece by Gilles Tremblay where it sounds as if two cellos were playing out of tune together very badly. This is beginning to feel like a different world. The last disc contains suites by Ned Rorem, Paul Moravec, and Lewis Spratian, all with descriptive titles for each movement. These are fine works, a bit less abstract than some of the others. Moravec’s suite also contains some spoken quotations from Mark Twain. This is a rather overwhelming collection of modern music for solo cello played by one of the cellists who does it well. We should all consider it. This limits the pieces included to ones written recently. If you want the earlier works you’ll have to look around for the other recordings. If you want to know more about this popular cellist, there was an extensive article in the New York Times describing several places where he was discovered playing Bach suites and related material. He seems determined to bring the cello to a wider public life, though playing in Columbia University’s cafeteria and gymnasium are perhaps not as good recital locations as Miller Hall.

D MOORE

Shadow, Echo, Memory

WADSWORTH: 3 Lacquer Prints; FAURE: Apres un Reve; VAN DER SLOOT: Shadow, Echo, Memory; RACHMANINOFF: Vocalise; THOMALLA: Intermezzo; KERNIS: Ballad; LIGETI: Lux Aeterna; MAHLER: Adagietto

Northwestern University Cello Ensemble/ Hans Jorgen Jensen—Sono Luminus 70004 — 63 mins

As you may have gathered from the listing, this program combines arrangements of familiar music with others of less common material and a few original works, all for cello orchestra. It opens with a short but sweet trilogy by Zachary Wadsworth (b. 1983) written in 2012 on poems by Amy Lowell. These appear to be transcriptions by the composer of what were originally vocal pieces—words are supplied in the notes. Then we have an arrangement by Roland Pidoux of Gabriel Fauré’s famous song, played with warmth and beauty of tone by 8 of the 60 listed cellists, the vocal line played by Gabriel Cabezas.

Back to the 21st Century, we meet Canadian cellist and composer Michael Van der Sloot (b. 1991) with the 10-minute title number, a description of paintings from the Ice Age left in hidden caves, played by 21 cellists. This is a sonically colorful but musically rather uneventful piece, after which Rachmaninoff’s *Vocalise* brings a sigh of relief.

There’s a transcription of an *Intermezzo* by Hans Thomalia (b. 1975) from his opera leisurely based on Medea and originally written for string orchestra with guitar and percussion (21 cellos and 2 double basses here). It is sonically slithery and musically mushy, a continuous sliding from one chord to somewhere else. It is a waste of nine minutes of my life.

Aaron Jay Kernis (b. 1960) wrote *Ballad* for 8 cellos in 2004 in memory of his parents, who had recently died. This eight-minute work employs jazz harmonies sometimes and is a real beauty to hear, full of feeling. Moving farther back in time, Gyorgy Ligeti (1923-2006) sets the final chorus from his Mass for the Dead for 16 cellos in eternal transgression and micropolyphony (a term he invented to describe the indeterminate movement of the voices). In other words, this is another example of musical vagueness.

Finally we meet the longest work on the program, the slow movement of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony, originally for string orchestra but played here by 50 cellists plus 6 basses and harp. I love the sound of it, but almost 13 minutes is too long for a piece that Bruno Walter finishes in less than 8.

I expected to enjoy this more than I did. It is beautifully played and recorded with clarity, but there is so little going on in so many of these works that I don’t feel I heard much music, lovely as the cellos are. But there is some lovely music here, notably the pieces by Wadsworth and Kernis.

D MOORE

We learn from history that we do not learn from history.

Hegel
Here is an interesting historical collection of early German cello concertos accompanied by strings and harpsichord. Johann Adolph Hasse (1699-1783) wrote his around 1725, and the ones by Johann William Hertel (1727-89) and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-88) date from the 1750s. The styles differ greatly. Hasse's are in four movements including a fugue and sounds relatively Baroque, while Hertel and Bach have the three movements we expect, fast-slow-fast. Hertel's style is early classical, but Bach's is classical and exciting, particularly when led up to by the other fine but relatively easy-going works.

Part of the reason for the Bach sounding modern is that Rudin plays the outer movements at very fast tempos, which the Russian orchestra responds to very happily and with brilliant technique. At first I was afraid that the fast speed was going to carry us across the border into Russia, but Rudin is a fine early music performer and makes it work for everyone. He is not only the cello soloist but the conductor of Musica Viva, also known as the Moscow Chamber Orchestra. So these are really exciting performances of some very interesting music, most of it little known. The Bach has been recorded but never to greater effect than this, and the three other concertos are first recordings, I believe. The recording is excellent, clear as can be and warm to the ears as well.

D MOORE

Cello Concertos
by CPE Bach, Hertel, Hasse
Alexander Rudin; Musica Viva
Chandos 813 — 71 minutes

Lyrical Clarinet 2
Chausson, Debussy, Field, Francaix, Guastavino, Massenet, Ravel, Schumann
Michael Collins; Michael McHale, p
Chandos 10901—65 minutes

McHale adds four of his arrangements for clarinet and piano: three John Field Nocturnes and the famous Massenet ‘Meditation’ from his opera, Thais (1894).

Collins offers his usual pleasant tone, and he fills each selection with his naturally expressive persona. He sports effortless fingers and articulation when required, and overall he controls his free-blowing set-up nicely. But he often allows his throat tones to turn cloudy and spread, and at very loud dynamics he tends to push his soft reed to its absolute limit. McHale is solid at the keyboard, handling every lyrical and technical obstacle with ease, but he is almost always too laid back, preferring calm and quiet precision while Collins plays with energy and direction. Even so, McHale’s arrangements are beautiful and thoughtfully rendered, and clarinetists looking for a poetic recital encore should find them.

HANUDEL

Premiere Rhapsodie
Bartok, Brahms, Debussy, Horovitz, Kovacs, Poulenc, Ravel
Som Howie, cl; David Howie, p
Cala 77020—73 minutes

In 1992, Australian keyboardist David Howie became a full-time Lecturer in Accompaniment at the Sydney Conservatorium, one of only four such positions on the continent. His son Som grew up watching him play with the faculty, and Som was especially struck by the great clarinet-and-piano works that David performed with clarinet professor Mark Walton. Drawn immediately to the instrument and its literature, Som later studied at the Sydney Conservatorium and in London, and now, for his first recording project, he asks his father to join him as pianist.

The program is a parade of recital favorites, notably the Brahms Sonata No. 1 in F minor, the Debussy Premiere Rhapsodie, the Horovitz Sonata, the Poulenc Sonata, and the Bela Kovacs Homage to Manuel de Falla. The early Bartok Romanian Folk Dances, originally for keyboard only, appears in a clarinet-and-piano version; and the Gaston Hamelin transcription (1926) of the Ravel Piece en Forme de Habanera (1907) is a short entry between the Brahms and the Horovitz. At the end, Som and David include two short jazzy encores that Mark Walton used to perform on his recitals, one simply titled ‘Clarinet Cadenza’ and the other ‘Who’s Sorry Now?’

Som plays with a decent tone and adequate phrasing, and he has a flair for the jazz idiom. Yet his ideas are halfhearted and pedestrian, and his legato and fingers need more
refinement. He also struggles with the British traits in his sound, producing hazy timbres, limited colors, and some wobbly intonation. David is an excellent pianist, with superb touch and technique, but sometimes he comes across as a passive accompanist rather than an engaged chamber music partner. He seems to enjoy the Brahms the most, even if he fills it with too much rubato.

**HANUDEL**

**European Recital**
Gieseking, Blumer, Tansman, Respighi
Jürgen Franz, fl; Henning Lucius, p
TYX 16072—74 minutes

This interesting recital is the second outing on CD for flutist Jürgen Franz; the first was a set of French trios for flute, cello, and piano. Franz demonstrates his originality in choosing a 20th Century program of works that have not become hackneyed through repetition in countless flute recitals. Walter Gieseking (1895-1956), though German, was treasured in my youth for his recordings of French repertoire, and in fact his sonatina (1935, published 1937) for flute and piano is in the very purest French—simple, direct, cantabile, with no hint of German complication in either melody or harmony. It is so attractive that there have been perhaps half a dozen recordings in recent years, but it is still little-known in comparison to the Poulenc sonata, in the same key.

Though from only a few years earlier, the style of the Sonata, Op. 61, (1928) of Theodor Blumer is much more Germanic, still full of the complications of the late romantic, without either the serialism or the neo-classicism of familiar works from the 20s, particularly in the opening allegro con passione (the allegretto and closing vivace are lighter in tone). Blumer has a substantial number of other works for flute and piano from this period (including Op. 40 and Op. 46) so we might expect this to be the first of a flood.

The young Pole Alexander Tansman moved to Paris in 1920, and were his sonatina (1925) any lighter it would float away, with a charming fox-trot (marked Scherzo) at its center. Heavy and serious enough to (over-)balance the rest of the program entirely is the flutist’s own arrangement of the Respighi violin sonata from 1917, completely idiomatic in transcription.

Franz elicits a beautifully produced and fluid sound from his two gold flutes, not pushed, without an over-the-top vibrato, very tasteful; and his interpretations here are convincing, with excellent support from his accompanist Henning Lucius on piano. A fine collection for both flutists and lovers of modern music.

**Flauto d’amore**
Ginevra Petrucci; Paola Pisa, p
Brilliant 95289—61 minutes

Most of these selections are songs, and then there is the Romance from Schubert’s incidental music to Rosamunde. The instrument they are played on was familiar in the 18th and 19th centuries, then forgotten in the 20th. In 1989, Italian flutist Gian-Luca Petrucci, whose very accomplished daughter has created a worldwide reputation for herself, asked the flute maker Albert Cooper to produce a flute d’amore pitched in A. This was quite possibly the first one built in the 20th Century and the first such flute anyone had heard for many decades. In the 1920s, Australian John Amadio played a flute d’amore in B-flat while touring with singers Nellie Melba and Luisa Tetrazzini.

We hear the 1989 instrument on this recording in ravishing sound played with all the splendor and accomplishment a fine musician is capable of. It’s easy listening, but you shouldn’t pass this by any sooner than you wouldeforegous Turkey Tetrazzini or Peach Melba. In the years before World War II, Etty Hillesum would write, “Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths.” Put some of this in there too; then go to the table for nourishment and pleasure in those other forms.

**Word Police: Innovative**

This is a favorite word of publicists, vastly overused. It is supposed to mean that the composer or artist is doing something NEW! Wow! But we have found that (1) very little that is created is even slightly “new”; it’s all old hat--the same old tricks, and (2) there is no virtue in newness for its own sake. Who cares if an "innovative" composer has an instrument make a sound seldom heard before? (Almost never is it a sound never heard before.)

The word “inventive” is used in a similar way by publicists: we are supposed to be impressed by something supposedly created out of nothing. But it is never so; it is just an unfamiliar sound that has been around a long time.

People who think they are inventive and innovative probably use too many drugs.
Kristine West, recorder
VIVALDI: Concerto in C minor; BARSANTI: Old Scots Tunes; BACH: Partita, S 1013; Sonata in C; more

Daphne 1055—65 minutes

This varied recital, to my knowledge, marks the recording debut of the young Swedish player Kristine West, who studied both recorder and baroque flute in Stockholm with faculty including the eminent Dan Laurin. The varied selection of works shows that she has not only chops, but taste and spirit as well.

The C-minor Concerto by Vivaldi is certainly one of the most technically difficult in the repertoire, but the unnamed ensemble (presumably her colleagues in Stockholm) takes up the opening allegro (carefully marked “non troppo”) with a real swing. West continues through the florid quadruplets in the episodes without any let up, with every note crystal clear. This music—and the similar material in the closing allegro—sounded hard when Frans Brüggen recorded it, but here it seems effortless.

The other major work on the disc is the Bach solo partita, which also holds no pitfalls. West sounds very much at home in the Scottish tunes from Francesco Barsanti (who lived and worked in Edinburgh). This is not surprising, since she is actively involved in performing folk music. All in all, a first outing that promises much for the future.

T MOORE

19th Century Guitar
ANELLI: Sonatina; GIULIANI: Rossiniane 1; LEGNANI: Capricci; SOR: Mozart Variations; Fantasy &; AGUADO: Fandango Varie; COSTE: Le Tournoi

Luigi Attademo, g—Brilliant 95024—67 minutes

Mr Attademo is an Italian scholar, student of Angelo Gilardino, with a number of important publications to his credit. He is also a fine player, with several CDs, including an excellent all-Scarlatti program (M/J 2010). He presents here a collection of substantive works by 19th Century composers, all played on instruments contemporary with the compositions.

Well, mostly substantive. The Anelli Sonatina and the Legnani caprices are pretty forgettable, though well played. Giuliani’s first Rossiniane is the most popular of the six and has had some really fine recordings. I find Attademo’s just a bit too uneven in tempo and clarity to be competitive. On a modern guitar, you can hardly beat Pepe Romero on Philips; and on a period instrument, Shin-ichi Fukuda’s on Thorofon (N/D 2007) has a far better sound and technical control.

The Sor Mozart variations have been at the core of the repertory since Segovia’s early days, though I can’t name a performance on period instruments, unless you count Segovia’s ancient one done on gut strings. I have never liked his way with the work—he treats the music as if it’s by Tarrega instead of inspired by Mozart. Attademo avoids those excesses and gives a more tasteful and satisfying interpretation.

But the real interest here is in the Aguado and the Coste. Aguado’s suite has three movements based on the fandango rhythm. Other than his two large-scale works, a rondo and an adagio, his surviving music is mostly student pieces. But the two big works, especially the rondo, show so much maturity and bel canto beauty that I have to suspect there are some lost works that lead up to those. These works fit that hypothesis, and they’re quite delightful.

I’ve loved Coste’s music since I met it in college (I even play a seven-stringed instrument, inspired by him). I have read through Le Tournoi, Fantasie Chevaleresque but never heard it played. It is one of his finest works and dedicated to Berlioz, one of his strongest influences.

I am not especially fond of the thin sound of period guitars, and Attademo does nothing here to change my mind. But he plays fluently and expressively, and the Aguado and Coste are real discoveries.

KEATON

Expressivo
BARRIOS: Waltz; DYENS: Tango en Skai; ALBENIZ: Sevilla; Granada; Asturias; Tango; VILLA-LOBOS: Prelude 1; BROUWER: Canción de Cuna; Ojos Brujos; MYERS: Cavatina; TARREGA: Recuerdos; Capricho Arabe; GRANADOS: Spanish Dance 5; PIAZZOLLA: Adios Nonino; LENNON, McCARTNEY: Here, There, & Everywhere; CARMICHAEL: Georgia on My Mind; GERSHWIN: Summertime

Jacob Cordover, g—Cala 77022—74 minutes

I first encountered Mr Cordover in his release Blackwattle Caprices (J/F 2014). I was deeply impressed. He has it all—technique, musicianship, inventive programming. In this release he confirms that impression.

This program is different. The selections are mostly familiar works from the Segovia repertory—the very pieces that first caused him (and me) to fall in love with the guitar. There’s always a risk in such a program. Do we really need another ‘Asturias’ or ‘Recuerdos’?
Does he have anything different to say that we haven’t heard before?

The answer, I’m happy to say, is yes. Nothing is dramatically reinterpreted in a self-indulgent fashion, but nothing sounds just like it always does. More or less consistently, the performances are slower—not because he lacks the technique (he doesn’t) but because he wants to allow more time for the music to emerge. That means that Barrios isn’t rushed, and the Dyens can catch the spirit of the tango without seeming eccentrically nervous. The center section of the Villa-Lobos prelude is clear and precise—that passage that most guitarists just strum is played as written, as a clear arpeggio. Most delightfully, he starts ‘Asturias’ pianissimo and builds a steady crescendo to the biggest chords. That’s how Alicia de Larrocha does it on piano, to a glorious effect, but this is the first time I’ve heard a guitarist even try. He does his own transcriptions of the Albéniz and Granados—again, nothing radically different, and closer to Tarrega than Barrueco. But there are a few special touches, especially octave displacement, that brought a smile to my face.

Even if you already have these pieces in other performances, Cordover’s have such a distinct and attractive personality that it will be worth finding.

KEATON

Pavel Kukhta

GORELOVA: Castle of Mir; Prelude & Fugue;
BROUWER: Sonata del Decameron Negro;
RODRIGO: Toccata; GERHARD: Fantasia;
MORALES-CASO: Jardim de Lindaraja; ASSAD: Fantasia Carioca; DYENS: Blue Montuno
Naxos 573577—64 minutes

Mr Kukhta, of Belarus, won the 2015 Heinsberg Guitar Competition in Germany. Like nearly all of the emerging artists on the Naxos Laureate series, he presents a program of the highest musicianship and technical accomplishment.

This was a bit difficult to review, since nearly all of the pieces are new to me. I only knew the Morales-Caso from Adam Levin’s fine recording (N/D 2013), and the Rodrigo ‘Toccata’. That piece has an interesting story. It was composed in 1933 for Regino Sainz de la Maza, but unpublished (and unplayed) until 2005. Rodrigo referred, in a letter dated 1936, to the “huge and unparalleled fiasco of the toc
cata”. He probably meant that the work was so demanding that no guitarist of his time could play it. Well, that was then. There are a num-

ber of virtuosos who can indeed master the tremendous demands of the work, and Kukhta is one—he brings it off beautifully, with no sense of strain.

Indeed, all of these works are seriously demanding pieces, except Dyens’s ‘Blue Montuno’—and that is utterly charming, a perfect end to this tour de force. Except for the neobaroque works by Gorelova (sometimes transliterated as Harelava, though neither spelling occurs in the ARG Index), all are original guitar pieces. The Gerhard, Morales-Caso, and the Assad explore the range of sonorities that can be generated by the instrument—and go quite farther than the Segovia repertory ever dared. And each has a distinct voice and architecture—something I often miss when composers go off into uncharted territory.

Morales-Caso’s ‘Jardim de Lindaraja’ was his first composition for guitar, inspired by the beautiful Alhambra gardens—it’s an amazing first effort. Assad’s ‘Fantasia Carioca’ salutes his native Rio de Janeiro, but goes far beyond the expected Brazilian street rhythms.

The most exciting piece here is Brouwer’s Sonata del Decameron Negro. It has nothing musically in common with his earlier Decameron Negro. Rather, it derives from the same literary work, a set of oral tales from Africa collected by Leo Frobenius. Its language is mostly tonal, with high dissonance and the sort of inventiveness and expressiveness that Brouwer can produce at his best. It’s a four-movement work, with the character of each in keeping with the sonata cycle. He continues his habit of quoting from unexpected sources—Milan in the first movement, Tarrega (‘Adelita’ in four, which frankly just sounds odd) in the last. The earlier (1981) work became quite the “It” work for a while—you couldn’t go to a recital without a good chance of hearing it. This may be the next such work.

Bravo to Mr Kukhta for presenting a rich, substantive, varied program and executing it with such fine musicianship. I look forward to more from this gifted artist.

KEATON

In interviews with college professors about their freshman students, 70% said they could not understand complex reading materials, 66% said they couldn’t think analytically, 62% said their writing was poor, 59% said they didn’t know how to do research, and 55% said they could not apply their knowledge.

November/December 2016
Fantasia Andaluza

SABICAS: Fantasia Andaluza; La Delicada; Sevillanas; FALLA: Homenaje; Danza del Molinito; Danza Espanola 1; TARREGA: Recuerdos de la Alhambra; ALBENIZ: Sevilla; RICARDO: Sierra Nevada; LÓRCA: Nana de Sevilla; GRANADOS: Malaguena; TRAD: Verdiales

Petri Kumela, Joonas Widenius, g
Alba 391 [SACD] 50 minutes

I have reviewed Mr Kumela twice before, in a brilliantly executed mixed program (J/F 2012) and in a performance of the works of Paavo Korpiaakko (S/O 2013). I was impressed with his execution and his musicianship in both. I am less so with this, though it has some very fine moments.

Flamenco has had a profound influence on the Spanish guitar repertory, though classical guitar and flamenco are very different. Even the instruments are different—the flamenco has a brighter sound, less rich and rounded, with a low action that allows fast, percussive playing, but uses almost no counterpoint. Any time a classical player joins with a flamenco tocdor, there may be a clash of styles. Such is the case here. Kumela plays with Joonas Widenius, a flamenco specialist (though he is Finnish). All the material is at least flamenco influenced, and several pieces are pure flamenco.

Kumela plays the Falla 'Homenaje', 'Recuerdos', and 'Sevilla'—all three oddly flat. I've heard many better interpretations of these popular pieces. Widenius plays two flamenco solos, 'Sierra Nevada' and 'Malaguena'—both cited with composers, though the music probably has improvised passages. The rest are duets.

Falla's 'Miller's Dance' and the dance from La Vida Breve are the best thing here—they have a rough edge, but that's appropriate; and they generate a wonderful excitement. They also do one of Garcia Lorca's song arrangements, 'Nana de Sevilla', and two pieces by Sabicas.

It was Sabicas who first popularized solo flamenco guitar. This was anathema to purists—flamenco is first and foremost about the song, especially the cante jondo, and the dance. The guitar has a supporting role, not starring. His two duets are also exciting and moving (the first quotes another of the Lorca songs, 'Ande, Jaleo', or perhaps draws on Lorca's original source). Don't look for tight ensemble or pure finish here. But you will find beautiful, rough expressiveness. This performance manages better than most to bring classical and flamenco together.

American Record Guide
Handel alone is worth the cost of the disc, and there’s much beyond that. If this is not in your collection, it needs to be.

**Ben Verdery**

**BRESNICK:** *Joaquin is Dreaming*  
**LADERMAN:** *On Vineyard Sound*  
**KERNIS:** *Lullaby*  
**LASH:** *For Ben*  
**THEOFANIDIS:** *January Echoes*  
**MARMILDS:** *The Mentioning of Love*  
**VERDERY:** *En Ti los Rios Cantan*  
**LANG:** *Little Eye*  
**VEES:** *National Anthem*

Viney 0—79 minutes (215-514-7710)

Ben Verdery is the head of the Yale University guitar program, and all the composers here are Yale faculty. The project had its origins in Verdery’s request of his colleagues to produce pieces with little specific guidance for their interpretation, to be used for student auditions. The result is a large body of new music by Yale faculty. The project had its origins in Verdery’s request of his colleagues to produce pieces with little specific guidance for their interpretation, to be used for student auditions. The result is a large body of new music for guitar, each piece with a distinct character and style.

Martin Bresnick’s *Joaquin is Dreaming* is a three-movement work inspired by his grandson. The music is quite tonal, with a slow harmonic rhythm. It’s not really minimalist, but it does seem static—a dream-like quality. Ezra Laderman’s *On Vineyard Sound*, in four movements, is the closest to atonality here. The sounds are often rough, even strident. At one particularly harsh passage, I looked at the name of the movement: ‘Strident’.

Aaron Jay Kernis is the best known of the composers and is represented by his ‘Lullaby’, originally for solo piano, but arranged for flute and guitar. Verdery is joined by his life partner Rie Schmidt, who has a really beautiful sound. The outer sections are calm and soothing, as one would expect, but there is a wild and piercing central passage. Musically it works beautifully, though it’s no longer a lullaby at that point. I can only assume Mr Kernis has no children.

Hannah Lash’s *For Ben* is played on a 1956 Gibson Super 400 electric guitar. The first movement is a lovely jazz ballad; II a bebop solo with the guitar sound distorted. The notes don’t say whether there are any improvised parts. The last movement is closer to a chorale than any jazz piece—it’s a bit incongruous. Verdery gets a different sound for each of the movements, something I would expect from electric guitar players, though I rarely find it.

Christopher Theofanidis’s ‘January Echoes’ was adapted from a solo viola work, inspired by Dowland’s ‘Flow my Tears’. Schmidt again joins Verdery for Ingram Marshall’s ‘Mentioning of Love’, an homage to both his late teacher and to the relationship between Verdery and Schmidt. These two are my favorites—the most purely beautiful works on the program.

Verdery’s own composition, ‘En Ti los Rios Cantan’ (In you the rivers sing—from a poem by Neruda) is an odd work. The guitar part is static, with the poem spoken in fragments, electronically repeated by two strangely nasal speakers, coming in different channels. It reminds me a bit of stuff Berio did in the 60s, like the ‘O King’ movement of his *Sinfonia*. I didn’t know people were still doing that. The last two pieces, David Lang’s ‘Little Eye’ and Jack Vee’s ‘National Anthem’ are both what I’d call Ambient Music—static, without a set rhythmic character or distinct harmonic progression. The Lang is played with guitar, Jack Vee on pedal steel guitar and Verdery playing on a brake drum; Vee’s piece is done by his Indie Rock band, The Nationals. I found these the least interesting.

But what is consistently excellent here is the level of performance. Verdery plays with a rich range of sound, always deeply expressive, and always with a solid sense of whatever style he is interpreting, no matter how wide the range of demands. This collection is not like anything I’ve ever encountered, but it contains some real delights.

**Journey around Europe**

Richard Lester, hpsi, fp, org; Elizabeth Lester, rec  
Nimbus 5939 — 80 minutes

Lester plays a general-interest recital, mostly of well-known pieces that are available in dozens of other recordings. The program is mostly sonatas, toccatas, and variations. The Mozart variations (on the tune we know as ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star’) are from a public concert in 2007; nothing else is in concert. He has good flair for the music of Scarlatti, Seixas, Soler, and Mozart. Some of the other performances sound less imaginative, especially Bach’s D-major Toccata (S 912) and Handel’s *Harmonious Blacksmith* Variations. In the Soler sonata there are some rough notes in the top register.

The Haydn and Mozart pieces are on a 1795 fortepiano by Johann Schantz. For one of the short canzonas by Frescobaldi, Lester plays a chamber organ, accompanied by his daughter Elizabeth playing well on a Renaissance recorder. For everything else he uses...
modern copies of Italian and Portuguese harpsichords.

B LEHMAN

Pleasures of the Imagination
Sophie Yates, hp— Chandos 814 — 75 minutes

This is a genteel program of English music by colleagues and competitors of Purcell and Handel, without involving them. The composers are Blow, Clarke, Croft, Greene, Jones, Arne, and Johann Christian Bach. It’s all consistently pleasant while it’s happening, but not distinctive or memorable when it’s done. I went through the album four or five times, finding that it kept receding to the background of my attention. Still, there’s nothing wrong with chipper and lightweight tunes, or with following typical rules of counterpoint in the craftsmanship. The biggest piece is Bach’s, a Sonata in C minor from his Opus 17 of 1779. I like best the seven-movement Set of Lessons in B-flat, a suite by Richard Jones.

Everything is well chosen for variety and to give an overview of the harpsichord in 18th Century England. Sophie Yates plays gracefully on two French-style double harpsichords, both built and serviced by Andrew Garlick. The harpsichords sound great, but half of the recital is tuned in one of the crude Werckmeister temperaments that had nothing to do with England or harpsichords. The recording is from August 2012. The 24-bit sound is excellent, and Yates’s notes give adequate introduction to the composers and pieces.

B LEHMAN

Enrico Calcagni, oboe

COSTE: Concertino; Sonata; Consolation; Les Regrets; Cavatina
KLOSE: 10th Concert Solo
VERROUST: 12th Concert Solo
Sonia Ballarin, p
Dynamic 7759—56 minutes

Although billed as works by Napoleon Coste, music by two other composers appear on this release: Hyacinthe Klose (a name well known among clarinetists for his etudes for that instrument) and Stanislas Verroust. The three men were contemporaries in 19th Century Paris. All bear the stamp of the Paris Conservatory in their approachable, virtuosic style.

Known as a brilliant guitar soloist, Coste composed a number of works for the oboe as well, including this concerto and sonata and a number of characteristic pieces. The latter are good examples of the salon music that was in vogue in Paris of the day. The concerto, originally composed for oboe and orchestra, has been rather clumsily arranged for piano, and the program notes state that this is the first recording of this arrangement (perhaps for good reason). Pianist Sonia Ballarin nimbly makes the best of it, and in music actually written for the piano she does a very fine job. Coste’s compositional style is similar to Weber but with less substance, and so much of it on a single program quickly becomes tiresome. The three stand-alone works are better, with a bit more to them harmonically.

The Klose is a transcription of a concert piece written for clarinet. It and the Verroust are typical examples of the Paris Conservatory pieces of that era. Pulling off a program consisting entirely of such music requires a lot oferve, fire, and high drama. Unfortunately this performance doesn’t quite do it, and the effect is more like charming but repetitive etudes with piano accompaniment.

PFEIL

Luciano Franca, oboe

SINIGAGLIA: Schubert Variations; BOLZONI: Canzona Boema: Minuet; Fantasia; GARIBOLDI: La Traviata Mosaic; DONIZETTI: Sonata; SGAMBATTI: Gluck Melody; ZANELLA: Andante & Scherzo; LONGO: Suite; ROTA: Elegy
Filippo Pantiere, p— Tactus 850002—70 minutes

These are all Italian works from the 19th and 20th centuries. There are two pieces for piano solo. I’m not sure why, since trimming the program from 70 minutes to 62 would be no great loss. The program opens with Sinigaglia’s Variations on Schubert’s Heidentotslein. This is satisfying music, tuneful and inventive. Three works by Giovanni Bolzoni follow. The Canzona Boema is melodic and flowing; the Minuet for piano speaks the harmonic language of Chopin, but is otherwise insubstantial. The Fantasy is the most interesting of the three and exhibits French influence harmonically. It begins with an improvisatory statement by the oboe, followed by a wistful melody that is laid on more sprightly music later on. The Sgambati is simply a transcription of the ‘Dance of the Blessed Spirits’ from Gluck’s Orfeo for piano solo. I’m not sure why it was included.

A pastiche piece like the Gariboldi requires a lot of vivaciousness and dramatic flair to avoid becoming plodding and predictable, especially at 11 minutes long. Franca and Pantiere don’t quite succeed with this mosaic of “hits” from Verdi’s Traviata. The Donizetti sonata is a more familiar work in two movements, slow-fast. Full of the Italian operatic
tradition of the time, it is both virtuosic and melodic. The Zanella is cast in a similar mold, with a singing slow movement followed by a sparkling finale. The three-movement Longo suite would be a nice addition to a recital, with its lovely melodic lines and hints of Fauré. The program finishes off with the Adagietto of Elegy of Nino Rota, the famous film composer. It’s short lyrical, and pensive, and makes for a nice little encore.

**Tod in Venedig**

**LISZT:** Angelus; La Lugubre Gondola; RW Venice; At the Grave of Wagner; DUBOIS: 2 Pieces; GRANDVAL: Gavotte; Lamento; WAGNER: Elegie; Traume; English horn solo fr Tristan; MAHLER: Adagietto

Lajos Lencses, ob; Leo Lencses, vc; Budapest Chamber Academy/ Geza Gemesi

Bayer 100401—65 minutes

The 130th anniversary of Liszt’s death inspired this release, with a central theme of “Death in Venice”. Initially it refers to Richard Wagner’s own death at the Palazzo Vendramin, attended by his friend, supporter, and father-in-law, Franz Liszt, who found deep inspiration in his grief. The program closes with the poignant Adagietto from Mahler’s Symphony 5, used in the film based on Thomas Mann’s Death in Venice. This program includes music by Liszt and Wagner, as well as of Theodore Dubois and Marie-Felicie Grandval. The French pieces are only tangentially related to the theme of the program, but are amiable and lyrical, and together serve as a nice palette cleanser between Liszt and Wagner. The program is balanced and satisfying, especially the Wesendonck song leading to the music from Tristan, and then the Mahler.

Oboist Lajos Lencses has made many recordings in his long career and has been described as “one of the greatest oboists of our time” by the French magazine Diapason. There’s lovely playing all around, though the stones struggle sometimes to play together in the Mahler. The works by Liszt, Wagner, and Mahler are by far the strongest. The late pieces by Liszt are contemplative and haunting, especially ‘Lugubre Gondola’, which stayed in my head for days.

The works by Liszt and Wagner (except for the English horn solo from Tristan) were transcribed by Geza Gemesi.

**Mozart & Norwegians**

**MOZART:** Oboe Quartet in F; **HVOSLEF:** Concerto; **SAEVERUD:** Concerto; **Rondo amoroso**

David Friedemann Strunck, ob; Elise Batnes, v; Henninge Batnes Landaa, va; Bjorn Solum, vc; Oslo Philharmonic/ Arvid Engegard

LAWO 1100—64 minutes

This varied program of Mozart and two recent Norwegian composers is brought together in an interesting way. Harald Saeverud was an important Norwegian composer and a great admirer of Mozart. Kettl Hvoslef, Saeverud’s son, has incorporated some of the themes of the Mozart quartet.

The Mozart, one of the great works in the oboe literature, is a charming, exquisite gem. Strunck plays it with tasteful elegance, and his light, clear sound is in perfect balance with the strings, maintaining a singing tone even in the lowest register of the instrument. His phrasing and articulation are just right for Mozart.

The one-movement Hvoslef concerto, composed in 2012, is eclectic, with modernist language and angular melodies. In this context, quotes from the Mozart quartet appear shocking, almost intrusive. An unusual technique is the interplay between the orchestral oboists and the solo oboe, which the notes call “polyphonic oboe”. The orchestration is intricate and sometimes dense, but Engegard and the Oslo Philharmonic never overwhelm Mr Strunck.

The program ends with two pieces by Harald Saeverud. The oboe concerto is composed in the standard three movements. I is tuneful and playful, with a hint of Stravinsky. The slow movement is pensive and atmospheric, a mysterious soundscape that transitions directly into a lively, vivacious Allegro, which incorporates jazz elements.

**European Court Organs**

Antico, A Gabrieli, Frescobaldi, Pasquini, Cabezón, Hofhaimer, Scheidemann, Scheidt, Aston, Attaignant, DuMont, anonymous

Francesco Cera

Brilliant 95240—68 minutes

In the 16th and 17th centuries the chamber organ was a vehicle for domestic music making for people who could afford one. They were often found in the homes of the nobility and at royal courts. Francesco Cera presents a program of secular keyboard music of the period performed on an 18th-Century positive organ now in the refectory of a Franciscan convent in Lustra Cilento, Italy. The repertory
consists mainly of dance pieces, intabulations of French chansons, and variations on secular melodies. The earliest composer here is Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537), and the latest is Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710).

The organ builder’s name is not known, but based on the style of the instrument and its case decoration, it was probably built in Naples. Inscribed on the languid of one of the front pipes is the date “7 Otobre 1772.” This means that the instrument is considerably later than the latest music on the program, but it seems appropriate for the repertory. Like many chamber organs of the time, it is an organo ottavino with no rank sounding lower than four-foot pitch—an octave higher than the written pitch. The basic register is a four-foot principal. There is also a four-foot flute that takes its bottom two octaves from the principal then continues as a separate rank. There are two high-pitched ranks for brilliance—a duodecima (1-1/3’) and decimaquinta (‘1’). The principal has a solid but refined tone that is agreeable when played alone but also securely anchors the full ensemble. The organ was restored in 2012 by Giuseppe Fontana.

Cera’s playing is stylish and animated. Some of the pieces involve virtuoso passagework, but he makes it sound effortless and, more important, musical. The music on the program is remarkably varied. This much music played an octave (or more) above written pitch may not be to everyone’s taste, but listeners who love the secular instrumental music of the 16th and 17th Centuries will not be disappointed.

GATENS

Tapestry

LEFEBURE-WELY: March Militaire; SCHUMAN: Album for the Young; TCHAIKOVSKY: Album for the Young; GUILMANT: Sonata 1; LEMAIRE: Irish Air; When Johnny Comes Marching Home

Michael McGhee, org
ACA 20126—64 minutes

Another recording on a symphonic style organ built by the Aeolian company (1/A 2016). In 1925 it was installed as a house organ in an Atlanta mansion known as Briarcliffe Manor, owned by Asa Chandler Jr, son of the founder of Coca-Cola. It was offered for sale in 1935, but had no buyer. Finally in 1952 Chandler donated it to Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. Virgil Fox played the dedicatory recital in October of 1958. He had played it often for informal receptions at Briarcliffe Manor. In 2005 Schantz rebuilt and re-configured the organ in an attempt to make it better in the auditorium.

McGhee has put together a wonderful period program that reveals the endless variety of color available. He is a fine player, and his transcription of selections from the Schumann and Tchaikovsky albums are particularly effective. I also like his vigorous rendition of the Guilmant, only wishing that he had taken a little more time with II, which is rushed.

Unfortunately a bad acoustic will ruin the effect of an excellent organ; in this case, the room is so dry that the sound cannot bloom or soar. One yearns to hear it in the magnificent acoustics of Duke Chapel. Notes on the music, history of the organ, and specification.

1753—Quebec

Montreal Organ Book, LeBigue, Nivers, Marchand, D’Anglebert

Yves-G Prefontaine
ATMA 2717—77 minutes

This recording is a showcase for the chapel organ built in 2009 by Juget-Sinclair of Montreal for the Musée de l’Amérique Francophone in Quebec. It is an instrument of one manual with ten stops and pull-down pedals that reproduces the specification of the 1753 organ by Robert Richard for Quebec Cathedral. There is a four-foot principal (montre) and flutes at eight, four, and two feet. Two mutations, two mixtures, a trompette (8’), and a cromhorne (8’) complete the stoplist. All of the registers but the two mixtures are divided to allow for contrasting registrations in the treble and bass. The original 1753 sales contract is extant, as well as a good deal of correspondence from Canon de la Corne, who was in charge of procuring the organ for the cathedral. The trompette was not part of the original specification, but several organists urged the canon to include it, noting that it will “make as much noise as the rest of the organ.” That is certainly true of the new instrument’s trompette.

Organist Yves-G Prefontaine has chosen a program of pieces that would probably have been played in New France in the 18th Century. It opens with a set of anonymous Magnificat verses in C from the Montreal Organ Book, a 540-page manuscript collection of liturgical organ music brought to Montreal in 1724 by Jean Girard. Composers are not identified in the book, but 16 of the pieces have been iden-
Prefontaine includes a selection of pieces from Marchand’s first the rare books department of Laval University. Prefontaine includes a selection of pieces from Marchand’s first Livre d’Orgue. There is no evidence that works by Jean Henry D’Anglebert (1635-1691) were played in New France, but Prefontaine concludes the program with five of his fugues.

The sound of this organ is simply delightful. The tone is bold but not brash or raw. There is warmth and refinement that serves the music well. The trumpet produces a very fine tone, but it is so loud that I would prefer it in smaller doses. It is perhaps too overwhelming when used as a chorus reed. Prefontaine’s performances leave nothing to be desired. He conveys the impression that he is speaking his native musical language. He uses a registration assistant, and this allows the performance of works that would involve dialog between manual divisions on a larger organ.

GatenS

God Save The King

Hesse: God Save the King; Kohler: Austrian Folksong Variations; KuHmStedt: March of the Priests; Stehle: O Sanctissima; Pfretzschner: Dilent Night Variations; De Lange: Sonata 4: III

Halgeir Schiager, org
Lawo 1102—73 minutes

A program of works by unfamiliar German composers who wrote between 1833 and 1879. They were influenced by the late classical and early romantic styles, performed their own works, and were considered influential in their time. All the pieces are theme and variations on well known melodies.

The last movement of De Lange’s sonata, dedicated to the American organist Clarence Eddy, uses the ‘Star-Spangled Banner’. Adolph Hesse (1809-1863) is probably the most familiar to organists. Known as the “Silesian Bach”, he was considered one of Europe’s leading organ virtuosos, and his repertoire included Bach’s organ works—which at the time were seldom performed. In 1844 he took part in the dedication of the new organ at St Eustace in Paris, “wowing” the audience with his pedal technique.

The most substantial piece is by J. Gustav Eduard Stehle (1839-1915). It was dedicated to Liszt and consists of a fantasy, theme and variations, and fugal finale. It is a demanding work and employs a four-voice pedal part in the fantasy. Samuel De Lange (1842-1911) was also interested in pedal technique, writing a wonderfully virtuoso pedal passage near the end of the finale.

Schiager gives engaging and colorful performances of this interesting music, which are effective on the 2014 Hermann Eule organ in the Sofienberg Church in Oslo, Norway. Tonal, it is modeled on ones by the 19th Century German organ builder, Friedrich Ladegast, and perfect for this repertoire. A welcome addition to the extensive notes is the registrations for each piece.

DEL Camp

Sunday In Paris

Berlioz: Priere du Matin; Gounod: Messe Breve; O Salutaris; Franck: Entree; Offertoire; Tantum Ergo; LeFebur-e-WeLy: Elevation; Sortie; Romance sans Paroles; Pifferari; Soupirs et Regrets; Sur le Golfe; Dubois: Paris Angelicus; Pastorale; Reverie; Elegie; Gilmant: Ecce Pansis; Melodie; Becuellement; Lemmens: Laudate Dominum; Nocturne; Toby: Vielle Gavotte op 142; Lorent: Souvenir de Madrid; Mouquet: Theme Faire; Sarabande; Rigaudon; Saint-Saens: Barcarolle; Leybach: Les Bateliers de Venise; Gregoir: Harmoniophone Caprice; Joris Verdin, harmonium; Christ Church Schola Cantorum/ Stephen Kennedy
Loft 1126 [2CD] 125 minutes

In 1842 Alexandre Debain took out a patent for a keyboard instrument he called the Harmonium. Many will be familiar with the "pump organ", formerly used in churches and often found in our grandmothers' living rooms; but the 19th Century instrument invented by Debain was much more elaborate, powerful, and expressive. Many French churches began using it as an orgue du choeur, up front in the Chancel to accompany the choir. These instruments were of the highest quality and workmanship, with a price equivalent to an 8-stop Cavaille-Coll organ. They can still be found in French churches.

This unique program presents music as it would have been heard in French Catholic circles on a typical Sunday; Mass in the morning, Le Salut (Benediction) in the afternoon, and pieces that would have been played in the evening as home entertainment. By the middle
of the century the harmonium matched the piano in popularity, and its features made it comparable to a small organ: expressive sound, split keyboard with different colors in the bass and treble, and a percussion stop for faster movements. The vast amount of music produced for the instrument by composers such as Franck, Guilmant, Dubois, Lemmens, Vienne, and Lefebure-Wely attests to its popularity.

I was amazed at the variety of color and the expressive possibilities of the instrument. Verdin plays one by Victor Mustel, who was one of the more important builders. Only the bellows have been restored; the playing mechanism and wind chest are completely original. He plays a variety of sacred and secular solo pieces, and accompanies the excellent choir in a Gounod Mass setting and several motets. The sound gets to be a little wearing after 125 minutes, but this is a uniquely enjoyable recording. The beautiful booklet offers notes on the music, translations, and information on the instrument.

DELCAMP

Saint Remi Basilica, Reims

DE GRIGNY: Organ Hymns (5); PAULET: Hymn; ROBIN: 5 Verses on Veni Creator; MERNIER: Pange Lingua; FARAGO: Adusque Terrae限
item; ESCAICH: Evocation IV

Olivier Latry, Jean-Baptiste Robin, Benoît Mernier, Pierre Farago, Vincent Dubois

Aeolus 11101 [2SACD] 118 minutes

The year 2011 marked the 800th anniversary of the laying of the first stone of the present-day Reims Cathedral, site of French royal coronations. Among the events organized to observe the anniversary was a four-year musical project inspired by the work of Nicolas de Grigny (1672-1703), a native of Reims who was organist of the cathedral from 1696 until his untimely death at the age of 31. His only musical publication was a Livre d’Orgue (1699) containing an organ mass and five organ hymns. The five hymns were the point of departure for the anniversary project. Five composers—Vincent Paulet (b1962), Jean-Baptiste Robin (b1976), Benoît Mernier (b1964), Pierre Farago (b1969), and Thierry Escaich (b1965)—were commissioned to write new organ works based on the plainsong hymns elaborated by De Grigny. Apart from that, the only conditions invoked were that the pieces be about 12 minutes in length, and not so technically difficult as to discourage a proficient organist. The new pieces and the hymns of De Grigny were presented in a series of five recitals. The first two took place in the anniversary year and one each in the following three years. Three out of the five were played by the composers themselves.

The recitals did not take place in Reims Cathedral, as the organ there was in need of restoration and deemed too fragile and undependable for a project of this sort. The performances were given at the nearby Basilica of Saint-Remi with its three-manual organ (2000) by Bertrand Cattiaux. It is an instrument well suited to the French classic and contemporary repertories. The recording by the participants in the original project was made in August and September of 2015.

Vincent Paulet was inspired by the sculpture of the crowning of the Virgin over the central arch of the cathedral’s west portal, so ‘Ave Maris Stella’, the only Marian hymn of De Grigny’s five, was a natural choice. In his piece, Paulet invokes the imposing grandeur of the cathedral facade and the contrast with its intricate stone tracery. On the whole, I find that piece disagreeable. It opens with loud, dissonant chords to represent the grandeur, but reduces volume for a quiet section where we get relentless repetition of figures such as a line—I would hesitate to call it a melody—characterized by wide downward and upward leaps. The piece is dedicated to Olivier Latry of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, who plays it here.

Jean-Baptiste Robin’s ‘Five Verses on Veni Creator’ is similar in format to De Grigny’s hymns as a series of organ verses based on the plainsong melody. I find the music far more engaging than Paulet’s, in an idiom that suggests modern French improvisation complete with a virtuosic toccata finale. Robin adheres closely to the plainsong melody in its entirety, where some of the other composers use the plainsong as a mine for phrases and motives to be developed. This may contribute to the coherence of the music, and the perceptible sense of expressive and structural purpose behind the dissonances that abound in the work.

Benoit Mernier chose the Eucharistic hymn ‘Pange Lingua’ for his contribution and wrote a set of four organ verses. Unlike Robin, whose verses on ‘Veni Creator’ form a suite independent of De Grigny, Mernier intended for his verses to be interspersed with the baroque composer’s. De Grigny wrote only three organ verses for this hymn, as compared with the four and five verses for the others. The
first and last of Mernier’s verses are fairly extended movements: a prelude and doxology that frame the composite work. The inner movements are shorter, and the composer views them as the counterpart of the strophes that would have been sung between De Grigny’s organ verses. It is for individual listeners to decide whether Mernier’s uncompromisingly modern idiom blends well with the older pieces. I am not fully persuaded.

Pierre Farago’s ‘Adusque Terrae Limitem’ (unto the ends of the earth) is in some ways the strangest of the pieces on this recording. The title is the second line of the first strophe of the Christmas hymn ‘A Solis Ortu’. The registration is confined to three or four organ stops: a 4’ flute on one manual, an 8’ principal on the other, and 16’ plus 8’ on the pedal, with the 16’ optional. The structure of the work is deliberately cryptic. For example, the plainsong melody is taken in retrograde. The composer is quoted in the booklet: “I wanted absolutely to avoid any direct reference. I like whatever is hidden, imperceptible, and yet present!...I am always intent on serving the message, but while making it unrecognizable head-on. For me, whatever is invisible is a source of riches.” Where this leaves the listener is hard to say.

Thierry Escaich returns us to the idiom of modern French improvisation with his ‘Evocation IV’, based on the Corpus Christi hymn ‘Verbum Supernum’. It is part of a series of works based on pre-existing musical material. Three of De Grigny’s organ hymns conclude with a movement for the Grands jeux (chorus to mixtures plus brilliant chorus reeds). His ‘Verbum Supernum’ does not, and to some extent Escaich’s new piece could be heard as supplying such a conclusion, even though its polytonal language makes a bold contrast with the French baroque idiom. The work is a breathless romp that builds up to a dazzling conclusion for full organ. It is dedicated to Vincent Dubois, who plays it here as a fitting conclusion to the recorded program.

Martha Argerich: Early Recordings

Mozart: Sonata 18; Beethoven: Sonata 7; Prokofieff: Toccata; Sonatas 3+7; Ravel: Gaspard de la Nuit; Sonatine

DG 4795978 [2CD] 90 minutes

True to what one has come to expect from Argerich, her early recordings are superb and clean. Though fans have probably heard her perform some of these pieces many times over (Prokofieff’s Sonata 7 and Ravel’s Gaspard de la Nuit, included here, are staples of her repertoire), listeners both old and new will enjoy listening to recordings from before Argerich became famous (1960 and 1967).

Of interest is the Mozart sonatas. She plays with ease and comfort, with plenty of color and fine pacing. Argerich captures the cheerfulness and youthfulness of the piece brilliantly. With Beethoven, her drive is incredible, with the range of dynamics so familiar to her playing. The Presto movement has great clarity, especially in the left hand, and what seems to be a miraculous range of sound. The tempo is incredibly fast and light, yet always clear. Prokofieff’s ‘Toccata’ is exhilarating.

Enough has been written about her performances of Prokofieff’s Sonata 7 and Gaspard de la Nuit. I would like to hear more Mozart from Argerich.

KANG

A Madness Most Discreet

Schumann: Kinderszenen; Wagner: Liebestod; Harris: Prelude: Landscape with Too Few Lovers; Granados: Endearments; Prokofieff: Romeo & Juliet

Stephen de Pledge, p

Champs Hill 93—77 minutes

Referring to Romeo’s description of love as “a madness most discreet”, De Pledge presents an album of love-themed piano music. Though romantic love is apparent from the titles of most of the works (Romeo and Juliet, Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde, and so on), Kinderszenen is not as obviously “romantic” as the others, as it was written about childhood. De Pledge justifies its inclusion by discussing Robert Schumann’s love for Clara.

De Pledge’s playing of Kinderszenen balances delicacy in ‘Traumerei’ and ‘Of Foreign Lands and People’. There is not a wide range of sound, though, in ‘Frightening’. Its bursts of energy sound tentative rather than frightening. I found more convincing the crisp ‘Endearments’ by Granados; while De Pledge has a daintier touch than Alicia de Larrocha, his phrasings and crystal clear playing are not unwelcome. I did miss the more full-bodied sound of De Larrocha. His restrained touch resounds in Ross Harris’s ‘Piano Prelude: A Landscape with Too Few Lovers’, a spare work meant to evoke landscapes from New Zealand. While I would have preferred more verve—he playing le ans towards too careful—he offers a solid rendering of Prokofieff’s Romeo and Juliet. He could pick up the pace in a rather too

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delicate first movement, but this kind of
exacting care works for the bleak and bitter-
sweet final movement.

**Fluvial**

**SIBELIUS:** 4 Lyric Pieces; **RAVEL:** Jeux d’eau;
**BYSTROM:** Air Russe Varie; **SCHUBERT:** Sonata
in A

Anna Kuvaja, p—Alba 386—71 minutes

I enjoyed the Finnish works. Kuvaja’s tempo
and pacing could be improved. Though she is
sensitive to the material of the easy going 4
Lyric Pieces and has a warm and lively sound,
*Jeux d’eau* sounds over-pedalled and rushed,
contributing to a frenetic quality. Though the
second theme in I has lovely moments, her
Schubert needs more depth, and the runs
could be a little more fluid; the pacing of the
movement sounds rushed. It is too dramatic
and does not capture the somber mood very
well. IV is disappointing because of its poor
phrasing. It sounds choppy. Early 19th-Centu-
ry Finnish composer Thomas Byström’s
*Air Russe Varie* is based on a Russian song and
seems solid.

The word “fluvial”, meaning river, is taken
from a quotation from Ravel’s favorite poet,
Henri de Regnier. But I think Kuvaja’s
approach to the works needs more fluidity.

**Brücken**

**BUSONI:** Bach Chorale Improvisations; **LIGETI:**
Sonatina; **KURTAG:** Spiele; Chorale Arrangement;
**REGER:** Beethoven Variations

Hans-Peter & Volker Stenzl, p
Genuin 16549—63 minutes

The Stenzl brothers have put together an inter-
esting program that they request you to listen
to in its entirety if possible. *Bridges* goes to
great lengths to establish sophisticated cross-
connections between four composers with
birth or death dates that relate to 2016. Reger
died 100 years ago, Busoni was born 90 years
ago, Kurtag was born 90 years ago and Ligeti
died 10 years ago. There is a lot of counter-
point, fugues, and canons in these original
works for two pianos that have themes and
influences from Bach to Beethoven to Verdi. I
must say that without the extensive and
detailed program notes I would be hard
pressed to pick up on even half of the inter-
relationships.

This is not the easiest program to listen to,
even though it surely is one of the most
thought-out ones. Beginning with tone clus-
ters and glissandos in Kurtag’s *Fog Canon*, you
are immediately aware that this will not be a
typical two-piano recital. Seven more short
pieces by Kurtag follow before we get to the 17-
minute Busoni *Improvisations*, which sound
less adventurous harmonically and technically
when placed between Kurtag and Ligeti. The
short Sonatina by Ligeti is actually a playful,
entertaining work. The largest work (almost a
half hour) ends the program with 12 variations
and an extended fugue based on Beethoven’s
Bagatelle, Op. 119:11. I would rarely use the
term charming for Reger’s music, but this
surely is—and it’s a grand, fitting and extended
finale to one of the most inventive programs
I’ve come across in a long time.

Earlier (2010) releases in my library by the
Stenzl duo include the Brahms *Haydn Varia-
tions*, Liszt’s *Don Juan Reminiscences* and
these same Reger Variations (*Ars Musici*
232278, not reviewed). I was also quite
impressed with their piano sonatas for 4 hands
by Johann Wilms (*Carus* 83434, *Mar/Apr*
2010). They are an exceptionally fine duo easi-
ly on the same level as the Kontarsky, Paratore,
and Contiguglia brothers. Genuin has done an
admirable job (as always) with the production
values. If the program appeals to you, the per-
formances could not be better.

**My Favorite Trumpet Concertos**

Arutiunian, Planal, Torelli, Neruda, Haydn, Pia-
zolla, Morricone

Josef Holbauer; Schonbrunn Festival/ Guido Mancusi

Solo Musica 234—74 minutes

Austrian trumpeter Josef Hofbauer’s warm
tone and seeming ease with these pieces make
for very enjoyable listening. In the flashy Aru-
tiunian concerto, orchestral sounds are vivid,
individuals easily heard. There are moments,
in fact, when the trumpet is slightly overbal-
anced. Afincionados will notice that Hofbauer
plays a brief and rather easy cadenza at the end.

The 1966 Trumpet Concerto by Robert
Planal is so breezy and pleasant that I wonder
why it has so few recordings. Besides Hof-
bauer’s, I know only of ones by John Holt
(Sept/Oct 2007: 208), Ole Edvard Antonsen
(Jan/Feb 2014: 221), and Pierre Kremer
(Sept/Oct 2013: 245)—as well as what was
probably the first one, by Maurice André.

The old pieces—concertos by Torelli,
Neruda, and Haydn—are played with tasteful
enthusiasm in the fast movements, heartfelt

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**KANG**
expression in the slow ones. In the Haydn, woodwinds (especially solo flute) seem more prominent than usual.

The album ends with beautiful arrangements of Astor Piazzolla’s ‘Libertango’ and ‘Gabriel's Oboe,’ by Ennio Morricone.

The album ends with beautiful arrangements of Astor Piazzolla’s ‘Libertango’ and ‘Gabriel’s Oboe,’ by Ennio Morricone.

KILPATRICK

Hardanger Fiddle

HALVORSEN: Fossegrimen; NYHUS: 3 Pieces;
KVANDAL: Quintet

Ashild Breie Nyhus; Per Kristian Skalstad, Per Saemund Bjorkum, v; Audun Sandvik, vc; Ingrid Breie Nyhus, p

Simax 1333—44 minutes

This is the first hardanger fiddle collection that I have had to review. The hardanger fiddle is a type of Norwegian violin with playing strings and four sympathetic strings. In this respect, it is similar to many Renaissance and baroque instruments, like the viola da braccio or the baryton. The hardanger fiddle is usually used in folk music, but this program has music written in a classical vein for the instrument.

Johan Halvorsen’s Fossegrimen (The Watersprite) was written for a play by that title and gave a prominent role to the fiddle. It was arranged for hardanger fiddle and piano by Ingrid Breie Nyhus. Sven Nyhus (b 1932) is professor of folk music at the Norwegian Music Academy, where he taught Ashild Breie Nyhus. His music has the flavor of Norwegian folk music but is academic in structure. Johan Kvandal’s (1919-99) quintet is in two movements. The hardanger fiddle adds a folksish tang to the music that otherwise sounds academic in a reserved, modern idiom.

If you want to hear hardanger fiddle in the context of classical music, this is for you. I prefer to hear it in folk music.

The 12 Seasons

VIVALDI: 4 Seasons; PIAZZOLLA: 4 Seasons of Buenos Aires; SHOR: 4 Seasons of Manhattan

David Aaron Carpenter, va; Salome Chamber Orchestra

Warner 48695—77 minutes

The title The 12 Seasons is derived from simple math, because each of the three composers wrote pieces based on the four seasons.

Astor Piazzolla’s Four Seasons of Buenos Aires aren’t actually entirely by Piazzolla. He wrote the works originally for a pop quartet, but the Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov arranged them for solo violin and orchestra at Gidon Kremer’s request, and that arrangement has been adapted for viola and orchestra here.

My impression of this arrangement in David Aaron Carpenter’s hands is that it is masterly, and Carpenter really is one of the world’s greatest violists.

Kiev-born American composer Alexey Shor (b 1970) has written his Four Seasons of Manhattan in a heavier, more Russian idiom. The effect is pleasing, but not as engaging as the Piazzolla. The Shor pieces were written for viola and orchestra.

The Vivaldi originals arranged for viola complete the program. I have heard livelier performances of these works, but I am consistently impressed by how nimble Carpenter is and how he manages to avoid letting his instrument’s sonority tire the listener’s ears.

The sound is exceptional; I especially enjoyed the ambiance that the engineer gave the Piazzolla. The sound of the Vivaldi could be a bit brighter and livelier.

Viola Suites

REGER: 1-3; BUSCH; WEINREICH: 1-3

Roland Glassl

Audite 97.721—80 minutes

There are two finds on this release: violist Roland Glassl and composer Justus Weinreich. Glassl has immaculate intonation, a flawless technique, and a full, firm tone. Weinreich (1858-1927) was a court musician at Karlsruhe, but aside from that not much is known about him. His three suites are modeled on an 18th-Century dances. The shadow of Bach looms over this music. I wouldn’t say that these compositions are as masterly as Reger’s suites, but they are refreshingly different.

More along the lines of Reger is the Suite by Adolf Busch (1891-1952). It is simpler than Reger, but not as obvious an homage to the baroque as Weinreich’s suites. This is an interesting collection of rare music for solo viola and the finest recordings of the Reger solo viola suites that I know. Roland Glassl plays a viola made by his father in 2002.

Polish Violin Concertos

Bacewicz, Tansman, Spisak, Panufnik

Piotr Plawner; Berlin Chamber Symphony, Jurgen Bruns

Naxos 573496—56 minutes

Here is a pleasant trip to an under-visited corner of the violin world. Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-69) was a child prodigy on the violin and won an Honorable Mention at the first Wieniawski Violin Competition. She stopped playing...
professionally in 1953 and devoted herself to composing and teaching. Her Concerto No. 1 (out of seven) is a charming, short neo-classical piece. I is sprightly and rhythmic; II is lyrical and takes some unusual harmonic directions. III has almost a French pastoral feel to it, and there are plenty of places where it stops to smell the flowers. The first time through, the structure seemed unsatisfying, but after that, the little detours ended up becoming my favorite parts. One place, with a brief appearance of Phrygian mode in the flute, is especially winsome.

Alexandre Tansman’s Five Pieces were written in 1930 for Joseph Szigeti. I, III, and V, the fast movements, are too busy for my taste; but II and IV are pretty if melancholy. Like the Bacewicz, they are neo-classical. Michel Spisak’s Andante and Allegro, from 1954, is for violin and string orchestra. The Andante starts with the violin playing a minor-key, chromatic solo; the orchestra echoes something similar, and when it comes to rest, the violin soars slowly over it. The atmosphere is ghostly, and Spisak develops the material wondrously. The Allegro has some rhapsodic passages, and even though it often dances, the harmonies retain the mystery they had in the Andante. For its strange beauty, this one may be my favorite of the bunch.

Yehudi Menuhin commissioned a concerto from Andrzej Panufnik in 1971, and he gave its premiere in London the next year. Panufnik eschewed virtuosity, wanting to explore to the utmost Yehudi’s rare powers of spirituality. I begins with a meditative introduction; things pick up when the orchestra enters, but the movement returns to its prayers near the end. The violin part is abstract but gentle. II is singing, yet the slow-moving orchestral chords make it seem frozen in time. III is based on the oberek dance, but the writing doesn’t sound too folk-influenced. Panufnik based the themes in II and III on two intervals—the major and minor thirds—and I think he limited himself too much.

The violinist plays with strong emotion and an engaged intellect, but his intonation slips quite a bit. No complaints about the orchestra or the sound. Notes are in English and German.
Catholic liturgy. Julien Krein’s *Berceuse* of 1928 reflects a traditional belief that the soul leaves the body during sleep and travels to other worlds. I had not heard the Krein before now, and I don’t find it a particularly interesting piece except for the ecstatic middle section. Schiff and Cameron Grant are good musicians but outclassed in the Franck and Bloch.

**Mi-Bemol Saxophone Ensemble**

Alarcon, Crepin, Demersseman, Dudas, Kalinkovich, Milhaud, Puccini, Tomasi  
Kenneth Tse, Masahiro Maeda  
Crystal 781—67 minutes

In 1989, Japanese saxophonist Masahiro Maeda founded the Mi-Bemol Ensemble, a group of more than 20 professional saxophonists dedicated to transcriptions of classical favorites and brand new literature for their medium. University of Iowa saxophone professor Kenneth Tse joins the Mi-Bemol Ensemble for a recital of familiar tunes and lesser known yet highly accessible works.

The program includes the virtuosic *Carnival of Venice* by the 19th Century French flute virtuoso Jules Demersseman, the *Ballade* (1939) for alto saxophone and orchestra by French modernist Henri Tomasi, the *Fantasia* (2011) for alto saxophone and orchestra by American-born composer Richard Dudas, based on an elegy by South Korean poet-composer Lyun Joon Kim; the *Concerttango* (2008) for band by Spanish composer Luis Alarcon, *Saxflight* by Belgian saxophone professor and retired Belgian Royal Air Force Band conductor Alain Crepin, the *Concerto Capriccio on Themes of Paganini* by the late Moscow Conservatory professor Grigorij Kalinkovich; the Darius Milhaud *Scaramouche* (1937), originally for two pianos; and the Puccini ‘Nessun Dorma’.

The concert is well played. Tse sports a lively and attractive timbre, excellent fingers, and heartfelt phrasing; and while his tone can turn somewhat reedy and diffuse sometimes, it has a supple quality that allows him to swoop into and out of the saxophone soundscape. Meanwhile, the Mi-Bemol Ensemble boasts such exceptional balance, blend, and intonation that the group may be mistaken for a full concert band and its wide variety of wind color. Beyond the lovely sculpted performances, though, the overall manner is cautious and conservative, especially with regard to volume and direction. Saxophone aficionados will enjoy this release, but broad music lovers may wish for more.

**Piano Centric**

Beethoven, Ibert, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Saint-Saens  
Kathryn Tremills, p; Sibylle Marquardt, fl; Peter Stoll, cl; Eric Reed, hn; Achilles Liarmakopoulos, tbn—Opening Day 7439—55 minutes

In this Canadian production, prominent Toronto pianist Kathryn Tremills heads a chamber recital with Royal Conservatory of Music flute professor Sibylle Marquardt, University of Toronto clarinet professor Peter Stoll, eminent New York horn player and former Canadian Brass member Eric Reed, and Greek prodigy and current Canadian Brass trombonist Achilles Liarmakopoulos.

The program consists of the Beethoven Clarinet Trio in B-flat, Op. 11; the Saint-Saens Tarantella in A minor for flute, clarinet, and piano; the Ibert *Deux Interludes* for flute, clarinet, and piano; and the Rimsky-Korsakoff Quintet for piano and winds. Liarmakopoulos assumes the role of the cellist in the Beethoven and the role of the bassoonist in the Rimsky-Korsakoff.

Tremills deserves credit for her creativity. The famous Beethoven has a fascinating new color; the Saint-Saens and the Ibert are rare yet delightful guests on chamber concerts; and while the Rimsky-Korsakoff is more Gallic than Slavic, its craft and charm are worth blowing off the inches of dust this piece often collects. Moreover, Liarmakopoulos is a sensational talent: his beautiful tone, supple phrasing, and incredible technique rival the capabilities of the instruments he replaces, and his music-making ought to be heard well outside brass circles.

The rest of the presentation, though, is very bumpy. While Reed is rock solid in the Rimsky-Korsakoff, Marquardt and Stoll undermine their expressive ideas with thin, hollow tones and dubious intonation all through. Tremills boasts superb clarity and a wide array of touch and dynamic range, though she could sometimes play with more inspiration and leadership.

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Every man derives most of his thoughts, opinions, and principles from others. Obedience to some authority is inescapable; if we reject the authority of tradition, then we must accept the authority of local fashion.

WH Auden
American Classics
Barber, Bernstein, Copland, Delerue, Ives
Eric Aubier, tpt; Philippe Berrod, Philippe Cuper, cl; Christelle Chaizy, eng hn; Nicolas Prost, sax; Angeline Pondépeyre, Laurent Wagschal, p; Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine/Sebastien Billard; Brittany Symphony/Claude Schnitzler; Paris Light Band/Fabrice Colas

Indesens 78—74 minutes

In this Indesens compilation spanning 1992 through 2015, several prominent French musicians collaborate with three French ensembles in four 20th Century American masters punctuated by the neo-Baroque theme from “La Nuit Americaine” (1973) by prolific French film and television composer Georges Delerue.

Included here are the July 1992 recording of the Copland Clarinet Concerto with Paris Opera solo clarinet Philippe Cuper and the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne, the 1998 recording of the Bernstein short ‘Rondo for Lifey’ with trumpet soloist Eric Aubier and pianist Angeline Pondépeyre, the 2009 recording of the Bernstein Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs with soloist Nicholas Prost on soprano saxophone, assisted by the Paris Light Band; the March 2015 reading of the Bernstein Clarinet Sonata with Paris Orchestra solo clarinet Philippe Berrod and pianist Laurent Wagschal; and a September 2014 recording of Copland’s original incidental music from the Irwin Shaw 1939 play Quiet City with Aubier on trumpet, Berrod on clarinet, Prost on saxophone, and Wagschal on piano.

In February 2015, Aubier and the Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine recorded four more selections for the album: The Unanswered Question by Ives, the Delerue, Copland’s official 1941 version of Quiet City with Garde Républicaine English horn player Christelle Chaizy, and the Barber Adagio for Strings.

Much like the assemblage, the performances are somewhat haphazard. Casual listeners will appreciate the enthusiasm and the sincerity; yet fastidious listeners will find many of the timbres too thin and coarse, a lot of the execution rather faulty, and a great deal of the teamwork lacking. Berrod and Wagschal offer wonderful lyricism in the Bernstein sonata, even if the rhythmic climax is somewhat rough; and while Aubier and Cuper have great stage presence, they could use more polish and consistency. Prost and Chaizy play very well, though Bernstein’s jazz band can overwhelm Prost’s delicate soprano saxophone.

The ensembles, too, are uneven. Although the strings of the Orchestre Symphonique de Bretagne bring marvelous warmth and tenderness to the first half of the Copland concerto, they fall victim to the composer’s difficult and awkward writing in the second half. And while the members of the Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine know their scores, all of their readings need much more refinement and weight. The Paris Light Band creates exciting moments down the stretch in the Bernstein Prelude, Fugue, and Riffs, but the section elements are too patchy and jagged.

HANUDEl

Creation
SCHNITTKE: Suite in the Old Style; BEETHOVEN: Trio in B-flat; VAZQUEZ: Triptych

Poulenc Trio
Delos 3516—71 minutes

The Schnittke Suite is performed twice, first with poems by Lia Purpura read by the author after each movement, and (at the end of the program) the music without the poetry. In between are the Beethoven Op. 11 Trio and Triptych by contemporary Spanish composer Octavio Vazquez.

Alfred Schnittke is known for his originality and eclecticism, often juxtaposing different styles from past and present. This suite was originally composed for violin and piano or harpsichord, combining a pseudo-baroque style and extremely tonal language. It is quite conventional, even bland, with little hint of the complexity and tension typical of this composer. The ending of the Pastoral (I) trails off, leaving the harmony unresolved. The final movement has a brief moment of sharp dissonance, then reprises the music of the Pastoral, including the unresolved ending. It’s a bit disappointing, though the Poulenc Trio plays it very well.

The Beethoven trio was originally composed for clarinet, cello, and piano but also published with a transcription for violin, cello and piano. The arrangement here was based on the latter. It’s an early work, written in 1797, and the virtuosic piano writing gives hints of the Beethoven to come.

The Triptych by Spanish composer Octavio Vazquez is a fine work and the strongest performance on the program. His music is fresh and original, with some echoes of Shostakovich and Poulenc. It opens with a fast-paced perpetuum mobile. The slow movement is a kind of chaconne with variations (according to the composer), which shows off the technical capabilities and expressive range...
of the players. The finale is a Prokofieff-like scherzo, where themes from earlier movements reappear. It’s a bit of a letdown to follow this lively, captivating piece with another dose of the Schnittke. It would have been far more interesting to hear the Poulenc Trio finish off with something as interesting as the Vazquez.

Program notes were written by Bryan Young, the bassoonist of the Trio.

**Mediterraneum, Orient, Africa, Sicily**

> Capella de Ministrers; Musica Reservata
> Barcelona/ Carles Magraner
> Lic anus 1639—75 minutes

This is the third and final volume of a set of recordings that brings to life the journeys of Ramon Llull—a 13th Century poet and theologian—using music he might have encountered while traveling among the populations living around the Mediterranean rim. This and two other discs form part of an edition that comes complete with a book entailing Llull’s travels (below).

Disc 3 combines instrumental music from various sources with songs that seem to reflect the Christian attitudes Llull propagated through his writings. He also composed songs that must have been sung, but, to the best of my knowledge, none the music survives. What we have instead is sacred songs by Troubadours and anonymous songs from the Canti gas de Santa Maria, the Codex Las Huelgas, the Chansonnier de Clairambault, and a motet from the Codex Montpellier. Instrumental music based on songs by Troubadours or by anonymous composers from Asia and North Africa evoke local coloring indigenous instruments.

The songs sound beautiful, performed in their original languages and to the accompaniment of vielle, harp, organ, bells, and various other percussion instruments. The repertory includes Marcabru’s ‘Pax in Nomine Domini,’ Peire Cardenal’s ‘Sirventes Novell Volh Comensar,’ ‘Jhesus Cristz, Filh de Dieu Viu’ by Guiraut Riquier’ is recited over an instrumental accompaniment. The German song ‘Nu Tret Herzuo der Boessen Welle’ is performed with improvised polyphony by several male and female voices. The cantiga ‘Quen Leixar Santa Maria’ is sung by a soloist with a chorus joining in on the refrains. Texts are in English.

**Ramon Llull: The Last Pilgrimage**

> Capella de Ministerrs, Musica Reservata
> Barcelona/ Carles Magraner
> Licanus 1640 [3CD] 206 minutes

**Ramon Llull: A Time of Conquests, Dialogue, Disconsolation**

> Capella Reial de Catalunya, Hesperian XXI/ Jordi Savall—AliaVox 9917 [2CD] 137:29

He was a remarkable personality of Late Medieval culture (1233-1316). He was a poet and a novelist, philosopher and scientist, theologian and mystic, missionary and multiculturalist. His exploration of rational method make him a precursor in sociology and even computer science. He produced somewhere between 250 and 300 writings, in Latin and in Catalan—he is regarded as a literary founding father of the latter. He was born on Majorca of Catalan background and identity, but he was fluent in a number of languages, including Arabic, and was a compulsive traveler.

The year 2016 marks the 700th Anniversary of his death, which has understandably provoked celebrations, notably from Catalan quarters. At hand are two recorded commemorations. Both are issued in the format of the “CD-book.” The pioneer in that format, Savall, recorded his program at a public concert in November 2015, but fellow Catalan Magraner anticipated him in a series of studio sessions in September of that year.

Magraner’s project has been issued by Licanus as three separate CDs (1637, 1638, 1639—the first two already reviewed by Mr Brewer (S/O) and the third by Mr Loewen (above). In its CD-book form, the Licanus release parallels Savall’s: a thick book-packaging; full vocal texts, with voluminous annotations, in sections separated by language—Catalan, Spanish, English, French for Licanus; Catalan, French, English, Spanish, German, Italian for AliaVox. There are many illustrations in each. Licanus gives period images almost entirely in black and white, but AliaVox is far more lavish, uses color, and (unlike Licanus) identifies the sources for the period images. Both devote many pages to promoting earlier releases on the label.

A certain difficulty comes up in deciding how to spell his name. Its Catalan form is “Ramon Llull,” which AliaVox sensibly uses in all language sections. Licanus needlessly subjects the name to change through the various languages. Sometimes elsewhere you will find the spelling as “Lul” or “Lull.” In Latin it is “Rai mondus Lullus.” But here, for the French, it is
Raymond Lulle, in Italian Raimondo Lullo, and in English it is the preposterous "Raymond Lully". (Rest quietly, Jean-Baptiste!)

Let’s settle for Llull. He was an extraordinary synthesizer of so much both new and old in medieval thinking, running in so many directions. He began as a secular poet in the troubadour tradition, but then, under the effects of a strong religious conversion, devoted himself to serious thought, mostly spiritual. He was an ardent missionary, undertaking repeated ventures around the Mediterranean, especially to North Africa, and eventually to Jerusalem, but including Muslim communities in Majorca, Spain, and Italy. He became celebrated for rethinking the idea of the crusade.

In his lifetime, in 1291, the fall of Acre to the Mamelukes had completed the expulsion of Christian power from the mainland of Syria-Palestine. Schemes of crusading revival became merely empty talk. But Llull tirelessly advanced the idea of replacing the “crusade of violence” with the “crusade of persuasion”, for which he devised a widely circulated program. Deploring violence, he preached (and practiced) the idea of interfaith discussion and debate. To this end, he became a champion of the teaching of languages in Christian institutions, and he himself taught some Arabic. His motivation remained traditional—to convert the world to Christianity—but his method anticipated a lot of what we admire today in inter-cultural exchange and inter-religious understanding.

Both releases offer introductory essays on Llull’s life and achievements, and then go on to use music of his era to illustrate both. In ventures such as these, it is easy to turn out a program that is simply “Music in the Time of —”. And it true that there are no musical selections that relate directly to Llull himself—though the Savall program does give us one later poem of his as sung, on Llull’s own advice, to a melody by Guiraut de Bornell. Still, both programs annotate each piece and fit it into the biographical and historical context. For Licanus, that process is straightforward, selection by selection. For AliaVox, the musical selections are interwoven into the readings of titles and then of contemporaneous texts spoken in Catalan by a pair of actors (Silvia Bel, Jordi Boixaderas). That is altogether appropriate to a regional concert performance, but it is of little meaning if you do not know Catalan and would like the space used for more music.

The Savall program manages to fit in 29 selections, and Magraner has room for 47. That I have not been able to find any specific duplications of items between the two testifies to how much musical material there is out there. Both directors draw on the same areas of literature (by composers both known and unknown), such as the Laudario di Cortona, the Cantigas of Alfonso the Wise, and other devotional song; contemporaneous liturgical and para-liturgical Latin music, and secular song, along with examples of Moorish, Turkish, Jewish, and (for Magraner) even Greek music.

Magraner has a pool of 8 singers and 12 instrumentalists at his disposal; Savall has 7 singers (including the lustrous Maria Cristina Kiehr) and 8 instrumentalists, plus 7 performers of various Levantine backgrounds—a particular group he has long cultivated, and one that gives him an advantage in the representation of “Eastern” musical traditions. Both directors are only too happy to give their instrumentalists repeated display. Savall is quite free-wheeling sometimes with his arrangements (one Latin Te Deum is a real horror!), but Magraner might well have been less generous with added drummings and harpings. I agree with Mr Brewer’s general approval of Magrander’s direction, though I sometimes find his tempos a bit on the slow side in more familiar items. But if the Magraner performances are good, Savall’s are really splendid, full of verve and color.

There is perhaps a narrow audience (outside of Barcelona) for releases celebrating this unusual individual, and only a few collectors might want both of these releases. Savall’s program, visually more lavish, has a broader historical scope than Magraner’s, and the material is more clearly set forth. Savall’s musical content is less extensive, but it is more astutely selected and performed more robustly. Magraner’s set, though, has much more music to offer (and without the distraction of spoken Catalan texts) presenting a particularly rich treasury of period material—most of which is not readily available elsewhere.

**Word Police: Aggravate**

The French word refers strictly to the appetizer, never the main course. The same is true in formal English, according to the dictionary: “the course before the main course”. For some reason the word has come to mean “main course” in many American restaurants. It sounds rather pretentious. Why not just say “main course”?  

*BARKER*
The Sun Most Radiant
Eton Choirbook 4

BROWNE: Salve Regina I+II; HORWOOD: Gaude Flore Virginali; STRATFORD: Magnificat

Christ Church Cathedral Choir/ Stephen Darlington— Avie 2359—69 minutes

This is the fourth volume in a distinguished series of music from the Eton Choirbook. The technical level of these performances is astounding. As I said in my reviews of the second (July/Aug 2013, p 195) and third volumes (Jan/Feb 2015, p 223) there is no need to make allowance for the fact that the treble parts are sung by boys rather than adult singers. Their technical polish and artistry are little short of miraculous. Sometimes the men sound slightly strained, but not the boys.

Two of the works on this volume are claimed as first recordings: the second of two settings of ‘Salve Regina’ by John Browne (fl c1480-1505) and ‘Gaude Flore Virginali’ by William Horwood (c1430-1484). Browne is widely regarded as the most gifted of the composers represented in the book. It originally contained 15 works of his, more than of any of the other composers, but only 9 of them survive. Of the book’s 224 leaves, all but 126 are lost. Horwood was director of music at Lincoln Cathedral from 1477. The piece recorded here is a lengthy poem in praise of the Virgin Mary in a verse form like the Stabat Mater.

The review copy sent to me is defective. The sound of each track cuts off abruptly, in some cases only a few minutes into the track. I trust this will not be the case with the production copies.

GATENS

Ice & Longboats: Ancient Scandinavia
Ensemble Mare Balticum/ Aake & Jens Egevad
Delphian 34181—76:24

This is the second in Delphian’s series of (so far) three volumes devoted to the “ancient” music—i.e., the earliest—of various European countries and lands. Scottish Highlands are the subject of the first (34171) and Celtic lands the third (34183).

The program of 29 selections jumps around in three different phases of Scandinavian musical sounds. For the first two—the prehistoric and the Viking, almost no actual music survives, and therefore the concentration is on the instruments that can be recreated from archaeological and literary evidence. The material recorded is almost entirely improvised or invented by the performers in this Swedish group, save for a few scattered bits that survive in folk tradition.

The third phase represented in the medieval one, running up to the mid-16th Century. That yields a few songs, but mainly Latin sacred pieces. One of them, the two-voice hymn in honor of St Magnus, ‘Nobilis Humilis’ of the 12th Century, is the only piece that has any recorded history before this. Others come from the 16th Century Finnish hymnbook, the “Piae Cantiones”, and some of those have been explored on records.

The reconstructed instruments, and their uses, are not always pleasing, much less convincing, but the efforts are fascinating. All of the vocal selections are sung as solos or duets by the two members of the group who happen to be female. I raise my purist eyebrows about the use of women’s voices in Latin liturgical music, but these two do sing prettily.

The booklet is long, thorough, and entirely in English, and texts and translations are supplied for the vocal items.

People curious about the earliest Scandinavonian musical sounds will find this release fascinating, while collectors of early music may well enjoy it as a true fringe find.

BARKER

Latino Ladino
Yaniv d’Or, ct; Ensemble NAIA & Barrocade/ Amit Tiefenbrunn
Naxos 573566—67 minutes

This release, subtitled “Songs of Exile and Passion from Spain and Latin America”, is a collection of Hispanic and Sephardic works, effectively sung by Yaniv d’Or. While most of the songs are from the Sephardic tradition in the Ladino dialect, they come from many different regions of the Jewish diaspora, including the Spanish colonies of the New World. Mixed in among these are modern songs in Spanish by Isaac Albeniz and Violeta Parra and two baroque works (by Etienne Moulinié and Vincenzo Calestani) and two instrumental interludes (by Gaspar Sanz and Biagio Marini).

Compared to other counterenors I have heard in this repertoire (such as José Lemos, May/June 2008: 247 & Mar/Apr 2011: 280, or Juan Francisco Sanz, Nov/Dec 2010: 269), D’Or has much better diction and is more expressive. The arrangements (termed “folk-baroque”) are quite inventive, even when D’Or combines quotations from Vivaldi and Rameau with the anonymous Ladino song, ‘Hia mia’ (My Daughter), in order to express “love’s torment”. While this might be considered his-

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torically uninformed performance, the entire recording is quite enjoyable. The full texts and translations are available as a download.

BREWER

**Li Due Orfei**
Caccini, Peri, others
Marc Mauillon, voice; Angelique Mauillon, hp
Arcana 393—57 minutes

These are sensitive, flexible, and heartfelt performances by the sister-and-brother team of Angelique and Marc Mauillon. There’s a good deal of variety in the program, with a mix of strophic songs and declamatory, freer-form vocal compositions along with a few pieces played on solo harp. There are 12 pieces by Giulio Caccini and 5 by Jacopo Peri, the two Florentine composers often regarded as the first “fathers” of the opera genre.

Marc Mauillon uses a quasi-spoken style sometimes, and the whispering at the start of Peri’s ‘Tu Darmi, E ‘L Dolce Sonno’—rising to full voice declaring the torments of love—is a close fit to the text where the poet initially addresses the sleeping beloved. His voice has a certain edge to it, which takes a little getting used to, and I found that listening closely with headphones for a while helped me hear the elasticity of pace, articulation, and expression that serves the music well.

The two performers are very well suited to each other, and exercise a range of color to great effect, from the languid melancholy sighs of Caccini’s ‘Movetevi A Pieta’ to the elaborate and decorative vocal ornamentation the composer wrote out in his published music.

Notes, texts, translations.

**Quando Cala La Notte**
Frottola by Cara, Cavazzoni, Tromboncino, others
Enea Sorini, voice; Corina Marti, hpsi
Carpe Diem 16308—66 minutes

To unify their program of 16th-Century frottolas, Enea Sorini and Corina Marti selected the theme of nighttime and took their CD title from Petrarch’s sonnet, ‘Quando Cala La Notte’ (When Night Descends). As described in the booklet notes, night has many and varied connotations: peace, fear, reflection, and love among them.

When programming a full CD of these short pieces, interpreters need to decide the extent to which they will vary timbre, tone, and instruments in order to supply contrasts and sustain interest. It’s easier to supply variety in the vocal pieces (7 of the 20 pieces here) because two musicians engage with each other and inspire the little twists and turns that animate the sound, punctuate the pulse, or illustrate the poetic text. Together, these two musicians push each other to be flexible, vibrant, lively, seductive, or thoughtful.

Enea Sorini sings with good color and expression, and the vocal pieces are better than the harpsichord ones. The frottolas on harpsichord are well played by Corina Marti, but in a rather careful and deliberate manner. Since she plays with much more animation when accompanying Sorini, it would be good to have that same singing spirit when there isn’t a singer. One fine example of this type of “singing” playing is Marti’s interpretation of Cavazzoni’s ‘Madame Vous Aves Mon Cuor’.

The early Renaissance harpsichord used here has a distinctive sound, but not a wide range of color for the player to draw on. For the listener this means that it’s important to be attentive to subtle details of articulation and savor the resonance in the harpsichord, which Marti brings out very well.

Notes, texts, translations, bios.

**Viva Italia—17th Century Rome**

CHARPENTIER: Dixit Dominus; VICTORIA: Ave Regina Caelorum; Salve Regina; Regina Caeli; CARISSIMI: O Dulcissimum Mariæ Nomen; SANCES: Mass Sancta Maria Magdalenae; Ave Maris Stella; Vulnerasti Cor Meum; PALESTRI-NA: Alma Redemptoris Mater
Duke Vespers Ensemble; Mallarmé Chamber Players; Washington Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble/ Brian Schmidt
MSR 1580—58 minutes

This is a concert recording made at the Duke University Chapel, Durham, North Carolina, in April of 2015. The program consists of sacred works mainly by composers who had connections with the Collegio Germanico in Rome, a seminary for the education of German-speaking priests. From 1574 it was found at the Palazzo di Sant’Apollinare and the adjoining church of the same name. Tomas Luis de Victoria became choirmaster there in 1575, and under his leadership and of his successors the church was one of the most important centers for sacred music in Rome. In contrast with the conservative tradition of unaccompanied choral music at the Sistine Chapel, instruments were often used at the Collegio Germanico, especially from the 1580s on. At first they were used to double the voice parts, but the musical establishment there soon took a leading role in the development of baroque
concertato church music with independent instrumental parts, often quite lavish. The recording contains examples of both.

The old school is represented by the works of Palestrina and Victoria. Palestrina’s ‘Alma Redemptoris Mater’ is sung unaccompanied, but the pieces by Victoria are doubled by the organ. Giacomo Carissimi (1605-74) was one of the most influential composers associated with the Collegio Germanico in his long tenure as its music director. He is represented here by a short Marian motet, ‘O Dulcissimum Mariae Nomen’ for two solo sopranos and organ continuo, a sacred vocal counterpart to the baroque trio sonata. Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704) studied with Carissimi in Rome, and while he worked in Paris for most of his career, the Italian influence was pervasive. His Vesper Psalm ‘Dixit Dominus’ was probably written around 1688 in the format of the French grand motet for a group of soloists, choir, and orchestra.

The principal work on the program, the Mass Sancta Maria Magdalenae, is by the least familiar of these composers, Giovanni Felice Sances (1600-79). Born in Rome, he was a chorister at the Collegio Germanico but later entered the service of the Hapsburg court in Vienna where he remained for more than 40 years, first as a singer, later as music director of the imperial chapel. The mass was probably written in 1665, at a time when the Feast of St Mary Magdalene was celebrated by the Austrian court with lavish ceremony. The mass is a full-fledged example of the baroque concertato style for soloists, choir, and an orchestra of strings and winds. Listeners may be reminded of comparable works by Monteverdi. It is claimed here as a first recording. Also by Sances are two shorter pieces, ‘Ave Maris Stella’ and ‘Vulnerasti Cor Meum’, for solo voices and continuo. The first is cast in a baroque ritornello structure with a pair of violins. The second includes continuous variations over a descending tetrachord.

The performances are very good technically and warmly engaging. The Duke Vespers Ensemble is a choir of 24 voices that sings evening services every Thursday of the academic year as well as concerts. I would not describe their unaccompanied Palestrina as flawless, but the standard is very high. The cavernous acoustic of the Duke University Chapel is very much in evidence. Perhaps it is for clarity in such a setting that the recording seems excessively close. It took several tries to get the volume to a comfortable level without losing presence. The ear does adjust. Listeners with an interest in this repertory will find the recording a delight.

GATENS

The New Old Albion

Music around the Harp Consorts of William Lawes
Il Caleidoscopio Ensemble
Brilliant 95274—61:19

This program is built around the conceit of reviving musical styles of the past in later 17th Century England. And the basis of the conceit is the nature of this ensemble of four players. Their instruments are violin, viola da gamba, harp, and lute or theorbo. These are the instruments called for by William Lawes (1602-45)—a leading musician at the court of Charles I—in a subgroup of his many instrumental works, the “Harp Consorts”.

The program gives us examples of Lawes’s music for this combination, much of it quite beautiful. But then fancy takes over (and I don’t mean that as a musicological pun). It is imagined that just this combination of instruments is set to work in the reign of Charles II, with the aim of both reviving past literature and making new additions to it.

On the one hand, we have older music in transcriptions or adaptations: three keyboard pieces by William Byrd (1543-1623) and one lute piece by John Dowland (1563-1626). On the other hand, we have the new music (supposedly neo-old): a group of dances by the transitional Matthew Locke (1621-77), “divisions” (or variations) by another transitional figure, Christopher Simpson (c.1602-69), and two selections from a publication of 1684 by John Playford (1623-86).

The whole idea is rather forced and is backed up by juvenile album notes. Still, there is plenty of really interesting and delightful music here, which can be enjoyed without worrying about the strained concepts and scholarly fussing. I particularly recommend one of the variations pieces from Playford, Faronells Division on a Ground, which turns out to be a treatment of the endlessly familiar folia motive. But you can find your own choices.

Lovely sound.

BARKER

17th Century Xacaras & Dances

Musica Ficta—Centaur 3501—70:24

Hispanic music of the baroque, whether for the court or church, was imbued with the spirit of dancing. The repertoire chosen for this new
recording includes instrumental and vocal works based on the traditional dance patterns of the Folia, Chacona, Passacalles, and, unique to Hispanic culture, the Xacara (or Jacara). The instrumental selections are found in collections by Antonio Martín y Coll, Antonio de Santa Cruz, Juan Cabanilles, Gaspar Sanz, and others. The vocal selections can be as erotic as Juan Arañés’s ’Un sarao de la chacona’ (A chaconne soiree), or as spiritual as the “Christmas xacara”, ’Los que fueren de buen gusto’ (Those with good taste), by Francisco de Vidalles, an organist for the cathedrals in Mexico City and Puebla.

The members of Musica Ficta with their guests have created performances that are inventive and vivacious. The three male vocalists, both as soloists or as an ensemble, effectively convey the various affects of the texts. It is unfortunate that the booklet, which includes a very good essay on the music, omits the texts and translations for the last four vocal works.

**Suite Life**

Bergen Barokk—La wo 1096—66 minutes

This is a most pleasant potpourri of French baroque chamber music. The four suites are arranged by key, but the performers have created eclectic mixes of short dances by many different composers rather than single integral collections by Nicolas Chedeville, François Couperin, Michel de la Barre, Jacques-Martin Hotteterre le Romain, Marin Marais, Anne Danican Philidor, and Robert de Visée.

The five members of Bergen Barokk—Forde Thorsen (recorders), Hans Knut Sveen (hpsl), Markku Luolajan-Mikkola (viola da gamba), Thomas C. Boysen (theorbo), and Thor-Harlad Johnsen (guitar)—are all sensitive to the French style. I found both the Chaconne in A by Philidor and the Chaconne in G by De la Barre very effective, with the constant shifting between the possible permutations and combinations of these five accomplished musicians.

**Voyages de l’Amour**

Ensemble Meridiana

Chandos 812—57:39

This is a collection of chamber music from 18th Century France by Joseph Bodin de Boismortier, Jean-Fery Rebel, and Michel Corrette. Five works by Boismortier are included: a ‘Simphonie pour l’arrivée des Genie Elemen-

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simple epigones, of the great Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), and who had ties to the musical world of Rome that Corelli dominated.

The program offers five works in the concerto grosso form. Corelli is the logical starting point, with his Op. 6: 4 in D. Then we have Op. 7: 11 in A minor by a rival, Giuseppe Valentini (1681-1753), followed by works of two pupils: Op. 1: 11 in C minor of Pietro Locatelli (1695-1764) and Op. 3: 4 in A minor of the little-known Pietro Castrucci (1679-1752). Things come full circle at the end with a part of the expansion into concerti grossi of the full set of Corelli's Op. 5 violin sonatas—here No. 7 in D minor.

All this makes a very enjoyable program. Yet, allowing for bias through degrees of familiarity, it seems to my ear that Corelli’s own music stands head and shoulders over his companions in beauty and character.

Admirers of the original group will want to know how this newest configuration stacks up. Well, there is not quite the sheen and suavity of playing familiar from the original group. On the other hand, the current players have not joined the period-style movement, even if they show some influence from it. Vibrato is not avoided, but is used modestly—and often to sweet effect. Quite noticeable, though, is the acceptance of the speedier tempos with which Baroque music is now generally played. Indeed, in the Corelli—the most familiar of the works here—the pacing is absolutely break-neck. Traditionalists may be dismayed.

Still, this is a nice collection of interesting music, performed with a fine combination of energy and elegance that cannot be shrugged off. Just what lies ahead for the current I Musici is difficult to predict, but the group clearly deserves a wider recognition than it has these days.

BARKER

Abschied & Ewigkeit
Weser-Renaissance / Manfred Cordes
CPO 555010—68 minutes

This program of music by Johann Philippe Förtsch (1652-1732), and the Österreich brothers Michael (1658-after 1709) and Georg (1664-1735), explores the grand cantatas composed for state funerals around the turn of the 18th Century at the ducal court of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorf. Each of the five works is substantial, consisting of arias and recitatives for the soloists and choruses, all accompanied by chamber orchestra and continuo.

As usual, Manfred Cordes brings the best out of his performers. The dotted rhythms of the “amens” that close Förtsch’s Ich Vergesse, Was Dahinten Ist are both virtuosic and emphatic. At the conclusion of Plötzlich Müssen die Leute Sterben—for the funeral of Maria Elisabeth Niederstedt in 1702—Georg Österreich has the tenors declaim the chorale melody in long pitches to contrast the agitated passagework of the chorus and instruments. Georg Österreich’s funeral cantata for Duke Friedrich IV, also from 1702, exposes listeners to extremes of feeling by forcing singers to the extremes of their vocal ranges. Harry van der Kamp (bass) descends considerably on the phrase “Sei getreu bis in den Tod”, while Sabine Lutzerberger reaches the upper extremes of her voice on “Heulet, ihr Tannen”. The strain in her voice seems to underscore the affect of “Heulet” (wailing), while her chro-
matic passages on “und Sterben ist mein Ge-

Sang, Var Sang: Swedish Choral

Ida Falk Winland, s; Anders Olund, org; Katarina

BIS 2237 [SACD] 58 minutes

Song, Our Song! proclaims the title, and why

shouldn’t it? For like the rest of Scandinavia,

Sweden never seems to run out of worthy

composers or good choirs to sing their music.

And so it is with the Danderyds, and with Alice

Tegner (1864-1943) and Gustaf Nordquist

(1886-1949), the composers of this

seasonally-charged program. The daughter of

a sea captain, Alice Tegner was an organist and

choir master whose difficult personal life

never kept her from crafting uplifting hymns,

songs for children, and liltting Christmas fare

like ‘Shepherds Make Music’ and ‘The Star of

Bethlehem’, which are both included here.

Introspective interludes come from her as well, such as ‘Saliga’ where the soprano and

string quartet come together to extend the gra-

Nordqvist was a central figure in Swedish

musical life back in the day: organist-for-life at

one of Stockholm’s most prominent churches,
a professor at the city’s conservatory, and an

influential member of the Royal Swedish

Academy of Music. He, too, composed lovely

Christmas fare like ‘Yule, Yule’, ‘At Christmas-
time’, and his version of ‘Star of Bethlehem’.

And he, too could plumb the depths with a
beautiful ‘Consider the Lilies’ and a Psalm 23

that also relies on the soprano and strings to

put its message of comfort across.

The performances are lovely and hand-
somely recorded, with the Super Audio desig-
nation actually living up to its name. Swedish

texts and English translations are supplied, as

are well-intentioned notes that are so poorly

translated it’s hard not to smile.

Dresden Kreuz Choir

Aulen, Walter, Schein, Schutz, Kuhnau, Rhein-
berger, Mauersberger, Mendelssohn, Brahms,

Mozart

Berlin 738—56 minutes

The Dresdner Kreuzchor is very well known,
even to people who have no particular associa-
tion with classical music. The choir’s musical

traditions date back to the 13th Century and have weathered many of the great (and not-so-
great) cultural and political reformations in

history. The works to be heard on this cente-

nary edition are all connected in some way

with the history of the choir at the Church of

the Holy Cross in Dresden and show an excel-

lence that seems to have been maintained

from the beginning. Everything is meticulous

in preparation and execution. There were

moments where I almost wept at the sheer

beauty of the singing. I’ll admit I prefer adult

choirs, but I won’t complain about anything I

heard here.

A few selections are recordings made back

in 1964, but most are much more recent

(Johannes Eccard’s arrangement of ‘Ein Feste

Burg’, for example, was recorded just last year).

The sound is uniformly excellent. If you enjoy

all-male choirs, don’t miss this. The singing is
good and life-affirming. Better brush up on

your German, though: texts are included, but

no translations.

Chorus vel Organa

Ludford, Cornysh, Sheppard, anonymous

Magnus Williamson & James Leitch, org; Gonville

& Caius College Choir/ Geoffrey Webber

Delphian 34158—67 minutes

St Stephen’s Chapel in Westminster was

founded by Edward I and raised to collegiate

status by his grandson Edward III in 1348. It

was an important center for liturgical music

until the foundation was dissolved in 1548.

The building became the first regular meeting-

place of the House of Commons. It is now the

site of St Stephen’s Hall adjoining the modern

Houses of Parliament. A lower chapel is now
called St Mary, Undercroft. This program has

music associated with the chapel in the first

half of the 16th Century.

An important figure is Nicholas Ludford

c1485-c1557), who was employed at the

chapel from the early 1520s. A work explicitly

for the feast of St Stephen is his five-part Mass

Lapidaverunt Stephanum. The Gloria and

Agnus Dei are performed here. The mass sur-

vives in the Caius Choirbook, a source proba-

bly commissioned by a canon of St Stephen’s

for the use of the chapel. A set of royal part-

books, possibly copied by Ludford himself,

contain his cycle of seven Lady Masses for

each day of the week. These are in three parts

and were possibly intended for the lower

chapel. They include settings of the Propers

as well as the Ordinary, and are to be sung in

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performances, but here they are sung to stanzas. A polyphonic setting of the second office hymn on the same text. There are three stanzas by John Sheppard (c1515-58) is framed into the performance decisions for this music. We know, for example, that the organ played an important role in English liturgical music of this period, but no 16th-Century English organs survive, and surviving examples of organ music are sparse. Most organ playing at that time would have been improvised in any case. The ideal instrument proved to be the 2001 Goetze & Gwynn organ in the reconstructed St Teilo parish church on the grounds of the Welsh National Museum at St Fagans near Cardiff. In 1977 parts of a 16th-Century organ were discovered in Wetheringsett, Suffolk, and this became the basis for the new instrument, commissioned under the leadership of Professor John Harper of Bangor University. The new instrument has open metal diapasons at unison, octave, and 15th, and a wooden stopped diapason. Its sound is a perfect match for this repertory.

One of the partbooks containing Ludford’s Lady Masses contains what appear to be polyphonic lines that have no counterparts in the other books. These melodic fragments are known as “squares” and are the basis for organ improvisation between the sung verses. As it happens, the square for the Kyrie of the Lady Mass for Tuesday corresponds to a pair of verses in another English source dating from around 1530. The line appears to be from a French chanson. These two verses are played here, and others are improvised by organist Magnus Williamson based on the stylistic idiom of the period. The result is thoroughly convincing.

A Magnificat by William Cornysh survives in the Caius Choirbook. There were two composers by that name—one who died in 1502, and one in 1523—and it is not known which one composed this piece. Alternate verses are set to polyphony. Intervening verses are most often sung to unison plainsong in modern performances, but here they are sung to faburden, a form of improvised part singing with the plainsong in the middle voice, the lower voice a third below, and the upper voice a fourth above, so as to produce a succession of parallel triads in first inversion.

The program opens with ‘Sancte Dei Pre-tiose’, the Sarum processional and prose for the feast of St Stephen. Also sung here is the office hymn on the same text. There are three stanzas. A polyphonic setting of the second stanza by John Sheppard (c1515-58) is framed by anonymous organ verses of the period. A great deal of learned speculation went into the performance decisions for this music. The program includes three settings of the Magnificat—without the companion Nunc Dimittis—(Stanford, Tippett, Howells) and familiar anthems by Parry, Vaughan Williams, Purcell, Tye, and Leighton. Two morning canticles—a Jubilate by Walton and a Te Deum by Howells—and Messiaen’s Communion motet ‘O Sacrum Convivium’ are included.

Three works in particular stand out as reasons to acquire this. First is the “world premiere recording” of ‘Magnificamus’, the concluding movement of a Vespers Service, Lit by Holy Fire, by Francis Grier, a 1973 organ scholar at Kings. A second important and lesser-known work is George Benjamin’s ‘Twas in the Year that King Uzziah Died. Judith Weir’s ‘Vertue’ is the third work that stands out. These three are also the most recently composed ones on the program.

This is the Record of John’, by Gibbons, is conducted by organ scholar Tom Etheridge and uses the option of a tenor soloist rather than the more customary countertenor. Cleobury conducts the rest and elicits the clarity and beauty of sound for which King’s is so rightly famous. The treble soloist in Stanford’s Magnificat in G, with his chirpy and flutty voice and incipient vibrato, is about the only thing I didn’t like in these performances.

Notes, texts, translations.
Von Gott, Zu Gott

Gabrieli, Homilius, Wood, Norman, Pearsall, Brahms, Lauridsen, Gjeilo, Matsushita, Whitbourn, Nystedt

Maulbronn Chamber Choir/ Jürgen Budday
K&K 125—70 minutes

This release is the latest in an extensive series from the Maulbronn Chamber Choir, many of them on the K&K label. The group is based at a secularized former Cistercian Abbey (established 1147, closed 1806), next to the city of Maulbronn (from which it is separated by fortifications) between Stuttgart and Karlsruhe, more or less. The selection of a cappella choral works ranges from a single Gabrieli motet, three later 18th Century motets by Homilius, through romantic works by Charles Wood, the unknown Ludvig Norman and Lucas de Pearsall, and Brahms, to five contemporary works.

The chorus is large (about 50 singers), with substantially more sopranos and altos than men’s voices, and has the assets and liabilities of such a large amateur ensemble. The tone from the upper voices is not unattractive en masse, but the lack of professional vocal technique means that the very uppermost notes in particular are not well-supported or in tune, and this compromises the tuning in general in many places. It’s not dreadful, but it’s not exquisite, either. The modern works are better, perhaps because their demands on the extremes are less. The ensemble of the group shows that it is well drilled, but the somewhat removed microphone placement means that the tone is diffuse. All in all, not bad for an amateur chorus, but not close to the finest choral work.

De Profundis: Polish Psalms

Łukaszewski, Koszewski, Bembinow, Jasinski, Twardowski, Swider, Zielinski, Bielerzwewski, Urbaniaik

NFM Choir; Agnieszka Frankow-Zelazny
Accord 221—59 minutes

Perhaps more so than for any other area of classical music, striking national differences remain for choral music, probably owing to the vastly varying professional opportunities and choral situations in each country. Few would disagree that Britain has the most refined choral ensembles, owing to the continuing emphasis in the Church of England on fine music. The various national branches of the Catholic Church, alas, are far from that. All the more rewarding then, to hear this excellent disc from the Choir of the National Forum of Music in Poland, directed by Agnieszka Frankow-Zelazny. It presents psalm settings in Latin, Church Slavonic, Polish, and English by ten contemporary Polish composers, among whom only Romuald Twardowski (b. 1930) might be a familiar name.

Almost all the pieces are quite new, the oldest dating to 1989, which perhaps explains the assurance of these composers in writing compelling religious works in idioms that are far from old-fashioned but will draw in the modern listener. The choral technique evoked by the direction of Frankow-Zelazny in this unaccompanied recital is at the very highest international level, with beautifully produced and supported tone, excellent intonation, crisp diction, and rousing rhythmic verve. The composers (all but three still living) should be delighted to have their works presented by the NFM Choir; I can only imagine that this will lead to much wider appreciation of contemporary Polish writing. Texts and translations included.

Songs of Innocence

HUBNER: Songs of Innocence; Purcell Project;
NYSTEDT: Peace I Leave With You; RUTTER: Prayer of St Patrick; Open Thou Mine Eyes; Look at the World; God Be In My Head; PORTERFIELD: Agnus Dei;
MANTYJARI: Come Away, Death; JOEL (arr SHAW): And So It Goes
Sirius Quartet; Collegium Iuvenum Boys Choir/ Michael Culo
Rondeau 6120—56 minute

Handsome music performed in English by a German boys choir that isn’t quite up to the job. The unfamiliarity of language weighs on the singing, as phrasing and overall inflection are stilted and not in tune with the texts. The dry recording isn’t always flattering, either. I do like the Six Songs of Innocence, a tribute to William Blake’s poetry crafted by Gregor Hubner, who doubles as first violin in the Sirius Quartet. The quartet’s bustling accompaniment to Hubner’s work combines baroque string flair with bits of jazz, Latin rhythms, and East European ethnicity. The boys are at their best here too; so were this release to be of interest, it would be to check out the Blake-Hubner connection. Hubner’s 10-minute Purcell Project for strings alone also crosses idioms, with melodies from Purcell’s Dido (‘When I Am Laid’) and Gordian Knot surrounded by exotic interludes that sound like they traveled Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road before settling in Stuttgart. But while there are things to
admire (including the sweet voice of soprano Jakob Thier in Rutter’s ‘Open Thou My Mine Eyes’), the singing often falls short of the mark.

GREENFIELD

**Emanuele D’Aguanno, tenor**

*Songs of Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini*

Charles Spencer, p

Capriccio 3005—66 minutes

Capriccio’s “Premiere Portraits” series supports young, talented artists by producing their debut recordings. This new release in the series presents Emanuele D’Aguanno, one of the most promising young operatic tenors I’ve heard, in a program of 17 songs by Bellini, Donizetti, and Rossini. The texts deal with love and longing, the distress of being separated, melancholy, grief, and death. Many of them are by Metastasio; others are anonymous. Two highlights—and the longest works of the program—are Bellini’s ‘Torn a, Vezzosa Fillide’ (6:37) and ‘Il Pescatore’ by Donizetti (7:42); both are well developed operatic scenes.

With his lovely light lyric voice D’Aguanno is truly a *bel canto* artist. His singing is glorious and his diction immaculate. He has the right sense of style and both fluidity and intensity. On the basis of these fine performances this is a singer whose name should become more and more familiar. I found his singing thoroughly wonderful and didn’t want to stop listening. I would love to hear his performance as Nemorino.

Charles Spencer is his dependable collaborator and handles the transitions well in the longer pieces. Together they convey the spirit of the music beautifully.

The major disappointment of this release is that the slim liner notes give information about the performers only; nothing about the music itself, no texts and translations. Nevertheless, if you like this style of music, this is how you want to hear it. If you’re not familiar with it, this is a wonderful way to get to know it.

R MOORE

**Songs to Fill the Void**

Robert Barefield, bar; Carolyn Hague, p

Albany 1625—51 minutes

Love and loss are the themes of this album of American art songs by five composers, each of whom presents a different perspective. The program begins with Virgil Thomson’s *Mostly About Love*, four settings of texts by Kenneth Koch. Five songs of Charles Ives follow, only one of which (‘At the River’) shows some of the composer’s more adventurous voice.

The centerpiece of the program is Scott Wheeler’s *To Fill the Void*, a set of three songs on texts by Barefield that tell of the sudden death of his life partner from a fall while the two were visiting Angkor Wat in Cambodia. It is a moving expression of grief, all the more poignant as Barefield himself sings them. The title of the album, “To Fill the Void”, is a reference to the void in his life left by his partner’s death.

Theodore Chanier (1902-61) is represented by six short songs: *Three Epitaphs* and *Three Songs*, including a fresh setting of Blake’s ‘The Lamb’. The program concludes with five songs by Marion Bauer with texts about the beauty of nature. You won’t find any avant-garde compositional voices here; all the music is tonally conservative.

Barefield’s voice is robust and glowing. His singing is very expressive and his diction lucid. A very moving point of the program is when Barefield describes his partner’s death with an octave leap and a gorgeous diminuendo on the words, “you flew”. He is recorded quite close-up, so his vocal limitations are also evident. His vibrato lends an indistinct pitch definition to his singing, and his upper voice isn’t secure. Still, this is a fine and moving program. Barefield is beautifully accompanied by Carolyn Hague.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

**Verlangen**

Berg, Strauss, Schoenberg

Maya Boog, s; Michael Lakner, p

CPO 777976—51 minutes

Terrific programming! Berg’s *Sieben Frühe Lieder* (Zig-zag 345, M/A 2015, in the small arrangement I didn’t care for; more recently, Decca 4788439, M/A 2016) followed by the Strauss *Mädchenblumen* (Aparte 54, J/A 2014; WHL 62, J/A 2014; BIS 2102, S/O 2015; Genuin 15379, M/J 2016 & Solo Musica 239, this issue), and the Schoenberg *Brettl-Lieder* (the fabulous Cabaret Songs—I love them but almost never get to hear them). It’s like a delicious late-romantic meal, complete with mains, light cheese and fruit, and then a dessert cart full of zesty (yes, I mean that), rich, creamy, and cheekily decorated sweets. This is my kind of meal and my kind of concert.

Performances are good. I didn’t love every rubato, but I appreciate that they did some new things. Boog’s voice is perfect for this:

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clear, with just the hint of an edge. Sometimes she holds back, but for the most part she stays in the voice and in the character. Lakner could be warmer but he makes up for it with clarity. It’s clear that these performers are enjoying this music; that goes a long way towards telling a compelling story and creating a good sound.

Brief notes, texts and translations.

HEISEL

Surrender: Voices of Persephone
Ilona Domnich, s; Leo Nucci, bar; Southbank Sinfonia/Simon Over
Signum 419—67 minutes

Ilona Domnich is a singer with a lovely voice who performs arias and duets (with Leo Nucci) from well-known operas, including Donizetti’s Linda di Chamounix, Poulenc’s Voix Humaine, and other roles for women in negative circumstances. She sings all the arias with solid tone and only occasionally pushes to reach some high notes. Her duets with Leo Nucci are all from Rigoletto, where she plays Gilda (another unfortunate soul). Nucci has performed Rigoletto more than 500 times and at this point in his long career has developed some vocal roughness. His commitment to the drama allows him to talk-sing through some of the more difficult passages.

The very complete booklet includes an English and original language libretto. Ms Domnich wrote the extensive notes explaining her reasons for selecting each aria and duet. She explains each selection’s relationship with the mythical story of Persephone, who is kidnapped by Hades and taken to the underworld, as an object lesson of women’s “surrendering” to men’s negative treatment. Her long explanations are rather obtuse and high-minded.

What you’ll immediately notice is the reverberant sound. St Augustine’s church in Highbury, England, where this was recorded, sounds like a long railway tunnel. The voices can be heard, but the words are unclear. The orchestra plays well, but sounds even more diffuse. I found it difficult to listen to for extended periods. This is not fair to the performers or the audience, who expect more than a pretty performance with garbled sound.

Ms Domnich is a noteworthy singer who presents an interesting program, but the sound sabotages her efforts.

FISCH

Ama Me
Respighi, Stravinsky, Pärt, Bodorova, Eben
Eva Garajova, mz; Ludmila Peterkova, Jana Lahodna, Marek Svejkar, cl; Jaroslav Sveceny, v; Jitka Hosprova, vl; Katerina Englischov, hp; Zemlinsky Quartet
Arco Diva 184—70 minutes

The best thing about this release is the programming of unusual works, each with different instrumental accompaniment. Some of these works have been recorded before but never together in one program.

The program begins with Respighi’s Il Tramonto, a setting in Italian translation of Shelley’s Sunset for mezzo and string quartet; it’s a sad poem about a young woman whose lover dies and who “did not die, but lived to tend her aged father”. This has been recorded many times, but I find that her finely nuanced reading holds up very well against the competition of Kozena, Otter, and others.

Stravinsky’s four Cat’s Cradle Songs have also been recorded before, notably in a delightfully arch performance by Kathy Berberian with the composer conducting her and a trio of clarinets. Garajova’s performance doesn’t have that same sparkle, but she sings them with appropriate gentleness as lullabies.

Arvo Pärt’s setting of Brentano’s ‘Es Sang vor Langen Jahren’ (Long years ago there sang) is listed as a “Motet for Alto (countertenor), Violin, and Viola” in the minimalist style Pärt calls his “tintinnabuli”. It has been performed more vividly in several collections of Pärt’s music, but Garajova sings with good attention to this text about the sadness and longing of separation from a lover.

Petr Eben’s Loveless Songs of 1963 for alto and viola are settings of five texts by Polish, Hungarian, Russian, and Czech poets that present loveless relationships. The work is, as the notes described it, “a kind of counterpoint” for voice and viola. It is uncompromisingly and starkly intense, dark, and brooding as it explores the walls and resentments that keep lovers apart. I have not heard any other recordings of these songs—nor am I aware of any. Her readings convey a wide range of emotions from sadness to lashing out in anger.

Sylvie Bodorova (b. 1954) is described in the notes as “one of the most effective Czech composers”. She revised her 1999 work, Ama Me, for this recording and composed Three Psalms in 2015 for Garajova. These seem to be the only available recordings of those works.

The three songs of Ama Me are accompanied by harp, each played in a dramatically dif-
ferent way. ‘Ave Mater’ offers a litany in praise of more than 40 women; it starts out like an Elizabethan lute song and builds steadily to a
dinal outburst of “Ave mater!” ‘Mamo’ is a
gypsy song accompanied percussively by harp;
it is both a remembrance of a mother’s care
and a lament for a mother’s death. ‘Newborn
Child’, accompanied by syncopated rhythms
and sweeping glissandos, exuberantly pro-
claims “Hallelujah” for human unity in the
midst of religious differences.

The program concludes with Three Psalms
for mezzo and string quartet. Using lines from
biblical psalms, the cycle builds from weeping
in humiliation to confidence in God. This
is highly engaging, accessible, and simply lovely
music.

This is an album I am happy to have. Gar-
jova’s exploration of this challenging music
made for rewarding listening. It puts unusual
works together to make a compelling program.
Her singing is commendable. She is especially
effective singing the music of Czech com-
posers. She uses her rich and lustrous Slavic
voice expressively in Italian, Russian, German,
and English, as well. Most of the songs are
plaintive, lamenting, somber, and searching;
her tonal qualities are a good match for them.
She is especially effective when she sings soft-
dynamics her voice becomes a little harsher
and her vibrato becomes more intrusive.

The fine playing of the Zemlinsky Quartet
offers nice bookends to the program. The
instrumentalists of this program are all excel-
ent. The recorded sound is first rate. Repeated
listening—and a good deal of comparative lis-
tening—yielded many rewards. Notes, texts,
translations.

Songs of the Holocaust
Strauss, Ullmann, Taube, Weber, Klein, Simon,
Glanzberg
Rachel Joselson, s; Rene Lecuona, p; Hannah
Holman, vc; Scott Conklin, v
Albany 1627—75 minutes

This is a program of music by musicians
imprisoned at Theresienstadt. If you’ve pur-
chased the album I reviewed in the last issue
(Centaur 3490), David Garner’s settings of
female Jewish poets who survived the Ho-
locaust, this would make an interesting compan-
ion volume. Garner’s music sets poems whose
words we might otherwise not know; this pro-
gram sets music of composers we might other-
wise not hear.

The composers include: Victor Ullman,
whose music needs no introduction and
whose songs I’ve discussed recently (Arcodiva
1762131, J/F 2016), German composer and
musicologist James Simon (1880-1944); Carlo
Taube (1897-1940), who was born in Galicia
and set his wife Erika Taube’s poetry; Czech
poet and writer Ilse Weber (1903-1944); Czech
pianist Gideon Klein (1919-1945), who was
also a composer and arranger; composer and
pianist Adolf Strauss (1902-44), who com-
posed “cabaret-like”, lighter pieces; and Aus-
tro-Hungarian conductor Norbert Glanzberg
(1910-2001), who toured with Edith Piaf and
survived the Holocaust in part because
Georges Auric hid him. His cycle Holocaust
Lieder was composed in 1983 and “inspired by
a collection of poems written by death camp
prisoners, both Jews and German resistance
fighters”.

The music is varied and interesting. Strauss’s gentle and romantic piece belies the
darkness of his time at Theresienstadt and
later murder at Auschwitz. The Ullman songs
here, the Drei Jiddische Lieder have a nostal-
gic, folk-like feel that borders on the modern,
especially in the accompaniment of the playful
‘Margarithelech’. Taube’s ‘Ein Jüdisches Kind’,
arranged by David Lisker, has a mournful violi-
obligato. Weber’s songs are, for me, the
most heartbreaking of the program. The poet-
ry, set in simple, direct, fashion over rolling
accompaniments (some of it her own), deals
directly with her circumstance. In ‘I Wander
Through Theresienstadt’ she asks, “when will
the suffering end?”. In ‘Ade, Kamrad!’ she
writes, “Now we will never see each other
again.” Most poignant, in ‘Wiegala’ (Lullaby),
she asks, “How is the world so quiet?”

Klein’s arrangement of ‘Ukolebavka’ (Lul-
laby) is dark, rich, and warm. Simon’s Drei
Lieder Aus der Chinesischen Flöte is harmoni-
cally interesting, with a nod towards exoticism
in some carefully placed moments in the
piano. Glanzberg’s cycle is lovely, varied, and
full of warm melodies. My favorite is the gentle
‘Alter Baum’ with its lilting piano accompani-
ment and warm cello accents.

Performances are good. Joselson sings
with legato and excellent diction, and
Lecuona’s playing is supportive and clear.
Conklin and Holman add warmth and depth.
Notes, texts, and translations.
**Lullabies**

William Matteuzzi, t; Francesco De Poli, p; Cesare Sampaolesi, g, lute

Bongiovanni 2568—78 minutes

William Matteuzzi, winner of the Enrico Caruso Singing Competition in 1980, is an Italian operatic tenor known for his high vocal range. He now devotes more of his attention to teaching than performing.

This collection of 24 songs from several centuries offers great variety, including songs by Monteverdi, Grieg, Puccini, Falla, Moussorgsky, Fauré, Quilter, and Gershwin. To his credit he sings clearly in many languages: Spanish, French, German, Russian, Greek, English, and Italian. All but two songs are accompanied by piano.

Not all of the songs are really lullabies, even if they refer to sleep or to a child sleeping. The program includes some unlikely pieces. The first of Liszt's *William Tell Songs* is enough to scare a child into not daring to sleep. Lorca's 'Nana de Sevilla' is a sad song about a child who has no crib.

The biggest problem with this release is the quality of the sound, which is harsh and hollow. Matteuzzi is not well represented here, and the aural atmosphere is anything but rest inducing.

There are problems also with his approach to the songs. His singing of 'Les Berceaux' (Fauré) lacks delicacy. All through the program he uses lots of scooping and swooping, which always detracts and is especially bothersome in Reger's 'Nun Komm die Nacht.' He may be better than he sounds here, but his vocal quality is not what you want to hear in lullabies. Often his singing is too forceful and his voice too penetrating to create any sense of serenity. More elegance and less edginess are needed.

The most heart-breaking song—and a highlight of the program—is 'Wiegal' by nurse Ilse Weber, a song she sang to children to comfort them at Terezin before they were sent to Auschwitz to be murdered. [See also the previous recording. —Ed] The notes indicate that this is the song she and the children were singing at the time they died. Matteuzzi's tender singing captures well the pathos of the song in this context.

The booklet is laid out nicely. The notes and texts are in two columns: original language and English translation. Hearing a wide variety of lullabies is the chief reason to be interested in this, but both the performances and the recording make it hard to recommend.

R MOORE

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**Southerly**

Art Songs of the American South

Jos Milton, t; Melinda Coffey Armstead, p

Albany 1622—51 minutes

Jos Milton has put together a very fine program of songs by living composers that reflect aspects of southern life and culture.

James Sclater's 'Beyond the Rainbow' and Dan Locklair's *Portraits* give glimpses into summer pastimes: fishing, Pentecostal worship, Civil War deaths, dealing with noisy hens by shotgun—and the experiences of Southern African-American women.

Price Walden's *Abide with Me: Five Songs of Love* employ poems of Whitman, Baptist hymns, and a work from a personal friend. They supply what the notes call "a meditation on love in its various forms: divine, physical, sacred, and secular. His settings of 'In the Garden' and 'Abide with Me' transport them to a new dimension.

John Musto's *Shadow of the Blues* uses "blues" elements in setting poems of Langston Hughes, glimpses of African-American life in Mississippi. Much of the story is told in the accompaniment of these songs.

Musto is probably the best known of the four composers here, but the others deserve to be familiar. These are all arresting compositions with memorable vocal lines. Even people who despise 'In the Garden' might think differently of it if they heard Walden's setting.

Milton's singing is exemplary. His voice is luminous and his diction exceptionally clear. The artistry of his singing is quietly radiant in his unaccompanied performance of Locklair's 'Unknown.' When I first looked at this disc, I thought a quick hearing would be all it needed. How wrong I was. So much for my biases. Bravo to Albany, to Milton, and to Armstead, whose interpretation of the fine piano writing is outstanding. The sound quality is also first rate. Notes and texts.

R MOORE

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**German & French Songs**

Mozart, Strauss, Liszt, Fauré, Meyerbeer, Duparc, Debussy

Janet Perry, s; Jean Lemaire, p

Solo Musica 239—63 minutes

French songs outnumber the German here by quite a few, but it's a very nice program of mostly songs you know by composers you
know. Charming Mozart songs are followed by the Strauss 'Mädchenblumen'; German and French songs by Liszt, and French songs by Fauré, Duparc, Meyerbeer, and Debussy, ending with Fauré's zippy 'Fleur Jetée'.

Perry's voice is bright and she has a fast, even vibrato. Her diction is quite good and she's a good storyteller, too. She does a nice job with both the extended lines and depth of the Duparc and the high, exposed moments in the Debussy. Lemaire is supportive, warm, and clear in every piece. In short, a charming, easy to enjoy recital. Extremely brief notes by Perry; no texts or translations.

Being Beauteous
Debussy & Britten
Eva Resch, s; Francois Salignat, p
Genuin 16430—64 minutes

I love this programming. Pairing Debussy’s Verlaine settings with Britten’s exquisite Illuminations is a great idea. The story of Verlaine and Rimbaud is a great literary tragedy, though much of the writing produced in that time is magical, beautiful, and almost ethereal is subject and scope.

Unfortunately, the performers aren’t quite up to the task. Resch’s voice is light and, although in moments pleasant, lacks a real core. She does a little better in the Britten but it isn’t satisfying. The diction can be a little aggressive and spread and the vibrato uneven. Salignat is better, especially in the Britten, where his playing gives each piece (or scene) color and shape. The notes don’t mention that the piece was originally written for soprano voice, and I prefer it with soprano. The definitive interpreter is Felicity Lott.

Notes and texts but translations only into German.

French Songs
Caplet, Honegger, Milhaud, Ravel
Simon Wallfisch, bar; Edward Rushton, p; Efrain Oscher, fl; Raphael Wallfisch, vc
Nimbus 5938—61 minutes

The program begins with six songs of Andre Caplet, including his delightful settings of three fables of Jean La Fontaine. Wallfisch’s interpretations of the lushly Debussyan style of the first three is entrancing. His approach to the three fables shows a keen ability to convey their slyness, wit, and whimsy; he does a skillful job as a singing storyteller with his use of contrasting voices.

Arthur Honegger, though he was Swiss, was a member of the group of French composers known as “Les Six”. His Six Poemes d’Apollinaire and Trois Poemes de Paul Fort are wonderful to hear sung with such lovely delicacy and finesse.

Milhaud’s Soirees de Petrograde, his settings of brief sardonic and wily poems of Rene Chalupt, is in two sections: six songs about Russian life in pre-revolutionary St Petersburg and six about life in post-revolutionary Petrograd. Wallfisch delivers them well in mock-serious tone while Rushton conveys the underlying message of the text in picturesque sound (e.g. the ominous tolling of church bells as Rasputin rides in a Rolls Royce to the dinner party where he will be murdered).

The most familiar work of the program is Ravel’s three Chansons Madecasses—one an ardently erotic love song, one a cry of outrage at colonialism, and one a tender lyrical idyll of leading mezzo-soprano of her time...” The voice is simply fabulous: rich, warm, and full of color. She is perfect in the more dramatic moments, such as the orchestration of Liszt’s ‘Mignons Lied’, as well as the delicate, as in her almost half-sung interpretation of Strauss’s ‘Morgen.’ The Verdi allow Takacs to be playful while maintaining an exquisite line. The Strauss are also wonderful. Jeno Jando, who accompanies these, offers perfect balance for the incredible variety of colors and characters.

Frauenliebe und -Leben has the perfect balance of charm and depth, the latter decreasing as the former increases over the course of the cycle. Listening to Takacs on CD, it’s possible to get a fuller picture of the character than what I often see in concert.

A consummate artist’s work is available in a new format again and we are the lucky ones. Brief notes, no texts or translations.

Klara Takacs, mz
Songs by Liszt, Verdi, Strauss, Schumann
Sandor Falvai, Jeno Jando, p; Hungarian State Orchestra/ Andras Korodi
Hungaroton 32769—67 minutes

This is a compilation of performances by Hungarian mezzo-soprano Klara Takacs. The recording is quite good, even though the most recent selections date from 1985. What a gift to listeners that these have been preserved and re-released.

The notes state, “This selection offers an insight into the Hungarian musical world of the 1980s. Klara Takacs, who was then the
ecstatic abandon. Ravel described the work as “a sort of quartet where the singing voice plays the role of principal instrument”. Wallfisch uses vocal coloring and varied dynamics effectively to express the mood of each song. He is at his best here, and his nicely nuanced singing of these exotic songs is accompanied expressively by the trio of flute, cello, and piano.

Here is a singer with a truly lovely voice, especially when he sings softly, as in his rendition of Ravel’s ‘Nahandove’. He is able to coax out fine details from these songs. At louder dynamics and higher pitch, his vibrato widens unhappily. Otherwise this is fine singing.

The instrumental balances are very good, and the closely recorded sound is warm.

Most of these songs, all well worth hearing, are not recorded often. It is disappointing that we are given no translations.

R MOORE

CHRIStMAS COLLeCTIONS

Rundumadum
Christmas music for brass
Grassauer Brass Ensemble/ Wolfgang Diem
Klang 1402—60 minutes

Some good playing here, some good skills, but tone qualities are often too bright.

KILPATRICK

Let the Angels Sing
Michala Petri, rec; Danish Vocal Ensemble/ Michael Bojesen
OUR 6220615 [SACD] 52 minutes

It’s mortals here, but they come close enough to justify the title! I am also beyond pleased to announce that ‘Greensleeves’ is not included. In fact, the joy is enough to practically make me jump up and down. A fine balance has been struck between including songs that will be familiar and avoiding the ones that get done to death. The arrangements are meditative, ebullient, performed with exquisite taste, and available from Wilhelm Hansen. With the variety, even the seven verses of ‘A Virgin Most Pure’ will not bore you. There are 17 carols, and all but one are 13th to 18th Century; the newest selection is ‘It Came Upon a Midnight Clear’ (1849). The Renaissance vintage of many of these helps bestow on them an elevated or divine quality: just sample the treatment of the Coventry Carol and find out!

The words are sung in English and the text is supplied, though you may not need it. The choir is beyond excellent and I have praised it before in singing far more difficult than this. A 30-page booklet covers it all with plenty of vivid pictures. Therefore, there is little else to say except that if you enjoy music of this season, you can bring this fine program into your home or offer it to someone else with no qualms whatsoever! Prepare to be charmed and delighted, uplifted and relaxed. The bumper sticker says running is cheaper than therapy; if life has damaged your spirit, this will help restore it too!

GORMAN

Make the Season Bright
USAF Concert Band, Singing Sergeants/ Col. Lowell E. Graham
Klavier 77046—70 minutes

In this November 2000 recording, the United States Air Force Concert Band and Singing Sergeants present a holiday program that includes several beloved Christmas carols and a few surprises: notably, the Polonaise from the Rimsky-Korsakoff opera Christmas Eve (1895) from a short story by Russian novelist Nikolai Gogol; ‘December Makes Me Feel This Way’ by American smooth jazz saxophonist Dave Koz from his 1997 Christmas album of the same name; and a narrative version of the Chris van Allsburg children’s book The Polar Express (1985), four years before the release of the 2004 Robert Zemeckis film.

Select members of the Singing Sergeants are soloists: sopranos Robin Askew, Amy Statz, and Carol Willey; alto Angela Williams; tenor Russell Colleran; and baritone Robert Harrelson. Dana L. Steinhauser is the narrator in The Polar Express, and then-Commander Colonel Lowell E. Graham, now the Director of Orchestral Activities and Professor of Conducting at the University of Texas at El Paso, leads the entire production.

Both the performances and the sound engineering are very good. The USAF Band delivers splendid balance, blend, intonation, and precision; the Singing Sergeants offer excellent diction, poise, and purpose; and the recording team always ensures the presence of the vocalists among the instrumentalists. The soloists seem to have the leverage to dig into the music, while the Band must work with predetermined structures, though when the Band
managed to steal some risks in volume and excitement, the result is more than satisfying.

Nevertheless, the arrangements are a glaring weakness. A handful are clever and interesting, particularly ‘Jingle Bells’ and ‘Sleigh Ride’, and keen listeners will note that the best medley belongs to the famous Broadway orchestrator Robert Russell Bennett and the legendary choral conductor Robert Shaw. Many of the arrangements, though, consist of cheap Hollywood tricks and recycled band clichés, and while some will argue that the American public prefers a diluted product, the reality is that people will take to good music if they are given the chance. Thoughtful and artistically educated arranging may be an uncommon and difficult skill, but if music directors wish to make a lasting impression on their audiences, they need to foster and encourage music that lasts.

**HANUDEL**

**Christmas in Medieval England**
Blue Heron/ Scott Metcalfe
Blue Heron 1006—71 minutes

This is a concert recording by the Boston-based vocal ensemble Blue Heron under the direction of Scott Metcalfe. It took place at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in December of 2013. The program consists of music that might have been heard in England in the 1440s, the time of the latest music here. Some is earlier than that. Among the earlier works are the familiar 13th-Century plainsong hymn ‘Veni, Veni, Emanuel’, probably of French provenance, and the Sarum office hymn for First Vespers of the Nativity ‘Veni Redemptor Gentium’. Also from the 13th Century is the monophonic strophic song ‘Angelus ad Virginem’. It is performed here in alternation with two-part strophes of another version of the melody to the English text ‘Gabriel fram Heven-King’ as found in a 14th-Century source. There are anonymous polyphonic works from sources of the 14th, and 15th Centuries. Works by John Dunstaple (d 1453) and Leonel Power (d 1445) are included, as well as a Gloria from the Old Hall Manuscript attributed to ‘Pycard’. Apart from his name, nothing is known about him. He may or may not be the Thomas Pychard who with Thomas Damett witnessed a charter in 1420.

The program includes six polyphonic carols. These pieces seem to be addressed to a broad audience, considering their strophic structure with refrain and their direct, memorable melodies. Metcalfe points out that they are found mainly in manuscripts of church music with sophisticated musical notation. Their texts often combine Latin and English.

More overtly learned polyphony is found in the works of Dunstaple, Power, Pycard, and the Sanctus and Agnus Dei from the anonymous Mass Veterem Hominem that dates from around 1440. They are replete with canons, hockets, and sophisticated cantus firmus treatment. Dunstaple is represented by the isorhythm polytextual motet ‘Gaude Virgo Salutata/Gaude Virgo Singularis’. The isorhythmic motet was already an old-fashioned genre by the 15th Century, and its formal strictures could be an artistic straitjacket to the composer, but Dunstaple produces music of graceful elegance that Metcalfe describes as compelling. (Compare the musical elegance of JS Bach’s canonic writing as a later counterpart.)

Some of this music needs to be fleshed out for performance. This is done here with taste and a sense of historical integrity. ‘Veni, Veni, Emanuel’ is fitted with an idiomatic second voice in some of its strophes, and parts of ‘Veni Redemptor Gentium’ are sung against a vocal drone. Metcalfe makes use of a 15th-Century-style harp in some of the pieces. It was made by Lynne Lewandowski of Bellows, Vermont, and is based on surviving originals and paintings of the period.

The most extensive reworking is in the carol that concludes the program: ‘Nova, Nova! Ave Fit ex Eva’. It survives as a monophonic song, but Metcalfe has added two parts to the refrain and one to the strophes to produce the alternation of three and two parts found in so many medieval carols.

It is notable that the 15th Century was probably the only period in western musical history when continental composers were strongly influenced by English music. The English idiom, with its emphasis on imperfect consonances and mellifluous harmonies, pointed to the character of Renaissance polyphony. I believe that accounts in large part for the infectious charm and direct appeal this music has for many modern listeners. That is certainly the case with the music recorded here. These sensitive and intelligent performances allow the music to speak eloquently.

Blue Heron was founded in 1999, and they specialize in music of the 15th and 16th Centuries. There are ten singers listed for this recording, but they do not all sing in every piece. Most are sung one voice to a part. As with many concert recordings, there are occa-
Winter’s Delights
arrangements & compositions by Nikolaus Newerkla
Quadriga Consort/ Nikolaus Newerkla
German Harmonia Mundi 7572—59 minutes

The subtitle of this collection is “Early Christmas Music and Carols from the British Isles”. It consists mostly of traditional music, some familiar and some not so familiar, from England, Ireland, and Scotland, with one song from Nova Scotia. Two of the songs are original compositions by the Quadriga Consort’s founder Nikolaus Newerkla: ‘Sleep Baby, Sleep’ to a text by George Wither (1588-1667) and ‘Winter’s Delights’ to a poem by Thomas Campion (1567-1620). Newerkla arranged all of the traditional music for these performances.

The music can be better described as understated and often wistful folk or pop music than classical, even though it is played on early instruments. The consort consists of recorders, viola da gamba, bass violin, percussion, and harpsichord. On some of the tracks Newerkla plays the vibrandoneon, a free reed instrument winded by human breath and played from a keyboard. Vocal soloist Elisabeth Kaplan sings in a folk-pop style.

The technical standard of the performances is very high. It is for the individual listener to decide whether this approach to traditional music is congenial. Samples of their artistry are available online. Newerkla founded the Austrian-based ensemble in 2001.

Heavenly Christmas
Hassler, Bernhard, Bruhns, Bach, Meder, Biber, Schütz, Zelenka
Marie Luise Werneburg, s; Klaus Mertens, b; Bell’arte Salzburg/ Annegret Siedel
Berlin 687—79 minutes

The principal works on this program are sacred concertos by German composers of the 17th Century. They are pieces on an intimate scale for solo voice, one or two obbligato instruments, and continuo. Not all of the works have texts explicitly for Christmas. There are psalm settings by Nicolaus Bruhns (1665-97), Johann Valentin Meder (1649-1719), and Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644-1704). Even Heinrich Schütz’s German Magnificat (B 344) would have been sung at other seasons of the year. Nevertheless, all of the music here has a spirit of joy, exuberance, or serenity that befits the celebration of the Nativity. Among the sacred concertos that have seasonal texts are Fürchtet Euch Nicht by Christoph Bernhard (1628-92), who was a pupil of Schütz at Dresden, and Alma Redemptoris Mater by Jan Dismas Zelenka (1670-1745), a setting of the Marian antiphon for the time of Christmas.

In addition to the sacred concertos, there are six settings of the popular Christmas chorale ‘Vom Himmel Hoch’ in arrangements by composers of the period. JS Bach is represented by a strophic aria, ‘Ich Steh an Deiner Krippen Hier’, that he contributed to Schemel- lis Gesangbuch. A fascinating rarity is the anonymous trio sonata on the chorale ‘ Wie Schön Leuchtet der Morgenstern’. Period vocal arrangements of the chorale are inserted between the movements of the sonata.

The playing and singing here is of the highest order. Much of it is quite virtuosic, but somehow it comes across without undue ostentation. The violin virtuosity in Biber’s Nisi Dominus is especially noteworthy, but hardly surprising from one of the most celebrated violinists of his time. Marie Luise Werneburg and Klaus Mertens are undaunted by the often athletic vocal lines of this music. Bell’arte Salzburg, directed by violinist Annegret Siedel, is a period instrument ensemble specializing in German and Austrian music of the 17th and 18th Centuries, especially by composers who served the court of Salzburg. Seven players are listed for this recording.

A Wondrous Mystery
Stile Antico
Harmonia Mundi 807575 [SACD] 73 minutes

This collection of “Renaissance Choral Music for Christmas” is centered around Jacobus Clemens non Papa’s Pastores quid Vidistis Mass. Compared with the earlier recording by the Tallis Scholars (S/O 1988), Stile Antico’s interpretation is much more melodic, in that each voice follows a natural arc as its melody rises and falls, in contrast to a much more rhythmic quality in the earlier recording. Between the movements of the Mass (even between the Kyrie and Gloria), other motets and chorales are interwoven. From the Catholic tradition are two motets by Jacob Handl (Jacobus Gallus), ‘Canite tuba’ and the hermetic ‘Mirabile mysterium’—the Huellgas Ensemble has a better control of its extreme and slippery chromaticism (M/A 1996). Hans
Leo Hassler’s eight-part motet, ‘Hodie Christus natus est’ is here. From the Lutheran tradition are two works by Johannes Eccard, ‘Ubers Gebirg Maria geht’ and ‘Vom Himmel hoch,’ and two by Michael Praetorius, ‘Ein Kind ge- born in Bethlehem’ and ‘Es ist ein Ros entsprungen,’ with Melchior Vulpius’s short canon on this famous text interpolated between the two verses.

The recording also includes the eight-part ‘Magnificat quinti toni’ by Hieronymus Praetorius, and I prefer this to the earlier recording by Cardinall’s Musick (Jan/Feb 2009), which uses only 8 voices.

The 12 singers of Stile Antico have developed a very smooth and balanced style, and this is beautiful ensemble singing. I do miss a bit more contrast between the very different styles of the compositions on this recording: for example, Handl’s ‘Canite tuba’ needs a more rhythmic and martial spirit, which would create a greater contrast with the more suave polyphony of Clemens’s Mass. Texts and translations.

Of Kings & Angels
Medieval Babes
Medieval Babes 5009—54:23

For this album, Katharine Blake, a member of the Medieval Babes, has made modern arrangements of traditional Christmas carols. These range from close-harmony a cappella women’s voices to intricate combinations of voices with medieval and traditional instruments. This is obviously a studio recording with intricate overdubbing and reverber, but Blake’s effective arrangements are not typical of other Christmas albums driven by the aesthetics of popular music. Each is rather delicate, and the entire recording sounds “sotto voce”, so this might not be the recording for a raucous holiday party. The copy supplied for review has a defective booklet; the words and performer information for some of the songs are missing.

In Dulci Jubilo
St John Cathedral, Albuquerque
Raven 974—58 minutes

We at ARG face Christmas in July and August every year, in the form of at least 50 CD issues. This one stood out for me. First of all, the choir is simply wonderful. They are beautifully balanced and sound utterly natural—yet much of what they sing is quite sophisticated. Even much-recorded pieces like David Willcocks’s arrangements of ‘Once in Royal David’s City’ and ‘O Come All Ye Faithful’ are beautifully done—and never overdone. The choral director is Maxine Thevenot, and you will hear men, boys, women, and girls in various combinations. Even the soloists—fine as they are—are mixed, and someone named “Jordyn” may very well be a girl. It doesn’t matter when they are so good.

Out of the 16 pieces (13 choral, 3 organ alone) I marked 7 that I especially liked, including some new pieces and arrangements. There were only 3 that I won’t return to (all new). All 3 organ pieces are In Dulci Jubilo: Buxtehude, Robin Milford, and of course Bach—he’s the program gloriously.

Episcopal cathedrals are often great places for music.

Snow on Snow
The 13/ Matthew Robertson
13 Media 401—59 minutes
(125 Coccio Dr. West Orange, NJ 07052)

A collection of 17 mostly traditional hymns, mainly by British composers and arrangers; there are a few Americans, one German, and one Austrian. Songs like Praetorius’s ‘Lo, How a Rose Eer Blooming,’ Walton’s ‘What Cheer?’, Britten’s ‘A Boy was Born’, David Willcocks’s ‘Ding Dong! Merrily on High,’ and Tye’s ‘Lord, Let Thy Servant Now Depart in Peace’ are presented alongside newer settings like Joseph Jennings’s chant-influenced ‘O Come, O Come, Emmanuel’, Nathan Jones’s ‘In the Bleak Mid-Winter’, Stanford E SCRiven’s ‘Christ the Appletree’, and Thomas LaVoy’s ‘Adam Lay Ybounden.’

This is definitely midnight-mass music in spirit, not something for a lively Christmas dinner. Other than a straining soloist in Howells’s ‘Spotless Rose’, the singing is smooth, gentle, and fairly polished. The darker tone in Byrd’s ‘Lullaby’ is effective, and the tangy polyphony it shares with Gibbons’s ‘Magnificat’ makes ‘I Wonder as I Wander’, which appears between them, even sillier and lyrically weaker than normal. The conductor’s arrangement of ‘Silent Night tries too hard to be harmonically unusual, but it has some beautiful moments. The sonics are reverberant but not muddying.

One of the greatest delusions in the world is that evils can be solved by passing laws.

Thomas Reed, edited

November/December 2016
Christmas From Christ's
Christ's College, Cambridge/ David Rowland
Regent 446—74 minutes

Lux De Caelo
Clare College, Cambridge, Dimitri Ensemble/
Graham Ross
Harmonia Mundi 907615—68 minutes

O Come, Emmanuel
Selwyn College, Cambridge/ Sarah MacDonald
Regent 456 [2CD] 71 minutes

Yulefest
Trinity College, Cambridge/ Stephen Layton
Hyperion 68068—65 minutes

While the wonderful choral tradition that flourishes in Cambridge, England is dominated by St John's and King's College, there are several other superb choirs that sing in the other college chapels, often on a daily basis. These recordings show four of them in a variety of Christmas repertoire. They are mixed choirs made-up of students in these colleges, many on choral scholarships. Trinity, a choir which is the equal of King's in every way, mixes the sacred and secular, familiar and unfamiliar, all sung superbly. Christ's program of carols by Warlock, Holst, and Vaughan Williams is the most interesting. Aside from the popular favorites, there are other unfamiliar gems from these composers. Clare College uses a fine instrumental ensemble in a mixed program of Baroque and unfamiliar 20th Century carols, including Webern and Schoenberg. Selwyn College presents music for Advent and Christmas by the English composer Alan Bullard. Under the direction of Sarah MacDonald, the first woman to be appointed director of a Cambridge college choir, the program includes a sequence of pieces for Advent, organized around the Great O Antiphons and a group of ten carols that are well-crafted, melodic, and in a harmonic idiom "respectful of tradition but not a slave to it."

These are all fine ensembles that exhibit all the qualities typical of the Cambridge-Oxford choral traditions: perfect blend, intonation, ensemble, and diction. You can’t go wrong with any of these.

American Record Guide

Adeste Fideles
Chapel Royal/ Huw Williams
Signum 460—72:19

This is a choir of 11 boys and 6 men with a pleasant sound—not “hoothy” or stiff, though the blend is not always perfect. There are 26 selections—all true Christmas music, no garbage. There are little-known pieces by people like Michael Head, Jonathan Dove, and Benjamin Britten. There are a number of David Willcocks arrangements and descants, plus arrangements by John Rutter, Malcolm Sargent, and Ralph Vaughan Williams. And 'Adeste Fideles' was written for the Chapel Royal in the 1600s.

The usual reservation about English choirs applies. That is, everything is utterly tasteful and neat and clean, but nothing really takes off and soars. (The two Negro spirituals don't sound very “authentic” either.) You can’t help but like much of it, but nothing will thrill you. I’m inclined to think that the Feast of the Incarnation requires more joy and majesty.

O Heilige Nacht
Dresden Chamber Choir/ Hans-Christoph Rademann
Carus 83.392—72 minutes

This is an attractive collection of romantic Christmas pieces, all a cappella and all in German. Each draws on a pre-existent tune—some chorales, some folk material. A few are based on fairly well known chorales—'Von Himmel hoch', 'Wie schön leuchtet'—and there is a 'Stille Nacht', but otherwise the pieces are fairly unfamiliar.

Several composers are represented: Reger, Loewe, Gustav Schreck, and Franz Wüllner (3 pieces each); Carl Reint HAL threat and Robert Fuchs (2 each); and single contributions from Brahms, August von Othegraven, Carl Gottlob Reissiger, and Max Bruch. Most are straightforward SATB, homophonic and strophic; but a few (Loewe and Reger) are more enterprising, and of course Brahms, never one to be satisfied with a simple solution, sets 'Es floh ein Täublein weisse' with pre-imitation in the Renaissance manner.

The Dresden Chamber Choir, fresh off their acclaimed complete recordings of Schütz, is in excellent form for this (fairly simple) music. The group, numbering about 30,
sings with fine blend and intonation, and conductor Rademann makes consistently fine judgements of tempo and dynamics. If, like me, you spent a full year in college theory harmonizing chorale tunes (and then painfully comparing them to Bach), you’ll appreciate the lovely arrangements of ‘Wie schön leuchtest’ and ‘Wie soll ich dich empfangen’ by Gustav Schreck, who for a time held Bach’s job at St Thomas. Choral conductors looking for new repertory may also be interested in this, since Carus also publishes the music for 14 of these pieces. Good notes; texts and translations.

ALTHOUSE

Still
Stephen Smith, org, p; Borealis Quartet; Lorna McGhee, fl; David Owen, ob; Elektra Women’s Choir/ Morna Edmundson
Elektra 1501—43 minutes

This excellent Vancouver-based choir specializes in choral music for women’s voices—often composed or arranged by Canadians—and also by composers from several other countries. There’s a very attractive freshness to all the performances, and the mix of styles is a delight to hear. For example, Canadian composer Stephen Smith’s ‘If You Would Hear the Angels Sing’ includes familiar Christmas-morning phrases in the text, and its music has a vibrant lightness that certainly evokes the angelic host. In ‘Northern Lights’, by Norwegian Ola Gjeilo, the music tapers to an almost-impossible-to-sing silence at the end, illustrating the stillness and wonder themes that span the whole program.

Guest instrumentalists (oboe, flute, strings) add even more color, as in the Swiss composer Ivo Antognini’s ‘O Magnum Mysterium’; where the Borealis Quartet complements and amplifies the choir’s expression of wistful longing and rapture on beholding the Great Mystery of the Nativity. The Elektra Women’s Choir is at ease with all the technical demands of the music, and their long experience of concert performance, welcoming support of new music, and beautiful sound all combine to make this a gift to everyone in the Christmas season.

Notes, texts, translations. It would be nice to have a little information about each composer—some are not well known, and all are very fine. I’m glad that publishing detail is supplied for all the compositions, making it easy for other choirs to start singing this.

Latvian Christmas Cantatas
Zilveris, Zemzaris, Rupaine, Lacis
Balsis Youth Choir; Fortius Chamber Choir; Sono Childrens Choir; New York Latvian Concert Choir; Latvian Opera Chamber Orchestra/ Laura Padega Zamura, Andrejs Jansons
Albany 1389—73 minutes

The full album title is The Light of Christmas: Latvian Cantatas of the Christmas Season. Valdis Zilveris’s Starlit Christmas is in the pop-classical vein, and the melodies are winsome. Ingmars Zemzaris’s Immanuel, O God Most High has some neo-romantic harmonic twists to the overall Baroque feel. Our Lady’s Lily Garden, by Ilona Rupaine, has the most stereotypical Baltic flavor to it. Karlis Lacis’s Christmas Cantata has some Brahmsian touches.

These are all pretty pieces; none may be Christmas masterworks, but I enjoyed every one of them. There are two drawbacks worth noting: an incessant woodblock in the Lacis and parts of the Rupaine and some minor intonation problems from the choirs. The sonics are decent. Notes and texts are in English and Latvian.

ESTEP

Festival of Carols
Los Angeles Master Chorale
LAMC 119254—60 minutes

I find this kind of thing obnoxious. Sleazy arrangements of sleazy Hollywood Christmas songs are alternated with sleazy arrangements of carols that deserve better treatment. ‘Silent Night’ is a wretched example of the latter. Harmonies are queasy (that goes with “sleazy”), and the only accompaniment is piano—rather New-Agey piano.

This is exactly the kind of thing that makes me hate Christmas: the music has been popularized to death and is never sung “straight.”

VROON

Es Naht ein Licht
Octavians
Rondeau 6109—50 minutes

Octavians is a group of eight male singers from Jena, Germany, that grew out of the Jena boy choir. They’ve recorded a restful, elegant album of German, Latin, and English Christmas songs, ‘Simple Gifts’, and Jay Giallombardos setting of ‘Sure on this Shining Night’. I could live happily without ‘Simple Gifts’, but Bob Chilcott’s arrangement for the Kings Singers is fine. ‘Sure on this Shining Night’ is a bit note-y in the middle and lacks the ecstasy of Barber’s setting.
The holiday music proper ranges from the 14th-Century ‘In Dulci Jubilo’ to ‘Jingle Bells.’ ‘Es ist ein Ros Entsprengen’ is Swedish composer Jan Sandström’s reworking of Praetorius original, slowed way down and adorned with mystical, floating drones. Geoffrey Keating’s arrangement of ‘The 12 Days of Christmas’ has a restrained wit to it. Andreas Hamerschmidt’s full, joyous ‘Machet die Tore Weit’ is a high point, and ‘Stille Nacht’ has some muscle. These Germans’ English is natural-sounding, with little accent and no awkward phrasing. The sound is fine; notes and translations are in English and German.

**ESTEP**

**Carols**  
St Paul’s Cathedral Choir/ Andrew Carwood  
Decca 4789225—62 minutes

Two fine cathedral choirs. St Paul’s sings oft-recorded pieces but manages to make them sound fresh and interesting. This is particularly the case with the boys, who sound bright, clean, and energetic. Perfect intonation and blend in committed performances.

The choir at York Minster is much improved from what had been a rather lackluster choral tradition. The engaging program includes familiar carols, new settings of traditional texts, and a superb performance of the *Three Carol-anthems* by Herbert Howells. The boys are strong, colorful, and lively; and the justly famous organ sounds magnificent. The arrangement of ‘Jingle Bells’ by Richard Shephard is like none you have ever heard.

**York Yuletide**  
York Minster Choir/ Robert Sharpe  
Regent 467—64 minutes

**Christmas with St John’s**  
St John’s College Cambridge/ Andrew Nethsingha  
Signum 458—67 minutes

22 items here, and almost all of them are delicate. The singing is neat and clean and cool—almost antiseptic. Even the organ, when it can be heard, seems subdued. One or two of the recent pieces gets louder (ones by William Mathias and Michael Finnissy are examples). Very little is familiar to Americans. Even the tune of ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’ is not one of the two I know; it’s by Henry Walford Davies, so it’s not new, but the other two tunes have taken over outside of England.

Two pieces by living composers are particularly lovely: ‘The Shepherd’s Carol’ by Bob Chilcott and ‘Dormi Jesu’ by John Rutter. A couple of arrangements are not to my taste—too jazzy. It’s too bad that every cathedral and college choir in England seems to do a Christmas album, and every one of them has something very good on it, but if you put all the good parts together you wouldn’t have much more than an hour of music. Maybe they are trying too hard to offer something different. But how can it sound different if almost all the choirs are 24 to 40 men and boys? And composers all write in that same tradition. I don’t recommend collecting them all unless you are a true English Choral Fanatic.

**American Record Guide**  

197
Scandinavian Christmas
Choral Arts Northwest/ Richard Sparks; David Dahl, org
Lof 1017—61 minutes

This is an outstanding program of unfamiliar Christmas carols from the rich Scandinavian choral tradition. One of its hallmarks is a fondness for slow, lush singing, which this choir does superbly. This mixed ensemble was formed in 1993 and exhibits the very best of American choral singing: perfect blend and intonation, a wide dynamic range, and clear diction, all done with expressive musicality. Several of the pieces have excellent solo voices interspersed with Advent and Christmas organ chorales by Scandinavian composers. The booklet is particularly informative: composer bios, publishers, and translations of the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian texts. Unfamiliar Christmas music beautifully done.

Advent Calendar
Singer Pur
Oehms 1810—68 minutes

This takes its inspiration from those Advent calendars where you punch out a little window for each day leading up to Christmas, perhaps with a treat inside. Here we have an arbitrary number of 24 pieces (since the length of Advent varies with the calendar), meant to begin on December 1 and going to Christmas Eve. So if you wish, you can savor one piece a day. There are no Christmas carols here, and I confess I knew only a few of the works. (One, Heike Beckmann’s ‘Leise Rieselt der Schnee’ owes a debt to ‘Silent Night!’) They range in period from Renaissance to modern, and for some of the chorales (e.g. ‘Nun komm der Heiden Heiland’) a different harmonization is used for each stanza. Everything is in German.

This is, to cut to the chase, a wonderfully beautiful recording, for which credit must go to the singers known as Singer Pur. It is a group of six, five of whom are former Regensburg Cathedral choirboys (three tenors, one baritone, one bass), plus one (female) soprano. They are simply superb, perfectly blended, with enough vibrato to give life to the sound, but never too much to muddy the texture. They do everything well, but I particularly like the more dissonant pieces (e.g. Hugo Distler’s ‘Ich brach drei dürre Reiselein’ or Marcus Schmichl’s ‘O du stille Zeit’) because their razor-sharp intonation opens up some wonderful expressive possibilities. A few pieces are intricate rhythmically (e.g. Oliver Gies’s ‘Wir sagen euch an den lieben Advent’ or Reiko Füting’s ‘O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf’), and they too are flawlessly done.

If your interest goes in this direction, you won’t be disappointed with this excellent disc. Bilingual notes, but texts in German only.

Himmelslieder
Britten, Part, Kaminski, Poulenc, Praetorius, Sandstrom
SWR Vocal Ensemble; Maria Stange, hp/ Marcus Creed
SWR 19015—69 minutes

There are a number of Christmas-related pieces here, but I’ve heard some of these compositions programmed at other times of the year. This is an imaginative collection of choral music (Songs of Heaven) devoted to choirs of angels, lullabies, and Marian hymns.

Britten’s Ceremony of Carols is so well known it hardly needs any introduction, and yet every time I listen to it I marvel at its melodic expressiveness and sheer imagination. It’s not an easy piece to pull off: the choral harmonies are tight and tricky and leave little room for error; the solos sound very simple, but are so exposed that any deviance from pitch is mercilessly obvious. Peter Pears, Britten’s partner, describes how it was written on a Swedish merchant ship that was hardly conducive to creating a piece of this nature. Even so, Britten prevailed through the noise, stench, and heat to give us one of the 20th Century’s great choral pieces.

The SWR’s performance of it is excellent. The two soloists sound like angels, the women are first-rate, and conductor Marcus Creed leads everyone with splendid verve and finesse. Maria Stange’s harp is magical. Some might complain because Creed didn’t use a boys’ choir, but there are plenty of wonderful boy choir renditions on CD already. Besides, I think the extra color of adult women’s voices makes a more beautiful sound.

By way of contrast, Creed gives us two selections by an anonymous 15th Century composer sung by the men. They match their female counterparts in musical excellence.

The Pärt Magnificat Antiphons are also well known. I had the pleasure of singing them with a choir in Los Angeles. Pärt’s musical language seems very reduced, and yet the tensions he is able to evoke with those means are fascinating. All the choirs I’ve sung with love his music. Poulenc’s four Christmas motets
(pour les temps de noel) come from an entirely different musical world. His choral music uses harmonies enriched by dissonance and melodies whose design, lines, and phrases are taken from the sounds of the French language. Poulenc is another favorite among choral singers.

At first glance, Heinrich Kaminski’s three Christmas carols seem to be conventional. Only when one listens more closely does one hear the ingenious counterpoint in these songs. The final selection is Swedish composer Jan Sandstrom’s well-known setting of the Praetorius ‘Es ist ein Ros’. One of the two choirs sings the original carol in the style of a cantus firma at a very slow tempo while the other choir envelops the setting with the humming style so popular in Scandinavian folk music.

The Southwest German Radio singers perform flawlessly in all these selections. Creed not only leads his forces with conviction, but has created a program that plays very convincingly with ample contrast between selections. Texts are supplied, but translations are not.

Very English Christmas
James Sherlock, org; Tenebrae/ Nigel Short
Signum 902—56 minutes

This arrived too late to make the Christmas reviews in 2015, so it may not be advertised much this year, but if you’re looking for a collection of Christmas music that includes a lot of pieces you don’t often hear, don’t overlook this outstanding release. Lovers of choral music will need no introduction to Tenebrae, a superb mixed chorus of around 16. This is their third album of Christmas music, and it is the most interesting of the three.

Nigel Short writes in his introductory notes about his choice of music for this album. Many of these works are written by people he has been associated with (at King’s College, Cambridge or Westminster Abbey); some are pieces recommended to him by Richard Baker, a fellow former choral scholar at King’s. At least half of these works are less familiar—works by Jonathan Lane, Richard Hickox, Arnold Bax, Richard Knight, Alec Redshaw, and Philip Radcliff. Highlights include Richard Lloyd’s ‘Love Came Down at Christmas’ and John Gardner’s jazzy ‘Rejoice and be Merry’.

You rarely hear choral works of Simon Preston, and I know of no recording dedicated solely to his music, though it crops up from time to time—but not as often as it deserves. This program includes three fine settings of his (‘I Saw Three Ships,’ ‘There is No Rose,’ and ‘On Christmas Day’). Warlock’s ‘Benedicamus Domino’ (included here) is heard often, but others included here are less familiar.

One nice aspect is hearing texts set by different composers: ‘There is No Rose’ (Preston and Lane); ‘Rejoice and be Merry’ (Christopher Robinson and Gardner); ‘Adam Lay Bounden’ (Warlock and Philip Ledger); ‘Balulalow’ (Warlock and Gardner); and ‘I Sing of a Maiden’ (Bax and Redshaw).

Sherlock accompanies commendably in 10 of these 22 carols, starting almost imperceptibly and building steadily to a vibrant conclusion in Gardener’s ‘Tomorrow Shall By My Dancing Day’. (I presume he is playing the Willis organ with its impressive pedal Ophicleide at St Augustine, Kilburn, where the program was recorded.) Tenebrae’s sound is precise, transparent, ethereal, nimble, elegant, and perfectly balanced. Their crystal-clear enunciation makes texts (given) almost unnecessary. My only complaint is that the program is not longer. This joins my short list of favorite Christmas CDs.

Noel Francais
William Whitehead, org; Geraldine Bruley, gamba; Maitrise de Toulouse/ Mark Opstad
Regent 470—77 minutes

This attractive seasonal program comes courtesy of La Maitrise of Toulouse, an ensemble that joins choristers aged 11 to 15 with voice students from the Conservatoire of that same French city. The program is divided into three parts. The first is a set of motets by Jean Mouton (c 1459-1522), Guillaume Bouzignac (c 1587-c 1643) Etienne Moulinie (1599-1676), Louis-Nicolas Clerambault (c 1676-1749) and MA Charpentier (c 1645-1704). (If you’re on a first-name basis with any of these guys besides Charpentier, you’re more up on your French Baroque than I am.) The second set gives us Poulenc’s ‘Salve Regina’ and 4 Christmas Motets along with a pair of forgettable works—one each by Jean-Roger Ducasse (1873-1954) and Marc Bleuse (b 1937). Noels from the folk traditions of Toulouse, Provence, Alsace, Catalonia, and the Basque county round out the program.

The Noels are delightful, and I’m quite taken with the Poulenc, which is laid out sumptuously and elegantly by the young singers. It’s the baroque fare that had me wishing for more mature voices, especially in the soprano department. Still, the music is glor-
ous. If you’ve never heard Bouzignac’s ‘Stella Refulget’, here’s your chance. It’s gorgeous, and the young singers do pretty well with it. Regent’s engineering doesn’t add much sheen to the voices, but doesn’t detract either. Notes and texts supplied in French, Latin, and English to help make your Noel even more joyeux.

**GREENFIELD**

**Merry Christmas from Vienna**

Vienna Boys Choir

DG 23692—56 minutes

This is yet another Christmas album from the Vienna Choir Boys, and if you enjoy their singing or collect their Christmas discs you’ll enjoy this one as well. There are many familiar carols here as well as some lovely German songs that are still sung in German households and communities. Some may or may not approve of the inclusion of secular songs like ‘Rudolph’ and ‘Jingle Bells’ but in today’s commercialized world they are perhaps inevitable. At least the arrangements are tasteful and painless.

Rolando Villazon joins the choir for a beautiful rendition of ‘O Holy Night’. Aida Garifullina (a young soprano who appears to have quite a following in Europe) ends the album with a pretty ‘Silent Night’. The sound is up to DG’s usual high standards, as is the attractive booklet, but texts are not included.

**REYNOLDS**

**Heilige Nacht**

Judith Simonis, mz; Philip Mayers, p; Ensemble Vokalzeit

Coviello 91516—55 minutes

Ensemble Vokalzeit is made up of two tenors, a baritone, and a bass who freelance with radio choirs and opera companies across Germany and The Netherlands. They’re joined by a mezzo (alto?) with a pleasant, easy-going voice that could transfer easily to the Pop-Broadway idiom. All five sing with flair, though the basso is a bit too profundo to sound convincing in the lighter fare that comes his way.

When the arrangements suit the season, things go very well. I like the quartet’s delectably slushy ‘O Holy Night’, and there are three songs by Engelbert Humperdinck that are crooned so handsomely they become centerpiece of the program: ‘Leise weht’s durch alle Lande’, ‘E strahlt am Himmelsramd’, and ‘Nun sind die lieben Engelien.’ You’ll have fun with the ensemble’s breezy, heavily-accented versions of ‘White Christmas,’ ‘Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,’ ‘Let It Snow’ (with that bass prominent), and ‘Chestnuts Roasting On an Open Fire’. You have to wonder what happened to ‘Stille Nacht’, ‘In Dulci Jubilo’, the ‘Coventry Carol’, and a couple of others, which are poorly arranged and never get off the ground. This dark, dissonant ‘Lullly Lullay’ would keep children up all night, not put them to sleep.

When this is good, though, it’s very good. Notes, texts, and translations.

**GREENFIELD**

**December Celebration**

Adamo, Heggie, Morris & Bolcom, Garner, Woolf, Getty, Corigliano

Lisa Delon, s; Lester Lynch, bar; Steven Bailey, p & org; Volti Chorus; New Century Chamber Orchestra/ Dawn Harms

Pentatone 5186537 [SACD] 57 minutes

Mark Adamo’s ‘Christmas Life’ sets a Wendy Cope poem for chorus and chamber orchestra; with stately calm it calls you to bring in a young Norwegian spruce, memories of Christmas past, and the birth of hope and love and light. Jake Heggie’s *On the Road to Christmas* comprises poems by AE Housman (‘The Night is Freezing Fast’), Frederica Von Stade (‘The Car Ride to Christmas’), John Jacob Niles (‘I Wonder as I Wander’), Emily Dickinson (‘The Road to Bethlehem’), Heggie himself (‘Christmas Time of Year’), and ‘Good King Merrily on High’—a combination of ‘King Wenceslas’ and ‘Ding Dong’. The songs are nice enough, but Delon is difficult to listen to; she sounds like her larynx is squeezed all the way up to her uvula, and her vibrato is dizzyingly fast.

Joan Morris and William Bolcom’s ‘Carol’ (Neighbors, on this Frosty Tide) uses Arnold Weinstein’s adaptation of part of *The Wind in the Willows* and is nondescript. ‘Magnum Mysteriun’, the second of David Garner’s Three Carols, is sung from the animal’s points of view for seven of its nine verses. Delon is back, and Lynch joins her; his voice is better, but his diction leaves much to be desired, at least in these acoustics. Luna Pearl Woolf’s ‘How Bright the Darkness’ is for baritone, treble chorus, harp, percussion, and string orchestra. The words are by Eleanor Wilner, and they’re the most creative here, venturing beyond the usual Christmas subjects of kings, donkeys, presents, and mittens.

Gordon Getty wrote his own lyrics for his Four Christmas Carols, and if his childhood holidays were anything like what he describes in ‘Candles on the Tree’, I’m rather jealous:

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Billy dances a jig on the pickle barrel, and the family drinks to all the Irish, Pelicans and catfish, Onions and the soapdish, Anything outlandish. Its too bad the choir is so hard to understand. Corigliano's 'Christmas at the Cloisters' is a thick, murky William Hoffman setting for Hammond organ and indistinct baritone. Getty's respectful, French horn-heavy setting of 'Silent Night' closes the program.

All told, the pieces are solid but not too interesting, and the singing detracts from about half of them.

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**Christmas Carols from Village Green to Church Choir**

Vox Turturis/ Andrew Gant
Signum 387—68 minutes

This is the real thing—true Christmas music (except that the last two minutes are a carol of Spring). The choir of adults is rather small (16 voices plus two boy soloists) and is often accompanied discreetly by an organ. Nothing is big enough to be majestic or thrilling, but nothing is ruined by dumb arrangements or sleazy, pop-style singing. This is classic Christmas music in the classic style. Some arranging was done, but by people like Ralph Vaughan Williams (‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’ in the traditional English tune, with descant). Some carols are sung in two tunes (‘While Shepherds Watched’ and ‘Away in a Manger’). Actually there are three tunes here for that last one, including one by Henry Bish that sounds like ‘Home, Sweet Home’. Many are sung in the original language (French, Latin, German).

Everything is utterly tasteful, refined, restrained—very English and a little bland. A true church or cathedral choir (even English) would sound more joyful, I am sure. But it is less common every year to hear Christmas music done “right”, so this has its place. Some of what came thru this office this year labelled “Christmas” was so bad we didn’t even bother telling you about it.

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**Christmas in Ireland**

Noel McLoughlin, Ger O’Donnell
ARC 2548—44 minutes

This will appeal to people who enjoy Gaelic and Celtic music, but it also can be enjoyed if you simply want something different in your Christmas music this year. Yes, there are a lot of familiar tunes here, but there are other songs that point out cultural differences or specifically address moments in history that one doesn’t get a chance to hear very often.

A good example of this is the second track, ‘Christmas in the Trenches’, an anti-war song depicting the famous truce in World War I where a game of football took place between opposing sides. The biting lyrics present quite a contrast with the folk-like tune. It’s delivered with understated charm by Noel McLoughlin. The performers here not only sing the material well, but never try to oversell it or “put it over”. Their approach is very relaxed as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Texts are not included, but you won’t need them - the dict-ion is that good.

I also enjoyed McLoughlin’s touching and darkly humorous ‘Maid Who Sold Her Barley’. This is more of a winter song than a Christmas song, depicting a young lady selling her barley, a symbol for her hand in marriage. The man she initially meets seems to have less than honorable intentions, but she deals with him handily enough. Ger O’Donnell sings the haunting song, ‘The Snows they Melt the Soonest’, describing the transition from autumn to winter with a subtext of strife in relationships.

Although I’m not Irish myself (my father was English, my mother Austrian), there must be a little Irish in there because I felt a kindred spirit with these performers and this material.

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**Nordic Winter**

Borg, Nordquist, Tegner, Weyse, Hamburger, Aagaard, Liljefors, Kohler, Adam, Dahl, Knudsen, Grieg, Sibelius, Maasalo

Gitta-Maria Sjoberg, s; Dorthe Zielke, tpt; Tobias Durholm, v; Lindy Rosborg, org
DACO 755—65 minutes

A magical album of Nordic Christmas songs from Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Finland, and the Faroe Islands. I was familiar with a few of the pieces because some years ago, I became obsessed with an album of Swedish choral music for the holidays, in particular the gentle, longing melody of Swedish composer Gustaf Nordquist’s (1886-1949) ‘Jul, Jul, Strande Jul’. The album also includes the Swedish adaptation of Adam’s ‘O Holy Night’ (Jul-Snag), Grieg’s ‘No Ser Eg Atter Fjell Og Dalar’ (Now I See Again Mountains and Valleys) and by Sibelius, ‘Julviss’ (Don’t Give Me Gold) and ‘Demanten Pa Marssön’ (The Diamond on the Snow of March).

There are both compositions and arrange-
ments by Danish composers Matti Borg (b. 1956), CEF Weyse (1774-1842), Povl Hamburg-er (1901-72), and Thorvald Aagaard (1877-1937), as well as pieces by Swedish composers Alice Tegner (1864-1943), Ruben Liljefors (1871-1936), Emmy Köhler (1858-1925), and Faroese composer Regin Dahl (1918-2007), Finnish composer Armas Maasalo (1885-1960), and Norwegian composer Peder Knudsen (1819-63).

The performances are excellent. If you like warm, introspective, quietly joyful holiday music as I do, you do not want to miss this. I’ve only said this about one other holiday album: I’ll probably wear it out in December. No notes. Texts and translations.

HEISEL

Vom Himmel Hoch
Erna Berger, Elisabeth Grümer, Margot Guelaume, Ursula Lüders, Lisa Otto, Maria Reith, Rita Streich, Gunthild Weber, s; Josephine Varga, Annelies Westen, a; Walther Ludwig, t; Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, bar; Gerhard Tucholski, lute; Felix Schröder, org; Hendel Quartet; Berlin Quartet; Berlin Radio Orchestras/ Günther Arndt, Fried Walter, Hans Carste
Audite 95.741—67 minutes

These monaural recordings of 26 German Christmas carols are taken from archives of German radio broadcasts from 1950-64. Year after year, distinguished singers were engaged to perform on radio, and leading composers and church musicians produced arrangements. The notes describe how families would gather around the radio in post-war Germany to listen to these Christmas broadcasts when commercial recordings were hard to obtain. Some of the carols sound like folk tunes; others are Lutheran chorales.

Accompaniment is by various musical forces, and the performances are mostly of good quality. (One exception may be Maria Reith’s scooping and sliding between notes.) It is a pleasure to hear Rita Streich’s crystalline voice and Fischer-Dieskau’s young and winsome voice and the recordings of other distinguished singers, but the music will probably appeal mostly to people who lived in Germany in those years.

Notes but no texts.

R MOORE

Conformism to the tyranny of the present moment is far more enslaving, far more destructive of integrity and originality, than any thoughtless copying of the past.

WH Auden

CHRISTMAS VIDEOS

Baroque Christmas
Bach, Mozart, Handel
Barbara Bonney, s; Matthias Goerne, bar; Freiburg Baroque Orchestra & Boychoir; German Brass
EuroArts 2016388—60 minutes

This video recording of a concert at Freiburg Cathedral in 1999 includes some lovely shots in and around the cathedral as well as stunning performances by artists at the top of the game. Goerne and Bonney are, as expected, flawless. Up close camera shots give them nowhere to hide—not that they need it. The duets are outstanding; together, these two voices create the perfect color combination for this music, combined with expressive storytelling and beautiful tone in every measure. The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra plays with excellent balance, and the German Brass are the perfect mix of stately and ceremonial. The cathedral’s boychoir and the unnamed other soloists are also terrific.

If there is anything to complain about, it’s that sometimes the camera is panning around the cathedral (inside and outside) or zooming into part of a painting at a moment I wanted to see a singer. Still, the cathedral and its artwork are beautiful.

It’s also worth noting that the scenes from the Christmas market during the boychoir performance of Bach’s ‘Je Me Suis Levé’ made me homesick for the Christmases I spent in Germany. There are also a few moments where the panning isn’t stable (the sound was only affected a few times), but this may have been my antiquated DVD player. This would probably make a very nice gift.

HEISEL

Carols From King’s
King’s College Cambridge/ Stephen Cleobury
Kings 13—134 minutes

In 1954 the beloved service of Nine Lessons and Carols, broadcast on radio since 1928, was recorded for television. This 2014 BBC-produced DVD celebrates the 60th anniversary of that event and is a gorgeous production both aurally and visually. The “Carols from King’s” service is recorded in early December, and is not the same as the ‘Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols’, which is broadcast on Christmas Eve. There are seven rather than nine lessons, readings are drawn from both scripture and secular sources, and it is not a public service. It is attended by members of the College by invitation only.

November/December 2016
In the complete service this famous choir is heard in all its glory: perfect diction, phrasing, intonation—all done with apparent ease. The program contains traditional carols arranged by Willcocks, Darke, Howells, Holst, Tavener, Cornelius, Mathias, and a fresh arrangement of ‘Ding, dong, merrily on high’ by Mack Wilberg. All sound glorious in the superb acoustics of King’s College Chapel. The service begins at 3:00. The bright, rather harsh winter light gradually changes to a warm candlelit glow as the service progresses. Heaven.

The second chapter is a fascinating documentary about the choristers, the tradition that surrounds the singing of ‘Once in Royal David’s City’, interviews with Cleobury, choristers and choral scholars, and appearances by composers Bob Chilcott and John Rutter. Included are clips from 1954 with Boris Ord conducting and 1964 with Chilcott as a chorister singing ‘Once in Royal’. There are interviews with the chorister who sang it in 1954 recording, Jonathan Willcocks, son of Sir David, talking about singing in the choir under his father, and with one of the two organ scholars, whose brother was a chorister at the same time. The last time that happened was back in the 16th Century when Orlando Gibbons was a chorister and his brother, Edmund the organist. Fascinating.

In the words of John Rutter, the King’s College Choir Lessons and Carols “is an enchanted hour and a half, when the noise of the world stops. When the service is over, Christmas has begun.” Hear, hear!

DELCLIFFE

FROM THE ARCHIVES

BRAHMS: Symphony 4; SCHUBERT: Symphony 8; BEETHOVEN: Leonore Overture 3
Swiss Festival Orchestra/ Paul Kletzki
Audite 95.642—77 minutes

This is a particularly interesting broadcast concert, recorded 7 September 1946 with an ad hoc orchestra which the Vienna-bound Walter Legge had just been recording. Kletzki (1900-73) had spent the war years in Switzerland and must have got on well with the ensemble, for the musicians, if a little ragged sometimes, play their hearts out. His extreme interpretations sound remarkably unlike EMI productions—except perhaps their Furtwangler. There is something to be said for provincial performances—one thinks of all the “bad” Homeric manuscripts from out of the way places now being diligently examined for traces of an earlier Homer than what came down through Athens. Kletzki and his Swiss musicians play in a manner which might be described not only as pre-war but pre-electric, with outrageously fluctuating tempos, rubato, massive dramatic contrasts, and eccentric phrasing.

This would be all for naught if the results were not musical, but I find these highly-charged performances persuasive, particularly the Brahms symphony. Subtle they are not, but if you enjoy unfiltered, late-romantic, expressionist modernism you will find it here, captured with a thrilling dynamic range not obtainable when this mode of performance was still in vogue. One thinks of over-the-top Russian 78s—it may be that the conductor, who had been in the Soviet Union before migrating to Switzerland, was inspired by Golovanov as well as by Furtwangler (who had once played his compositions in Berlin). It must have been a great release for Paul Kletzki to be able to travel in the West after all those difficult years, but this late outburst of Nikisch-Mahler sensibility is a worthy memorial of what he left behind. The production is first-rate.

RADCLIFFE

GLUCK: Iphigenie en Tauride
Patricia Neway (Iphigenia), Leopold Simoneau (Pylade), Pierre Mollet (Oreste), Robert Massard (Thoas); Aix-en-Provence Festival/ Carlo Maria Giulini
Profil 16008 [2CD] 117 minutes

This production was recorded at the Aix Festival in 1952. Carlo Maria Giulini conducts the Vocal Ensemble of Paris and Paris Conservatory Orchestra with an international cast. The current release lists only the four most important cast members—none of the minor roles, not even Diana.

The opera contains much beautiful music, but this is opera seria without the vocal fireworks of Handel or the infinite variety of Mozart. Listening to it can prove a bit soporific unless the singers are exceptional. This cast is only half exceptional. The two French baritones, Pierre Mollet and Robert Massard, in the roles of Oreste and Thoas, have serviceable voices but nothing to make a listener sit up and take notice. Massard sounds a bit like a pushed-down tenor, and Mollet’s voice is ade-

American Record Guide
quate, not beautiful. In the title role, the American soprano Patricia Neway reveals a big, rich dramatic soprano that can be a little shrill on top but is never less than exciting to listen to. She has the power for her big moments, such as her aria at the beginning of the last scene, but she can scale the big sound down to a fine pianissimo when needed. To people who know Ms Neway mainly from The Consul or even The Sound of Music, this recording reveals much more about her ability. As Pylade, Oreste’s great friend, the Canadian tenor Leopold Simoneau simply proves again that he is one of the finest lyric tenors of his time—maybe the finest. He uses his beautiful voice with an elegance that puts him in the class of Wunderlich, Gedda, and Kraus. This recording is recommended for the singing of Neway and Simoneau.

The booklet contains timings, a synopsis, a short bit of background information, and bios, but no text.

**PUCCINI:** Suor Angelica
Sena Jurinac (Angelica), Hilde Rössel-Majdan (Old Princess); Vienna Symphony/ Wilhelm Loibner

**VERDI:** Don Carlo excerpts
Sena Jurinac (Elisabetta), Eugenio Fernandi (Carlos); Vienna Philharmonic/ Herbert von Karajan

Myto 316—67 minutes

This performance of Suor Angelica was recorded in December of 1951. Unfortunately, the little brochure that comes with this does not shed any light on where. Since there is no applause, I assume that it was not performed before an audience. There is a narrator who apparently fills in some of the action, so I am assuming this was a radio broadcast. In any case, the musical performance is quite good. Naturally, the main interest centers on the great soprano Sena Jurinac, singing a role not usually associated with her. In 1951 she was only 30, and her voice sounds quite young and fresh, fully able to deal with the high tessitura in the last third of the opera. It shows no sign of strain even in the highest reaches of Angelica’s music. Jurinac also projects the essential character of this troubled nun: the kindness, sadness, and despair that drives her to her final act, but also the wonder of the last moments.

Jurinac is not the only positive element here. The mezzo Hilde Rössel-Majdan creates a believable Princess and sings beautifully the best mezzo role Puccini ever wrote. The small roles are well sung—very important in the first half, which is full of Puccini’s scene-setting “local color” writing. The conductor Wilhelm Loibner keeps things moving as they should.

For some people the fact that this very Italian work is sung in German may be a problem. I would never choose this as my only Suor Angelica; but it is a fine performance, and one gets to hear the young Jurinac in an atypical role. I will also hang on to Tebaldi on my old London Trittico recording.

But all is not in German here. To fill out the program the Myto folks have included excerpts from the final scene of Don Carlo: Elisabetta’s aria, part of the following Carlo-Elisabetta duet, and the final moments when the couple is confronted by the King, the Grand Inquisitor, and that mysterious Friar. This music comes from Salzburg in 1959; the orchestra is the Vienna Philharmonic, and the conductor is Karajan. Again Jurinac seems at the height of her powers; she performs the long aria with great artistry. Her Carlo is Eugenio Fernandi, a tenor who sang often at the Met in those years. Fernandi’s voice is adequate, but compared to many Carlos before and since, he seems a bit nasal and a little light for the role. But it’s always good to have some of Don Carlo done by a singer such as Jurinac, and the presence of Cesare Siepi as Philip and Nicola Zaccaria as the Friar make one wish we had the whole opera.

The little brochure has only a cast list and a track list—no timings, synopsis, or texts.

**RAVEL:** Bolero; La Valse; Rapsodie Espagnole; Valses Nobles & Sentimentales; Menuet Antique; Pavane; Tombeau de Couperin; Mother Goose; Alborada del Gracioso; Une Barque sur l’ocean; Left Hand Piano Concerto
Paris Conservatory Orchestra/ André Cluytens
Urania 121.268 [2CD] 153 minutes

Was not the 1950s the great decade for Maurice Ravel? There were three generations of truly great French musicians at work in those years and few composers better suited to the new high fidelity than this great master of orchestration. The recordings flew off the shelves and many remain collectors’ items to this day. Ones by André Cluytens (1905-67) attracted less attention at the time, but the Belgian who in 1949 succeeded Charles Munch as conductor of the Paris Conservatory Orchestra was as considerable as his rivals.

His Ravel is about equal parts Dutch and

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French—very Dutch in attention to detail, all nuances attended to in a manner one associates (positively) with Mengelberg, and (negatively) with Van Beinum. Attention to detail is not a characteristic traditionally associated with Paris orchestras, but under Cluytens the Paris Conservatoire could give the Philharmonia a run for the money, particularly in these splendid 1961-62 EMI productions. But this seems to have come with a cost, since the reedy sonorities typical of French orchestras in Ravel’s day are gone too—one might as well be listening to the Philharmonia.

In another and appropriate way this Ravel is very French indeed—the way of French neoclassical art. To describe something as “academic” is usually to condemn it, but such should not be the case here. Ravel was as French as they come, not least in his clearly delineated forms, bold colors, and mastery of tradition. Think Poussin, think Racine. Cluytens observes all the proprieties—the unities, one might almost say—in a way that cannot fail to draw approving smiles from knowing listeners. His musical pearls—*Bolero*, *La Valse*—are as geometrical as they are glittering. The concerto with Samson François is stunning.

Then there is the rather striking nude on the cover, very Edward Weston-ish. [*the Producer was unable to trace the Author of the picture published on the cover. The Publisher is obviously available to the above mentioned parties to define their rights in terms of law*”—sic.] I’d like to believe this is a throwback to the vulgar erotica used to peddle high fidelity in the 1950s (Ravel’s *Bolero*—oo-oo-oo!) But it is eye candy and no more. The erotica of the old LPs at least had associations with yellow-covered novels, night life, and the Left Bank—with France, if not exactly with poor Ravel. I suspect that for listeners who associate erotica (or high fidelity) with back-lit naked bodies, Cluytens, for all the justice he does to Ravel’s sonic textures, is not the best choice. He offers more subtle forms of titillation.

**S** **CHOECK:** *Penthesilea*

Martha Modl (*Penthesilea*), Eberhard Waechter (*Achilles*), Paula Brivkalne (*Prothoe*), Paula Lenchner-Schmidt (*Meroe*), Res Fischer (*Oberpriesterin*), Stuttgart Opera / Ferdinand Leitner
Walhall 225—77 minutes

Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck is known for his operas, instrumental works, and songs. (Some people consider him the last of the great lieder composers.) He is considered a romantic neo-Straussian, but for a period in the 1920s he worked with modernism. There were signs of that coming in *Trommelschlage* (1915) and less so in his opera *Venus* (1921). The transformation began in 1923 after he and Honegger attended the premiere of *Les Noces*. After hearing more Stravinsky plus works by Hindemith, Schoenberg, Berg, Krenek, and others, Schoeck joined the parade. 1923 also marked the bitter end of his affair with Mary de Senger. It was perhaps with that in mind that his biographer Hans Corrodi suggested Heinrich von Kleist’s “man against woman” play, *Penthesilea* (1808), as a subject for an opera. Schoeck took to the idea quickly and finished it in 1925, while involved in another tumultuous affair; this one with soprano Hilde Bartscher that led to his marriage.

None of the four existing recordings comes with an English libretto. Three come with a German-only libretto; the Walhall has none. I am not sure of the synopses I’ve seen, so I am going to rely on my condensation of one by Kurt Moses (a German speaker) from his review of the Marco Venzago recording (March/April 2001).

“Schoeck omitted the initial expository scenes of [Kleist’s play]...[Kleist]...turned the original Greek story...on its head. In that version, Achilles killed Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons, in combat during the Trojan War...[I]n the Kleist play, Penthesilea lusts for the Greek hero...[but] according to Amazon custom, she can only accept him if she first conquers him in combat. So when Achilles wounds the Queen in battle, takes her prisoner, and then wants to win her love, he pretends that she was the victor. The truth emerges...as the battle resumes. Achilles then invites the Queen to single combat but throws away his armor as the irate Penthesilea rushes at him and kills him with her arrows; she then helps her hounds tear apart his body. When she finally regains her composure, she is appalled at what she did, and kills herself...falling over Achilles’s body.”

Schoeck said that he did not “add a comma” to Kleist’s play, but he did rearrange it and cut the first seven or eight scenes, turning a three-act play into what he called “one great finale”. After the 1927 Dresden premiere fared less well than he hoped, he added a Straussian love duet to enhance its appeal—the opera’s only lyrical music.

The opera’s musical roots are Strauss’s *Elektra* and Bartok’s *Bluebeard’s Castle*. It is
compact and full of grinding dissonance, blood, passion, and violence. There are many startling and worthy effects: the off-stage male and female choruses representing combat accompanied by off-stage trumpets, the tense conversations of the Amazons, the employment of contrapuntal ostinatos, and much more. According to Peter Palmer (“Schoeck’s Penthesilea”, Musical Times, Spring 2009), the harmony is “not...atonal so much as freetonal...It has more in common with modernism than Expressionism”, an opinion confirmed by Schoeck’s overstatement that “Kleist’s verses supply the actual melody, and the music adds only the harmony and rhythm.” An interesting facet of that harmony is the assignment of C-Major to Achilles’ music and F-sharp to Penthesilea’s, thereby creating a relationship between them based on the tritone or “devil in music”. The dark orchestration is made up of four violins, a large contingent of violas, cellos, and basses; three flutes doubling on piccolo, one oboe doubling on English horn, contrabassoon (but no regular bassoon), four horns, four trumpets in the pit and three on stage, four trombones, tuba, two pianos, and a large percussion section. That produces a raw, menacing, yet dark sound, enhanced by the low writing for Achilles and Penthesilea, a role that Schoeck called the most rewarding contralto part he knew, though it has usually been sung by a mezzo on recordings. All that contrasts with the preponderance of female voices, with males represented only by Achilles, Diomedes, and a brief appearance by a Herald. The text is delivered as sung, spoken, and what Palmer calls “fully notated recitative” where rhythms are indicated but not pitches. Schoeck applied these techniques freely, seamlessly shifting from one to the other.

Many Schoeckians consider Penthesilea the composer’s greatest work, though it may sound forbidding to lovers of post-Mahler romanticism. It is gripping, exciting, well-paced, and more approachable than one might think. Schoeck’s varied treatment of the text works; the harmonies are interesting, even haunting, and the effects come off. Modernist though it may be, Schoeck softened the edges of Penthesilea just enough for it to appeal to admirers of Zemlinsky, Schreker, and the romantic Schoeck. (As it turns out, he returned to tonality and reinstated himself as a romantic soon after the opera’s premiere.)

This Walhall recording is a 1957 broadcast from Stuttgart. Martha Modl is solid, rich, and powerful in her low register, with a bit of reaching downward here and there. For Wagnerites who relish Modl’s Brunnhilde from those early 1950s Bayreuth Ring recordings led by Joseph Keilberth, she is reason enough to acquire this recording. The other women sing with enough militancy to be worthy of their powerful leader. Eberhard Wächter is not the most powerful of baritones, but his lyricism is an asset. Ferdinand Leitner leads the fiercest and most violent performance available. The monaural sound is very good, though the singers dominate because of the close miking. Walhall supplies nothing but the 20 track titles and timings.

Other choices are stereo concert recordings led by Zdenek Macal (which may not be on CD), Gerd Albrecht (Jan/Feb 1995), and Mario Venzago (Mar/Apr 2001). Macal does a good job of balancing the violence with what lyricism exists in the piece; and Carol Smith, whom I have seen listed as a mezzo and an alto, leads a strong cast. Albrecht and his recording smooth out the opera a bit too much. Helga Dernesch is an OK but somewhat stressed lead, and Theo Adam’s Achilles is wobbly. Between the two, I prefer Macal. The Venzago seemed good from what I heard sampling it on inadequate equipment. Mr Moses liked Yvonne Naef but was less impressed by Jeffrey Johnson’s Achilles.

In terms of timings, Venzago is at 85, a drawback because it comes on two full-priced CDs. Albrecht comes in at 80 minutes (one CD), and Macal at 79. Leitner is 77 minutes. Some of that is owing to his tempos, but from what I can tell following the Macal libretto, Leitner may have made some small cuts.

**Word Police: Curate**

Suddenly we are seeing in publicity “curator” and the verb “curate” applied to classical concerts. Season folders even say things like “a program curated by”. It makes no sense. A curator manages or oversees a collection in a museum. The word is being used for anyone who designs an exhibit or product line--and that is not legitimate. You will even see “curated” menus in restaurants. Can you believe it? Who decides what will be performed at a concert is either the Music Director or the musicians themselves. There is no “curator”!

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HECHT

November/December 2016
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS & HOLST: Songs, Choruses, Band Music
Edgar Coyle, Peter Dawson, Robert Irwin, bar; Stuart Robertson, t; Gerald Moore, p; Black Dyke Mills Band; HM Life Guards/Lieut. H Eldridge; Colne Orpheus Glee Union/ Luther Greenwood; Hastings Municipal Orchestra/ Julius Harrison; New Concert Orchestra/ Rae Jenkins; St George’s Chapel Choir, Windsor/ Rev. EH Fellowes; Temple Church Choir/ George Thalban-Ball; BBC Chorus/ Leslie Woodgate
Albion 27—66 minutes
David Michell collected a large number of 78s made from 1922 to 1946 and made those archival recordings available to Albion Records, the label of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society. The program is a hodgepodge of vocal and instrumental works by Vaughan Williams and his friend Gustav Holst.

Five songs of VW begin the program, three accompanied by the exemplary Gerald Moore and one accompanied by an unnamed string quartet. His hymn, ‘For All the Saints,’ is sung by the St George’s Chapel Choir (Windsor Castle) and ‘Wassail Song’ by the Colne Orpheus Glee Union.

A song and three choral works of Holst works are included. His setting of ‘Turn Back, O Man’ is sung by the Temple Church Choir under Thalban-Ball, their music director for nearly 60 years.

Moore’s accompaniment of Irwin and Robinson is as excellent as one would expect, but the singing is of an older style that may not appeal as much to audiences now. Performances of music for concert band (English Folk Song Suite by VW; First Suite for Military Band and Moorside Suite by Holst) are undistinguished; they’re like hearing a badly recorded summer concert in the park by an amateur band.

Better performances of all these works are easily found. If you are looking for older recordings reissued from old 78s, this may be of interest to you. Notes and texts. R MOORE

VERDI: Rigoletto
Renata Scotto (Gilda), Kostas Paskalis (Rigoletto), Luciano Pavarotti (Duke), Rosa Laghazza (Maddalena), Paolo Washington (Sparafucile), Plinio Clabassi (Monterone); Rome Opera/ Carlo Maria Giulini—Urania 121.310 [2CD] 149 minutes

Even though the cover reads “1966 RAI recording,” this recording sounds as if it were made by someone in the audience at the Rome Opera performance. Often, especially in the first act, one can hear the prompter’s cues. Again in the first scene, the final ensemble loses its balance because one can barely hear Pavarotti, who apparently is far enough away from the person recording to become almost inaudible.

Aside from these problems, this is a very good performance of Rigoletto. It observes the cuts standard in 1966, such as the Duke’s third act cabaletta, now nearly universally restored. The conductor, Carlo Maria Giulini, makes his orchestra play with the clarity and superb articulation of a chamber group. His cast is nearly faultless. The young Pavarotti simply sings the Duke perfectly. One would be hard put to find a flaw in his singing. To judge from the picture on the cover, Pavarotti had not yet let himself balloon into obesity, so he must have cut a dashing figure as the perfect Duke of Mantua. Renata Scotto sounds young, fully able to summon all the tricks of the lyric-coloratura’s trade to create a believable and sympathetic Gilda. Near the end she uses her soft singing and even a break in her voice to picture Gilda’s dying moments. Yet she has all the power needed for the big Verdi moments: the ‘Vendetta’ at the end of Act III and the storm trio with the killer siblings in Act IV.

As Rigoletto, the Greek baritone Kostas Paskalis creates a most sympathetic tragic figure. He does not possess the huge sound of a Warren, Bastianini, or Merrill, but he uses his lyric baritone to full effect. His cries of “Gilda” after the kidnapping make his despair very real, and he is willing to distort the line in ‘Cortigiani’ for dramatic effect, making good use of portamento. He rises to real fury in the ‘Vendetta’ duet. Some may quibble that he sounds a bit light in the quartet or that he avoids the high note at the end, but in general he holds his own with Pavarotti and Scotto and makes a more than acceptable Rigoletto.

In the three important-but-lesser roles, Paolo Washington and Rosa Laghazza make a fine pair of thugs, and Plinio Clabassi intones his curse well as Monterone.

The bonus material includes arias by Pavarotti from Boheme and Tosca as well as the seemingly-redundant three arias from Rigoletto. The one item of interest here is a duet with Josephine Veasey from Beatrice di Tenda. All these extras are early Decca recordings by the tenor.

This recording will be a welcome addition for Pavarotti fans who want the tenor at every
stage of his career. The little booklet contains timings, nothing else.

SININGER

Charles Munch

DEBUSSY: La Damoselle Elue; Martyrdom of St Sebastien; POULENC: Gloria; VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Symphony 2; BARBER: Adagio

Boston Symphony, Paris Conservatoire Orchestra

Urania 121.262 [2CD] 142 minutes

If this appears like a rather odd program, it is typical of what Bostonians became accustomed to, over the decades, music directors Monteux, Koussevitzky, and Munch built an audience with a taste for large, complex, and seldom-heard works and for contemporary music of many stripes.

The Honegger symphony (heard here in its first recording, made in Paris in 1942) is delivered in a clean-lined, thoroughly modern performance suggesting why Munch would have appealed as a successor to Koussevitzky. The world premiere performance of Poulenc’s Gloria, given in Boston in 1961, burbles with untrammeled joy and, like the Honegger, benefits from the conductor’s close relationship with the composer. The Debussy pieces (like the Barber, taken from commercial recordings) were perhaps too French to travel well, but benefit from the thick, late-romantic aura the conductor imparts and from his role as speaker in St Sebastien.

The standout item is, of all unexpected things, the Vaughan Williams symphony, from a 1958 broadcast. This short, busy work with its out-sized percussion simply dazzles, Munch letting go with the fireworks while imparting enough warmth to the chromatic harmonies to remind one that this strange symphony is Vaughan Williams after all. RCA would never have recorded such an item, reminding us why off-the-air performances will always be a valuable supplement to the studio selections limited by product-branding—no doubt the company had it on the chin with some of the more outré items Koussevitzky recorded.

The Munch years with the Boston Symphony, 1949-62, marked the end of an era, to be followed by a dull reign of prim uniformity in classical repertoire and rebarbaric experimentation in contemporary music. That there was a happy conjunction before classical and contemporary went their separate ways, mid-century recordings by American symphony orchestras bear witness. No notes, texts, or photographs.

RADCLIFFE

Nathan Milstein, violin

Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, Bruch Concertos

Pittsburgh Symphony/ William Steinberg; Philharmonia Orchestra/ Anatole Fistoulari, Leon Barzin—Urania 121.153 [2CD] 154 minutes

Unless you don’t mind sonic defects you should skip this. On its website (but nowhere in the skimpy liner notes) Urania claims: “All our CDs are produced to the highest standards of quality and the restoration is accurately made in 24 bit and 96 kHx with a special method which, while aiming at the presentation of the sound naturalness of the source, fully recovers the beauty of the original recording.” So I gather they upsamled a 16-bit 44 kHx CD and then converted it back to standard CD resolution. It seems this back-and-forth process created a sonic defect—a rapid whup-whup-whup, heard at the start of the Mendelssohn, Bruch, and slow movement of the Tchaikovsky, and in various other spots, though not in the Beethoven and Brahms. The defect isn’t present on the EMI Seraphim of the Tchaikovsky and Brahms (69035, M/A 1996), still available for about 5 bucks. An 8-disc Milstein set including these five concertos plus much more can be had for about $50 (EMI 98667). These Urania discs sell for full price, almost $30. You do the math.

EMI has reissued these performances, recorded 1955 to 1960, many times and they’ve been reviewed by ARG again and again. The sound is quite good despite its age, and all but the Beethoven is stereo. Even the monaural Beethoven is dynamic and relatively hiss-free, with accurate instrumental timbres—I’m impressed that engineers achieved this in 1955. Milstein is very fine, his tone unforced, sweet, and compact. I feel like a lawyer: “Your Honor, I don’t think you should buy these overpriced, defective discs; but if you do, rest assured the performances are wonderful!”

WRIGHT

The war did a lot more harm than good. You can’t teach fellows to go around killing people and giving them medals the more they kill, and then expect them to settle down like a lot of bank clerks for the rest of their days.

Anthony Gilbert, in Death Won’t Wait
Music can mean many things to different people and to some it can mean everything. Music can represent religious beliefs, create political conversations, and preserve the cultural aspects of a civilization. Now imagine living in a place where music has been heavily censored since the 1970s, a ban on instrumental music wasn’t lifted until 2001, and the first performance of a decades old children’s book moved people to tears because they thought the songs were lost. This is Afghanistan. This is the importance of the “Rosegarden of Light” release. The liner notes tell of books about Afghan music and its history and a website to view videos of performers. The performances are lively and solid, mostly a mix of Indian, Persian, and Pashtun, with some strongly influenced by western music. The music isn’t the most difficult, but simply having groups like the ANIM Junior Ensemble of Traditional Afghan Instruments playing folk songs and the all-female Ensemble Zohra existing at all is a major accomplishment. The US string sextet Cuantro Puntos does the heavy lifting on the culturally mixed pieces, and the collaborative works turn an already important musical release into something even greater.

Robert Martin forces the Enkidu Quartet to do all the lifting in his Embrace the Wind! cycle of nine string quartets with seven interludes. Each work celebrates the wind as an artistic, cultural, spiritual, or mechanical contributor to humanity. Sliding Gears is, understandably, filled with ascending and descending slides. ‘Pinwheels’ whirls and bends consistently; ‘Gusts in a Field of Windmills’ mixes the consistency of mechanical wind machines with the capricious wind itself. An ostinato trudges ahead while trills, slides, and motives bounce to and fro. Slides are the most prevalent compositional tool used by Martin in his chromatic program, though plucks and smacks do appear as well. All the pieces and some of the interludes are solos, and are related to the wind in some manner, but the program feels far from coherent. This could be because motives rise and die seemingly apart from anything around them—that gives several pieces a very disjointed feel. But this is also exactly how the wind can act, so maybe Martin achieved exactly what he set out to.

It’s strange, and perhaps sad, when the entirety of a program’s liner notes is devoted to...
countering the thinking of individuals who believe expression cannot exist in traditional harmonies. I generally contend with outlandish and nonsensical claims asserting how proudly postmodern a program or composer is, but because none of those words have any actual meaning I try to forget them as soon as I can. Jean-Baptiste Muller, composing and performing solo piano music, falls victim, apparently, to not using nonsensical words and so must plead that the listener forget “everything you know about the history of music. Don’t deny yourself the pleasure!” The instructions should more accurately read, “forget everything after the classical period”, because there is a tranquil Bach chorale sandwiched between two brief sonatas filled with descending harmonic series and too many trills. The music gets no darker than a lighter movement of Haydn circa 1770, and Muller’s touch is effortless as his fingers skip across the keys.

Haskell Small’s fingers dance through decidedly less tonal material. The recording is also not compressed and there is a bit of clipping that accompanies the expanded dynamic range. The main motive of Journey in Silence: Reflection on the Book of Hours is heard across the 11 movements with some sounding more like ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb’ than others. Small makes perspicacious use of silence in his program, though that same space often abuts jagged lines and octave leaps. The eight lamenting movements of Lullaby of War include the narration of various poems ranging from Stephen Crane’s ‘War is Kind’ to Paula Tatrunis’s ‘Guernica Pantoum’. Each poem stands alone, set apart from Small’s musical setting, and this creates the slightest hint of a conversation between the two.

Another program not intended for the fierce devotees of atonal music, Emily Mitchell’s harp performances, swing and sway like porch chimes in a summer breeze. Performing pieces by Gary Shocker, the music is tranquil and heavy in the sense that it may make you sleepy. There is elegance in Shocker’s My Kingdom for a Harp but the instrument is somehow relegated to the background even though nothing else is playing. Better Than One is a cute and playful harp duo that “reflects a more upbeat style” and, while this is true compared to other pieces on the program, it falls short of keeping my attention. ‘Snow’ tosses in a few tricks between the harps to create new sounds and demonstrates Shocker’s clear knowledge of the difficult instrument, though his employment of that knowledge faithfully reproduces the traditional stereotype.

Far more upbeat than Shocker’s pieces, Ryan Francis’s ‘Remix’ is a rumination on electronic music for violin and piano. The repetitions and figures mimic American minimalism, and the breaks and motives push it past that particular John Adams brand of it. Regardless, the work is incredibly kinetic and syncopated. Clint Needham’s ‘On The Road’ is highly visual. It’s easy to envision the open road of I, the pedal tones of the violin representing the horizon stretching endlessly ahead, the shifts in character depicting the second guessing and changing thoughts of the driver. II is all optimism, with a quicker pace, mild trepidation, and motive piano. Imagined Archipelagos, by Reinaldo Moya, fuses Venezuelan folk music with the minimalist leanings of the program.

The shakuhachi is bewitching and beguiling. The Japanese end-blown flute is a traditional Eastern instrument with cultural significance dating back to the 8th Century. It was in the medieval period even used to catch spies of the Shogun. Tuned to a minor pentatonic scale and made primarily from bamboo, each instrument is an individual voice with five holes requiring different embouchures, fingerings, airspeed, and angles capable of producing, depending on its size, octaves of subtly colored notes. Elizabeth Brown’s Afterimage adds voice and shamisen to create motives with echoes. Richard Teitelbaum’s Hi Kaeshi Hachi Mi Fu’ uses chance operations to recombine melodic phrases that appear regularly in traditional material. Ralph Samuelson’s program is calming, meditative, and exactly the kind of music that respects the limitations and difficulties of an instrument while offering an exploration of its capabilities.

Having been a film and TV composer for 20 years, Shie Rozow determined it was time to create music not for producers but for himself. Rozow’s music concentrates and contemplates beauty and grace in music in different ways. The solo piano Fantasia Appassionata was inspired by a female musician sent to a concentration camp in WW II who was forced to play concerts for officers. Upon release, she played the piano every day until her death at the age of 110. Rozow’s piece attempts to capture the triumph of this woman’s spirit despite the terrible ordeal she endured with lots of minor mode passagework with major lifts and chorale-like voice leading. The melodies are hopeful, yet slow, until the dark and stormy
Handel: Saul  
Christopher Purves (Saul, Samuel), Iestyn Davies (David), Lucy Crowe (Merab), Sophie Bevan (Michal), Paul Appleby (Jonathan), Benjamin Hulett (Abner, Priest, etc.), John Graham-Hall (Witch), Glyndebourne Chorus, Age of Enlightenment/Ivor Bolton—Opus Arte 1216—185 mins

I approached this with some uncertainty, given the rather garish production photos. Though I retain some reservations, I am mostly impressed by this video.

Directors give themselves enough trouble bringing Handel’s operas to staged production, but doing that for oratorios is really tricky. Though Handel did not intend them to be staged, their dramatic character often inspires it—at least if potential directors can behave themselves.

I must salute stage director Barry Kosky’s genuine respect for Handel’s score. It is followed in full here, save for one very tiny recitative (No. 31). The long overture is played without stage distraction. Other orchestral sections are either played straight or enlivened by dancers. Above all, the mighty choruses are not only preserved but brought quite theatrically to life. For whatever practical purposes, though, the work’s three acts are turned into two parts, the first running midway into Act II, the second picking up there and working on through Act III.

Kosky is very much a master of visual effects and lively action. Never a dull moment. His imaginative use of action is often very good at amplifying dramatic moments or motives—but also to further his interpretation of the work.

It is clear from the Old Testament accounts and from Charles Jennens’s libretto for Handel, that Saul is from the very beginning a disturbed personality; but Kosky does everything to make the tragic king almost totally insane.

VIDEO
from the outset. He has Saul stalking around the stage glowering and restless, descending steadily through his jealousy (from the start) of David into manic melodrama rather than gripping tragedy. Purves throws himself into such a portrayal with frantic intensity.

Kosky makes David even more of a foil to Saul than one would expect. His David is a cold and calculating schemer, manipulating Jonathan with homosexual provocation while he treats marriage to the palpitating Michal as just a political move. Jonathan himself is mere cardboard virtue by comparison. But the personalities of the initially scornful Merab and the loving Michal are very deftly developed.

At least two of Kosky’s interpretations set off alarm bells, opinion. He gives to one singer, the agile tenor Hulett, four lesser roles, dolling him up variously as a grotesque clown. And the powerful scene with the Witch of Endor is a disaster: the Witch is sung by a male singer (tenor), who gives Saul (in his underwear) a big, lusty kiss. He/she is fitted with big breasts, which suckle Saul with so much magic milk that the disoriented king sings both his own words and those of Samuel’s ghost. This carries Saul’s story away from tragedy or even melodrama into a disgusting travesty of his last appearance!

There is really no set, but there are some set-pieces—notably some banks of candles, interestingly mounted, at the beginning of the second part. The staging and the lighting readily give us sense of place instead. The costumes are more-or-less of Handel’s time (though why does the king—Saul at first, then David—wear a black skirt?).

Vocally, the cast is resplendent. Despite all the shenanigans required of him, Purves manages to sing with power and expression. If you close your eyes to Davies’s icy acting, you can relish his smooth and quite lovely singing. Crowe and Bevan are continuing delights as Saul’s two daughters.

The chorus is given a lot of movement and participates often very movingly (‘Preserve him for the glory of thy name’), but it manages to shift about as required and still sing with an appropriate beauty and force. The team of six dancers carries out Otto Pichler’s clever choreography with really enjoyable zest. Handel veteran Bolton conducts the period orchestra with obvious relish.

Added is a ten-minute Extra where Kosky and others argue for his interpretation.

There is much in this production to admire and relish. But my two objections prevent me from placing this video on a par, as a successful oratorio visualization, with Luc Bondy’s production of Handel’s Hercules—conducted by William Christie and recently reissued (S/O).

BARKER

MOUSSORGSKY: Boris Godunov
Martin Tsonev (Boris), Angel Hristov (Pimen), Sergei Drobishevski (Shuiski), Kostadin Andreev (Gregori), Irina Zhekova (Xenia), Mario Krastev (Fyodor), Peter Buchkov (Varlaam); Sofia Opera/ Konstantin Chudovski
Dynamic 37718—115 minutes

This outdoor production was staged in front of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia in 2014. The opera is not complete. The scenes of the Polish act are eliminated, as is the (often final) scene in the Kromy Forest. Musically, this is Moussorgsky’s orchestration, rather than the more frequently heard Rimsky-Korsakov or the Shostakovich. The action takes place on a huge stage or series of platforms, thus creating a very large performing area, even surrounding the orchestra. The audience is seated in stadium-style bleachers.

The large stage enables impressive crowd scenes and some interesting special effects, such as mounted soldiers chasing a running Gregori offstage. But the size of the stage makes smaller scenes difficult. Often in a scene with only a few people, the singers take rather long walks to one area of the stage or another, destroying any intimate connection between characters. Other directoral touches make no sense at all. For his first scene, Pimen is situated in a sort of tree house, high above the stage. He converses with Gregori, who wanders about below, certainly not in close communication with the older monk. Worse, in the last scene, when Pimen supposedly visits Boris in the palace, he stays on his high platform. The shepherd he tells of appears in the palace and sings some of Pimen’s story. The appearance of the shepherd adds nothing to the production except another bass to the cast. Even weirder is Boris’s death. After he falls, he gets up and, accompanied by the beautiful music that ends the scene, walks upstage to an open door leading to a heavenly light. The director apparently forgives Boris and gives him an ending similar to Marguerite in Faust.

The performance of most of the singers is quite good. In the title role Martin Tsonev has the big bass voice as well as the imposing physical stature for an ideal Boris. In this bass-
heavy opera, Angel Hristov and Peter Bashkov are both impressive as Pimen and Varlaam. Boris's children are exceptionally well sung by soprano Irina Zhakova and boy soprano Mario Krastev. Tenor Sergej Drobishevski makes a good Shuiski, but I was less impressed by Konstantin Andreev, who looked too old and sounded somewhat forced as Gregori. The chorus, orchestra, and many small parts were effective under the leadership of Konstantin Chudovski.

The booklet contains a synopsis and some (but not enough) background information. This is a Boris with some good singing but a lot of questionable staging. There are better and certainly more complete Boris out there.

SININGER

Mozart: Abduction from the Seraglio

Sally Matthews (Konstanze), Mari Eriksmoen(Blonde), Edgaras Montvidas (Belmonte), Brenden Gunnell (Pedrillo), Tobias Kehrer (Osmin), Franck Saurel (Pasha Selim); Glyndebourne Opera/Robin Ticciati

This 2015 Glyndebourne production bears the mark of its director, David McVicar, but this time the mark is a very positive one. McVicar centers much of his attention on the nonsinging role of the Pasha Selim, whose humane decision brings about the happy ending. Without adding material, McVicar simply uses more of the dialog that is usually heavily cut; he also shows us the Pasha's other wives and children, who appear happy. We also see the Pasha's difficulty in controlling his outright lust for Konstanze and his anger when she will understand a man who treats family with and children, who appear happy. We also see manage his estate with what amounts to a police force and hire a (however comic) thug singing role of the Pasha Selim, whose humane decision brings about the happy ending. Without adding material, McVicar simply uses more of the dialog that is usually heavily cut; he also shows us the Pasha's other wives and children, who appear happy. We also see the Pasha's difficulty in controlling his outright lust for Konstanze and his anger when she will not accede to his demands. Thus we begin to understand a man who can treat family with kindness and seek intellectual wisdom yet manage his estate with what amounts to a police force and hire a (however comic) thug like Osmin.

None of the restored dialog seems tedious, probably because McVicar's setting of the action moves rather often from one place to another on the Pasha's estate, giving the whole a rather cinematic effect and definitely increasing the audience's comprehension and enjoyment. The sets and costumes, designed by Vicki Mortimer, are consistently appropriate and often beautiful.

So here we have a European (well...English) production of an opera that gives the audience an accurate and complete realization of the work as a piece of theatre. Bravo, Mr. McVicar!

Actually, this may be one of the few cases where the dramatic end of the production may outweigh the musical, though the music is generally well served also. Robin Ticciati leads the Glyndebourne Chorus and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (how appropriate for this work); the tempos are right, and the orchestra plays expertly. The best singing comes from the two extremes—Konstanze and Osmin. Sally Matthews seems to have no trouble with Konstanze's difficult coloratura; she even sings the fiendish 'Marten aller ar ten' while fighting off the lustful advances of the Pasha. She somehow succeeds in making Konstanze a really sympathetic person, not just the snob she can become. As Osmin, Tobias Kehrer reveals a wonderful dark bass that should keep him employed in the German bass repertoire for a long time. (He is Fafner in this fall's Rheingold in Chicago.) He also has the feel for comedy that Osmins must possess, and he can even do a cartwheel on stage! Though somewhat older than most Pedrillos, Brenden Gunnell sings quite well and displays lots of dramatic energy as the wily servant. Edgaras Montvidas does not have the most beautiful tenor, but he acts well as Belmonte. As Blonde, Mari Eriksmoen pulls off her comic scenes with skill and sings generally well, though she has a problem with that pesky high tone in her second act aria. Franck Saurel brings out all the elements of the Pasha's character.

The DVD comes with a booklet containing two short articles and a synopsis. There's also a bonus on the disc—a short discussion of the production.

Rossini: L'Inganno Felice

Silvia Della Benetta (Isabella), Lorenzo Regazzo (Tarabetto), Artavazd Sargsyan (Duke), Tiziano Bracci (Batone), Baurzhan Anderzhanov (Ormondo); Rossini in Wildbad Festival/Antonino Fogliani—Dynamic 37760 [DVD] 94 minutes

Here is yet another early Rossini opera. The composer wrote it when he was only 20, two years after his success with La Cambiale di Matrimonio. It is described as a farce for music, but that is misleading. It has a happy ending, and there are some comic scenes, but the story grows out of a crime committed years before that could have resulted in tragedy. There is the threat of death for the heroine until the final moments of the opera, and the

American Record Guide
villain is as heartless as Don Pizarro or Iago, both of whom he resembles.

But however one classifies it, _L'Inganno Felice_ (The Happy Deception) is a delightful 90 minutes of opera. Rossini packs those minutes with non-stop action and several arias and ensembles that already bear the traits we will hear in his later works. Except for Ormondo, the villain, the characters are quite recognizable Rossini types: the virtuous, intelligent heroine (here a soprano), the romantic tenor, the foolish bass, and the wily, good-natured baritone who engineers the whole plot even better than Figaro.

The cast in this performance is not well known, but the Rossini in Wildbad Festival seems to come up with singers who are masters of the style. The tenor Ar tavazd Sargsyan, whose voice seems a bit small, has the range and flexibility for the Rossini hero. As the hapless Batone, Tiziano Bracci contributes a fine basso buffo sound and excellent comic timing. Baritone Baurzhanchand Anderzhanov makes a believable villain and sings acceptably.

Best of all are the two most sympathetic characters—Isabella, the wronged wife, and Tarabotto, her savior and father figure whose combination of kindness and intelligence make him just about an ideal person. Silvia Della Benetta brings out the several facets of Isabella's character—her fear, her caution, her confidence, and her love. She has a fine lyricoloratura soprano just right for the role. As Tarabotto, Lorenzo Regazzo nearly steals the show. His is not a great voice, but he uses it and his excellent acting skills to create a totally lovable man who would go to any lengths to secure the happiness of his "niece". Just watching his performance is a treat; it's the work of a real theatrical artist.

The production is updated with modern costumes and a car. It's all very clever and well done, a good job by director Jochen Schönleber. The orchestra looks happy and plays well under Antonino Fogliani. The booklet has a synopsis and an essay. No text, but none is needed. Rossini fans will want this one.

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**SHCHEDRIN: The Left-Hander**

André Popov (Left-Hander), Edward Tsunga (Platov), Kristina Alieva (Flea), Maria Maksakova (Princess Charlotte), Vladimir Moroz (Alexander I, Nicholas I); Mariinsky Theatre/Valery Gergiev

Mariinsky 588 [DVD & BluRay] 120 minutes

Last year I reviewed the CD of this performance (July/August 2015). Now there is a DVD and BluRay. In the earlier review I commented favorably on the double nature (satire and tragedy) of the work and how Shchedrin's music fits both moods very well. Seeing the production, I have no reason to revise my opinions, though I did not think the work too short for the story, as I apparently did the first time around.

The production, directed by Alexei Stepanov and designed by Alexander Orlov (sets) and Irina Cherednikova (costumes) is simply excellent. One watches intently just to see what exciting action or spectacular effect will be next. Among them are the clever choreography (by Ilya Ustyantsev) of the British Royal Guards, the ingenious depiction of the microscopic flea, and especially the realistic staging of the wild storm in Act II.

The singers' performances become much more meaningful when one can see as well as hear them. Most impressive is André Popov in the title role. Not only can he sing the terrifying high tessitura of his role; he also completely embodies the simple peasant. From his first entrance he creates a totally sympathetic man who wants nothing more than to stay in his beloved home, help his parents, and live his creative little life. Popov makes the little left-hander totally believable: his innocence, his love of country, and even his love of alcohol. He is so convincing that one has difficulty watching his sad fate at the end.

The booklet contains some background information, including bios. If you are interested in a brilliant production of an interesting new work, here it is.

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**STRAVINSKY: Rite of Spring**

Rotterdam Philharmonic/ Valery Gergiev

Arthaus 109211 [BluRay] 57 minutes

Mr Gergiev gives us essentially a pre-concert lecture, discussing the composer and the composition itself, combined with a master class and bleeding chunks of a rehearsal performance. It will surprise no one familiar with Gergiev's style that he uses adjectives like light, clear, and shiny when describing his per-
formance ideals to the Rotterdam musicians and that he demands strict adherence to the score. We also get a few charming, interesting, funny video comments about Rite, in English and subtitled French, from Stravinsky himself. Gergiev reveals that he’s studied the two-piano Rite arrangement and demonstrates how it informs his cool, steely interpretation.

After a pre-concert lecture, I want to hear the work just discussed, but there’s no complete performance here, only snippets. During those snippets, the producer-videographer shifts the view from chair to chair, giving us close-ups of the musicians like a typical concert video, sometimes showing Gergiev and the full orchestra from a distance. Gergiev’s accented English is usually clear, but there are a few phrases I couldn’t quite catch, and only French subtitles are available. Gergiev looks always disheveled, haggard, and greasy—I kept wishing he’d either shave or grow a full beard. It’s from 1999, so resolution is standard 4:3, upscaled.

WRIGHT

**Weill: Lady In The Dark**

Ann Sothern (Liza), James Daly (Charley), Carleton Carpenter (Russell), Shepperd Strudwick (Dr Brooks); Orchestra/ Charles Sanford

VAI 4588—84 minutes

*Lady in the Dark* is probably the best known musical you’ve never seen. Although very successful in the 1940s—mostly in productions starring the original Liza Elliot, Gertrude Lawrence—it has been sporadically revived over the years. At the time of its premiere in 1941, the psychoanalysis basis for the plot was considered revolutionary, and the musical numbers were only performed in dream sequences. In 1944 a spectacular but unconvincing movie starring Ginger Rogers was released that eliminated some of the dream sequences and made hash out of Kurt Weill’s score and Moss Hart’s plot. If you’ve seen the movie, also rarely shown, you were probably as unimpressed as I was.

The play’s structure and music are unusual: Weill’s score uses some strange meters, is not always melodic, and there are no “hit” songs (though some are now famous). The plot—real-time scenes alternating with bizarre dream sequences—is very dated, with the assumption that a woman’s fulfillment comes from marriage and housekeeping. Also, Ira Gershwin’s lyrics are a little too arch or clever, even referring to the show sounding like “Gilbert and Sullivant” (sic) in order to make the rhyme. Cute.

The lady in the dark is Liza Elliot, the founder of a women’s fashion magazine who is seeing a psychiatrist because she is having disturbing dreams where she can’t make up her mind. At the end of each fanciful dream she hears the same melody, but she can’t remember the words. Liza also can’t make up her mind in real life, in her job or love life. She is surrounded by men who want to marry her, one irritating fellow worker (Charley Johnson) who has a love-hate relationship with her and calls her “boss lady,” and a fey fashion photographer (a part that made Danny Kaye famous). As the dream sequences progress we see that Liza is frustrated in her love life and her role as the “boss lady.” She finally does make up her mind.

Recordings have only presented the musical dream sequences, which makes it hard to understand how the real-life and dream sequences come together. Recordings include a long out-of-print RCA LP with this television cast and a bootleg soundtrack in poor sound of this performance (AEI). A mostly complete 1963 stereo version starring Rise Stevens (Sony 62869—now on Archiv) has been available over the years. Less known, but even more complete and satisfying is Jay 1278 with London’s Royal National Theater. Individual songs have been recorded by many famous singers, including the 1941 originals, Gertrude Lawrence (last seen on an early Decca LP) and Danny Kaye (included on the Sony CD).

This is from a telecast performed before a studio audience on September 25, 1954; it makes a good case for the show and corrects many of the slights inflicted by the movie. Although condensed to 84 minutes, the story and dream sequences are combined in a way that makes sense. You understand the characters’ motivations and you can see how the dream sequences fit into the plot. They are mostly complete and well staged, but the real-life scenes are bare-bones.

Casting the right person as Liza is critical. Ann Sothern is enchanting and convincing; her performance is just what the role calls for. Her singing and acting is quite good, she knows how to put meaning into the songs, and you really care about her character’s predicament. Each dream sequence has a song for Liza, including the ‘Saga of Jenny’ who “would” make up her mind, and ‘My Ship’, which Sothern sings beautifully and is key to understanding Liza’s dreams. Carleton Car-
penter, best known for his MGM musicals, sings the amusing 'Tchaikovsky,' naming 50 Russian composers in about 39 seconds (the song that made Danny Kaye famous) in the Circus dream.

This production is entertaining, and if you can get past the dated script, fairly enjoyable. The songs are effective, the performances convincing. The sound is acceptable and the picture is from a good-quality black and white kinescope. VAI includes the introductory and closing Oldsmobile commercials on separate tracks. The program is only in English (no subtitles). The enclosed booklet is fascinating, relating the history of the show and the background of this production. An updated production would be welcome.

\textbf{Herbert von Karajan}

Maestro for the Screen

CMajour Blu-Ray 737704—84 minutes

This disc contains two programs. The first is a retrospective by Georg Wubrecht. The second is a pair of Bach performances (Orchestral Suite 2 and Brandenburg 3).

The Wubrecht is quite intelligent. It documents how Karajan’s involvement with video evolved over time as his understanding of what he could do with it deepened. The starting place was a Japanese concert with a full hall that Karajan was told would reach millions of listeners in rebroadcast. The contrast between the numbers stunned him and he resolved to find a way to bring his music-making to that wider audience.

We see the first tentative steps, director-driven films with bizarre arrangements of players, ones in which the performers were reduced to blobs of color on the screen (unfortunately not for the \textit{Symphonie Fantastique}), and so on. Then Karajan started doing his own directing and had to find his own way. All the way through, we see clips of the films and hear from the people involved with them and with him—a producer, orchestral players, and so on.

We’re left with an admiring glance at his legacy and the reflection that, through his video work, he lives on past his death.

This was probably a television show in Europe and it’s worth seeing and thinking about for those who wonder about the future of high-quality music performance.

The Bach performances are from 1967-68. They are very good examples of postwar German Bach playing. It sounds beautiful, is very serious, and is a little heavy to ears used to more dance-driven Bach or the transparency of old instruments. It’s not lush-toned. It’s not rhetorical. It has a kind of purity and cleanliness that’s engaging. The superb flute soloist is Karlheinz Zoller, whose life is worth a digression.

He was principal flute in the BPO from 1960-1969. In 1968, he was in an automobile accident in Argentina and a piece of metal pierced and damaged one of his lungs. He had to leave the orchestra (James Galway replaced him). In 1976, after going through surgery that let him regain his lung capacity, he was able to rejoin the orchestra when Galway left and remained there until 1993.

The Bach is simply a bonus. The weight of this disc is the documentary. Each time I watch it, I catch a different idea to think about, a different question the filmmaker has posed. So here is a film about films about music.

\textbf{Jose Carreras: Best Wishes}

Monserrat Caballe, s; Vincenzo Scalera, Miguel Zanetti, Lorenzo Bavaj, Ariel Ramirez, p; Andino Basilica Socorro Quartet/ Jesus Gabriel Segade

ArtHaus 109232 [3 Blu-ray] 274 minutes

This set of concerts records Carreras’s career after his recovery from leukemia. There was real concern that he would never be able to sing again, but these concerts prove otherwise. His voice did change; it had lost some of its youthful sweetness, but his vocal firmness, tone, clarity, and dramatic abilities were still very strong.

The first disc is his first concert after his recovery. The two-hour concert from the Vienna State Opera on September 16, 1988 was highly anticipated. The house was overflowing with people. The concert contains 22 songs by French, Italian, and Spanish composers including Puccini, Massenet, Turina, Tosti, and Liszt. During the first hour, Carreras is obviously cautious, doesn’t push himself too much, is fairly inanimate, and the mostly slow selections are not very exciting.

In the second hour he loosens up and takes more chances, and in general, sings beautifully and commands the stage. The last 30 minutes are encores; Lara’s ‘Granada’ is the audience favorite. There is 30 minutes of applause with numerous standing ovations, and Carreras is a model of understated appreciation. The video quality is somewhat soft, the stereo sound good, and the video direction is adequate. The piano accompaniment by Vincenzo Scalera is excellent.
Anatomy of Voice: How to Enhance and Project Your Best Voice
Blandine Calais-Germain & Francois Germain
Healing Arts Press, 303pp, $29.95

This is a detailed, illustrated guide to how the voice works. Dividing the vocal apparatus into skeletal, generative, and laryngeal functions, it names and describes how each bone, muscle, organ, as well as various membranes, tendons, and tissues, contribute to sound production. It is less a "how to" than an anatomical guide, and readers looking for concrete ideas in terms of exercises and strategies for vocal work will be disappointed.

No book on the professional voice is complete; the voice is a complicated mechanism, and there are already a lot of books available detailing pedagogical and interpretive theories and practices of vocal work. Books about the voice necessarily rely on other books as well as the living art of the vocal tradition for a complete picture for students, practicing artists, and people curious about the craft and mechanics of singing.

Also disappointing about this book is that while necessarily omitting certain related details of the vocal tract, readers are only specifically referred to other books by Blandine Calais-Germain (though a brief bibliography includes a few other texts, including a French version of Richard Miller’s seminal *Structure of Singing: System and Art In Vocal Technique*). It’s always more interesting if reference books tie other researchers’ work together; it shows a broad awareness of the field and a sense of collegiality sometimes missing in the hallowed halls of academia (or the proprietary nature of some voice programs).

Despite my more than ten years of university teaching and professional singing, I found this book both too detailed and unnecessarily vague. I do not find it a worthwhile practice in my own work to “palpate my intercostal muscles”, and in reading through this book I found the rare “how to” moments too vague to be useful. Some of the suggestions might even lead a student singer or public speaker into developing unhealthy habits if followed without a teacher to assist and explain—for example, “dropping the sternum to encourage exhalation” in singing.

There are a few admirable aspects of this book: the detailed illustrations, a section that takes on the widespread misunderstandings of
The Idea of Art Music in a Commercial World, 1800-1930
Christina Bashford, Roberta Montemorra Marvin (eds.)—Boydell Press, 350 pp, $81

“Follow the money.” The disgruntled bureaucrat’s advice works in art as well as politics. These essays, though more for scholars than general readers, trace the uneasy connection between so-called art music and commercial value. (Commerce has but one value—making a profit. I don’t mean this pejoratively.)

A Huntington Piano ad claims that Paderewski used their instrument. In the 1900 season, the ad notes, Paderewski earned $200,000 (more than 4 million now). If he made so much, he had to be a great pianist, therefore would use a great piano.

Michela Ronzani’s study of Ricordi’s innovative promotional campaign for La Bohème notes that a lot of the disesteem for Puccini then (and now) was due to critical resistance to the media blitz. She does underrate the work’s irresistible musical charms. Franchetti’s Germania and Mascagni’s Iris got similar Ricordi hype. They’re worthy operas, but never quite “took”—in Franchetti’s case because Italians would have little interest in Germany’s War of Liberation; in the case of Iris (see the review in this issue) because its obscure symbolism needs sophisticated staging.

David Wright examines the success of Stainer’s Crucifixion in connection with Novello Publishers. He demonstrates that publishers with popular hits in their catalogues actively discouraged the publication of symphonic works. WH Reed’s 1949 Elgar biography has a sarcastic description of the grief of a composer submitting an overture to a publisher. Parry’s Symphony 3—one of the best English symphonies even now—earned him in today’s money about $105. One good Novello practice for their amateur market was to use treble and bass clefs only. If only this had caught on; that endlessly irritating movable alto clef is past its sell-by date. A less savory trade scam then was called “13 as 12” where 13 copies sold counted as a dozen. This sharp practice cheated success. Stainer’s primers on harmony and on the organ sold nearly 250,000 copies. “13 as 12” meant he never got the royalties on well over 19,000 of them.

George Biddlecome’s entry on Jenny Lind traces an artist shrewdly in control of her career and her image. She kept track of photos and illustrations, the latter touched up and subtly re-proportioned to show her in the best light. In her concerts, along with opera excerpts, she also gradually worked in ballads to attract a wider audience. Nicolas Vaszonyi’s essay, ‘A German in Paris’, examines Wagner’s insistence on his work as pure art, while manipulating the market to ensure its commercial success. Fiona Palmer in ‘Conductors and Self-promotion in the 19th Century’ notes how Julius Benedict and Frederic Cowen helped introduce to London the notion of a star English conductor.

Entries on instruments include the player piano and the violin. Ads for the former stressed its value as a center for family activity. One ad has Dad at the keyboard, his family listening raptly. Editor Bashford’s ‘Art, Commerce and Artisanship; Violin Culture in England’ tells how, in the early 20th Century, the availability of inexpensive but decent instruments resulted in more people, men especially, taking it up. George Bernard Shaw noted how young women had already observed that proper standing posture while playing showed off a good figure.

The collection is generally readable, bar the occasional gargoyle like “performativity”. The footnoting for all the articles is superb and guides the reader to further fascinating sources.

Bach and the Organ
edited by Matthew Dirst
University of Illinois Press, 124 pages

This collection of scholarly articles is the tenth volume in the series Bach Perspectives published under the auspices of the American Bach Society. I would not describe it as a book for the general reader. The press release des-
The articles are on very specific topics with meticulous source study and intricate interpretation of evidence, often involving the careful but speculative reconstruction of documentary links where the documents themselves no longer exist.

Lynn Edwards Butler opens this volume with a detailed study of JS Bach’s report (1717) on the organ for St Paul’s Church (the University Church) in Leipzig by the local builder Johann Scheibe. Bach was often engaged to examine and assess new and renovated organs. There are 20 such examinations documented, but only 7 of his reports are extant. The one on St Paul’s, Leipzig, is one of the more detailed. Some ambiguities of wording have led to significant differences of interpretation over the years. Apparently Scheibe was treated rather shabbily by the church and university authorities. It is worth noting that Butler is the translator of The Organs of JS Bach, a Handbook by Christoph Wolff and Markus Zepf (J/F 2013), a book that is repeatedly cited here.

Robin A Leaver, emeritus professor at Westminster Choir College, gives a detailed description of a comprehensive manuscript collection of figured bass chorales attributed to Bach. He addresses the question of whether Bach actually compiled the collection, its provenance, and its purpose. It may have been a teaching tool for organ students in the art of accompaniment—or possibly an anthology for use in church services.

George B Stauffer, series editor for Bach Perspectives, examines the free (as opposed to chorale-based) organ trio movements, some based on pre-existing pieces by Bach or other composers, that Bach wrote in the five years before the six Trio Sonatas (c1730). It is likely that these pieces were used for teaching, as were the sonatas, and it is possible that some were written by other members of Bach’s Leipzig circle.

A pair of articles by Christoph Wolff, professor at Harvard University and the Juilliard School, and Gregory Butler, professor at the University of British Columbia, examine the instrumental sinfonias with organ obbligato that Bach included in several church cantatas of the later 1720s and their connection with Bach’s keyboard concertos. He compiled final versions of seven concertos in an autograph manuscript around 1738. Of special interest are the concertos in D minor (S 1052) and E (S 1053), as they incorporate versions of sinfonias from the cantatas. They may be related to pieces for organ and orchestra that Bach performed in Dresden in 1725. This raises the possibility that these originated as organ concertos rather than harpsichord concertos. The fact that the two scholars do not always agree on the interpretation of the evidence adds interest to their essays.

Matthew Cron, who is on the faculty of the New England Conservatory, also writes about cantata movements with obbligato organ, but he is concerned with Texted movements rather than sinfonias, and he sets his study in the context of the regard for the organ in Bach’s day. In Lutheran Germany the organ was associated chiefly with church music and was widely regarded as a gateway to heaven. This is borne out by such things as the decoration of baroque organ cases with sculptures of angels and representations of heavenly objects like the sun, moon, and stars. Such imagery and the influence of the organ on the human soul is the subject of many a surviving sermon at the dedication of a new or renovated organ. Cron quotes passages from several of them. He also points out that such imagery is present in the texts of arias with organ obbligato and may have influenced the choice of instrument.

Matthew Dirst, the editor of this volume, is professor at the Moores School of Music, University of Houston. He combines scholarly research with a performing career as organist, harpsichordist, and conductor.

Selected Letters of John Cage
Laura Kuhn, editor
Wesleyan University Press, 652 pages, $40

As one of around 20 or so international scholars actively working on John Cage, I know firsthand how important this book is: the bulk (but probably not all) of Cage’s correspondence is housed in an archive at Northwestern University. Folders corresponding roughly to years are arranged in what I remember to be one entire wall of file cabinets. A group of letters is in a folder corresponding, I believe, to a particular month, and the individual letters, once examined, can easily be misplaced out of sequence. Most are written on small note-organisms: handwritten (or sometimes typewritten) note-sized sheets allowed for a carbon copy to be retained for archival purposes. They include a space for a response; and, if I remember correctly, sometimes the original note-ogram was also present with a reply. Some of these were quite perfunctory—for
instance, regular announcements of alimony payments to his wife Xenia. Others were remarkably detailed—for instance, a typewritten description of the compositional technique used for works like Apartment House 1776.

As explained in the preface, Laura Kuhn, the head of The John Cage Trust, originally worked with the writer Kenneth Silverman (then working on a Cage biography) to bring out an edition of selected letters with the following criteria for inclusions: “that the letters collectively reflect Cage’s wide and egalitarian reach; that they reveal Cage’s preoccupation with particularly complex compositions and ideas; that the various periods of Cage’s life be covered; and that the whole reflect the incredible range of Cage’s activities over some six decades.”

The selection seems quite comprehensive to me. There are 5 sections corresponding to years in Cage’s life. Each is headed by a short essay that puts the letters into a biographical framework. Footnotes are generously added; their numbering is continuous, which leads to 1159 in all. I see no other deficiency in this edition, which will be of invaluable help to scholars and a great joy to read for many others.

Cage himself sometimes resorted to dipping—guided by chance operations—into books with subjects that interested him. With a deadline approaching, I have decided to do the same, selecting three letters. I was surprised to learn, for instance, that Cage, who rarely wanted to sign on to any group political activity, wrote a short note in support of the director Robert Wilson, who had then (1972) been arrested in Crete for carrying a small amount of hashish. (Wilson was released around 6 weeks later, avoiding the usual 7-year sentence.) Writing from Algeria in 1930, Cage tells his relatives about a “chap” he’s traveling with (Don Sample, his first important romantic relationship) and the tendency both men share to avoid touristy areas in favor of “the natural, average places of the countries”. The 1974 letter to Christian Wolff is one of the most important here: it considers the relationship of art and politics, and one passage deserves quoting in full. “Interlude re your trouble with my distinction between politics and society, my refusal of politics. Cf. periodic and aperiodic rhythm: aperiodic can include periodic (society can include politics), not vice versa. I should say that I begin to use the world but not as signifying government, to which I continue to object. I met a Swiss, asked him what he did. He said he was a politician. I laughed because

in one ear he was wearing a ring. He then explained that politics was “all of the actions of all of the people”. To that I am devoted, if we add non-sentient beings.” Passages like this are rare in Cage’s published writings: they reveal him more simply and more forcefully, probably because he disliked doing anything that would even remotely suggest coercion.

And finally, because I began my work on Cage with his final pieces and am always interested in a composer’s words at the end of his life, I selected for myself a short note he wrote to a sixth-grade student from Houston. (I remember it from my time hunting in the correspondence archive.) He said, probably provocatively, “I am most interested in music that doesn’t say anything.” True, as far as it goes; but I might argue, from a Zen perspective, that music that says nothing also says everything. And so does Cage’s work.

HASKINS

Words and Music
Peter Dickinson
Boydell Press, 318 pages, $49.95, cloth

A composer, writer, and pianist—this is a man after my own heart. Over the last few years, Mr Dickinson has made use of his own extensive archives to publish with Boydell a number of important books on composers as varied as Lord Berners, Samuel Barber, and John Cage. This volume is largely a compilation of previously published essays by and about him. He approaches music on its merits without subscribing, as so many of his contemporaries did, to any one particular aesthetic precept. He lauds Michael Tippett for incorporating elements of blues and spirituals in his music, unquestioningly accepts (and understands) the important role Zen Buddhism plays in Cage’s aesthetics, writes with approval and sympathy for MacDowell’s piano concerto.

And he is witty as well as wise. Again about Tippett, he writes, “Just as Lambert seemed to be on the wane in the later 1930s with war approaching yet again, another English composer of exactly the same age was only just starting to make an impact [sic]. This was Michael Tippett, who was still composing in his 80s and was celebrated in some parts of the US at the time. One reason Tippett has appealed to younger generations is that he was always ready to tell us what was wrong with society and with ourselves—plenty, of course. So his music stands for something—and it also relates to popular traditions, British and American folk
music, mixing them up with African American influences.”

Most of this material is available elsewhere, but collected as it is here, one gets a fuller impression of Dickinson’s vast range—and a handy, one-volume snapshot of new music reception.

HASKINS

Absolutely on Music
Seiji Ozawa with Haruki Murakami
Knopf, 352 pages, $26.95

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese novelist and writer. This book was written in Japanese and translated by Jay Rubin. It is obvious that the interviewer is a very good writer, and he doesn’t just ask questions; he enters into conversation with his conductor friend and often says more than Ozawa does. But that often works out well, because it gets Ozawa going (he is a rather quiet man by nature).

I got to know his conducting at Ravinia in Chicago—an important launch to his American career. He was then very energetic and rather self-effacing. The energy weakened as he aged, but he remained self-effacing; he seemed to care only about the music. I heard him conduct in Philadelphia a few years later (he has nice things to say about Ormandy here) and again found him one of the better conductors of his generation.

He studied with Karajan in Berlin and assisted Bernstein in New York. He has quite a bit to say here about how they differed, how orchestras differ, how European musicians differ from American. (For one thing, the Europeans prefer things a little more vague, more atmospheric—less plain-spoken.) Ozawa himself claims to be a German musically. That may surprise record collectors, who remember the many recordings of French music that he did in Boston. Further surprise: he claims he never conducted that music before Boston; he learned it in Boston. The Boston Symphony had a French sound, but he tried to change it over time to a German sound. He thought they were too “nice”, too unwilling to dig into the music. In trying to change the sound of the orchestra he made some enemies and lost some musicians (the concertmaster, for one). And one can read of his frustration that he could not get them to sound idiomatic in Beethoven and Brahms. His work with the Saito Kinen Orchestra in Japan did result in great Brahms—despite the fact that Japanese musicians are so reticent by nature. I understand after reading this why they did such great Brahms.

So you will read a lot here about conductors, pianists, and “style”. Mr Ozawa’s ideal is almost old-fashioned: passionate playing. He says at one point that solo violinists don’t play like that any more. But later he says that if an orchestra is playing with heart and soul, his job is much easier: he just becomes a traffic cop.

VROON

Svetik:
A Family Memoir of Sviatoslav Richter
By Walter Moskalew, Anna Moskalew-Richter, Dagmar von Reincke—Toccata Press, 462 pp, $50

Svetik means Little Light in Russian and is a common diminutive nickname for children with the name Sviatoslav. It is clear from this amazing book that the nickname, at least among those who knew Richter best, stuck with him for the better part of his life. This is not a traditional biography, but a collection of three large independent writings from Richter’s cousin, mother, and aunt. We learn about the world Richter was born into and much about his family and the strong people and world events that shaped his life. It is a feast for the eyes, with 250 black-and-white pictures and drawings (a number by Richter himself), as well as 30 color pictures.

There is a foreword by Vladimir Ashkenazy, which describes his first interactions with Richter. The Introduction is by film maker Bruno Monsaingeon, who has made a documentary on Richter’s life (Richter, The Enigma, Ideal 3073514—J/A 1999). There are genealogies, Notes on Names, Transliterations, Dates, Russian forms of Address and Other Conventions; a 20-page Glossary of Names that you will refer to often; and a comprehensive Index.

And it reads well. It is far more than a reference and should on the shelves of a large number of Richter admirers. Nowhere is this kind of information available, especially about his young life.

The book is largely a result of decade-long efforts of editor and translator Anthony Phillips, who knew Richter since the 1960s. He also met Richter’s much younger cousin, Walter Moskalew, and his Aunt Meri (Tamara Pavolovna Moskalewa, who also used the German name Dagmar von Reinecke). Richter’s mother, Anna Moskalewa-Richter was estranged from her son most of his life, but did meet him at his Carnegie Hall debut in 1960. The complexity of the family relationships are explored in detail in Part 1 (237 pages). Part 2 is “My Life”, a shorter (89 pages) but fascinating memoir by Richter’s mother that includes

American Record Guide
a good portrait of Richter’s early musical life. Part 3 is “Sviatoslav Richter as a Young Boy” by Aunt Meri (65 pages). This is truly an indispensable book for all who want to know more about Richter, the man and the musician, and how he came to be who he was.

HARRINGTON

Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer and His World
Caroline Porter
Boydell Press, 269 pages, $29

In the final chapter of this fine book, Caroline Porter considers the reception of Satie’s work, which was particularly strong in both middle-brow and avant-garde circles. I can remember hearing his first Gymnopedie on the radio, and my later friendship with Gavin Bryars and work with Cage (both of whom adored the man) allowed me to get to know his work in greater detail. Two of his Gnossiennes, in somewhat altered form, played an important part in the soundtrack for Hal Ashby’s film Being There, which was one of the most important formative events of my 20s. I’ve played the Gymnopédies, the two Gnossiennes—even participated in a marathon performance of Vexations. What strikes me as interesting about Satie’s music is its elusive form: it almost works as a conventional classical music, but it has a way of turning back on itself that makes you question everything you assumed when you listened to it the first time.

Porter demystifies the composer by giving detailed information on the people he knew, the politics of the time, and the important influence of contemporary intellectual currents like Futurism and the general fascination with machines. About the music she is not always as reliable or valuable a commentator. For instance, her odd description of the first Gymnopédie claims that the accompanimental pattern “surely arose from Satie fumbling at the keyboard”. Perhaps; but the voice-leading of the opening pair of chords and the careful (yet sometimes unexpected) choice of others defies common sense and suggests considerably more craftsmanship. Even so, this book, handsomely produced and illustrated, offers a rich look at the cultural context that gave rise to the eccentric composer and is attractively written and painstakingly researched.

HASKINS

George Smart & 19th Century London Concert Life
John Carnelley—Boydell Press, 329 pages, $99

The Victorian era is full of men and women who managed to produce a huge body of work in the arts, literature, exploration, and politics. It was an age of multi-taskers and over-achievers, much like our own, but without the distraction of cell-phones, computers, movies, and TV. Sir George Smart (1776-1867) was one such figure who, through his numerous activities as a musical animator and perhaps Britain’s first professional conductor, was at the forefront of the evolution of concert life in London in the years 1800-1867.

His 91 years spanned the late 18th and early 19th centuries—the reigns of George III to Victoria. As a Chapel Royal chorister he took part in the 1784 Handel Commemoration and later organized the music for the Coronation of Victoria in 1838 and the concerts surrounding the opening of the Great Exhibition in 1851.

This is a detailed and somewhat academic study of his activities as a producer, enabler, advisor, and conductor. Of great importance are the journals he kept, listing his activities in detail. Particularly illuminating is the one he kept during his 1825 European tour, where he garnered information on musical practices and the state of opera in various cities, and met performers and composers, most notably, Beethoven and Weber. The result was his promotion of the music of Beethoven, a commission to Weber to write an opera in English, a friendship with Mendelssohn and the subsequent performance of his works. (He also saw Wagner conduct in 1855.)

Carnelley examines four distinct areas of Smart’s activities: his upbringing and aristocratic connections, which fueled his rise to the top of the emerging musical profession; his innovative contributions to concert life during those years, in particular as a conductor; his 1825 European tour, and his rise to the top of the professional music world. Smart was in constant demand to serve on commissions and committees, including the ones that founded several institutions that still exist today: the Philharmonia Society, the Royal Academy of Music, and the Royal College of Organists.

This may be more information on a minor figure than you really need—especially given the price—but it does afford a fascinating glimpse into a little known but immensely influential era of British musical life.

DELCAMP

November/December 2016
Franz Liszt: 
Musician, Celebrity, Superstar 
Oliver Hilmes 
Yale University Press 353 pages $38

There are numerous biographies of Liszt, led by Alan Walker’s magisterial three volumes. Many have centered on Liszt’s musical activities, but Hilmes has produced a thoroughly engrossing account of Liszt the man, in all his many personalities: child prodigy, romantic eccentric, fervent Catholic, actor, lotharian, celebrity, astute businessman, genius, and extravagant showman. He draws upon hitherto unpublished sources to provide a riveting chronicle of the composer’s tangled relationships: Marie d’Agoult, Hans von Bülow and Cosima, Cosima and Wagner, the years at the Court of Weimar and his failed effort to marry Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein, and the amorous dealings with the "mad cossack" Olga Janina, all careening towards the grotesque Danse macabre that surrounded his death during the 1886 Bayreuth Festival.

Hilmes has written biographies of Alma Mahler, Wagner, Mozart, and in 2010 Cosima Wagner: The Lady of Bayreuth. This fluent translation by Stewart Spencer is colorful, witty, engaging, and compulsively readable.

DELCAMP

LETTERS

William Grant Still Music 
809 W Riordan Rd 
Ste 100, Box 109 
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Dear Friends,

We at William Grant Still Music are aware, as you probably are also, that the cultural arts in the nation are falling into ruins at an alarming rate. Reasons? Internet theft, the woefully inadequate recompense made to authors, composers, artists, and musicians for downloads of their work, the high cost ($30,000+) to sue in federal courts for copyright thefts, illegal photocopying, the inability of the federal government to pursue copyright thieves, and the overall intellectual decline in the land. Bookstores, music stores, libraries, record companies and publishers are vanishing forever. In a short time, there will be no great composers, writers or performers: what will remain will be the barbaric tripe that commercial media offers, and a second Dark Age will prevail. William Grant Still Music is one of the few cultural entities still clinging to life, and we plan to survive this crisis.

What can all of us do to stem the tide? We can instill in the young a respect for intellectual property and a sense of morality where copy machines and the internet are concerned. It must be understood that illegal copies and downloads are stolen property, and those who own them are criminals. (It is also well to point out that much of the "research" accessed on the internet is incorrect and biased, and many works offered for downloads are stolen).

Furthermore, we can teach our young people to speak and write intelligently again. Our American students are so uneducated that none of them qualify for international academic competitions. Filling speech with filler words such as "like", "you know", "you know what I’m saying", "basically" and "like I said" is illogical, and the brain, which operates according to logic in language, short-circuits when filler words are thrown in. Brain malfunction lowers the I.Q. of both speaker and hearer.

An energetic approach to education and public uplift is needed at this time. We ask that you address this crisis in any way that you deem appropriate, if you agree with our point of view.

Sincerely yours,

Judith Anne Still 
Owner/Manager 
William Grant Still Music

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